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Preserving, Digitizing, and Sustaining *The Weekly Challenger*, a Local African-American Newspaper

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Abstract:

A local newspaper in Saint Petersburg, Florida, [The Weekly Challenger](#) was established in 1967 with the goal of documenting and sharing information about the African-American community at a time when other local news outlets largely ignored it. Through a special legislative appropriation from the State of Florida, the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library at the University of South Florida Saint Petersburg received funding to preserve, digitize, and sustain the newspaper. In this article, the authors discuss the steps taken to build the repository for the newspaper's print and electronic [archives](#), including [photographs](#) and [videotaped interviews](#) with a long-time publisher. NPML has made the archives freely available to the public; however, current issues published electronically will be embargoed for six months. The archive preserves Saint Petersburg's cultural heritage, allowing scholars and students to have a deeper understanding of the historical context of African-Americans in central Florida as well as their contributions to and struggles with the city in which they live.

Keywords: digitization, preservation, sustainability, cultural heritage, newspapers

Introduction

During the 2017 election cycle, the city of Saint Petersburg, Florida, was immersed in a heated mayoral race. Republican Rick Baker, the former mayor from 2001-2010, opposed Democrat Rick Kriseman, the incumbent. The race divided the entire city, including the African-American community, and had little to no middle ground and no clear front-runner. The local African-American community paper, *The Weekly Challenger* (*TWC*), covered the race and shared information from a variety of perspectives, including differing opinions from prominent thought and religious leaders in the community. After the race, one of the religious leaders made a call for unity and healing in the community.¹

¹*TWC* published several pieces leading up to the 2017 mayoral race in Saint Petersburg, FL. On September 7, 2017, Dr. Goliath Davis, former Chief of Police and contributor to *TWC*, wrote "[My Brother and Sister's Keeper](#)," a feature article supporting Republican candidate Mayor Rick Baker and praising his many contributions to the community. On October 27, 2017, Dr. G. Gregg Murray, Pastor at Mt Zion Primitive Baptist Church, wrote "[A Great Divide](#)," a letter to the editor lamenting the schism the mayoral election caused in the city while supporting incumbent Democrat Rick Kriseman, who narrowly won the election. *TWC* coverage continued after the election, this time focusing on healing the community after the divisive election. Dr. Davis contributed another article, "[I Thank You](#)," urging continued action and sharing appreciation for the democratic process: "Now that the election is over, it is time for the real work to begin. It is time for campaign promises to be realized

Researchers at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill found that newspapers, no matter their size, have “an expansive mission and role that goes significantly beyond the original ‘watchdog’ function envisioned by our nation’s founders [E]ven in the digital age, newspapers are quite simply ‘the glue that binds’ a community together politically, socially, and financially, as well as journalistically” (Abernathy, 2014, p. 22). As evidenced in the recent hotly contested mayoral race, *TWC* clearly has served this function in the Saint Petersburg African-American community.

Cleveland Johnson bought *The Weekly Challenge* in 1967 and quickly changed its name to *The Weekly Challenger*. After Mr. Johnson’s death in 2001, his wife Ethel assumed leadership of the paper and, later, in 2012, his youngest daughter Lyn became the owner and editor.² The paper reports on key issues in the community, and of particular importance, it is the only source for positive news and stories about the people in Saint Petersburg’s African-American community.

In 2016, through a special legislative appropriation from the State of Florida, the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library (NPML) at the University of South Florida Saint Petersburg (USFSP) received funding to preserve, digitize, and sustain the newspaper. It is in the process of digitizing and archiving print-only issues and archiving born-digital issues. The archive is freely available to the public, except for recent articles under a six-month embargo, which can be found on *TWC* website. The archive will preserve Saint Petersburg’s cultural heritage, allowing scholars and students to have a deeper understanding of the historical context of African-Americans in central Florida as well as their contributions to and struggles in the city of Saint Petersburg.

