

# Framing the Case for Host Support: Action steps and questions for digital project leaders

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Leaders of digital resource projects, even quite successful ones, may face difficulty in developing reliable sustainability plans that cover all their ongoing costs for maintenance and enhancement. One source of potential support is the host institution, whether that is a university, library, or museum. But gaining host support, whether in the form of ongoing funding, staff time, or other in-kind contributions, is not automatic. Rather, this is often the result of careful planning and some advocacy on the part of project leaders and seems to happen most often when the institution has a real stake in the project at hand.

The following briefing guide offers questions to help project leaders consider future project needs and frame the value of their work when seeking support from their host institution.

## 1. What will you need in the future?

*What will your project require in order to continue to deliver value after the end of the grant period?*

Most project leaders do an excellent job of envisioning the work needed during the grant period, but considering what is needed to sustain the project's impact post-grant is just as important:

- What impact do you want your project to have?
- What ongoing development or activities will be necessary post-grant in order for that to happen? Adding new content? Upgrading hardware or software? Promotion and outreach? Project management?
- Which activities can be best done by others, such as a library partner? Which activities must you do, or at least fund, yourself?

Whether projects remain independent endeavours or embed themselves in larger platforms or infrastructures, most will need to think about how to undertake activities to ensure consistent access and impact. Simply developing a plan for basic storage is not enough, in many cases, to ensure adequate access and impact. Thinking through these questions beforehand will allow you to develop a strategy for sustainability and value. For additional detail on developing a post-grant strategy, please see Ithaka S+R's *A Framework for Post-Grant Sustainability Planning* (July 2011) <http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/wp/files/2012/02/framework-slide-5-09.pdf>

## 2. What are your succession plans?

*Have you considered what will become of your digital resource should you move on?*

Many project leaders demonstrate deep devotion to their work, but few have considered what will become of the project they have created should they choose to move on. Past research indicates that having a "champion" for a project is one of the most important points in developing a sustainable project. Thinking about exit plans, documentation of key processes and building in associates or partners who can take on the work is an important part of a long-term sustainability plan for any major digital resource.

- Establish a clear succession plan for ongoing management of the resource. Who will run the project, if not you? Will the resource be deposited with the library or IT department? Does documentation exist outlining standards and practices?

### 3. Who are possible partners within your institution?

Ideally, you have been working with either the library, the IT department or another campus-based partner from the start, so that costs and standard formats have already been built into the plans for your project. If this is not the case, it is time to determine who these partners might be and how you might work with them.

Questions to consider when approaching potential partners include:

- What support will the partner provide: Storage? Preservation? Curation? Marketing and outreach?
- What value will the partner derive from this partnership?
- How will the partner be credited for this arrangement?
- Over what time period will this support be required? What plans are in place beyond that time?

### 4. How does your project align with institutional priorities or solutions?

*Does your project present some unique value to your institution? Why is your institution uniquely suited to support your resource?*

Library and university administrators we have spoken to report that they are more likely to agree to take on projects that they did not initiate themselves, if (1) the projects have strong alignment with their own institutional mission, and (2) the projects have been created in ways that are technically compatible with the systems they have in place.

Questions to ask when studying institutional priorities:

- Are there specific areas of expertise or subjects of interest within the support units or departments at your institution? UCL has a particularly strong historical relationship with Jeremy Bentham, for example; its Centre for Digital Humanities has particular expertise in social media.
- Are there any current institutional initiatives for supporting digital content?
- How will you identify these subjects? You may find it helpful to speak directly with institutional management, academic administrators, library directors, or IT leaders (among others) to explicitly identify these areas.
- If these priority topics or initiatives exist, how will your project fit into those structures or advance those topics?

### 5. Making the case: why should your host institution help to sustain your resource?

A common assumption is that one's host institution will willingly take on support of digital projects but this is not always the case. In order to draw host support, whether from a library, centre, or other campus-based unit, you must present some type of value to the institution. Ideally, this bond has been forged in the early days of your project. If not, it will be even more important to take into consideration the value your project offers, whether because of a substantial or highly enthusiastic audience of users, demonstrable importance in research or teaching, or close alignment with the history or mission of the institution. Ideally, supporting a project that has demonstrated value will reflect well on the institution that sustains it and badly if they do not.

