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NIRDs Unite: Building a Community of Institutional Repository Practitioners in the Northeast

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In the northeastern United States, there is a noticeable lack of any organized regional events specifically related to the topic of IRs. With other regions across the country holding similar events — along with recent national discussions and projects proposing a move away from local repositories (Coalition of Networked Information [CNI], 2017; Weinraub, Alagna, Caizzi, Quinn, & Schaefer, 2018) — starting a regional community of practice could prove beneficial in the long-term for repository managers and their institutions. Repository managers have a vested interest in the ongoing success of the repositories they manage; have genuine policy, copyright, and self-archiving concerns; and have developed robust workflows to manage their IRs' unique content and needs. At the end of the day, how do we communicate the value of the work we do to external stakeholders, our broader institution, and library administration?

The idea for "Northeast Institutional Repository Day" (NIRD) was conceived by a group of five repository librarians in the northeast. The organizers sent out a pre-conference online survey to the IR community in November 2018 to see if fellow repository practitioners had an interest in attending and/or participating in such a day and the response was a resounding, "Yes!" The survey results suggested that building a stronger regional network of repository managers would foster meaningful discussions on the merits and effectiveness of IRs.

As we began to move forward with setting a date for the first Northeast Institutional Repository Day (Figure 1), we wanted to ensure that our local community was interested in attending a one-day event devoted to institutional repositories. NIRD took its inspiration from other long running regional IR days, such as the Southern Mississippi Institutional Repository Conference (SMIRC, est. 2015) and the Northwest IR User Group Meeting (NWIRUG, est. 2016). Given the density of institutions in the northeast, we thought the northeast was ready for a regional IR day of its own. The pre-conference survey was distributed to various national and regional discussion lists (both platform specific and platform-agnostic) and received 109 responses. 57.5% of respondents indicated that they would be able to attend a one-day conference in Boston and 40.6% indicated that they might be able to attend such an event. The positive response to the survey helped us get funding and sponsorship from our institutions as well.
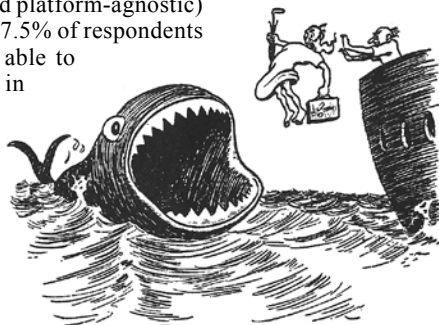

Figure 1. The Northeast Institutional Repository Day website *https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/neirug/2019/*

To make this event meaningful to our local IR community, we asked survey respondents to identify the pressing issues or questions they face in their day-to-day work. We received 89 unique responses to this question. The responses were so varied and specific that it is difficult to point to obvious trends among our survey respondents. However, multiple users mentioned an interest in community-owned or community-built infrastructure, a need for which came crashing to the forefront of repository administrator conversations after **Elsevier's** acquisition of **bepress** in August 2017.

Metadata (management, creation, standardization), preservation, outreach, and data were also mentioned by a number of respondents. With the exception of a few mentions of migration from specific platforms (both open source and proprietary hosted), most of these responses were platform agnostic and represented issues that all repository managers encounter regardless of our institution or platform.

We also gave respondents a chance to share their thoughts, suggestions, or questions for the organizers and received 31 responses. Given that this was our first time organizing an event of this type and that we had budget, space, and time limitations, we could not accommodate all of the suggested format requests (interactive workshops, roundtables, platform demonstrations). These suggestions have given us ideas for possible future iterations of this event.

Early on in our planning process, we made the decision to make this a community-led conference and not to have vendor-led presentations or vendor-sponsored events incorporated into the NIRD19 program. We limited presentation types to lightning talks (5-10 minutes),

panels (45-minute collections of brief presentations followed by a moderated Q & A), and presentations (20 minutes). We received a total of 19 proposals from individuals working with IRs and digital collections in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. These presenters came from a wide range of institutions — large universities, small private liberal arts schools, and a non-profit research institute. The Planning Committee was dedicated to creating a welcoming a supportive space for NIRD attendees, and to this end we established a code of conduct (*https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/neirug/conduct.html*).

