# Zine Union Catalog application for Digital Humanities Seed Grant 2021

The Zine Union Catalog (aka ZineCat) is a union catalog dedicated to zines. A union catalog is a resource where libraries can share cataloging and holdings information. ZineCat lets researchers discover zine holdings by searching a single catalog, helps librarians copy catalog records to eliminate duplication of cataloging effort, and facilitates lending across libraries. ZineCat serves educators, researchers, librarians, archivists, and anyone in the general public with an interest in zines.

Zines – self­-published literature that often features counter cultural, political, and artistic content – are an increasingly important primary resource for humanities, social sciences, and other scholars, but due to the diverse standards and practices among the libraries, archives, and community organizations that collect and maintain them, accessing them through traditional research discovery systems is difficult.

The initial [prototype](https://zinecat.org) was developed by Lauren Kehoe (Faculty Librarian, NYU) and Jenna Freedman (Librarian, Barnard) in their MA Digital Humanities program at the City University of New York Graduate Center using 25 records from three libraries with different metadata schema: MARC, Dublin Core, and a spreadsheet-based standalone schema to a [Collective Access catalog](http://collectiveaccess.org/). The prototype has grown to include over 31,000 zines from six collections.

## Research agenda

Zines are self­-produced and self­-published literature that often feature counter­cultural, political, empowering, and artistic content. Zines are produced in small runs and are often distributed directly by the creator(s) or through “distros” (i.e., specialized distributors of alternative publications). Unmediated by editors, publishers, or parents, zines provide primary, personal, and documentary accounts of social, political, and art movements that provide evidence of knowledge production and dissemination within alternative communities.

Because zines exist in a counter-­cultural space, they have historically been collected and circulated by independent zine libraries. Over the last fifteen to twenty years, public libraries, special collections, and academic research libraries have begun collecting zines as both scholarly resources and as part of leisure reading collections. This hybrid environment of zine collections translates into dispersed, often erratic mechanisms for access. Zine descriptions and metadata, and thus discovery of zines, is scattered across library catalogs, archival finding aids, standalone databases, spreadsheets, and online platforms such as LibraryThing. This situation poses impediments to finding and using zines in aggregate for research, teaching, and learning in the humanities. The Zine Union Catalog (ZineCat) seeks to aggregate metadata from these disparate sources.

ZineCat is designed to be:

* A cross­-repository resource for zine research, providing access to metadata about as many zines, and in as many ways (Linked Open Data, links to digital content, etc.) as possible.
* A collaborative platform for cataloging zines and creating authority files for their creators, by persons both within and external to the library profession.
* A hub for zine research, where partners can seek inspiration and collaboration.
* A promotional and educational resource for the zine genre.

ZineCat, as a reference resource for the zine genre, will contain three primary components:

* Catalog records for zine titles (descriptive metadata), which give both identifying (e.g., title, creator name, production date and locality) and contextual information (e.g., subjects, genres, abstracts, biographical and historical details)
* Holdings information (details about libraries that hold specific issues, and how to access them)
* Digitized and/or digital content when available

The [ZineCat prototype](https://zinecat.org/) contains a sampling of records from six zine libraries, with a limited number of metadata fields represented in each record: creator, title, non-normalized date, non-normalized publication location, collection(s) holding the zine, subjects, and language. With additional funding, project organizers would contract a web developer, metadata consultant, and graduate student to provide support in ingesting more metadata collections, improve the Collective Access system to accommodate a greater variety of metadata, document processes and workflows, and establish an outreach and communication strategy to support the scalability of future contributions. When ZineCat is fully realized, contributions will be opened to any library, and the scope of ZineCat will grow to represent zine collections and more robust zine metadata from across the globe.

