Welcome, welcome everyone. Thank you for your patience. We were just making sure the Zoom was set up properly. It's a pleasure to be here with you all today. We're going to give another 30 seconds or so just so that folks can get settled in. Um, I'm going to ask my colleagues also to monitor the waiting room and just let people in as they arrive.

All right, so let's get started. Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the second webinar of the Digital Justice Grants Program fall webinar series: “What Is Digital Justice: Reflections from ACLS Grantees.” If you missed the first webinar, which occurred a few weeks ago and was a general information session about the program, its ethos, its design, and also about some of the application components, that recording is now currently available on the ACLS Digital Justice supplementary materials web page. So you can check that out. Feel free to also share that with colleagues.

My name is Keyanah Nurse. I am Senior Program Officer of IDEA Programs and Program Lead of the Digital Justice Grants Program. Now, before I introduce our very esteemed interlocutors, I want to quickly say a few words about the intention behind this webinar series, which is now in its third year. Believe it or not, it feels like we just started this the other day.

So, we initially imagined this webinar series to go beyond simply providing general information about the program and to instead intervene within what I think is the aptly named, quote unquote, “hidden curriculum” of academia, which you all know is those sort of unstated yet deeply influential expectations about how one is to exist as a scholar. And those can range from the professional to the intellectual, not only in one's specific areas of study, but also in how one articulates their work to others. And I think the grant application is an arena where those unstated expectations are pretty—ironically—on full display, right? And this is where the webinar series comes in as a way of kind of making plain how to approach the application for this particular program in a really transparent and thoughtful way.

So, not only did we—meaning the team at ACLS behind this effort—want to provide a forum for applicants to directly engage with former reviewers of our digital grants programs, but we also wanted to have these sessions be useful and generative as you craft your application materials. And that's why the selected topics, you know, taken as a whole, really try to be attentive to some of the challenges that I've seen applicants face over the years as well as some of the areas that reviewers have expressed that they would like ACLS to provide a little bit more coaching on.

So, today's session, “What Is Digital Justice,” is in service of that mission. The number one question that I often get when folks are considering whether or not they should apply or if their project, you know, which may have a few digital elements like a website or a podcast, they're trying to determine if it's a good fit—right?—if they should submit an application. And so the primary question I often get is: what is a Digital Justice project, and how is that any different

than a, quote unquote, more traditional Digital Humanities project? So what does this program actually fund?

Again, you can find some of my reflections and remarks about that question in the recorded general information session from a few weeks ago. But today's session—which features three interlocutors who have all been reviewers over the years for previous Digital Justice competitions as well as grantees themselves—I hope this session will do a better job of showing rather than simply telling, since our interlocutors will not only talk about their own Digital Justice projects but also provide some insights on how proposed digital projects for this competition can best articulate their alignment with the larger values and ethos of this program.

So with that said, I'd like to introduce our first interlocutor Jakeya Caruthers. Jakeya Caruthers is an Assistant Professor of English and Africana Studies at Drexel University. She is a scholar of Black feminism and cultural studies and her research attends to political expression within literature, media, and visual art alongside matters of race, gender, and state discipline.

Our second interlocutor is Stephen Davis. Stephen Davis is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Kentucky. He is an author of *The ANC's War Against Apartheid*—um, you're gonna have to correct me on that, Stephen, I'm so sorry—and *The Liberation of South Africa*. Hopefully you could do so when you tell us about your project. He is currently Principal Investigator of two DH projects: Bitter Aloe, a research group that applies machine learning models to human rights testimonies, and The Personal Rights to the Political, which developed a handwritten text recognition tool for transcribing anti-apartheid solidarity letters.

And our last interlocutor is Cynthia Wang, who is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies at California State LA. She is interested in the impact of communication technologies and digital media on social relations, cultural practices, and power dynamics, particularly in relation to time and temporality. She has also done work around prison pedagogy and restorative justice and is the founder of The ARQIve, an interactive digital LGBTQ storytelling map which was a recipient of an ACLS Digital Justice Grant in 2022.

So now that I've provided the formal introductions for our interlocutors, I would like to sort of do a round-robin, in some ways, to get our, you know, attendees familiar with your actual projects. And so if each of you could go around and sort of share a brief summary of your project for about two or three minutes or so.

We'll be alphabetical. Maybe that'll be the way we do it. Can everyone hear me? All right. Yes? Okay, great.

Jakeya Caruthers: So, um, again, I'm Jakeya Caruthers and I am co-managing editor of Resound and Resist, which, um, when we first applied was known as Decriminalizing Survival. It's an

online, open-access digital archive dedicated to curating and sharing materials that were created by participants in feminist mobilizations against the carceral state—historical, um, going back to, and in a few cases, the 19th century, um, up to now. And the archive itself has several goals, but one of the main intentions is to amplify under-documented anti-carceral actions. That includes defense campaigns, one-off grassroots research projects, publications, entire organizations, and we're uniquely trying to amplify those that were forcefully submerged or co-opted or just generally devalued within mainstream narratives of gender liberation and anti-violence and prison resistance. Um, I'm gonna stop there. Thank you.

Stephen Davis: So, um, I'm Steve Davis. I'm the co–principal investigator of The Personal Rights to the Political. Um, so the genesis of that project was a very large collection of handwritten letters that were authored by, um, families whose loved ones had been caught up in some part of the apartheid carceral state in South Africa. Um, so the letters were generated as part of a welfare scheme that was run by the largest anti-apartheid organization of its day, which was based in London. Um, and what the letters capture is everyday life in struggle families. So it's a really invaluable record of the contributions that families made during this time. And that's particularly important because oftentimes families are not identified as sort of frontline activists, but they play an enormously important role in sustaining the activism of their loved ones and sustaining their loved ones while they were sort of ensnared in the carceral state. So what we did was we used a vision learning model to create a handwritten text recognition tool called Karakal, um, that can be used by this archive and any archive to automate the transcription of large volumes of handwritten material.

