

Keyanah Nurse ([00:00:01](#)):

All right. Good afternoon, everyone. It is quite gloomy here in New York City. I hope it's a lot sunnier wherever you are. Welcome to the Digital Justice Grant Fall webinar on Capacity Building for Development grants. My name is Keyanah Nurse. I'm program officer of IDEA Programs, which is a very new unit at ACLS, which stands for Intentional Design for an Equitable Academy. So, among a few other things, I work as the program lead for the Digital Justice grant program. I'm joined by my colleague Katie Reis, who is the Program Associate for IDEA Programs, and she'll be managing the behind the scenes. So I wanted to quick give her a quick shout-out and to thank her for managing the production that's happening behind the curtain. Before I introduce our interlocutors, I wanna highlight that this webinar is part of a fall series of webinars aimed to provide additional resources to applicants during the active competition period as folks are drafting the application. And the inspiration for this came out of conversation with former reviewers of both digital justice and our digital extension program around how ACLS might further engage applicants as they were working on their own material. And so this fall series, along with the supplementary material that you can find on our program site, is our attempt at unveiling the hidden curriculum that goes into grant writing by inviting back former reviewers to provide realtime feedback and just to sort of engage in some thought partnership. This is the fourth of such of such a webinar. The first was a general information session where I discussed program parameters and ethos dove a little deeper into the eligibility of requirements and the application components, and also the differences between the seed and development grants. It's also where little discussion around, you know, what is digital humanities, the ACLS, and rather than offering a kind of prescriptive definition of what it's, I walk through examples of the kinds of projects that we have funded through digital justice. The second session was on data ethics, and we invited Professor Kim Gallon from Brown University and archivist La'el Hughes Watkins from the University of Maryland College Park. And they both discussed strategies for articulating your data ethics plans throughout your proposal narrative. And our most recent session explored capacity building for Seed grants with Professor Morimoto, who is at Princeton University, and Dr. Lorena Gauthereau, who is the digital programs manager of US Latino Digital Humanities at the University of Houston. So I wanted to offer a quick recap of the sessions that we've done to also say that if you missed any of those sessions, you can find both the recordings and the transcript on the right, on the digital justice grants supplementary materials page, which my colleague Katie will pop into the chat for you right now so you can have on hand. Today, we are tackling the topic of capacity building for development grants, given that this is a new priority of the program. So we'll discuss a little bit what we mean by that, um, in terms of thinking about the conditions, those could be institutional, financial, technological related to personnel that allow you to do your work. What we mean when we think about, uh, building capacity and thinking about the infrastructures that support you to do your work.

Keyanah Nurse ([00:03:43](#)):

So, to give you a clear sense of how we'll spend our time today, we'll start with a general discussion with our interlocutors around capacity building. What we mean by that, the wide range of activities that can fall under the umbrella for digital humanities projects, but also we'll delve into the specificity of what that looks like for established projects and what scaling up a project might look like. We'll then transition into breakout rooms with one interlocutor in each room. And the purpose of that is really to talk more extensively about some of the issues raised in the general discussion or even to get feedback on the parts of your application that are related to this topic. So I did want to highlight that the first half of this session, the general discussion with our interlocutors, those who were not able to attend because of scheduling conflicts can watch this asynchronously, but once we transition into, into breakout rooms where you're talking, where you may be talking about your application, that part of the session will not

be recorded just in the spirit of respecting folks' privacy as they're still sort of working away at ideas, and that they, we want to offer a relatively contained space for folks to be able to do that. So we'll then reconvene into the main breakout room for closing remarks, where I'll also share some housekeeping details around the application deadline and also some other dates that are coming up over the next couple of weeks that you'll want to keep on your ring sharing this screen. So now that I have gotten those bits of housekeeping out of the way with the introductions, I have the pleasure of introducing our very esteemed interlocutors for today. So today we are joined by professor Marisa Parham, who is professor of English and Digital Studies at the University of Maryland College Park, where she's the director of AADHUM, the African-American Digital Humanities Initiative, the Associate Director of MITH, the Maryland Institute for Technology in the humanities and Co-director of IRL Humanities. Now, I could spend the rest of the session talking and fangirling about Marissa's achievements and advancements in the digital humanities, but I also want to highlight that since 2021, she served as the chair of the ACLS Commission on fostering and sustaining diverse digital scholarship, which is a national commission featuring scholars, librarians, publishers, and archivists who have been broadly, you know, tackling the issues of sustainability and how to better support digital scholarship related to racial and social justice. So she is joined by my ACLS colleague, Dr. James Shulman, who is the Vice President and Chief Operating Officer here at ACLS, and most recently, the author of the Synthetic University, how Higher Education Can Benefit From Shared Solutions and Save Itself, which was just released by Princeton University Press Black Month. I hope I'm not embarrassing him by flagging it, but I have a copy on, so I just wanted to throw that out there. Uh, before joining ACLS in 2018, shaman was 15 year fellow at the Mellon Foundation, where he worked with the foundation's president on strategic issues concerning higher education, philanthropy and cultural institutions. In the 2016 to 2017 academic year, he served as an affiliate of the Berkman Center for the Internet and Society at Harvard. And from its founding in 2001, I want to give a virtual clapping, uh, to our, our wonderful interlocutors who have agreed to talk with us today.

