FY 2020-21

ANNUAL REPORT

Knowledge Futures Group

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⌗ Introduction

Knowledge Futures Group is a nonprofit organization that builds infrastructure for a more effective, equitable, and sustainable knowledge economy. Our commitment to this mission has deepened as the past year continued our experience that those who most fundamentally produce new knowledge have insufficient control over how their work is captured, disseminated, and evaluated. The power instead rests with those incentivized by something other than producing high-quality knowledge — be it financial gain or political power. As we wrestle with this misalignment and the challenges faced by society in the past year, we find ourselves repeatedly asking: How do you best produce high quality knowledge in an internet landscape?

While the fate of our responses to global pandemics, climate change, and civic challenges are inexorably tied to this question, we find that our current set of infrastructure and mores are insufficient. While study after study show the systemic inequities of academic publishing and knowledge production broadly, one anecdote that feels especially telling is that as the pandemic wrought its destruction and there was sufficient motivation to simply focus on what was best for research and collective understanding, people wound up taking actions that didn't look at all like the status quo. And they didn't just do one alternative thing, they tried lots of different approaches. It was the first genuine moment of collective innovation and experimentation for research and scientific process in decades. Researchers, funders, journalists, industry, and the public changed what they were doing because it simply wasn't effective at addressing the challenge before us.

··· Introduction

Working through this with communities of practice, two lessons regularly emerge: 1) communities find it essential to have the autonomy to say what's right for their people and their work, and 2) among all the diversity of opinion and process between communities — between biologists and historians, industry and academia — most want very similar fundamentals. People want to be able to build and engage a community, they want a mechanism for sustaining their action, and they want a mechanism for their work to be understood as trustworthy and high-quality. The challenge is that the dominant economic model to do these things is structured to maintain the status quo, preventing us from making the meaningful systemic changes that are needed.

Despite the energy poured into new products, better tech, and more open data, we have no mechanism for change if the economic model underpinning those efforts is fundamentally aligned with preserving the status quo. As such, we see our role as providing the foundation for new economic models of knowledge production. As an infrastructure organization, KFG sees its pathway to sustainability going directly through enabling communities to find their own sustainability models — an economic model that sees knowledge producers as groups to empower, rather than as groups from which to extract.

In pursuit of this work, Knowledge Futures Group has grown. We've grown the number of communities using our infrastructure; the number of contributors on the KFG team; the number of guiding perspectives helping us become a diverse, equitable, sustainable organization; and the number of funders who find our work meaningful and catalytic. In this report, we'll share more details about what makes us grateful for the past year, and eager for the year ahead.

Travis Rich
Executive Director
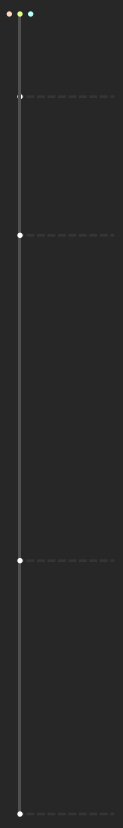
Year in Review

MILESTONES

Jul 2020

KFG launches the *Commonplace*

Launch of *Pub Connections*, enabling users to create overlay journals such as *Rapid Reviews: COVID-19* and engage in other types of connected publishing experiments

Sep 2020

Consejo Nuevo León launches *Participa,* marking the first known use of PubPub to collect constituent feedback in an open review of government policy proposals

Launch of Pub Connection *deposits*, allowing Communities to add their connected Pubs to the scholarly record so third parties like biorxiv and medrxiv can query the Crossref API and display outputs like preprint reviews

Oct 2020

Launch of Twitter embed within pubs

Launch of automated numbering and referencing for figures, tables, and equations on PubPub

Nov 2020

Phone and Spear (Goldsmiths) wins 2020 Bateson Book Prize

Dec 2020

Launch of PubPub user forum

Enhanced alt text options and caption structure for screen readers improve PubPub's accessibility features

PubPub code base migrated to TypeScript, improving documentation, code validation, and bug prevention