Diane Turner: All right. Um, my name's Diane Turner. I don't know if I'm supposed to be in here or not. I—I haven't gotten the grant, but I can talk about what we're trying to do here. I'm the, uh, curator—

Keyanah Nurse: Sorry, Diane, can I interrupt you for just a second? So, the format of this is actually we're going to have the interlocutors engage in the— Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. We'll have questions at the end of the—at the second half of the session. Okay? Okay. All right. Sorry about that. No problem. Thank you. My screen popped up; that's why I was up there. Oh, wow. Okay.

Cynthia Wang: Hi, everyone. Uh, my name is Cynthia Wang. Um, and my project is called—uh, it's called The ARQIve and it's spelled A-R-Q-I-V-E. So it's essentially an LGBTQ map both historically and, uh, sort of trying to map stories through time and space. And, um, the whole sort of idea behind it is because a lot of queer stories have been sort of erased and, um, a lot of the spaces have been taken over and gentrified throughout history. Um, what we've really tried to do is create a platform—so it's, it's sort of live, it's, you know, thearqive.com. Um, and we, uh, we programmed it so that anyone can sort of add their queer story and pin it exactly where that happened. So it's like, “Oh, you know, I had my first kiss here.” Pin it and, um, and tell a

story. Um, so we're, uh, you know, we—we sort of were able to build a pretty robust, like, search function and, um, basic functionality to do that. So that's, in a nutshell, and I'm happy to talk more about it as, um, as we get into the questions.

Keyanah Nurse: Wonderful. Thank you all for that. Uh, I know the elevator pitch can be an annoying exercise to do, but I definitely appreciate the brevity, and I'm sure that we'll sort of delve more deeply into certain facets of your project once we get into the discussion. I just wanted everyone in the room to sort of have a primer of the projects that you worked on—um, particularly the, obviously, the one that has been funded through the Digital Justice Grants Program, but also I think it's a good entryway point to thinking about the broader aim of this session which, as I mentioned at the top of our time together, is to sort of show rather than tell and to really think concretely about this relationship between the form and the content of the project, right? Which is, um, I think a really great way of thinking about what is digital justice.

And so the first question that I want to ask you all is sort of about the relationship between the digital and justice within your projects, right? So how do our understandings of justice—or the understandings of justice that you've articulated in your project—inform how you mobilize digital tools and methods? Um, and if you'd also like to enter that question by way of thinking about, um, sort of the relationship between why you picked certain digital methods or tools for the particular content that you're exploring, um, I think that's also another way that we could sort of enter that question as well.

Cynthia Wang: I—I'm h—I'm happy to start. I was, like, not sure if we're just going in order. Um, I think, uh, for me I've always just been really interested in communication technologies and these sort of opportunities as well as the constraints of technologies that we have. Um, so my project—I just wanted to map stories. Like, I—it was, like, 2009 or something. I was in Hong Kong and looking for a gay bar and the only thing that I found were these, like, lists from the ’90s, um, on, like, Yahoo Groups or something. And so, you know, I went to the location and there was not a gay bar there. And I'm like, well, this is kind of a problem. And so, at the time, I also was just thinking about mapping and, um, space and place and things like that. So I was—I was sort of really interested in seeing how we can use the digital form to sort of make visible some of the maybe stories that have not been told or some of the spaces that have had to remain hidden for—for whatever reason.

So, um, I think a lot about the way that—like, I think about the affordances of digital tools—um, sort of credit to Nancy Baym—about how the internet has afforded things like reachability and accessibility and, um, you know, searchability of things, as well as this sort of asynchronous and synchronous and instant sort of communication that goes on. Um, and then how we can sort of, like, kind of leverage that to tell stories that have been essentially and historically gatekept from

the mainstream. And so, um, so I was really sort of thinking along those lines when I was designing the project.

Jakeya Caruthers: About “if” is a thing is really important, um, because I think that that sort of informed the ways that we were envisioning the idea of digital justice too. So, you know, initially our broad understanding of digital justice was that it's a digital project whose themes and content are attuned to issues related to social justice. And that was clear in terms of our themes and our content. We were studying feminist resistance that had an anti-oppressive and anti-carceral bend that organized our work according to an understanding that certain systems—criminalization, gender violence, racial capitalism, etc.—were unjust. So the kind of analysis that we were documenting was itself pointed toward readings of justice.

Um, but what we understood too was that the terms of that—you know, what Cynthia is referring to as gatekeeping—that the kind of, like, the force of that submergence of these movements within mainstream analysis, even within, you know, some radical sectors, um, was itself also unjust. That there's something that's happening there, and not just for quaint, you know, reasons that are related to documentation and to memory, but because the silence and the enforcement of that silence might have—intentionally in some cases and unintentionally in others—defanged the power of the theory and the practice against state discipline that these formations that we're trying to unearth, or at least document in a particular way, were forwarding.

So, um, it's—I mean, there are multiple levels to our thinking about digital justice and, like, the why we're doing what we're doing. Um, and so much of that came from our understanding around Black feminist practice, things that we learned far before and far out of our interest in digital tools and methods. In fact, I don't know if Stephen and Cynthia too were Seed Grant recipients, but our project was, um, and we were very, very new to digital tools and to archive and aggregation. So ultimately we spent a lot of our early grant period learning technical vocabulary and, with that, determining ways that, like, broader struggles around digital justice—that’s data, surveillance, digital carcerality, power relations within, you know, digital publics, information manipulation, and all these other sorts of things within the digital sphere—might be important and might need to be considerations for how we were making our choices too.

