

Ruohua Han*

Building Companionship Between Community and Personal Archiving: Strengthening Personal Digital Archiving Support in Community-Based Mobile Digitization Projects

<https://doi.org/10.1515/pdtc-2018-0014>

Abstract: The interconnectedness between personal digital archiving (PDA) and community-based digital archiving provides an entry point for thinking about how to better bridge the two within single projects. Flexibility and sustainability are dimensions that warrant special consideration to support PDA within community-based digital archiving projects. This paper examines the flexibility and sustainability of two community-based mobile digitization projects (Culture in Transit and Georgia HomePLACE DigiKits) in supporting PDA. The assessment shows that the projects are in a good position to support PDA, with only some concerns about ensuring sustainable access to digitization equipment and sufficient guidance in long-term preservation. Drawing from this work, I propose three ways community-based mobile digitization projects can be redesigned to further strengthen their support for PDA without undermining their community-based objectives. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the value in considering connections and differences between community and personal archiving needs in current and future projects, and calls for further coordination of efforts and collaboration to build better collaboration between community and personal archiving.

Keywords: Community archiving; Personal digital archiving (PDA); Mobile digitization units; Collaboration.

1 Introduction

Personal and community archives and archiving are exciting areas transforming the archival landscape. While both fields have traditionally existed outside of formal and institutional cultural heritage frameworks, information professionals are showing a growing interest in these their role as memory (Gilliland and Flinn 1; Kim 154). Since individuals make up and embody communities, their archival materials and archiving activities interact on a continuum

with the *personal* at one end and the *communal* at the other. Personal archives and archiving are interconnected with community archives and archiving in many ways. For instance, Queens Memory, a community archiving program of the Queens Library, conducted a digitization training session at the Great Ridgewood Youth Council for a group of teenagers who were participating in a community documentation project. The participants “left with a basic but comprehensive understanding of the decisions and processes for a small-scale, local digitization project” (Schreiner, *Training*). In this case, digitization training was provided for the teenagers for conducting a specific community project, but what they learned can be easily applied to their own personal archiving efforts. Digitization knowledge is an element that can bridge community archiving and personal archiving. At the same time, personal archives and archiving can also be quite distinctive from community archives and archiving, given that they have very different motivations and goals. For example, individuals may intend their personal collections to be casually shared within a limited circle of relatives and close friends, while community archives may be created to “bring together evidence to support critiques of dominant historical narratives [to serve] emerging publics whose constituent members have been traditionally excluded from or denied full participation in public discourse” (Sheffield 362). These multi-faceted relationships suggest that being aware and taking advantage of the connections between personal and community archives and archiving may be useful for understanding and advancing both areas, but the differences between them also need to be respected and considered.

Applying this line of thinking to specific projects, it may be possible to find aspects of community archiving projects that can work to support personal archiving, and it may be desirable to enhance or strengthen such aspects if needed. Naturally, not all personal archiving needs can be served by a community archiving project due to inherent differences that exist, but even these different needs could at least be partially met by connecting the project to other projects, or by adjusting some parts of the original projects under the premise that their main community-based objectives are not negatively impacted. Finding ways to enhance community

*Corresponding author: Ruohua Han, School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, IL, USA, e-mail: rhan11@illinois.edu

archiving aspects in personal digital archiving (PDA) projects can work in similar ways. Some projects have already been making such connections. Queens Memory found that their community scanning events “provide the opportunity to integrate PDA education into a structured, history-focused event,” and they developed several teaching tools for this purpose as part of their project (Milbrodt and Schreiner 112–113). In writing about the DC (District of Columbia) Public Library’s Memory Lab, a project dominantly focusing on supporting PDA, Jaime Mears frames the importance of not requiring the patron’s digitized personal materials to be ingested into the library’s collections from a community perspective instead of a purely personal one: “Allowing communities to archive themselves—especially those that have been left out of traditional archives or, worse yet, whose stories and songs have been taken and/or exploited for scholarship—shifts the traditional relationship paradigm between archivists and community members from protectors to enablers of cultural stewardship.” (86) In a word, I am suggesting the field may already be considering (or would likely benefit from considering) how to better connect and coordinate community and personal archiving needs and efforts within projects, and it may be constructive to analyze existing projects from this perspective to inform potential future iterations of them or inspire designs of new projects.

Following this idea, this paper attempts to investigate how well two community-based archiving projects that use the same core tool are currently able to contribute to supporting PDA as they achieve their community archiving goals. It then explores potential options of using this tool in redesigned community-based archiving projects that may provide strengthened support for PDA without undermining the fulfillment of their community archiving objectives. The tool I focus on is the mobile digitization unit; the analyzed projects all feature the use of such units as a central tool. For the sake of brevity, such projects are referred to as mobile digitization projects. These projects usually slant towards being institutional or community-based, but a few among them have already displayed some intersections with PDA. As such, they seem to be appropriate examples for investigating how personal archiving can be better supported in community-based mobile digitization projects. In my analysis of the projects, I discuss how they are currently supporting PDA and what aspects they might not have fully covered. Discussions of the latter are by no means suggesting them as shortcomings of either of the projects. Instead, they are intended to work as starting points for envisioning how

community-based mobile digitization projects might be reimaged to support PDA in better ways. Ultimately, I hope to highlight the importance of considering the connections and differences between community and personal archiving needs in current and future projects, and underscore the necessity of collaboration in sustaining a diverse range of complementary projects across community and personal archiving areas to work collectively towards fulfilling the archival mission.

