

Tracking the Funding Lifecycles of Former Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants Awardees 2011-2016



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

REPORT

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THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES START-UP GRANT

Founded in 2007, the Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant (DSUG) supported projects centering on innovation and planning. The program was the first grant competition launched by the Office of Digital Humanities (ODH). In a time when funding for innovation in the digital humanities was scarce, this award functioned as NEH's investment in the planning phase of humanities projects. Proposed projects focused on novel digital research in humanities education, public programming, and preservation. The NEH award supported the collaborative planning of these long-term projects, which often built on and yielded cutting-edge digital tools or methodologies. By the final cycle of awards in 2016, the DHSUG had funded 299 projects nationally.

Within a few years, the DHSUG was no longer the only ODH program that supported digital research. In 2011, the ODH launched the Digital Humanities Implementation Grant (DHIG). This award program allowed DHSUG projects past the preliminary stage to apply for larger grants. Digital humanities projects could now continue their funding relationship with the ODH. Finally, in 2016, in order to avoid budget constraints, the ODH combined these programs to form the multi-layered ODH program we recognize today: the Digital Humanities Advanced Grant (DHAG).

Though DSUG projects often involved long-term planning, the NEH did not systematically track the life cycle of digital projects beyond the conclusion of the funding period. [A 2010 ODH report](#) investigated the progress of earlier projects, but prior to creation of the implementation and advancement grant programs.

This investigation extends the 2010 report, focusing on the 154 grantees who received funding between 2011 and 2016. With a total of 997 applications submitted throughout these five years, the Start-Up Grant had the competitive award rate of 15.4%. DSUG projects spanned various disciplines, regions, and technologies.

The ODH is interested in understanding the long-term impact and sustainability of the DHSUG projects, including their influence on the field of digital humanities and the challenges involved in supporting digital projects for the long term. The term sustainability, in this study, refers to a project's ability to maintain an accessible virtual presence that can develop as technologies change. This study focuses specifically on the role that external funding plays in the long-term survival and advancement of digital projects. Acknowledging that many other facts might influence the success of a project, financial stability is central to the sustainability of a digital project. Indeed, at its foundation. The DSUG attempted to address funding needs in the world of digital humanities.

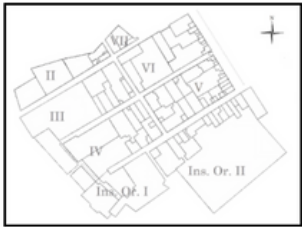
Today, after the completion of an NEH award, financial support can come from either another NEH program or an external organization. While the status of funding neither guarantees nor prevents the success of a project, funding eases costs associated with employing humanities scholars or engineers, paying for domains or software, and updating projects as technology progresses. By tracking the funding history of these 154 projects both within and beyond the NEH, I aim to offer both the NEH and future applicants insights that aid project sustainability and financial security.

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HUMANITIES INTERN

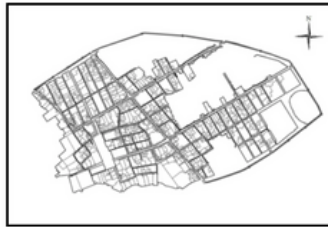
The Ancient Graffiti Project

A digital resource for studying the graffiti of Herculaneum and Pompeii

Herculaneum



Pompeii



Periodo

A gazetteer of periods for linking

Download the periods.

JSON

Turtle

CSV

THE SEARCH FOR HARMONY



PLAY

ABOUT

HOME ABOUT SVOBODA FAMILY PROJECT HISTORY EXPLORE DOWNLOAD CONTACT

The Svoboda Diaries Project



L'arrivée des bateaux Svoboda à Bagdad.

