

Federal Agencies Audio-Visual Working Group

Notes from the Recorded Sound Subgroup meeting, April 21, 2008

Abstract: Two agencies represented, discussion of drafting guidelines and reference to earlier documents by others, audio decision lists and structural metadata, and evaluation of digitizing systems in terms of the IASA pass-fail recommendations.

This meeting for the recorded sound subgroups was held at the Library of Congress on April 21, 2008. In addition to representatives from the Library of Congress, the meeting was attended by a representative of the Voice of America.

The discussion focused on the guidelines we wish to draft, and particularly on the pre-existing source documents that can be cited and summarized. One subgroup member has made an initial breakdown of those source documents, and these will be reviewed by subgroup members. The review process should look at each section and answer questions like these:

- What have the previous documents omitted that ought to be covered?
- What other source documents should we use, where else can we harvest good information?
- Do we agree with what the previous document said, can we endorse their descriptions and/or recommendations? Where do we differ?
- Where might practitioners wish for better support, better knowledge, or improvements in tools?

There was also a draft for the categories of sound items and the objectives for digitization. The draft categorization was structured in terms of final-output-quality factors, i.e., *not* in terms of types of original materials (cylinders, discs, tapes, etc.). Since it seems clear that the recommended specifications for the resulting digital files will be the same, regardless of original-source type, the group agreed that was a good way to proceed. The discussion also revealed that incoming born digital content is a fact of life for archives like those represented in this meeting, and there was consensus that these should be part of this categorization.

The proposed categorization also turns on elements of metadata: for which categories will structural metadata be needed for multi-part (and thus multi-file) items? The group agreed that structural metadata could be important. There was some back and forth on Audio Decision List metadata (“ADL,” from the standard AES31-3; see examples in the Sound Directions project), which has not been used by any of the agencies at this meeting. One member of the group noted, as a sidebar, that WAVE files can contain multi-track content in linear PCM form (more than just stereo). This general matter of multi-part, multi-channel, and other multi-possibilities will continue to be pursued as time passes.

The important TC-04 document from IASA discusses the evaluation of the systems, equipment, and operators that carry out digitizing. It provides pass-fail points for such elements as THD, frequency response, IMD, jitter, etc. How important would it be to evaluate and confirm that systems in use by federal agencies would pass this test? The discussion revealed a mixture of

views:

- The better quality equipment on the market easily meets or surpasses IASA's "pass" values; there may not be a need to measure their performance.
- It is difficult to carry out these measurements; it requires expertise and expensive lab equipment.
- The distortion measures may be less important than the clock and jitter elements; this is where a-to-d conversion devices may fail to perform perfectly.
- No organizations that we know about actually measures these elements, everyone takes it for granted that high-end equipment will perform well.

The discussion of system evaluation moved on to the matter of practicality: how could these performance factors be measured in an affordable way? The group agreed that it was worth having an initial consultancy to assess the situation, to draft a statement of what might be done to accomplish the desired outcome, and to forecast what this might cost.

Another topic had to do with checking files after production. The JHOVE tool can be used to determine if WAVE files are well-formed and valid. One or two within the group will run JHOVE on some sample files from recent reformatting and see what the typical reports tell us.