

# Resources

## (Best Practices)

Info available through July 24

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# Demonstrations

This section is a placeholder for organizing information about the demonstrations done by the DHSC for SC members. The info should probably be sorted into the appropriate subsections of the Resources section.

Stan suggested that some sort of DHSC whitepaper on "the state of DITA-based help" might be useful for the industry and a visible byproduct of all the cool demos that have been happening in the DHSC. This demo info could possibly serve that purpose.

## ***Delivering DITA source for dynamically rendered content***

Tony Self

Tony demonstrated how dynamic DITA content was employed for content publishing at HyperWrite.

<http://www.hyperwrite.com/Articles/default.aspx>

In the "Articles" section, a DITA map is transformed into an HTML web page listing the titles of articles. When a user clicks one of these links, MS ASP.net fetches the DITA source for the selected article and renders it dynamically as HTML. There are no links or conrefs between articles. The details are in the article "Moving to an XML-based Web Site" at:

<http://www.hyperwrite.com/Articles/showarticle.aspx?id=68>

Metadata in the DITA map drives the creation of the breadcrumbs and the sitemap link at the head of each rendered page.

Alice noted that IBM uses dynamic rendering in EclipseHelp.

## ***Full-text Search Plug-in***

Tony Self

This DITA OT plug-in is available at the Yahoo DITA site at:

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/dita-users/files/Demos/>

The Search plug-in is also integrated with Tony Self's WinANT application. From inside WinANT, you can build TOCJS XHTML, Search-enabled XHTML, and various "skins" for XHTML output. This generates a tremendous amount of material that can be worked into basic help systems.

## ***Expandable-content***

Tony Self

Tony demonstrated a piece of user assistance that he has integrated with his DITA source: specifically a "Note" tag that provides expandable content when clicked. See the following web page for a working example:

<http://www.hyperwrite.com/Articles/showarticle.aspx?id=71>

By adding JavaScript calls and JavaScript library links to XHTML output, Help-friendly pieces of user assistance can be added to DITA environments. Other candidates for these value-add features might be help "skins," rich-text pop-ups, and links to secondary windows.

## ***Context IDs and callbacks***

Tony Self

Tony demonstrated how context IDs stored in a separate file can be used by DITA when it produced .chm output for MS Help.

## **EclipseHelp**

Jeff Antley, IBM

Jeff presented a slide show ([since posted to the DHSC web site](#)) and demonstration of the IBM EclipseHelp product.

Highlights:

- There is a full EclipseHelp IDE and lightweight Eclipse web server.
- InfoCenter is a stand-alone implementation of EclipseHelp that can run outside the Eclipse IDE environment.
- The EclipseHelp plug-in is transtype "eclipsehelp" and is integrated with the DITA OT. - Extensibility through plug-ins is the key.

Amber noted that interest in EclipseHelp is strong in companies that want to post and update docs internally.

## **CSHelp Plug-in**

Jeff Antley, IBM

Jeff explained how the CSHelp plug-in provides a specialized topic type and transform logic to generate a ready-to-integrate context-sensitive EclipseHelp integration XML file from a DITA ditamap.

## **AIR Help**

Scott Prentice

Scott Prentice did a demo of AIRHelp and the Adobe AIR (Adobe Integrated Runtime) environment.

<http://leximation.com/airhelp/>

Once the lightweight AIR runtime environment is installed on a system (typically in conjunction with Acrobat or Flash), the same binary AIR application file can run unmodified on multiple AIR-enabled platforms.

AIR allows developers to deploy rich Internet applications as though they were desktop apps.

Scott's AIRHelp is an AIR application that wrappers DITA XHTML output in a graphical interface.

Features in that interface include:

- Full-text search
- Reader commenting
- Server-to-local propagation of reader comments
- Server-to-local propagation of updated/new content
- Context-sensitive callbacks (uses the target filename as the ID)
- A full DITA-OT plug-in is in progress with the following features:
- Indexing specialization (including search of index content)
- Flash output (\*.swf) from the DITA-OT as input to the AIR Packaging tool.
- Flash-based navigation (outputs action-script logic as JavaScript routines) as needed

- No visible or separate licensing is required.
- Accessibility is an issue on the side of the common visual readers, i.e. do not support the appropriate Flash extensions.