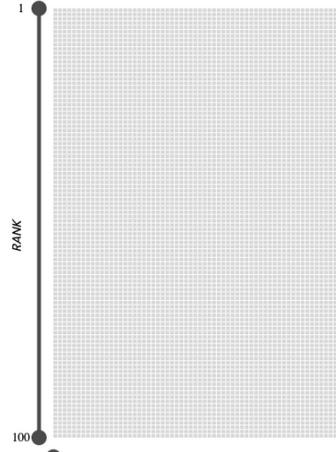
Rediscovering The Stories Of Self-Liberating People

A database of fugitives from American Slavery

Topics

1. thy, thou, thee, er, love
2. church, rev, pastor, sunday, work
3. rev, conference, bishop, district, presiding
4. party, democratic, state, vote, election
5. church, conference, general, bishops, bishop
6. god, lord, christ, jesus, spirit
7. god, freedom, land, liberty, blood
8. subject, question, opinion, public, regard
9. flowers, sweet, summer, beautiful, bright
10. heart, love, mother, child, life
11. john, james, william, smith, thomas
12. present, means, plan, purpose, success
13. states, constitution, state, congress, united
14. army, general, war, gen, soldiers
15. antislavery, slavery, abolitionists, society, liberty
16. life, world, soul, nature, mind
17. society, meeting, friends, antislavery, held
18. boston, massachusetts, phillips, antislavery, garrison
19. silk, black, dress, white, fig
20. moral, social, human, nature, mind
21. cents, price, frank, copies, illustrated
22. thing, things, give, put, thought
23. fire, killed, murder, death, shot
24. public, conduct, character, false, spirit
25. st, evening, clock, sunday, saturday
26. eyes, face, hand, stood, night
27. book, author, work, volume, story
28. money, dollars, pay, paid, hundred
29. friends, hope, feel, friend, work
30. fact, true, question, facts, point
31. church, christian, religious, religion, churches

Topics ranked by percentage of corpus



MOBILIZING the PAST for a DIGITAL FUTURE

GEOPACHA
GEOspatial PLATFORM FOR ANcient CULTURE, HISTORY, AND ARCHAEOLOGY

About GeoPACHA

The Viral Texts Project

Mapping Networks of Reprinting in 19th-Century Newspapers and Magazines



OUR COLLECTION



Pink Day Dress



Short Army Jacket

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process for this project included both data collection and interviews with select project directors. This yielded both general and personalized insights into the funding lifecycles of DSUG projects. Research on funding was divided into two categories: external funding and additional NEH awards.

To understand the funding history of the 154 DHSUG projects between 2011-2016, this project draws on three sources. Internal NEH data was used to identify returning applications from DHSUG awardees. Project websites were used to determine external funders. This data was complemented by emails and conversations with project directors. This multi-faceted research approach provided three complementing perspectives on the nature of funding.

The interview process consisted of emails that went out to sixteen project directors and optional phone interviews. From these emails, I hoped to learn about specific hurdles encountered by project directors. The selected projects varied in size, year, current accessibility, and number of funders. Each email contained six questions pertaining to external funding, additional NEH awards or applications, non-funding impediments encountered by the project, and recommendations for the ODH. Nine directors responded, relaying their experiences with funding and providing their feedback for the NEH.

For the purposes of this study, projects were categorized as terminal, continuing, and surviving. Terminal projects were projects which were not designed to continue beyond the end of the DSUG, while continuing projects were designed to continue beyond the initial funding period. Among the continuing projects, those which had a currently accessible product such as a website, developed GitHub code, or published material were designated as "surviving."

2010 Results

This report builds on a September 2010 report titled "[Summary Findings of NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants \(2007 - 2010\)](#)", which surveyed 65 project directors in order to analyze the initial impacts of the DSUG program. Several survey questions used in the 2010 report influenced those posed during interviews conducted in 2020. Additionally, the report's conclusions on the relevance of external funding and reoccurring NEH applications inspired this report to engage with the subject more deeply. With regard to external funding, the 2010 report found that "[NEH] grants were helpful in establishing credibility and "demonstrated that other people thought the project worth funding." In the realm of additional internal NEH funding, the report stated, "at least eight of the start-up projects were turned down by NEH for further funding, some multiple times. Only one project was successful in receiving another NEH grant after an initial failure." The research conducted in this report follows up on these initial conclusions by investigating and collecting data on these preliminary insights regarding external and NEH funding.

