Introduction

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We assembled this book because, when we needed this book, it did not exist. And yet, scholars across a variety of disciplines were already involved in community-engaged digital projects. How were they navigating the fragile relationships between communities and the academy? What aspects of community engagement change with the addition of digital components? How do communities change the technologies scholars choose? If we grouped these projects together, would there be something cohesive that might be called digital community engagement?

We fondly refer to our volume as DiCE, our attempt at an acronym for digital community engagement that accidentally stuck. This volume is a series of nine curated case studies focusing on projects that emerged through the creative engagement of community partners with academic faculty, staff, and students. These partnerships formed in classrooms, through institutional initiatives, and as components of individual research agendas. We collected essays from scholars who co-authored with their community partners (wherever possible) to describe their projects, the digital components, and what made them successful and meaningful. The projects all take various shapes, form partnerships along different lines, include and define “community” in distinct ways, and utilize a host of digital tools. We believe that, when viewed as a whole, these exemplary projects form a cohesive practice.
What is DiCE?

DiCE blends established digital humanities, public humanities, and community engagement practices. We recognize the importance of digital and public humanities broadly construed, grounded in many of the discussions, whether theoretical, practical, or pedagogical. We three editors, however, are trained as historians. We play to our strengths in this volume by drawing from the larger field of digital and public humanities while situating ourselves more firmly in digital and public history. Our academic contributors are also primarily historians, but not exclusively so. Although we looked outside of our discipline, the projects we found most compelling were typically history-related or otherwise examined change over time. This focus created greater cohesion for the projects described in this volume and helped us draw upon the vibrant conversations in history and related fields.

Scholars in these fields are increasingly thinking about community engagement in the digital age. During the National Council on Public History’s annual meeting in 2017, a working group called “Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital World” assembled to discuss common issues in using digital methodologies when partnering with communities and using digital platforms to reach a wider public.¹ The American Historical Association held its first workshop on digital community engagement during the 2018 Getting Started in Digital History workshops. Imagining America, an organization that brings together scholars, students, and community partners, released a special issue of Public about digital civic engagement in 2018. Serge Noiret and Mark Tebeau are currently editing the Oxford Handbook of Digital Public History that includes a couple of chapters on community engagement and shared authority.

Ours is the first volume fully devoted to DiCE, but its exploratory (rather than definitive) nature will perhaps raise more questions than it will answer. Even the three fields we draw upon—digital history, public history, and community engagement—have contested meanings and definitions. The number of definitions on “What is Digital Humanities?” alone is staggering (and occasionally quite poignant and funny). Rather than offering yet another
definition for either digital humanities or digital history, we instead want to highlight and embrace digital humanities’ potential for social change. In what we hope isn’t misguided optimism, we believe that digital humanities has the capacity to positively shape the study of the arts, culture, and social sciences. We believe it can do so while promoting inclusion, justice, and recovery with beneficial impact for communities.

This element of the humanities, however, needs constant invigoration lest the field become complacent, or worse, hidebound and irrelevant. Kathleen Woodward, citing Herbert Blau’s 1969 essay that “bursts with blooded thought [. . .] about participatory democracy in the wake of the student revolution,” argues that we need to “reclaim that sense of intellectual urgency.”2 Gerald Early further explores this disciplinary tension in his article on the historical links between the humanities and social change: “At any given moment, [humanists] see themselves either as cultural gatecrashers and agents of radical social change or cultural gatekeepers and champions of tradition.”3 Digital humanists have built upon this analog work as they interrogate the power structures that undergird everything from individual technological choices to the field writ large.4 These same choices in technology have implications for the communities involved, including ownership, sustainability, and reach. It is this civicly engaged current that shaped our selection of the included projects, as you’ll read in the chapters ahead.

