

## NEH and Digital Humanities

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Are humanities scholars enthusiastic about using technology for their work? Though not every humanities discipline enjoys relevant and thoughtfully constructed tools to use complex data, the response the National Endowment for the Humanities has seen for the technology projects it has funded has been resoundingly positive. So though barriers do exist for some projects such as open electronic publishing, considerable incentives also exist for humanities scholars to "buy in" to the digital humanities.

NEH has supported data-driven projects in the past that tackle the challenges of complex and large-scale text-based data, such as the Perseus Digital Library. As a second ambitious example, NEH and the Library of Congress together are funding the National Digital Newspaper Program, which will over the next 20 years create a national, digital resource of historically significant newspapers that will be accessible via the Internet and maintained permanently by the Library of Congress. The popular teaching resource web site Edsitement, maintained by NEH and partners the National Trust for the Humanities and the Verizon Foundation, provides teachers with a reliable and reputable resource for online humanities content. Nevertheless we recognize that these projects only foretell the promise of scholarship that could be done with larger and more complex data.

In an effort to nurture the digital humanities, in 2006 the National Endowment for the Humanities launched its Digital Humanities Initiative. This new Initiative signals an increased commitment to digital humanities projects and cyberinfrastructure and an additional incentive for scholars to adopt technical tools for scholarship. The Digital Humanities Initiative, in addition to encouraging technology projects throughout the Endowment's existing grant programs, has introduced the following new grant programs:

- Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants for the planning or initial stages of innovative digital initiatives in all areas of the humanities;
- Advancing Knowledge Grants, a partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services to fund collaborations among libraries, museums, archives, and universities;
- Digital Humanities Challenge Grants to endow digital humanities centers and other large projects;
- Digital Humanities Workshops to offer professional development programs for K-12 educators seeking to use digital resources to strengthen the teaching of the humanities; and
- Digital Humanities Fellowships to support individuals pursuing advanced research or other projects in the humanities that employ digital technology.

Of the above programs, Workshops especially focus on reaching individual scholars who may not have previous experience with technology tools. Because many humanities scholars may not have been exposed to or trained in the use of technology during their graduate school years, Workshops are constructed to offer a rapid and comprehensive view of particular digital resources. They also encourage collaboration by introducing teachers to scholars already conversant in technologies and encouraging teachers to return to their schools armed with new knowledge to share with their colleagues.

Even with the introduction of these new programs and the promise of greater NEH support for digital humanities, complicated issues remain, particularly for a small agency like NEH. Data-driven projects require a wide range of expertise that reaches beyond humanities disciplines, particularly the consistent involvement of technical experts. In the past NEH has seen great success encouraging collaboration, but it is challenging to support long-term collaboration for many years as needed by technically complex and expensive projects while also funding new projects. How can NEH work to support these long-term collaborations? And, better yet, how can NEH support the creation of tools humanities scholars could use for research on large and complex data sets without requiring, for example, full time programming expertise?

One other challenge NEH faces in its increased support for digital humanities is balancing the goal of open access with existing mechanisms for project dissemination. Online content maximizes access to humanities materials not only for students, teachers, and scholars, but also for the American public. However not all projects funded by NEH are developed for online access, which may add a complex and expensive component to a project. NEH is looking carefully at the issue of access to online products and welcomes feedback from the field.

NEH is seeking opportunities to collaborate with other funding agencies, organizations and corporations to offer more broadly defined grant programs and to widen the pool of applicants for digital humanities programs. Our current joint program with IMLS, Advancing Knowledge, promises to bring together libraries, museum officials, and archivists with humanities scholars in new and innovative ways. The Documenting Endangered Languages projects, a joint venture with NSF, are valuable forays into collaborative work that joins technology with the humanities. This kind of collaboration is especially important to provide support for large and expensive projects, like national centers of excellence, and to build a cyberinfrastructure for work in the digital humanities.

Past and existing collaborations with IMLS, NSF, and other partners have expanded the scope and reach of NEH programs not just by increasing the number of projects that can be funded, but also by augmenting the constituency served by NEH. Scholars in technical fields such as computer science may have rarely pursued funding support by NEH though working on tools that could be used by humanities scholars. Joint programs increase the likelihood that these individuals will consider the application of technology to humanities projects and encourage future collaborative work. In addition, NEH is able to take advantage of the expertise of its funding partners to identify the best ways to encourage collaboration. Increasing the number of partnerships among NEH and other funding agencies and organizations is of key importance to expanding the digital humanities.