2 Definitions and Provisional Understandings

In this section, I provide definitions for key terms in this article and outline some provisional understandings regarding what supporting community-based digital archiving and PDA entails. I also suggest some additional dimensions that are worth considering when examining how community-based archiving projects can support PDA, and these dimensions are used in my later analysis.

2.1 Definitions

In this article, I use Milbrodt and Schreiner’s description of a community-based archiving project as a project “that involves and empowers members of the community toward self-documentation” (104). The terms “community archiving” and “community-based archiving” are tentatively treated as interchangeable, and they are used to refer to activities in which members are empowered and actively involved in self-documenting their community. These activities may or may not be supported by institutions, and how the community should be involved in such activities is capable of different interpretations (Gilliland and Flinn 7). The term also usually implies these community self-documenting activities need to result in an accumulation of actual collections of materials that can be “actively used, engaged with and employed in the ‘now’” (Gilliland and Flinn 9) by community members, and perhaps also by the broader public upon approval from the community. The aims and objectives of community-based archiving projects may thus include providing resources to empower and engage community members in self-documenting and facilitating the creation and active, shared use of community collections. Building archival spaces that can serve as sites of resistance, safety,

autonomy, expression, or intervention can also be their goal (Gilliland and Flinn 9–10).

Kim regards “PDA” as “part of everyday recordkeeping with the goal of long-term preservation of documents, possibly beyond an owner’s lifetime and a lifelong practice of forming a personal documentary heritage collection with objects that are meaningful to the owner, either as evidential resources or as memory objects” (155). However, her definition is medium neutral and thus can be understood more appropriately as a definition for personal archiving. The goals of personal archiving are implied in the definition: the lifelong formation and long-term preservation of a personal collection meaningful to the owner. When “digital” is added to either personal archiving or community-based archiving, it refers to a subset of archiving activities that focuses mostly on born-digital/digitized materials and digitization.

2.2 Provisional Understandings: Connections and Differences Between Community-Based Digital Archiving and Personal Digital Archiving Needs for Individuals

In this section, I establish some provisional understandings about what supporting community-based digital archiving and PDA means. Based on the outlined aims and objectives of community-based archiving projects in the previous section, for this paper, any efforts working towards supporting one or more of these aims and objectives that involves “digital aspects” will be counted as supporting community-based digital archiving. Likewise, based on the goals of personal archiving, any efforts that support the lifelong formation and long-term preservation of digital/digitized parts of a personal collection meaningful to the owner are understood as supporting PDA.

The central issue here is while efforts to support community-based digital archiving and PDA can often intersect and overlap, community-based digital archiving needs of individuals may not always align perfectly with their PDA needs. When writing about archivists’ efforts in archiving communities, Kaplan argues how “archivists seeking to balance the record, to incorporate authentic voices, to resolve the problem of the underdocumented, or even sometimes, to celebrate diversity must reify identity, thereby making cultural differences immutable and eliminating individuality, personality and choice within the group in question” (144). Community-based archiving

frames individuals under a shared identity, and its activities work mainly to present and preserve this identity. To build and assert this common identity both internally and externally, community members will usually need to share materials among themselves as well as with the public when appropriate. Connecting and contributing to shared identities and histories is indeed also a personal archiving need that has been identified by Noah Lenstra, who discovered people wanted to “make connections between things they have in their own personal archives and things that may be in other people’s personal archives, between one person’s history and other people’s histories” (Ashenfelter, *Reality*). Nevertheless, the issue remains that which shared identities and histories individuals are contributing and connecting to should ultimately be decided by the individuals themselves, and there are other personal archiving needs apart from building and connecting to shared identities. For example, there may be materials that can be uniquely meaningful to an individual herself that she does not want to share with broader communities, and the need to digitize these materials is another legitimate goal of PDA.

Therefore, community-based digital archiving projects may support some facets of PDA needs, but not necessarily others. When community-based archiving projects provide equipment and technology for individuals to digitally archive their materials in a community context, or provide basic knowledge and skills to help individuals digitally archive their materials in a community context, they are indeed supporting PDA in a general sense, because individuals can achieve some of their crucial PDA goals. The two Queens Memory examples in the introduction illustrate this point. However, we need to acknowledge how other more intimate and idiosyncratic PDA goals also exist. Projects need to be able to support not only personal archiving that can contribute to building specific, designated community identities, but also personal archiving that may be used to contribute to other community- and identity-building activities of the individual’s choice, as well as personal archiving that may only be meaningful to individual themselves. In sum, providing flexibility is critical. Another key factor to consider is the sustainability of community-based digital archiving projects in terms of serving PDA needs. Kim’s definition of PDA stresses “lifelong formation and long-term preservation” (155), indicating sustainable support in various aspects is a central concern.

