**The Chester Justice Digital Collection: Chronicling Community Resilience**

Narrative:

Our project’s core objective is to nurture the imaginative powers of memory and story through the use of digital technologies to provide a robust, accessible, and sustainable compilation of grassroots experiences, memories, and community storytelling. Our proposed [Chester Justice Digital Collection](http://chesterdigital.sunycreate.cloud/CDS/) is a collaborative initiative to build a repository at Swarthmore College for state-of-the-art collecting, storing, and sharing of digital content (stories, oral histories, social media graphics, digitized images, text, etc.) centered on and created by individuals and grassroots organizations to further their social justice efforts in Chester, Pennsylvania. The Chester Justice Digital Collection will serve both as a *practical asset* for social justice efforts in Chester and as a *knowledge resource* for critical humanities education and scholarship at Swarthmore College and beyond (Moe 2014, Ortiz 2023).

Chester ranks as Pennsylvania’s poorest city situated in one of the state’s wealthiest counties; Black families, who comprise the majority (70%) of the city’s residential makeup, bear the brunt of a concentration of polluting industries (a ‘toxic dumping ground’) leading to disproportionately high rates of asthma and cancer and contributing to high unemployment and poverty, inadequate educational and job training resources, and deteriorating housing stock. Yet, being targeted as a ‘sacrifice zone’ is not Chester’s singular story; Chester is a resilient city, rich with dedicated, homegrown leaders, social activists and everyday change makers who are taking seriously James Baldwin's exhortation to social justice activists to “make the impossible possible” (Ransby 2021). Following a long tradition of community storytelling, Chester residents harness local knowledge, experiences and histories of resilience as a collective asset to overcome the consequences of decades of systemic racial discrimination and social and economic disinvestment. Chester’s change makers mobilize local pride and generational commitments to home, neighborhood, and a strong culture of community care to advance social justice aims and visions for the future.

Our proposed project builds upon the engaged scholarship and collaborative action research undertaken with community partners by Giovanna Di Chiro and Christopher Mele, both individually and jointly. Both work with several Chester social justice groups, including the environmental justice organization, Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living (CRCQL, aka “Circle”), and the YES Center’s digital storytelling initiative, which documents and preserves the experiences of Chester residents to advance social justice. CRCQL and the YES Center first adopted digital platforms for communication, such as Zoom, social media, and digital storytelling, at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and have since expanded their use as part of their organizational programming and communication of their core ideas and social justice objectives. Their digital presence resonates in Chester and surrounding Delaware County, attesting to the popularity, ease and increasing affordability of digital hardware (mobile smart phones) and software (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, podcast, Instagram, etc.).

Our ongoing work with Chester community partners employs a humanities-based, interpretive framework to develop sustainable management, labor, and collaborative arrangements necessary for making effective born-digital content (e.g., posts, ‘tweets’, digital stories, etc.) that advance social justice goals. Our work is informed by and complies with engaged humanities and ethical/anti-colonial practices of reciprocity, peer review, and consent that contribute to “best practices'' of engaged humanities scholarship (Whyte 2020; Suarez-Balcazar 2020); community partners define the purpose, objectives, and content of their digital initiatives. We acknowledge (through authorship attribution) digital content creators to include everyone who has contributed to an initiative’s creative process, production, and dissemination. Our work shows how under-resourced communities can adopt, adapt, and use digital technologies to effectively make justice claims, (re)shape narratives about their collective experiences, and build alliances and collaborations across social class, race, and geographic borders that too often define interactions between community and campus (Rice et. al 2022, Jackson et. al 2020).

