UVA EaaSI Statement of Importance

Please provide 250 words that address the following:
- Why is software preservation important?
- What are the advantages to community infrastructure or approaching software preservation and emulation as a collective action problem?
- What are your strongest use cases for emulation?
- What are you hoping to learn through your participation in the EaaSI Network?

The University of Virginia Library is an enthusiastic participant through the Software Preservation Network in Yale's Emulation As A Service Infrastructure (EAASI) project. We are motivated strongly by the urgent need to preserve software in ways that make our preservation of digital scholarly and cultural materials more accessible and meaningful.

As preservation professionals (whether or not it is a primary assignment for each of us), we are fond of a commonly expressed perspective: preservation without access is pointless. The preservation of relevant software adds many layers of complexity to the notion of digital preservation while promising critical additional value in the result.

Here, we are closely focused on preservation of important digital objects in their native states, but doing so risks the rapid obsolescence of the means of access--the underlying software (and an environment in which it can operate)--that provide access in any practical sense. If we lose access to the software component-mix that an object requires to be something other than an unintelligible sequence of bits, the object becomes useless.

Such software component-mixes usually contain a large number of individual components, each of which is likely to become obsolete on its own schedule. To meet that challenge, we need to document in some standards-based and automated way the original inventory of components that have been used together to enable use of a digital object. The harder part is to employ that inventory to find and (legally) assemble the components that we need in a virtual place where they can perform their function related to our digital object. That is the promise of EAASI, and we're pleased to be a partner in proving it through a widespread collaboration aiming to build a community-based infrastructure. The massive scale of our shared mission demands nothing less.