To conclude, my analysis of the community-based digital archiving projects in the following section examines how they support PDA in a general sense, but

also pays special attention to the flexibility and sustainability dimensions of their support. In this way, it identifies potential entry points for designing future mobile digitization projects that may strengthen companionship between supporting community and PDA needs for individuals.

3 How Projects Featuring Mobile Digitization Units are Supporting Personal Digital Archiving

Mobile digitization units are portable collections of tools for converting analog materials to digital formats. Specially designed to be relatively easily transported to, set up, and used in different locations, they often include essential digitization hardware (e.g. scanners, digital cameras, and laptops) and software (e.g. Adobe Photoshop), as well as digitization knowledge and expertise in the form of detailed documentation or human specialists that move along and operate the units. The premise of having the ability to easily move sets of digitization equipment across a geographical region enables projects featuring such units to achieve the following three common goals: to save overall financial and intellectual costs within a particular area or system by maximizing the usage of limited sets of equipment and sharing knowledge and expertise; to strengthen existing relationships, establish new relationships, or accomplish both across a broader scope of institutions, communities, and individuals; and to expand the digitization of materials to institutions, communities, and individuals that were previously excluded for reasons such as being marginalized in collection development or located in difficult-to-reach areas. These units are thus ideally suited for being potentially supportive of both community and PDA, and examining how these units are currently being used in practice can be useful in obtaining a general, grounded understanding of how they are assisting both aspects.

Indiana Memory, Indigitization, Culture in Transit, Georgia HomePLACE DigiKits, and PROUD and PRAVDA are some of the major projects that currently use mobile digitization units.¹ Indiana Memory and Indigitization both provide units for institutions to digitize small, existing collections without involving interactions with

communities or individuals outside of these institutions (Indiana Memory, *Mobile Scanning*, 1; Indigitization, *Indigitization Grant*, 2, 7), and are thus in a sense “institution-only” projects. Since the interest of this paper is how existing mobile digitization projects can support personal archiving of individuals, both projects are out of scope. Culture in Transit, Georgia HomePLACE DigiKits, and PROUD and PRAVDA all have community-based elements and involve interactions with individuals, which signals potential connections between supporting community and personal archiving. Therefore, these three projects are introduced briefly in the following sections.

3.1 Culture in Transit

A collaboration between the Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO), the Brooklyn Public Library, and Queens Library, Culture in Transit (CIT) was an 18-month public archiving project conducted between 2015 and 2017 that expanded out of Queens Memory. CIT digitized materials located in small cultural heritage institutions and communities in the New York Metropolitan area via digitization specialists who operated mobile digitization kits brought directly to local sites (Culture in Transit, *FAQ*). The project created three types of mobile kits used in community and institutional scanning: scanning kits (each with a flatbed scanner, laptop, and supplementary items such as USB drives), copy stand kits (each with a digital camera, laptop, tripod, photographic backdrop, and lights), and outreach kits (used only in community events and include tablets and headphones to play slideshows of photographs and oral histories) (Culture in Transit, *Culture in Transit Toolkit / Equipment*). Since community scanning is most relevant to the purposes of this paper, only this component is introduced here. Community scanning included transporting and setting up the mobile kits at library branches and other community spaces to digitize personal items brought in by individuals. Items were digitized on site and returned to individuals along with a thumb drive containing the digitized copies, a *What’s on my thumb drive* handout, and a *Preserving your Digital Memories* brochure. Digitized materials were ingested into institutional digital repositories as well as the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) and made available online, except for some materials that cannot be cleared for copyright (Culture in Transit, *Culture in Transit Toolkit / Community*). CIT also provides

¹ These projects were mostly located via web searches, and some were referred to me by colleagues at the 2018 Personal Digital Archiving Conference.

an online Toolkit that covers event planning, digitization workflows, and equipment lists for building mobile digitization kits, as well as a blog that reported on the project. CIT is evidently a community-based archiving project based on the definition of the term in this paper.

3.2 Georgia HomePLACE DigiKits

Georgia HomePLACE DigiKits (DigiKits) were conceptualized in early 2016 and officially launched in September 2017 by the Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS).² It is a service that provides mobile digitization units that can be borrowed by any library system in Georgia for a negotiable 3-month period for any kind of use they might need it for, such as organizing community scanning events, doing staff and patron training at libraries, or completing small-scale in-house digitization projects (Georgia HomePLACE, *DigiKits FAQ*). The service provides three types of portable digitization units: two bulky kits for in-house scanning, two more lightweight kits for outreach events, and two kits specifically built for microfilm scanning. All kits include flatbed/microfilm scanners, laptops (with necessary software installed), and other ancillary items (Georgia HomePLACE, *Available*). The loaning of the kits is facilitated via online reservations, and the kits are transported by Georgia's local public library automation and interlibrary lending network courier route. The project provides an online user guide on how to plan scanning processes and operate the equipment, and GPLS states it will replace antiquated equipment in the kits with newer technology in the future (Georgia HomePLACE, *DigiKits FAQ*).