INTERVIEWS

Questions

1. Can you confirm that the following website, [link to website], is the most up-to-date representation of your project (Project [Number])? If not, please respond with an updated link.
2. Have you applied for additional NEH funds to support this project? If not, why?
3. Have you applied for additional funding for your project outside the NEH? Where? Were you successful? (Please list)
4. Do you believe having a digital project opened you up to greater funding opportunities?
5. What barriers have you encountered in attaining further funding?
6. We know it can be difficult to continue to fund research after the completion of a grant. How have you ensured the financial sustainability of your project? How do you believe the NEH could support that sustainability?



The NEH grant has been vital to getting publicity for the project, we engage more people with the NEH funding.

NEH was first on our list in terms of places we were interested in applying to.

The ODH gives opportunity for everyone. Big universities and individuals with cool ideas have an equal shot.

Reviews are incredibly helpful for resubmissions.



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Between 2011 and 2016, Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant Project received funding from over 140 unique organizations other than the NEH. Of 101 surviving projects, 72 boasted either university, library, laboratory, non-profit, private foundation, crowdfunder, or professional society funders.

At a Glance

140 Unique Organizations
93 projects with additional funders
181 total partnerships

Most Popular Partners

1. National Science Foundation
2. American Council of Learned Societies
3. Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
4. Institute of Museum and Library Services
5. University of Virginia (Departments & Libraries)

17

Nonprofit



22

Private Foundations



1

Crowdfunder



70

University Programs



14

Government Agencies



4

Professional Societies



8

Libraries



4

Laboratory



Insights on External Funders

This report represents one of the first efforts to track the external funders of former DHSUG projects. The collected data reveals a correlation between a project's continued development and the presence of funders outside the NEH. The presence of organizations other than the NEH willing and prepared to fund digital innovation and implementation in the humanities bodes well for the financial sustainability of these projects. This report aims to highlight not only the existence of these organizations but also their disciplinary and geographic diversity. In fact, with nine projects funded by the National Science Foundation and many more by organizations such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Google and Microsoft, many external funders extend beyond the realm of the humanities.

In White Papers and interviews, DHSUG awardees reported that initial NEH funding was helpful in pursuing further funding opportunities. For example, the "[Meeting the Earthworks](#)" White Paper reported, "it gave us credibility in seeking additional funding." This sentiment was consistent among interviewed project directors. Among projects that secured funding prior to submitting their DHSUG application, these awards facilitated the process of planning for and drafting applications.

Though interviewed project directors often applauded the funding opportunities offered by external organizations, they had differing opinions on the overall benefit of university affiliations. Diana Saiki, whose project was hosted by Ball State University, noted that university funding allowed her to gain credibility during the NEH application process and hire students to support the project. Independent scholar Marie Acemah, however, affirmed that without ties to a university she could avoid overhead costs and "bureaucratic hoops." Jonathan Amith, a research scholar at Gettysburg College, lamented that external funding is far more difficult to attain without a concrete connection to a large research university.

Project directors noted that even with the presence of partner funders, many other factors can still interfere with projects' lifespans. These factors involved conflicting personal relationships, project "burn-out," lack of available technology, and the international health pandemic. When asked how they might advise future digital humanities project directors, interviewees shared several observations. Marie Acemah emphasized the paramount importance of local funding. She stated, "NEH funding gives a project visibility, people want to be associated with a project if it is NEH funded." Indeed, a vast majority of project funders were either local or state-based organizations. The project directors who received funding from non-humanities organizations encouraged others to broaden their applications to include institutions like the National Science Foundation. The following list provides a foundational base of organizations that offer funding for digital humanities projects.

