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MANIFOLD MOVES TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY, PROMOTES LEARNING AND EQUITY WITH TWO MAJOR GRANTS

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(MINNEAPOLIS, MN)—The digital publication platform Manifold Scholarship will enter a new phase of its development, supported by two major grants, one from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and one from the National Endowment for the Humanities, allowing Manifold to solidify its structure for future sustainability and to expand its work as a leading provider of digital Open Educational Resources (OERs). Manifold, a collaboration between the GC Digital Scholarship Lab at the CUNY Graduate Center, Cast Iron Coding, and the University of Minnesota Press, is an open-source platform that enables publishers to create media-rich, interactive digital publications and extend the educational benefits and access of this scholarship to more communities.

“Manifold is an innovative platform that exemplifies the University’s vision of integrated research and teaching,” says Chris Cramer, Vice President for Research at the University of Minnesota. “It demonstrates a creative and collaborative spirit that crosses scholarly boundaries and disciplines, and its open-access, open-source orientation allows it to transfer knowledge out of the university to the benefit of the general public, especially underserved communities.”

The Manifold team is charting its course to sustainability through the engagement of its community, formalizing four different participation levels—Manifold Publisher, Partner, Sustaining Partner, and Sponsor—that encompass a range of financial contributions and knowledge sharing. Through the shared wisdom and resources of the community, Manifold plans to grow and meet the needs of established and nontraditional publishers. Underlying this structure will be the implementation of a sustainable business, Manifold Digital Services, which will offer hosting, training, and support packages. Over the next two years, with support from the Mellon Foundation, the Manifold team will expand the Manifold informational website (manifoldapp.org) with a significant expansion of the resources offered on the site, including a series of training videos and a broader listing of services. Development work will focus on new solutions for installation and hosting, enhancing Manifold’s documentation, developing platform features for a growing and diversifying community of publishers, and establishing GDPR compliance to better serve European publishers. These activities expand the scope of Manifold’s work of transforming scholarly publishing, while maintaining its commitment to open-source development and open-access publications.

A concurrent grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, “Manifold in the Classroom,” will enable the platform to fill a growing need for cost-effective educational solutions, with a focus on underserved communities. Adding teaching-specific features to Manifold Scholarship will expand its capacity to act as an OER platform that will engage students with dynamic, customized course versions of open-access, openly licensed, or public-domain texts. This expansion will require Manifold to build out front-end functionality for annotations and resources, but also to redesign the back end to support OER workflows such as remixing materials and evaluating student work. This grant will help Manifold accommodate scholars using the latest digital humanities methods, such as data visualization, mapping, and network analysis, in new ways but also help to make this scholarship available to vast numbers of underserved students through free, open-access course materials.

Matthew K. Gold, Associate Professor of English and Digital Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center, notes that “Manifold is already being used at a number of institutions across the country, including CUNY, the University of Washington, and Temple University, to share course materials with students, who love Manifold’s beautiful design and mobile-friendly interface. With a slate of OER and teaching-focused services and features supported by grants from the Mellon Foundation, the NEH Office of Digital Humanities, and CUNY Library Services, Manifold will be well positioned to serve as a course platform across a number of academic disciplines, all while building on its already-established identity as a publishing platform for open-access texts.”

Manifold will continue to expand its user base with a commitment to promoting equity and justice in the humanities—not only through the educational materials it provides but through the publishers it empowers through the platform. In 2021 and 2022, Manifold will supply eighteen new publishers with a year of managed hosting and training support through Manifold Digital Services Support Grants, funded with generous support from the Mellon Foundation. As it has in previous grants, Manifold will continue to prioritize and reach out to diverse publishers, including those who represent marginalized academic communities and publish projects in service of social justice. Additionally, Manifold will continue its work with the accessibility team at the University of Washington to ensure that its platform is accessible to readers of all abilities.

Doug Armato, Director of the University of Minnesota Press, says: “We’re committed to enhancing Manifold’s functionality in a way that serves the needs of all readers, including those who are differently abled, and also continuing to expand our community of publishers, teachers, and students to include those who represent traditionally marginalized communities and perspectives. We believe a powerful open-source publishing tool such as Manifold can do much to break down the barriers to access that still characterize higher education.”

Development of Manifold Scholarship began in April 2015, and the platform launched publicly with Release 1.0 in March 2018. Publishers, and any group wanting to create open-access projects on the web, can quickly and easily turn existing files into online publications, through a robust ingestion system that can import texts from EPUB, HTML, Markdown, Microsoft Word (docx), and Google Doc source files. Currently in Release 5.1.3, notable recent improvements to the platform include Reading Groups, which allows teachers and other academic leaders to invite collaborators to collectively annotate, highlight, comment upon, and share texts; and Access Controls, which allows publishers to set limits on access to projects, enhancing the privacy options in Manifold and laying the groundwork for publishers to offer paid content through the platform.

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For more information, visit:
<https://manifoldapp.org/>