The DigiKits service may be viewed as a service that can support community-based archiving projects. When they are used for community scanning events or as tools for teaching digital literacy for community members, which is explicitly encouraged by the project (see Georgia HomePLACE, *DigiKits FAQ*), they apparently serve community-based archiving goals. However, other in-house institutional uses may not always qualify as supporting community-based archiving. Overall, it is constructive to include it in this analysis due to how it specifically endorses community outreach and demonstrates potential to connect with PDA when used in such community-based contexts.

² Information provided by Georgia HomePLACE Director Angela Stanley via email correspondence.

3.3 PROUD and PRAVDA

PROUD and PRAVDA is an in-progress project initiated by the University of Wisconsin in 2016 and supported by an IMLS Sparks! Ignition Grant. The project aims to build two kinds of portable, shippable kits: PROUD (Portable Recovery of Unique Data) with equipment to migrate data on obsolete digital-storage media (e.g. floppy disks) to current formats for long-term preservation, and PRAVDA (Portably Reformat A/V to Digital from Analog) with equipment to digitize audiovisual materials stored on VHS and audio cassette tapes. It plans to create written and video documentation on building and using the units, and both the units and documentation will be tested for usability, with the explicit goal of enabling “any reasonably-enterprising staff member, volunteer, or patron to make them work without in-person training” (PROUD and PRAVDA, *Project*, 5). In the future, the project envisions PROUD and PRAVDA to be built and kept in various organizations such as archives, libraries, and Library and Information Science schools, and the units can be shipped to institutions and students who might need such equipment (PROUD and PRAVDA, *Project*, 1–5).

It is difficult to determine whether PROUD and PRAVDA is a community-based archiving project based on the definition used by this paper, because it seems to be mainly geared towards professional use by institutions and students, making it in some ways closer to institutional projects. Yet, similar to DigiKits, since it does not dictate how the kits should be used once they are borrowed, the kits may indeed be used for supporting community-based archiving projects. Since this aspect of use of PROUD and PRAVDA is almost identical to DigiKits, the project is not included in the following analysis to avoid repetition.

3.4 How CIT and DigiKits are Supporting Personal Digital Archiving

Upon further examination, CIT and DigiKits appear to be the major mobile digitization projects that are mainly community-based, while other projects slant towards being institutional or “hybrid”. In the section, I briefly examine how these two projects are supporting PDA while fulfilling their community-based archiving objectives.

First, both CIT and DigiKits provides equipment to enable individuals to digitize a collection of their materials. Using the scanning kit and copy stand kit, CIT can digitize two-dimensional materials, three-dimensional

materials, film, and negatives, covering a broad range of formats while meeting archival digitization standards. For DigiKits events, their units can digitize two-dimensional materials, film, negatives, and microfilm, also capable of digitizing a diverse range of formats in archival quality. Second, both CIT and DigiKits can impart core knowledge and skills about PDA. At CIT events, a *Preserving your Digital Memories* brochure that contains condensed, user-friendly tips on digitization, management, and long-term preservation of PDA are given to participants (also downloadable from the CIT Toolkit website), and informal learning can also happen in communications between project members and participants (Milbrodt and Schreiner 112–115). Similarly, at DigiKits digitization events, digital literacy can be cultivated through interactions with participants, and it is possible to directly hold training events on digitization and digital preservation for individuals with the kits. Overall, both projects provide sufficient resources to digitize a reasonable range and amount of materials that should be able to meet general needs of PDA for participants, and they can teach basic PDA knowledge and skills to individuals. In this sense, they are both already supporting PDA in significant ways.

Considering the importance of flexibility in supporting PDA, a potential issue both projects may run into is how much materials can be digitized for an individual in their events. When turnout at events is low, they may be able to handle a larger amount of materials from each person; but when turnout is high, individuals may not be able to digitize everything they bring in. It is also possible that individuals may have materials in special formats that the mobile digitization units cannot digitize, which is not a fault of the projects, but does suggest that occasionally individuals may need to look for other options after the events (project members can try to point individuals to further resources). Regarding the possible tensions between community needs and personal needs, for CIT, because digitized materials are expected to be included in institutional repositories and DPLA, flexibility is achieved by providing an archival quality master digital for the individual's personal use. Although there are copyright restrictions for CIT and they cannot include items such as newspaper clippings or magazine articles, they take special care in not turning anyone away and suggest "it is good practice to provide community members with a digital copy of their items to take home, even if it can't be used for Culture in Transit" (Culture in Transit, *Culture in Transit Toolkit | Community*). The amount of such restricted materials that can be digitized may depend on the situation. For instance, it is hard to say whether CIT will digitize a whole scrapbook

of newspaper clippings for an individual to meet their personal needs. For DigiKits, since their events do not necessarily involve collecting materials, individuals may have more flexibility in digitizing items that may be copyrighted, but the concern about amount works the same way as in CIT. Altogether, both projects offer a reasonable degree of flexibility in supporting PDA, with the exception of some minor issues.