The co-created digital initiatives have had a clear impact on the social justice efforts of our community partners to broaden public participation, build new relationships within and across interests, catalyze new collaborations, and develop leadership in the community for the future. To cite just a few examples:

* CRCQL, Swarthmore’s C4 (Campus Coalition Concerning Chester), and regional partners launched a robust social media campaign on the history of environmental racism and the siting of the country’s largest waste incinerator in Chester that succeeded in getting 75% of Delaware County’s towns and boroughs to pass “zero waste resolutions'' and effectively end their contracts with the waste incinerator.
* The YES Center’s ongoing public storytelling project provides online and face-to-face opportunities for young women with interests in social justice to connect with an older generation of Chester activists who share their experiences, achievements, and organizing skills.
* The non-profit, Friends of Green Lawn Cemetery (the city’s long-abandoned, historically Black cemetery), deployed social media and digital storytelling to drum up a record number of volunteers to cut grass, clear out overgrowth, and document the graves of residents’ ancestors, including veterans dating as far back as the Civil War.
* A coalition of Chester organizations, regional partners, and Swarthmore allies mounted a powerful social media and digital educational campaign to support efforts leading to the ouster of the city’s decades-long political machine and the election of young, progressive leadership to the Mayor’s office and State Representative’s seat.

Our digital initiatives have catalyzed community conversations and organizational action (especially among young people) around innovative steps to combat the city’s environmental crises, recognize and advance the legacies of local activism, undo the erasure of Black histories, and promote platforms and candidates aligned with progressive social justice aims (Ritchie 2023).

As Chester-Swarthmore collaborative community storytelling grows, our project faces a critical juncture. Currently, we collaborate with community partners who maintain their own digital storage and public-facing digital platforms with limited financial and technical resources. Viewed in its entirety, the Collection today is a listing of social justice digital initiatives owned and operated by various community partners, each using an *ad hoc* array of different servers, formats, and styles. The first phase of our project successfully helped create digital initiatives and ongoing, very productive campus-community partnerships. But to ensure future growth and sustainability, the next phase of our work is to centralize the digital initiatives at Swarthmore so as to best address technological issues and systematize digital content production and improve public accessibility.

We propose to develop a centralized GitHub repository and public-facing dedicated website to allow us to make the Collection better suited for instructional and training purposes and more accessible to humanities scholars and the general public. In addition, our project will strengthen our campus-community collaborations by offering Chester residents digital skills-based training during the academic year at Swarthmore College. Our central purpose is to guide community members in core elements of digital content selection, metadata and information systems development, and maintenance processes, making them equal partners in the digitization process. With training, we anticipate residents will work within the community to develop their own social justice digital initiatives, recruit new participants, and share their interests and skills in digital production within their networks.

The Environmental Justice & Community Resilience (ECJR) Program at the Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility, Swarthmore College will administer the Collection and provide for its sustainability and growth

For social justice movements that serve historically under-resourced and minoritized communities, digital forms of communication seem especially promising; they appear to offer an effective means to overcome powerful efforts to silence marginalized voices, share ideas openly and directly, and shape and control their own (counter)narratives for publicly conveying empowered visions for transformation. Digital communication may also facilitate new entry points for alliances with organizations and communities facing similar circumstances of environmental injustice as well as coalitions or partnerships with potential supporters and allies (e.g., neighboring colleges and universities with greater access to technological and financial resources).

**Overview of New Activities**

The Digital Collection will serve as a publicly-accessible *participatory* *archive*[[1]](#footnote-1) to document resilient community-based knowledge – the experiences, information, skills, memories, and expertise – derived from past and current social justice struggles. It will also serve as a practical *resource* for grassroots organizations and social justice advocates to share and make use of in their ongoing efforts to address a variety of issues, including environmental justice and community health, educational access and civic participation, sustainable development to counter gentrification, affordable housing and homeownership assistance, and heritage activism. As a community-based knowledge source, the Collection will challenge racist narratives of urban decline in Black and Brown communities that eschew historical analyses of structural racism and economic injustice, and ignore, or dismiss, community voices in identifying problems and generating real solutions. The Collection will also serve as an effective pedagogical tool for anti-racist humanities training and as a robust model for engaged humanities scholarship. Lastly, it will contribute to diversifying the ecosystem of digital scholarship for humanities scholars seeking to incorporate more inclusive and imaginative forms of knowledge into their work.