## ***PTC/Arbortext development system for all PTC online help***

Chris Goolsby (PTC/Arbortext)

How PTC is doing application help using DITA. Demonstration of the Arbortext Digital Media Publisher (DMP).

Highlights of the demonstration:

- PTC Help System viewer, DITA-based content. Browser-based application. Stand-alone or online help or Web application.
- System or Web-based updates. Don't need to update the entire (content) image.
- Metadata support with filtering.
- Includes API for delivery, filtering.
- Boolean search, sortable search results. Show search results in TOC.

Also advanced search based on metadata, product, and content type.

- Persistent bookmarks, annotation.
- Customizable UI.
- Future directions: leverage DITAMap technology.

## ***HTMLHelp2 Plug-in***

Deborah Pickett, Moldflow

Deborah demonstrated how the HTMLHelp2 plug-in handles context-sensitive help IDs as it generates a MS HTMLHelp .chm help file:

- Context IDs as otherprop metadata values
- \*.ali files provide a mapping of IDs to paths to individual help files.
- \*.map files correlate IDs to the engineering GUIDs or object IDs.

Deborah also demonstrated how the compiled help topic and their associated context IDs could be tested in a tool such as the FAR HTML tool:

<http://www.helpware.net/FAR/index.html>

Deborah noted that Moldflow has moved away from using HTMLHelp2 for production builds because of limitations in the number of IDs that it can handle. The plus-html plug-in is an attractive alternative. See dita-plus.zip on the Yahoo site:

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/dita-users/files/Demos/>

## ***WinANT and Help IDs***

Tony Self

Tony demonstrated how WinANT handles resource files full of context IDs when it processes a DITA collection in MS HTMLHelp.

<http://www.hyperwrite.com/Articles/showarticle.aspx?id=71>

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# Help Formats – Platform-specific

Are we devising a platform-agnostic (aka cross-platform solution? DHSC: Yes.

DHSC members mentioned having worked with the following Help environments:

## ***Microsoft WinHelp***

### **WinHelp transform for the DITA-OT**

*Contributed Technology?*

## ***Microsoft HTMLHelp***

### **Issues relating to creating HTML Help from DITA**

Matthew Ellison forwarded a list of issues that a colleague had encountered in transforming DITA sources through to MA HTML Help. This warranted a bit more scrutiny and discussion at our next meeting.

AI/Tony to forward a copy of the email to Paul O'Rear at Microsoft.

I recently met up with UK-based author Ian Balanza-Davis at the X-Pubs Conference at Heathrow. He has been doing some interesting work using the DITA Open Toolkit to create Microsoft HTML Help. He has encountered a number of issues and wondered whether these were being addressed by the DITA Help TC. Ian's issues are as follows:

- Child CHMs cannot be included in a ditamap, as there is no type="chm" option that could be picked up and used during processing.
- Window definitions cannot be created. Currently a definition is hardwired into the Dita open toolkit, but again there is nothing in place to define windows through Dita. (This would also be more than a little helpful for context-sensitive help.)
- He can only create a hierarchy of HTML headings by having multiple topics within a single file rather than through a ditamap. (He has raised this with John Hunt, but has yet to get a reply.)
- The default topic in a TOC is hardwired in the output, but there are many good reasons not to have the first topic in a TOC as the default.
- There seems to be no way to convert See Also links (ALinks) to Active X, or include javascript in Dita. That seems to be a bit of a hole for IE-based resources (and web-based in general).

## ***Microsoft Vista Help / AP***

## ***Sun JavaHelp***

### **JavaHelp transform for the DITA-OT**

*Contributed Technology?*

## ***EclipseHelp***

<http://help.eclipse.org/ganymede/index.jsp?topic=/org.eclipse.platform.doc.isv/guide/ua.htm>

The EclipseContent plug-in installs DITA source collections in an Eclipse environment so they can be rendered dynamically by an XSLT into HTML for a browser.

## **Generic HTML Help**

Don't know what this is

## **Other Formats**

There may be other platforms where DITA is being employed.

