

2024 Digital Justice Grant Webinar: Tools, Methods, Deliverables

Good morning, everyone! It is so lovely to see you all. We have a very full room this morning. Welcome to the second webinar of the Digital Justice Grants Program Fall Webinar Series, "Digital Justice in Practice: Tools, Methods, and Deliverables." If you missed the first webinar, which took place last week, it was a general information session about the program, its ethos, design, and some of the application components. We hope to have that recording, along with a transcript, available on the ACLS website next week. You can also find a recording of the first half of this session there.

My name is Keyanah Nurse, Senior Program Officer of IDEA Programs, which stands for Intentional Design for an Equitable Academy. I am also the Program Lead for the Digital Justice Grants Program. Today, I'm joined by my colleague Dr. Jovonne Bickerstaff, Director of IDEA, who will be moderating one of the breakout sessions and keeping an eye on the tech behind the scenes.

Before I introduce our esteemed interlocutors, I'd like to say a few words about the intention behind this webinar series. We launched it last year as a way to provide a forum for applicants to directly engage with former reviewers of our digital grants programs—Digital Justice, our sunseting Digital Extension program, and the Digital Commission. Not everyone has access to informal information-sharing networks that can often determine whether a proposal gets funded. So, these webinars aim to reveal some of the hidden curriculum of grant writing and to offer insights into specific aspects of this program. As other parts of this program have evolved and been refined, so have these webinars. This year's series is based on feedback from both reviewers and applicants. Reviewers identified areas where they wanted to see applicants get more coaching, while applicants expressed a desire for more guidance on specific application components. Just like you, they attended last year's sessions and completed our post-webinar survey, and I'm grateful that we've been able to actualize that feedback into this session, which delves more deeply into some of the concrete aspects of digital projects that our reviewers evaluate. I also encourage you to complete the survey we'll pass on to you at the end of the session; it truly does shape the programming we offer.

Now, to get started, I'd like to introduce our first interlocutor, Tatiana Bryant, Director of Teaching, Learning, and Research Services at Barnard College. She leads the Personal Librarian team, which provides specialized research and instruction services for all Barnard students and serves as the lead for all academic departments. Before joining Barnard College, she was the Research Librarian for Digital Humanities, History, and

African American Studies at the University of California, Irvine. Tatiana holds an MPA from NYU, an MLIS from Pratt Institute, and a BA in History from Hampton University.

Our next interlocutor is Rachel Kuo, currently an Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Asian American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research on social movements and digital technology has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Social Science Research Council. She is a founding member and current affiliate of the Center for Critical Race and Digital Studies, as well as a co-founder of the Asian American Vist Collective. I am thrilled to have both of them join us today to discuss some of the concrete aspects of digital projects that are ultimately funded through this program.

Before we jump into the discussion, let me give a quick overview so you know what to expect. We'll begin with about 30 minutes of discussion on the topic, specifically curated around two of the application prompts. The first is, "What digital tools and methods are at the center of the project? Please detail how those tools and methods inform the project's intellectual contributions and its advancement of equity and justice." The second is, "Please detail the project's digital deliverables, as well as its outcomes and anticipated intellectual contributions." We wanted this conversation to help you start thinking about how to respond to these prompts, whether you're applying this year or planning to apply in the future.

After the discussion, we'll move into breakout rooms, each with an interlocutor and an ACLS staff member, to provide you with concrete feedback on how you're approaching these specific prompts. Finally, we'll reconvene in the larger room for closing remarks. I'll stop sharing my screen now so we can engage in the discussion. To start, I'd like to ask our interlocutors about selecting the best tools or methods when framing your project. Either in your own projects or as you evaluate other digital projects, what are some initial considerations that can help determine the most appropriate tool or method for a specific line of inquiry? I think this is a good starting point because we are often well-equipped to talk about a project's intellectual contribution and problem setting, but as my colleague Jovonne has said, sometimes you need a specific tool, like a hammer, but pick up a wrench instead. How do you know which tool is best suited to your specific inquiry? Please feel free to jump in when you're ready.