Keyanah Nurse ([00:07:24](#)):

Now, when we opened up the discussion around capacity building for grants, we started with just sort of a deficit. What counts as capacity building? How do we find that? How do we identify the scope of activities, um, that could fall under umbrella? Well, for development grants, I wanted to start in a slightly different place. We'll get to talking about the activities that constitute that definition. But I wanted to start with this question of scale first, right? In thinking about the appropriate balance between ambition and a reasonable scope of activity for established product, because we're sort of operating from the assumption that if you're applying for a development, you already have done some preliminary progress beyond the prototyping phase, and you're thinking about what's the next steps that you want to take your project to? And so part of what, you know, makes a strong application is obviously the ambition or thinking about what kinds of things you'll, your project, will contribute. But we also want to want to encourage a reasonable sort of scale, right? We don't want people to think that they have to completely, I guess, underwrite a new digital humanities program at their respective institution when we talk about capacity building. So again, just as a starting question, what would you say is an appropriate balance between ambition and scale?

Marisa Parham ([00:08:55](#)):

I'll start, I guess sort of thinking when thinking about ambition and scale, I mean, ambition is where we get the drive from, right? So there's a way in which in so many ways, it has to stay fore rounded or forefronted when we're working. But scale is really difficult to, in certain ways, even just to plan for and predict because so many things change in process over the course of a project, right? So I'm thinking

like, you know, even to be clear, like very nuts and bolts, like even at the level of, you know, making a plan of how this person in library is going to work with you in order to make sure your data plan, da, da da. And by the time you're actually gift a grant and start, the person gets a new job. You know, so just at the base level, right? There's sort of a constant, I mean, I guess part of this too is if you're thinking about particularly academic institutions, when we're thinking about sort of scaling up and sustainability, we're talking about institutions as if there are far more sort of stable entities than they actually are, right? And so that's a really long way of saying as much as possible, thinking about the steps that will constantly scaffold your scaling, right? So how to forefront ambition, hopefully I'm not meeting your question with the question, but on the forefront, ambition, while at the same time really thinking about a sort of stepped in layered approach, the scaling up, because there are so many different kinds of scale you have to be able to think about at one time, like the scale of the project, the scale of the institution, the scale of your own workforce, the scale of your own body, like health, you know, all the things, right? And so what are some ways to set smaller accomplishable goals that keep you moving at a steady pace, but can always help you sort of reassess and course correct as you go along and as you scale up?

James Shulman ([00:10:45](#)):

Yeah, I think that the way Marissa was just parsing ambition and scale is super helpful because I think nothing happens with ambition, without ambition, right? I mean, it's hard enough to get outta bed in the morning, you know, then figure out how to, you know, get a project going and get through all the, all the barriers that would stop you from doing whatever that project is, right? And so the ambition, and I, I think we, you know, a lot in our society when people, people confuse ambition and ego with, uh, egotistical, you know, and ambition is really good for these projects because they, they take such will to, you know, make them get anywhere. And, and I think what, what I heard and Marissa was saying is that, you know, that you can be ambitious without it being, you know, the largest project that ever happens, right? And I think, you know, one way of parsing a project, even a project in the development stage that's already up and going is, um, is thinking, you know, realistically but ambitiously about where, where it might be in a year or two, right? Like, and, and that's okay if you, like, you're, if you're cataloging a, a community archive and you can't get all of it, but you could, you could see doing some of it and you figure out how to do it, and that's ambitious enough how to scan it or catalog it or, you know, or bring it into, into a digital realm that, you know, again, you, you figure out if you're gonna start with a, and try to get to Z and only get to B or you can figure out, oh, this is a, this is a, a chunk of this archive that would be, if we don't get any further, that this in and of itself would be a great source. And that's both ambitious and realistic and, you know, doing that well and doing that well with the partners in a, in, in, in a respectful way is in itself ambitious, even if it's not, you know, the entire archive of the entire world.

Keyanah Nurse ([00:12:45](#)):

Yeah, I love both of those comments because it sort of linked really nicely with a conversation we had in the capacity building for seed grants, which was really thinking concretely about how even other parts of the application can help you sort of strike that balance between ambition and scale. So, for example, thinking about something like the project staffing list, um, as a way of checking in with the amount of labor that you're requiring or asking of folks to do, and whether or not that fits within the timeline that you have outlined for the project, um, or even thinking again about the, the timeline of activities, um, recognizing that people are human right and that the world is in a difficult place right now. So, and, and I think too, sort of taking into account the added addition of time re relative to the kinds of projects that you're doing, and how, if you are sort of, uh, visiting an archive that's been historically neglected and how that adds an additional layer of time that one has to have in terms of thinking about, um, sort of

doing the project. And so these very concrete, uh, measures provide, I think, a wonderful checks and balances with ambition of what you hope to do. So always keeping these things, you know, intention with one another. And so I think, you know, as I am very close to the application components in that way, um, as the program officer for this program, are there other sort of ways that when you think about things like a project staffing list or a project timeline, or even a budget, for example, how these things can function as tools for people to use in terms of thinking about that relationship between ambition and scale for the scope of their activities?