- Apple Help?
- WebHelp

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# Prospective Help Features

## ***Delivery Format***

Example: Microsoft delivers Help in compiled AML and relies on the run-time help engine to handle rendering and navigation. In terms of DITA, even XML-aware browsers are not capable currently of rendering DITA source into HTML without the assistance of a run-time XSLT. TS

Don: One vision of a DITA-aware Help engine might involve it being aware of browser-specific or user-specific information (preferences, run-time platform, role) and handle the resolution conditional conrefs. Basically, the help engine would be conditionally filtering, rendering, and personalizing DITA content at run-time. Companies could deliver a single set of sources to a customer and let the help engine handle the personalization and/or customization in the field. Performance should not be a concern if:

- Server technology keeps up with network and process loads over time
- DITA source topics remain relatively small
- Server-side processing of the dynamic content keeps I/O thrashing to a minimum (optimizing local bandwidth).

Tony asked attendees whether anyone had had much exposure to XML interface languages such as XUL or XAML. Didn't seem that anyone had.

## ***DITA Help Markup***

Would DITA Help markup be a subset configuration of the current DITA specification (DITA 1.2) or some set of specializations to it?

DHSC: Everyone seemed to agree that reusing topics that had already been written/translated for other deliverables is a high priority for DITA-based help. The configuration versus specialization options will need to be an ongoing exploration.

## ***Stand-alone Help vs. Embedded UA***

Should we be thinking about both Help as a standalone deliverable and embedded UA? DHSC: Initial (but not universal) thoughts of members trended toward focusing on standalone help primarily and then figuring out how DITA support for embedded UA might work on top of standalone help. at least initially. To the extent that there is significant variation in the way engineering groups design, encode, and maintain embedded UA in their GUIs, it would be prudent to gather/clarify requirements for embedded help before moving directly into DITA-based implementations. - Should embedded UA be task-based Help, and standalone be concept-based?

(Ref: Mike Hughes' blog)

DHSC: Mike's argument is that improved UI design and well-implemented, task-focused embedded UA has diminished (to some extent) the need for the standalone help accompanying GUIs to be primarily task-oriented. Standalone help may well trend toward predominantly conceptual or reference information.

## ***Feature List***

DITA help features to consider:

<http://www.hyperwrite.com/Articles/showarticle.aspx?id=65>

Tony references the features in the HAT (Help Authoring Tool) Matrix set up by Char James-Tanny at

## Upper Level Features

What upper-level features does Help require?

DHSC: There didn't seem to be much initial controversy about the common top-level features in modern help systems.

- Search
- Breadcrumbs
- TOC
- Index
- Browse Sequence (Joe put this section here)
- Context Sensitive Help (Joe put this section here)

## Lower Level Features

What lower-level features does Help require?

- Popups
- Expansion links/sections
- Translation support
- Windows (joe put this topic here)
- New Development (joe put this topic here)

## ***Breadcrumbs***

(at what levels? wrapping?)

## ***Browse Sequences***

Some Help authoring tools provide "browse sequence" functionality. This allows an alternative navigation method to the TOC; browse sequence are manifested as either Previous Topic and Next Topic sequences (which don't have to reflect the TOC topic sequence), or as an alternative hierarchical contents list. TS

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My first thought would be to follow the old WinHelp browse sequence approach of assigning a number (not necessarily a sequential number) to each topic to define the ordering. This could be as simple as

```
.. topic/prolog/metadata/othermeta/@name='browse' @content='NNN'
```

Although it might be nice to be able to assign this via the map as well.

I'm not familiar with the way modern tools require this data, but I'd imagine that this would probably work for them as well. SP

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1. Define the browse sequence with some sort of custom metadata field (e.g. meta\_BrowseSeq=ID) in a DITA 1.2 map (not individual topics).
2. Add one or more functions to the processing stack (quite probably for each processor) to generate some sort of lookup table:



- meta\_BrowseSeq0001 = foo1.target

- meta\_BrowseSeq0002 = foo2.target

3. Add function(s) to integrate the Browse Sequence GUI controls with the lookup table.

I believe that I have seen some sort of metadata support for doing browse sequences in one or more of the better CMS systems. My best guesses would include SiberLoic SiberSafe and Contenta. Might be interesting to review and reverse engineer their proprietary approaches. SD

## **Context Sensitive Help**

What is required of context-sensitivity for all Help platforms (and embedded UA requirements)? DHSC: Microsoft uses a variety of CS callback tokens: context strings, context numbers, search matches, index strings, or URLs. EclipseHelp uses a unary, unique string. AI/Committee: Validate whether these options comprehensive as a starting place.