Finally, looking at the sustainability dimension in supporting PDA, the two projects may face some challenges. First, support in sustainable use of digitization equipment is limited in both projects. The CIT project has ended, and there is no guarantee that institutions borrowing DigiKits will consistently hold community scanning or training events. While individuals can hold on to the connections they may have made with project members and institutions for future assistance, opportunities to use equipment may still be limited to a handful of events.

Second, both projects may have potential issues in supporting the long-term preservation of the newly-digitized materials of individuals. CIT addresses this problem by ingesting a copy of the digitized materials into institutional repositories/DPLA, so at least these copies can be carefully maintained in the foreseeable future by institutions, which is a thoughtful and practical strategy. However, equally important copies in the hands of individuals still face preservation challenges in the long term, and any digitized materials that were not ingested due to copyright issues are especially at risk. For DigiKits, this issue can be more pronounced. Since the project does not require collecting digitized materials, it is likely the long-term preservation of newly-digitized items will mainly be handled by the individuals themselves.

CIT and DigiKits both have additional strategies to alleviate this problem. Apart from the knowledge exchange about PDA that happens at their events, they also provide some form of sustainable guidance on the long-term preservation of digital personal archives. For guidance to be sustainable, it should be accessible to individuals relatively consistently. For CIT, the most significant sustainable resource developed for teaching individuals about the long-term preservation of their digitized/born-digital personal archives (as well as tips for digitizing photographs and documents) is the previously mentioned *Preserving your Digital Memories* brochure. Written carefully in accessible and succinct language and based on resources from the Library of Congress and the *Activists' Guide to Archiving Video* created by the WITNESS project (Milbrodt and Schreiner 113–115), the brochure is brief but efficient in providing

general principles and best practices that can guide individuals in preserving their newly-digitized items and digitizing additional materials on their own. For DigiKits, since their portable digitization units are loaned to institutions and each institution is responsible for holding its own events, resources related to digitization workflows and standards as well as long-term preservation are provided on the DigiKits webpage (<https://georgialibraries.org/digikits/>) for institutions instead of directly for individuals (though individuals can also access the page on their own). Apart from an internally produced user guide of the kits that focuses on scanning, some external resources that the webpage links to include the *How to Preserve Family Archives (papers and photographs)* page by the National Archives, the Personal Archiving resources page by the Library of Congress, and, interestingly, the CIT Toolkit. The degree of sustainable support for individuals will thus highly depend on how each institution chooses to present these resources to the participants at their events. How well these resources from CIT and DigiKits may work for individuals in terms of supporting the long-term preservation of their materials newly-digitized from the projects, as well as their PDA in general across their lifetimes, remains to be seen.

In conclusion, current community-based digitization projects such as CIT and DigiKits are in reasonably good positions for supporting PDA, with the ability to provide essential equipment and knowledge while respecting the need for flexibility. How to better maintain sustainable equipment use and long-term guidance is perhaps the central concern for designing new community-based digitization projects that intend to further strengthen their connections with PDA.

4 Building Companionship: Proposals for Strengthening Personal Digital Archiving Support in Future Community-based Mobile Digitization Projects

In this section, I propose future possibilities for designing projects featuring mobile digitization units, including goals of striving to better serve the sustainability and flexibility dimensions of PDA needs without losing sight of community-based archiving objectives. The three proposals presented in the following sections are based upon the various thoughtful models introduced

earlier. They vary from presenting substantial changes to current project designs to making only moderate adjustments. I have also attempted to anticipate some of the practical difficulties that may arise in implementing these proposals and suggest some potential solutions. None of these ideas have been tested; they are solely meant to inspire innovative thought and invite further experimentation from the field. In the last part of this section, I discuss additional thoughts on how sustainable PDA guidance may be better provided to all three proposals.

4.1 Creating Small Communities of Practice with Unit-Sharing Cohorts

One way to design mobile digitization projects can be bringing mobile digitization units neither to community spaces (as in CIT and DigiKits), nor to one institution or individual (as in PROUD and PRAVDA), but to groups of individuals residing in the same or adjacent neighborhoods as “cohorts”. Institutions can build mobile digitization units with usability-tested documentation as in PROUD and PRAVDA to enable individuals to independently operate the units, and find cohorts of people that live relatively close to each other and are all interested in digitizing their personal items. Cohorts can consist of five to ten individuals selected by application (size of cohorts can be adjusted as the project continues based on feedback and assessment), and institutions may want to require that at least one individual has basic computer skills³ to serve as a team leader. Training sessions can be offered to one or more members of the cohort, and user policies and agreements can be signed before a unit is sent to the residence of one cohort member. Cohort members can then take turns using the equipment to digitize their personal materials individually or in groups, transport the units among members, and help each other with PDA. The institution can provide assistance only when serious issues arise (such as equipment malfunctions), and the loaning period of the unit can be negotiable.