And, like, very importantly, it meant figuring out what a digital infrastructure for something called a community archive is—because I think we were really taking that for granted. We were thinking about that in a kind of analog way, or we were thinking about the ways that we might do that in different spheres, and we were not correct that that's—you know—building such an infrastructure would require other considerations, including the ones connected to digital justice just a bit ago. So we did a lot of research, we did a lot of close study, we met with folks like Michelle Caswell, the folks at the South Asian American Digital Archive, and so forth. So for

us, digital justice again refers to the content of our [work] but also the sort of intentioned and intended outcomes of—

Keyanah Nurse: Thank you for sharing that. And if I just could quickly jump in, I do want to come back to that I think maybe later in the session, because one of the things that's perhaps unique about the Digital Justice Grants Program is that we do offer these Seed Grants, right? And it is in a lot of ways an opportunity where, you know, we invite experimentation. We invite this to be a kind of introduction for scholars who are interested in kind of incorporating more digital tools and methods into their work. So I am, you know, very interested to kind of have a conversation about that learning process of, you know, how you even got ready for the Seed Grant by thinking critically about the digital and what specifically it added not simply to the content that you were interested in sort of centering in your project but also how, like, the whole sort of ecosystem around digital tools—and I think we'll talk about this in the next session around data ethics, which I also encourage people to attend—but sort of, you know, what happens to your data when you use particular tools, especially proprietary ones, things that we take for granted, right? And so, thank you for surfacing that. I just wanted to say that out loud as something to come back to. But, um, Stephen, would you mind going next?

Stephen Davis: Yeah, sure. Um, so the genesis of our project, as I mentioned earlier, was this collection of letters. Um, I had known about the collection for a number of years—going back to my dissertation fieldwork, where I was interviewing ex-combatants that were part of the African National Congress's armed wing. And as I was conducting interviews, I was becoming more and more aware of the family dynamics that weren't being represented in the literature. Um, I just wasn't seeing much of it. The story of the anti-apartheid struggle is very often told through the autobiographies of elites within the struggle. Um, but there's this whole backstage that is going on within families that really wasn't making it into the public sphere. It wasn't being recognized.

Um, so, you know, I wondered why this archive of letters wasn't being utilized, because it was such a rich record of these contributions and these sacrifices that people made. Um, and in conversation with our archival partners, we learned about the sensitivities attached to working with records of everyday life. Um, oftentimes it contains a lot of intimate details. There's personally identifying information that make it really tricky to kind of open up an archive like that.

Um, so I was kind of confronted with this paradox. I mean, there's this amazing material, but there are all these limitations that prevent it from making its way into the public sphere—into literature, into public consciousness. Um, so as we began to investigate developments in machine learning and vision learning, we began to realize that there are ways to safely open the door to that archive in a very controlled way that allows our partner within South Africa to hold the lion’s share of power over access and how this material is presented and represented.

Um, so that's when we began working on Karakal, which was our HTR tool. There's a whole other part of the project that I didn't mention that relates to privacy. So, um, we created an automated way to identify personally identifying information and mask it and also ways of collecting large amounts of structured data from text that can be used to tell the story in the aggregate. So rather than conducting close readings of individual letters, you can see the strain on hundreds, if not thousands, of households during the time of year when school fees are due and you're missing a primary breadwinner because that person is being detained or is incarcerated. Um, so there are ways of making this archive available through digital means—making it legible as data—that weren't possible before. Um, so that's kind of where we stood on this question of digital justice.

Keyanah Nurse: Yeah, I think, you know, what I'm hearing across all three projects is sort of the ways that digital tools allowed you to obviously make certain things visible that were sort of invisible or silenced before, but the justice piece of it comes into it not simply just because of the subject matter, but also the very intentional politics that you have to navigate in terms of whether or not—and the extent to which—things should remain invisible, um, or sort of dancing around surveillance, taking into consideration issues of privacy, and then also thinking about the integrity of the data that you were using over time and who will have access to it.

And so I think that's a really good set of considerations that folks should think about in terms of thinking about, like, the specific tools that they're using and why—the particular relationship that it will have to your content and also these larger questions around justice.

Um, one of the things, though, that I think I talked a little bit about in the general information session is that, you know, justice is a very big concept. Um, we all have different ideas or definitions of what it is, but at least within the confines of this program, we have tried to center reparative and redistributive aspirations, right? And so an example of the redistributive aspirations is that we really try to focus on projects—or fund projects—that are also engaging in some kind of capacity-building work as well in terms of, you know, undergoing the project itself. And so how is a project-based understanding of capacity building either building up the technological infrastructure of a community or a place? How are you bringing more folks to the project and doing a skill training or, again, just bolstering the capacity for whatever local communities that you're engaging with to do this work on their own terms?

And so that's been a real sort of clear value of the program in terms of how we think about digital justice. And so I want to ask, you know, in what ways do your own projects engage in or forward a kind of reparative or redistributive work?

Stephen Davis: I'd be happy to jump in. Um, so, um, I think we primarily work within the field of machine learning, and when machine learning is applied in service to digital justice it can act as

a labor multiplier. Um, so the custodian of this collection of letters, the Mayibuye Centre, is the largest repository of anti-apartheid material in the world, but you would never guess that looking at the resources that are available to them. So, like a lot of archives in Africa and elsewhere, their budgets are pretty poorly matched to the tasks that they have set before them.

So what we wanted to do was to create a way for records to be rendered as machine-readable and then they could be rendered as data, but not impose a significant burden on their allocations of labor. Um, so, um, what we were hoping is that if we could automate this process, we could free up archivists to do what they do best, which is to focus on sort of higher-order interpretive questions and, you know, the sort of public engagement questions that rely on an archivist's expertise, and kind of reduce the amount of routine work that taxes an archive that has a small staff and a small budget.

