### DH RSE Scenario 1

The Annals of Amberwald

# Background

Your small team is Digital Bench Press (DBP); a collective of RSE practitioners with many years collective experience, embedded in an academic department. Your team are usually in high demand and have a strong reputation for high quality work. The end of the financial year is approaching, and the team haven’t yet reached their funding target. Your hosting institution want the RSE team to increase collaboration with external partners.

50% of the team are working to finish a project that has overrun, due to an issue regarding access to a data source that has finally been resolved. That project began before DBP adopted new working practices and the research partner has made several recent requests for further development. They insist that if these requests aren’t implemented then the rationale for the whole project will be compromised.

# Pre-project Stage

The RSE team inbox receives an e-mail from potential project partner:

July 10 2021

Dear Digital Benchpress team,

“The Annals of Amberwald” is a circa 300-page manuscript purportedly written by local clergyman John of Amberwald over a period of 30 years in the late 16th century. It is a unique perspective on the ascendance of Amberwald as the main cultural, social and economic hub of the County of Ambshire, powered in part by the influx of pilgrims (attracted by the relics of Our Lady of Amberwald that are housed, to this day, in the small parish church of St. Corisande), and the emerging local wool industry building on the fashion for garments made from the dark coats of the endemic “Long Shadowed Sheep”.

Part regional history, part social commentary, the MS offers a contemporaneous, subjective and heavily gendered perspective on the social changes taking place nationally, through a local lens. Doubt has been repeatedly cast on the claim that the Annals are the work of a single scholar, particularly one who is almost entirely undocumented in other contemporary sources.

We plan to use digital methods to demonstrate that several unique hands and voices have contributed to the content in the Annals and that John of Amberwald may in fact be an amalgam of several local personae who were promoting a collective agenda. We also suggest that the codicological evidence confirms a previously suspected palimpsest.

Through employing the latest digital techniques, we plan to explore this manuscript holistically as an artefact in its own right, and as pure documentary history. We approached Amberwald Parish who have expressed an interest in the project.

We plan a 3-year project answering the MURC call “Local Voices, Building Nations” employing 1 full-time Post-Doctoral researcher at University of Eastfolk. We are hoping to submit by Aug 1st, so we would be keen to establish the costs for this digital component by Jul 28.

This ground-breaking project will rewrite the nature of British early modern historiography. The associated online resource will have a lasting impact on the study of local and national history and enable a diversity of public audiences to interpret the material.

Your Sincerely

Professor Jake Neilman

## Task 1 - Orientation

Read through the e-mail and as a group take 5 minutes to discuss the following questions:

1. How well does the project fit with your institutional strategy?
2. Do you have any initial concerns about elements of the project’s feasibility?
3. What else do you need to know about the project to have a productive discussion?

# Requirements

A follow up video meeting with Prof. Neilman is arranged. He is keen to submit the grant application at the beginning of the holiday, so that he can concentrate on writing a book chapter over the summer. When the teaching schedule resumes in September he is concerned he won’t have sufficient time to develop the bid. However, the MURC standard grant is a rolling application with no hard and fast deadline, so he could use a Post-Doc to help prepare the bid.

The allowable budget for an MURC Standard Grant is £200,000 per year of active research planned in the project. Professor Neilman is hoping to allocate £20,000 to the digital development.

He wants a website, which will allow him and his team to create blog content and long-form articles, and which has a strong project identity. The full text of the *Annals of Amberwald* should be viewable and searchable. He would like the website to display a map of features derived from places and events mentioned in the text, which is also searchable. The format and layout of the text, marginalia, and the bindings etc. all need to be recorded for analysis to identify different authors’ contributions. When the web resource is made live, interested members of the public should be able to create their own collections and commentary on the manuscript, making a community resource.

A local museum holds a collection of objects from the period which are typical of the day-to-day activities of the working classes. They are beginning a phase of digitisation of these collections.

He also likes the idea of data visualisation but is vague on the details.

He asks for any suggestion you might have to enrich the digital outputs.