You should be able to speak clearly and decisively about the impact of your resource. Considering basic questions about audience and usage and impact will help you to structure an argument for why your host institution should support your resource. The person you should approach with your case for support will vary by institution, but we anticipate that this may be a provost or dean of research, or a head of a support unit (eg the library, the museum).

- a.** Who are the people using your resource? Do you have figures on the size of these audiences?
- b.** How are they currently using your resource?
- c.** Are there any other indications that the broader community is noticing your resource?
- d.** What other positive impact does your host institution derive from supporting or being associated with your resource? Conversely, will your host institution be viewed poorly for allowing your resource to expire or move elsewhere?
- e.** What is the unique value of your project? What needs does it satisfy that other resources may not?
- f.** How with the community respond if your resource is discontinued?

At the same time, you should be clear about the support and terms that you will expect from the institution.

- a.** What activities and costs do you specifically require? What will these be used for?
- b.** What costs will be borne by the project itself?
- c.** What other measures are you taking to minimise the ongoing costs and needs of the resource?
- d.** Will there be any possibilities for revenue generation in the future?
- e.** Over what period will you require support? Explicit signed agreements for defined periods of time appear to be relatively rare and you may have to agree to less stable implicit agreements for support.

## Additional references:

The prompting questions above are intended to help project leaders think about post-grant sustainability and maximise the likelihood of receiving host support. However, in order to present a strong case for host support, projects must first be valuable and impactful — they must be projects worth supporting. While this briefing guide will not delve into those details, you may find it helpful to consult these Jisc-commissioned works for guidelines on how to maximise the impact of digital resources:

Chatterton, Peter. *Sustaining and Embedding Innovations: A Good Practice Guide*. (London: Jisc, October 2010). <http://jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/page/40439212/Sustaining%20and%20Embedding%20Innovations%20Good%20Practice%20Guide>

Maron, Nancy L. *A Framework for Post-Grant Sustainability Planning*. (London: Jisc, July 2011). <http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2011/07/26/a-framework-for-post-grant-sustainability-planning>

Maron, Nancy L., Kirby Smith, K. and Loy, Matthew. *Sustaining Digital Resources: An On-the-Ground View of Projects Today*. (NY: Ithaka S+R, Nov 2009). [www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/sustaining-digital-projects-ground-view-projects-today](http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/sustaining-digital-projects-ground-view-projects-today)

Maron, Nancy L., and Loy, Matthew. *Revenue, Recession, Reliance: Revisiting the SCA/Ithaka S+R Case Studies in Sustainability*. (NY: Ithaka S+R, Oct 2011). [www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/revenue-recession-reliance-revisiting-scaithaka-sr-case-studies-sustainability](http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/revenue-recession-reliance-revisiting-scaithaka-sr-case-studies-sustainability)

Jisc Netskills. "Maximising online resource effectiveness". (London: Jisc, April 2011) <http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/wp/allpublications/maximising-online-resource-effectiveness/>

Quirk, Rachel, et al. *The Guide to Researching Audiences*. (London: Jisc, Dec 2009) <http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/wp/portfolio-items/the-guide-to-researching-audiences>

Tanner, Simon. *Measuring the Impact of Digital Resources: The Balanced Value Impact Model*. (London: KCL, 2012) [www.kdcs.kcl.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/pubs/BalancedValueImpactModel\\_SimonTanner\\_October2012.pdf](http://www.kdcs.kcl.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/pubs/BalancedValueImpactModel_SimonTanner_October2012.pdf)

Oxford Internet Institute. *Toolkit for the Impact of Digitised Scholarly Resources (TIDSR)*. (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, 2008) <http://microsites.oii.ox.ac.uk/tidsr/welcome>