Um, so that was part of the kind of reparative/restorative work. The other part was sort of socio-technological. Optical character recognition—which is rendering typescript into machine-readable text—it's been around for a very long time, and its trajectory, its arc of development, was much more steep at an earlier stage. So it developed really quickly. Handwritten text recognition has not really achieved levels of accuracy that are comparable to OCR until relatively recently. So over that span of several decades, what you see are large numbers of datasets being produced from typeset records, which oftentimes reflect either official sources or elites—because they typically have access to the typeset word; they have the means of production of typeset material—and handwritten material, which oftentimes is being generated by folks who are marginalized or have less power or access. Those datasets weren't being made.

Um, so beyond this letters collection, we discovered that this tool has applicability throughout the Global South and in the postcolonial world where handwritten records more often reflect voices of people that are outside the centers of power and wealth.

Cynthia Wang: I can talk a little bit about that too—just sort of building off of that. I think this is a really, uh, like, a really important part of the justice piece is that reparative and redistributive aspirations that we have.

Um, for us—for this particular project—we were actually, I think, a Development Grant. So it wasn't Seed funding. We—this project had already been going for maybe five or six years before that, but we really needed an infusion of funding to keep going and to sort of expand the work that we're doing.

So just fundamentally The ARQIve, sort of talking about queer history and, you know, LGBTQ issues and movements—ours is not local. Ours is very global right now. Um, we're—our content is sort of localized, like the concentration of our content is localized to Los Angeles because that's just where we are. But we also have had a lot of—like, because here in the U.S., for better

or worse, we have conversations about queerness. We have these conversations. In other parts of the world, these conversations don't happen. So people who are queer or are struggling with their sexuality—it's very invisible. And so we really were trying to combat the invisibility of, um, like, people and of queerness in different parts of the world.

Um, a lot of—you know, I was going to jump back to the last question a little bit, but we take anonymity—we do approximate location. We didn't want to put a pin in, like, you know, Russia, saying there is, you know, a gay spa here, come raid us now or something, right? Like, so we really were thinking about what were the ramifications of having this digital record out there. So those are, I think, some of the considerations too that we were really careful about.

Um, I think for us it was a question of whose voice was getting out there, and it wasn't just, like, identity-based voices—because we know that a lot of, you know, queer people of color and queer women of color's voices and trans voices are often sort of rendered invisible in more mainstream narratives of queerness. Um, but we were also sort of—I also think of it as opportunity-based. So, like, who gets to tell the story of Stonewall, right? Versus—we have a story on the site of somebody in Kuwait who, like, kissed her—kissed, like, her first girlfriend, right? And that was this sort of beautiful story that otherwise wouldn't have been told. So it's both, sort of, what do the history books, right, talk about? Or what does, like, you know, even mainstream queer narratives [say], versus these personal narratives that otherwise wouldn't get a voice.

Um, the other thing I wanted to sort of point out in our project is that we actually—and I don't know, maybe this fits into the reparative stuff—our entire site right now, when we built it from the ground up maybe like six years ago, it's completely designed and developed by our students at Cal State LA—our undergrad and graduate students at Cal State LA. And that's something that we're really sort of proud of. You know, we have mostly first-generation students, and we're a Hispanic-Serving Institution. So that aspect of it and being able to sort of give our students this opportunity to participate in the actual development of this site was really meaningful to us. So I'll sort of maybe pause there for now.

Jakeya Caruthers: Not that I—I don't have so, so much to add, just because I think that both Cynthia and Stephen have articulated really beautifully what I would say is the sort of redistributive power—what we were trying to do—which is to say, um, epistemic. We were trying to widen what counts as organizing against criminalization. We were trying to illuminate critiques from folks and formations whose social position—whose [voices were ignored]. But again—not just, as Cynthia said, not just in terms of how they were identified in the world, but also folks and formations whose political logics and whose resistance practices were routinely discounted.

So it's not just, you know, like, neutral documentation of proud histories. We understand our archive as articulating, like, very directly, a multi-variant anti-carceral analysis. We understand it as, honestly, a usable resource of practical guidance from, like, a long history of grassroots movement-building. Um, like, we hope that people will visit this and say, “Oh, they did what?” You know, as there's, um, really wonderful projects like 1 Million Experiments or other kinds of abolitionist aggregations of the kinds of things that you can do to avoid and to transform a world that does not rely on policing and prisons and punishment, incarceration, in the ways that we have for so long. This is a set of those experiments—a set of those 1 million experiments.

And I talked about this at an ACLS convening. What we really hope to do is to make sure that these articulations—not just in terms of, like, the visible outcome, like a memory of the visible outcomes—but also the kind of, like, behind-the-scenes business. The way I phrased it and borrowed from my colleague was that we're not trying to, you know, air dirty laundry, but we are trying to be frank about “dirty lessons.” Um, so, like, just telling the story and doing—with that, for example, hypertext or other kinds of things—to show that there are layers to everything; that all stories are complicated and they are contested.

So, um, in that way, again, we're sort of redistributing epistemic power. And then, of course, in terms of the reparative work of it—given that it's a usable source of practice—like, we're making a case for abolition feminism. Um, we are seeking to repair damage from what Beth Richie calls, you know, the “prison nation” and the matrix of violence to which so many people are vulnerable. Um, so it's about offering models and raw lessons. Um, it's about, you know, coalition-building, and I think I will—well, hopefully I'll have a chance to talk a little bit more about community partnership. Um, but I'm really learning a lot from you right now, Cynthia and Stephen, about the ways that community partnership can happen and that community power beyond what we've done. Maybe we'll get to that later.

Keyanah Nurse: Actually, I think that's a wonderful segue to that very question, because one of the things that's very understated—and we did a session on this last year called Operationalizing Digital Justice Projects—that took a deep dive into the often neglected parts of the applications like the budget, the work plan, and the timeline, and thinking through how even those elements reflect or don't reflect the larger values around reparative or redistributive work, and how that itself is a space that can—or not—articulate the values around justice that the project is trying to engage in. And so community partnership is certainly central to that.

