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Unlocking Digitization Grants: Expert Tips to Accelerate Your Organization's Digital Transformation

Webinar Transcript • March 20, 2025

Presented by Elizabeth Evans and Amanda Day • Grants Office, LLC

Welcome and Introductions

Elizabeth Evans:
Hello everyone, and thank you for joining us today. My name is Elizabeth Evans, the Manager of Research and Consultation for our U.S. and Canadian operations here at Grants Office. Today we will be discussing unlocking digitization grants — expert tips to accelerate your organization's digital transformation.

Housekeeping

Elizabeth Evans:
Before we get started, I've got a few housekeeping items that I'd like to run through with you. First and foremost, know that you can listen hands-free over your computer speakers or headphones. There is no need to dial in. If your audio does become disconnected, for whatever reason, you can use the audio and video menu at the top of your screen to access the speed and dial in by landline or cell phone.

Also, you may ask questions at any time during today's event using the question and answer interface on the right-hand side of your screen. Feel free to submit as many questions as you'd like. We'll get to as many as possible toward the end of our time together. If we do happen to run out of time and don't have a chance to get to your specific question, you can always email us directly, and our amazing Multimedia Coordinator, Kate, who is running everything in the backend today, will drop that email address in the chat box for you.

If you don't see the Q&A box automatically on your screen, just look for the three little dots at the bottom of your screen to find the options for more interface interactions. From there you can select to have the Q&A and other features pop up.

Finally, know that this session is being recorded and the recording will be available for download at Grants Office's website starting tomorrow. Again, Kate, our wonderful Multimedia Coordinator, is going to drop that URL in the chat box for you. Also, the PowerPoint slides from today's presentation will be available at that same location. You can also send us a quick email to request these slides if you're not

able to get them from the website for whatever reason, and again, Kate will have that email in the chat box shortly: education@grantsoffice.com.

Today's Speaker and Agenda

Elizabeth Evans:
Today we are talking about unlocking digitization grants, providing expert tips to accelerate your organization's digital transformation. I already introduced myself, but we have an amazing speaker joining us from our very own Grants Office team — Miss Amanda Day, who is a Grants Development Consultant here with us. I am so pleased to have her joining us today to share her knowledge. If you do have any questions throughout the event, please send them in using the question and answer interface on your screen. Don't be shy with those questions — we have budgeted some time at the end for Amanda to get to as many as possible.

For today's session, it is going to be jam-packed for our little mini-webinar series. Amanda will be covering a lot of wonderful information. First and foremost, she's going to start out with talking about what digitization actually is. Then she's going to move on to the types of digitization projects we most often see being funded, and run through some available grant opportunities that are going to help you fund your own digitization efforts. She's going to wrap up by covering some basic tips and tricks to make sure that your own organization is grant-ready to pursue some of those funding opportunities, as well as offering a few guidance points on creating a successful grant proposal for your digitization efforts.

With that — enough for me — I'd like to have Amanda kick things off by talking about digitization. Take it away, Amanda.

What Is Digitization?

Amanda Day:
Thank you, Elizabeth. Hello, everybody. It's wonderful to be here, and thank you so much for joining today's webinar on digitization and digital transformation. We'll discuss what digitization actually is, types of digitization projects, and some available grant opportunities that will help us fund these projects. After that, we will cover some tips to make sure your organization is grant-ready, and then we'll share some guidance on creating a successful grant proposal.

First, what is digitization? Simply put, it's the process of converting information and materials from traditional methods — like physical paper documents, pictures, audio, and video — into digital formats. It's all about using technology to streamline operations, reduce costs, improve efficiency, and ultimately stay current in an evolving digital world. As materials are entered into the system, they're converted to a binary code that computers can then store in different digital files. Binary code is the fundamental

language of computers, using a series of zeros and ones to represent all data, instructions, and operations. It forms the basis of all digital technologies. This process makes access and retrieval much easier and protects the converted data from damage as well as unauthorized use or cyberattacks.

