Submission to the Consultation on Advancing Digital Scholarship in Canada

This document sets out the response from the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (the Federation) to the document, *Toward a Policy Framework for Advancing Digital Scholarship in Canada*, from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Canada Foundation for Innovation and Genome Canada (together referred to as the TC3+).

I. Context

As the consultation document states, Canada is at the edge of an information and communications revolution. We are facing opportunities to enable, accelerate and influence research through dynamic new technologies. Within the humanities and social sciences, we have seen quick adaptation and adoption of such technologies for research, teaching and open access publishing purposes. Recognizing the leading work being done in the social sciences and humanities is central to moving forward with digital scholarship infrastructure. Typical patterns of digital scholarship infrastructure development have, in the past, reflected the methods and needs of research areas other than the humanities and social sciences. These developments have also at times originated through a top-down, overly reductive design and implementation process that does not reflect the valuable diversity of methods and audiences of humanities and social science researchers, and the important and distinct communities they serve.

The Federation applauds the TC3+ for initiating this consultation. It is essential that the extensive and complex ecosystem of stakeholders is engaged, and the final policy framework should recognize the diversity of their practices and needs. Digital scholarship is an emerging area, with proof of concepts and best practices just starting to appear across all research disciplines; these are worth paying attention to.

II. Recommendations

This section provides A) recommendations for strengthening the policy framework and B) recommendations for additional components of the policy framework.

A) Recommendations for strengthening the policy framework

The Federation supports the TC3+'s aim to develop a policy framework to advance digital scholarship in Canada and suggests that the TC3+ strengthen their policy by implementing the following measures:

1. **Adopt a bottom-up approach to eventual implementation, with national-level coordination**. As the consultation document mentions, there are already a number of regional and individual initiatives underway at the local institutional level that are likely to produce reasonable data management and curation solutions. These nascent initiatives could provide the foundation for a more coordinated national system, as these projects invariably involve a cross-section of local stakeholders equivalent to many of those identified at the national level in the consultation document.

2. **Consult with libraries and archives, and their representative organizations.** Key stakeholders in digital scholarship initiatives, particularly for humanities and social science research, include institutional and provincial libraries and archives, as well as Library and Archives Canada. A national digitization strategy and integrated infrastructure would provide access to the results of local digitization initiatives, allowing sharing, repurposing and collaboration with respect to data. A strategy on digital scholarship has a bearing on access to and understanding of Canadian heritage, particularly with respect to non-consumptive use of copyright or licensed datasets. Including these important stakeholders in the final development of the framework would support humanities and social science researchers, as well as benefiting the whole of Canada by adding to the understanding and preservation of its history and heritage.

B) Recommendations for additional components of the policy framework

The Federation recommends the following for consideration as components of the TC3+ policy framework to advance digital scholarship in Canada:

1. **Create a national-level cloud storage system accessible to all academic researchers.** Canada has a strong tradition of networks and high performance computing. What is currently missing is the storage component capable of handling massive amounts of data.

2. **Develop policies that set out data management plans and open access requirements for research data.** Data management plans should be required of all project proposals with a digital component, with the arrangements for archiving or ongoing management a required part of final reporting of grant outputs. This will require defining what constitutes data, particularly in the humanities. Data policies should require open access and standards compliance in order to facilitate archiving and interoperability. Data management plans should address the question of the standards that the project will adopt, as well as its approach to metadata and documentation.

3. **Provide cross-disciplinary support for basic resource digitisation and tool development, as well as funding for data digitization initiatives**. Software and tools, as part of the ecosystem of digital scholarship, are frequently funded by public money, and require policies that address the desirability of open-sourcing and documenting such software so that research and infrastructure resources are optimized. In doing so, the TC3+ will also need to consider programs to develop research infrastructure and tools that will provide support to the initiatives already underway at the local or regional level.

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The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences works to promote the value of research and learning in the humanities and social sciences. Created in 1996, its membership comprises over 80 scholarly associations, 79 institutions and six affiliate organizations, representing 85,000 researchers, educators and students across Canada.

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