Built on long-standing and robust collaborative efforts between the Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility at Swarthmore College and Chester community partners, the objectives for the capacity development phase of this project are 1) to centralize and systematize digital content currently spread across Chester (by multiple producers, in different formats, and with *ad hoc* storage schemes) into a single, sustainable public digital platform (GitHub) operated by Swarthmore College; 2) develop the Chester Justice Digital Fellows Training Program to build capacity and empower Chester community partners and Swarthmore students on shared stewardship, digital production and preservation techniques, and their effective uses in social justice campaigns; 3) host annual, in-person community ‘sweeps’ (or ‘archive-athons’) of new digital content produced in Chester, so as to maintain the Collection’s relevance and sustainability; and 4) make Chester’s ‘local knowledge’ readily accessible to residents, changemakers, students, policymakers, and academic researchers. We appreciate how closely the goals of the ACLS’s Digital Justice program align with our core principles and investment in community-based participatory research (CBPR) that deeply values community partners as co-producers of new knowledges to advance social and environmental justice. Funding from the ACLS would allow us to build on our existing campus-community collaborations and to develop the necessary supported technological infrastructure for the Collection’s management, sustainability, and contribution to public humanities scholarship.

**Project History and Impact**

To build a new future is as much about memory as imagination. Day by day, we are *making the impossible possible*. Then daring to dream even bigger.

Barbara Ransby, “Letter From The Year 2071” (2021)

Moreover, Chester’s documented history of uneven urban development, labor extraction, and post-war white flight created the wealthier, racially-segregated suburbs, of which one is Swarthmore, home to the renowned liberal arts college (Mele 2017). What are the responsibilities of our institutions of higher education to the cities and communities that have been abandoned and sacrificed for their benefit? Our collaborative efforts with Chester organizations run deep; we have been working together with Chester leaders and activists on various projects since the early 2000s to document and make visible these his/stories of urban decline, resurgence, and reconciliation. Di Chiro is currently teaching the ChesterSemester Fellowship course (which was established in 2018 to offer engaged scholarship and internship opportunities for students supporting Chester-based organizations), and she will continue to teach the course in years to come.

With funding, our project would use institutional resources and assets to best support Chester’s ongoing efforts to advance social justice. Establishing the required technical, scholarly, and pedagogical elements of the Collection at Swarthmore College will ensure a sustainable means for Chester social justice activists to share their stories, inform their neighbors, draw on their collective expertise, and advance their vision of the city’s future. In addition, our project is a model for similar campus-community initiatives on how participatory digital archiving assists resource-challenged populations, such as Chester residents, to expand the scope of who participates in the public process of social change and publicly counter long-standing official narratives about them and their community (Willox, Harper and Edge 2012).

Additional Materials:

Table 1 (below) itemizes some of the collaborative digital initiatives authored, designed, and produced to date in collaboration with our community partners. The initiatives are publicly engaged projects co-created with community partners, including projects that connect scholars across humanities disciplines and academic institutions. These initiatives show how digital technologies best tap into and magnify Chester’s robust tradition of sharing stories, experiences, and personal and community histories and local knowledge through deep social and interpersonal networks.

Table 1. List of Collaborative Digital Initiatives, 2023 (also available on our [website](http://chesterdigital.sunycreate.cloud/CDS/) <http://chesterdigital.sunycreate.cloud/CDS/> )