The University of South Florida Saint Petersburg and Community Connection

Because USFSP is a regional mid-sized university, one of its core responsibilities is active participation in the local community. Enriching the lives of community members, helping to find solutions to local problems, and partnering with local businesses are significant elements of USFSP’s mission.³ Given this mission and connection to the surrounding city, archivists in Special Collections focus on collecting materials related to Saint Petersburg, including the African-American experience.⁴ NPML has provided an appropriate home for *TWC* print and digital archive.

Management and Oversight of the Initiative

NPML moved quickly with implementation of the three goals of the project—preservation, digitization, and sustainability—thanks to the partnerships and professional work already in progress. The library became the physical archive for *TWC* in 2013; collaborative efforts with people and organizations in the local African-American community were ongoing; and the librarians were well versed in operating and building a digital archive. With access to the legislative funds, NPML was able to acquire high-end digitization equipment and hire staff to move most of the project forward. In particular, NPML hired a collections specialist with strong digital skills and training to contribute to the project. She oversees and manages the preservation activities related to *TWC* initiative and serves as the digital projects manager

and to hold the mayor accountable. I hope and pray the administration will act appropriately and ensure those most in need and desirous of change, residents of Midtown, are afforded opportunities to grow and prosper in all areas—self-determination, employment, education, housing and economic development.” On November 16, 2017, Dr. Murray wrote a letter to the editor titled “[A Call for Unity](#)” encouraging the community to heal: “If we can address our hurts and disappointments, our pain and our defeats, our setbacks and our anger, perhaps then we can discern the times and seek God’s face as to what He wants you to do to bring the community together, make the community better and lift the community higher. If all you have is misery and malcontent because things did not go your way...then you are now the obstacle, you are now the problem.”

² [TWC Timeline](#) contains highlights about key moments in the newspaper’s history.

³ [Vision 20/20](#), USFSP’s strategic plan, identifies “Commitment to Community” as one of the university’s core values.

⁴ [The Jordan Park Collection](#), which contains photos and documents related to a housing project, is an important collection related to the African-American experience in Saint Petersburg. Another collection of note is the [Norman E. Jones Collection](#). Mr. Jones was a prominent figure who opposed integration and valued self-determination during the Civil Rights era.

who provides day-to-day oversight of activities related to the assessment of materials, digital imaging, and quality control and maintaining documentation related to the workflows for ingesting and making available content through Digital Commons. The collections specialist works in conjunction with the Special Collections and Digital Collections teams to advance the project. Since the library is not in the newspaper business, it was essential to identify an appropriate partner to ensure the success of the goal related to sustainability. The Poynter Institute for Media Studies, located across the street from the university, agreed to join the project. It is a global leader in journalism, providing expertise in newspaper management and professional development to journalists who want to hone their skills and become more business savvy.

Preservation and Digitization Initiatives to Date

In order to set up *TWC* collection's preservation and digitization initiatives and secure project deliverables, a realistic assessment of available resources was vital. Details such as accession, metadata schemas, workflows, and equipment purchases were extensively researched, implemented, and tested.

Deliverables

The top four deliverables at the beginning of the project included:

- developing a portal for *TWC* digitized newspapers on bepress,
- researching and purchasing digitization equipment,
- completing newspaper digitization by June 2018, and
- preserving all born-digital, digitized and physical materials.

Institutional Capabilities

Institutional capabilities must be considered when choosing a metadata schema, long-term processes, workflows, future digital preservation planning, staffing, and budget. NPML is a mid-size university library with no software developers for in-house or open-source software customization. Thus, before making a decision or recommendation to purchase hardware and software, the collections specialist would question its sustainability within Special Collections.

Since there were no workflows or guides in place at the institution for this type of project, the collections specialist referred to the DCC Curation Lifecycle Model⁵ and digital preservation standards and guidelines. The intent was that the workflows created for this project could be used as a guide for future initiatives. Inter-departmental collaboration helped the collections specialist secure those decisions.