### **Strategy for DITA-based context sensitivity**

Tony suggested that we focus on the architecture of context sensitivity in the short term. Implementation options (to get the discussion moving):

- 1 - Implement context-sensitive hooks as DITA metadata in topics and maps
- 2 - Implement context-sensitive hooks in separate, external files.

### **Discussion:**

Allow context sensitive Help metadata to be defined in topic and topicref attributes.

<http://www.oasis-open.org/apps/org/workgroup/dita-help/download.php/28362/dita-proposal-csh1.html>

goal: support context-sensitive output

numeric identifier

string identifier

window name

### **Discussion: CS Help Processing Options**

Tony walked the committee through his proposed framework for implementing context-sensitive help specializations.

- A. Manage CS map files external to DITA source and processing
- B. Derive CS map files from DITA source ditamap files
- C. Derive CS mapping from DITA source topic files
- D. Process CS maps as intermediate, DITA-managed files

The committee recognized that these options are not mutually exclusive and that, in all likelihood, we would be providing many (if not all) of them in parallel. In that context, we'd have to determine precedence and other block-and-tackle issues. - Persistence in naming output files needs to be a consideration.

The committee was most supportive of this overall approach and wished to move ahead with this as a frame of reference for our work.

## **Implementation Scenarios**

[http://wiki.oasis-open.org/dita/Implementation\\_Scenarios](http://wiki.oasis-open.org/dita/Implementation_Scenarios)

## **DITA Help API matrix**

Tony walked the committee through the Wiki page that contains a draft table of help API calling conventions to ten (10) popular help implementations:

[http://wiki.oasis-open.org/dita/Help\\_API](http://wiki.oasis-open.org/dita/Help_API)

The committee was mightily impressed and supportive of this table, committing to review it in more detail offline and to update/augment it in the wiki.

Robin noted that an API function to display an individual topic should have a row in the matrix.

Tony pointed out to the committee that the wiki page could be edited in a code-view or in WYSIWYG.

## ***Expansion links/sections***

a la JavaScript divisions in HTML or MS flavors of help

DHSC: The general sentiment here was that users loved these features. They seemed to be good candidates for DITA specializations, addressing content and presentation.

## ***Translation support***

Stan suggested that we need to have a good story about L10N support at a minimum

- best practices
- resource files

## ***Windows***

Allow window specifications for display of online content to be defined in the ditamap.

<http://www.oasis-open.org/apps/org/workgroup/dita-help/download.php/28363/dita-proposal-csh-win.html>

## ***New Developments***

Tony opened a discussion about interesting new developments that might advance the use of DITA as a delivery format as well a source format:

### **DITA-aware browsers:**

There is some development afoot to use a cut-down version of DITA as source input to a web browser.

### **Compiled DITA:**

Eliot Kimber is working on a standard for compiled DITA called the DITA Exchange Package (DXP):

<http://ditadxp.sourceforge.net/>

Oxygen 9.3, for example, can edit DITA files living inside a ZIP format, so the acceptance of compiled or ZIP'd DITA directories may be coming our way. Being able to ship ready-to-use archives of DITA files that do not need to be debugged or parsed to resolve conrefs and links is critical. Perhaps we can invite Eliot to join our meeting some time for an update and/or discussion about the implications of DXP for Help.

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# Tools and Technologies

## **Active Content**

How might "Active Content" be implemented?

DHSC: Microsoft's Active Content consists of ShowMe links embedded in help topics. When the customer clicks one of these links, an interactive helper app executes. There are many forms of active content in other help implementations, e.g. multimedia demos, tours, interactive graphics, wizards, diagnostic applets, etc.. Calling rich content from DITA might be as straight-forward as some processing specializations. Metadata could set that up.

## **Flash**

Scott queried the group about experiences with calling Flash demo files (.SWFs) from DITA source files using the <object> element. Even if you embed the correct wrappers to call the Flash object, the DITA processors get confused when building references to the physical SWF file on disk.

Stan mentioned that he had encountered the same sorts of problems with the object element and had reverted to calling a stand-alone HTML topic that contained the correct HTML code to load the SWF.

Tony mentioned that he had gotten some of this working, but not within the context of the DITA-OT. He would send some pointers.