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Digital Initiative Title** | **Comm-unity Partner** | **Institutional Partner(s)** | **Social Justice Issue Area(s)** | **Digital Location:  URL or storage situation** | **Current Status (start-end dates)** |
| Chester ML King Commemoration Black History Month | The YES Center | Lang Center, Swarthmore | Black history; Chester history | <https://www.yescenterchester.org/mlk-day-celebration> | January 2022-  ongoing |
| CRCQL EJ social media | CRCQL | EJCR\* | Environmental justice; social media | <https://www.instagram.com/chester_ej/?hl=en> | May 2022-  ongoing |
| Chester’s Ruth L. Bennett | The YES  Center | Lang Center, Swarthmore | Chester history; women’s activism | <http://chesterdigital.sunycreate.cloud/RLBennett/> | February 2023 |
| Chester Women Change Makers | The YES Center | Lang Center, Swarthmore/  DSSN\*\* | Women’s activism | <http://chesterdigital.sunycreate.cloud/rlbennett/> | March 2022-  ongoing |
| Looking Back, Moving Forward: Law, Policy & Environmental Justice | CRCQL | Lang Center, Swarthmore; Baldy Center\*\*\* | Environmental Justice; environmental law; grassroots activism; academic conference | <https://ejlawpolicyconference.domains.swarthmore.edu/> | April 2022 |
| From Erasure to Empowerment | CRCQL | EJCR\* | Environmental justice; social media research | <http://chesterdigital.sunycreate.cloud/home/> | July 2023-  ongoing |
| Hidden Histories: Chester & Widener University | The YES Center | Widener University & Swarthmore College | Chester history; civil rights activism; town & gown relations | Google Drives; personal hard drives; Widener cloud storage | UNDER DEVELOP-MENT |
| Environmental Justice Organizing in Chester: Building Youth Involvement and Leadership | CRCQL | EJCR\* | Environmental justice; campus- community collaborations | Google Drive; personal hard drives; Swarthmore cloud storage; temporary | UNDER DEVELOP-MENT |
| Friends of Green Lawn Cemetery | FOG | EJCR\* | Historical site preservation | <https://greenlawnchester.org/> | November 2023- ongoing |

\*Environmental Justice & Community Resilience Program, Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility, Swarthmore College  
\*\*Digital Scholarship Studio & Network, University at Buffalo/SUNY  
\*\*\*Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy, University at Buffalo/SUNY

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We have also shared our work on community-based digital storytelling and our campus-community collaborative model with academic colleagues at professional conferences. Included in these presentations are: Engaged Scholarship Consortium Conference (Eason, Di Chiro, and Mayfield 2022), Association of Literature and the Environment Conference (Di Chiro, Reyes, and White 2023), the American Sociological Association Conference (Considine, Chang, Di Chiro, and Mele 2023), and the Keystone Digital Humanities Conference (Mele 2021), and with humanities-based organizations (Penn Program in Environmental Humanities, University of Pennsylvania and PA Humanities) (Di Chiro and Mayfield 2023). We intend to publish a digital anthology (coauthored with community partners and student researchers) with a university press on Chester’s social justice digital initiatives and engaged scholarship through meaningful campus-community collaboration (Mele, Di Chiro et. al).

beyond the ACLS 18-month grant period. Should this proposal be awarded, the Collection’s technologies, software, storage, and web hosting, the Fellows Training Program, its pedagogical component (the Chester Semester course), the annual Chester digital sweeps (archive-athons), the ECJR student researcher positions, and the collaborative relationships with Chester partners will be extended into the future through programming at the Lang Center and committed institutional partnerships with Swarthmore College Libraries and Instructional Technologies.

**Infrastructure**

We share our research on community-based digital storytelling and our campus-community collaboration with academic colleagues at professional conferences. Included in these presentations are: Engaged Scholarship Consortium Conference (Eason, Di Chiro, and Mayfield 2022), Association of Literature and the Environment Conference (Di Chiro, Reyes, and White 2023), the American Sociological Association Conference (Considine, Chang, Di Chiro, and Mele 2023), and the Keystone Digital Humanities Conference (Mele 2021), and with humanities-based organizations (Penn Program in Environmental Humanities, University of Pennsylvania and PA Humanities) (Di Chiro and Mayfield 2023). We intend to publish a digital anthology (coauthored with community partners and student researchers) with a university press on Chester’s social justice digital initiatives and engaged scholarship through meaningful campus-community collaboration (Mele, Di Chiro et. al). In GitHub, documentation and standards for the project can be stored alongside content, enabling the centralization of project knowledge for our proposed training of students and community partners. In terms of the project content, the Swarthmore College Libraries already employ professional metadata standards that, when applied to project content, will bring this content into alignment with professional best practices. In the case of future migrations (our planned community digital ‘sweeps’ or ‘archive-athons’), a GitHub repository and commitment to metadata standards will make the project easily portable to new and/or supplemental platforms. For the projects’ many audiences, static-site generation tools such as GitHub Pages and CollectionBuilder provide infrastructure for front-end access with minimal developer involvement for continued maintenance. This approach was recommended by partners in Swarthmore Information and Technology Services in order to optimize interoperability and minimize technical debt.

