Contemplating Grant-Funded Project Infrastructure as Collaboration from the Ground Up

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In the 2022-2023 Academic Year, SSHRC awarded over 5300 grants and fellowships, with over $60 million (CAN) in funding. The final round of 2022 NEH funding last August was over $30 million (US) to 226 projects. While many projects supported by these funding agencies, especially DH projects, have begun to think in terms of connection and interoperability, the fact remains that the majority of these projects, even if they are open source, tend towards isolation.

By the time that DH and other research projects in the humanities begin to engage in collaboration, it is usually at a point in project development that presents challenges in compatibility and interoperability. For instance, Linked Infrastructure for Networked Cultural Scholarship (https://lincsproject.ca/) is a vital Canadian initiative aimed at "empowering researchers to link their data", but most of the projects they engage with are already established with bespoke data sets. As a result, the majority of the labour involved on this project entails converting already-established ontologies and data structures so that they are interoperable with other projects.

Likewise, the DH Digital Documentation Process (https://digitalhumanitiesddp.com/) and Socio-Technical Sustainability Roadmap (https://sites.haa.pitt.edu/sustainabilityroadmap/) are excellent resources for anyone looking to develop their own project and keep sustainability, transparency, and posterity in mind. So there are many resources and projects dedicated towards linking already-established projects and helping scholars produce new projects that will last, but what about building something new with fully developed publicly-funded projects that are open access? On that front, we still have some work to do.

As an example, I want to talk about a project I really respect and admire: *Six Degrees of Francis Bacon* (http://www.sixdegreesoffrancisbacon.com/) is an excellent scholarly project developed from a

relatively large grant from the NEH with incredibly successful community outreach and an equally

successful publication record. Moreover, their datasets and project code are readily available online in a

gesture towards openness that meets all the criteria for open access. However, the bespoke nature and

complexity of such a project makes the likelihood of other scholars or community members reusing this

code, or even its data, very unlikely. For instance, as someone interested in network visualization and

analysis, I'd still need funding for a small team to adapt this infrastructure in a meaningful way. I make

this point not to discredit the open access efforts of an excellent project, but to express that even when

we make these efforts it will often be the case that other scholars will be able to do little more than

mirror or evaluate these projects because we usually develop projects in siloes and then connect.

One of the reasons it can take a long time to develop meaningful collaborative discourse in

humanities projects is that we do not foster this model in the classroom to the same extend as we do

others, yes, but also traditional grant structures don't allow for this kind of work until early career

scholars are already established. Doctoral and postdoctoral grants in the humanities are independent

and other grants can limit the eligibility of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Today, I want to propose beginning work on collaborative projects and infrastructure from the

ground up, including shareholders and colleagues in conversations about the potential for and

development of a project early in its inception. I use my own work as an example: documenting the

Network Edition as a theoretical approach in one chapter of my dissertation to its current state as a

working prototype, I argue that involving even limited potential partners in a tool's development from

the outset will make for more innovative scholarship, longer-lasting projects with a greater impact, and,

ultimately, a better use of publicly-granted funds.