

Hello. Hello everyone. We are going to start in just another minute or two. I just want to give folks another opportunity to log in. Thank you for arriving on time, and we'll get started in just a moment. Got it. Now you learn.

All right. Thank you, everyone, for indulging my music taste. I like to break up the afternoon with a little bit of music and start these webinars with a little bit of music.

My name is Keyanah Nurse. I'm the Senior Program Officer of IDEA Programs, a new unit at ACLS (which stands for *Intentional Design for an Equitable Academy*). I'm joined by my colleague Katie Reis, who is the Program Associate for IDEA Programs, and she'll be managing the tech behind the scenes. If you have any questions, feel free to pop those into the chat; if you're having any technical difficulties, feel free to reach out to her.

As the program lead for the Digital Justice Grants program, which is now entering its fourth competition year, I'm very happy to kick off our fall webinar series with this general information session, where—hopefully—all of your questions about the application, eligibility requirements, and evaluation criteria can be answered. I also intend for this session to set the groundwork for our next webinar in mid-September, where we will dive deeper into the core mission and values of the Digital Justice Grants program and how the program's articulation of digital justice is enacted both through its administration and in the projects that it funds. It's been a real pleasure to steward this program as it has morphed and evolved over the past four years and, relatedly, to navigate the growing interest in it. As always, this session will be recorded so those with scheduling conflicts can still access the materials.

As I mentioned, today's general information session encompasses a mix of discussion about both the ethos of the Digital Justice Grants program and some of the finer details of this year's competition. After defining the vision—by uplifting some of the recently funded projects—I'll explain key details about eligibility, including the difference between seed and development grants; give an overview of the application components; highlight some resources meant to assist you as you craft your application, should you decide to apply; and finally review the competition timeline before the concluding Q&A session.

Given the volume of participants today—there were over 450 folks registered as of this morning; I'm seeing about 250 participants who have actually signed in—we're going to use Zoom's Q&A feature, which Katie will be monitoring. Please post your questions there throughout the session and be sure to upvote the questions that you would like to see answered. Obviously, we won't have time to get to everyone's individual inquiries, but I hope I can answer as many questions that people have in common as possible. I would

also encourage you to frame your questions as generally as possible. If you have specific concerns or questions about your individual project, I'll explain how best to get in touch with us to receive feedback. But for this first general information session, try to keep the questions general so that as many people as possible can benefit.

So, let's begin with the focus and ethos of the ACLS Digital Justice Grants program. I'm starting here to underscore the specificity of what this name—*digital justice*—means at ACLS and within the context of this program, because I often get the question: “What’s the difference between a digital justice project and a digital humanities project?” I hope that by beginning with the program’s focus and ethos the difference between the two will be made plain. I’d like to add the caveat that this isn’t an exhaustive definitional effort. I’m not defining the incredibly complicated and multifaceted term *digital justice* or talking about how the term is used in other spaces. I’m simply making plain why we mobilize the aspirational and reparative spirit of justice in the very name of this program—and how that is made manifest through digital tools and methods—so that you have a better sense of whether your project would be a good fit.

I assume that if you registered for this session, you’re at least familiar with the basic thematic focus of the program: it specifically funds digital projects in the humanities and social sciences that critically engage with the histories and interests of people of color and other marginalized groups through the ethical and intentional use of digital tools and methods. I’d like to highlight the definitional work that this framing does for us. It positions digital justice as both a process and an outcome with a specific thematic focus—which has ranged from projects on Indigenous data sovereignty, Black carceral feminism, and environmental reparations, to name just a few—and a methodological imperative, which has reflected similar diversity (from projects developing equitable models for using large language models to redact sensitive information in archives, to training independent scholars to digitize and make publicly accessible primary sources about slavery in the Northeast).

Because we position digital justice as process and outcome, our commitment to that framing reflects a very intentional, historically informed, and reparatively oriented grant-making process. Projects funded through this program advance equity and justice in the digital domain not simply through their content but also through their methods. Digital technologies are central to these projects’ analyses and interventions within ongoing legacies of racial capitalism, colonialism, heteronormativity, among others.