Rachel: I can start, and maybe we can just have a back-and-forth conversation, because this is such a great question to begin with. So often, we read applications that beautifully detail the literature of a problem, but then in the last paragraph, it says, "Oh, and then we'll create a website" or "we'll create this thing." And questions arise like, "Wait, how do we get

from A to B?" I think a lot about how the method and process inform that output. This question of the "best tool or method" should be considered in a plural way, as there are many factors to move from point A to B.

For example, if an output is a digital archive or platform to display materials, what methods will support the organization and cataloging? Will there be interviews with people along the way to understand how they engage with artifacts? I think with grants focused on the digital, the tool and method don't always have to be digital. There are many methodologies that can inform the output, and the end product doesn't necessarily have to be digital, either. It could respond to a problem shaped by digital technologies. Those are some initial thoughts, but I'll pass it to Tatiana to continue.

Tatiana: I'd encourage people to start small and consider the expertise you have and those around you. Think about what interests you. If you're working solo or with a small team at an institution that may not have as much infrastructure, that's an important factor. Always reach out to others on campus who are doing interesting work and ask questions. Did they hire a developer? Are they self-taught? Consider your own capacity—are you interested in learning a new tool from scratch? Do you have people around with specific skills who can help you draft and test something?

I often think of starting a project like setting up a "petting zoo" of tools and methods to try out. There are great online tutorials and journals, like [Reviews.in.Digital.Humanities](#), where you can see different projects and the work that went into developing them. I encourage you to start by exploring and being realistic about your capacity and time.

Rachel: I love that idea of a "petting zoo" and thinking about capacity and expertise. Especially with projects involving community partners, it's crucial to consider the tools and methods you're using. In this program, we talk about data ethics in terms of collection, maintenance, and ownership, but we can also apply that to the choice of tools and methods. Since you're engaging with community members, there are ethical considerations in both tool selection and application.

I'm wondering if you can each share a project where ethical considerations were tied to specific tools or methods. Not just the tool itself, but also the process and method around its use.

I think I can go ahead and start. A number of projects come to mind, and I think the gold standard is the Colored Conventions Project, which is run on Drupal, an open-source platform. That really ties into the ethos of the project as well. Much of what has been

developed over time has been closely integrated with the community, and they have an ethos where they bring people in and take them along for the growth of this project over time. I know it's helpful to add links while I'm talking, so I'll put those into the chat as well. I also really admire projects that use the Omeka platform. I don't know, Rachel, if you wanted to speak to that more?

Yeah, I was thinking along similar lines but in a slightly different vein, focusing on ethical considerations. I often think about ethics, especially in community work, regarding the types of data we actually need to collect and what we don't need to collect. For example, in terms of ethics, there are two documents that I find really useful: the Feminist Data Manifesto and the California Resistance Network. They have thoughtful frameworks for thinking through digital tools. One point that organizers have raised is the design and interface of something as basic as a spreadsheet, where you might feel compelled to collect names, email addresses, and other personal information. It raises the question: what do we actually need to collect? What can we let go of to ensure we are intentional and thoughtful about what we gather?

I think it's also important to ask questions like, "Does this tool really need to be built? Who is it for, and who does it serve?" A project I've really admired is SAR W's, which involves sharing news with the community about misinformation in Vietnamese communities. They created a bilingual digital zine in English and Vietnamese. But to make sure people in the community would actually engage with it — since not everyone would find an online digital artifact, even if it's open access — they held in-person workshops with food and conversation, especially for elders, to engage with the resource. This brings us back to the earlier point about process and tool: as we create these resources, we need to think about how people will engage with them. Just because something is digital and accessible doesn't mean it's always easy for people to engage with. I think many people express a desire to work with communities or those most directly impacted, but sometimes digital objects that live online aren't necessarily reaching the intended audience.