Public humanists increasingly sought the inclusion and participation of diverse voices in humanistic inquiry since the social and cultural turn of the 1960s.5 More specifically, public historians have actively invited the public to participate in history-making. Nina Simon’s The Participatory Museum is an inspired exploration of how museums across the globe are staying relevant in the twenty-first century by developing scalable participatory experiences. Of particular note is Simon’s chapter on co-creating history with the public that describes the museum as a place for dialogue and community engagement, centered on the needs of the community itself.6 In a similar vein, the edited volume Letting Go?: Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World probes what it means for museums and museum practitioners to share authority with the public in an increasingly complicated world.7 The popularity of the term
“a shared authority” can be traced back to Michael Frisch’s book *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. In this sweeping collection of essays, Frisch delves into the potential of treating the public as equal partners in history-making.8

Given the works outlined above, it should come as no surprise that public and digital history have intertwining trajectories. This is not because publishing academic scholarship online calls upon some cosmic forces that merge the web and the ability to reach a wider public, and thus digital public history is born. Stommel succinctly states, “Doing public work is different from making academic work public. Available is not always accessible.”9 Writing for the web requires a similar ability to communicate beyond the academy. Sheila Brennan also argues that “understanding audiences is not a skill most humanities scholars are taught in graduate school, but it is a key element for successful digital projects.”10

Good communication skills aren’t the primary reason digital and public history can be a powerful pairing. Digital tools and platforms open opportunities for public humanists who have, more often than not, been in the vanguard of the “digital turn.” Public digital humanities practitioners (especially archivists and librarians) have always been one step (or more) ahead of traditional humanists in integrating digital tools and critically examining structures of information on the web.11 Public historians specifically, as Simon and the contributors to *Letting Go?* demonstrate, have the drive to experiment as they work to make good, relevant history. It was the insatiable curiosity of historians who experimented with the digital medium that forced a field to grow around them.12 Incidentally, this is also what makes digital and public history so much fun.

A few preeminent scholars have specifically examined how the digital affects public history. As Sharon Leon argues, “to use fully the affordances of digital technologies, public historians have begun to shift the ways in which they work, organize and structure historical content, and engage with public audiences.”13 Leon reserves a section of her argument to specifically address the web as a portal through which the public can engage with history as active participants, rather than just as passive consumers. This follows a shift
in the very infrastructure of the web itself, from “read” to “read-write.” The web generates exciting opportunities for public engagement outside of and in addition to traditional venues.

In 2017, Stephen Robertson and Lincoln Mullen assembled twenty-five prominent digital historians, including Leon and one of our editors (Jason Heppler), to provide historians with the rationale and language to discuss digital scholarship in productive ways. The working group argues that one of the key differences between digital public history and print narratives is that digital projects often “[incorporate] the sources themselves as a central element, which can allow for more analysis and engagement. They also often take advantage of the digital medium to incorporate non-textual sources as well as visual argumentation including graphs and maps.” Also included in Robertson and Mullen’s working group were Edward Ayers and William G. Thomas III, two authors of one of the first web-based digital history projects. *The Valley of the Shadow Project* chronicled daily life in two counties, one north and one south of the Mason-Dixon line, in the Civil War. The project sought materials and other ephemera from local community members (as well as archives, libraries, and museums) to contribute to the digital archive.

That’s right. Digital projects involved community from its earliest days.

And it is with the intersection of digital and public humanities and history in mind that we turn our attention to the “community engagement” portion of DiCE. Communities commonly define themselves through three facets: shared demography, experiences/interests, and geography. Community exhibits itself, as Benedict Anderson once wrote, as a “deep, horizontal comradeship” that binds groups of people together. In the pages ahead, our communities find themselves in shifting Venn diagrams of these facets. For example, the predominantly African American community of Rondo in St. Paul, Minnesota, defines itself through demography and geography, but also a shared fracture of that community by a concrete freeway bifurcating its neighborhood. The people of La Crosse, Wisconsin, share a statue with a controversial history even as its collective historical memory remains contested. This three-pronged definition of community, as these examples indicate, is fairly common throughout our volume.
We also observed an exciting trend in our collection: some projects used digital tools to bring together a community that did not previously recognize themselves as such. One of Amy Sullivan’s projects brought together harm reduction workers in Minneapolis active in the 1980s via social media. Sullivan’s event included people who organized the country’s first women-focused needle exchange programs, among others. In so doing, the participants realized that they formed a broader community of harm reduction specialists; they comprised an important local and national history of which they didn’t even know they were a part. Similarly, James Connolly and Patrick Collier maintain an online collection of daily diaries from residents of Muncie, Indiana. The diarists submit and interact with each others’ entries anonymously. They form a virtual community and have never met in person—that they know of, anyway. We don’t have a crystal ball, but we suspect that many more academic projects will explore this type of community formation in the future.