Why Digitization Matters

Amanda Day:
Why do we want to digitize files? First, enhanced accessibility — plain and simple. Easy access to records and materials online from anywhere at any time. This can mean digitizing records for internal use by your workforce, or it can mean creating an online database for public access to those materials. It streamlines workflow, increases sharing abilities, and creates a level of transparency by making those documents available to the public.

Second, digitization increases efficiency. The process allows for quick and accurate retrieval of specific records, eliminating the need to search through physical materials manually. No need to sort through written materials to find information — we can access those files right online.

There is also a cost reduction with this process. Cloud-based solutions and digital processes reduce the need for physical infrastructure and manual labor. There are literally local governments I've talked to that have entire buildings dedicated to storing files. That would no longer be needed if those files were in a digital format — sometimes extra rooms, sometimes extra buildings. The cost saving in that respect is important. The cost saving in manual labor is also important, so we're not having to send people out to find those files and spend hours looking.

Data security is a big part of the digitization process. Data integrity is improved on the records through measures like encryption, access controls, and securing information in the cloud. Data integrity is much higher with digitized files than having those physical files in a building somewhere.

Finally, using data analytics tools after those files are converted allows organizations to identify trends, patterns, and areas for improvement. All of that data can be worked into different types of formats to really streamline processes and keep yourself organized.

Types of Digitization Projects

Amanda Day:
What are some digitization projects? These can be used in so many different areas — really most sectors. It can be used in public safety, in the justice system, the education system, in healthcare, and the humanities.

State and Local Government

Amanda Day:
In the state and local government area, public safety agencies can use digitization to convert dashboard and body camera footage. That is a huge asset, making it available at the touch of a button — recording criminal history records and incident reports. Municipalities can also digitally store information like tax and deed information, death and birth certificates, building permits, and other local documents for easy access to either the public or to internal employees.

In addition to governmental documents that can be stored, historical materials such as newspapers, archives, and other information can be converted to preserve historical data for cities and counties.

Court Records

Amanda Day:
As far as court records go, this is another huge area for digitization. Files can be easily converted for public access so that it eliminates the need to go to the courthouse to see court decisions, case details, or legal proceedings — really just making that information accessible to the public.

K-12 and Higher Education

Amanda Day:
When we come to K-12 and higher ed, there's a lot of use for digitization in that realm. It streamlines educational opportunities. It can involve designing online libraries with digitized documents, developing interactive digital textbooks, and creating online databases for faculty use by sharing research papers or data collections between teachers.

Healthcare

Amanda Day:
Additional areas of note are healthcare — this is one of the biggest. Digitizing patient records to make them readily accessible can literally save lives. It's important to get those files out of filing cabinets and into the digital realm so that information could be accessed easily by emergency rooms or specialists to make sure that medications aren't mixed up, and things along those lines.

Humanities, Libraries, and Museums

Amanda Day:
Additionally, in the humanities, libraries and museums are recording a lot of physical materials like paper materials, but they can also record physical objects with 3D scanners and things like that to essentially save our history and make it accessible to the public for study, research, or educational reasons — sometimes entertainment reasons.

All of these examples have numerous benefits, and every area of every sector can use digitization projects as a way to preserve information or to make that information accessible to the public.

The Broader Impact of Digitization

Amanda Day:
Digitizing government files allows for easy access to agencies so they can share these materials and better understand trends and commonalities between localities. The preservation of documents and materials ensures that historical and cultural information will also be available for generations. As physical objects deteriorate — documents can disintegrate, other materials can be damaged or broken — as they're digitally entered into the cloud, they're going to be available for generations to come. As technologies advance, those digital files will even need to be converted into a different format as technologies advance.

By digitizing documents and making them publicly accessible, organizations create that level of transparency and trust. We're talking specifically with police departments and body-worn camera footage, police files, and things like that. As long as those files are made accessible to the public, it really does improve the level of trust between the public and public safety.

Having information at your fingertips just makes life easier. It's a lot easier, as we all know, to access information if we're doing research, if we're trying to educate ourselves on any historical information or any governmental information — all that information is available at the touch of a finger in those digital files. It really just improves workforce processes internally as well. We're not searching for paper documents or filing through cabinets to look for information. Expanding those educational opportunities is a huge part of digitization as well.