Yes, I think that's a great reminder to challenge the "build it, and they will come" mindset that often accompanies digital projects. A dissemination and engagement plan has to be intentional and integrated into the process, not something that happens after you've already built the project. The ways in which community partners and audiences will engage with the project should inform your choice of tools from the very beginning.

Rachel, as you were speaking, it reminded me of the potential tension that can emerge between data security and accessibility, especially when working with community

partners. How do you approach this when selecting specific tools or platforms, balancing the need for security with accessibility, particularly if you want a wide variety of people to access the project's materials?

I love this question. My response here is informed by a project I did with workers in informal economies, where we explored how digital technology can support organizing in the face of precarity and risk. One thing that emerged, and which is relevant to this question of security and access, is that there are often assumptions about privacy and security that are rooted in the idea of individual device ownership. There's an assumption that everyone has access to a single, private laptop or phone. That's something I think about a lot, beyond just the digital tool itself — it's also about understanding the kinds of security and privacy practices people are already using within the limitations of their existing technology.

For example, one issue that came up in those conversations is that during a Zoom meeting like this, people can dial in, but if they do, they can't actually see the slides. In response, some groups have taken the time to print out all of the materials and distribute them by hand so that people have physical copies. Another example people have discussed is that you can't assume there's a single email address or phone number to reach someone, and it's also not always secure to store that information. So how do you navigate these frictions?

I think when we start considering the specifics — the edges or peripheries — of how technology is used differently, it helps us think about how to design for security and access. Often, another point of friction is with university tools. The most secure tools, like Box or OneDrive, which universities or institutions often rely on, aren't necessarily easy to collaborate on. So, you have to build in time for reciprocal technical training or conversations about what access actually means and what collaboration looks like, thinking through those day-to-day frictions.

That was a great answer from Rachel. I guess I can add to this by thinking about security versus access in a few different ways. When it comes to security around the materials we collect or engage with in digital projects, I think that, when developing a project with community members — collecting stories, historical information, objects, or photographs — it's important to think long-term. I'm currently working on a couple of projects where we've had to go back and request re-consent because the original agreements we made with individuals weren't expansive enough. That's something to keep in mind.

Depending on the project, you may want to make certain materials, like photographs or histories, fully and freely available online. However, you have to work with individuals

whose stories or testimonies you're sharing, as those stories belong to them. I also want to take a different tack here, thinking about data security and accessibility, and how inaccessible some university campuses can be. For those who can't or don't feel comfortable coming to campus to view materials, it's an argument for making as much as possible widely accessible online. But there's also a tension: when you're collecting data from people, whether stories, photographs, or objects, you need to bring them along in the process so they fully understand what they're agreeing to in consent forms and agreements.

It takes significant time and effort to go back and request re-consent, and it's also not entirely within your control to foresee everything at the start of a project. But it's always something to keep in mind.

Thank you for that. I wish we all had crystal balls to give us some insight, particularly into how different tools will develop and what platforms might evolve into as you make decisions at different phases of your project. In line with that, and with the goal of being as proactive and forward-thinking as possible, generating MOUs or consent agreements with the folks you're engaging in your projects is essential. I want to adopt that perspective in thinking about the different tools and platforms that people might consider using at various stages of their projects.

And so, again, we all have principles, but we can't predict what might happen five or ten years from now. What are one or two considerations for making your own work — or if you're advising others — to think about when deciding where their projects will live or what tools to use within the project, keeping in mind that these things are dynamic and always changing?

I think so much of the grant process is speculative because you're betting on something that might not come to be, right? For example, if the resources don't materialize. If you're collaborating with others, you're asking them to speculate with you. Then, by the time you get the grant, things might have changed. So how do we adjust for that? I think that forward-thinking approach is partly a budget question. On one level, if you want to put something online, you need to consider: who is maintaining the domain, the website, or the hosting space? Is it being accounted for?