When we use the term “community engagement,” we refer to reciprocal (rather than extractive) academic collaborations with communities where each side is accountable to a project. This is akin to the fine distinction Frisch makes between “shared authority” and “a shared authority”; the former implies that historians have authority that they may deign to share, while the latter is built upon equal meaning-making by its very definition. Simon likewise distinguishes between co-creation and collaboration: “Co-creative projects originate in partnership with participants rather than based solely on institutional goals.” She continues, “While co-creative and collaborative processes are often quite similar, co-creative projects start with community as well as institutional needs.” Our decision to include or exclude a project from this volume typically fell along this line: are the projects built with communities, or for communities? We sought projects for this volume that did not just provide venues through which community voices are heard, but that actively sought their equal co-creation.

Community-engaged practice is closely aligned with the goals and methods of civic engagement and civic tech, or the creation of tools “to improve public life.” Supporting our belief that the powers of digital humanities can
be wielded for good, a major goal of civic engagement projects is to effect positive social change in a variety of ways, such as by influencing public policy or contributing expertise or labor to a community organization. Effecting broader social change is not a necessary outcome for DiCE projects, though, as our projects demonstrate, it may indeed be an outcome.

Similarly, DiCE projects often draw upon the approaches and values developed in the field of academic civic engagement, which encompasses community-based research, place-based engagement, public scholarship, and service learning or community-based learning. Over the past three decades, higher education networks and consortia such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Bringing Theory to Practice, Campus Compact, the Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Foundation, Imagining America, and Project Pericles have advanced the institutionalization of civic engagement on individual campuses and advocated for the importance of the civic mission in higher education. By drawing together practitioners, these networks have supported pedagogies focused on student development and learning through mutually beneficial campus-community partnerships and the valuing of engagement as components of faculty scholarship and work. Scholars and leaders in the field have increasingly raised questions of equity in engaged practices and advocated for projects that are co-created with community stakeholders.

While higher education’s civic engagement mission provides broader frameworks for considering student development, campus-community collaborations, and faculty work, it rarely takes into account digital methodologies. Though student involvement is not mandatory in DiCE projects (and only half of the projects highlighted in this book have it), we believe that DiCE is, at least in part, an extension of the academic civic engagement movement.

It figures that digital and public history scholars have something to say about community engagement. “The public digital humanities starts with humans, not technologies or tools,” Stommel notes. “[Its] terrain must be continuously co-constructed. There is no place within the public digital humanities for exclusion or anti-intellectualism. No place for hierarchies. . .” The Arguing with Digital History working group also focused on the ethical
considerations of community-engaged practice. Emphasizing community authority, they argue that “historians working with communities have an obligation to engage with those communities on their own terms.” In *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, Wendy Hsu addresses the potential power of community knowledge by asserting that when scholars practice listening, they can “learn from the public,” and that when we do, we can yield a “more efficacious and engaged public humanities work.” She ends the chapter with a plea: “Humanists, I urge you to leverage your knowledge of the digital as a tool of community building. Working, listening, and making in proximity with communities will bring us closer to the co-imagination of a socially just world.”

As the tone in all these works indicates, digital and public history scholarship about community-engaged practice has primarily been geared toward practitioners in the field. In large part, these works have focused on driving questions and practical information for public historians as they pursue community-engaged work. These publications are certainly important; however, we need to shift the conversation of DiCE back to the community.

Where our collection seeks to intervene is by exploring the impact of technology on community engagement from the perspective of academics and the communities we serve. Our volume tries to reverse the typical practice of talking *about* communities by talking *with* communities. We examine the ways that technology has empowered communities, promoted collaboration, constructed or collapsed barriers, and sparked new dialogue. We believe the case studies in this volume raise important questions for the broader civic engagement movement and public digital humanities fields: Who benefits from the digital projects and the knowledge they produce, and how? Who owns them? How does DiCE impact the benefits and risks to communities when they partner with the academy? What are the pedagogical implications? How can physical and digital projects compliment each other?