Partner Organizations

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Foundation
Alaska Native Education Equity grant
Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
Allen Foundation
Amazon AWS Research Grants
American Council of Learned Societies
Andrew Mellon Foundation
Arms Control Disarmament and International Security
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Cansius College
Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies
Center for Hellenic Studies (Harvard)
Center for Research and Evaluation Lifelong Learning
Center for the History of the New America
Charlotte Marton Foundation
Clark County Historical Promotion Grant
Cleveland State University
Coalition for Academic Science Computation
Cornell University Institute for Social Sciences
Council on Library and Information Resources
Creative Media and Digital Culture Program
Washington State University
Cultural Heritage Imaging
Dartmouth College
DELLXL Consortium
DePaul Innovation through Collaboration Program
DH at Washington & Lee University
Digital Archeological Laboratory
Digital Humanities @UMASS
Digital Humanities Initiative at Buffalo
Digital Press at the University of North Dakota
Dornsife College of Letters
Electronic Literature Lab for Advanced
Inquiry into Born Digital Media
Electronic Literature Organization
Environmental Protection Agency
Florida High Tech Corridor Council
Florida Humanities Collection
Fonds de recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC)
French Ministry of Higher Education
Games and Playable Media
Georgetown University
Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation
Google Focused Research Award
HASTAC
Hathitrust Research Center
Humanities Intensive Learning and Teaching (HILT)
IDHMC Texas A&M University
IEEE Robotics and Automation Society
Independent Television Service
Indi-Go-Go
Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities
Institute for Computing in the Humanities
Arts and Social Sciences
Institute of Museum and Library Services
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Kress Foundation
Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services
Loyala University Chicago
Lyrasis
MacArthur Foundation
Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities
Meta Harvard
Miami University
Michigan State University
Microsoft Azure for Research
Miner & Kasch
MIT
Mozilla
National Archives
National Film Preservation Foundation
National Historical Publications Commission
National Science Foundation
Neukom Institute for Computational Science
New York Public Library
New York Times
North Carolina State University
NULab for Texts
Ohio Board of Regents
Ohio History Connection
Ohio State University
Posner-Wallace Foundation
Public Radio Exchange
RASMUSSON Foundation
Reed College
Rochester Institute of Technology
San Diego State University
SAR School for Advanced Research
Simpson Center for the Humanities
Smith Foundation
Social Sciences and Humanities Research
Council of Canada (SSHRC)
Southern Poverty Law Center
Spatial Analysis Research Laboratory
St. Mary's University
Stanford University Libraries
Texas A&M University Commerce
Texas Digital Library
Text Encoding Initiative
The American Society of Aesthetics
The British Library
The Center for Africana Studies at Johns Hopkins University
The College of Physicians of Philadelphia
The Department of English UVA
the Internet Archive
The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey
The Robert W. Wilson Charitable Fund
The University of Southern California
The University of the Pacific
TriCollege Digital Humanities Initiative (Bryn Mawr, Haverford, Swarthmore)
Tulane Center for the Gulf South
UC Santa Cruz University Libraries
UCHRI
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Universitat Siegen
University of Arkansas
University of Bergen
University of California
University of California Santa Barbara
University of California Santa Cruz
University of Delaware
University of Florida
University of Kansas
University of Leipzig
University of Michigan
University of Missouri Research Board
University of Nebraska Lincoln
University of Oregon Honors College
University of Oregon Libraries
University of Oxford
University of San Francisco
University of Virginia
University of Virginia Library Scholars' Lab
University of Washington
USC Shoah Foundation
Vanderbilt University
W.M. Keck Foundation
Washington State University
Wayne State University
Winter Park Health Foundation
XSEDE
Yale University
Yale University's Beinecke Library

INTERNAL NEH GRANTS

The Office of Digital Humanities offered and continues to provide several grants that allowed continuing Digital Humanities Start-Up projects to continue experimenting and to implement their work. 70 former DHSUG project have reapplied for additional NEH funding as late as 2020. These applications expanded to divisions outside the ODH including Public Programs, Preservation and Access, Challenge Programs, and Research Programs.

Returning Applications From DHSUG Projects

NEH Programs: 2011-2020



Internal NEH Grants Cont.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Applied</u>	<u>Recieved</u>
DHAG	33	9
DHIG	41	12
IADTH	8	4
NEH/DFG	5	2
Media Projects	4	1
Digital Projects for the Media	6	2
Preservation and Access	2	2
HCRR	13	8
DELP	2	1
Research and Development	3	1
Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge	1	0
Collaborative Research	4	1
Scholarly Editions and Translations	3	2
Summer Stipends	2	0
Fellowship	9	4

This project used the NEH's internal database system to track returning applications from DHSUG projects. Though this trend is difficult to follow, due to shifting project titles and directors, "Future Plans" sections in DHSUG white papers and the returning applications themselves clarified project continuity. Approximately 69% of surviving, non-terminal projects applied for additional NEH funding. This value is almost identical to the proportion of projects that applied for external funding, as largely the same projects tend to apply for further grants.