Marisa Parham ([00:14:43](#)):

Yeah, I know it's taken me a while, um, to come around. I can't even get the, the sentence else. I was gonna try pull off a, to come around to the pleasures of doing an application, but no <laugh>. But <laugh>, I can say that when I get to the end of every application and like, you know, the dust sort of settles, I always have a moment I admit of appreciation because what these applications sort of force out of us is to really, I'm trying to use the word scale again, but thinking about ideas, thinking about thoughts and feelings and the real complexity of just in every way quantifying a lot of that, which for me often feels counter to the thing I'm trying to do. That's why it took me a while to sort of come around to it, um, in a certain way, but that ultimately, when I say quantify, I don't mean just like put dollar amounts of what's helpful, but time, right. Person power, right? Et cetera. And the ways in which, you know, any application is going to ask us to just continually parse ideas down back into materialities. But it's so hard because you're actually in many cases, still at a pre material place, right? So I guess some of this, that's really interesting, thinking about also even about scale and sort of the scaffolding I was speaking of earlier, is really how to break projects down into the component parts. And it takes seriously, again, all the dimensions of a project. I know I keep saying this, but I'm hitting the point now as some other people here, I imagine where, you know, stewarding or building projects that now have been alive for 12 years, right? And just thinking even over time, like those changes of what projects need and what they ask of me, and thinking of how, for some of those projects, it would've been really helpful actually to be able to sort of materialize or itemize even a staff's relationship to the project. And again, thinking about all the ways that the cash flow around a project is actually there in many cases to support the people of the project. And so what kind of planning do you have to do to actually make that cohere, right? I've seen so many projects that actually get, you know, a huge gob of money, but there's a way in which no amount of money in the world right, can fix sort of structural issues if you haven't planned out a certain way. So I'm going to abstract, so I'll stop there. But again, just thinking about applications, thinking about the parts and thinking about every aspect, even the most, usually the most mundane aspects of a project application are probably the things upon which you need to cast the most attention, because that's when I actually is most gonna catch up with you in the end, right? I'm trying to make that sound positive.

Keyanah Nurse ([00:17:44](#)):

I love the, the reframe and, um, also that reminder of things like being attuned to something like a budget, for example, which I don't think we put far enough emphasis on because we're so concerned about, you know, articulating our ideas in the proposal narrative. But I think, again, given the focus on things, something like capacity building and the activities around that, the budget is actually a really tool in helping figure out what, right. Especially in terms of investing in the people, right? That will either be supporting the project or key members of the project. And so I did want to flag, because this has been a question that Katie and I have received sort of in the digital justice inbox where folks can send questions, you can absolutely use grant funds to fund graduate students, to fund postdocs, to fund undergraduates who may be part of the project teams, but also, and I wanna stress this, but also to fund

the community partners outside of your institution that are working on the project with you, right? And so, again, to lift up a comment from the capacity building for seed grants, Dr. Lorena Gauthereau was talking about how the budget actually reflects a lot of the values that are articulated in the proposal narrative. And so if there's an incongruence there, you know, that sends up a red flag when she's reading application. So I, I definitely would encourage folks to revisit that recording for that discussion because it was really great. But since we have been talking sort of about the tools that allow you to capture the material aspects of what counts as capacity building and at different scales, let's get into what a, what those material parts of capacity building are those concrete forms of capacity building. And so how would you define capacity building specifically for projects that have progressed beyond the prototyping phase? So projects that running and they're looking to the next phase of development. What kinds of things can they do to further sort of build up capacity and capacity to, for what also I think is a great sort of implicit question within that?

James Shulman ([00:19:51](#)):

Yep. I'd start, Keyanah, by going back to something you said earlier, which is, what, when one does working on a project, digital project or a digital archive, that is really seeking to rebalance a neglected subject or a set of materials or the evidence of a community or a culture that the reason it's not in the, in, in the library already is because that group or that community wasn't part of what was established as, as the canonical works in 1924 or 1931, or whenever the collections were built. So if you were working on the, you know, the, the papers of Thomas Jefferson, the library was gathering those materials, right? And they were cataloging them, and they were creating finding aids, and then eventually they were digitizing them. So all that work that is both scholarship and librarianship and, you know, cataloging and, uh, and making accessible and technology and data ethics as, as your other webinars talked about, all of that work is enfolded usually under the rubric of scholarship, you know, in an application that, that you and your colleagues would get. So I think the capacity in that is recognizing that all that work is work, and that work is time, and that work is a resource and that work in the currency of building, uh, the academic careers. Um, and the careers generally of the people participating shouldn't disappear into the ether, right? So the capacity is, is the learning of doing that work, but also the, the documentation and the credit of it. And I think that, you know, the, the recognition, I mean, when, when, when thinks of a project like, you know, the Colored conventions project, I mean, from, from the beginning, they, they built in, uh, because people were going to be building their careers on working on a new, uh, uh, academic resource, a new new scholar base for scholarship. People were building their careers on it. They were building their crews and building it and gathering the materials and scanning them and cataloging them. And then, you know, that scholarship too, it's not, the scholarship is not the stand back and present the materials and then I will do my work, right? It's figuring out it's the choice of what materials to scan and what materials to include. And so I think not letting all that credit that goes along with that capacity get lost, uh, is, you know, is super important.