Scott noted that he had been in touch with John Hunt and the DITA Learning SC; they might have figured some of this out.

## **RoboHelp**

Tony: Plans to contact Vivek from Adobe about writing the RoboHelp piece.

## **DITA-to-MAML transformation:**

The collective sentiment of the DITA community participating in an email thread on MAML (Microsoft's Help markup language) and DITA was that no robust or functional transform appeared to be available.

## **Other Contributed Technologies**

Not sure where these fit in.

### **Company-specific internal specializations**

Contributed Technology?

### **XHTML transform for the DITA-OT**

Contributed Technology?

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# DHSC

## **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the OASIS DITA Help SC (DHSC) is to:

1. develop a top-level design for authoring of Help systems and user assistance content for implementation using DITA;
2. establish recommendations for the integration of DITA-authored Help systems and software applications using context-sensitivity;
3. remove the obstacles to effective use of DITA for Help systems through the creation of best practice guidelines, cookbooks and worked examples, and to promote the use of DITA for creating Help systems and user assistance content;
4. develop informal support for processing DITA for delivery as Help systems and user assistance;
5. establish guidelines that promote best practices for applying standard DITA approaches to Help systems and user assistance content.

## **Deliverables**

The deliverables of the DHSC will be:

1. recommendations to the DITA TC for specification changes to better support Help systems and user assistance content;
2. a high-level processing model description that defines the standard use of DITA for Help systems and user assistance content;
3. explanations and guidelines for the use of DITA for Help systems and user assistance content.

## **Name of "DITA Help"**

The committee discussed issues surrounding the term "DITA Help" and what role we should play in defining/branding/managing it. - Joe pointed out that our immediate goal is focused on getting writers and groups to use DITA as a help authoring architecture regardless of the delivery formats they might choose for the information (HTMLHelp, WebHelp, EclipseHelp). By raising awareness of the capabilities of DITA as a source architecture, we increase the motivation of tools vendors to brand something that they are productizing to support DITA source as "DITA Help" or "DITAHelp" or DITA-Help" or whatever. - Scott noted that associating any output transform with the DITA source format violated the logic of XML in general and DITA in particular. Until we figure out how to ship DITA as a delivery format, branding "DITA Help" does not make sense. - Joe noted that we could be creating as much confusion about DITA/source and DITA/delivery if we do not have a more precise and more visible definition of what we mean by "DITA Help." - Stan suggested that issue such as branding and marketing may be within the charter of the new DITA Adoption TC.

AI/Stan to update the DITA Technical TC about this discussion and seek their advice on what role the DITA Adoption TC might play. - Scott noted that we should really set expectations and boundaries for the term are critical. Submitting key names ought to be reviewed and considered by some standards or adoption committee. - AI/Tony and Joe to chat offline and develop a first-pass definition for "DITA Help."

## **Team Bios**

### **Matthew Ellison (Individual)**

Matthew hails from the UK and has been actively working with online help for over 15 years -- MS Help, cross-platform help, and most recently, XML-based help.

### **Pat Gee from Sun Microsystems Inc.**

joined the DHSC and shared with the group her interests and experiences:

18 years working with SGML and XML publishing systems

Experience designing topic-based authoring solutions for DocBook (now) and DITA (eventually)

Interested in DITA-based Help implementations because two groups that she supports in Sun have Help deliverables.

### **Alan Houser**

is a member of the OASIS DITA Technical Committee and a frequent presenter on DITA at STC, XML, and WritersUA conferences. Alan is also liaison between STC and W3C.

### **Deborah Picket (Moldflow)**

is a long-time DITA expert and an active participant in the many DITA user discussion lists. Deborah works for Moldflow in Melbourne AU and has developed several DITA-based context-sensitive help implementations. She is also a member of the DITA Technical Committee.

### **Scott Prentice**

has been working with online help of various types for 16 years: WinHelp, HTMLHelp, and Web help. He is currently working on AIRHelp, a cross-platform help implementation based on the Adobe AIR Framework. Scott will be making a presentation about AIRHelp at the WritersUA conference.

### **Bryan Schnabel**

is an architect working at Tektronics. Bryan is currently working with online help, Arbortext, and custom DTDs. Bryan also works on the OASIS DITA Translation SC.

