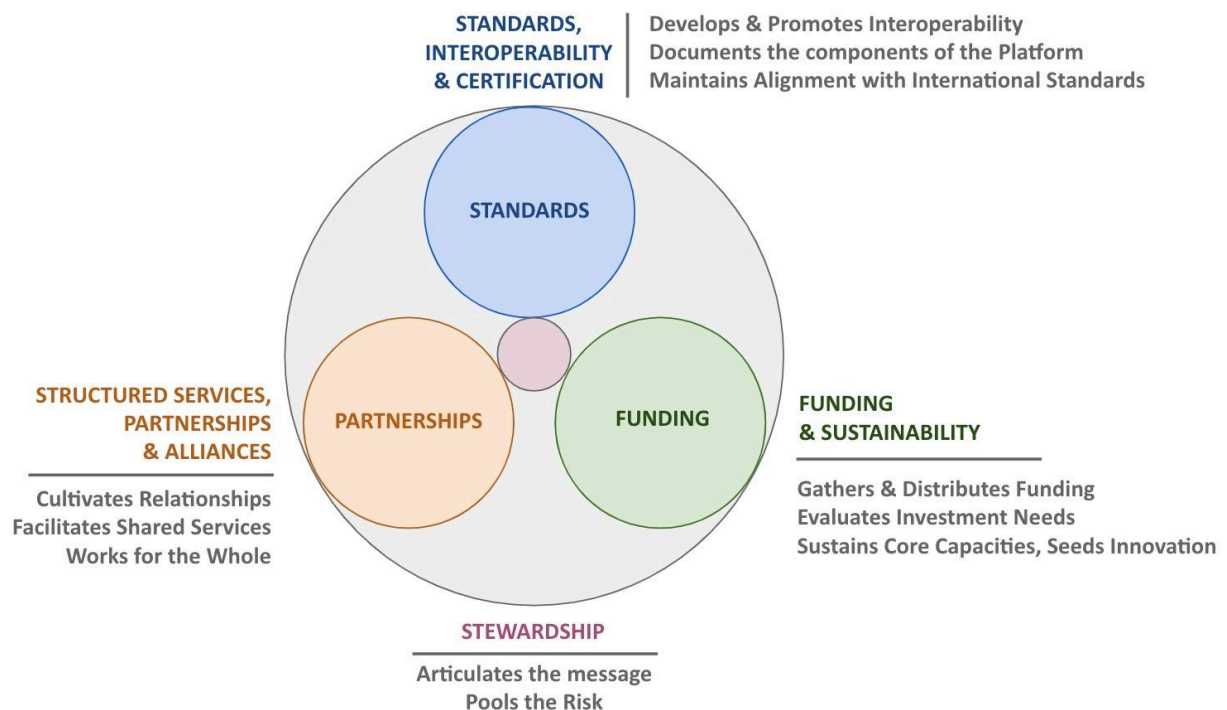


# The Open Platform

## A Proposal for Collective Action towards Coherence and Sustainable Interdependence for Community-owned Knowledge Infrastructure To Safeguard the Public Interest

### Value Proposition and Statement of Shared Purpose



The vision for the Open Platform  
is more than a collection of software and tools.  
It is a fluid ecosystem—  
a set of technologies, shared principles, and  
standards that includes both open source  
and commercial solutions.

# Value Proposition for an Open Platform

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## OVERVIEW OF THE INITIATIVE

The systems, structures, and collaborative networks necessary to support the knowledge ecosystem have reached a level of complexity and scale that has overwhelmed the ability of existing methods of funding, cooperation, and governance to reliably support shared open infrastructure. In the face of inaction, there is an imminent threat that libraries, archives, and museums will no longer be able to serve the academy as responsible custodians of the scholarly and cultural record. The Open Platform initiative is lead by a consortium of institutions committed to promoting sustainable, interoperable infrastructure to safely and continuously steward the digital content integral to academic inquiry, scientific knowledge, and cultural heritage. The core intentions of the Open Platform initiative are to reduce risk, to make durable commitments at the institutional level, and to consistently improve our position.

Through collective action, we propose to create an **Open Platform** that brings financial, strategic, and institutional coherence to **community-built, interoperable, service-driven infrastructure** and software projects that support the **preservation and access of scholarship and knowledge**. The platform must have an intrinsic, **robust capacity** to execute, sustain, and scale. The Open Platform initiative supports and endorses alignment with this strategic direction through three domains of activity, which are outlined below in the Statement of Shared Purpose.

