



**Harvard Library Lab
2010-07-15**

Description

The Harvard Library Lab has been established to create better services for its students and faculty and to play a leading role in shaping the information society of the future. It's an opportunity for individuals to be innovative and make original contributions to the way libraries work. The Lab operates by promoting the development of projects in all areas of library activity and leveraging the entrepreneurial aspirations of people throughout the library system and beyond. Proposals from faculty and students from anywhere in the university will also be welcomed and the Lab will encourage collaboration with projects being developed at MIT. The Lab offers infrastructure and financial support for projects and establishes a venue for cooperation across projects.

The Lab's efforts are based on the following principles:

- **Entrepreneurialism:** Projects should be based on ideas supporting the library system, championed by people invested in their success. While these ideas must be consistent with the overall mission of the Harvard University Library, the Lab will operate on the principle that the generation of ideas should be bottom-up, through a proposal mechanism, rather than through top-down mandates.
- **Scalability:** Projects should lead to changes in systems or practices that can scale so a reasonable investment can have substantial and lasting effects. It is better, for instance, to build infrastructure or tools that enable members of the Harvard community to achieve their goals themselves than to provide "one-off" solutions to individual problems.
- **Openness:** Projects should promote openness, and should be sharable to the extent technically feasible.
- **Experimentation:** The Lab promotes experimentation; risk of failure of a project does not disqualify it for support.

Guidelines

The Lab will promote rapid development of lightweight solutions that have the potential for large-scale benefits. In keeping with the principles above, projects should not scale in such a way as to add heavy carrying costs over time to library budgets. Consider creating a standalone project that could have the option to plug into existing infrastructure later. Projects should not be for content creation or reformatting, but

they could be for infrastructure in support of those activities. Projects should be a balance of innovation and benefit to the library community. The following criteria are examples of how projects will be evaluated and selected for funding:

- Innovative or novel in application or idea
- Benefit to Harvard library users or staff either directly (e.g., web services) or indirectly (e.g., processing efficiencies to make content available quickly)
- Experimental and provides a challenging opportunity for the applicant (i.e., moves past business as usual)
- Open, collaborative, and sharable
- Fills a demonstrated need
- Mid to long term value and scalable
- Low cost to develop and maintain
- Does not rely on development of new central infrastructure or enterprise wide resources
- Can be completed in less than 1 year

Supporting resources

The Lab is planning to have technical staff available to augment the home department's staff.

Funding

Funding can be requested for:

- Term staff or release time for existing staff
- Outsourced services
- Equipment
- Technical tools

Funding for business-as-usual processes will not be considered.

Ideally, funding from the Lab will be leveraged with investment (in effort, dollars, or kind) from the home department to ensure strong support from everyone involved. Projects ranging from very short-term quick fixes to as long as a year in duration can be funded. For large projects, proposals should be structured in two phases:

Funding stage 1: Accepted proposals will be given initial seed money to show proof of concept within three months.

Funding stage 2: Three months after funds are awarded, individual projects will be reviewed. Successful demonstrations will be asked to continue work and awarded the remaining project funds. It is possible not all projects will be asked to move forward. This is to be expected when testing experimental projects.

Application

The proposal process is meant to be quick and lightweight. Proposals should be two to three pages including a simple budget outline. The proposal should address the project idea, what problem it will solve, how it fits with existing activities, and what resources are necessary in the short and long run, including how daily operations will be shifted around in order to allow time to work on this project. In addition, the proposal should

address questions of how to measure the benefits of the project and determine if the project has succeeded or failed. The review committee may request further details if needed.

Eligibility

Harvard faculty, staff, or students may apply for project funds. Individuals should have support from their department, including approval of any release time to work on a project, before submitting an application. A letter of support to this effect will be required of funded proposals.

Timing

New proposals will be accepted at any time, with primary proposal reviews occurring three times a year:

December 1, 2010

April 1, 2011

August 1, 2011

Small projects may be funded on a rolling basis.

All projects should take less than one year to complete. When the project is completed, if additional work could be done to enhance it, applicants are welcome to submit a follow-on proposal.

Reports

Key participants from every funded project will attend regularly scheduled meetings to promote synergies among the projects. Occasional meetings presenting Library Lab projects to the broader university library community will also be scheduled.

Examples

The following list of potential projects indicates the kind of proposals that would qualify for support by the Lab. Some of these projects are underway or completed.

1. Mobile-apps for existing library systems. Allow users to search and browse library information, such as hours and locations, from handheld devices.
2. Customizable cross-search of e-resources. Library staff can select several databases to search simultaneously, save the set, and then add a search box of that new collection to their library web site. Patrons will have quick access to a pre-selected set of domain specific resources.
3. Self help document delivery. A web form for requesting document delivery that does an automated search on open-access resources before placing the request with the library.
4. A new infrastructure for developing digital collections. By taking advantage of recent technology, this project would enable faculty and students without specialized computer skills to develop, manage, and distribute collections of digital objects as easily as they can now participate in blogging.

5. A safety box for digital preservation. Lightweight in character, a digital repository would complement the heavier repositories — DRS, DASH, and Dataverse Network — that already exist at Harvard.
6. Digital browsing. Because 45 per cent of Harvard's holdings are stored miles away in the Harvard Depository, it no longer is possible to browse through most material by strolling through the stacks. By expert engineering, it should be possible to group them digitally so that a user can sample online a wide variety of related works.
7. Print-on-demand. POD technology offers new opportunities to readers within Harvard and to those outside the university who want to consult its open-access collections. Despite the increasing popularity of e-readers, most people continue to prefer printed texts and are eager to have them supplied rapidly and at low cost. Experimentation with POD options could show how new technology can reinforce older forms of assimilating information.

Library Lab administration

Library Lab is managed by the Harvard University Library, Office for Scholarly Communication. The OSC Advisory Committee will also be the advisory committee for Library Lab. The project review committee includes faculty and staff from the Harvard University Library, Law Library, and FAS.

- Robert Darnton, Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor; Director of the Harvard University Library
- John Palfrey, Henry N. Ess III Librarian and Professor of Law; Special Advisor for Information Technology
- Tracey Robinson, Head of the Office for Information Systems in the University Library
- Helen Shenton, Deputy Director Harvard University Library
- Stuart Shieber, James O. Welch, Jr. and Virginia B. Welch Professor of Computer Science; Faculty Director of the Office for Scholarly Communication