The strategy of this design is to empower individuals to develop “small communities of practice” centered around PDA. Communities of practice is a concept coined

³ This idea is borrowed from the DC Public Library Memory Lab project, in which users need to assert they can follow directions independently and can perform basic computer operations such as typing, searching, and saving on their own before being allowed to use the memory lab equipment (Mears 94).

by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger that refers to “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner). The cohort formed here may be viewed as a temporary community of practice that shares PDA goals and resources (e.g. the mobile digitization unit, documentation, and training sessions), and they may work to facilitate collective, active learning. In this sense, such mobile digitization projects are community-based in that they are established upon smaller communities and depend on community-building to work successfully, but they also specifically facilitate PDA. Individuals have sufficient flexibility in making personal archiving choices, and they can have relatively sustainable access to equipment and knowledge if institutions allow the option for the units to be loaned to members of previous cohorts again if needed in the future. There is the possibility that some of these temporary cohorts can autonomously develop into more lasting communities of practice, which also works towards obtaining a degree of sustainability in peer knowledge sharing and support.

Some issues may be difficult to resolve in building such projects. First, there might be difficulties in finding individuals to build cohorts. Second, there is no guarantee that these small communities of practice can be effective in terms of sharing knowledge. Finally, there is the risk of the equipment being damaged or lost during transportation among members. To conclude, small-scale experimentations need be carried out before the feasibility and necessity of this kind of project can be practically gauged.

4.2 Coordinating with Memory Lab Projects

Another way to supplement the sustainability and flexibility of mobile digitization projects in supporting PDA is to coordinate them with related projects that have a better advantage in the two dimensions. One highly suitable type project for partnering with is the memory lab model that has been gaining attention in the personal archiving field (Mears 91–92). Public-facing memory labs are transfer stations with digitization equipment and other kinds of reformatting tools set up in institutions such as libraries for patrons to support their personal archiving needs. The DC Public Library’s Memory Lab, for example, carefully compiled online documentation on equipment operation and archiving best practices that patrons can refer to on site, and patrons work with the equipment on their own; trained staff are consulted when needed (Mears 88–95). With professional

equipment and user-friendly documentation that are maintained by institutions and knowledgeable staff on site for consultation, memory labs exemplify projects with sustainability and flexibility as central considered factors in their support of PDA. Therefore, they are ideal companions to mobile digitization projects in how they can provide a long-term, stable space for individuals who participated in single scanning events to continue their PDA efforts. Correspondingly, mobile digitization units also have much to offer to complement memory labs. Due to their mobility, they can take digitization out to individuals who are unable to come directly to institutional memory labs to serve their needs, and they may work as an introductory tool to generate interest in digital archiving, which may, in turn, draw individuals to seek more available resources such as memory labs at institutions. Thus, the two kinds of projects can combine their strengths to collectively support both community and PDA efforts. The strategy of this design is to find companion projects to compensate for the limitations of mobile digitization projects and to maximize the integrated impact of collaborating projects.

In an ideal scenario, if an institution has sufficient funds to build a hybrid project that has memory labs and mobile digitization units as two components, mobile kits can be used for hosting community scanning events when needed (can be modelled after CIT or DigiKits events) to support community archiving objectives and individuals with limited mobility to visit institutions, while memory labs can be introduced to participants during the events as an option for further supporting their personal archiving needs. The memory lab serves as the “headquarters” at the institution providing sustainable equipment and assistance as well as flexible choices. However, it is likely that such hybrid projects will be too much of a burden for even well-funded institutions, though there is the option to build them in modules gradually.

Two possible alternatives may be able to achieve similar results. The first is for institutions willing to build mobile units to partner with institutions interested in undertaking memory lab projects, and they can match up their efforts and offer events and services together. The second possibility is to do a simplified version of the memory lab component by having mobile digitization units perform “double duty”. An institution can build two mobile units, which can be stationed at a dedicated space to serve as a mini memory lab. One of the units can be packed and taken out for community events whenever needed and set up back in place afterward. In this way, the project can imitate the costlier hybrid projects, although the functions of the “memory lab” component

may be limited when compared to full-scale memory labs.