And so I'm wondering if each of you could speak a little bit about, you know, the community partnerships that support your work—if you could give us a little bit of history of how you formed those things, but also how you, um, I guess, thought about articulating that relationship within the confines of, you know, for this grant, and thinking about equity issues, labor issues,

proper distribution, where things should be housed, sort of how you form partnerships across resource and power differentials. Uh, so anything of the sort.

Jakeya Caruthers: I can start with this one. Um, and I'll start with, I guess, the question about the language that's used in the proposal, or at least that's one of the ways that we tried to begin—from the time of the proposal and onward—and certainly got developed as, you know, the project sort of iterated.

Um, so we understood our community partners as research and archival partners, and in that way I think that's sort of some of what Stephen and his team are also doing. Um, but it's—you know, most of the formations that we're archiving—many of them are defunct, but lots of them are still operating, and even within the defunct historical formations most of the organizers are still available to partner with us. And in doing so, they are not just, like, helping us—not being our, you know, junior staff or anything like that—but really taking leadership over the curation and collection of materials. They're making suggestions for their own metadata. They're providing their own descriptions and curatorial statements regarding what's included and why. Um, and again, like, doing some more meta documentation of the conversations around what gets included and why. So that's been really interesting.

Um, we make sure that we are in conversation with community research and archival partners to guide political principles, intellectual principles. Um, and for the most part, because we are already in community—the three co-PIs for this project are feminist organizers. Like, these are our friends. Some of these folks are our friends or they are folks that we studied or learned from. Um, so some of this back-and-forth and this building has been so organic because it's been a little bit informal. But as we were starting to build the infrastructure, we were—as I was saying before about, like, oh wait, a community digital archive might need to be built in a very specific way—then that sort of distribution of real kind of intellectual and political partnership and contestation and that sort of thing showed up in that infrastructure too. So that was, you know, how we're creating the instructions or how we're creating and what we're saying within our collections guide.

Um, and I do want to say that, like, though I'm talking a lot about political and intellectual principles, it does occur to me that we were—in trying to be fair about labor and about resources—a lot of the digital mobilization, like, a lot of the actual digital labor, was work that we the co-PIs were doing and organizing. Um, and I'm not sure that that's—as I'm so glad to be thinking about this right now and to be thinking a little bit more about how to share even decisions about digital tools and methods. Like, again, there are certain things that we're all kind of in agreement around fundamentally because of the kind of theories and practice that inform what we're doing, and we've been transparent about everything along the way. But in terms of skill-sharing, there's certainly some more room to do that kind of thing.

And toward, you know, Keyanah's point earlier regarding the Seed Grant and the learning that has to happen and the learning curve that is a part of building a project from scratch or just figuring out some of what you're doing—it's certainly messy sometimes. But I want to give just, I guess, a little anecdote around the ways in which we were trying to come into a clearer understanding of what the infrastructure for a community archive looked like. We ended up having to revise our budget to reconsider compensation for community research partners. Um, a couple times we had to revise our budget and shift things around to make sure that we were, you know, we don't need—we can do something else to pay for this technology. People who are doing labor—laborers—need more money. And what was so beautiful was that Keyanah—Dr. Nurse—was so amazing and so flexible. And I remember an email where you were like, "Yes, you should pay your community partners more. That sounds like a wonderful idea." And that kind of feedback was obviously helpful, but it was also a breath of fresh air because there are ways in which institutions sometimes can be hostile to community partnerships and that hostility manifests in bureaucracy—and we've discussed ways to try to get around that. But it's certainly not easy. So it just meant a lot that ACLS did not, you know, put forth that bureaucratic hindrance and also shared our values with respect to distribution and to—

Stephen Davis: I can go ahead. Cynthia, do you want to go? You go ahead. Okay. Um, so in regards to community partnership, our partner organization was the Mayibuye Centre, and throughout the course of the grant, we've had really in-depth, ongoing conversations about the nature of the work and, you know, us articulating what was possible and then trying to harmonize that with their mission and their capabilities. Um, the last thing we wanted to do was to impose an additional burden on an already overburdened organization. We actually wanted to do the opposite.

Um, so being mindful of their limitations and also being respectful of what they wanted to do—and then incorporate that into the heart of the project, into the kind of reason for the project—was really important. Um, one of the difficulties, I think, of working across the North–South digital divide is this unequal flow of data from the Global South to the Global North. Um, there's this notion of "digital safaris" where research teams and institutions from the Global North will go to Africa, um, they'll digitize a bunch of materials, and then the data will end up ultimately residing on servers in Paris, in London, in New York—wherever. Um, and it's not only the digital material leaving servers in Africa that's the issue. It's the power being shifted to control access and to shape how that material is represented that oftentimes goes with it.

So about midway through the Seed Grant funding, we realized we were dealing with a much more complicated set of privacy concerns than we originally planned. I'll be honest with you, I thought this would be a really easy project and we would just go down there, do a mass digitization, and then that would just be so great. It would open up so many research

possibilities. But we really needed to slow down, take into consideration the reputational risks and just sort of political risks of a data breach for our partner institution, and then redesign our workflow in consideration of that.

So what we did was we started to compartmentalize access to the letters themselves. So, in consultation with Mayibuye, we created a pretty complicated workflow that limited access to the content of the letters to our South African partners and then allowed our North American partners—myself and William Mattingly—the ability to develop and implement software solutions for them. Um, so that was a really kind of ongoing challenge throughout the grant—just sustaining the conversation, making sure that we were adaptive and responsive to the needs of our partner.

