

September 11 Digital Archive: Plan of Action, 9/11/02-9/11/03

Background:

The September 11 Digital Archive uses electronic media to collect, preserve, and present the history of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania and the public responses to them. Funded by a major grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and organized by the American Social History Project at the City University of New York Graduate Center and the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, the Digital Archive will contribute to the on-going effort by historians and archivists to record and preserve the record of 9/11 by: collecting first-hand accounts of the 9/11 attacks and the aftermath (especially voices currently under-represented on the web), collecting and archiving emails and digital images growing out of these events, organizing and annotating the most important web-based resources on the subject, and developing materials to contextualize and teach about the events.

The project was launched on 11 January 2002 and it has already exceeded all expectations in its first eight months of operation. Nevertheless, we believe that we can do more and this document sets out our plan for the next year. Below we summarize the largest goals of the project, the specific goals for the next twelve months, our strategies for reaching our goals (including a timetable for implementing the strategies), and a set of metrics for measuring our success (and some challenges we face in that work).

Overall Goals of Project

1. Collect, preserve, and present the digital record of the September 11, 2001 attacks.
2. Become the leading web site relating to the 9/11 attacks—the place that diverse audiences (students, teachers, scholars, the general public) turn for information on this subject.
3. Demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of digital history collecting and develop techniques and protocols for doing online history projects that can serve as models for other projects

Specific Goals for the Next Twelve Months

1. Increase awareness of site and visitation to the site;

2. Double participation in the site, i.e., contributions to the various sections, including stories, images, emails, special collections;
3. Find additional funding to help carry out goals (given that existing resources are stretched extremely thin) and to continue work on project beyond the current funding from the Sloan Foundation;
4. Find a permanent repository for the digital material collected by the project—ideally a repository that will enhance public confidence in the site and, hence, support the goals of increased awareness, participation, and funding.

Strategies for Achieving Goals (with schedule of deliverables).

1. **Site Redesign:** The site needs a fresh makeover, including an effort to reduce site load time (for those accessing the site with limited bandwidth and slow computers) and an effort to more fully reflect non-New York audiences. We also need to add features that would increase contributions, e.g., a “refer a friend button” and changes to confirmation emails that would encourage participants to refer others. We also need to improve the usability of the site by enhancing the search engine (e.g., offering a site-wide search). The redesign and infrastructure work has already begun. We hope to have a partial redesign by 9/11/02 and a full redesign by 11 December 2002.

2. **Fundraising:** We have developed a fundraising committee to approach foundations, corporate donors, and wealthy individuals to provide additional and ongoing support for the project, including possibly an endowment. We have already approached the Heinz and Carnegie foundations and have plans to approach the Rockefeller and MacArthur foundations. We have made some preliminary approaches to corporations (e.g., Smith Barney) about funding projects relating specifically to corporate response to the attacks. We are also working on an approach to U.S. Steel to support further work in Western Pennsylvania. We are trying to work out a good set of contacts to approach Larry Silverstein, who owns the lease on the World Trade Center site.

In addition, we are seeking in-kind contributions from corporations to support our work. U-Reach, a voice-mail provider, has given us voice-mail service to use for contributions at a deep discount of about 80 percent. In addition, Seagate Technologies is contributing several large (180 gigabyte) hard drives to deal with our data storage problems. And we are working on

an approach to IBM to provide us with a new server. Naturally, the Sloan Foundation remains our most important funder, and our support of their goals remains our top priority. Ideally, our success in meeting the joint goals of our project and the Sloan Foundation will result in additional funding from them. But, overall, the climate for additional foundation contributions is fairly tough. The fundraising work is ongoing but our timetable would be to have out a full set of additional requests out by 1 November. This would allow us to capitalize on the added traffic and responses we will have gotten as the result of the anniversary.

3. Alliances: From the start, we have seen that multiple alliances have been crucial to the success and expansion of the project. Early on, we forged a key set of alliances with institutions in New York (New-York Historical Society, Museum of the City of New York, Brooklyn Historical Society, City Lore) and Washington (the Smithsonian). These alliances were critical in enhancing our credibility with multiple audiences. We have also developed close ties with several other major groups, include NPR's Sonic Memorial and the American Association of Museums and these ties are already paying off in major ways.