4.3 Developing Community Scanning Events as a Service

Mostly considering strengthening sustainability, an option that does not require much modification of existing mobile digitization project designs could be for an institution to build mobile digitization kits based on the CIT or DigiKits models, but establish community scanning events as a regular service in selected community spaces distributed across an area. Rolling out this service will likely require an overall environmental scan to identify where demand is concentrated and find appropriate locations. CIT mentions their biggest challenge in conducting community scanning events is getting a large enough turnout (Milbrodt and Schreiner 111). Depending on the situation, more regularly scheduled events may work towards gaining a steadier turnout in the long term by virtue of accumulated outreach effects and building a stable group of interested participants, or it may simply reveal that demand is not high in certain places. Events could be held every few months or so at first at each test location, and frequency of events and specific locations can be continuously adjusted based on periodical assessments of need as the service develops. It may be useful to maintain some sort of communication system between the institution and participants, such as allowing participants to be added to a mailing list that will notify them of future events and any changes in the service.

The strategy of this design is to establish a sort of *adjustable consistency* to community scanning events to ensure a certain sense of sustainability in equipment and assistance. The bottom line is as long as scanning events are continuously being held somewhere within an area at some regular frequency by the same (one or more) main hosting institution(s), and individuals can learn about the events, people will have intermittent but lasting opportunities to take advantage of mobile equipment and digitize more of their personal materials if needed, and they can use the events as semi-regular occasions to consult with information professionals on any PDA questions they may have. The service can use either the CIT model that collects the digitized materials if they have the necessary infrastructure in place, or use the DigiKits model that does not collect materials, although I suggest that giving participants the option not to share their digitized materials at the events is key to ensuring the flexibility of choice when

supporting PDA. To make sure the community-building elements of the events are not lost, equipment like the outreach kits from CIT can still be used prominently, and project members can, when appropriate, encourage participants to make available at least part of the digital copies they are comfortable with sharing to contribute to building their community histories (if the service has collecting infrastructures in place).

The biggest challenge of realizing this option is limited institution resources. If community scanning events are to be developed as a service, regularly dedicated time and effort from institution staff and volunteers are needed to ensure the sustainable management of the service. As such, it will require stable funding as support. The work also demands cultivating long-term relationships with communities who will serve as the home bases for these reoccurring activities, which needs to be handled respectfully, equitably, and with perseverance. Again, institutional collaboration can be one way to lower the bar to starting such services. Libraries and other cultural institutions within an area can provide the service collaboratively, share the mobile units, and take turns hosting events, though coordinating follow-up communication from participants in a consistent manner may be a challenge when multiple institutions are involved (Milbrodt and Schreiner 111).

To conclude, the three proposals all focus on trying to strengthen the support of PDA in community-based mobile digitization projects, with particular attention paid to ensuring flexibility and sustainability in the support provided by the projects. Concurrently, they attempt to maintain the community-based elements that are crucial to how mobile digitization projects have been conceived and implemented. Thus, I argue they are efforts that aim to build companionship between community and personal archiving, striving to connect the two aspects to complement and support each other in a single or integrated project. These efforts illustrate—at least in theory—how PDA may be better supported by community-based projects via reimagining community-based projects in new ways, collaborating actively with other PDA projects/tools, or slightly adjusting some parts of original community-based projects.

4.4 Additional Thoughts on Providing Sustainable Personal Digital Archiving Guidance

A significant point that emerged from this analysis is: for community-based mobile digitization projects aiming to

build companionship with PDA, while ensuring flexibility and sustainability in supporting equipment use tend to be dimensions that each project must largely handle on its own, providing sustainable, long-term PDA guidance is not something it must do alone or from scratch. As briefly mentioned in the previous section, CIT's brochure and the additional guidance for institutions provided on the DigiKits webpage either heavily reference or directly link to existing resources, which indicates there are projects that have already taken advantage of the collective knowledge of the PDA field. The field does not lack rich, openly-accessible educational documentation (Mears 88–89). On the contrary, the amount and variety of information might be overwhelming to true beginners. Thus, the central issue for community-based projects may be how to better connect participants to truly accessible personal archiving educational resources in ways that are genuinely useful to them across their lifetimes.

Perhaps this suggests the need to create an integrated, accessible online knowledge base specifically designed for lay individuals that can be collectively created, curated and maintained by institutions, professionals, and anyone interested in the field of digital archiving. Any project can refer to this knowledge base as a starting point for individuals to find sustainable guidance on digitization and long-term preservation of their personal archives. Existing curated resource hubs on smaller scales such as the DC Public Library's Memory Lab's libguide resources and The National Digital Stewardship Alliance's Digital Preservation in a Box Wiki can serve as foundations for such endeavors. At the same time, more assessment studies on how existing documentation and other educational resources across the field are being used by individuals and how well they match up with people's needs and expectations may be useful in obtaining a fuller picture of how sustainability can be better achieved in projects of community-based digital archiving.