The Open Platform endeavors to be human-centered by resting on a foundation of shared understanding, common purpose, and interdependence. It strives not only to support usable and dependable technologies, but to strengthen the health of the communities that create them and fortify the collaboration of the institutions that use them. The Open Platform is not simply a collection of software and tools. It is infrastructure broadly defined as a complex network of policies, standards, workflows, integrations, frameworks, applications, and services. Its purpose is to provide value by promoting shared capacities and services that enable durability and persistence for content and data; usable discovery and access for users; and capabilities for staff to effectively manage and curate the knowledge stewarded by participating institutions.

This vision fills an important niche in the variety of active initiatives that are advancing infrastructure for digital scholarship and open knowledge. Integrated with and working alongside existing and emerging efforts, it has significant potential to realize a return on institutional investment by reducing duplication of effort, reducing variance in practice, more effectively managing shared investment, and bringing down collective costs through scale.

## OUR PURPOSE AND WHO WE ARE

We are a group of institutions who are major supporters of and investors in the ecosystem of open source communities and software projects that support the preservation and access of digital content. These technologies and communities support our individual and collective mission as responsible stewards of the knowledge and cultural heritage in our care. Collectively, we have been building these technologies, in one form or another, for over twenty-five years. We experience the impulse to collaborate on building the infrastructure, technologies, and software that support this mission as an imperative. Yet we rely on a relatively small group of institutions to carry much of this work, and recognize that a large number of institutions are struggling to resource and sustain our collective efforts to achieve our mission as stewards. We have seen some of our efforts fail, and some components of our technical platform suffer from lack of resources or poor coordination. We believe that we are at a crucial moment to act to bring coherence to these shared projects and communities.

We endeavor to sustain a balance between open and proprietary services, technologies, and standards through partnerships, healthy relationships, and building trust. We acknowledge and appreciate the inherent tension between our need to act together and our responsibility to serve the interests of our individual institutions. We seek an interdependent, dynamic ecosystem based in agreements and commitments that are durable beyond any particular personality or individual and aligned with the needs and values of higher education. We believe that a coherent, open ecosystem must be infused with credibility and reliability in order to serve the stewardship mission entrusted to our institutions, with systems and services that meet both our immediate needs and our long-term goals as they continually evolve. Sustainable resourcing for these communities, strengthened by strategic partnerships and alliances, is essential to realizing both our short term and long term goals for this platform.

While proprietary, third party, and vended solutions have an important role to play in the knowledge lifecycle, we prefer community-driven, open-source efforts where we derive value from having control over the systems and standards that manage knowledge over the long term. Such a strategy reduces our risk as we control the runway, the migration pathways, and the way content is preserved. In general, while all the elements in the table below have their merits, we value those on the left over those on the right.

A marketplace of ideas and solutions	over	Central planning
Smaller, interoperable services in an ecosystem	over	Large, monopolistic systems
Shared services from fiscal sponsors	over	Redundant administrative infrastructure
Fluid funding	over	Ossified funding streams
Interoperable, standards-based systems, data and services	over	Isolated, unconnected systems & bespoke innovations

# Statement of Shared Purpose

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The Open Platform is committed to developing and promoting sustainable, interoperable infrastructure to safely and continuously manage academic, scientific, and cultural content. The purpose of the Open Platform is to create coherence by increasing interdependence, sharing risk, and bringing down collective costs through scale. It aspires to provide value to participating institutions through shared capacities and services that enable durability and persistence for content and data; usable discovery and access for users; and capabilities for staff to effectively manage and curate the knowledge stewarded by participating institutions.