The Smithsonian alliance has been particularly important. It has, on the one hand, consumed considerable energy for our staff. But, on the other hand, it has yielded very positive results—especially enhanced contributions and credibility with possible funders (e.g. Seagate). We need to build and develop these alliances in the next twelve months. Probably the most important such alliance is with the Library of Congress, which not only enhances our credibility but also would be the best long-term repository for our collection. We have begun to work on forging connections with the Library—working both through staff contacts and through the library's primary digital preservation coordinator. This process will, however, take time because the Library is a large bureaucracy and their chief operating office is leaving and has not yet been replaced. Our goal would be to reach an agreement with the Library by 1 March 2003. In the meantime, we will be pursuing other possibly fruitful alliances, including with the Internet Archive and the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

4. Targeted Outreach: In order to build a truly comprehensive archive, we need to do substantial targeted outreach to particular communities. We have begun this work with our extensive work in Somerset County, Pennsylvania and with schoolteachers in Fairfax County. Our partners at the American Social History Project are focusing on outreach to a range of New York-based communities, including Moslem Americans, corporations with headquarters in the WTC, residents of Chinatown, Hispanic New Yorkers, students and teachers at schools located near the WTC, and members of SEIU, which a

large presence in the WTC. In this area, we will be focusing on outreach to Fire and Rescue crews from Northern Virginia and Pentagon employees. The targeted outreach will work more through direct and personal contacts. We will be doing a total of ten outreach projects and will launch one per month starting on November 1, 2002.

5. Publicity: We have had great success in achieving press coverage for the project, including published or in-press stories by the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Knight-Ridder news service, the Newhouse news service, Tribune Group Television, CNN, the BBC, MSNBC, Better Homes & Gardens, NY 1 News, NBC News 4 in Washington, and many other local and regional media outlets. In fact, more than 150 outlets carried one recent AP story across the country. Nevertheless, we think that we can do more. Our plan is to issue a major press release every other month, starting on 1 October. Each would have a different focus. For example, on 1 October, we will focus on the response to the anniversary and the Smithsonian exhibit. Then, on 1 December, we might profile two of our successful outreach efforts. Another press release would (hopefully) cover our completion of an alliance with the Library of Congress.

6. Building our Existing Audience: An important resource for the project is our connection to hundreds of people who have contributed stories, emails, images, or other materials and who have given us permission to contact them. We plan to develop a monthly newsletter that will go out to those people and others for whom we have contact information. The newsletter will highlight new developments, give people reasons to return to the site, and encourage them to spread the word about the project to their friends. We will issue our first newsletter on 11 October and then monthly thereafter.

Metrics for Gauging our Success in Reaching Goals (and some challenges in implementing those metrics):

1. Log Analysis: We need to undertake close and detailed analysis of our visitation logs to track numbers of visitors, source of traffic, referring sites, etc. Unfortunately, this has proven more difficult than anticipated because of our limited resources. Our Linux server has allowed us to create a robust and secure web site at modest cost. The available log analysis tools for Linux are, however, difficult to use and our budget does not provide funding for either the technical implementation of high quality log analysis or the work of closely analyzing the results. We have made this a high priority for our current work, although ideally it would be best if we had further support (cash or in-kind) for this work. Nevertheless, we are committed to producing a full analysis of current and past logs by 1 November 2002.

2. **Publicity tracking and database:** We need a careful database of all media coverage and its effects on traffic. We also need to create a section of the web site that presents press coverage. We have begun work on this, but it has been slowed by the overwhelming work of responding to the current anniversary. We will have this implemented by 15 November 2002.

3. **Google ranking:** Google rankings are an important indication of how extensively other sites are linking to you and they also drive further traffic to your site. We have tracked our progress in Google informally, but beginning September 15, 2002, we will do a weekly check of our rankings on various key words (e.g., "September 11" and "archive").

4. **Contributions to the site:** This is easy to track but we need to implement a regular weekly system for tracking each area of the site: stories contributed, emails donated, images donated, email sent to the info@911digitalarchive.org address; stories contributed to the joint site with the Smithsonian; special collections donated, etc. In order to better track our progress (and relate it to our efforts), we need a weekly mapping of this data, which we will post on an internal page on the site along with the Google rankings and our log analysis. We will implement this starting on 1 October 2002 and include as much retrospective data as possible.

5. **Funds raised:** This is obviously easy to track and is already being done.