About this Volume

Before we introduce each chapter, we want to call attention to a few overarching themes of this volume. First, we argue that digital engagement may help
reinvigorate humanities fields such as history, but it must do so in ways that contribute to the community and minimize risk. From the position of a historian, William G. Thomas III astutely remarked over ten years ago, “The Web 2.0 movement might allow historians and the public to make history together rather than separately. The professional barriers are significant, but our professional relevance is also at stake in the digital age.”27 Given the sharp decline in humanities majors over the past decade, we think Thomas was correct in his assessment that humanists need to actively assert their relevance.28 Community engagement is certainly one way to do that, but communities aren’t here to save our disciplines. As Wingo asserts in a later chapter, “communities aren’t an endless supply of generosity that scholars can mine at will with no reciprocity or compensation.”29 Communities typically have more of a stake in the projects than their academic partners. Fruitful partnerships between communities and the academy help pave the way for digital projects that provide access to community sources while also enabling communities to act as archivists, curators, and experts themselves.30

Towards that end, our academic contributors made every effort to include their community partners as co-creators in their chapters as well as in the projects they describe. This looks different in each chapter, taking the form of full-fledged co-authorship, interviews, devoted written sections or vignettes, and solicited feedback. Although we privilege digital community engagement, we would not want to promote the idea that such projects are entirely digital. The labor involved includes countless hours of face-to-face time that are often unbound from the quarter, semester, or academic year. The amount of time spent in church basements, at powwows, at community centers, in neighborhoods, and in living rooms is an essential ingredient of co-creation and trust-building. In other words, our contributors keep their focus on people, not technology.

Second, our volume is not all-encompassing. We are missing important voices among Indigenous peoples, disability studies, and Queer studies, among others. We also recognize that our chapters are American-focused and that there is a growing interest in facilitating international public history conversations.31 These voices are not absent for lack of trying. The academy often
Introduction

overburdens those engaged with undervalued public scholarship and communities. Some of the people we asked could not participate for any variety of reasons, knowing that they had to balance contributions to this book with other commitments.

We also recognize that these and other communities with whom we partner could become targets of harassment in a digital environment where doxxing, cyberbullying, surveillance, threats of, or actual, violence, racism, sexism, and bigotry are sadly prevalent. We hope that does not dissuade potential partners and institutions from working together to carve out safe spaces to co-produce compelling projects. The choice of digital tools and approaches to partnerships should always reflect mindfulness concerning privacy and harassment. Some of these issues are addressed in the pages ahead.

Third, academic-community partnerships often navigate complicated imbalances of power, particularly if the academic collaborators are white and the communities with whom they partner are marginalized or underrepresented. Since there is no universal code of collaborative conduct, we asked the contributors to address how they adapted their partnerships to reflect a more egalitarian practice. Each negotiation of power happens on an individual basis and is often contingent on the people involved. We hope that the examples to come will at least provide some insight into successful practices.

Furthermore, public scholarship in general is undervalued in the academy. For non-tenure-track faculty, librarians, practitioners, and staff, this type of labor is often conducted outside of their assigned duties. Some places have institutionalized community engagement as part of their mission; others have not. The academy rarely affords these scholars the security and remuneration needed to advance their projects and careers. Speaking to tenure and promotion specifically, a joint white paper by the American Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, and National Council on Public History has noted that community engagement—“a vital component of public history”—is largely “relegated to the undervalued category of service.” The effect is that public historians take on a larger workload. To remain engaged in the field they must remain publicly engaged scholars, yet their promotion is largely judged on the basis of traditional publications.32
Women often bear the brunt of this undervaluation. They have taken on key leadership roles in digital public history and community engagement projects (indeed, most of our contributors are women), yet that labor is still undervalued by professional structures. While we know that women are under-cited across academic fields, the same structures in academic labor also slow the advancement of women and fail to recognize contributions, leadership, and innovation. These structures, labor, and prestige will require continual work and revision.

