

ALAIR: Why & How

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Librarians, with all our information superpowers, continue to be vulnerable to attack by our archenemy—loss of information. A few years ago, members from ALA’s Association for Library Collections and Technical Services Division (ALCTS), hoping to eradicate the threat from that dastardly villain, requested a repository that could handle their digital records and publications. During a pilot project in 2013, the ALA Archives collaborated with ALCTS to develop an open-access repository suitable for use by members of the entire ALA organization. Now the ALA Institutional Repository (ALAIR) is available as a place for officers, members, and staff of ALA units to deposit copies of their born-digital and digitized materials with enduring value. Over 5,000 items have been deposited in ALAIR thus far, and 66% (3,503 items) are documents issued in the 21st century.

ALAIR is not a replacement for ALA and division websites or for ALA Connect. Both of these online venues are intended for disseminating current documents, resources, and other communications. ALA Connect also provides additional features for group work and communication (e.g., community forums). In contrast, after documents are no longer active, ALAIR can handle the preservation and storage of these materials. More importantly, ALAIR ensures access (the ability to view online or download) to these materials for ALA members, researchers, and the public. The burden of collecting and preserving existing electronic documents is thus passed from ALA constituents to ALAIR and the ALA Archives. Depositing electronic records in ALAIR eliminates the risk of loss of information during changes in leadership, staff turnovers, and changes in round table or committee membership. There is no longer any need to convert born-digital documents into analog formats for depositing into the ALA Archives. Reports and publications from ad-hoc committees, temporary status notwithstanding, are eligible for deposit. ALAIR can also handle reports and documents culminating from cross-committee partnerships. Researchers will be able to access ALAIR items anytime and anywhere, making it easier to conduct research or to preview material before determining whether to travel to the ALA Archives for an in-depth visit.

ALAIR’s Contents

The ALA Archives have policies in place for accepting materials; these also apply to ALAIR. Documents should have enduring administrative, legal, or research value, typically comprising official records, historical files, publications, and audiovisual

materials. Official records are things like constitutions, bylaws, minutes, transcripts, member rosters, or agendas. Historical files include decisions, policies, reports, or speeches. Publications encompass articles, programs, newsletters, press releases, and periodicals. Audiovisual materials include images, photographs, videos, and sound recordings (see [ALAIR policies](#) for more information).

ALAIR is able to receive electronic documents in *any* format. PDF and Word documents are common. Text files, PowerPoint slides and mpegs of session recordings also have been deposited.

Because ALAIR is intended to be open access, ALA staff or groups should be mindful of depositing any electronic documents of a sensitive nature, have copyright issues, or may infringe on privacy. The ALA Archives' private server can permanently retain and preserve these types of digital documents separately from ALAIR.

Using ALAIR

ALAIR's online interface is easy to navigate. At the top left of the page is a search box to input search term(s). Along the left side are facets for browsing, accessing one's account, and popular terms (Author, Subject, and Date Issued) to initiate searches in ALAIR. Additional filters are available at the top when browsing, including an alphabetical list to quickly jump to items starting with a certain letter or a box to input the first few letters of the term one is using. The browse lists can only be sorted in ascending or descending order, but the per-page browsing list results can be adjusted between 5 and 100. Search results are listed by default according to relevancy ranking. A drop down list can narrow the results by a specific top-level community. Filters, such as "title contains" can be applied to further narrow the search. A gear-shaped icon at the right provides ascending or descending sort options for title or issue date as well as how many results are listed per page (again, from 5 up to 100).

Once a sought-after item is found and opened, the default display is a simple item record; the title, URI (handle permalink), and date (of creation) are prominently placed at the top. If an item includes an abstract and/or a description, these display below the date. The full item record is accessible through a hyperlink; in this full view, the item information is arranged according to its Dublin Core metadata elements and values. (A reciprocal link back to the simple item record is included in this detailed view of the record.) The accessible digital files are at the lower part of the item display. Thumbnails for the digital files are accompanied with technical metadata including the filename, file

size, and file format as well as a hyperlink to View/Open them. Listed underneath the digital files are the collection(s) in which the item belongs.