## Environmental scan

ZineCat was originally imagined like WorldCat--a catalog of catalogs of print and other media zines. WorldCat is a huge cooperative cataloging effort, with member libraries paying to participate. We anticipate that ZineCat will also have a dues-paying membership model. WorldCat provides ZineCat with a model for standardizing metadata and building a collectivized community of contributors to ZineCat so that users (researchers, scholars, students, zinesters, etc.) can discover information about zines, and zine collections, closest to them and in the world at large. WorldCat contributors typically add records directly into WorldCat via an application called Connexion or batch upload records from their local integrated library system (ILS). It is important to note, though, that ZineCat will never be as large as WorldCat, so the scope is quite different.

Another model for ZineCat is the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). DPLA is a discovery tool that provides information from libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural organizations about their digital collections. In DPLA, batch uploads of metadata, with links to digital assets stored locally, are ingested by localized regional hubs who have trained representatives to support the upload of large batches of metadata from a variety of contributing organizations. It would be great to establish a hub model for ZineCat in order to minimize data errors and to coordinate training so that not all individual zine librarians would need training--they could coordinate the metadata ingestion through a ZineCat hub partner. However, there’s a big difference between DPLA and ZineCat: the majority of ZineCat's holdings will not include links to digitized zines, whereas the DPLA’s model is to link out to the cultural organization’s digital item at the local holding level. We are not competing with WorldCat or DPLA--for one, we could not, and for two, we have a different mission and scope than they do. However, we would adopt the most useful aspects of each.

A final model for ZineCat is the Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP). They use the same digital asset management system as we do, Collective Access (CA), and QZAP provided the framework for ZineCat’s setup during early prototype development. However, they use their CA to display a single collection of digital zines from one organization while ZineCat has to grapple with multiple collections from multiple organizations.

## Work plan

* April - May - Advertise, interview, and hire three contract positions: web developer, metadata specialist, and graduate student
* June - Project managers meet with web developer, metadata consultant and graduate student intern weekly to orient new members to the ZineCat environment and discuss goals and milestones for the work to be accomplished. Set a schedule of meetings and deliverables through mid-December.
* July - Check in bi-weekly with the team to finalize scope of deliverables.
* August - November - Bi weekly check-ins with the teams to assess progress of deliverables: i.e. setting up Collective Access to ingest a variety of metadata, community outreach, ingestion of additional collections of metadata, publication of documentation and workflows to support metadata harmonization and ingestion.
* December - Assess successes/accomplishments and failures. Strategize for future growth of ZineCat.

## List of participants

* Lauren Kehoe, Zine Union Catalog Project co-Manager, Accessibility & Accommodations Librarian, Assistant Curator NYU Division of Libraries; MA Digital Humanities (CUNY Graduate Center) and MS Library and Information Science (Pratt Institute)
* Jenna Freedman, Zine Union Catalog Project co-Manager, Curator of the Barnard Zine Library, Librarian for Women's Gender, and Sexuality Studies; MA Digital Humanities (CUNY Graduate Center) and MA Library and Information Science (University of South Florida)
* Web developer - provide support in back end Collective Access database set up and guidance on improving the user interface of ZineCat. Assess and improve the site's digital accessibility. Will work with the metadata consultant.
* Metadata Consultant - Support configuration of the Collective Access system to accommodate and ingest a variety of metadata with different schemas thus, harmonizing the metadata. Support cleaning the metadata and developing documentation workflows for sharing with the zine librarian community to contribute their own metadata to ZineCat. Will work with the web developer.
* Graduate Student intern - provide support in documenting workflows and community outreach.

## Sustainability plan

ZineCat operates under open source and open culture principles. Data sharing requirements will adhere to a GNU General Public and Creative Commons licensing: share and share alike. CollectiveAccess is freely available under a GNU Public License. ZineCat will not own the metadata, but will openly aggregate it from contributing organizations. The data provided through ZineCat will be used by catalogers, librarians, humanities and social sciences researchers, zine makers, among other interested parties. The data will be published on zinecat.org and regularly updated, shared, and archived as the project grows and more contributions from the zine community are made. ZineCat uses a [GitHub repository](https://github.com/zinecat/zinecat.org) where assets and documentation will be maintained.