Marisa Parham ([00:22:33](#)):

I really love that. And I've been thinking a lot, take a second, um, about documentation, um, which I've been extremely bad at over the years. I've been thinking a lot about it, um, in theme of documentation and even thinking about, to even pull this together with some of the second part of Kenna's question of thinking about, you know, what comes next for capacity when you're past prototype, the work of narrativizing, like re not redoing an application, of course, but like sort of going back and doing the work of narrative izing process up from the beginning of the thought, the idea through the prototype to now, right? And thinking about that as an exercise that one helps do some new work that James very rightfully, um, has just pointed out around attribution and also just around, you know, talking about the

project, but also using that as a process for really sort of delineating what has worked and what hasn't. And also to do a check-in, um, you know, earlier, you know, I start with saying sort of like thinking like how ambition, um, is what gets us started. And then James's point is like, kind of what gets us outta the bed in the morning and to do this work. And so also really assessing the extent to which the prototype is meeting your goal, right? Both materially in terms of what you want to do, but even just emotionally, right? And for your team, does it change, you know, does it turn out that your team or the people you've been working with aren't technical enough? Maybe they're too technical, maybe, you know, et cetera, right? There's a way in which doing that work of documentation can really help move a project forward, right? Because it's the period of assessment and it's also the period of, again, realigning sort of intention ambition with outcome, because it's really hard with prototypes to get it to actually reflect the thing that first sparked you, right? And if you add into that, I think as James is also hinting, if you add into that sort of the sense of working with communities or, you know, all other kinds of communities outside of academia, in all the other kind of social aspects, there's a way in which for better, I don't how to put it, so I apologize if it sounds weird or gross, um, but that those social relationships also have to be engineered. And because they also on some level have to be engineered, like scaffolded supported, et cetera, that that's something else to be documented, right? In thinking about that as well.

Keyanah Nurse ([00:25:07](#)):

Yeah, I think those are, those are both really great comments. Um, and to sort of shift gears a little bit, but related to what both of you just said, you know, one of the things that we are effectively asking by including capacity building as a thread here, is for people writing their applications to give us a, a sort of scope of the landscape that they're existing in, right? Because we have to have, and we hope to give our reviewers a more granular understanding context in which folks are actually doing their work in order to understand where we can, you know, best support them. And so in terms of thinking about the relationship between capacity building and infrastructure, right? Because that is also one of the unstated, I think, um, sort of themes when we talk about capacity building as well, is that what are some questions and considerations that you would ask yourself as you are sort of thinking about a project that would provide insight onto the things that are currently available to you. I think engaging in that kind of self-reflective work and narrative advising process sort of allows you to sort of look internally at your project, but how would you take that process and sort of apply it externally to think about the context in which the project is situated in to get a better sense of, of what's happening?

James Shulman ([00:26:35](#)):

One of the things that the commission that, that Marissa chairs and we've all been working on, has been realizing is how many different kinds of infrastructure are involved in, or not involved, but potentially involved in any project. I mean, there's technical infrastructure and there's servers and there's software, um, but then there are all sorts of, uh, uh, funding and relationship infrastructures and navigating those and figuring out what the, what the possibilities are, you know, is a enormous chunk of the uncredited work of digital work, right? Like, you know, the relationship building, if it is with an archive or with a, a group outside of the institution or within the institution, the, the relationships with the, you know, administration and the library and where does this fit in and why is it scholarship and what is it trying to do, the relationship with the department around, you know, um, what counts and why the relationship with graduate students and making sure that the work is advancing their path in a way that they can see, they can understand, they know what their risks are, they know what the possibilities are. And, you know, and even with undergraduates, you know, these are the, you know, figuring out, um, how this fits in with their work, what they're getting out of, whether they're gonna go on to an academic or career, which most of them won't, right? But like, what does this give them? So all of these, you know, I mean

the, you know, the one doesn't want, uh, waste in any of these, right? Like, one doesn't wanna waste people's time. One doesn't wanna build a software tool or a widget if there's something else that would already do it. One doesn't wanna scan things if one doesn't know where one's gonna put them. So, you know, I think in all of these things, infrastructure are the things that allow the work to, uh, resonate and continue, and that's resonating and continue, both in terms of the things created, the digital objects created, but also in terms of the impact on the people. And, and so that's where the sort of, you know, credit infrastructure and the technical infrastructure have the same capacity to support the work. However far the work gets. It may not, again, may not encompass every, you know, archive that one might, you know, potentially desire to build. But the work itself, by thinking of how it fits in with all these other infrastructures, physical, virtual, technical, allows it to resonate and have the, you know, the broadest possible impact in those different circles.

Keyanah Nurse ([00:29:47](#)):

Yeah. So much of what you just spoke to James, as I'm chewing on that or processing it, is sort of the importance of, um, kind of navigating relationships within your institution to sort of see what's available, who's available to you, and how things work. And I know that's a very, very simple, obvious point to make, but I think stating it out loud like that and sort of foregrounding the human relationships that go to support digital work is important to say. Um, because oftentimes I think, you know, as I have seen conversations around digital humanities or people who are curious about it and wanna get into it, always start technical rather than starting at the human in terms of the relationships that have to support all of this. And so, um, professor Rio Morimoto in the last session sort of talked about, you know, talking to your neighbors in your institution, figuratively speaking about your project as a way of trying to figure out, um, what kinds of infrastructures are currently available to you at your institution. It's a very simple but difficult exercise to see how other people, um, serve in your institution may respond to, to your work. Uh, Marissa, did you have any thoughts on that?