ALAIR Platform & Structure

ALAIR is powered by DSpaceDirect, which is a hosted DSpace-based platform provided by DuraSpace. The technical support, maintenance, and preservation functions are handled through DuraSpace's cloud service, DuraCloud, with an additional two backups made at Amazon's S3 and Glacier services.

DSpace repository structure consists of community (i.e., an organizational unit), collection (a group of records of the same type or purpose), and item (the digital objects themselves). At the topmost level, ALAIR's communities mimic the broad categories in ALA's organizational structure, including Committees, Divisions, Executive Board and Council, Member Papers and Publications, Offices, and Round Tables. Communities can be further divided by communities (sub-communities are "nested communities"), or by collections, or both. For instance, the Divisions community in ALAIR comprises eleven sub-communities, one for each ALA division. The ALCTS community has a child community for its Preservation and Reformatting Section (PARS) as well as collections for Annual Reports, Meeting Minutes and Agendas, Publications, and Task Force Reports. Following this structure, publications and records generated by PARS would not be deposited into the ALCTS collections, but into the collections available within the PARS community. Collections also can be shared in cases of interdivision or cross-committee cooperation, avoiding the need to deposit duplicate documents in different communities.

Items consist of three parts: metadata, bundles, and bitstreams. Qualified Dublin Core metadata records contain a description for the item. Bundles may contain the original files deposited—the publicly available version may change over time so it is necessary to save the original files deposited for preservation purposes. Other bundles associated with an item may include thumbnails, licenses, and extracted text to use for indexing. And finally, bitstreams are the files that people can view and download, and each bitstream is part of a bundle that helps to identify the file's relationship with the item. It is possible to submit items with a single bitstream, but there is no limit to how many bitstreams are incorporated into an item.

Depositing into ALAIR

Currently, ALA staff can login into ALAIR with their ALA credentials when depositing material. Non-staff ALA members from committees or round tables can request an account through the ALA Archives when their group has determined it is ready to deposit documents.

Users with submission privileges for a specific collection can deposit items using ALAIR's guided Item Submission tool, which is available through the Submissions area in the user profile. The next step, describing an item, provides a two-page form for information about the item, including the Title, Author, Date Issued, and Keywords. Subject keywords can only be added individually by inputting a keyword and then clicking the + (plus symbol) button; the form does not currently handle input of multiple terms separated by punctuation. Uploading files is the next step; it is also possible to include a line for a brief description of the file (useful when an item consists of several parts or multiple bitstreams) as well as the date and reason for setting an embargo. The final step requires that the user agree to a distribution license granting ALAIR non-exclusive rights to the digital files and acknowledging that no copyright or proprietary rights are infringed. Currently, bulk uploads (e.g., a year's worth of documents) are handled by ALA Archives staff, but individuals and groups still can help with the deposit process by completing a spreadsheet provided by ALA Archives. The completed spreadsheet accompanies the electronic materials when transmitted to the ALA Archives for bulk deposit into ALAIR.

Only ALA Archives staff can perform administrative functions in ALAIR, such as granting submission privileges to users, creating communities and collections, correcting metadata and submission errors, or withdrawing items.

Getting Started with ALAIR

If your ALA committee or round table is ready to take up the fight against our nemesis, here are a few things to consider before getting started. Collocate all existing documents, if this hasn't been done already, and then review the types of documents to determine the collections that your ALAIR community will need. Take some time to explore ALAIR to see how other groups have decided to treat their documents. Some prefer to keep agendas and minutes together under one item while others deposit only the minutes. Make certain that titles and authors are formatted consistently, with titles using sentence capitalization and, in the case of periodicals, ending with the volume

and issue number, and authors with last name first. Becoming familiar with ALAIR will provide guidance on whether a subcommittee might need its own community and whether a collection needs to be shared for collaborative reports. If there are many legacy records awaiting deposit, using the bulk option through the ALA Archives is a great way to jumpstart your collection. ALAIR is just the tool ALA units need to become invulnerable against loss of organizational memory!