The project will also result in one conference, and a co-authored book

You ask him to think about User Journeys and the next day he e-mails through a list of typical experiences he expects the resource will offer:

Dear Digital Benchpress team,

Thank you for our meeting yesterday which I found very informative. In answer to your question about User Journeys, I have consulted with the rest of the team and we have defined the following key audiences:

1. As a “Palaeographer”, I need to make detailed observations of the original letterforms, sufficient to differentiate authors
2. As a “Local Historian”, I want to be able to link outside the website to other related resources, and to be able to cite specific areas on the Local Voices, Building Nations website
3. As an “Interested Member of the Public”, I want to record my own interpretations alongside those of the academic researchers.
4. As a “Social Historian”, I want to understand the evolution of perspectives, such as the status of women, based on the events recorded in the Annals.
5. As a “Historian”, I’d like to identify each distinctive historical person referred to in the Annals.
6. As a “Researcher on the Project”, I’d like to regularly publish articles on the latest developments in the project
7. As a “Historical Geographer”, I’d like to identify places referred to in the Annals, and details about them so they can be placed on a contemporary map.
8. As a “Funder”, I require that the website remains accessible for 10 years following the completion of the research.
9. As a “Researcher”, I want confidence that our work is securely stored and won’t be lost if there is a server problem.

I’m sure that many more such “journeys” will emerge in the course of our discussions and in light of your own suggestions, though I hope this modest list will give an idea of our general intentions.

Regards

Jake Neilman

## Task 2 – Requirements

A) Consider Prof. Neilman’s request for suggestions to enrich the digital outputs. Given the extra information you’ve received, are there some novel and interesting ideas to pursue or innovative use of technology? Might the local museum collection be incorporated somehow? Are there any opportunities for data visualisation?

B) Based on the User Journeys *and* the conversation, create a list of the requirements for the online resource, then prioritise these requirements as Must Haves, Should Haves, or Could Haves (don’t worry about Won’t Haves for now)

Set out your answers in the form:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Priority** | **Requirement Definition** |  |
| M | (e.g.) Content Management System for publication of project articles and blog posts |  |
| S | … another requirement |  |
| C | … and so on |  |
| W | … |  |

### Task 3 - Estimation

When your team has a list of Requirements, use the 3rd column to estimate the time in days needed to complete these tasks. You may find it helpful to allocate time between the different roles in the RSE team, for example, the Developer, the UI/UX Designer, the Analyst, the Systems Manager.

In the example in the requirements table above, what else is needed to provide the Content Management System? There’s no need to name specific pieces of software so try to think in terms of the infrastructure needed and the people or roles required.

As you do this, think not only about the deliverables, but also all the tasks needed to develop the requested functionality. Are there pre-requisites to enable some of these items to be developed? Are there different ways to achieve some of these goals?

For example,

1. What sort of information would the Palaeographer need to record and how might they do it? How could a digital approach enable them to keep track of the many different handwriting features?
2. What form is the manuscript in and what processing does it need to meet the requirements?

For this exercise, don’t worry too much about being correct in your estimates about particular tasks; it’s more important that the task estimates are proportionally accurate when compared to each other.

Which RSE roles will be needed, and in what ratios? For example, who will need to contribute to any audience research?

### Task 4 – Costs

DBP need to charge £400 a day to cover their personnel costs. To host a website also incurs infrastructure costs according to the table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Cost** |
| Disk Space | £2.50 per GB/year |
| RAM | £25 per GB/year |
| CPU | £100 per CPU per year |

An archival quality scan of one page of the Annals of Amberwald is around 50Mb, and the operating system on the server requires at least 2.5GB, 2GB of RAM, and 1 CPU.

Based on the requirements you have defined, and the infrastructure needed, calculate an itemised cost for the project at the moment.

In your itemisation, you don’t need to list each individual requirement, but divide up the RSE roles and the infrastructure costs, both during and after the project.

# Product Quote

The DBP RSE team has agreed the resources needed to complete the project, and has communicated the expected costs to the research partner. Shortly after sending, DBP receive a response

Dear Digital Benchpress team,

Thank you for your Product Quote. I’m afraid the project can only afford 75% of your estimate as we need to buy out teaching time and recruit a Post-Doctoral Research Assistant. Perhaps we need to be less ambitious in our scope!

To satisfy the funder’s requirements, we will lessen the focus on the non-academic audience. Also, we’re not worried about the design of the website being too polished, so long as the research team are able to find what they need.

Can you advise where and how we might be able to cut 25% out of the budget?

Regards

Jake

Consider Prof. Neilman’s response to the Product Quote. Can the project budget be cut and still remain viable? Which requirements could be modified, re-prioritised, or dropped completely? What do the team think about Prof. Neilman’s position on design?

Take 5 minutes to discuss.