Jan 2021

Three PubPub Communities honored by the *PROSE awards*

Pandemics and Games Essay Jam, co-organized by Critical Distance and the Arizona State University Center for Science and the Imagination, launches marking *first use of PubPub for a writing sprint*

Year in Review

MILESTONES

Feb 2021 Established pro-bono partnership with Coalition for Diversity & Inclusion in Scholarly Publishing

Apr 2021 *SERC Case Studies* launches as the inaugural MITops partnership project

The *Commonplace* reaches 30,000 page views across 127 countries

Launch of Community and Collection *Overview dashboards*, featuring improved searching, sorting, and filtering of Pubs and Collections

All CC licenses now available for free to all communities on PubPub

May 2021 Launch of first PubPub exhibit space on *Contours*

The MIT Press launches an Open Architecture and Urban Studies library on PubPub, supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through the Humanities Open Book Program

Jun 2021 KFG launches new website

The *Commonplace* launches its first series, *The Business of Knowing*

PubPub partners with the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania to publish *Academic Entrepreneurship for Medical and Health Scientists*, an open textbook

⌗ Products

1. PUBPUB

This was a foundational year for PubPub, our core product. On the development side, we invested heavily in stability and usability by drastically improving page-load times, introducing better management tools for Admins, and making under-the-hood improvements to our codebase. This focus paid off in exponential growth in all of our use metrics (despite not investing in traditional marketing and promotion) as more communities felt confident adopting the platform.

Because we mostly focused on internal improvements, we were able to devote a significant amount of time to better understanding our users and giving them more of a role and stake in PubPub's development. To this end, we launched the PubPub Discussion Forum, a public roadmap, and engaged users in a series of group and 1:1 conversations about their needs, pain points, and views on the future of knowledge creation and dissemination.

Through those discussions, we developed a clear, shared vision: PubPub should be the best place for knowledge communities to produce work that is meaningfully used by the audiences that matter most to them. Note that we did not use the words "tool" or "software" in that description. Our conversations revealed that knowledge communities need more than just software; they need support understanding, connecting with, and growing their membership and audiences, and understanding their impacts in both conventional and unconventional ways. This shared understanding has laid the groundwork for the projects we're planning to take up in the next fiscal year, including features like submission and review, community discussion, and payment management; and resources like audience development toolkits, impact assessments, sustainability plans, and expanded content services.
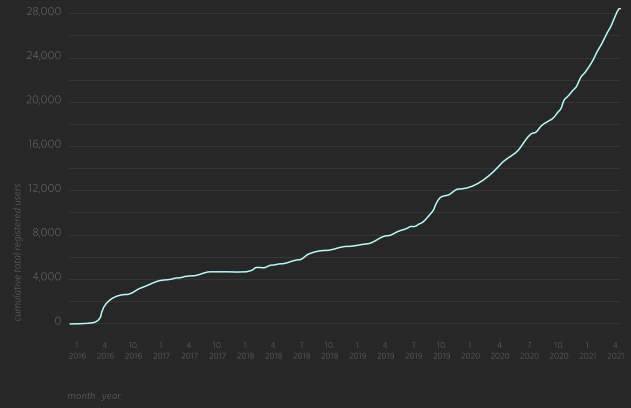
PubPub Stats

COMMUNITIES
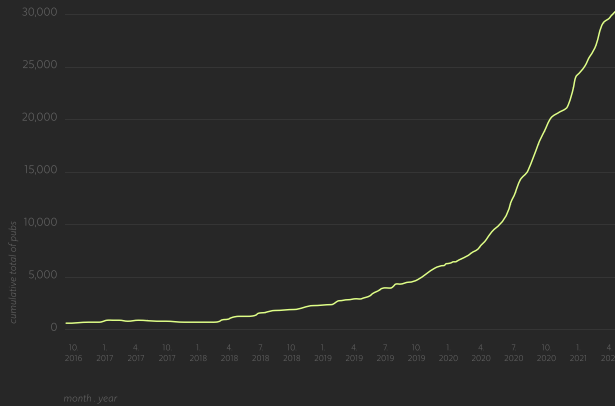
FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY19-FY20 % change
414	947	1,468	+55.02
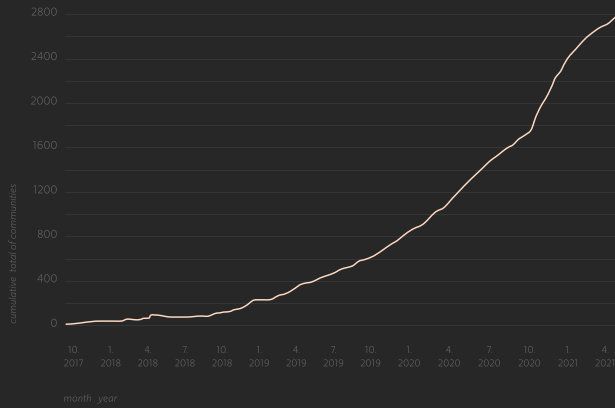
REGISTERED USERS

FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY19-FY20 % change
2,694	7,332	13,607	+85.58

PUBS

FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY19-FY20 % change
2,448	8,025	21,490	+167.79

PAGEVIEWS

FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY19-FY20 % change
746k	1.9M	4.2M	+121.05
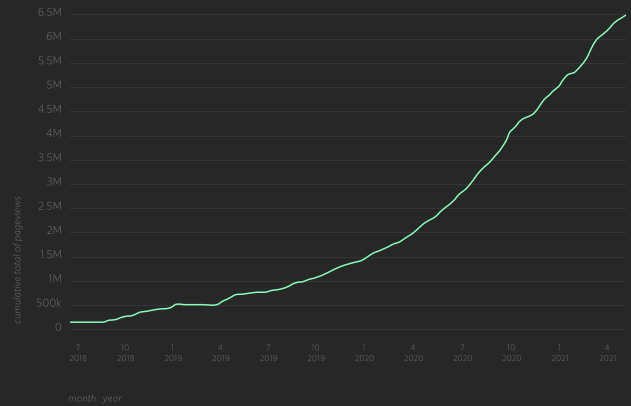
2. UNDERLAY

The Underlay is an open tool for building collaborative knowledge graphs. It is designed to empower communities that organize and produce structured data, in part by allowing communities to combine their data with the broader world of publicly available structured knowledge. Most current knowledge graphs are either isolated, privately-owned graphs that are inaccessible to most, or loosely structured public graphs that are cumbersome in their generality. The Underlay provides an alternative: community-owned knowledge graphs that are focused, relevant, and meaningfully interoperable.

While protocol work on the Underlay has taken place for the past few years, we are now expanding our focus to a platform that allows Communities to organize themselves around the knowledge graphs, schemas, and processes they find important. The platform makes it simple to import existing datasets, discuss and establish shared schemas, organize trusted data sources, and publish knowledge graphs to a public (or private) Community hub for others to use in their own applications. Rather than publishing static, quickly-outdated .csv or .zip snapshots of data, or building and maintaining a cumbersome API, the Underlay allows Communities to create living Collections that are open to collaboration, explicit in their versioning, and easily exported to the database or file needed for custom applications.

This is a long-term undertaking with the potential to transform our mechanism for sensemaking from isolated claims of fact to continuous collaboration around shared context. We believe the best strategy to do that is to grow the number of communities that can independently produce and maintain data that is more accessible, higher quality, and more visible. As such, our work for the next fiscal year is focused on launching this platform and then facilitating

the socio-technical processes that undergird a Community's ability to produce and maintain such Collections. We will continue to work directly with communities to help them form the structure, strategies, and collaborative approaches that result in long-lived, highly impactful knowledge graphs and data products that form the first steps in a new paradigm of collective understanding.

3. COMMONPLACE

The *Commonplace* is a publication of the Knowledge Futures Group working to spotlight the voices and ideas behind the push to make knowledge a public good. Launched in July 2020, the *Commonplace* has grown quickly around an editorial commitment to publishing helpful pieces and ideas that promote progress.

