3. Environmental Scan and Literature Review

Conducting an in-depth environmental scan and literature review early in the planning process is a critical step to see if there are existing projects that are similar to your own or that may accomplish similar goals to your potential project. Sometimes, the planning process stops after the scan. Typically, a scan is useful in crafting and justifying "the need" section of a grant proposal. Performing an environmental scan can position your proposed project as filling a clear need not fulfilled by current projects, tools, or programs.

Successful project proposals demonstrate knowledge of the ecosystem of existing projects in your field, and the field's response to those projects. Scans often help organizations identify potential collaborators, national initiatives, publications, articles, or professional organizations, which in turn can demonstrate a wider exigency for your project. Following a preliminary scan, you should be able to explain why your project is important to the field, what it provides that does not currently exist, and how your project can serve as a leader or example to other organizations in such a way that they can put your findings to new use.

Below are *suggestions* for finding similar projects and initiatives in and outside of your field:

- Search for funded grants at federal agencies:
    - Institute of Museum and Library Services Grant Search for Awarded Grants: http://www.imls.gov/recipients/grantsearch.aspx
    - National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Funded Projects Query Form: https://securegrants.neh.gov/publicquery/main.aspx
    - National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Recent Grants: http://www.nea.gov/grants/recent/index.html
    - National Science Foundation: http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/

- Search and browse through literature in the field and resources for digital tools and innovations. Some examples include:
    - IMLS Webinars & videos: http://www.imls.gov/resources/videos.aspx?CategoryId=
    - D-Lib Magazine, http://www.dlib.org/
    - The Signal: Digital Preservation, blog from Library of Congress, http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/
    - Curator Journal, http://www.curatorjournal.org/issues/554-october-2012
    - American Archivist, http://www2.archivists.org/american-archivist
    - Informal Science: http://informalscience.org/
    - Center for the Future of Museums, American Association of Museums, blog, http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.com/
    - Up Next, IMLS blog, http://blog.imls.gov/
    - Technology in the Arts blog, http://www.technologyinthearts.org/
    - OCLC blogs, http://www.oclc.org/us/en/community/talk/blogs/default.htm
    - DH Commons Project Registry of digital humanities projects some seeking collaborators: http://dhcommons.org/projects
    - Bamboo DiRT Registry of Digital Humanities Tools: http://dirt.projectbamboo.org/

- Browse through Resources on Project Evaluation
  - IMLS Recommendations for Evaluation Resources:
    http://www.imls.gov/research/evaluation_resources.aspx
  - Visitor Studies Association: http://visitorstudies.org/resources
  - Informal Science: http://informalscience.org/evaluation
  - Evaluating Participatory Projects, http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter10/

- Browse Award-Winning Media Projects
  - American Association of Museum's Media and Technology (Muse) Awards:
    http://www.mediaandtechnology.org/muse/index.html
  - Museums and the Web, Best of the Web Awards,
    http://conference.archimuse.com/page/best_web_awards

- Check conference programs and gray literature from your field and related materials
  - Museums and the Web Conference, Papers and presentations,
    http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/researchForum
  - Code4Lib, Conference sessions: http://code4lib.org/conference
  - Museum Computer Network conference programs, http://www.mcn.edu/conferences-past
  - National Council on Public History, conference programs, http://ncph.org/cms/conferences/

- Schedule an Appointment with a Program Officer
  - Not a requirement for most grant program, but all program officers are great resources when planning project.
  - All IMLS, NEH, NSF, NEA and other grant-making agencies have program officers on staff who are there to give you advice. Schedule a call **at least 3 months before** grants are due to shop your idea to them.

- Discuss project ideas with colleagues in and outside of your home institution or field, at conferences, luncheons, regional meeting groups.