Um, the other thing is we changed the leadership structure. So, in the midst of kind of navigating our way through this really complicated privacy landscape, we realized we didn't have a familiarity with what was going on within the organization and on the ground more broadly in South Africa. So we brought on another PI. So we have three co-PIs: Stanley Salo, who had spent 17 years at this archive but had recently left to start his own information management consultancy for archives and heritage institutions. So he was brought in as a co-equal leader of the program, and his input has been absolutely essential in kind of redesigning the project as we go.

I mean, if there's any bit of advice I can impart to applicants and grantees, it's remaining open to change and accepting that the environment that you're working in is really unpredictable. Um, but that unpredictability is a real source of intellectual joy because it really stimulates you to think about how the digital can overcome these challenges. That is, it's not an obstacle; it's actually a great opportunity to challenge yourself to think about how the digital can kind of solve some of these problems in an interesting way.

Cynthia Wang: So yeah, this is—it's so wonderful to be in communication with both of you and all you all on this side as well. Um, I think ours was a little bit different in terms of our community partners, or it felt like they were less partners and more just trying to be part of community. So, I've done LGBTQ activism for a long time, even before I was at Cal State LA and certainly way before I started this project. And so, like, Jay, you were saying that a lot of your community partnerships were just kind of informal—you were friends. Like, I felt the same way.

So, we—you know, throughout the granting period we did do some sort of formal things. We were on a panel with the ONE Foundation and worked with them a little bit. We have sort of ongoing relationships with the ONE Archives and other archives around town, but really for us our community is anyone who sort of has a not-so-straight story to tell. And so we sort of did a lot of, like—one of the pieces that we built into the grant was public relations. You know, like,

how do we sort of go and let people know what we're doing and let the community know what we're doing?

We did spend some time reaching out to other people who were doing queer mapping projects. And so we're actually, at this point, two years out from funding. We've actually had a lot of changes. Our main co-PI in tech—our computer science faculty—he passed away, and so we really had to reshift a lot of our tech stuff in the last year or so. Um, like you were both saying, we also had to shift our budget a little bit. One of the things that we built in was a mobile app. And we ran into several challenges in trying to get the app (a) developed and (b) on the Apple and Android platforms. So we reshifted and just went to develop a mobile browser app.

I'm trying to look at some of my notes. Um, so yeah, I think our community partnerships—I literally was just here pulling up my old grant application to see how we articulated the community partnerships, just so you all have an idea. You know, we really pushed on internal partnerships. So we really made this kind of an interdisciplinary educational and pedagogical process for our students. We're really a heavily teaching institution, so we really value bringing our students into our research, bringing our students into what we're doing.

We had a lot of different components to it—like, so we had the tech component but we also had the content component and the community component, and we were just trying to get all those to kind of work together. For those of you who are thinking about, you know, doing a grant and the community partners piece, I think in my grant I'm just saying I listed my internal—the internal partnerships that I had—and then I listed the external partnerships, right? And then even partnerships where it's like these are the existing ones and these are the ones that I know about that I'm going to plan on developing a relationship with.

But it is sort of, I think, just even through this process getting an idea of who the community is and who the players are in it, I think, was really important for our project in general. Like, how do we sort of integrate with the larger community—not just in LA, but I also have a list of potential partners in Asia, right, because I travel to Asia a lot—so how do I sort of start doing [that] with them? So for our project, I think it's a little bit different because we were going for breadth rather than depth. Like, I think, Stephen and J[akeya], your projects are more based in partnerships where you were really able to engage them. Ours is more like, you know, queer people—we're everywhere. So it's like how do we make more weak ties with community partners but keep them engaged at the same time.

Keyanah Nurse: Thank you for actually bringing up your old application, Cynthia. I know it must feel like a thousand years—

Cynthia Wang: It is. I'm just like—because when you asked that I'm like, what did I even write? It's because we're two years out; we haven't had funding for two years. And this is something

that I did actually want to address—is I feel like getting the funding set us up. We had so much tech. So, we came in as a Development Grant. We had the project going, and one of the big things when we got this grant and we looked at our site was, oh my gosh, we need to update all of our stacks. So, going back to, like, giving sort of—JK, you were talking about skill-sharing—like, one of the things that is sort of maintained for us is me and my co-PI, Zachary Vernon, who is an art professor—like, I'm communication studies—we have no tech skills whatsoever, and so all of the tech expertise of how the site works lies with our students and our alumni and people who are not us.

So it is kind of an interesting space where we're two years without funding, and I think when we had the site they said they had to update the stacks. That's really all I know about what's going on with it. But apparently the site just was, like, minimally functional, and by updating it we were able to sort of build in, I guess, the tools that integrated with more modern tech—like, digital technology. I—I'm not really sure of the tech lingo. My job really was to, like, give our team the means to sort of do the tech. But two years out, we're still going. We have a team—we have a tech team of students. They're going through the site right now trying to learn what the site is about. And then on the content end, we're still looking at partnerships. Um, what we really want to do is actually—because the mapping—our tech site, it can be sort of used for anything. It doesn't have to be queer mapping, right? And so our hope is to be able to create this technology in a way that anyone can sort of clone it and then use it for whatever purposes they want. So that's sort of like, two years later, what are we doing?

Keyanah Nurse: Yeah, I do—I mean, I don't know if we'll have time to talk about that, but I do find the kind of incorporating students, right, into how you were going about developing a project as part—a really critical part of the capacity-building component of it as well. But I'm curious about, like, how the students also, you know, teach other members of the team to sort of maintain the site once they graduate, because they are a transitory, you know, population in that way, and how, you know, teaching students is part of skill-sharing, but how can your students also teach you and train you in different tools or methods that, you know, can help you and can help with the sustainability of the project.