## THE OBJECTIVE

A coherent, interoperable, and adaptive ecosystem of systems and services under joint stewardship that collectively works to serve user needs and provide value to a diverse community of higher educational and cultural institutions. This fluid ecosystem is the Open Platform--a set of technologies, shared principles, and standards supported and leveraged by organizations, institutions, projects, and communities working to achieve a common purpose.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF COHERENT STEWARDSHIP

Effective stewardship builds and maintains credibility and integrity through impactful, decisive, and transparent action. The institutional stewards who support the Open Platform initiative maintain its viability through a joint commitment to sustaining it as a well-resourced initiative that engages in three strategic domains of activity:

### (1) STRUCTURED SERVICES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND ALLIANCES

- **Cultivates relationships** between institutions, projects, communities, vendors, funders, and public and private enterprise to ensure long-term sustainability of our efforts
- **Facilitates incubation, shared services & fiscal sponsorship** of new projects and innovation, to reduce friction of start up and scaling, and reduce duplicative effort
- **Works for the whole** with confidence that it has value to the parts. Remains committed to the core purpose and shared mission of the community, which is distinct from individual or institutional roles, perspectives, and personalities
- **Works to ensure inclusivity** of voices and perspectives of all participants in the Platform

## (2) STANDARDS, INTEROPERABILITY, AND CERTIFICATION

- **Develops and Promotes Interoperability.** Weaves the software and technologies of the Platform together. Maintains the credentialing standards that define compatibility with the Open Platform, which then allows any entity to contribute compatible tools and content. Creates the glue (in between the software that the communities build) that makes the parts work together as a whole (e.g., APIs, web services, standards...)
- **Maintains documentation of the components of the Platform.** In particular, the function of the components with respect to the whole; and known gaps in capacities, functions, workflows, or interoperability
- **Maintains alignment with existing national and international standards.** Aligns with existing and emerging standards in areas such as accessibility, security, privacy, annotation, etc.

## (3) FISCAL STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

- **Gathers and distributes funding and resources.** Distributes resources to the communities to use to accomplish their goals, including operational excellence and core development as well as innovation. Monitors the use and effectiveness of resources it distributes, and the successes it enables
- **Reviews and evaluates the resource needs of the ecosystem.** Maintains regularly updated reports and an overall picture of the resources flowing into ecosystem projects

At the center of these activities, the Open Platform maintains two core responsibilities.

- **Articulates the message.** Creates consistent marketing, both internal and external; especially, as a community of institutions, what we did, what we need, and why it matters
- **Pools the Risk.** Provides a bedrock for sustaining what is working, a shared method for understanding and responsibly managing risk, a cushion for innovation, and a pathway to repurpose what hasn't worked

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SOFTWARE PROJECTS AND COMMUNITIES:

The Open Platform initiative seeks to foster inclusive, learning, interdependent, and continuously-improving communities that have freedom through self-determination, and are supported and sustained in their work. As partners in realizing this ideal, communities and projects articulate the following for sharing with the Open Platform Stewardship function, funders, and other participants in the Platform.

- The community's mission, the value of community services to whom, the value of community services to the ecosystem, and how the services meet the published standards of the Platform
- The community's strategy and direction, and an implementation plan
- A resource plan that includes a statement of needs, expenditures, and impact

# APPENDICES

This proposal has a series of appendices and supporting documents that are in draft:

## **Appendix A - Domains of Strategic Activity**

A conceptual outline of the three primary domains of activity (Credentialing, Partnerships, Funding), including the key responsibilities of each area, how it would work, what it would need, and what success would look like, as well as a strategy towards implementation

## **Appendix B - Models and Research**

A detailed “case for change” that looks to our shared history of collaborative efforts for models that characterize the successes, failures, lessons learned, and best practices that should inform a renewed effort for collective action at scale.

## **Appendix C - Profiles of Open Infrastructure Software Projects**

High level profiles of a sample of major community software projects that together form the “stack” of open infrastructure supporting the preservation and access of digital content, including governance models, funding, membership, current challenges, and direction

## **Appendix D - Data and Analysis**

A snapshot of membership data and financial contributions to the community projects profiled in Appendix C in 2018, across more than 200 institutions who currently contribute to them financially with analysis and information on overall investment.

## **Appendix E - Glossary of Terms**

List of terms used throughout the document that identify and define a shared vocabulary.

Institutions involved in outlining the initial Open Platform concept and drafting of this proposal:

- University of Michigan
- University of Virginia
- University of Wisconsin, Madison
- University of Iowa
- Penn State University
- Stanford University
- University of Colorado, Boulder
- Northwestern University
- Virginia Tech
- The Ohio State University
- Indiana University
- Emory University
- New York University
- Columbia University
- Johns Hopkins University
- Princeton University
- North Carolina State University