Two teams in NPML meet and engage in collaborative conversations to assist in implementation and transition of born-digital and digitized content into the repository: the Digital USFSP team and the Special Collections team. Members of the Digital USFSP team include personnel from Systems, Online Learning and Instructional Technology Services (OLITS), Administration, Instruction, and Special Collections departments. The Special Collections team includes personnel from Special Collections, Administration, Instruction, and Cataloging.

Concurrently, the library had recently subscribed to bepress to replace DSpace as its repository. *TWC* was the first collection housed in bepress, without migration from DSpace. Considerations included how the ingest workflow for digitized and born-digital formats would work with the new digitization equipment as well as how it would be integrated with other tools and portals NPML may use in the future. To better understand these processes, the collections specialist researched bepress through seminars and experimented with basic troubleshooting situations.

⁵ DCC Curation Lifecycle Model
<http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/curation-lifecycle-model>

Accession and Inventory

The first donation of physical newspaper issues came to NPML in March 2013. However, they were not accessioned or inventoried but were instead stored until the start of the 2016 legislative grant. Prior to the arrival of the collections specialist, fieldwork students and interns started an inventory spreadsheet that contained basic metadata of the newspaper issues. When the collections specialist began, she evaluated and re-organized the metadata fields to reflect digital preservation standards, and began to populate them with the help of fieldwork students.

The collection contains both physical and digital formats of newspaper issues and images. Within the physical newspaper collection, there are currently no issues prior to 1973, and yearly representation of these issues become strongest in the years following 1997. Because they were stored in places not fully protected from Florida's environment, most physical issues are in poor shape. Specifically, they show signs of water, humidity, and insect damage, which cause warping, yellowing, and holes, respectively. Born-digital primary copies of *TWC* start in January 2009. Most of *TWC* still images are in print form, but the born-digital files are in various formats and were either stored on CD-ROMs or transferred with the born-digital instances of newspaper issues.

Metadata and Keywords

bepress uses Dublin Core as the metadata schema, which does not have newspaper specific fields. Therefore, the collections specialist had to determine the best way to integrate newspaper Dublin Core metadata standards into bepress. The metadata fields and keywords selected for the collection were gathered from various sources: the Library of Congress (LOC) National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP)⁶, Umbra Search⁷ and the Newspaper Digitization Interest Group⁸. Umbra Search is a unique resource because it gathers African-American history resources from numerous institutions and its metadata and keywords are based on culturally appropriate descriptive terms.⁹ Each *TWC* record has a local identification, a Creative Common (CC) license, and Rights Statement. NPML does not own the copyright to the newspaper, as it still belongs to the publisher. To ensure these protections, the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License was chosen, and the Rights Statement¹⁰ indicates that copyright is in effect and the material is only for educational use.

Equipment and Digitization

The search for the right digitization equipment began with the research into digitization standards and guidelines for newspapers. Consideration was given to the multiple formats and material types in the collection, but also for the different types of materials that could be part of future projects. To prepare for this decision, the collections specialist researched similar newspaper digitization projects (i.e. Kentucky Digital Newspaper Program¹¹ and Chronicling America¹²).

⁶ LOC National Digital Newspaper Program: Guidelines and Resources
<http://www.loc.gov/ndnp/guidelines/>

⁷ Umbra Search: African-American History
<https://www.umbrasearch.org/>

⁸ Newspaper Digitization Interest Group: Metadata Specifications
<https://sites.google.com/site/digitalnewspaperspractices/technical-specifications/metadata-specification>

⁹ Nuckolls, K.A. "LC Subject Headings, FAST Headings, and Apps: Diversity Can Be Problematic In the 21st Century"
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1555&context=law_facpub

¹⁰ Rights Statement: In Copyright, Education Use Permitted
<http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC-EDU/1.0/?language=en>

