

Digital Scriptorium 2.0:

A National Union Catalog of Pre-modern Manuscripts in US Collections for the Digital Age

Summary: The University of Pennsylvania, on behalf of the consortium Digital Scriptorium (DS), requests a National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives planning grant of \$100,000 from the National Leadership Grants for Libraries program to support the exploratory phase of redeveloping DS's digital platform in order to create a new digital infrastructure based on linked open data technologies. The objective of this project is to transform the digital platform into an inclusive, open access, online national union catalog of pre-modern manuscripts housed in US collections. It will also serve as a model for how to rebuild an outdated digital project into a viable and sustainable online resource.

Statement of National Need: DS is a consortium of 34 institutional members representing American libraries and museums across the country (<http://www.digital-scriptorium.org/>). A 501(c)(3) organization, DS is led by a Board of Directors composed of seven elected representatives of fee-paying member institutions. DS is and has been committed to providing free cross-institutional digital access to member collections with pre-modern manuscripts through an online database open to the public. When it began in 1997, DS realized success as an early adopter of digital and web technologies with a rudimentary online platform that addressed the immediate needs of access and discoverability for United States institutions with pre-modern manuscript collections. Since then, its online database, accessible via its website, has grown to serve an international community of scholars, teachers, and students.

DS in its current state, however, faces serious threats to its sustainability if it does not adapt to meet the user and member institution demands that these new technologies have created. Users today expect free, facile, and open access to all library content, but many institutions, especially smaller ones, struggle to digitize and catalog their rare and ancient materials. Larger institutions may have the resources to create their own platforms, but separately managed approaches to digital access of early manuscripts have created a crisis of incompatible data produced without common standards or controlled vocabularies.

DS 2.0 will build on the strengths of its invested membership and existing data to adapt to this constantly changing digital landscape. A national union catalog based on a sustainable digital infrastructure will provide a center of authority control and standardization for manuscript cataloging practices, discovery, and access. In doing so, DS 2.0 will serve as leading model for providing access to these artifacts of our shared intellectual and cultural heritage in the digital age. DS 2.0 is committed to achieving these objectives:

- Provide a low barrier to both the contribution and use of metadata and images
- Build upon a clear and adaptable data model
- Employ linked and linkable data
- Support interoperability with other manuscript research projects
- Allow content contributors to maintain ownership of data while sharing in the benefits of national collaboration

Project Design: DS 2.0 develop in two phases: Planning (Phase I) and Implementation (Phase II). The current proposal seeks funding to support Phase I, a planning term of one year to achieve the following four goals: 1) refine the purpose and scope of DS 2.0, 2) develop the DS 2.0 data model, 3) create a plan for technological sustainability, and 4) create a plan for financial

sustainability. Phase I is based upon a 12-month work plan. The first step would be to hire a full-time Project Manager (PM). Working closely with the DS Board of Directors, the PM would drive the workflow of Phase I goals listed above, manage communications among the Board of Directors and DS stakeholders throughout Phase I, and organize and run two planning meetings. The first meeting, held Month 1, will bring together DS members, technical experts, and other stakeholders to refine the scope of DS 2.0 and confirm a roadmap for Phase 1. The second meeting will be held in Month 11 to assess Phase I progress and begin planning for Phase II.

In addition to the above duties, the PM will consult weekly with the Board of Directors on progress, draft a data model design in consultation with IT specialists at Penn and member institutions, and represent DS 2.0 at professional conferences and meetings. The final product of the PM's tenure will be a fully detailed proposal for implementation, including key partners, timeline, data model, and budget, as the basis for an application for a 3-year implementation grant.

Diversity Plan: Our aim is to broaden representation of and access to pre-modern manuscripts across languages, geographies, and cultural traditions in US collections. By presenting metadata and images of holdings across public/private, rural/urban, and large/small institutional special collections, DS 2.0 will activate collections and allow consistent discoverability for all users. Our free and open-access platform will eliminate geographic and financial barriers that have hindered or privileged the study and scholarship of pre-modern manuscripts and other rare materials from around the world. DS 2.0 will also provide the technological tools and expertise to support under-described collections and elevate them to the same level of discoverability as those of larger research institutions.

National Impact: As a national union catalog of pre-modern manuscripts in the US, DS 2.0 will galvanize manuscript studies through multi-institutional collaboration and provide a platform for international collaboration and data sharing. DS has already been invited, for example, to participate in the newly established International Standard for Manuscript Identifiers Consortium, led by the Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes in Paris. DS 2.0 will also provide an unequalled resource for underrepresented US libraries and museums to make otherwise hidden and understudied manuscript holdings available to researchers, teachers, students, curators, and librarians around the world. A planning grant will make possible a thoughtful, successful, and sustainable approach to creating such a resource that will stand as a model for similar projects.

Budget Summary: Total anticipated costs: \$100,000

- \$80,000: Salary and benefits for a full-time PM who, working closely with the DS Board of Directors, will drive development of Phase I goals. The PM will possess both experience working with online cataloging and digitization projects and a background in a relevant humanities discipline. Penn Libraries will administer this position.
- \$15,000: To support two planning meetings to be held at the beginning and end of the planning year. Funds support conference travel and accommodation costs for up to 6 invited outside consultants and stakeholders at each meeting.
- \$5000: For PM's travel expenses to partner organizations, DS member institutions, and professional conferences to publicize the project.