Recently, I was in a conversation where people were saying, "Oh, the website is down," and by then, no one remembers the login information. I've also wanted to look at data from a project that's now inaccessible because the link is broken, or it's glitching. The lifespan of

these projects can be surprisingly short — projects from as recently as 2020 or 2021 may already be difficult to access. The question of longevity is tricky to think through.

Another consideration is how a project should "sunset." We often focus on beginnings but not on endings, and the end often comes abruptly due to technical issues or conflicts. We don't always thoughtfully plan out what it means for something to come to a close. Sometimes, from an ethical standpoint, we don't want certain projects to live forever online. So what does that mean for ownership and preservation? I've seen projects live on shared drives and eventually disappear, but that doesn't mean they're truly gone. At some point, we may decide that a project should live online for five years, and then, in year four, we start conversations about archiving or sunsetting it.

That's a great point, Rachel — thinking about the end of a project when you're just starting is a best practice. I would add that engaging the people at your campus, like librarians, archivists, and digital scholarship specialists, and putting a preservation plan in place is crucial. Consider how long you want the project to live, how long you'll be teaching with it, and if your project partners are invested in its long-term future. People change institutions and jobs, and these real, pragmatic factors can affect digital projects despite everyone's best intentions. So keeping the end in mind when you're planning the beginning is key. I love the idea of intentional sunsetting, because too often, as Rachel said, a project ends simply because the funding runs out or someone leaves. Intentional sunsetting is also about the relational and infrastructural capacity around the project — who's contributing, and what expertise do they offer, whether technical or otherwise?

This concept is something we asked about in our development prompts, specifically around intentional sunsetting. It can be an important aspect of a successful project. I'd add that thinking about sunsetting is difficult, but it's something you need to consider throughout the life of a project, especially if you're using proprietary tools, which may change or become obsolete. Without a crystal ball, we can't foresee if or when a tool might become unavailable, so this ties into previous questions about security and platform choices.

In the last 10 minutes before we go into breakout rooms, let's discuss the digital deliverable components of the session. Since this topic is featured in one of the prompts, let's start with a basic definition of terms. It's always more complicated than expected, but how would you characterize the difference between tools, methods, platforms, and deliverables? This can help us establish a shared vocabulary as we head into breakout sessions.

This is a great question, and I really appreciate it. When I think about tools, I think of specific things like a timeline tool, MyLab, or Universal Viewer, which lets you look at images, audio, and video on websites. I also think of crowdsourcing tools, such as major platforms like onthepage.com. Tools, to me, are very discrete things.

As for methods, I think of a method as a way of analyzing or working with data. A method could be GIS to create maps or text analysis to study a corpus. When I think about platforms, I consider a much larger system that houses and holds digital or digitized content, either for preservation or access or both. A platform allows for exhibiting and viewing content and managing additions or removals. I'm thinking of things like Mukurtu, Omeka, and Twine.

The term "deliverable" can feel very corporate, but I use it as shorthand for the end product — a digital project that integrates scholarship and teaching resources. It's a way to bring everything together as a complete package.

I love this question, too. Even as I was taking notes on definitions, I saw that these concepts overlap but are distinct. For tools, I think of the instruments you use to execute a method. For example, if a method is visual analysis or storytelling, what are the tools you use for that? Tools are the things you employ to do the work.

Platforms, on the other hand, are where the product will live and be distributed. I agree with the idea of deliverables being more than just the final product. Sometimes, we think of deliverables as big things, but it's also helpful to think about small deliverables along the way, especially during the seed or development phase. For example, maybe we don't expect a finished product yet, but we're bringing stakeholders together for discussions or workshops. That interaction can also be considered a deliverable — the output of the early phases.

Or, you know, part of it might involve relationship building or conceptualizing. For instance, maybe we're going to try doing oral history interviews with ten different people, but that might not be the final product. So I think deliverables can exist at varying scales. Yes, I absolutely agree. "Deliverable" is sort of corporate jargon, but I was trying to find a term to capture the project's outcomes — like, the proposed activities funded by the grant, and what the outcome of that work will be. Rachel, your point about recognizing the smaller milestones throughout the grant term, like getting people together in a room to discuss something and building on that conversation in the next phase, is important. I want

to highlight that, especially since we recently incorporated capacity building into one of the program's larger goals. This aim is to bolster the ability for individuals, particularly at historically under-resourced institutions or within underfunded fields, to engage in this work and bring more people into it.

