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Strategic Content Alliance

building bridges to digital content

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Framework for Post-Grant Sustainability Planning for Digital Resources

JISC Content

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When planning to build a digital resource, project leaders tend to spend a great deal of time thinking about the execution of the project itself, and considerably less time thinking about what will happen once the resource is built and operational.

This framework can help project leaders and those who support them to better define the activities, costs and revenues that will be needed to achieve the sustainable outcomes they desire.

All types of projects should find this useful. Leaders of some "closed-ended" projects, such as completed research papers, may find themselves filling in just some of the columns on the chart. But leaders of the kinds of projects likely to result in what should become ongoing enterprises – large contributed databases, for example – will want to address the questions in nearly every column and every row.

Here are the steps to follow when using this framework:

STEP 1   **DEFINE** the desirable post-grant impact of your resource. Do you expect it to have impact by virtue of the large audience it will reach or by the cutting edge technical innovation it offers? Do you intend for it to grow to be comprehensive in its coverage of a topic, and to continue to grow through the addition of new content? Or do you simply want to make sure that the content you have created remains safe and preserved for future users?

STEP 2   **SET GOALS** for each type of outcomes it will be necessary to sustain in order to make this desired impact possible for the long term. So, if you are hoping that your resource will continue to be developed through additional content, you will need to think about what this really means. How much additional content? Added how often? Created by whom? And so forth.

STEP 3   **IDENTIFY** the **ACTIVITIES** these goals will require. If adding new and updated content is a goal, who will be doing this, and how? Will this require full-time or part-time paid staff, volunteer help, or some combination of these? Even activities you assume your host institution may provide (such as server maintenance and technical updates) should be included here.

STEP 4   **DETERMINE** the **COSTS** these activities will incur. Think about this picture across the full range of activities needed to sustain your resource in the manner you have defined. Include the estimated costs of activities you are assuming will be contributed (not paid for directly), to gain a fuller sense of the costs of sustaining this resource.

STEP 5   **BUILD** a **REVENUE PLAN** that shows where the needed resources will come from post-grant. Some may be covered by a host institution; some may be contributed by partners or volunteers; but there are likely to be some costs that will still need to be covered each year. Start thinking about different ways that you may be able to generate sufficient revenue to cover them.

Table 1. Framework for Post-grant Sustainability Planning

The table below shows how digital resource project director might begin to frame a post-grant sustainability plan. The activities and costs shown below illustrate the types of activities that will be needed and costs that will be incurred for the project to operate on an ongoing basis. This table does not represent a full financial model, but is intended as a tool to help project leaders systematically consider the future costs of their enterprises and the resources needed to achieve their goals.

STEP 1   DEFINE DESIRED POST-GRANT IMPACT

	Components of Post-Grant Sustainability				
	Technical Requirements	**Content**	**Access and Discovery**	**Audience and Impact**	**Staffing of Ongoing Enterprise**
STEP 2 SET GOALS To achieve desired post-grant impact, what must be sustained? Consider all components, though each project's goals will influence its needs.	What will the resource require for long-term conservation, storage, server space, migration to new formats?	Will the resource require ongoing editorial updating, new content, new metadata, other enhancements?	Does the project team have a desire or obligation to provide open access?	How does the project define its goals in terms of reaching an audience? (Or: What size/kind of audience, and what audience impacts, are desired?)	Who is needed to maintain the resource: PI, full project team, expertise in a certain area?
STEP 3 IDENTIFY ACTIVITIES What ongoing activities will be needed to accomplish the goals above?	Regular maintenance plus labour devoted to updating of hardware and software	Labour (of staff or volunteers) in developing and updating content and metadata	Maintenance and upgrading of user interface and search and discovery tool; search engine optimisation	Development and execution of outreach or marketing plans	Succession planning for leadership; staff training, retention; recruiting new staff, experts, volunteers as needed
STEP 4 DETERMINE COSTS What resources will be required to support these activities?	Included here should be direct costs as well as needs for non-financial resources, including volunteer labor and in-kind services.				
STEP 5 BUILD REVENUE PLAN Where will the project obtain resources needed to cover costs?	Included here should be a plan addressing all possible sources of revenue, including direct and indirect support from host institution, potential earned income, and additional grants, donations, or endowment payouts.				

Table 2: Project Worksheet

STEP 1 DEFINE DESIRED POST-GRANT IMPACT

	Components of Post-Grant Sustainability				
	Technical Requirements	Content	Access and Discovery	Audience and Impact	Staffing of Ongoing Enterprise
STEP 2 SET GOALS					
STEP 3 IDENTIFY ACTIVITIES					
STEP 4 DETERMINE COSTS					
STEP 5 BUILD REVENUE PLAN					

Table 3: Worked Example

The hypothetical project described below is a digital library of historical documents, whose project team will digitise and provide access to a core set of the most essential early modern French plays for research and teaching, with critical commentary contributed by leading scholars. Citations within the scholarly apparatus will be linked to full-text versions of secondary and primary sources held elsewhere online.

