

NEH awards grant to VIVA Virginia Heritage Project Task Force

VIVA
The Virtual Library of Virginia
PRESS RELEASE

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NEH awards \$250,000 grant to VIVA task force to develop finding aids for archival and manuscript materials

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has awarded a 2-year grant of \$250,000 to the Virtual Library of Virginia's (VIVA) Virginia Heritage Project Task Force. The task force will use the grant to create a union database integrating thousands finding aids that conform to the Encoded Archival Description (EAD) standard. EAD is a standard for encoding archival finding aids. This project will use EAD to create a resource that describes and provides online access to a large body of primary source materials held by major academic and research libraries in Virginia. In addition to providing the higher education community of the Commonwealth with access to electronic resources, VIVA promotes collaboration among its member libraries by developing new forms of access to traditional collections. This project exemplifies the spirit of cooperation among VIVA libraries and the innovative use of technology to solve problems of access to primary source documents in libraries across the state. The database developed for this project will be freely available on the Internet to scholars, students and ordinary citizens worldwide.

The Project will initially draw on collections held by the University of Virginia, the College of William and Mary, George Mason University, the Library of Virginia, Old Dominion University, Virginia Commonwealth University, the Virginia Historical Society, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, the Virginia Military Institute, Virginia State University, and Washington and Lee University.

The Virginia Heritage Project has two primary goals. The first goal is the creation of the union database of EAD tagged finding aids to archival collections in Virginia. The second goal is the development and implementation of a model for statewide dissemination of and training in newly emerging library standards and technologies. Traditionally, in order to access collections at archival repositories scholars had to travel to each repository and page through a variety of highly specific paper finding aids. The union database will allow researchers worldwide to search standardized finding aids from all participating institutions in a seamless, integrated fashion. From their desktops, researchers will be able to discover new links among physically distant collections. The database will also be a valuable resource for elementary and secondary school teachers and their students supporting Virginia's Standards of Learning which mandate that all Virginia high school students develop skills for historical analysis, including the ability to analyze documents, records and data.

The Virginia Heritage Project will establish its EAD processing center at the University of Virginia, which will provide the technological leadership for the project. Five institutions will begin their own in-house processing of EAD finding aids during the first year of the project and the other five will begin in-house processing during the second year. Each of the participating institutions will in turn begin to provide training and support for EAD processing and conversion to other nearby members of VIVA. At the conclusion of the project, a minimum of twenty-two archivists, librarians and staff across Virginia will be proficient in the use and application of EAD. According to Elsie Weatherington, Dean of Library Services at Virginia State University and chair of the VIVA Virginia Heritage Project task force, the NEH is particularly interested in the unique distributed training model exemplified by the project. This collaborative effort is evidence of VIVA's commitment to enhanced access to the full range of library and information resources.

VIVA, The Virtual Library of Virginia, is the consortium of the libraries of the 39 state-assisted colleges and universities (at 52 campuses) within the Commonwealth of Virginia. In addition, 32 independent (private, non-profit) institutions and The Library of Virginia participate where possible. VIVA's mission is to provide, in an equitable, co-operative, and cost-effective manner, enhanced access to library and information resources for Virginia's academic libraries serving the higher education community. VIVA is sponsored by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV).

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