Aside from the digital infrastructure, Swarthmore Libraries commits to providing support for training the team members, community partners, and Swarthmore students involved in the Collection’s Digital Training Fellows Program. That includes lending our physical spaces, for example the LibLab, which is a flexible, technology-enhanced meeting space and classroom, as well as the hardware needed to ensure access to everyone who participates in the trainings. We maintain laptop computers, as well as Audio Visual equipment, that can be used to deploy workshops both on campus and in the community as needed. We also employ a group of students, the LibLab Fellows, who receive in-depth digital literacy training and are available to support digital projects on campus. These students can be deployed as support staff to train the project team on GitHub, metadata standards, file conversion, and the other skills needed to maintain the digital content.

**Data Ethics**

The project’s choice to divest from proprietary platforms and commit to a centralized GitHub repository reflects our commitment to openness. Swarthmore models its support of this project after post-custodial archives; community partners will retain control and ownership over their content, while Swarthmore will commit its resources and support in order to provide long-term sustainability and preservation of this important work. Technical terminology associated with the repository and related protocols will conform to best practices as developed by the Association for Computers and Humanities (2023).

Our goal is to create flexible workflows to ingest content, convert it to sustainable formats, and archive it on open digital repositories. We want the workflow to be clear and easy-to-follow, with the intention that the grant team will provide basic training and support, but the community partners will maintain leadership and control over the content. As part of this process, we will train both the LibLab Fellows and students in a pre-existing course at Swarthmore to lead these workshops and support these platforms in the future. Therefore, students will learn new digital literacy skills, specifically in the area of data management, and will develop the ability to teach these skills to others. The community benefits through the initial efforts to move the existing content to open, sustainable platforms, but will also receive training to implement these workflows on an ongoing basis.

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**PROJECT TIMELINE**

**July–August 2024:** 1) We publicize and share our Collection’s purpose and objectives with the broader Chester community through social media campaigns, local media outreach (radio, blogs, e-newsletters), and in-person events, including the 3rd annual Chester Justice Celebration held in July. 2) We recruit one Chester partner and one Swarthmore [Lib-Lab](https://www.swarthmore.edu/libraries/lib-lab-fellows) Fellow (student) for our Chester Justice Digital Fellow Training Program 3) Christopher Mele, the Collaboration Lead, connects with community partners to review existing digital initiatives and develop plans to migrate/copy their content to the Collection.

**August–December 2024**: 1) Giovanna Di Chiro, the PI, teaches the first semester offering of the year-long Swarthmore course, *Chester Semester*, redesigned to connect students with the Collection project and connect students with our community partners to develop new digital initiatives. 2) Digital Scholarship Librarians Emily Higgs Kopin and Amanda Licasto begin migrating existing community partner content into Swarthmore’s GitHub Enterprise Server. 3) An undergraduate research assistant will be hired to work with two EJCR student assistants and Higgs Kopin and Licastro to document protocols for management, sustainability, and future ingestions of new digital content, develop documentation, and work on web design/UX 4) Mele coordinates migration of digital content with Licastro, Kopin and Community Partner Leads Zulene Mayfield and Twyla Simpkins. Mele develops community protocols for ingestion of future digital content initiatives for the Collection. 5) Swarthmore LibLab Fellow and Chester partner participate in the Chester Justice Digital Fellow Training Program in coordination with Licastro and Di Chiro.

