VIDEO, AUDIO AND DIGITAL HUMANITIES PLANNING TIPS

The Wisconsin Humanities Council funds projects that employ digital humanities. These may range from short videos to full length film documentaries, from websites to video games and from podcasts to audio projects. Digital projects may be part of a larger project such as an exhibit, or the cumulative effort of a larger humanities-based program. Projects could also be a stand-alone product such as a game or self-guided audio tour. Like other activities we fund, a digital humanities project cannot simply be archival. It needs to engage the public and be accessible. We want to see projects that encourage discussion and build communities.

Some questions to consider before designing and proposing your project:

- What is the goal of your project and how does this digital humanities product meet that goal?
- Why is the medium you’ve chosen the best medium for accomplishing this task?
- Will your project be readily accessible to the public in this format? Does use of the medium’s platform (e.g. smart phone application, game, interactive website, etc.) require specialized equipment or operating systems that will limit the ability of the general public to engage with it? Have you given thought to people with vision, auditory or other special needs?
  
  TIP → The website [http://webaim.org/intro/](http://webaim.org/intro/) provides some basic background on striving for online accessibility in recognition of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

  Other sites, for example, [http://wearecolorblind.com/](http://wearecolorblind.com/), provide specific design guidelines.
- Does the format you chose encourage discussion or public involvement in the subject matter? How will you engage the public in this project?
- Is your project easily transferrable to new platforms as technology advances? Does it have built-in portability?
- How will you promote or attract your audience to your digital humanities project?
- Is this project solely archival? If so, it isn’t eligible for WHC funds. If there is an archival component, such as the collection of oral histories, does your project establish a protocol for maintaining access after the project period?
- Have you engaged practitioners with the technical ability to design and produce your project?
- Have you thought through the design and make up of your project? Is this a user-friendly design?
Have you adequately mapped out a timeline for production with the technology expert involved?

Proposing a project

For some projects, the digital component is only one element of a larger project or exhibition. WHC needs to understand how our funds fit into the big picture, especially when the end result includes a digital product. In the narrative of your application, be sure to address the following aspects of your digital humanities project.

- Describe your goals for the project, the expected audience and what outcomes and impacts you expect from the digital humanities component.
- Provide details that explain its compatibility and accessibility across platforms. If users are expected to have a certain level of ability, expertise or technological ability/equipment to access this product please explain.
- Provide a sense of the technical expertise of the designer with links to their previous work in addition to their project personnel form.
- Tell us how the humanities component is woven into with this product and why this is the best medium to do the job.
- Explain how this project will be promoted to the public and used to generate public discourse.
- Where available, provide a proof, storyboard or design description/mockup or site map to explain how your project will look on completion. Lay out the final structure of your project.
- Describe the role of humanities experts in the design, delivery or development of this digital project.
- Explain how you will publicize your product and engage your audience.
- Describe how you will maintain or sustain the product after the project period.

FOLLOWING ARE A FEW TIPS

While most projects will have a technical expert designing the digital humanities component, we know that many of our applicants are new to the use of these technologies. Thus, we offer some of these questions to help you work with your technical expert as you think through your visioning process.

Game applications

Be sure you choose a flexible platform and consider whether the game can be accessed for free.
- Is your game design intended to be played on a computer or a smart phone?
- Is your audience a group that might have differing abilities to access the needed hardware? E.g. a school group where some students don’t have smart phones and can’t participate?

Games should be appropriate to the humanities content.
- How is the player intersecting with the game and the humanities content?
• How does the “educational/informational” element of discovery come in and the “game” element of reward play out?
• How does exploration in the game lead to knowledge? How does it build community or lead to discussion?
• How does the game lead to real world interaction?
Be sure your game designer understands your audiences.
• Are there lengthy instructions that a young child might be unable to read?
• Does the game require “game-playing” knowledge that some groups of people may not have?
• Do the game modules or steps require a task to be accomplished before moving on? If so, could this linear structure inhibit locational and temporal relationships to the humanities content? E.g. If the tour has moved on to a new location, would players be unable to access the content on the new location until the old location has been successfully unlocked?

Web Sites

While there are many options for web platforms, many of which are free and include extensive tutorials (e.g. WordPress), there are a number of considerations that need to go into a web design for a humanities project.

Make the underlying language and content format universal across formats and designed for changing technology and research purposes. Make sure your product is scalable and test it on multiple operating systems and browsers.
• Does your web design meet international standards so that it will line up with software and hardware upgrades?
• What kind of coding language is your designer using? The different design languages have varying applicability across international platforms which may matter when considering archival aspects of your project or its sustainability across platforms.
• Are you using non-proprietary data file formats and open-source database and web publishing framework?
• Will images be stored and displayed in widely compatible formats? Uncompressed TIFF is considered a preferred storage format while JPGs are the most universally readable for browser display.
• How will you store the metadata for your images? Scanning data for images? Locations of originals and video shooting formats?
• Have you dated your website and provided contact information and organizational attribution?
• Is it designed to be scalable for smart phones and tablets?

Strive for clean organization and easy readability. You want people to be able to navigate your site intuitively.
• Have you designed for Google keyword searches and for multimedia applications?
• Is navigation within your site consistent?
• Have you used space as part of your design to make it easy to read and follow?
• Have you kept it simple and considered the reading and comprehension level of your audience?
• Have you considered where appropriate hyperlinks and interactive elements would improve comprehension vs. where too much is too busy?
• Are you using the key design features of repetition, contrast, proximity, and alignment to help your viewers comprehend the content?
• Have you minimized the number of “clicks” needed to reach your content?

Use easy-to-read color schemes. Consider whether branding is complementary to or clashing with the design. Aim for consistency across web pages.
• Is the design attractive and free of typography errors?
• Has the top of the page pulled your audience in with compelling information?
• Does your page open fast and not overwhelm data streams with auto-loading videos and graphics?
• Does the narrative of your page tell a compelling story and employ humanities content?
• Does it encourage engagement?
• Does it avoid busy GIFs and “loud” color schemes?
• Do photos and videos have explanatory captions?
• Does it avoid difficult-to-read color and common pitfalls of special needs accessibility?