Example: New Orleans Burial Records

Amanda Day:
As a side story, as to the type of project that digitization can be a benefit for: I was speaking with a representative from the City of New Orleans, and the city was looking for grant funding to digitize a large number of burial records, because after Katrina, a lot of graveyards were actually under water and inaccessible. Several buildings with burial records from as early as the 1600s were water-damaged, and mold was quickly taking over those documents. There was a need to get those documents digitized so that the recorded history of burial sites could be accessible, since the actual burial sites weren't. I just thought that was an interesting example of how digitization is used in the real world.

Federal Digital Preservation Programs

Amanda Day:
Digitization actually really accelerated in the early 2000s with the first version of DocuScan. These scanners were used to scan physical documents into the system. The federal government has many sites dedicated to the preservation of documents and other materials.

Library of Congress Digital Collections

Amanda Day:
One that you all have probably heard of is the Library of Congress digital collection. This collection houses materials such as presidential documents, civil rights records, slave narratives, maps, and a lot of other historical materials. The information is stored and accessible to the public through the Library of Congress website. By preserving and making historical print materials accessible, information is available to a much wider audience and allows for better understanding of our country's history. It's a very interesting site — definitely visit it when you get a chance.

Harvard Digital Collections

Amanda Day:
Next is the Harvard digital collection. This collection holds a lot of varied records, as you can see by the slide. It includes records of exploration and scientific discoveries, early American history, the French occupation, immigration records, and the archives hold thousands of unique items across many digital formats. A lot of audio files from CDs, MP3 players, and cassettes have been converted to digital files — that's quite an interesting thing to note. This archive brings together curated, publicly accessible, and digitized materials all in one place.

State Digital Archives

Amanda Day:
In addition to federal sites and federal efforts to digitize materials, states often create their own. Most states have their own digital record and digital archive. Some that I wanted to point out: the state of Louisiana has its Digital Library. This is an online collection of historical documents and collections from libraries, museums, and archives. Michigan Memories is a one-stop site for photographs, maps, and other materials that record the state's history. And finally, Washington State Archives — this is an archive of local and state government records, and I'll note that this was the first site created solely to preserve this type of electronic record.

The federal government is focused on a much higher-level preservation effort, and each state will want to preserve their own information on a much smaller scale. That's why some of the states have developed these archives and focus on state-level preservation.

Sources of Grant Funding for Digitization

Amanda Day:
These programs can get very expensive. There are many different factors that can increase the cost: labor involved (the items have to be physically scanned), the equipment involved, the technologies involved — all of these drive up the cost. So what are some sources of grant funding? How can we find additional funding in addition to budgeted resources? These are big undertakings, and they can be time-consuming and very costly. There are three main sources of grant funding that help with these types of efforts.

Federal Funding

Amanda Day:
First is the federal government. They offer many different programs to help with this type of effort, through the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the National Archives. There are several different programs through these organizations. Most federal funding really focuses on the preservation of historical documents. As physical materials deteriorate over time, it's important to preserve the history for study and consumption. They're looking more at a high-level preservation effort.

State Funding

Amanda Day:
States have created their own programs. There are very few listed here, but in your state, you're going to have some kind of effort to help with digital transformation. New York State has a huge one with the New York State Library — there are several different programs through this that will fund digitization efforts for history, preserving public documents, and things like that. California also drives efforts through the South Central Regional Library Council, and its California State Library does have a few different programs focused on assisting with digitization projects.

Foundation Funding

Amanda Day:
Foundation funding is a great resource for this type of project. Organizations like the Mellon Foundation, the Knight Foundation, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation are providing funding for digitization initiatives. Foundation funds are going to be more focused on a specific sector like education

or healthcare, or they may focus on a specific geographic location. Foundations are usually focused on either one or a few states. It just depends on the foundation, but that is at a smaller level and will focus on a different set of preservation efforts.

