**Dear Jonathan:**

**Congratulations once again on your successful application to the National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant program! As per your request, please find below a copy of the panelists' remarks about your application.**

**The review process in this competition followed Endowment practice. Knowledgeable persons outside NEH read each application and advise the agency about its merits. Each panelist considers the application according to the review criteria and also provides a letter rating: E (Excellent), VG (Very Good), G (Good), SM (Some Merit) and NC (Not Competitive). NEH's staff comments on matters of fact or on significant issues that otherwise would be missing from these reviews, and then makes recommendations to the National Council on the Humanities. The National Council meets at various times during the year to advise the NEH chairman on grants. The chairman takes into account the advice provided by the review process and, by law, makes all funding decisions.**

**Below are copies of the panelists' comments with the identity of the panelists or references to other applications omitted. Since panelists frequently change their minds as a result of panel discussion, please keep in mind these comments do not always reflect the final judgment of a particular panelist or the reasons for a change in ratings.**

**Thank you,**

**Perry Collins**

[**pcollins@neh.gov**](mailto:pcollins@neh.gov)

***Evaluation from Panelist 1***

**Please enter your assessment of the proposal, using the criteria provided in the application guidelines, in the space below.  
  
The project does have the potential claimed by the proposers to be “innovative in content, structure and impact.” Documentation of the language used to name species of flora and fauna gives valuable insight into movement and relationships among earlier populations which can impact studies in the fields of anthropology, history, linguistics, and literature by linking information previously stored in disparate locations. Facilitation of comment and exchange will encourage and facilitate new research.  
  
Presentation of the materials in Spanish as well as in English will ensure that intended audiences, among them the current speakers of many of the languages under study, will be included in addition to affording access to non-indigenous scholars.  
  
Inclusion of indigenous contributors and partners at all phases of development is will enhance teaching and research possibilities among numerous constituents who are primary stakeholders in the implementation of the project.**

**Your initial rating for this project**

**E, Excellent**

**Additional comments after panel discussion**

**Your final rating for this project**

**E, Excellent**

***Evaluation from Panelist 2***

**Please enter your assessment of the proposal, using the criteria provided in the application guidelines, in the space below.**

**"Comparative Ethnobiology in Mesoamerica: A Digital Portal for Collaborative Research and Public Dissemination" is and interesting project of transdisciplinary cultural mapping where historical language development and fauna and flora species catalogues and analyses intersect to provide historical insights into the cultural formation of early Mesoamerica groups. The intellectual significance of this project is its development of a web portal that will be legible and useful for scholar-researchers of social sciences and biological sciences intermediated through technology for humanists as well. With the turn to environmental sustainability and indigenous language preservation across disciplinary fields in higher education today, "Comparative Ethnobiology" could well stimulate new research for humanities scholars. The quality of innovation seems apparent as Dr. Amith's team articulate a viable idea for an accessible web portal containing interactive features for engaging with and uploading scholarship and commentary on visual culture data now languishing in inaccessible repositories that can spur interest in this highly specialized area of inquiry. Understanding how early communities in Mesoamerica developed language and other cultural practices through developing typologies of plant and animal life is fascinating especially since collecting recordings of indigenous Mesoamerican languages, bird calls and creating bi-lingual manuals are part of the project as well. The quality of the conception seems clear and straightforward, and the definitions are adequate to the task. the feasibility of the six-phase work plan is consistent with the project goals.  
  
  
Since the project builds upon Dr. Amith's previous NSF and NEH projects related to this newer project, I feel the PI and team's qualifications are fitting. Dr. Amith's budget seems in line with the project goals and outcomes. The flora images are truly fantastic and gorgeous. All in all, the project will interest humanists for sure, still it feels like an NSF project.**

**Your initial rating for this project**

**VG, Very Good**

**Additional comments after panel discussion**

**Your final rating for this project**

**E, Excellent**

***Evaluation from Panelist 3***

**Please enter your assessment of the proposal, using the criteria provided in the application guidelines, in the space below.**

**The project seeks to remedy the paucity of New World biosemantics data through a web portal that will bring together a variety of experts from different fields: linguistics, anthropology, biology, entomology, and history. The project seeks to bring together a corpus of biosemantic data that has been generated as part of other projects that have documented endangered languages and host a resource where different users can contribute to and interact with the newly collated data sets. It is also important to note the interest in broadly disseminating the completed project to the indigenous communities that provided the source data, in addition to the broad academic community. The project is clearly structured, and the plan of action is consistent with the proposed benchmarks. This project will likely stimulate the application of digital technologies to data sets emanating from different disciplines. The combined background and experience of the project team is reasonable for the breadth of the proposed workflow, all pointing to success at the end of the project timeline.**

**Your initial rating for this project**

**E, Excellent**

**Additional comments after panel discussion**

**This project's contribution to the humanities and its conception is innovative and will stimulate new research and the development of new technologies to broader audiences.**

**Your final rating for this project**

**E, Excellent**

***Evaluation from Panelist 4***

**Please enter your assessment of the proposal, using the criteria provided in the application guidelines, in the space below.**

**Proposal describes a tool for collaborative data-gathering, enhancement of data quality, and exploitation of existing large data sets, made larger through aggregation and improved by cross-disciplinary and cross-ethnic participation. The project innovates by aggregating existing research in a shared digital resource, leveraging efforts already underway. The project is also testing a new model for research that exploits the potential of cross disciplinary collaboration and the potential of integration of datasets. The project also innovates by placing traditional knowledge in digital environment and engaging communities of origin.  
  
The proposed tool would aggregate knowledge across disciplines and communities that would otherwise be isolated from each other, making the data collected in one field useful to another, which is an exciting use of digital technology. The proposal presents a well thought-out plan and vision of what the tool can do, what's possible in the time allotted, and what it could then be developed to do in the future. Sustainability is addressed through commitment of Gettysburg for web hosting and UT for "archiving," but some questions remain: what is the UT data environment like and how will data be integrated further there? Is it a fedora-type data hosting system? Proposal also presents an ambitious development schedule, so much of its success rests on the developer, who is experienced in such projects; I am impressed by the developer’s experience with user experience and developing tools for diverse user communities. Support from user communities is evident in the proposal, but the plan for their participation is vague. How will it be organized? How can the applicants count on test use during development with such tight deadlines?  
  
I am impressed by the willingness of supporting researchers to share their data in support of others' research in other areas, and in the buy-in and enthusiasm among the experts who would be impacted by the existence of the tool. Project director is clearly expert on types of data being collected, historical data sets, and current practitioner’s' methods. I don't see any explicit support from "citizen scientists" on which the project partially relies, but maybe that's unrealistic to expect at this stage.  
  
In general, the proposal is highly innovative, and beyond its own application, could be a model for cross-disciplinary collaboration in digital sharing, linking, and leveraging of existing research for cross-pollination. The ambitions of project director seem more complex than the statement of work provided by the developer, and a unified vision of what the tool will be designed to do seems lacking on a first read. It's also a little difficult to clearly connect the types of data sets described by the proposal, the suppliers of data in the letters of support, and the examples given in the appendix. I wonder, after reading the proposal, how these complex narratives given as examples will be created and edited?**

**Your initial rating for this project**

**E, Excellent**

**Additional comments after panel discussion**

**Your final rating for this project**

**E, Excellent**