Marisa Parham ([00:30:57](#)):

Yeah, no, it's super useful, I feel, but I keep lagging. I haven't been in a zoom meeting in a while and I forgot, you can't really think quietly on Zoom, but I was thinking sort of no one can see you think on the screen, but I was thinking as you were both talking about sort of, I like that sort of talking to your neighbors. It's difficult though because it's like figuring out when, and I'm saying this 'cause it's a challenge, um, not is if that makes sense, but figuring out when through those conversations, you are in a good place to arrive at a path towards solutions, right? And when those conversations, you're realizing that your institution may not be able to give you what you need with their existing structures. Um, having been doing this again a very long time, um, and thinking back in the days where there was almost, there was seldom any infrastructure for anything to now where at many institutions there's a lot of infrastructure built up, but those infrastructures are usually built up around very specific projects and aren't particularly portable or transferrable. Right? And so also using those conversations, frankly, as a way to start navigating the question of what your institution or organization can really do for you. And also to start sort of finding ways to gently say out loud that you're not sure you're gonna have what you need, right? Um, because that's actually part of the conversation because it's not, you know, very often that moment of really being to talk about not having what you need, you'll also find people who are like, well, yeah, actually, now that you say it right? And you actually are gonna need those relationships and that sort of support right? Moving forward if you're gonna try and get anyone to help you, frankly. Um, yeah.

Keyanah Nurse ([00:33:02](#)):

Yeah. And I'm glad that you framed it like that. Oh, sorry James, but just to quickly say that, that is one of the sort of primary, um, it is a prompt, but it's also part of the evaluation criteria, right? Of folk ability to articulate what is available, but also what's not available. And so therefore, what does the funds form this grant step in to sort of offer additional support? Sorry, James, you were saying.

James Shulman ([00:33:28](#)):

No, I was just thinking that it, when Marissa was talking, I was struck by, you know, no one out there says, I'm going now to reinvent the wheel, right? I mean, no one, no one wants to do that. I mean, everyone who, who's in this, this, uh, this workshop, you know, is conscious of the, uh, uh, of, uh, of the danger of, you know, reinventing whatever wheel it is, right? And yet one doesn't always have the community to talk to, one doesn't know. I mean, I think, uh, and one of the things that I think, uh, we, you know, and when we break up into groups, I mean, love to hear from, from the people thinking about applying for this and doing this kind of work. You know, where, where do you go for questions that should be answerable but may not be answerable on your campus? I mean, you know, some of the, you know, some of, uh, you know, some, some other university has come up with really good, uh, you know, policies for how to do this or that, right? But you don't know about that. Some other university might have a really good charter for working with the library. Like, here's, here's how, here's what the library will do for you, and here's what you need to tell the library. But your library might not have that, right? And so you might know that you, you, you want these things or need these things, but in, in lieu of them being evident to you, you're, you're going to have to make them up, right?

Keyanah Nurse ([00:34:50](#)):

Right. And so this kind of reminds me of, um, a critical part of, right, doing digital work and thinking about where it lives as we were talking about what may be available to you or what's not available to you at your current institution. So let's say that you have created a project, um, you've been doing this project for a few years now, but you are thinking about moving across institutions or parts of your team have moved across institutions. How can you best determine the appropriate digital home for your project? And I'm asking this now because it does feel very much related to sort of thinking about what's available to you in different institutional context, being somewhat strategic about what you're able to leverage and how. And so, you know, it also begs the question of should, should projects move around? And if so, you know, what considerations would help one, make that determination?

Marisa Parham ([00:35:46](#)):

Yeah, I struggle, I think, you know, with this one, um, because I am deeply pro portability, um, but I'm not always the most practical person <laugh> around digital stuff. But also, I'm just very fortunate because, because I started so far before institutions, so long before institutions had infrastructures, I built, you know, a lot of my early work, as you know, was building infrastructures, right? But I'm also thinking, and I'm thinking of how to make it relevant to this group. I'm teaching a class this semester on digital storytelling, and every semester I teach these theory and production courses. So I mean, it's every semester you, I'm producing between 25 and 60 digital projects, right? So this is always front of mind. I can't express enough. This is why I'm actually probably, I know crazy, but I was thinking how, I was talking to a colleague of mine recently about this, and she was like, oh, what books are you using? And I said, well, we use book excerpts and we use, you know, this book, this book, because we can get it through the library. But on principle, I never asked the students to buy books for this course and I English. And they were just like, what did you just say <laugh>? You know? And I was like, yeah. I strongly emphasize to the students that, you know, they might wanna think about not buying the books. Um, and the reason why I don't have them buy the books is simply because I'm trying to be conscious,