¹¹ Kentucky Digital Newspaper Program
<https://kentuckynewspapers.org/program/>

¹² Library of Congress Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

Before researching digitization equipment vendors, a set of criteria¹³ was created using the information gathered from digitization standards guidelines for newspaper digitization projects¹⁴ and interviews with those who worked on similar projects. The collections specialist researched and received quotes from four different vendors for the copy stand, camera, and digital back, then presented her findings to the Digital Team for consideration. After deliberations, the team decided to move forward with the vendor Digital Transitions¹⁵ because of the equipment's versatility and adherence to digitization best practices and standards. NPML purchased a 3040 Reprographic Scanner, Phase One IQ350 for Phase One/Mamiya 645 digital back, DT RCAM-72 with eShutter, an ISA target, and their capture and post-processing software Capture One: CH. The library purchased LED lighting and computer hardware and software from other vendors.

All of the newspaper issues from 1973 - 2008 have been digitized, including 676 issues and over 15,000 pages. Papers from 2009 onwards were not digitized because the library already procured their born-digital copies from *TWC*. An image collection was also created to provide a sampling of 154 images from *TWC* collection. Currently, the concentration is on the post-digitization processes of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and ingesting records into the repository.

Workflows

Workflows were developed for physical, digitized and born-digital formats and delineated by still image and newspaper materials. The workflows evolved because of changes in the materials, equipment, or staff. Multiple drafts were created so changes to the workflow can be seen over time.¹⁶

Repository Data

Within Digital Commons, bepress provides a dashboard that pulls data about a collection, or entire portal, and provides data sets and conclusions with data visualizations. For example, *TWC* dashboard provided data on the number of records that were ingested and the number of downloads for each issue. It was through the download data visualization world map that alerted the collections specialist to a bot in Roubaix, Hauts-de-France, France that had quickly downloaded 465 records from *TWC* collection, which is almost the entire newspaper archive.

Following are statistics regarding the archive inventory:

- 434 born-digital records
- 247 digitized records
- 10,660 pages
- 3,169 downloads (data collected on April 5, 2018)

There is very little usage data on the image collection at this juncture because it is relatively new. We are getting metadata page hits, but no downloads have been recorded. On the other hand, readership distribution for newspaper collection is very active.

¹³ See Appendix A.

¹⁴ NDNP Image and OCR File Format Profile

<https://www.loc.gov/ndnp/guidelines/archive/guidelines1718.html>

LOC Preservation Guidelines for Digitizing Library Materials

<https://www.loc.gov/preservation/care/scan.html>

FADGI Guidelines: Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Cultural Heritage Materials

<http://www.digitizationguidelines.gov/guidelines/digitize-technical.html>

¹⁵ Digital Transitions, RG 3040

<https://dtdch.com/dt-rg3040/>

¹⁶ See Appendix B for current sample workflows.

Readership Distribution: TWC Newspaper collection in the Digital Archive



**Screenshot taken on April 5, 2018*

Digital Preservation

Preserving historically significant materials has always been the central mission of Special Collections and the digital archive. In terms of digital preservation, the NPML has arrived at the first stage by acknowledging that understanding “digital preservation is a local concern,” (Kenney & McGovern, 2003). The library’s current repository, bepress’s Digital Commons, is a publishing platform and institutional repository. It has built-in customer support, better functionality, and is more user-friendly than DSpace but is not explicitly for long-term digital preservation. The collections specialist and the head of systems discussed the various available options. They considered using a network server storage but concluded that would not provide enough space due to institutional realities. The solution they arrived at was to utilize two separate external mirrored hard drives. The first one is 4TB LaCie and located with the digitization equipment. The second hard drive is an 8TB LaCie backs-up the first and is in a separate location. NPML is currently investigating a cloud-based tool, such as Amazon Glacier, for the long-term off-site preservation of the files.

Sustainability Initiatives

From the fall of 2016 through 2017, regularly scheduled meetings took place between experts at the Poynter Institute and Lyn Johnson, the current editor and publisher of *TWC*. These meetings assisted the editor in developing marketing strategies, business plans, and other practices to expand the newspaper’s market base. Additionally, these meetings gave insight on how the newspaper promotes awareness of news and businesses in the African-American community while continuing to serve as a respected information source for residents and other businesses in the target market.

