

# UNESCO PERSIST Heritage Software Platform

## ***The Need***

Much of the world's documentary heritage exists in digital form, created by the authors using the particular software and hardware products that existed at the time. With the passage of time, these technologies become obsolete; withdrawn from the market and no longer supported. In many cases the digital material still exists but cannot be rendered in a useable form. In effect the digital documentary heritage is lost to humanity, not because the primary source material is lost but because we have lost the ability to read it.

## ***The Solution***

The UNESCO PERSIST Heritage Software Platform addresses this problem. It will equip Memory Institutions to interact with culturally significant digital content that is in danger of being unreadable due to technical obsolescence.

The Heritage Software Platform will preserve the computational and performance capabilities of "antique" software and hardware, making this available to Memory Institutions so that they can provide collection, preservation and most importantly access services to the broader community.

The platform will provide a virtual "eco-system" made up of open-source components but also containing "antique" commercial software that has been used over the years to create the world's digital documentary heritage.

## ***Its Operation***

The Heritage Software Platform will be a UNESCO entity, operating as part of the Memory of the World PERSIST program. It will operate through a community of participating Memory Institutions (primarily Libraries and Archives) each of which will provide a range of partner services to assist the broader community interact with the material but also to take measures for the collection, preservation and enhanced access services.

Software components will be sourced from the open-source community and proprietary products and associated licences will come from donors within the ICT industry, Government or Not-for-Profit sectors as well as individuals. A particular role exists for the software industry (including electronic games) sector. These companies should be encouraged to recognise their role as the creators of cultural heritage and their responsibility to ensure that heritage is not lost to future generations. By bequeathing obsolete software and usage licences to PERSIST they will be demonstrating themselves to be ethical and responsible corporate citizens, a gesture which might be formally recognised by UNESCO by awarding them a "UNESCO Digital Heritage Alliance" status which they can use for marketing purposes.

Hardware infrastructure and professional services will be required to establish and maintain the capability – which may be a distributed network of facilities. This will require funding for initial establishment and ongoing maintenance.

Governance arrangements will be established to provide executive management of the Platform and its services, as well as technical management committees to oversight the attendant policies and procedures. Day to day operation will require employment of suitably qualified staff.

### **The Business Model**

The necessary funding and ongoing management of this will be through a Foundation, established under the auspices of UNESCO Memory of the World but operating as a financially independent, self-sufficient, unit.

Revenue for the sustained operation of the platform will be primarily through usage fees or subscription payments by Libraries, Archives and other memory institutions. The Foundation may also explore the potential for philanthropy and sponsorship.