**January–June 2025**: 1) Di Chiro teaches the second semester of *Chester Semester*, with students completing their digital content collaborations with community partners 2) Di Chiro and two student assistants coordinate with Swarthmore student group, C4, to design digital initiatives (e.g., social media campaigns) with community partners. 3) This phase builds upon the technical work of the previous semester, with Kopin and Licastro working with one of our undergraduate research assistants and Mele to build and maintain the GitHub Collections repository. 3) Kopin and Licastro create the public-facing component of the Collection using Collections Builder. 4) Swarthmore Lib-Lab Fellow and Chester Fellow work with Mayfield and Simpkins on effective uses of digital content in social justice campaigns and.complete their Digital Collection Training Program. 5) The Chester Justice Digital Collection GitHub and public-facing website go live in June.

**July–December 2025**: Having completed their training, the Swarthmore Lib-Lab Fellow and Chester partner work with Mele, Mayfield, Simpkins and other community partners to develop new digital initiatives as part of the Collection. 2) Student assistants, Mele, Di Chiro and community partners organize and host the first annual Sweep (or archive-athon) of Chester community digital content as in-person event held in Chester city in July (in coordination with the 4th annual Chester Justice Celebration) 3) The second cohort (one Lib-Lab fellow and one Chester Fellow) of the Chester Justice Digital Fellow Training Program is recruited in the summer and begins in the fall. 4) Di Chiro, the PI, introduces the Collection and digital initiatives research to a new cohort of students enrolled in the *Chester Semester* course for the fall term. 5) Di Chiro and Mele submit paper proposals to professional academic conferences and a digital book proposal to university presses. 6) Kopin and Licastro monitor the GitHub repository and public-facing website, rework protocols as necessary, and provide assistance with the ingestion of new digital content from the July community sweep (archive-athon).

**Budget and Budget Description**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CATEGORY/DESCRIPTION** | **TIME PERIOD** | **COST** |
| **PERSONNEL SALARY/WAGES/BENEFITS** |  | **$** |
| Giovanna Di Chiro, Professor of Environmental Studies & Coordinator, Environmental Justice & Community Resilience Program, Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility, Swarthmore College (Project Director): summer salary and one course release | 18 months | $47,160  Cost Sharing (one course release @ $52,818) |
| Christopher Mele, Professor of Sociology, University at Buffalo & Senior Research Fellow, Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility, Swarthmore College (Academic-Community Collaboration Lead) ($100/hour) | 400 hours | $40,000 |
| Zulene Mayfield, Director. CRCQL (Lead Community Partner) (@ $50/hour) | 60 hours | $3,000 |
| Twyla Simpkins, Director, YES Center (Lead Community Partner) (@ $50/hour) | 60 hours | $3,000 |
| Emily Higgs Kopin, Digital Librarian | 140 hours | Cost Sharing ($11,804) |
| Amanda Licastro, Digital Librarian | 140 hours | Cost Sharing ($9,798) |
| 1 Community Fellow enrolled in Chester Justice Digital Fellow Training Program) (@ $50/hour) | 60 hours | $3,000 |
| 1 Swarthmore student LibLab Fellow, Chester Justice Digital Fellow Training Program | 65 hours | Cost Sharing ($1,004) |
| 1 Swarthmore Student Assistant (@ College rate) | 256 hours | $3,840 |
| 2 Swarthmore Student Assistants (@ College rate) | 240 hours/each | Cost Sharing ($7,687) |
| **WEB HOSTING FEES** |  | **$0** |
| Swarthmore hosting costs |  | Cost Sharing ($1,000) |
| Domain fees |  | Cost Sharing (400) |
| **EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES** |  | **$** |
| Year 1 Project Announcement Event and Year 2 l Digital Sweep Event (continued beyond grant period) | July 2024 and 2025 | Cost Sharing ($2,000) |
| **TRAVEL & LODGING** |  | **$0** |
| **DIRECT COSTS** |  | **$0** |
| **OPTIONAL COST SHARING** |  | **$86,511** |
| **BASE PROJECT COSTS** |  | **$186,511** |
| **TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST** |  | **$100,000** |