With support from NPML’s legislative funds, the Poynter Institute organized the Florida Ethnic News Symposium to assist editors and leaders at historically African-American and ethnic newspapers throughout Florida to strengthen their networks and enhance practices that will allow these businesses to thrive as well as become catalysts for information and economic growth. Notable speakers included Dr. Benjamin Chavis, Jr, CEO & President, National Newspaper Publishers Association; Janis Ware, Publisher, *The Atlanta Voice*; Martin G. Reynolds, Co-Executive Director, External Affairs and Funding, Maynard Institute; and Bill Celis, Associate Dean for Diversity, Inclusion and Strategic Initiatives and Associate Professor, at the University of Southern California.

According to Drouzas (2017), Chavis argued that the black press is not going out of business, and is, in fact, increasing its impact and reach because it is “trusted” and is perceived as “authentic,” unlike the mainstream press. He urged papers to make connections with large advertising agencies to get more revenue and with experts like the Poynter Institute to hone their awareness of business practices.

A faculty member at the Poynter Institute and Media Business Analyst & Leader of News Transformation, Rick Edmonds shared at the symposium the following insights in his presentation, “The Top Five Basics of Sustainability.” He encouraged attendees to make sure that they have “a strong, fresh editorial mission,” that they embrace a business mindset and staff positions accordingly, that news must still be published in print and digital formats, and that sponsorships are a way to boost revenue. In his most salient piece of advice, Edmonds argued that attendees need to “[e]mbrace the adventure of change. History is an asset, but clinging to the same old ways of doing things is not.”

Integration into the Curriculum

Given USFSP’s teaching mission, NPML actively promotes the integration of special collections into the curriculum. The use of *TWC* collection is prominent with the Neighborhood News Bureau (NNB), a journalism initiative headed by Dr. Bernardo Motta through a class to teach students that context and history matter. His mission is teaching his students how to write a story by looking back in history and visualizing how the narrative has evolved and impacted present events in the community.

To date, the NNB has used *TWC* as a resource and a teaching tool. For example, students have written for the paper and gained valuable experience. There are several ways NNB uses the collection as a resource. At first, Special Collections librarians traveled to the NNB classroom every semester to discuss *TWC* collection and other resources the students could use from the digital archive and Special Collections. Starting in the Summer of 2017, the NNB began a project to build a historical timeline of St. Petersburg. The timeline is being built through Heroku App, a cloud-based application developer tool. NNB partnered with the organization Hack4Impact to create an application that creates a “story” using maps. The “story” creates points of interest in the storyline using *TWC* resources in the digital archive while filling in the gaps of the collection through oral histories taken from the African-American community.

Conclusion

About the survival of current news production, Abernathy (2014, pp. 21-22) makes the following observation:

Publishers and editors can begin by asking this simple question: if your publication ceased publishing tomorrow, who has the most to lose? The answer in most communities . . . is that there would be a tremendous vacuum for many, including readers and public officials, who depend on the newspaper to be a credible and comprehensive source of news and information that affects the community; advertisers, who depend on the newspaper to connect them with local consumers of their goods and services; and, shareholders, employees, and vendors, who rely on the newspaper for income.

A similar question can be asked about newspaper digitization and preservation: if a community newspaper is not digitized, preserved and shared, who has the most to lose? In the case of *TWC*, it is the members of the African-American community in Saint Petersburg, who rely on the newspaper to capture the history and positive news of and issues facing their community; members of the larger Saint Petersburg community, who need to better understand the city’s historical and current racial climate; and researchers and students, who can study an important primary source and gain insight into the history of Africans Americans in central Florida from their own perspective. As part of an institution dedicated to making meaningful connections with the city, the Special Collections at NPML serve as an appropriate home for *TWC*’s permanent archive, safeguarding the city’s important cultural heritage.