The nine DiCE projects that follow reflect a diversity of topics and forms of academic-community collaborations. They share common struggles with central issues such as how to establish generative relationships, support shared authority, and find ways to sustain projects through uncertain economic and political moments. DiCE projects emerge in academic courses, as the product of individual professors’ activism or research projects, or in alliances formed by entities such as libraries and archives both attached to and detached from the academy. The DiCE projects featured in this book all reconstitute or amplify voices otherwise marginalized or silenced in history and the present. We believe that academics and communities can learn from each others’ methodologies, and have assembled a collection of inspiring chapters that share a common commitment to co-creative collaborations.

We open with what is perhaps the most seamless co-authorship represented in the book: the SNCC Digital Gateway. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), formed in the 1960s as a multiracial grassroots activist movement, focused on Black voter registration in the American South. SNCC veterans were frustrated by the academy’s Great Man focus for a movement that rejected the top-down approach to leadership and actively invited women to participate. In 2013, they did something brave: they approached Duke University Libraries and the Center for Documentary Studies and asked them to help tell a different story. The result was the SNCC Digital Gateway, a web portal with SNCC artifacts, interviews with veterans, and modern resources for other activist organizers. Part of their funding stipulated that one of the deliverables be a document about the collaboration. Karlyn Forner, the project manager, introduces the collaborative document
in Chapter 1, and the remainder is a guide to the successful partnership, co-authored by sixteen community and campus partners.

Chapter 2 features the People’s Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland (PAPVC). In November 2014, Cleveland police officer Timothy Loehmann shot and killed Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old Black youth. The following August, the Society of American Archivists convened in Cleveland for their annual conference, among them Melissa Hubbard, who, along with others, approached community groups seeking justice and the prevention of future violence to document police violence in the northern Ohio city. Unlike the SNCC Digital Gateway and many of the other projects in this volume, the PAPVC is freestanding, unattached to any academic institution. It is an anomaly in our collection. Hubbard explores the ethics of creating the archive, issues of ownership, and positionality. The Cleveland community partners involved in the PAPVC are the exact audience the SNCC Digital Gateway hopes to serve.

The three chapters that follow all center around a shared methodology: the History Harvest. The History Harvest is a pedagogically driven community digitization event in which community participants bring their items of significance for contribution to a digital archive. Chapter 3 examines the partnership between Rebecca Wingo, her students at Macalester College, and the Rondo community. In the late 1960s, the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul weaponized interstate construction by building a highway through the central business district of a predominantly Black community called Rondo. Marvin R. Anderson, the co-founder of Rondo Avenue, Inc., spent the better part of fifty years fighting for recognition for what happened to his community. The partnership between Wingo and Anderson resulted in a three-year collaboration producing the Remembering Rondo History Harvest, the co-creation of panels for the Rondo Commemorative Plaza, and an internship on the PCR project that seeks to build a land bridge over the highway. The depth of the partnership (and ultimately friendship) between Anderson and Wingo demonstrates the value of longevity in community engagement—when scholars and communities focus on broader goals rather than singular points of engagement, the sky’s the limit on the types of projects that can follow.
The flexibility of the History Harvest is one of its strengths. Chapter 4 discusses the same methodology, reimagined and reshaped to fit the historically Black Antioch A.M.E. Church northeast of Atlanta. In this chapter, co-authors Julia Brock, Elayne Washington Hunter, Robin Morris, and Shaneé Murrain discuss their variation on the History Harvest with the Antioch A.M.E. Church. As with Rondo, the production of the archive produced generative conversations and served as a mechanism by which the archive actually became secondary to developing a long-standing partnership between the congregation and the collaborators at the University of West Georgia and Agnes Scott College. The partners involved are still negotiating and navigating community needs.

Chapter 5 explores the History Harvest as an instrument for meaning-making. Amy Sullivan, a collaborator on the first Rondo History Harvest, turned the model toward her own research. She and her students hosted what can only be described as two overdue reunions, one between harm reduction specialists active in Minneapolis in the 1980s, and the other between Oklahoma Girl Scouts cut off from one another and their camp after the murder and sexual assault of three campers in 1977. Both groups experienced extreme trauma and silencing. What’s genuinely compelling about Sullivan’s application of the History Harvest, however, is that she reconstituted these powerful groups via digital means. As previously mentioned, the harm reduction activists and advocates in Minneapolis did not even recognize their role in the history of harm reduction until Sullivan assembled them for the Harvest. Likewise, the Girl Scouts knew they were part of a significant story but were never afforded an opportunity to share and document their experiences. They suffered their PTSD alone, until Sullivan used a Facebook group to bring former campers together in Oklahoma. Campers flew in from all over the country to attend the reunion. The furthest was from Oregon.