Beyond this link between form and content, and process and outcome, funded digital justice projects also demonstrate the greatest potential for advancing the program’s other

priorities, which include cultivating openness to new sources of knowledge and strategic approaches to content building and knowledge dissemination; engaging in capacity-building efforts (which can include, but are not limited to, pedagogical projects that train students in digital humanities methods as a key feature of content building, or publicly engaged projects that develop new technological infrastructure with community partners). There's a wide range of activities that could constitute capacity building. A quick side note: this capacity-building thread is relatively new. It's our hope it prompts applicants to provide a more granular understanding of the context in which they pursue their work, so reviewers can select awardees based on where funds might do the most good in bolstering digital scholarship. We certainly don't expect applicants to solve all problems at their institutions or completely bolster entire infrastructures. We want to be attentive to scale. The prompts around capacity building help reviewers gain a granular understanding of context so funds can have the greatest impact. It also helps us avoid philanthropic paternalism, where ACLS decides what capacity building looks like for each team. We'd much rather applicants express a vision grounded in the specificity of their local and institutional contexts and communities.

Other priorities: for Seed Grants, we'd like to see projects that explore or experiment with new materials, methodologies, and research agendas—through planning workshops, prototyping, or testing products. For Development Grants, projects should advance beyond prototyping or proof of concept and articulate the next financial, technological, and intellectual phases of development.

I've spent a lot of time talking abstractly, so I'll share how these ideas manifest in recently funded projects.

Example 1 (Seed): *Advancing Digital Justice for Indigenous Stewardship in Ecuadorian Amazonia* (awarded a Digital Justice Seed Grant this spring). Led by a team of scholars in the U.S. and the Amazonian Kichwa in Ecuador, this project uses digital mapping and storytelling methods to train youth in digital data technologies. Through intergenerational training, they co-create digital data with Indigenous community partners about traditional ecological knowledge and senses of place, aiming to foster intergenerational relationships for long-term Indigenous stewardship of riverine ecosystems. Seed funding will support audiovisual equipment, ArcGIS licensing, transcription subscriptions, honoraria for interviewees, and travel for the team—all of which support training youth in oral history collection and learning to use ArcGIS, as well as developing the website where story maps will be housed. Outcomes include straightforward deliverables (the website), but this project also demonstrates the value of process documentation as an important outcome—especially at the seed stage. Process documentation offers even so-called failures or

challenges as valuable parts of the project and sets the project up as an asset for others. For our purposes, process documentation and data training position the project within a larger capacity-building effort defined through countering the loss of traditional knowledge via intergenerational transfer grounded in data sovereignty. This example highlights the relationship between process and outcome and how capacity building is folded in through digital tools and methods.

Example 2 (Development): *Archaeological Archives as Inclusive Learning Laboratories* (awarded a Development Grant). Led by a transnational team spanning the U.S., the U.K., and Syria, the project aims to make archaeological archives—particularly those at the American excavation site at Dura-Europos in Syria—more accessible to a wider range of users by introducing local perspectives and affordances. Activities include digital upskilling of displaced and local Middle Eastern heritage professionals, descendant communities, and students; conducting oral history interviews of communities local to the Dura-Europos site; adding completed oral histories to archives; integrating new digital content within existing archival materials; and expanding/correcting institutionally received metadata. This expands on prior activities funded by the NEH and the Open Society University Network. Outcomes (digital archives that disrupt colonial legacies) are achieved through processes leveraging digital tools (a multilingual Wikipedia ecosystem and linked open data methods). Capacity building is central through training and collaboration with cultural heritage professionals at the site.

Now that I've spoken about the big-picture vision, I'll transition into concrete details of the competition and application. First: eligibility.

1. The principal investigator must be a scholar in the humanities or the interpretive social sciences. We do not limit *scholar* to PhDs or faculty. Given the collaborative nature of digital work—librarians at the center, graduate students partnering with faculty—our definition is someone with a demonstrated track record of engagement in scholarly debates and communities (publications, conference presentations, collaborations inside/outside their field). It's not limited to title or credential. This holistic approach has enabled advanced graduate students, postdocs, and librarians to serve as PIs and co-PIs on funded projects.
2. Public access: Projects must agree to make content publicly accessible. We folded what used to be the intellectual property agreement into the eligibility requirement to pare down application packets.
3. An institution of higher education in the U.S. must administer awarded grant funds. In the pilot year, we required institutions to host proposed projects; we no longer require institutional hosting of content. You may use institutional hosting if you have

easy access, but digital ownership doesn't need to belong to your institution. We've updated language to reflect a financial relationship (the institution administers the funds). If you're not formally affiliated, partner with someone who is. Strong applications typically feature a project team spanning multiple institutions; teams make strategic decisions about which institution will administer funds.