Websites Related to the Project:

The Nelson Poynter Memorial Library at the University of South Florida Saint Petersburg
<http://lib.usfsp.edu/home>

The Poynter Institute for Media Studies
<http://www.poynter.org/>

The Weekly Challenger
<http://theweeklychallenger.com/>

The Weekly Challenger Digital Archive @ USFSP
<http://digital.usfsp.edu/twc/>

USFSP Neighborhood News Bureau
<http://www.nnbnews.com/>

References

Abernathy, P. M. (2014). *Saving community journalism: The path to profitability*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Drouzas, F. (2017, June 15). Florida Ethnic Media Conference brings in civil rights leader. *The Weekly Challenger*. Retrieved: <http://theweeklychallenger.com/florida-ethnic-media-conference-brings-in-civil-rights-leader/>

Edmonds, R. (2017, June). *The top five basics of sustainability*. Presented at The Florida Ethnic Media Conference at the Poynter Institute, Saint Petersburg, FL.

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<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=spobooks;idno=bbv9812.0001.001;rgn=div1;view=text;cc=spobooks;node=bbv9812.0001.001%3A11>

Appendix A: Equipment Criteria

The Weekly Challenger Equipment Criteria

Created by: Alexandra Curran and last updated 10/20/2016

Criteria	Option 1	Option 2
<i>Functional Criteria</i>		
Copy Stand: Flat, non-pressed surface		
Copy Stand: Compatable camera		
Copy Stand: Compatable computer hardware/software		
Copy Stand: Adjustable stand		
Copy Stand: Compatible lighting included		
Copy Stand: Handles large objects		
Copy Stand: Handles fragile objects		
Camera: Image-editing software included		
Copy Stand: Room size compatable (10*10 or 10*12)		
<i>Organizational Criteria</i>		
Maintains current and complete website		
Specifies cost models		
Specifies and maintains current documenation of all services and terms		
<i>Technical Criteria</i>		
Copy Stand: 16 to 32 W inches		
Copy Stand: 23 to 30 H inches		
Camera: 300 - 600 dpi		
Camera: Bit depth		
Camera: Output file format -TIFF		
Camera: Output file format -JPEG 2000		
Camera: High depth of field (F11-F16)		
Camera: Remote shutter release		
Lights: compact fluorescent		
Lights: 5000K - 5500K		
Light: extendable stand		
Camera: Short and long lenses		
Metadata: Generates metadata file along with digital object		
Metadata: Generated metadata file linked to digital object		
<i>Documentation and support</i>		
Provides installation instructions for all linked equipment aquired from company		
Provides maintenance support		
Provides and maintains technical support		
Supports customization - integration with other equipment		
Documented evidence of effectiveness		
Provides equipment warrenty		
Maintains working wiki for troubleshooting		