The NIRD planning committee accepted a total of 14 presentations and lightning talks, which made for a full agenda for the day. Five presentations addressed policy development, hosting undergraduate non-text-based content, accessibility, and outreach. We accepted seven lightning talks that addressed undergraduate content, electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs), wikidata and IRs, publisher self-archiving jargon, refreshing your repository, and open access policy compliance. We converted two remaining platform-specific proposals — migrating from Digital Commons to figshare and building the open source (Islandora) infrastructure — into longer lunchtime talks that required pre-registration by attendees. We were also able to secure **Kathleen Shearer** (Director of Coalition of Open Access Repositories) to give our keynote, "Open is not enough! Sustainability, inclusiveness, and innovation in scholarly communication," which provided a high-level overview of the current open access repository landscape and how next-generation repositories can be more sustainable and inclusive going forward.

In order to ensure that we could make the first NIRD free while remaining within our budget, we capped the event at 100 attendees. One hundred attendees from 57 distinct institutions and organizations registered. We estimate that we had a total of roughly 97 attendees on the day of the event, counting no-shows and local walk-ins. Twitter activity during the day for the event's hashtag, #NIRD19, was positive and encouraging (Figure 2).
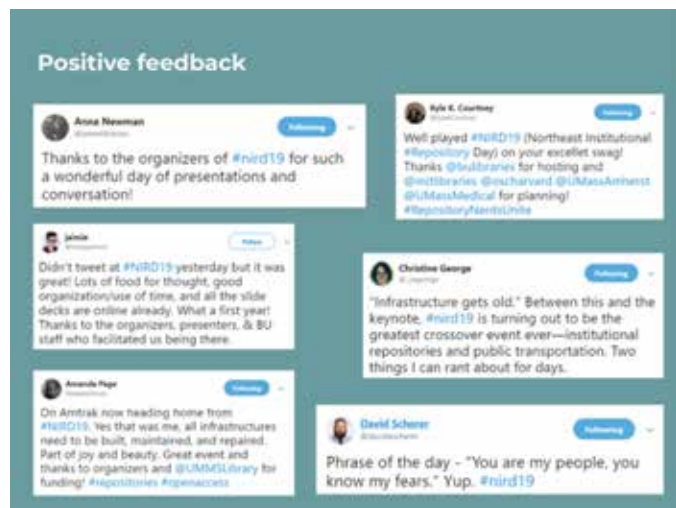

Figure 2. A sample of #NIRD19 Twitter activity

Thirty-six attendees completed our NIRD follow-up survey. 83% of respondents were extremely satisfied with the event and 13.89% were moderately satisfied. We feel that a major reason for this success is that the planning committee reacted to the needs and wishes of our audience, as expressed in the pre-conference survey. We adjudicated

the survey into broad categories, solicited presentations from those categories, and approved presentations that reflected attendee interests. Overall, everyone who completed the follow-up survey enjoyed having a day completely devoted to repositories; one mentioned that it was their favorite conference of the year, and another attendee referred to the event as an "inclusive hub." Other attendees asked that future versions of the event build in some "unconference" time, roundtables, and additional time for networking and discussion of pertinent issues and platform specific topics in a less formal, possibly birds of a feather style, setting. Several respondents indicated that they were glad that the focus of the conference was at the grassroots community level and not vendor-based, in terms of sponsorship and presentations.

The positive feedback we received from attendees has been encouraging post-conference and we hope to continue holding the NIRD as a regular event for the northeast repository manager community. We are currently exploring the possibility of adding NIRD-sponsored, smaller unstructured meetings throughout the year or as a pre-conference event in order to keep the momentum of this new regional community of interest going.

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