In that messaging, I've been careful to keep scale at the center of our focus. So when thinking about the deliverables of a project, in what ways does it contribute to that mission? In the last few minutes, could you share one or two strategies that applicants might consider to link their deliverables to this larger priority of capacity building as I just defined it?

I can start. I think scale is a key point because it doesn't always have to be big. What's nice about the ACLS Digital Justice Grant, compared to some other digital-focused or technology-forward grants, is that it doesn't have the same pressure for flashy outcomes. Sometimes, other grants demand an output like a brand-new innovative tool or a shiny new technology. But I think there's value in something else too.

Personally, I appreciate thoughtfulness around feasibility and whether that feasibility has been informed by a thorough understanding of the context. It's not just the intellectual rigor of the project, but also the political stakes. How do these elements align with the tools, methods, platforms, and deliverables? Sometimes, scale isn't about doing something expansive; it's about deep engagement with a particular topic. That depth can add a different kind of value.

Thanks for that. I appreciate it. One thing I look for is feasibility. It's okay to clarify in an application that your project is bigger than what this grant will allow you to complete. Being clear in the narrative — like, "this particular grant will help me accomplish X and Y but maybe not Z" — can be very helpful for readers. It shows that you understand the scale of your project and have realistic expectations for what can be achieved with the specific funds available. I appreciate when I see a clear vision and then a realistic plan scaled to fit the time and funding constraints if awarded.

Thank you both for those insights as we transition into the breakout session. Just a reminder that this part of the session will not be recorded, so I'm going to stop recording now.

I hope you had a good session in the breakout rooms. Before we conclude, I want to go through a few quick reminders and housekeeping issues. If you're considering applying,

remember that the application deadline is December 3rd at 9:00 p.m. After this date and time, our online fellowship application portal will no longer accept submissions, and we can't grant extensions.

It's worth emphasizing that this is also the deadline for your institution's administrators to submit their institutional verification. So if you're planning to apply, I recommend registering in the application portal as soon as possible. You don't have to complete the application in one sitting; you can look through it, save it, and submit your administrator's email address so the portal can send them instructions on how to submit that form. Regarding when decisions will be announced, given the increased volume of applications we received last year — a 140% increase between the 2021-2022 pilot year and last year — we had to restructure our review process to add an extra round of review. Results from the first round will be shared in February, followed by final results in April.

I also wanted to make sure you're aware of the remainder of this webinar series. In a few weeks, on October 17th, we have a session focused on cultivating community partnerships in digital humanities. That topic came up a little today, especially in terms of considering the specific tools we choose and how our community partners engage with those tools, but we'll be doing an even deeper dive into what that looks like.

After that, we'll hold some office hours, which will be very informal. If you have any questions about your application or the online portal, you can simply pop in, ask your question, and then leave when you're done.

Following that, in November, we have another webinar focused on operationalizing these projects. We'll dive into topics like budgets, timelines, and work plans, which often feel like neglected parts of applications. People typically spend a lot of time on the theoretical underpinnings of a project, but I think getting into these concrete "how-tos" and seeing how people approach them can be extremely helpful. Again, we want to ensure that the aspiration toward justice and digital justice is reflected in every component of the application.

Then we'll have another round of office hours in late November, right before the deadline. This will be a chance to address any lingering questions or concerns; you can just pop in and ask away.

I want to thank you all for attending. This has been a really great conversation. I also want to thank our interlocutors, Tan, Ran, and Rachel Co, for joining and sharing their time,

wisdom, insight, and grace. It's been wonderful getting to know all of you and having this discussion. Best of luck with your application, and enjoy the rest of your afternoon.