Um, I want to switch gears just a little bit because, you know, one of the benefits of having the three of you talk about your projects is that you've also served in prior competitions as reviewers for this program, right? So, you kind of have a sense of, you know, on the one hand crafting application materials, but then on the other hand, you know, reading and evaluating application materials—especially with respect to thinking about the kind of fit for a project for this program, and sort of thinking through again that relationship between the content and the digital tool or the method, but also how that informs or reflects the larger values around digital justice.

And so what are, sort of, I guess, one to two considerations that you could share—very generally, obviously; you don't want to talk about specific applications that you've seen—but one to two general considerations that inform how you read an application of a digital project for this particular program. So a Digital Justice project versus if you were just, sort of, you know, reading a Digital Humanities project. And I hate to sort of create this category of "traditional DH" because that sounds a little bit like an oxymoron, but are there sort of special considerations for this program that inform how you read and evaluate applications that you think folks applying should be aware of?

Stephen Davis: I can think of one that comes to mind really quickly. It's that purpose should precede method. So the means you're using to achieve the end are secondary to the end—like, you have to integrate and explain why you need this particular technology or method or form of presentation to, you know, serve the ends of digital justice. Um, I—you know, working in machine learning and AI, you know, the changes and the developments within the field are so rapid, there's a tendency to chase every shiny object and just want to apply something for the sake of applying it. Um, but that, I don't—in my mind—doesn't reach the threshold that kind of fits within the aims of the program. So you have to have that transformational goal ahead of those technological choices—or at least be able to explain how your technological choices serve that goal rather than determine that goal. That's a really—I think—really important part of a successful application.

Jakeya Caruthers: I think the same is true even with content and content intentions. Um, I think that there are sometimes situations—and I deal with this, you know, as that, you know, radical, critical—is sort of conflated with identity, and it shouldn't be, um, or with thought that proceeds according to a particular identity. So there are ways in which, you know, one imagines that if the content attends to race—and given what we know about [rac]ism or about racial—then obviously this is doing justice work. It's important to make that clear and plain.

So among the, I guess, components that sometimes give that away—like the difference between just a sort of tokenized or surface non-analysis that might be, you know, embedded in your project—is the bibliography. It gets a lot. And so too does the budget. And that again became clarified to me even as an applicant. I was like, oh, that—you know, this budget—what were we thinking? It doesn't align at all with—or not at all, that's not true—but there were ways that it could have aligned even more powerfully, more clearly, with what we were trying to do politically and intellectually.

So, again, I'd expect to see a bibliography that gestured toward a critical or reparative perspective—and not just about the subject of the project but even saying also the digital tools and methods being used. Um, so, for example, if somebody is proposing the creation of some kind of digital accessibility tool, then the politics of accessibility need to be made clear, and that

needs to be made clear in what you're reading or what you're citing or what you're explaining. Explain how they align with disability justice principles. Make sure you're not conflating accessibility with efficiency, which is a troublesome concept that all manner of unjust systems [use]. So, there's that.

And then there's also bibliographies that include so-called expertise—if we want to use that kind of language, which is a little bit troubling—but knowledge from a wide swath of sources, not just necessarily academic ones. So again, to take seriously the kind of redistribution of epistemic [authority] even at the point of the application itself.

And then lastly, appropriateness of scope. I love so much seeing creative and ambitious pieces, but I feel like the humility of modesty—and I mean this again, we're so new to this. So, I mean, the process humbles us—but even trying to do something with a sense of purpose that is made clear tends to go with, you know, being forthright and honest and reflective about abilities of scope. A lot of times those—

Cynthia Wang: So yeah, all of that I think is what—when I was reviewing—I was looking for. I was also trying to just really vaguely think about all of the criteria that we were asked to evaluate the grants against. And so I really looked for—and again, you know, the ones that I really focused on—was: how feasible is it? Right? Is it feasible? Do you have the tools? You know—tell in the grant, what are the tools that you have? If you don't have the tools, how are you going to get it? Right? So we're looking at feasibility. You can have pie-in-the-sky ideas. If you can't do it, funding is not going to—it's not going to help, right?

I was looking for: how are you engaging community? So this is—JK, you were talking about the budget. And one of the things that I remember looking at is in your budget, if you're talking about engaging community, how much of your budget is allocated to actual community versus sort of putting it toward the tech tools? So just the distribution of the budget—I was really looking at that.

I was also looking at just, like, data ethics and data protection. Long-term sustainability was something else, because a grant period is going to end, right? So what is your plan to continue the project after the grant period ends? Is this a project where it's like it's funded and then it's going to go away? Is there a long-term sustainability plan or is there a plan to sunset the project too? And I think that that's something that, you know, we should talk about—is these digital projects, how do we sort of sunset them? Or, you know, what is sort of the temporal scope—right?—how long should they be around? And having some thought around that I really appreciate.

Clarity—like, that's something that I really like: just clear writing, clear—I don't like a lot of jargon. I don't like a lot of huge words and stuff. Just, like, tell—because, you know, you're

probably doing something that I may not have an expertise in. So tell me really clearly: what are you doing? What are you trying to achieve with the funding that you're seeking, right?

I was looking at: how will the public access it? So, if you have—like, if you're doing a digital archive or something, right—where is it going to live? How are you going to let the public know about it? Will there be public forums? Will there be workshops? For our thing, we had posting parties, right? We're actually currently doing some user research on how people are using the site that we have. So, how are you sort of engaging with not just the comm—like, not just maybe the specific community that you're sort of doing this project for, but how will you also share what you're doing with the public?

And then finally, I think one of the biggest questions that I was looking for was sort of the "so what" question, right? So, okay, you have this cool project. It's great and everything. Okay, so what? So this is more maybe the theoretical—how is your project situated in these broader discourses and conversations around what your topic is, right? Why is this important, right? Why should your project—what did I say? I said what is the exigence, right? Why does this project need to be funded now? Why is it important to be funded now? So what is the urgency or the exigence to that? So those are the sort of things that I thought about when I was doing the review.