Specific Grant Programs for Digitization

Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG)

Amanda Day:
I wanted to point out some specific grants that are available that would help with this type of effort. Some examples in the public safety sector: the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant. This program provides funding for state and local governments to invest in a broad range of activities in crime prevention and control. For digitization initiatives, JAG funds can provide funding for public safety agencies to move from paper-based record systems to digital systems, or can be used to digitize evidence like photographs, camera footage, videos, and physical evidence.

The funds from this program are allocated to states and municipalities on a formula basis, and then those funds can be accessed by local governments and the like through the state. The deadlines will vary on this, so if it's a program you're interested in, you would just have to refer to the state you're in.

National Digital Newspaper Program

Amanda Day:
Next, the National Digital Newspaper Program. This aims to create a searchable online database for U.S. newspapers. It focuses on digitization and preservation of newspapers between 1690 and 1963. In addition to actually digitizing the papers, state partners then contribute descriptive information like essays or information about each newspaper title in its historical context. We expect this one to open again in October of this year.

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Archival Projects

Amanda Day:
Next is the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. There are several different programs through this, but the one I wanted to highlight was the Archival Projects program. Funds are used to improve online public discovery and use of historical records. These collections are intended to engage the public, expand education, and promote understanding. This program is currently open with a deadline of May 7, so it's definitely one to keep an eye on.

NICS Act Record Improvement Program

Amanda Day:
And last is the NICS Act Record Improvement Program. The program aims to enhance accuracy, completeness, and accessibility of records used by the National Instant Criminal Background Check System — that's the NICS part. This program focuses on filling gaps in the firearms check process by improving the flow of information to state and federal systems. They are recording things like criminal history records, records on domestic violence, stalking convictions, and protective orders. We anticipate this one to open in July of this year, and a total of $25 million is available for this program.

Grant Readiness Steps

Amanda Day:
Now that we've talked about what digitization involves and some of the sources of funding, I wanted to give you some grant-readiness steps to get you started on your digitization project.

Prepare for the Project

Amanda Day:
First, we want to prepare for the project. There are several steps we need to think about when we're creating this type of project.

Define the scope and objectives. Identify and organize what materials you want to digitize, and then decide how you want it to look in the end. Is it a public-facing website, or is it for internal use only? Next, conduct a needs assessment. Define the technological, human, and financial resources required for the project.

Then research the appropriate technology and tools. There are a lot of technologies out there to help you with this, so we need to research which ones are appropriate for our project — meaning hardware and software. Decide how the content will be stored. Is it going to be in the cloud, on servers, or both? Essentially, you could do both.

Create a timeline. We need to break this project down into manageable chunks and then assign them to the appropriate person to manage. Once all of those steps are followed, develop a plan that includes step-by-step processes and how to provide proper training to get it under control within the time frame.

Choosing the Grant

Amanda Day:
Once the planning is done, it's time to think about applying for a grant and choosing the grant. There are many elements that make up a grant application, and when you only have 30 to 90 days to pull all of

these elements together, it's very easy to miss things sometimes and get off track. It's important to have a grants champion who can oversee all the aspects you're looking at — following policies and procedures, getting accounts in order, breaking the project down into manageable chunks, and assigning it to the right person. Preparation and organization are key when you're applying for grants. We don't want to wait to the last minute for the grant to open. We want to start getting ready well before the grant is open.

Writing a Successful Grant Proposal

Amanda Day:
Most grants will ask for a written proposal. The primary goal of a grant proposal is to persuade the funding organization that your project is worthwhile and that it deserves financial assistance. When writing a grant proposal, it's important to keep some things in mind.

Projects, Not Products

Amanda Day:
Always remember that grants fund projects, not products. Technologies and other products requested are a part of a larger picture. We're looking at the larger picture: what is the meaning of the project? What is the goal of the project? Then incorporate the technological needs that are needed to complete the project. So we need a strong need statement — that's important. Start with your goal, and then figure out what you want to accomplish. Put the project first and follow with the product.

Learn Everything You Can About the Grant

Amanda Day:
Then learn everything you can about that grant. You need to know it inside and out. Read the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and make sure you understand the grant and the environment before you start the application. We always want potential grant recipients to enter the process with their eyes wide open. Know the program and how it works so that you don't receive any kind of surprises as you're going along.