In its first year, the *Commonplace* published 52 essays from contributors and served 32,249 page views to over 13,000 people. The top three articles published based on views were:

1. "White Men" by Sara Ahmed
2. "Labour of Love: An Open Access Manifesto for Freedom, Integrity, and Creativity in the Humanities and Interpretive Social Sciences" by Andrea E. Pia, Simon Batterbury, Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi, Marcel LaFlamme, Gerda Wielander, Filippo M. Zerilli, Melissa Nolas, Jon Schubert, Nicholas Loubere, Ivan Franceschini, Casey Walsh, Agathe Mora, and Christos Varvantakis
3. "Clarivate, ProQuest, and our Resistance to Commercializing Knowledge" by Gabriel Stein, Travis Rich, Zach Verdin, and Catherine Ahearn

⋯ Products

So far, this growth has enabled the *Commonplace* to cultivate a strong monthly newsletter called "5 Things to Think About" featuring a new curator each month, as well as a burgeoning series format that calls for submissions from readers on a single topic each quarter.

In the next fiscal year, the Commonplace strives to:

1. Further diversify its contributor pool and the perspectives its articles reflect
2. Iterate on its series format to fine-tune series timing, contributor demographics, and topics
3. Create clear connections between ideas posed within its pages and the open infrastructure being developed at the KFG and elsewhere
4. Host more conversations and events as part of its regular output
5. Work more strategically with KFG partnerships and development

⌗ Operations

Our first fiscal year as an independent organization coincided with a once-in-a-century pandemic and the largest social justice movement in a generation. We used both as an opportunity to re-think our work practices to put us on a path towards becoming a more remote- and justice-oriented organization.

In July 2020, we began a series of discussions about becoming an anti-racist organization in response to the Black Lives Matter protests. These discussions led to the adoption of a Statement of Principles and a number of changes to our hiring, speaking, and fundraising policies, among others. These discussions and changes have have helped us recruit a more diverse team and user community. They also provided a foundation for thinking about our company in general through a structural justice lens, which continues in the form of a task-force that is methodically re-evaluating every aspect of our company's work and culture, with a goal to propose policy improvements and publish the results by the end of the calendar year.

Responding to the pandemic, we held a companywide workshop in December 2020 to discuss improving our remote work environment. Luckily, our team had already been operating mostly remotely and we had already taken steps to adjust to the pandemic, including budgeting for a home office stipend and deploying Remeet, a scheduling and videoconferencing tool that has drastically reduced the hours we collectively spend in meetings. The workshop resulted in plans to eliminate unnecessary time spent in meetings, create a culture that acknowledges and celebrates the need to take breaks and vacations, add holidays to our calendar to supplement months that have no federal holidays, update and clarify our paid leave policies, and experiment with a 4-day work week. Though we're still measuring the effects, initial evidence points to increases in productivity

and job satisfaction, and decreases in stress. Our policies have also helped us hire two engineers in a competitive environment and even re-hire one who was hesitant about remote work and left to pursue a local job, but ultimately decided our product, values, and culture were superior. You can read our policies and thoughts about how we work in our Handbook.

TEAM

The Knowledge Futures Group is a network of people committed to a shared mission, led by the nonprofit Knowledge Futures, Inc. The full KFG team includes members across institutions and organizations, working together to develop programs and products to further the KFG mission.

In the past year, we've welcomed 5 new staff members and two new board members to the team.

Catherine Ahearn Head of Content

Amy Brand Board Member Emeritus

Quincy Childs Fellow

Joel Gustafson Software Engineer

Danny Hillis Underlayer

Ben Howe Software Engineer

Deepak Jagdish Design Lead

Sarah Kearns Acquisitions Editor

Boyana Konforti Board Member

Michael Stebbins Board Member

SJ Klein Underlayer, Board Member

Eric McDaniel Senior Software Engineer

Ian Reynolds Senior Software Engineer

Travis Rich Executive Director, Board Member

Gabe Stein Head of Operations, Board Member

Qwelian Tanner Software Engineer

Dawit Tegbaru Editorial Manager

Allison Vanouse Editorial Fellow

Zach Verdin Head of Strategic Programs

⋯ Operations

FINANCIALS

At the time of publication for this report, the audit of KFG's FY2021 financial statement has not yet concluded. When it does, the report and associated tax statements will be available on the KFG website.