### **Amber Swope**

is a 20-year veteran of online help development. She has worked with Jeff (IBM) on EclipseHelp and is currently a principal consultant at JustSystems.

### **Joe Welinske**

is President of WritersUA and manages the development of training resources and professional conferences in this field.

## **Meeting Logistics:**

Meeting frequency: every two weeks

## **Wiki Site**

DHSC wiki page to capture topics, issues, and resources: -

<http://wiki.oasis-open.org/dita/ditahelp>

AI/DHSC: Add links to DHSC-related resources at the DHSC Wiki site.

## **Best Practices Guide**

- Our current DHSC design and development efforts are targeted for integration with DITA 1.3.
- The formal approval process for the current DITA release in development (DITA 1.2) will require several more months (safe to say), so it could be a year before any proposals or demo specializations that are part of the 1.3 spec become visible to the general DITA community.
- There is sufficient time in the DITA 1.2 window to consider developing a lightweight Best Practices Guide for producing context-sensitive help from DITA 1.1/1.2 technologies.
- The Help demos and technology reviews that we have had in our DHSC have been tremendously useful for us in getting up to speed on current DITA-based options for Help. If that collective knowledge and wisdom has been useful for us, it is certainly useful for all the DITA content developers considering context-sensitive Help transformations.

## **Discussion**

The committee reviewed the first draft of the detailed Best Practices Proposal that Stan had posted shortly before the DHSC meeting and set some short-term goals for moving ahead with it.

Updates to the detailed proposal:

- Confirm: Jeff to work on EclipseHelp and CSHelp
- Confirm: Chris to work on PTC Help
- Confirm: Scott to work on AIRHelp
- New: Joe to work on Resources/Demos
- Confirm: Tony to work on Intros (with help from Stan and others)
- New: Somewhere in this guide we need to capture how some people are using DITA source as an input to MadCap Flare and/or RoboHelp (which in turn produce Help outputs).
- Add: A table about options and choices when building a custom solution from multiple DITA-generated components.
- Revisit: How and where do we make recommendations of the sort, "If you are producing HTML-based help, here are your best options ... ."
- Revisit: Where do we incorporate information about setting up run-time help environments such as EclipseHelp or JavaHelp.
- HTMLHelp really needed to remain unassigned until Tony can verify with Deborah whether she would be willing and able to pick it up.
- RoboHelp might be good for our new member from Adobe, Vivek? The committee suggested that Tony assess whether Vivek(?) would be willing and able to dive in on that one.

## **Discussion on collaboration and source format:**

The committee reviewed the benefits/drawbacks of using DITA as our source for this collaborative effort. Perhaps Word or a Wiki might work better. The committee was supportive of using DITA, but needed to see how it would really work out. - AI: Stan to post a sample topic in DITA to the DHSC web site for review. The proposed sample topic is about TOCJS.

## **DHSC to DITA TC Interactions**

Don reiterated to the DHSC that the DITA TC was there to assist and to support the DHSC.

- The DHSC can ask the TC periodically to review some of its work in progress.
- The DHSC can ask the TC to assist in detailed design work on specific issues.
- Progress reports or updates from the DHSC to the TC are welcome and encouraged.
- Updates to the TC on overall scope, deliverables, and timeframes assist the TC in determining how the DHSC deliverables align with release cycles of the DITA specification.

## ***OASIS***

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# External Resources

Sites, blogs, articles related to DITA Help.

## **WIKIs**

## **Events/Groups**

### **WritersUA Conference**

At WritersUA ((March 16 - 19, 2008) in Portland, Oregon, USA, members of the DITA Help Subcommittee hosted a panel discussion. Panel consisted of Tony Self, Scott Prentice, Alan Houser, Matthew Ellison. Good attendance and good audience feedback.

Creating Help with DITA - A Development Forum, PPT, 810KB

[http://www.writersua.com/ohc/suppmat1/suppmat108/dita\\_forum.ppt](http://www.writersua.com/ohc/suppmat1/suppmat108/dita_forum.ppt)

### **Boston DITA User's Group**

### **Other**

Do we see any overlap or partnering opportunities between what we are doing in the DHSC and what other standards groups are doing in help? - W3C? Joe and the Web help initiative - STC? Alan Hauser liaison to W3C What strategy should we adopt to contact them?