STEP 1 DEFINE DESIRED POST-GRANT IMPACT

The project leaders envision this resource continuing to develop and grow past the grant period, ideally becoming a trusted and popular destination for students, scholars and others interested in the field.

	Components of Post-Grant Sustainability				
	Technical Requirements	**Content**	**Access and Discovery**	**Audience and Impact**	**Staffing of Ongoing Enterprise**
STEP 2 SET GOALS What will need to be sustained?	▪ Interface that allows users to easily download texts, link between texts on the site and between texts on the site and external resources. ▪ Platform that performs with speed comparable to that of other high-quality academic resources.	▪ The integrity of the initial content on the site must be maintained. ▪ To maintain site's value for long-term users, 20 new plays and accompanying teaching materials will be added each year, and all teaching materials will be revised as needed.	▪ Provision of links from citations to external resources, and assurance of link vitality. ▪ Outreach to both e-licensing librarians and subject librarians. ▪ A system for responding to user enquiries within 24 hours.	▪ There are approximately 800 courses in the U.S. and U.K. with early modern French drama on the syllabus. Of these, approximately 400 are at research universities, 200 are at mid-sized universities, and 200 are at liberal arts colleges. We aim for subscriptions at 80% of these institutions by Year 3 after launch, with a 20% increase in usage each year beyond that.	▪ Key staff will need to be supported for the forseeable future to manage the project and select content, and for procurement, marketing and sales functions.
STEP 3 IDENTIFY ACTIVITIES How will you reach these goals?	▪ Maintaining platform. ▪ Procuring bandwidth and server space sufficient to meet demand. ▪ Upgrading core functions as needed including search, browse, and page-loading response time. ▪ Technical support (must be available on 24-hour emergency basis, in the event site goes down).	▪ Selecting new primary sources for digitisation. ▪ Soliciting and editing scholarly commentary on the primary sources. ▪ Migrating content to new formats in future (will be PDFs at launch). ▪ Clearing rights as needed.	▪ Providing user support services. ▪ Registering texts for linking and identification purposes (e.g., DOIs).	▪ Marketing activities to promote resource. ▪ Sales and other outreach activities to reach audience targets (e.g., selling institutional subscriptions).	▪ Engaging of marketing and sales staff. ▪ Access to office space, office supplies, other staples. ▪ Efforts of human resources and legal staff, as needed.

STEP 4 DETERMINE COSTS
What will these activities cost?
	▪ Maintaining a platform:
	  – **Est. £10,000/year to vendor.**
	▪ Servers and bandwidth:
	  – **Est. £10,000.**
	▪ Technical support services:
	  – **We may need to buy out time from a staff member employed by our university. Est. 0.5 FTE @ £60,000/year.**
	▪ Technical developer/project manager:
	  – **1.0 FTE @ £60,000/year.**
		▪ Project management, including content selection and editorial oversight:
		  – **1.0 FTE @ £80,000/year.**
		▪ Shipping volumes from contributing libraries:
		  – **Est. £30/volume via vendor.**
		▪ Commissioning costs for scholarly commentary:
		  – **Working on assumption that scholars will contribute freely.**
			▪ User-support specialist:
			  – **0.5 FTE @ £50,000/year.** (Working on assumption that we will find part-time contractor for this in Year 1 and Year 2 post-launch.)
			▪ Costs of registering texts for linking and identification purposes.
			  – **Est. £5/text.**
				▪ Marketing materials:
				  – **Est. £20,000.**
				▪ Sales and marketing time:
				  – **1.0 FTE @ £70,000.**
					▪ Office space:
					  – **Seeking institutional contribution.**
					▪ Legal and human resources:
					  – **Will need to seek these within our institution.**

STEP 5 BUILD REVENUE PLAN

▪ Based on these activities, we estimate the ongoing direct costs of the project to be approximately £310,000 per year. We estimate needing an additional 20% in surplus revenue to grow the project.
▪ So, in Year 1 and Year 2 after launch, we estimate that we will need to generate £387,500 per year.
▪ This figure does NOT include several types of (unbudgeted) contributions that we hope our host institution will provide, including office space and legal and human resources services. We have opened conversations about these contributions with our Provost, who has agreed to sign a letter attesting that the university will support our project in this way. We will continue conversations with her office.
▪ Our subscription model is intended to fully cover the direct operating costs needed to run this digital resource.
▪ During the grant period, our grant funding will ramp down each year as our subscription revenue grows.
▪ Our sales projections show that by Year x we will be covering our direct operating costs via subscription revenue; and by Year y we will be generating the target 20% surplus.