PROJECT NARRATIVE

Applicant Name: University of North Texas Libraries
Project Name: Portal to Texas History

Introduction

A “Portal to Texas History” will be created on the World Wide Web to offer students and historians interested in Texas history a gateway to the rich collections held in Texas libraries and historical museums. The Web Portal will be an entry point, a doorway that when opened directs researchers to important, primary-source materials on the topic of Texas History. With the creation of the Portal and the development of the accompanying services, future collaborations between UNT and schools, libraries, and museums will bring to the researcher’s desktop access to a more diverse collection of Texas historical materials than any one group or institution would be able to provide alone. To create the Portal to Texas History, the UNT Libraries request funding from the TIF Board in the amount of $250,000 and agree to a local match of $25,017.

The need for such a project evolves from three separate groups that will be affected by the project – Texas school children and teachers, historians, and Texas libraries and museums. The first group, Texas school children and teachers, is required by the Texas Department of Education’s Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to study Texas history, especially in the fourth and seventh grades. All too frequently the textbooks for these studies are bland, at best. Few public school students or teachers have easy access to supplementary materials that can bring the subject of Texas history alive for.

Historians make up the second group. Currently, to view important primary source material, historians must be able to travel about the state to historical museums or library archives and rare book collections. An example that illustrates the difficulties experienced by researchers occurred when the UNT Libraries digitized the nineteenth century volumes of the Laws of Texas. Feedback from historians indicated that some had not seen the volumes until
the digitized copies were placed online.

The third group affected by this project consists of museums and libraries. In preparation for this proposal, UNT representatives spent five days traveling for site visits to libraries and museums, including small institutions in rural areas. Archivists and librarians repeatedly expressed their interest in digitizing materials in their collections. However, in many cases, they noted their lack of knowledge about technology and about the digitization process as the reason they have not begun projects. Many of these groups wrote letters of support for the Portal project (see Attachment B).

The Portal project will rectify the above described situations by providing services to libraries and museums to meet their expressed need for technology and knowledge to begin digital projects. As a result, Texas students, teachers, historians, and other researchers will gain ready access through the Portal to an array of digital copies of major artifacts, manuscripts, photographs, maps, letters, and other primary source materials about Texas history. TIF grants and other funding sources wired Texas schools and libraries and gave them computers and Internet access. The Portal will build on this existing infrastructure to connect students and researchers to a wealth of materials about Texas history.

Project Objectives

To fulfill our goal to create a Portal to Texas History, five objectives to be achieved are:

- Build a technical structure for the Portal services.
- Create standards and best practices guidelines required for the Portal project and services, and design a training module to educate library and museum staff who lack knowledge of the digitization processes outlined in the standards and guidelines.
- Develop a Portal Web site to guide researchers in the use of the resources.
- Supplement already available Texas electronic historical materials by digitizing two
important collections.

- Create an evaluation plan for the first four years of the project and implement the first year of the evaluation plan.

Text below explains each objective more fully and shows its relationship with the budget items by noting in parentheses the schedule, section, and line of the budget item (ex., “B – 2-b” to indicate Schedule B, Section 2, line b).

**Objective One:** Creating the technical structure and the project services for the Portal to Texas History involves two elements. First, a three-server configuration (E – 3-a & b.1) with expanded system storage (E – 1-f) and with a sophisticated application framework (D – 1-b,f,g,h) is planned for the technical structure of the site. The application framework will supply file management capabilities, allow search and retrieval of files, enable harvesting of files from collaborating sites for indexing and preservation purposes, allow Z39.50 interoperability with other servers including the Library of Texas Project, and create backup copies of all files on a regular basis. Administrative functions will allow the project administrator to enable passworded access for collaborators at distant sites for purposes of data entry. Second, a portable digital imaging unit, comprising a high-end laptop (E – 3-b.2), a scanner (E – 5-b), and a digital camera setup (E – 5-a,f,g), will be purchased to assist with on-site training activities in libraries and museums. After training, small libraries and museums without access to digital imaging hardware and software will be able to borrow the portable equipment.

**Objective Two:** Project staff will create standards and best practices guidelines for the Portal project and services, and will also design and test a training module that will assist with imparting knowledge contained in the project standards and guidelines to persons in museums and libraries. Standards to be created include element sets for both descriptive and preservation metadata. The “descriptive” metadata will delineate the historical items that are digitized and allow searchers to discover and view the materials contained in the digital collections. The “preservation” metadata will maintain information about the files, such as file
size and location, software used to create the file, and preservation activities, which will aid the long-term maintenance and viability of digital files. A standardized element set will simplify data entry and ensure that important information is recorded. Best practices guidelines will recommend appropriate processes for digital imaging of various types of materials and artifacts. By following best practices guidelines to preserve long-term access to the electronic files, project participants will help ensure that delicate materials will not require repeated handling and re-scanning in the future.

To fulfill the expressed request of library and museum employees for training as noted above, a training module (A – c) will be created that can be taken to museums and libraries with the portable scanning unit mentioned in Objective One. Graduate students in the UNT School of Library and Information Sciences Digital Imaging Program will create the training module and then test it at three sites (C – a,b,c) that represent various levels of technical expertise and knowledge about digital imaging - Marfa Public Library, Fort Bend Museum Association’s George Ranch Historical Park, and the Austin History Center. After testing, they will make adjustments to the training module based on feedback from staff at the training sites.

**Objective Three:** With TIF funding, the creation of content to supplement already available Texas electronic historical materials will be continued by digitizing two important collections - Volumes 11 – 31 of H. P. N. Gammel’s *Laws of Texas* and the older issues of the *Texas Register* (B – 2-b). The UNT Libraries digitized Volumes 1 – 10 of the *Laws of Texas* in 2000, with funding from a TexTreasures Grant, and will complete the digitization of the set to stretch coverage of the laws of Texas from the 1820’s through 1939. Digitization of the *Texas Register* volumes from 1976 to 1991 would add historical perspective to our already heavily-used *Texas Register* online collection (September 1991 to current). Also, with just-received funding from another TexTreasures Grant, documents concerning the annexation of Texas to the United States will be digitized and become part of the Portal.

**Objective Four:** The Portal Web site will be designed to embrace both beginning and
skilled researchers – guiding them through the process of searching for and retrieving relevant information. In addition, Texas historians will contribute original, supplementary materials to offer guidance for diverse users and to highlight subjects of particular interest.

**Objective Five:** Doctoral students supervised by Dr. William E. Moen of the Texas Center for Digital Knowledge will design an evaluation plan for the first four years of the Portal project and implement the first year of the plan (A – d&e).

**Future Development and Conclusion**

In the future, K-12 teachers and university professors will create curriculum materials for use in K-12 and college level courses. These curriculum materials and other resources to assist teachers will be in a special “teachers only” section of the Web site.

The UNT Libraries, coordinating with our collaborative partners, are strongly committed to seeking out grant support for future project development, which would speed the growth of the site. However, with UNT’s commitment to future maintenance of the hardware/software configuration and with the contribution of graduate students in the UNT School of Library and Information Sciences Digital Imaging Program through their required practicum activities, the project will be sustained without grant funding, if necessary.

By the end of the grant period, the Portal will organize and point to materials already in digital format, display standards and best practices guidelines for digitization, and offer hosting services, training, and a portable scanning unit so that digital imaging work with collaborators can proceed to further expand digital collections. Access to the Texas history collections of small, rural institutions, in addition to the collections of larger libraries and museums, will become possible, creating a rich source of materials for our targeted audiences.