The results highlight a significant amount of cross-office applications throughout the NEH. Though the DHAG and the DHIG remained the most popular grant programs among DHSUG project directors, the Humanities Collections and Reference Resources (HCRR) overseen by the Division of Preservation and Access, and Fellowship grants offered by the Division of Research Programs were also relatively popular choices.

Not all surviving projects reapplied for NEH funding. One project director commented that he was reticent to apply for additional NEH funding after receiving rejections from NEH programs. Another explained that she no longer applied for NEH grants, due to the time-consuming nature of the process. She explained that with other university responsibilities, she has little opportunity for drafting applications. She affirmed that if the NEH were to provide feedback prior to submission, she would be more confident about future applications.

The latter comment suggests that more active engagement with former DHSUG projects emboldens applicants to pursue further funding. In fact, the project interviews themselves encouraged projects to reconnect with the NEH. Four of the project directors interviewed over the phone took advantage of the renewed contact with the ODH and expressed serious interest in reapplying for NEH funding.

With regard to the future of NEH awards, five project directors emphasized the need for a small grant focused on long-term sustainability. A project director explained that simply maintaining a domain can cost up to \$3000 a year. Often project directors pay this fee out-of-pocket or let their projects perish. If the ODH were to implement a smaller sustainability grant, the office could preserve the technological well-being of many former projects. The presence of smaller, long-term, easily-attainable sustainability grants would also encourage ongoing contact with former projects.

Concluding Comments

The Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant has yielded over one hundred currently accessible projects that offer users virtual access to research and education in various humanities disciplines. To showcase a merely a few, these projects include a digitized, interactive 19th century travel journal, an educational video game on African American musicians, and a collaborative corpus of Mesoamerican ethnobiology. These products reflect a coming together of humanities staff, technology, and finally, funding. The latter encompasses the relevance of this report. Results showed that 65% of former DHSUG projects continued their work after the award's completion and can display a virtual product today. Funding for this continuation involved both additional NEH awards and external partnerships. These developments include website maintenance, collaboration, and funding. These statistics reveal a correlation between continued funding, whether through NEH or external organizations, and the survival of a continuing projects. Projects gravitated slightly more to external funders than to the NEH.

However, though this project offers vital information on funding lifecycles, finances do not solely determine the success or failure of a project. Project Director interviews affirmed that funding, though integral, is merely one of many facets that influenced their work. Many projects did not continue due to personal conflicts among staff, lack of existing technology, bureaucratic issues, and departed project directors. However, this narrative did not prevent the continuation of approximately 84% of DHSUG projects that received awards between 2011 and 2016.

Future Research

While this report offers a preliminary outlook on completed DHSUG projects, it presents various elements worthy of further research and investigation. Though the NEH's applicant database and project websites provided substantial information, project interviews yielded the most relevant information. However, too few interviews were conducted to truly detect patterns. A continuation of this research should include at least 50 project director interviews with a diversity of "surviving" and "terminal" projects. This process will also help more former DHSUG projects reconnect with the NEH and encourage them to submit additional applications. In addition, a survey sent to all 154 project directors will yield basic information from a far larger proportion of projects.

A continuation of this project should also include additional information and potential contact with external funding partners. If the ODH plans to offer Project Directors a list of additional organizations where projects can apply for funding, this resource should also include specific awards. Additionally, this report largely focused on the continuation of projects prepared to extend past the award period. However, some terminal projects, such as conferences, yielded products that evolved into longer, multi-step digital platforms. Knowledge on the lifespans of these projects would nuance the report.

Finally, as previously mentioned, funding does not encompass a project's narrative in its entirety. Research on a project's academic and technological context would provide context for the paramount role of funding.

Acknowledgements

This research project could not have been completed without guidance and assistance from both NEH staff and awardees. I would like to extend my gratitude towards the members of the Office of Digital Humanities, and specifically Hannah Alpert-Abrams for providing me with consistent insights and feedback on my project. I would also like to thank the project directors who participated in the interview phase of my research. Finally, this project could not have been completed without the thousands of digital humanists who engage in collaborative innovation each and every year.