The project featured in Chapter 6, *Everyday Life in Middletown (EDLM)*, also used digital means to form their communities. In *EDLM*, Patrick Collier and James Connolly at Ball State University follow up on Middletown Studies, founded in Muncie, Indiana, in 1929. Based on the British theory of Mass Observation, the project seeks (and historically sought) to record the minutiae
of the daily life of ordinary American citizens by soliciting diaries. *EDLM*’s diarists are anonymous and their work is screened for any information that may reveal their identities. Diaries interact with each other anonymously as well, sparking conversations across race, gender, and socioeconomic status that may not otherwise occur. The project site is a searchable digital archive of day diaries that includes visualization tools developed by the project team to produce accessible textual analysis. While *EDLM* is place-based in Muncie, Collier and Connolly hope to export the model to other communities.

Chapter 7 counters another form of invisibility—the *Invisible Project* is a place-based collection of digital stories designed to raise awareness about homelessness in Porter County, Indiana. The project is the result of a partnership between two Valparaiso University professors, Allison Schuette and Elizabeth Wuerffel (Departments of English and Art, respectively), and Megan Telligman, the then-coordinator of the Porter County Museum (now at Indiana Humanities). Together with Valparaiso students, the team created a hybrid project that combined the searchable online archive of digital stories, art, and infographics with a travelling exhibition that toured the county, and audio spotlights on public radio. The authors address the ethics of telling the stories of homelessness when it carries so much stigma. They navigate this in a variety of ways, including giving final say concerning publishing the edited stories to the individuals interviewed. Local advocates later used the project to influence the mayor’s decision to build new affordable housing.

The next project, *Hear, Here*, also significantly influenced public policy in La Crosse, Wisconsin, when it contributed to the retirement of a large, caricaturish statue of a Native American located on sacred Ho-Chunk lands. *Hear, Here* is a pedagogical oral history project produced by Ariel Beaujot, a history professor at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. The project’s main interface is a series of signs posted around downtown La Crosse inviting passersby to call a phone number and listen to a place-based oral history; the caller is then invited to contribute their own story. Beaujot and her students actively partnered with local community organizations to amplify the voices of marginalized communities in La Crosse, once a “sundown town.” There is a web portal with archived stories, a contribution hub, and a sample
curriculum for expansion of the project into other classrooms and cities. As the project collected stories, Beaujot noticed a confluence around a downtown statue called “Hiawatha.” She then sought out story contributors and local activist groups to see how her project, students, and skills as a historian might be useful. The statue is slated for relocation to private property away from La Crosse’s historic downtown.

Wrapping up the volume, Aubrey Thompson, a staff member at the University of California, Davis, and Ildi Carlisle-Cummins of the California Institute for Rural Studies reflect on the lessons they learned while collaborating to research and produce the podcast episode “There’s Nothing More Californian than Ketchup,” which explores the controversial history of the mechanical tomato harvester. The fruits of their collaboration became the first podcast of the California Institute for Rural Studies’ Cal Ag Roots project, which “puts historical roots under current California food and farming change movements by telling the story of California agricultural development in innovative, useful and relevant ways.” Their chapter includes text and audio conversations between the two collaborators about how their research attempted to bridge the campus-community divide while drawing on academic and community knowledge to provide historical background on contemporary agricultural issues. The authors grapple with their own positions as scholars and advocates and the institutional responsibility of UC Davis in the creation of the tomato harvester, which made California’s Central Valley the center of U.S. tomato production but also concentrated farm production and put farmer laborers out of work.