## Future agenda

The project is in the prototype phase. The end result will be a fully formed union catalog for discovering, cataloging, and lending zines globally. The project will continue to grow as more zines and zine collections are added to ZineCat. We have records ready to go from an academic library in Toronto, a community library in Nova Scotia, and a dozen others interested in participating in future phases. Participation in ZineCat is sought out by and brought to the attention of the current project managers. We prioritize identity-focused community libraries and public libraries serving marginalized communities, as well as libraries with unique data standards, in selecting which holdings to include next. As the project develops, the process for contributing to ZineCat will evolve, too. Upon further development of ZineCat there will be fewer barriers to participation and will thus be easier to invite more organizations to contribute.

Initially, project managers have ingested all of the metadata records from the contributing organizations (through CSV or XML catalog exports), but the goal is to have a system in place where contributing organizations can be trained to upload their own collections of metadata to ZineCat. Representatives from ZineCat will be available to support the ingestion of the records, but ultimately, the responsibility for contributing metadata records to ZineCat will belong to the contributing organizations. The process will be modeled on the method used by the DPLA for ingesting massive sets of metadata records from disparate organizations. DPLA provides support in standardizing the metadata to match its discovery system and provides the framework (i.e. crosswalk or ingest map) for inputting the metadata on a semi-regular basis per their hub agreements with organizations in their region. Like DPLA, we would provide training, support, and oversight for others to complete the ingest processes.

The zine library community, sharing niche expertise, is a close, warm, and supportive group. Jenna and Lauren have deep ties in the community, including to identity-focused libraries that include the POC Zine Project, the Queer Zine Archive Project, and no-budget community libraries around the Anglophone world. Recently, having participated in the International Zine Librarians unConference, we have expanded our relationships to include non-native English-speaking zine librarians in Austria, Belgium, Chile, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia. The Zine Union Catalog will eventually host holdings from any and all collections that wish to participate. ZineCat membership from libraries beyond our previous scope will allow for a wider range of voices to attain visibility on their own terms. Control over one's words, images, and ideas is a hallmark of zine culture. Our effort to keep ZineCat weird by harmonizing metadata rather than standardizing it is crucial to its responsibility to the zine community and respecting its originators.

## Budget

| **Funding Need** | **Description** | **Justification** | **Cost** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Staffing: Web developer | To be used to pay the salary of a contract web developer who will be building out the functionality of the Zine Union Catalog interface and responsible for ingesting library and archive holdings and harmonizing metadata. | Contract web developer will be hired at a rate of $50/hour at 4 hours/week for 30 weeks (June - Mid December). The number of hours estimated for labor is $6,000 based on our experience doing this work for ZineCat, plus $1,000 for extra time for quality control, questions, meetings, etc. | $7,000 |
| Staffing: Metadata Consultant | Support configuration of the Collective Access system to accommodate and ingest a variety of metadata with different schemas thus, harmonizing the metadata. Support cleaning the metadata and developing documentation workflows for sharing with the zine librarian community to contribute their own metadata to ZineCat. | Contract metadata consultant will be hired at a rate of $50/hour at 4 hours/week for 30 weeks (June - Mid December). The number of hours estimated for labor is $6000 based on our experience doing this work for ZineCat, plus $1000 for extra time, quality control, questions, meetings, etc. | $7,000 |
| Staffing: Graduate Student | To be used to pay the salary of a graduate student assistant who will support the web developer, metadata specialist, and draft documentation, workflows, and outreach communications. | Hire a graduate student assistant at a rate of $25/hour at 4 hours/week for 30 weeks (June - Mid December). The number of hours estimated for labor is $3000 based on our experience doing this work for ZineCat, plus $500 for extra time, quality control, questions, meetings, etc. Additional 30% for overhead (health insurance, etc) = $1050. | $4,550 |
|  |  |  | $18,550 **(total)** |