Jakeya Caruthers: I'll say one really quick thing, just to add to the budget piece—not at all, I mean, I don't want to overdetermine what this can look like. And I'm saying from experience: if you need course release, say you need course release. If you don't, then you won't have it, and then, you know, you have to proceed accordingly. So again, in terms of that honesty—it's all right to be honest about what you need.

Cynthia Wang: Yeah, we absolutely built in course release because—I don't know if you all know—at Cal State LA we have, like, a 4–4 teaching load, and that was just way too much to, you know, try to handle a project of this size. So, you know, thank you, J. I think that's a really good point. Build in course release if you need it.

Keyanah Nurse: Yeah, and I think, you know, to that point, feasibility is one of the areas that reviewers evaluate in terms of reading an application, and the extent to which your timeline or your work plan is a little bit too ambitious. And within the context of this, I often think of "too ambitious" as like: are you yourselves, as a project team, taking care of yourselves as you do this work? Because if that's not also, you know, built in and considered—obviously we don't want you to burn yourself out in terms of doing this—and as you know, at ACLS you are our primary beneficiaries as the scholars that we are supporting, so that is of concern to us as well. Um, but also just making sure that the project is done in the way that is best reflective of, you know, the values that you're espousing in the application. And so that question around labor and what

that looks like and making sure that you kind of have a sense of what that looks like for your project team is really important.

So, we are coming up on 20 minutes. I know that there's some questions in the chat that I'm going to try to answer via chat, but if there are questions particularly around eligibility, I encourage you to email us at digitaljustice@acls.org. Um, we appreciate your patience—there are two of us sort of manning the inbox, and as you can imagine with all of the federal funding cuts, we've gotten a lot more interest in not only this program but across all of ACLS's programs, and so we will get to your question.

And so I want to use this time to allow folks who have questions, particularly for our interlocutors, to share that in the chat, or if you could use the hand-raising feature if you want to sort of provide some context for your question. Again, because we are short on time, I ask that the context for the question be brief. But if it's anything related to some of the things we've talked about today in terms of thinking through this question of digital justice—how does that show up in your project? What kinds of considerations you have for the kinds of digital tools or methods that you use? Thinking about community partnerships and how to articulate that within your application? Thinking about questions of labor?—we welcome those questions now.

There's one that I'm seeing: what kinds of organizations count as community partners for the purposes of this grant? Mhm. So, happy to yield it.

Keyanah Nurse: Uh, so, as I said, it can be a wide variety of organizations. Um, it really depends on what your project is and what you're doing. Um, one distinction that I will make in terms of partnership versus, um, like, bringing in a consultant, for example. So Cynthia was talking about having someone come in for—let's say you need technical expertise to help you build out some of the infrastructure of the project. That doesn't necessarily count as a partner in the same way because there's a sort of clearly defined task that they have been brought on to support the project in that way.

Um, when I think of partnership, I think about it in the literal sense of the term in so far as an equitable distribution of labor that's forwarding the project: who is involved in kind of framing the project intellectually, where ultimately is that project going to live in terms of the data, right? Where is the locus of activity happening with that project? And so when I think about ownership—or when I think about partnership, rather—I think about ownership, right? And so you want to be clear about the necessity for letters if you have partners versus if you're bringing in a consultant to do specific delineated tasks.

Audience question: There's one that I think we didn't address, which is how is ACLS defining what “interpretive social sciences” means?

Keyanah Nurse: Oh yes. Yeah, I saw that one. Um, so I actually love the framing of that because—I might have to edit this out of the recording—but “interpretive social sciences” as a phrase doesn't really make sense to me personally because I think of all social sciences as interpretive. And so I have since—and I think as an organization we've—moved away from that language for precisely that reason. And so if you look at the general information session, I just said “social sciences” and have been saying “social sciences.” But we do value a kind of social science practice that's also very much engaged with humanistic inquiry and humanistic disciplines.

And so I think that, you know, if you're obviously like a sociologist or if you're in economics—like, the projects that are typically funded through this program and that I think ACLS tends to fund are social science projects that also sort of incorporate the humanities and humanistic frameworks and methodologies in particular ways. And so to answer your question, I don't know that “interpretive social sciences” as a phrase means much for me and for this program. And so if you're in the social sciences, you're eligible to apply.

I also think, too, for what it's worth, given the fact that this is a program that supports digital work, it's so hard to kind of make a clear distinction around “interpretive social sciences,” right? Because there are plenty of folks who apply who have more technically oriented backgrounds—so folks in computer science, for example—who will partner with a sociologist, and so they've, you know, proposed really great projects in such instances and are still eligible to apply. And so, again, if you have any doubts about your own particular case and your project, then we welcome you to email us so we can think a little bit more critically about your particular situation. But we welcome folks in the social sciences worldwide.

So, we will make this recording available on the ACLS Digital Justice website. My colleague is reminding me that I have a survey to share with you all. So part of what we like to do is to get feedback from our attendees to actually make sure that these sessions are useful, and ways that we should, you know, improve or different things that we can sort of incorporate into subsequent sessions. And so if you can follow this link and submit some answers to our short survey—there’s, I think, five or six questions—we would greatly appreciate it. We do take your feedback very, very seriously and try to incorporate that into subsequent iterations of the program.

And so thank you so much. I want to close out by thanking our interlocutors. This is a really large crowd today, so I appreciate everyone's patience in terms of getting their questions answered but also just listening, hearing about these wonderful projects. But also I hope that this provided some insight—a little peeling back the curtain, in some ways—behind the review process that will be helpful to you all as you navigate your application and navigate this competition season. So, thank you all, and I wish you the rest of the afternoon.

Thank you.