The University of California, San Diego; New York University; and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Libraries are teaming up to develop a next-generation archival management tool, thanks to a grant in the amount of $539,000 from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

The grant will support the planning and design of a new software tool for the description and management of archives, based on the combined capabilities of Archivists' Toolkit™ (AT) and Archon™. The two predominant open-source archival tools are currently utilized by numerous academic libraries, special collections, archives, and museums worldwide, including universities like UCLA and Harvard, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the San Diego Zoo, and smaller archival repositories like the Niels Bohr Archives in Denmark and the Biblioteca Ateneu Barcelonès in Spain.

Planning activities will include the development of a next-generation architectural framework as well as a complete review of the new archival tool's required and desirable functional specifications. Members of the archival community will be consulted during the planning and product development stages. Six tracts of activities are planned to complete the stages, which will culminate in the development of the unified tool, including funding for maintenance of the current versions of Archivists' Toolkit™ (AT) and Archon™ until the unified tool is introduced.

"This project will capitalize on the functional strengths of both AT and Archon," said Brian E. C. Schottlaender, the Audrey Geisel University Librarian at UC San Diego and the principal investigator for the project. "This will result in a superior archival software tool and a long-term sustainability plan for the integrated product. We are grateful to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its support and look forward to collaborating with our partners, NYU and the University of Illinois on this significant undertaking."

According to Schottlaender, archivists across the globe have already registered their support for the development of the new archival tool. While AT and Archon have their own well-developed communities of support, most agree that Archon's access features, combined with AT's strong archival management attributes, will result in the design of a unique and even more powerful archival data management system that will greatly benefit the archival community and scholars worldwide. At a time when libraries are increasingly interested in putting primary research materials online, this new system will allow them to do so much more efficiently, while exposing previously hidden archival collections to scholars.

Schottlaender and UC San Diego Libraries will serve as the lead institution in the development of the new archival tool, sharing project oversight with Carol A. Mandel, Dean of Libraries at New York University, and Paula Kaufman, Dean of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library. UC San Diego and NYU Libraries sponsored the development of AT, released to the public in 2006; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library supported the development of Archon, also released in 2006.

AT archivist Bradley Westbrook of UC San Diego Libraries and Archon archivists Christopher Prom and Scott Schwartz will form the archives team for the AT/Archon integration project. They are charged with the single task of determining the functional requirements and drafting specifications for the integrated application.

In 2008, the AT received the C.F.Coker award from the Society of American Archivists for its "tremendous impact on archival practice and promotion and adoption of descriptive standards." Last year, Westbrook received the Archival Award of Excellence from the California Historical Records Advisory Board for his work on the AT. Archon has also been recognized for its impact, receiving (with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library) a Mellon Award for Technology Collaboration in 2008.