Introduction

A single point of access. A gateway to the cultural and intellectual riches stewarded by libraries, archives, and museums across the United States. Open to all, and only possible in the Digital Era.

This was the founding vision of the Digital Public Library of America, first imagined in 2010 as an open, distributed national digital library to harness the power of collaboration to inform and empower everyone.

Since its launch as an independent organization in 2013, DPLA has made this vision a reality through its cultural heritage network and ebooks initiatives. With a growing national partner network representing 41 states, over 4,000 contributing institutions, and more than 30 million items freely discoverable through a one-stop research experience, DPLA is transforming the landscape of access and discovery for the nation’s digital cultural heritage materials—photographs, maps, news footage, oral histories, manuscript documents, artwork, and more. The DPLA Exchange, paired with New York Public Library’s SimplyE platform, allows libraries to expand their digital offerings through a full-service, library-controlled pathway to purchase, organize, and deliver ebooks and audiobooks. The success of our cultural heritage aggregation network and ebooks services provides the foundation on which we will grow in the future and, as we enter our next phase, our commitment to expanding access to digital collections and other e-content remains unabated.

In this critical moment for American democracy, DPLA can and must leverage its unique position and capabilities to ensure access to trustworthy information is within reach for everyone. We see an opportunity to broaden our role to champion the work of libraries and cultural heritage organizations in our society. We will collaborate with partners to explore and test new tools and ideas to ensure that libraries and cultural organizations not only survive but thrive in the Digital Age. Our work will be driven by our mission to advance equitable access to knowledge for all.

Who We Are

Our Mission

The Digital Public Library of America empowers people to learn, grow, and contribute to a diverse and better-functioning society by maximizing access to our shared history, culture, and knowledge.
Our Strategy
The Digital Public Library of America amplifies the value of libraries and cultural organizations as Americans’ most trusted sources of shared knowledge. We do this by collaborating with partners to accelerate innovative tools and ideas that empower and equip libraries to make information more accessible.

We work with a national network of partners to:

• Make millions of materials from libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions across the country available to all in a one-stop discovery experience.

• Provide a library-controlled marketplace and platform for libraries to purchase, organize, and deliver ebooks and other e-content to their patrons.

• Convene library leaders and practitioners to explore and advance technologies that serve, inform, and empower their communities.

Proactive Collaboration
We believe that our institutions are stronger when we work together. DPLA actively seeks community leadership through strategic, balanced, mutually-beneficial partnerships in every aspect of its work. DPLA will bring together leaders and practitioners from across the field to address common challenges and identify areas for innovation.

Equity and Inclusion
We believe that our work can and should contribute to a more equitable society. We are committed to empowering institutions and communities that have been historically marginalized, underserved, and underrepresented. We will work with new and existing networks to collect and promote diverse and inclusive collections and stories.

Optimism about the Potential of Technology
We believe in the transformational potential of technology for unleashing knowledge and enabling creativity. Libraries and cultural heritage institutions can and must be active participants as these technologies are created, shared, and used to ensure that they are harnessed for the greater good.

Audience
DPLA’s partners are the heart of our work. We will continue to serve and collaborate with libraries, museums, archives and other cultural organizations through our hubs network and their contributing institutions. Our work to develop new services, tools, and approaches will be guided by the needs and diversity of our network.

As DPLA broadens its impact, we will initially work closely with libraries. DPLA’s ebooks projects demonstrate our capacity
to serve a diverse range of libraries—public, state, academic, school, consortia, and more—and DPLA will continue to expand on such partnerships.

DPLA will look for opportunities for crossover across each area of our work. We will likewise seek ways for our work in libraries to benefit the full range of cultural heritage institutions. As we engage in these explorations, we are guided by the principle that it is only through collaboration that we will be able to achieve our goals.

Expanding Our Current Work

All of DPLA’s work supports our singular mission to make digital content from our nation’s libraries and cultural institutions accessible to all. Ebooks and cultural heritage collections are two different programs that allow us to pursue this mission. DPLA will continue to build and advance programs, practices, and platforms that benefit our partners and other institutions across the country. This includes both expanding the cultural heritage aggregation network that has been DPLA’s hallmark achievement, as well as growing DPLA’s ebooks initiatives.

To ensure that libraries flourish in the Digital Age, we will heighten our role as convener, bringing together diverse stakeholders, including hubs, technologists, and service providers, to generate solutions that further our shared vision.

DPLA’s commitment to aggregating digital collections for public use is fundamental and mission-critical. As our first initiative, the cultural heritage network and platform laid the foundation for what DPLA is known for today: fruitful collaboration in pursuit of technology-based solutions to common challenges. We remain intent on the expansion of this program toward our goal of ensuring that every cultural institution in the nation has a pathway to contribute—particularly community-based efforts that represent experiences that have been historically marginalized.

Our ebooks program, through which we are working to improve the library e-content experience, complements our digital collections work. Driven by the common mission of maximizing access to digital content, the goal of our ebooks work is to give libraries across the country greater control over their acquisition and delivery of e-content; make more diverse e-content easily available to libraries and their patrons; and advocate for the needs of libraries in the e-content landscape.

Both our cultural heritage aggregation and ebooks initiatives emerged based on input from the diverse community of institutions working to advance a common vision of access for all. Over the years, DPLA has brought people together across fields and disciplines to problem-solve around common challenges and opportunities. We will build on this record by taking on a more active role as convener, champion, and advocate for libraries and cultural institutions and the technological advances that will help them thrive in the Digital Age.
Long-Term Success

DPLA will work to ensure that all of our projects are sustainable. We believe in taking responsible risks. As a small and agile nonprofit, DPLA is uniquely positioned to experiment with new technologies and explore new ideas on behalf of the field. DPLA will do so with careful calculation, balancing risks, costs, and benefits for our partners and the broader field. Our ability to pursue our values and mission is tied directly to the abilities of our organization and our collaborators to sustain our work.

Conclusion

American democracy is in turmoil. We know that we, and the libraries, archives, and museums with whom we work, are vital assets for this moment in time. DPLA envisions a future in which digital technology serves to spread knowledge and unleash creativity so that all of our stories are told.

Image Credits


Page 4, top: Patent drawing for a flying machine, from the collection of the National Archives and Records Administration.


Page 4, bottom: Lakȟóta Moccassins, from the collection of Minneapolis Institute of Art via Minnesota Digital Library.