5 Conclusion

The interconnectedness between PDA and community-based digital archiving provides an entry point for thinking about how to better bridge the two facets within single projects, under the premise that the needs of both sides should be fully respected. In this article, I argued in addition to providing equipment and knowledge, flexibility and sustainability are dimensions that warrant special attention when considering how PDA can be better supported in community-based digital archiving

projects. I examined how well two current community-based mobile digitization projects (Culture in Transit and Georgia HomePLACE DigiKits) can support PDA based on the two dimensions and concluded they are in good positions, with some concerns about their limitations in ensuring sustainable access to digitization equipment and sufficient guidance in long-term preservation. Finally, I envisioned three ways community-based mobile digitization projects could be redesigned to further strengthen their support for PDA without undermining the realization of their community archiving objectives, and proposed additional possibilities for enhancing the sustainability of providing guidance on digitization and long-term preservation for individuals.

As a conclusion, I hope this article illustrates the value in considering connections and differences between community and personal archiving needs in current and future projects, and calls for further coordination of efforts and collaboration to build better companionship between community and personal archiving. By working with a collaborative spirit, information professionals can encourage, build, and support a diverse range of "hybrid" or complementary projects that cross the boundaries of community and personal archiving areas, enabling the two to become close companions in driving the forward momentum of a broader archival mission.

Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank Lori Kendall for her help and support in completing this article. A special thank you to Rachel Mattson and Chris D'Arpa for first introducing mobile digitization units to the author, and to Lauren Algee for bringing PROUD and PRAVDA to the author's attention. The author also greatly appreciates the comments from the editor and reviewers of this paper.

References

- Ashenfelder, Mike. "Reality Check: What Most People Actually Do with Their Personal Digital Archives." available at <https://blogs.loc.gov/thesignal/2013/05/reality-check-what-most-people-actually-do-with-their-personal-digital-archives/> (accessed 9/3/18).
- Culture in Transit. "Culture in Transit Toolkit | Community." Culture in Transit Toolkit, available at <https://metro.org/cit-toolkit/community/> (accessed 8/20/18).
- Culture in Transit. "Culture in Transit Toolkit | Equipment." Culture in Transit Toolkit, available at <https://metro.org/cit-toolkit/equipment/> (accessed 8/20/18).
- Culture in Transit. "FAQ | Culture in Transit." Culture in Transit | Digitizing and Democratizing New York City's Cultural Heritage,

- available at http://www.mnyc.org/cit/?page_id=98 (accessed 8/21/18).
- Georgia HomePLACE. "Available HomePLACE DigiKits." Georgia HomePLACE :: Providing Library and Archives Collections Electronically, available at <https://www.georgialibraries.org/homeplace/availabledigikits.php> (accessed 8/20/18).
- Georgia HomePLACE. "DigiKits FAQ." Georgia HomePLACE :: Providing Library and Archives Collections Electronically, available at <https://www.georgialibraries.org/homeplace/digikitsfaq.php> (accessed 8/20/18).
- Gilliland, Anne, and Andrew Flinn. "Community Archives: What Are We Really Talking About." In *Nexus, Confluence, and Difference: Community Archives Meets Community Informatics*. Prato, Italy, 2013.
- Indiana Memory. "Mobile Scanning Units Overview and Guidelines." available at https://www.in.gov/library/files/IM_Mobile_Scanning_Units_overview.pdf (accessed 9/9/18).
- Indigitization. "Indigitization Grant Program Application Guidelines." available at http://indigitization-toolkit.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2018/01/Indigitization_Application_Guidelines_2018_Final-2.pdf (accessed 8/20/18).
- Kaplan, Elisabeth. "We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity." *The American Archivist* 63.1 (January 2000): 126–51.
- Kim, Sarah. "Landscape of Personal Digital Archiving Activities and Research." In *Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage. Information Today: Medford*, edited by Donald T. Hawkins and Brewster Kahle, 153–85. Medford, New Jersey: Information Today, Inc, 2013.
- Mears, Jaime. "The Washington, DC, Public Library's Memory Lab: A Case Study." In *The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving*, edited by Brianna H. Marshall, 85–101. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2018.
- Milbrodt, Natalie, and Maggie Schreiner. "Digitizing Memories and Teaching Digital Literacy in Queens, NY." In *The Complete Guide to Personal Digital Archiving*, edited by Brianna H. Marshall, 103–18. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2018.
- PROUD and PRAVDA. "Project Proposal." available at https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/grants/sp-02-16-0015-16/proposals/sp-02-16-0015-16_proposal_documents.pdf (accessed 9/5/18).
- Schreiner, Maggie. "Training for Small Scale Digitization Projects." *Culture in Transit | Digitizing and Democratizing New York City's Cultural Heritage* (blog), available at <https://www.mnyc.org/cit/?p=553> (accessed 8/20/18).
- Sheffield, Rebecca. "Community Archives." In *Currents of Archival Thinking*, 2nd ed. edited by Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood, 351–76. Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited, 2017.
- Wenger-Trayner, Etienne, and Beverly Wenger-Trayner. "Communities of Practice: A Brief Overview of the Concept and Its Uses." available at <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/> (accessed 9/20/18).