We're still discussing models to distribute award funds directly to scholars for team-oriented grants (ACLS has precedent via our central fellowship). It's complicated, but we're thinking through ways to grant more flexibility and agency.

These three requirements apply to both Seed and Development grants. One requirement varies: the phase of development. Seed grants are for startup projects in the prototyping/proof-of-concept phase. Development grants must demonstrate significant preliminary work and a record of engagement with public or scholarly audiences.

Which grant should you apply for? Consider:

- Technology: Have you tested the software/hardware? If not, seed. If yes, and you have a clear rationale for specific tools/platforms, development.
- Human relationships/infrastructure: Have partnerships been identified and active? The answer can steer you.
- Project history with audiences: If you can cite publications, exhibits, events, websites, apps—suggests development.

This isn't a rigid binary; answers exist on a spectrum. If in doubt, attend an ACLS office hour or email us. Note: the Development application includes a specific question about project history (not present in Seed); your ability to answer it is another indicator.

Further illustrations:

Seed example: *Stabilizing Futures: Mapping Housing Loss with AI* (University of Florida's AI Climate Justice Lab, with New America and Bright Community Trust). The project collects data related to climate-induced housing instability in Central Florida, leveraging AI to streamline collection, cleaning, and analysis—ultimately for an interactive website to inform policymakers and impacted communities. Seed funds support undergraduate assistants (data processing/prototyping), travel, and subawards to community partners supervising/directing data collection and analysis, plus podcast development and a final report. This seed project is oriented toward data collection and processing—a critical first step to establishing proof of concept.

Development example: *Black Lunch Table Digital Archive (BLT)*. A long-standing, 20-year digital archive with an open-access born-digital collection (images, transcriptions, 800+ hours of recorded roundtable conversations) with 2,200+ Black artists, art workers, and community members across the U.S., Canada, and South Africa. The team is using development funds to make the repository available for research and use: developing a web-based multimedia application prototype; installing a preservation-quality backend and digital asset management system; increasing availability of the BLT dataset in multiple linked open data formats; and other activities to encourage engagement. Compared with the seed example, this project already has a well-established repository; activities focus on access, infrastructure, and scaling engagement—and they can richly document project history.

Once you determine eligibility and the appropriate grant type, you'll complete and submit the application. Both Seed and Development grants share components: a bibliography; project timeline; project budget and budget description; project staffing list; and institutional verification. Components marked in orange last year were new. Previously, a 7–10 page proposal narrative comprised the bulk. We replaced that with discrete prompts with word-count limits. Reviewers noted applicants often spent too much time on intellectual underpinnings and not enough on mechanics (tools, methods, operationalization). Applicants said the same. The prompt-based model asks pointed questions about different dimensions of your project, corresponding to evaluation criteria. This streamlines reading/evaluation and helps you allocate space appropriately.

We continue to exclude formal letters of recommendation. Reviewers have not missed them. However, if your project features community partners, we ask for brief (≤ 1 -page, double-spaced) letters of support detailing the partnership. These can be in the original language with an English translation. Up to three distinct letters are welcome. Note: *partner* means someone outside your home institution (co-creators/co-PIs with intellectual ownership of data/outputs). Contractors (e.g., a full-stack developer hired for a discrete task) are not community partners; their role belongs in the budget/narrative.

Lastly, institutional verification is not a letter of recommendation; it's a short form (~20 minutes) sent to an administrator (e.g., department chair, sponsored research office, provost) to confirm the institution will administer funds, that activities can count for tenure/promotion, grantees can use available tech infrastructure, and that the institution will dispense funds according to the submitted budget.

Resources: We've designed materials to support applicants. First, this webinar series—six sessions total. Sessions with invited speakers will be recorded; office hours (October and

November) will not be recorded (informal, project-specific Q&A). Invited speakers are former reviewers/grantees addressing topics mapped to the prompts and current context (e.g., agentic AI, large language models, shifting sociopolitical and financial climates). On September 18, I'll be in conversation with grantees/reviewers about practicing digital justice and crafting compelling applications. On October 22, we'll dive into data ethics (stewardship, privacy, ownership), building on a 2023 session whose recording is available on the Digital Justice supplementary materials page. On November 6, we'll tackle digital capacity building in a context of attacks on academic freedom and budget cuts. Format: ~30 minutes of discussion + 40–50 minutes of breakouts for targeted feedback. We encourage you to attend. Unfortunately, given staffing, we can't offer individual phone/Zoom consultations; please come to the webinars/office hours or email digitaljustice@acls.org with specific questions. Breakout portions won't be recorded to respect privacy.