um, of cost. And what I'm gonna ask them to buy is their own little mini infrastructure for their work, right? I made the call, I mean, of course if you can afford it, buy the books too, but right where I would prefer to see your money go right, is into this infrastructure. And so, I train them on university's infrastructure and then show them how to move off of it. Um, and I bring this up now because there's a way in which some of the answer is gonna be a both. And which is to say, thinking about the kinds of hosting and other very technical things that you can do with your institution, but also as much as possible trying to produce projects that still might be portable, they should be able to move. And this really comes down to thinking about on some level, um, just sort of, so in a strange way, usually with institutions, and I might be over talking, so I'll really back in a second. They tend to have now immense digital infrastructure, but never quite the right thing, right? And that's because projects are so different from each other. And part of that huge infrastructure, and this is not necessarily a bad thing, I just wanna flag it, is because so much of that infrastructure has usually been sort of bought out of box proprietary software, right? So I'm struggling with the project when I just mentioned I've spent literally the last four hours on today, um, trying to address, um, that's not a proprietary software sort of need to be that way at the moment when it was made. Um, and thinking a lot about what it will take to get, I'm sorry I'm have to be vague, but what it would take to get this project essentially outta this software at this point, because it's become unsustainable. The thing that made the project sort of easiest for the PI we are working with in the moment over time has become absolutely unsustainable. Because even though it's a very big project, the ways the software is morphing over time, and you could imagine these kinds of softwares I'm talking about just to make it clear, omeka or scalar or just those kinds of things, right? That's what I'm talking about here, those kinds of software. So not necessarily those. And so what I'm getting at is in both, and it's thinking about again, how to parlay the resources that are available to you while at the same time making sure that in the moment of using those resources, you're producing a project that still has exit points, right? Sometimes if you're thinking about, for instance, um, digitization, right? At some point, you know, it will behoove you to only work with a software or infrastructure that allows you to just export everything as a plain text file or unless you export everything as ACSV, right? And if you go back to where the conversation started, um, this is a sense of the sort of nitty gritty things that when you're thinking things like your data management plan and et cetera, that move you away from thinking about things that are just, you know, what you think of as like details and materialities to thinking about the sort of conceptualization of the project itself around access, around morphing over time. If you're working with the community group, being able to give the assets back, for example, right? Um, so yeah, so starts a very long and rambly thing, but just really thinking about how to take advantage of what's in front of you if it is indeed in front of you. But even if you were to take advantage of the thing in front of you, still understanding that it's helpful to understand the ins and outs of the kinds of work that you're doing so that you can also plan for a future portability, right? A future movement of that work. Because offhand I will not name projects, but you know, we've barely think I can think of at least five projects that have, you know, I know have absolutely fallen apart in the last few years in a few more based on, I can tell you, we're coming down in the next five, right? Um, simply because even the teams that produce those softwares out of box right, have disintegrated, right? And so once you buy an infrastructure, if the team that supports the infrastructure disintegrates or changes over time, it's gonna take your project with it, right? So again, just sort of thinking about these things as well. I'm getting too nitty gritty in the details 'cause this is where I actually live, so I'll stop. No, the nitty gritty is

Keyanah Nurse ([00:41:33](#)):

Exactly where we wanna be. And I think, you know, to lift up the very profound points of, given the nature of the kinds of projects that we're funding through digital justice, so projects related to racial and

social justice, um, you know, you have to make that decision that maybe you don't want your project to live at your institution because of the speci the specific nature of the content itself, right? And so, you know, having that exit point, while still recognizing that like you can and should, you know, use the resources that are available to you where you are, but still keeping in mind the nitty ties of, of what those points can look like important and also speaks to the kind of, um, doing justice through the content itself and for the communities that the const is about or that belongs to.

James Shulman ([00:42:23](#)):

Yeah. And, and I, I think those decisions, Kiana, about where it should live and how, how you should govern the project often really bring up really difficult questions of, uh, of where and how much you want to fit in even if you are part of an institution, right? I mean, like the, there are trade-offs of, of buying into the system. Some are good and some are bad, and some are worth it and some aren't, right? I mean, but I think that that, again, if, if one is doing work that has been historically, um, not only neglected but deliberately excluded, it may or may not, uh, you know, feel like your work is being used, uh, as part of that institution. And that may be a being used that works, right? It may be like, okay, I can make this place better by bringing in a field and building work and building careers of my colleagues and myself and my students, that, that rebalances things that this institution, uh, didn't wanna be a part of, right? But it also may be like I, you know, then that institution might change, the provost might change, the president might change, might dean might change, and I might, it might not be the right place anymore. So that, uh, so, so what, what Marissa was saying about the, the capacity to not be so locked into a software or an infrastructure that you can't, you know, live by the values of the work is, is an interesting, you know, sort of dynamic because it's not, it's not always fixed, it's not guaranteed forever, right?

Keyanah Nurse ([00:44:10](#)):

Yeah. It sounds like sort of building capacity for a certain kind of, um, sort of either technological independence, right? From whatever specific academic institution that you may be attached to. And so if that is the case, if one is sort of trying to think through what that process might look like and would like to apply, right? Sort of under the guise of my capacity building is trying to think through having my project live outside of my institution in particular ways and migrating it to, let's say, in more control of the community partners that I work with. What sort of considerations, you know, should one have when trying to, to make that move, right? Because if it's no longer living in an academic institution and you are, um, sort of housing it somewhere else, right? That doesn't have the same kind of, uh, let's say contracts with proprietary tech companies that lock you into certain things, what sort of, um, considerations should folks think about in terms of the sustainability of the project outside these academic institutions and the security of it too?

Marisa Parham ([00:45:31](#)):

Sorry, you unmute at the same time, James, please. <laugh>.

James Shulman ([00:45:33](#)):

Well, I was, I mean, I, some of this I think for, for this group, you know, people have already been developing projects. Some of this is probably way too basic, but, you know, separating content from tools is like so completely essential. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and things that give, as MEA was saying, things get built into something consciously or unconsciously might outgrow the platform, or the platform might outgrow it, or it might just end up being locked in. And I, I, I think the idea of ask e files

and, and text files and, uh, you know, CSV files and, and, uh, you know, non-proprietary objects as much as possible because obviously a lot of the creative work is creating new things. But I think keeping those things, uh, you know, with, with, with a divorce clause and as Marissa said, as an exit strategy is, is always good. Because I think, you know, the, the other infrastructure is the social infrastructure. You know, as we were talking about it, the place might change, you might change, the work might change in fitting in or, or the strategy that your work is supported. You might've gotten a grant from the provost. 'cause they say, wow, we think that this kind of work, you know, and, and, and, and bridging this divide is really important. Uh, you know, and your work fits right in. And then as that plan gets readjusted, it might not fit in the same way. So I think, but I, I think the portability and, and, you know, and the modularity and all those things that do take extra time because it's easier to build one thing and get it up there and get satisfying results, but that, that, that leads you into a, uh, you know, a, a, a cul-de-sac.

