

Digital humanities platforms set to challenge technical barriers to digital research skills development.

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/05/07/technical-barriers-to-crowdsourcing-dhcrowdscribe/

5/7/2014

Digital humanists are becoming increasingly aware of the potential for much wider impact through 'crowdscribing' and other innovative approaches to digital research. [Emma Goodwin](#) provides further information on a new initiative DHCrowdscribe that allows early career researchers to gain from resources and expertise to support technical project development. This approach will also foster wider collaboration between the humanities and other more scientific or technical disciplines.



Established academics find it difficult to attract funding without a proof-of-concept prototype of the planned project and a workable budget which demonstrates value, innovation and alignment with the stated aims of funding bodies. It is especially difficult for doctoral and early career researchers to access funding for small and experimental projects, and yet we cannot aspire to be successful academics winning large research grants, if we do not have opportunities to develop a suite of project management skills. So the question is how and where we should all begin.

My own hunt for seed funding began a year ago, when I first became interested in using new data analysis methods to look at place names in French epic for my thesis. I have gone on to develop a digital project ([Crowd Map The Crusades](#)), a proof-of-concept crowdsourced transcription and mapping project. It is based on the crusade poem 'the Song of the First Crusade, a largely unedited Old French text attributed to Baudri, abbot of Bourgueil, in Anjou, France. Crowd Map The Crusades has a home at dhcrowdscribe.com, the online hub for the output of the AHRC-funded Collaborative Skills Project 'Promoting Interdisciplinary Engagement in the Digital Humanities' and welcomes crowdsourcers or crowdscribers to participate in the first tranche of the project.



Image credit: [Ben Schumin](#) (Wikimedia, CC BY-SA)

The idea behind 'crowdscribing' comes from an established need to make unedited texts of all kinds available for study and for the wider general public. There will never be enough funds or scholars to transcribe all the texts we might be interested in knowing more about. Yet through 'crowdscribing' we can pool resources and expertise from

all over the world and create new scholarly resources which have the potential for a much wider impact beyond universities and embrace the idea of researching and education in teams made up of both scholars and interested members of the public. One only need think of other large scale digital projects such as Old Weather and [Transcribe Bentham](#) in order to realise the potential for this idea. The Collaborative Skills Project is opening the minds of younger researchers to the possible ways they can create small scale projects which can engage with the public and create impact far beyond the boundaries of their own subject disciplines.

Learning to use new digital tools in scholarship can open up new ways of doing research through cross-border and cross-discipline collaboration. Setting up Crowd Map The Crusades required a lot of planning and a vision which was exciting and stimulating for me as the PI and for others, especially my IT developer, [Pat Lockley](#), who found the technical challenge of developing code for the project appealing. How did we succeed, well mostly through a shared willingness to understand the academic and technical components of the project and how the two fitted together. As young researchers budgets that will allow us to outsource IT development are far out of reach. This means we need to apply our researcher brains to understanding the technical processes involved and how they work, so that we understand the design requirements and limitations from a technical point of view and can engage fully with our IT collaborators. Adopting such an attitude benefits everyone: researchers can conduct more sophisticated research and the IT experts have the opportunity to work on innovative and interesting projects in the academy. It also supports wider collaboration between humanities and other more scientific or technical disciplines.

To address this difficulty in attaining initial funding for these types of projects, as Principal Investigator of the Collaborative Skills Project, I am running two workshops (one in [Oxford](#) and one in [London](#)), funded by the AHRC in June 2014. Both workshops cover digital and public engagement skills for use in research. We have a digital hub for the project at www.dhcrowdscribe.com, with links, events information and resources. This website includes hosting capacity for other digital projects, so if you are inspired from attending our workshops, we can help you achieve your vision.

The aim of all three projects is to allow doctoral and early career researchers to learn from some of the biggest names and projects in Digital Humanities, and to provide a forum online where they can build on the knowledge accessed through the training program. This isn't just a tick-box training program, this is a grass-roots led skills project which we plan to continue and develop as a training and project platform in Digital Humanities. Doctoral students and Early Career Researchers in the UK, don't just sit back, join us and see where it leads.

Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Author

Emma Goodwin is Principal Investigator of the AHRC-funded Collaborative Skills Project, 'Promoting Interdisciplinary Engagement in the Digital Humanities' (dhAHRC). Emma also set up the DHCrowdScribe and Crowd Map The Crusades digital projects, which are affiliated to the dhAHRC project and supported by the Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities (TORCH). She will be presenting 'Crowd Map The Crusades' at Edinburgh University on June 9 and giving a talk on "Obtaining the Unobtainable: The Holy Grail of Seed Funding for Small-Scale Digital Projects" at the Digital Humanities at Oxford Summer School on July 16. dhAHRC workshops will be held in Oxford on June 13 and at the British Library, London on June 27.

- Copyright © The Author (or The Authors) - Unless otherwise stated, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Unported 3.0 License.