Use SMART Goals

Amanda Day:
Fourth, use SMART goals. These stand for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-focused, and Time-bound. Avoid being vague, and instead be clear and direct about what you intend to implement, what the outcomes will be, and how those outcomes will be measured.

Get a Fresh Set of Eyes

Amanda Day:
Finally, before clicking submit, get a fresh set of eyes on your full application. Sometimes that second set of eyes can catch things like errors, abbreviations that reviewers might not understand — they may notice missing content or even typos. Receiving that objective feedback is key when you're applying for grants.

With that, now that we've provided you with information on what digitization is, what grant funding is out there, and some tips to help you with your application, I will turn things over to Elizabeth for further content.

Q&A Session

Elizabeth Evans:
Wonderful. Thank you so much, Amanda, for sharing your knowledge with everyone who's joining us today. Sounds like a lot of great information, and we've got about three minutes left in the half hour for our mini-webinar. With that, we'll go to a couple of questions that we have received from our audience.

Q1: Can an organization apply for the same grant twice if the projects are different, or is it better to roll all of the projects into one grant?

Amanda Day:
I was actually just reading about this in one of the grants, and it was better to roll it into one entire project rather than applying twice, because you're competing against yourself essentially. Just kind of roll that all into one bigger project. There are some grants in the humanities that specifically said: do not apply twice for this — roll everything all into one extensive grant proposal. Hope that makes sense.

Q2: I have a project and I want to apply for grant funding, but I don't know where to start.

Elizabeth Evans:
Thank you so much, Amanda. Our next question: I have a project and I want to apply for grant funding, but I don't know where to start. I'll actually take answering this one. Grants Office is a full-service provider of not only grants intelligence, but grant-seeking support as well, so we can do funder prospecting, project planning and consultation, and even proposal development — whether that's editing and reviewing the applications you're writing yourself, or bringing in one of our expert grant writers to pull the thoughts out of your head and put them on the page for you, so you have a draft to react to and we can make sure we're articulating your project vision appropriately. You can always reach out to Grants Office if you are in need of support. We're always happy to help with these kinds of projects.

Q3: Do we retain ownership of materials if we make them available through digitization grants?

Elizabeth Evans:
The last question that we have time for today: do we retain ownership of materials if we make them available through digitization grants?

Amanda Day:
Yes, the answer is yes, you do. When you upload that information into a digital process, the public websites only serve as the access platform for materials. As we're accessing them, you retain ownership. We do have to consider, before anything is uploaded, whether there is a copyright on that information, and if there is, there need to be permissions before that is uploaded into the system.

Closing and Upcoming Events

Elizabeth Evans:
Thank you so much, Amanda. I see we've had two or three more questions get submitted in the last minute here, and unfortunately we don't have time to get to those, but please reach out to us at education@grantsoffice.com. Kate will drop that email in the chat box again for you, so we can get an answer to your question afterwards.

Real quick, I do want to say that things are a little crazy with the federal funding landscape right now, and know that Grants Office is keeping our fingers on the pulse of everything that is going on. We've already done two fireside chat events on this topic, and we will have another one coming up on April 24, talking about the very recently passed continuing budget resolution, which is going to fund our federal agencies through the rest of this federal fiscal year, which ends on September 30, and what to expect in light of all of the recent executive orders now that we do have the remainder of the fiscal year 2025 budget locked in. You can go ahead and register for that event if you're curious by scanning the QR code on your screen or by going to the Grants Office website.

With that, I would now like to thank you all for joining us. Again, I want to thank Amanda for sharing her expertise during today's session. It has been recorded, and this recording, along with the slides, will be available on the event's resources page within the next 24 hours. So if you did miss anything, want to share this event with a colleague or an acquaintance, or even want to come back later for a refresher on something we covered today, you can always go back and review today's content at your convenience. We hope you had a nice time with us today, found this to be a valuable use of your time, and we look forward to seeing you on a future GrantsCast. Thank you, and I hope you have a great rest of your day.

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