Appendix B: Workflows

TWC Project Workflow for Digitized Newspapers

Created by Alexandra Curran

Last updated on 03/29/18

Key

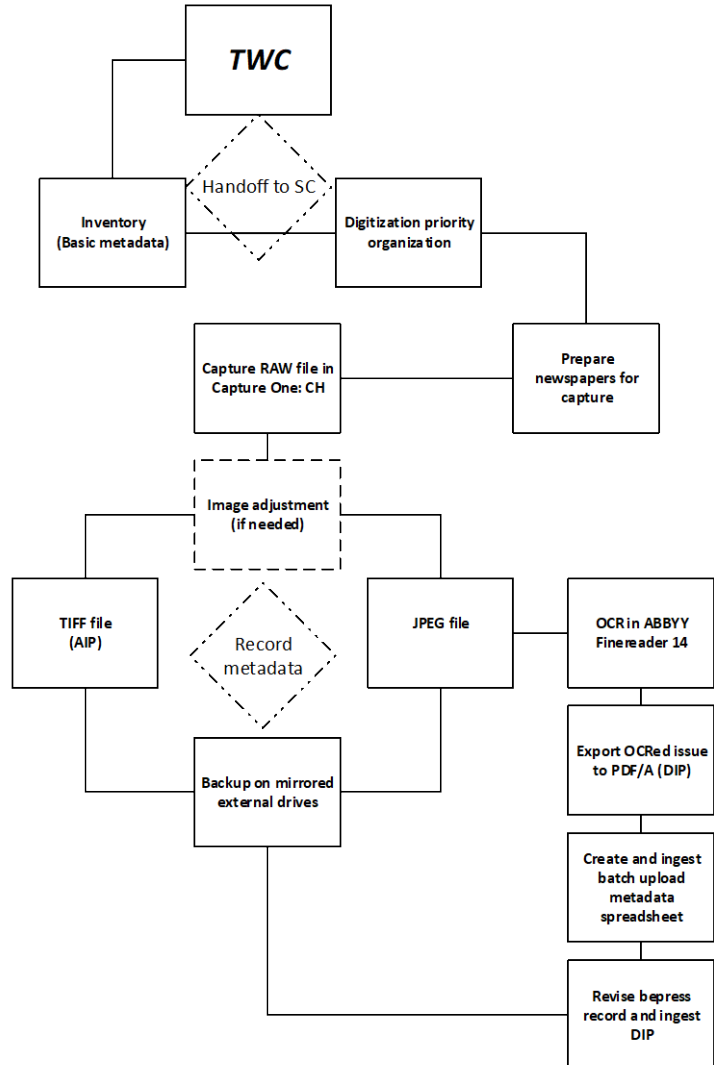
TWC – The Weekly Challenger

SC – Special Collections

SIP – Submission Information Package

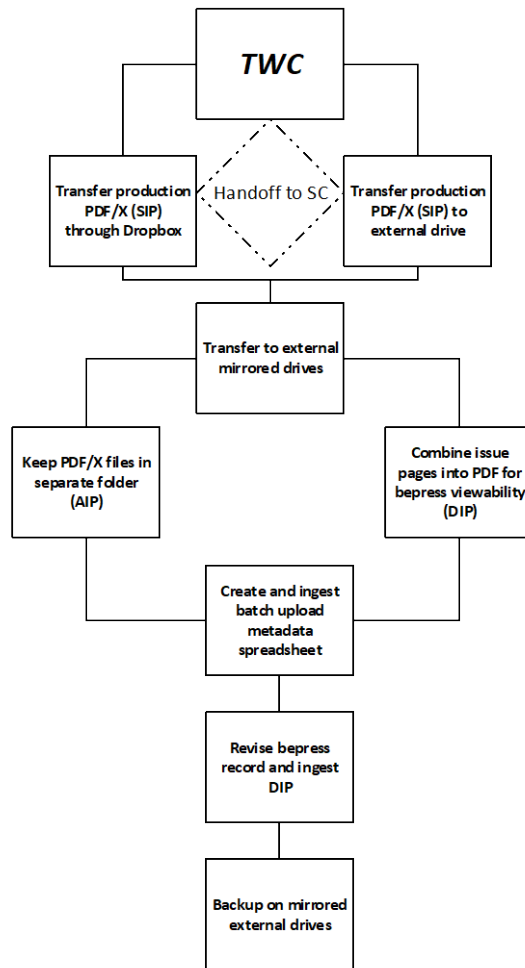
AIP – Archival (Preservation) Information Package

DIP – Dissemination Information Package



TWC Project Management for Born-digital Files
 Created by Alexandra Curran
 Last updated on 03/29/18

Key
TWC – <i>The Weekly Challenger</i>
SC – Special Collections
SIP – Submission Information Package
AIP – Archival (Preservation) Information Package
DIP – Dissemination Information Package



TWC Project Workflow for Digitized Still Images

Created by Alexandra Curran

Last updated on 03/29/18

Key

TWC – *The Weekly Challenger*

SC – Special Collections

SIP – Submission Information Package

AIP – Archival (Preservation) Information Package

DIP – Dissemination Information Package