In addition to the campus-community collaborations highlighted in these chapters, DiCE projects often require campus collaboration among faculty, archivists, librarians, technology specialists, and civic engagement professionals to create ethical, effective, and sustainable projects. These campus collaborations must overcome institutional silos, different reporting structures, and systems that may not sufficiently recognize the often-invisible labor that academic staff contribute behind the scenes. For example, civic engagement staff can facilitate projects that build on existing partnerships, train class-based projects in ethical engagement, and nurture community
relationships after individual class projects have ended. Archivists and librarians too consider ways to maintain projects and make them accessible for stakeholders beyond the boundaries of a course. Successful campus collaborations draw upon the assets of higher education for community benefit and help higher education institutions fulfill their civic missions.

* As we noted previously, DiCE is a blending of digital public humanities and community engagement practices. But what exactly does the digital change about community engagement? Primarily, it asks new questions about our technological choices, the ownership of digital material, the sustainability of the technology chosen for a project, and access to funding. While books have a well-defined path for preservation, digital products do not. One only needs to look as far as Myspace and its accidental deletion of twelve years of music produced by its community to see the fragility of digital material.34 There are both up-front and long-term decisions to be made about infrastructure, tools, platforms, and frameworks, as well as ease of use, for different technology options. Choices about infrastructure, like any aspect of a DiCE project, require input from the community. Such projects need to meet community members where they are—whether that engages ease of use, capabilities that can take into account things like language or culture, or accessibility. Such choices also mean determining who becomes responsible for a project’s long-term access and preservation, among academic staff and community members, as well as funding sources. Despite the internet’s seeming ubiquity and easy access, the “cloud” has monetary and labor costs that are borne by institutions, projects, and people. Similar to any digital humanities project, such choices must be thought through; what changes is that those decisions are coordinated with the community.

It is equally significant that there are some aspects of community engagement that do not change with the addition of the digital. Digital technologies do not change the need to decenter the academy by placing the community’s own knowledge and questions at the fore, which opens the opportunity for genuine co-creation.35 Poorly conceived, however, a digital project may offer a substandard substitute for real engagement—a form of distancing rather than creating relationships across difference. Digital technologies also do not
change the need to take deliberate steps to earn community trust, built at the speed of the community. This is an organic process of face-to-face contact, transparency, and open communication, as well as a healthy mixture of structured and informal engagement (regular check-ins and attendance at community functions). In the best-case scenario, stakeholders legitimately enjoy one another, and these small encounters can build up to larger successes.

It’s past time for a volume of this nature, and we hope the examples to follow inspire new projects that advance the conversations about community engagement in the digital age. Community members have the most at stake in the success of the project. Their inclusion in this volume is essential—their voices, their willingness to trust academic institutions, their comfort with sharing stories, and their eagerness to co-create form the backbone of any DiCE project. We’ve tried to reciprocate their time, trust, and efforts by publishing this volume as an open access book, which we hope, in some small way, reduces potential barriers between our work and those we seek to serve. Like other forms of academic-community partnerships, digital community engagement can be either empowering or disempowering. We do this for our partners and those partners to come.

Notes

1. Several of the contributors to this volume participated in this working group including Ariel Beaujot, Julia Brock, and Karlyn Forner.
4. The most comprehensive work in this vein was assembled in Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel, *Disrupting the Digital Humanities* (New York: Punctum Books, 2018). We also recommend Moya Z. Bailey, “All the Digital Humanities are White, All the Nerds are Men, but Some of us are Brave,” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1 (2011); Alan Liu, “The Meaning of the Digital Humanities,” *PMLA* 128 (2013): 409-423; and Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont, eds., *Bodies of
Information: Intersectional Feminism and Digital Humanities (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), especially the chapter by Sharon Leon.


17. This phenomenon is not unique to our volume. The *Georgetown Slavery Archive*, for example, located the descendants of the 272 enslaved women, men, and children they sold to keep their university afloat in 1838. These citizens did not know they were a community until researchers actively traced their lineage back to the GU272.


29. Wingo, Chapter 3.


31. See especially the work of Thomas Cauvin, President of the International Federation for Public History.


33. Leon, “Beyond the Principal Investigator,” and Bailey, “All the Digital Humanities Are White, All the Nerds Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave.”


35. Brennan, “Public, First.”

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