Marisa Parham ([00:47:20](#)):

Yeah. And I just wanna emphasize also, again, the sense of the both and right. I think when you're, I'm seeing the early third stage of the imagine and love of the projects that apply for this grant are so past prototype, right? To go to next level. Um, I know words just kind of struck out, stuck out to me. So sense of satisfaction, right? And also trying to think about speed and what's possible. And I keep saying both and I just wanna make sure I repeat it, really thinking about ways to satisfy whatever requirements that, you know, come from a provost office in order to gain the support, you know, et cetera. Um, but again, it's like some of the work of which I speak is quite quiet, right? Um, it's really in the background of how, not in the background, but it doesn't necessarily have to be, I mean, I'm not sure you would put in an application and you're asking for caution from your provost, and you're like, but most importantly, I wanna make sure this project can leave the institution, right? But <laugh>, you know, when you're thinking about it from a technical side, and I point out the technical stuff, which is, you know, again, somewhat boring to talk about in some ways for some people. But that's really where a lot of the ethical and the sort of this work we're talking about actually happens through the actual technical considerations. And one thing that we get to take advantage of is the extent to which administrations, et cetera, usually don't care that much about the technical details. What they care about is, um, the narrative, the story, the story about the thing, right? Um, I'm thinking of projects, again, trying not to name, but I'm thinking of projects where, you know, one perhaps might leave the front end of the project, the sort of websites part of the project, um, hosted the institution, but the data side actually lives somewhere else, right? That's the sort of thing. Or vice versa. Um, that's sort of the thing I'm thinking of with all of this when I say it's gonna be really clear when I'm saying both, and it is a really kinda structural point as well as an ideological point as well. Um, and it feels, I don't love foregrounding necessarily the ideological point, but this is just, again, from my experience of thinking now about projects over, you know, tens of years, right? And think about what it means for a project to sustain, right? And for your soul to sustain. But what else?

Keyanah Nurse ([00:49:53](#)):

We like soul sustaining work over here, <laugh>, we hope to support that kind of work. Um, so the last question that I'd like to pose before we transition into kind of smaller group discussions is about the dreaded word that's always attached to grants, uh, which is about outputs and how would you measure or anticipate the impact of capacity building efforts, especially for established projects. And here I do wanna sort of lift up, uh, Marissa's earlier process, um, as part of assessment, but I think that's also a wonderful way of thinking about an output, um, no matter what direction your project ends up happening or going to, um, throughout the course of the grant. And so, sort of thinking about the importance of documenting process as part of outputs, are there any other potential outputs, especially

related to capacity building efforts that folks could sort of preemptively imagine as they are building out their application, right? Because in some ways we're asking people to look a little bit into the crystal ball, but what would you anticipate, right? I think is probably a better way of framing that question.

James Shulman ([00:51:11](#)):

Marissa's got her zoom thinking face, so I'll start. Yeah.

Marisa Parham ([00:51:14](#)):

Sorry, <laugh>.

James Shulman ([00:51:15](#)):

No, no, it's great. Yeah, I, um, you know, I think on a very, uh, practical level as a reviewer, when, when I think about capacity building and projects like this, i, I, I guess I don't want like quick wins or like discreet measurable outcomes. I guess what what seems really important is that this is the work of field building, you know, and this is the work of, you know, of um, uh, of, of uh, uh, you know, sort of building the humanities of the future. And so I think, I mean, it, uh, so I think, I think having the scholarship at the heart of it, you know, is important because you don't want work that is like, you know, shows an instinct for the capillary. You want an insti, you know, want the instinct for the juggler. You want, you want work that's going to matter, right? And so if the method is solid, but the end goal is, you know, not, you know, not visible, uh, in terms of, in, in terms of the impact of the work, um, method, method doesn't really matter. So I think the capacity building is, you know, here's, here's what this, this team is going to contribute to this field, and here's, you know, in terms of the capacity of the students involved or the colleagues involved or the, or the archive being built or the institutional involvement, uh, all aim towards, uh, you know, enriching a field that, uh, deserves to be lifted up, right? And so I think that's it. It's the people and the work, but the goal has to be, you know, compelling.

Marisa Parham ([00:52:57](#)):

Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>, I think it's super helpful and I'm thinking also compelling and thinking what you were just saying, James, about humanities, right? So one thing I was thinking sort of jotting when Kenna first asked a question and your comments were helpful to this as well, your response is that one of the most difficult things I know I learned over time was the extent to which when I'm really bad at talking about outcome and assessment, I'm like pain to the point where like, I should seek help, or I guess I did. Um, but I realized over time that I maybe wasn't that bad. I just really struggled because I feel like you're working so hard to have this vision for this project, and then when it comes time to talk about assessment and outcome, you're trying to shove it back into these terms that the project very likely emerged out of not rejecting, but trying to move beyond, right? So it feels like a weird, like backsliding sometimes, right? And assessment and output should be the opposite. It should be feeling like that's like the t the moon moment, right? And so one of my examples would be I'm thinking about, you know, a program I've run before, and it was like, how will you gauge the success of this project or this program? And my answer was like, if people come back and they were like, that's not an answer. I'm like, you know what? It is an answer. And over time, what I learned from that, because if you're serving people and they come back for more at these weird times when these programs get offered, you must be doing something right? And it is actually that simple, right? And so what I began to learn over time is that the moment of talking about outcome and assessment is actually an opportunity to define the terms under which you want to be scrutinized, right? It's actually an opportunity, you know, I'm thinking, again, English I can't help, but like when you're writing, and I'm always trying, one of the