The supplementary materials page on the ACLS Digital Justice webpage includes: sample applications from 2024–2025 awardees (e.g., *Archaeological Archives as Inclusive Learning Laboratories*), our budget template, and recordings/transcripts from prior cycles (digital platforms/tools/methods; cultivating community partnerships; operationalizing digital humanities projects). These remain relevant for framing your project.

Competition timeline: The application deadline is November 20 at 9:00 p.m. Eastern. After this date/time, our online application will no longer allow submissions, and we cannot allow extensions of any kind. Applications must be submitted through the online fellowship application (not by email). This is also the deadline for administrators to submit institutional verification. Please register in the portal as soon as possible to trigger the verification instructions and track submission. Given increased application volume, we instituted an additional review round last year. First-round results will be shared in February 2025, followed by final results in April.

Before specific questions, a small favor: we distribute a post-webinar survey after each session to gather feedback that guides future program decisions. It's very short (five questions). The survey also asks whether you'd be open to being contacted for a summer focus group about your competition experience—answering “yes” doesn't obligate participation. We'd appreciate your time. We have about 15 minutes left for Q&A. Katie will moderate, prioritizing general and upvoted questions.

One other note: it looks like, for some reason, I'm only able to send messages in the chat to the hosts. I've put links in the Q&A where people asked for them, but I'm not sure if

everyone received the links in the chat. I don't know if that's something you can do, Keyanah, but I did put the survey link in the Q&A and the chat. Okay, thank you for that.

Q: Is data collected in fulfillment of a PhD dissertation considered a prototype?

A: The strongest applications typically feature project teams. If that data collection is part of a larger team project, that's permissible and doesn't make you ineligible. Using this grant as a replacement for individual dissertation fieldwork tends not to be as successful.

Q: Are community partners required? What defines a community partner?

A: Not required for eligibility, but often critical for digital justice work—"nothing about us without us." A community partner exists outside your host institution (e.g., cultural heritage site, community organization), co-creates the project, and shares intellectual ownership of data and outputs. Contractors providing services (e.g., a developer) are not community partners.

Q: Will a cost share make an application more competitive?

A: Not necessarily *more competitive*, but it's good practice to indicate other resources (financial, personnel, technology) that support feasibility—in the budget, staffing list, and prompts about available resources.

Q: What constitutes an interpretive social science?

A: We're moving away from that phrase, but we take it to mean social science that takes humanistic methods seriously. See examples in the application/FAQ. If in doubt, email us; we take a holistic approach given shifting institutional landscapes.

Q: Does education count as humanities?

A: We accept history of education as within this umbrella.

Q: Can a person's affiliation be research affiliate, research associate, or adjunct—or must it be tenure/tenure-track?

A: It does not have to be tenure or tenure-track. Institutional verification is about funds administration. As long as your institution can administer funds, you're fine.

Q: What constitutes a prototype—do focus group findings or quantitative data count?

A: They certainly can. Prototyping is project-specific and can include data collection, building/testing digital tools with constituencies, and other activities that test a new idea.

Q: Would a creative interpretive digital humanities project—such as an educational video game—be eligible?

A: Yes. We've funded scholars in gaming studies (e.g., *Trans Digital Gaming Zine*). Such projects are welcome.

Q: For a seed grant, should I have one or two community partners?

A: No prescriptive number; it depends on your project. Multiple partners are welcome when organic and mutually beneficial. We accept up to three letters of support (not a requirement to have three).

Q: What if I change institutions? Can I move the grant?

A: Yes. Have your current administrator submit institutional verification. If awarded, during grant setup we can accept new institution information and transfer the grant. We also work with grantees to move funds during the grant term if they move.

We will upload this recording to the ACLS Digital Justice supplementary materials page, along with a transcript. I've posted in the chat the link to the general page with all registration links to the upcoming sessions. It's been a pleasure chatting with the 177 (and declining) of you who stayed to the very end. If you have questions, please email digitaljustice@acsls.org. We've had an explosion of interest this year, as well as last year, so we ask for a little grace in response time. We want to be thoughtful and responsive to everyone's questions. Best of luck on your application. Take care, everyone. Have a good afternoon.