The vast amount of requested funds is for personnel. Swarthmore College has committed to cost sharing for the PI’s course release, two librarians, two student interns, the LibLab fellow, and the technology for this project. Faculty are encouraged to seek external funding for summer salary and external expert consultants.   
**PERSONNEL SALARY/WAGES/BENEFITS Giovanna Di Chiro, Ph.D**., is project **Principal Investigator**. She will be responsible for the ethical design, conduct, and reporting of the 18-month project and for monitoring and ensuring the integrity of the collaborative relationships. She will oversee responsibilities for the compliance, financial, personnel, and other related aspects of the project and for coordination with the College, project staff, and community partners to assure the project is conducted in accordance with the College’s policies and procedures.

**Christopher Mele, Ph.D.** is **Academic-Community Collaboration Lead** will develop and manage all of the relationships for the transfers and future incorporation of digital content from Community Partners to Swarthmore College, including creating MOUs between the ECJR Program and Community Partners and sustainable protocols for digital content production, sharing, and ownership. He will assist in the recruitment of the Community Partner for the Chester Justice Digital Collection Training Program and lead the collaboration and communication at all stages of the project between the PI, Digital Librarians, Community Partners, training participants, and student assistants.

**Zulene Mayfield, Lead Community Partner**, and Director of Chester Resident Concerned for Quality Living (CRCQL), Chester, PA and **Twyla Simpkins, Lead Community Partner**, and Director of the Yes We Can Achievement Center, will collaborate with Di Chiro and Mele to co-supervise student research assistants and program trainees in building the Digital Collection in the areas of environmental justice and sustainability (Mayfield) and Chester’s African-American history, culture, and social justice activism (Simpkins). Both will co-organize the Digital Sweep Event scheduled for July 2025, work with Mele and the two Digital Librarians on digital content transfer, and work with Chester residents, block associations, churches, and informal and formal social justice organizations in developing new digital initiatives.

Swarthmore Digital Librarians, **Emily Higgs Kopin** and **Amanda Licastro**, (salaries cost shared) will dedicate time from their workload to lead the development of the project’s infrastructure at Swarthmore College necessary for sustainable management of the Digital Collection and its future content production, storage and public accessibility.

The **Community Partner** will participate in the academic-year **Chester Justice Digital Fellows Training Program,** along with the 2024-2025 **Swarthmore Lib Lab Fellow** (cost shared),to learn the theoretical, ethical, and technical dimensions of digital research and training in the practical aspects of post-custodial collection, storage and accessibility (fall term). They will work with the two Digital Librarians on all aspects of the ingestion of digital content for the Collections (fall/spring terms)and with Mayfield and Simpkins on effective uses of digital content in social justice campaigns.

The **Student Research Assistant** will be employed from September 2024 to August 2025 for 10 hours per week. They will work with the **two EJCR Student Research Assistants** (wages cost shared) on developing new digital initiatives with Mayfield, Simpkins and other community partners, co-organize the Annual Sweep, assist the two Digital Librarians Kopin and Licastro on developing technical protocols for management, sustainability, and future ingestions of digital content and building the Collections public-facing website.

**WEB HOSTING FEES Swarthmore** College’s Information Technology Services will provide and cover all costs of the one-time and long-term technical requirements for the Digital Collection’s production, storage and accessibility, including hosting and Swarthmore hosting and domains.

**EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES** Swarthmore’s **Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility** and the **ECJR Program** will cover all costs associated with the two in-person Chester community events for this project’s timeline and in the years beyond. The Project Announcement Event will be held in July 2024. The first Annual Digital Sweep event provides the opportunity for residents and community organizations to participate/collaborate with the Collection and digitize their personal artifacts (photos, newspaper clippings, etc.), provided with a memory stick, and, with permission, contribute to the Collection. Both will be held at Chester’s ACCESS Center and the MJ Freed Theater in conjunction with Swarthmore sponsored Chester Justice Celebration and will feature presentations, games, activities, and food.

## **Project Staffing**

**Giovanna Di Chiro**, Ph.D., **Project PI**, is Professor of Environmental Studies at Swarthmore College where she teaches courses on environmental justice theory, ecofeminism(s), and community sustainability, and coordinates the Environmental Justice & Community Resilience Program. Di Chiro has published and lectured widely on the topics of environmental and climate justice movements, human rights, feminism and ecology, and food security. She has collaborated with and served as a faculty partner with environmental justice organizations focusing on environmental health, urban agriculture and food justice, biocolonialism, and ‘just’ sustainability. Di Chiro is the recipient of research fellowships from the American Association of University Women, the Humanities Research Institute, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the EPA CARE program (with Nuestras Raìces). She is co-editor of *Appropriating Technology: Vernacular Science and Social Power* (U of Minnesota Press) and is completing a book titled *Worldmaking from the Ground Up: The Praxis of Environmental Justice* (U of California Press).

**Christopher Mele**, Ph.D., **Collaboration Lead**, is Professor of Sociology, University at Buffalo and Senior Research Fellow, Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility, Swarthmore College. His research interests include: post-custodial archiving of community-sourced knowledge; racialized place narratives and urban policy discourses; and the geography of racial exclusion. Mele has been awarded a NEH-Mellon Fellowship for Digital Publication (2022), a SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching (2014), and a Fulbright at the University of Hong Kong (2004-2005). He is author of a book on Chester, *Race and the Politics of Deception: The Making of an American City* (NYU Press, 2017) and *Selling the Lower East Side: Real Estate, Culture and Resistance in New York City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

**Zulene Mayfield, Lead Community Partner,** is Chairperson of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living (CRCQL), a nationally and internationally recognized community organization fighting for the rights of the predominantly Black, brown, and low-income residents of the city of Chester. Mayfield routinely lectures at colleges and universities and consults with several environmental justice organizations across the country. She served as a member of NEJAC (National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee) from 1995-1997 and is the recipient of several awards including the NAACP’s Sojourner Truth Award, the city of Chester’s Civic Leaders Award, and the 2022 Rachel’s Network Catalyst Award.

**Twyla Simpkins, Lead Community Partner,** is Director, The YES Center, Chester, PA. She is a lifelong Chester resident and retired public-school educator. She collaborates with PA Humanities on the Chester Made digital storytelling initiative, serves as Board Member of Greenlawn Cemetery Restoration Committee, and Coordinator of the Martin Luther King, Jr Commemorative Committee of Chester and Vicinity. She is the Executive Producer of four minidocumentaries on topics pertaining to social justice in Chester.

**Emily Higgs Kopin** is the **Head of Digital Collections Strategy** for the Swarthmore College Libraries. Her role is to facilitate the creation of a GitHub repository and front-end webpage, and guide the migration of digital assets from existing storage in Google Drive and SUNY cloud. She will also document and train students to adhere to the Libraries’ metadata standards to ensure maximum findability and usability.

**Amanda Licastro** is the **Digital Scholarship Librarian** at Swarthmore College**.**  She partners with students and faculty on digital scholarship projects, and also teaches digital scholarship methods and technologies. Amanda will provide consultation, mentorship, and administrative assistance for the creation of sustainable workflows and training materials, including advising the LibLab Fellows to develop workshops for peer-to-peer learning. Amanda will work with the Head of Digital Collections Strategy to create the public-facing component using Collections Builder and to maintain the GitHub repository.

1. We employ a definition of participatory archives as “created by, for and with multiple communities, according to and respectful of community values, practices, beliefs and needs” (Gilliland and McKemmish 2014: 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)