hardest things to get advanced students to understand sometimes is how critical it is to do the work of making definitions so that if you're working with a theory or you're working with, you know, just ideas that you've come from elsewhere, even your own, how important it is to just absolutely clarify your take on those terms because you actually have to shut down other people's relationships to the term. And it doesn't mean like, you know, you're disallowing them, but you wanna be really clear that when you say this thing, this is what you mean, right? And I think when you're thinking about output and assessment, it's actually quite a similar moment where that's the time for you to articulate, you know, and don't be wild, but you know, it's a moment to articulate an outcome that again, speaks to the heart of the project versus an outcome that sounds like what you think a project outcome should look like, right? And again, I really, I mean to the point, and this is the person, I mean, to the point where there were things I wanna apply for because I just knew there was no way I could make a compelling argument on the terms they were asking for this response, right? Um, and so thinking about how you take, again, these app where we kind of started taking these application moments, but even thinking about outcome and assessment as another site for making definitions. This is one thing, you know, James, earlier you mentioned, um, the Color conventions project, they excel at this, right? Of saying it doesn't really matter what you think the outcome of the project should be, not being confrontational, but this doesn't matter what matters, right? I'm talking as a group, I'm not in it, but you know what, from them, they're saying what matters is what we see should happen, and we're gonna explain to you why what we wanna see is important. And that's kind of the end of the conversation, right? They'll also emphasize that part of what made that possible was also the capacity to build infrastructure not attached to specific institution, you know, so herb. But I just think there's just something there. And I've been thinking a lot about that. Again, you know, trying to think of these moments as these small application moments as opportunities. But I don't think if you're thinking about even the assessment of our work as digital scholars, like how the work will be perceived within the department or beyond, you have to get that definition work done early and often, right? Because if you don't get it done, someone's gonna do it for you. And I still am not convinced we live in a world, frankly, where the path is easy for digital work, right? In terms of assessment and institutional value and all the things, right? Um, so I'll stop there, but yeah,

Keyanah Nurse ([00:57:43](#)):

Well, thank you for that. I've never sat through a sort of discussion about outputs and assessments that was so inspiring. Now I'm like gonna revisit with some of my own grant applications and be like, I could, this is actually a moment here that I'm gonna take. Um, so I'm going to stop the recording now, actually. All right, everyone. So I hope you enjoyed that, uh, discussion and that it helped to, to provide some good feedback in terms of the things that you're thinking about as you craft your application materials, either for this competition or for following competition. You have another digital justice competition slated, um, for next academic year as well. So I wanna extend a warm thank you everyone who attended today and ask questions, which always works to the benefit of the group. As I mentioned, this session will be recorded and uploaded to YouTube so you're able to reference it, um, or send it to colleagues who may have missed the session. So before you go, however, I do wanna ask a small favor. Um, I'm a firm believer in the value of revision, not just to writing or our projects, but also to programs like this. The digital justice is, you know, it's an iterative process itself. And so as much as you know, we made a lot of changes to the program to live up to that aspiration of digital justice. We recognize that there's still a lot more to do and it's with candid feedback from folks who engage with acls that we can make the necessary adjustments and changes so that the program itself is a little bit less onerous to apply to apply, that it offers resources for people that they can leverage for other opportunities. And even if they're not selected as a, as a grantee, it really is my hope that the process of applying has some intrinsic value in and of itself. And also that the barriers to applying our, so Katie is gonna post in the chat a link

to a post survey is very short. Five questions that hopefully give us a sense of how useful these sessions offered to you. The survey also asks you to consider whether or not you'd be open to being contacted about participating in a focus group in the spring once the competition is over about your experiences navigating the competition. And so the answer to this question doesn't lock you into participating. It simply gives us a starting point for outreach once we do the work of inviting folks to that focus group in the spring. And so I'm gonna share my screen once more and just remind you all of deadlines, right? The application deadline is December 15th, uh, which is just a few short weeks away at 9:00 PM Eastern Standard time. So Katie and I will be on call <laugh> that night. So if there's any sort of emergency that you run into in terms of uploading your application, you can send us an email and we'll be sure to get back to you, um, pretty much immediately. And then the other dates that I wanted to flag are that the selection committee meetings will be happening in March and we'll notify folks of decisions via email in May of 20 so coming up. And so as you can see, uh, we have our fall webinar series. There are two more left, which are just applicant q and a and those really function as kind of office hour type sessions where you can pop in, ask a question about application and then pop out. So it's a lot less structured than the formal webinars within Oculars and they also will not be recorded. So again, if you missed any of the sessions, <inaudible>, those are recorded and you can find the transcripts and the recordings online on the <inaudible>. So once again, thank you for your time. Best of luck on your application. I wanna thank again our interlocutors, James and Marissa for engaging us in conversation today. And if you have any further inquiries or just wanna send you know some good wishes to us as we head to the end of the competition you can send to Digital Justice. Thank you everyone.