In-House vs. Contractors

One of the first questions in any digitization project is whether the scanning and related work (quality control and metadata) will be performed by in-house staff or offsite by a vendor. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

In-House Scanning Projects	Offsite Contractor-Run Scanning Projects
Advantages *Control* • All aspects of the project take place within your organization, allowing staff to collaboratively resolve issues as they arise and make decisions. *Material Handling* • Fragile or valuable materials remain on site and are not subject to changing environmental controls, or potential damage through transportation. • Security and proper handling of records ensured because the local unit can monitor access and ensure proper handling. *Develop Staff Skills* • Digitization may allow staff to learn new skills, including project management. *Project Development* • The project and its requirements can develop incrementally. • Easier to ensure desired quality requirements are met and upheld.	**Advantages** *Costs* • Project costs are more transparent because many vendors will allow an organization to negotiate a set price per item. • The vendor is responsible for the upfront costs for technology including scanners, servers, computer terminals, and network connections. • Problems and costs associated with obsolesce are the responsibility of the vendor. *Project Timeline* • Vendors can typically perform a higher volume of scanning then can be done in-house because trained staff are working in a setting designed specifically for scanning, and using top of the line equipment. *Experience* • Vendors may be able to offer project advice based on past experience. *Staffing* • Expenses related to staff training and turnover are incurred by vendor. • No need to increase/reallocate unit staff to the project.
Disadvantages *Equipment Investment* • The purchase of hardware and software falls on the organization. • The organization is responsible for replacing obsolete technology. *Costs* • The staff learning curve makes it difficult to set a specific price per digitized item and determine the costs for the entire project. *Staffing* • The organization will either need to reallocate staff to the project, or hire new/temporary staff. • Staff turnover may create variables that can affect the quality, cost, and ability to meet deadlines. *Space/Resources* • Need to be dedicated to the project including computers, tables/desks, and outlets. *Standards* • The organization is responsible for researching standards and staying abreast of changes. *Project Timeline* • Projects will take more time to get up and running as staff learn and/or develop skills.	**Disadvantages** *Removed From the Process* • Because the scanning is offsite you may have less control over the image processing and quality control. *Contract Negotiation* • The contract must be negotiated to exact specifications at the outset of the project. Any changes to specifications based on results will need to be re-negotiated. *Material Handling* • All records need to be transported to the vendor. Fragile or large format material may be hard to transport. • Vendor staff may not be trained to handle confidential records. • Records may be damaged or lost during transport. *Access to Records* • Records are inaccessible while they are with the vendor. • Handling of confidential and/or sensitive records will need to be specifically addressed with the vendor. • Some vendors use proprietary software which limits access or leads to extra costs.

Resources referenced for this document

Northeast Document Conservation Center. *Outsourcing and Vendor Relations.* n.d. https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/6.-reformatting/6.7-outsourcing-and-vendor-relations (accessed June 2017).