

Response to Project Plan Feedback: Australian Internet Observatory Project plan

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback on the project plan. We are very pleased with the positive response the plan received with feedback indicating that the facility will be useful for tackling the important challenge of collecting and understanding digital platforms and digital trace data including for researchers, cultural institutions, historians and policy makers. To address some specific concerns raised in the feedback:

Partnerships:

Feedback suggested that the partners should have greater geographic spread and include Sydney-based institutions. There are currently 6 university co-investment partners on the project from two states (Victoria and Queensland) and collaboration with two current national ARC Centres of Excellence which have partnerships with institutions across NSW, Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland as well as internationally. As a national project AIO will provide access and training for researchers across all states and regions. The project team is keen to engage with, learn from and collaborate with organisations, projects and infrastructure across many sectors including education, government, civil society and industry in Australia and internationally in developing the facility. Further co-investment partnership opportunities may also open up as the project progresses.

Governance:

Feedback identified the need to manage integration of work packages across project partners including training, access and authorisation. To ensure this occurs the project builds on networks of collaboration and expertise across the partner institutions operating on a distributed governance model and has been carefully designed to work with the strengths and capabilities of each partner. There is also a focus on an integrated DevOps approach to ensure ongoing monitoring and benchmarking of all aspects of the project led by the lead institution.

Feedback identified that there can be challenges with data donation approaches including representative sampling and privacy issues. The project team has extensive experience with developing research infrastructure for digital data collection including citizen-science approaches and the training program will advise and support researchers using these methods. The project plan also includes extensive processes for developing appropriate ethical and legal frameworks for managing data collected and providing training across education and the wider community.

Technical and implementation issues:

Feedback identified potential overlaps with work in the CDL, as well as lessons that can be learned from the LDaCA project on access systems, storage and repositories. We will be working closely with other teams within the HASS and Indigenous RDC to ensure alignment and learn from their experiences in these areas. Feedback also emphasised the importance of using interoperable standards for storage and metadata. It is intended that systems and protocols for storage and access to data collected as well as metadata standards will be developed in collaboration with project partners and in consultation across the wider NRI system to ensure they are integrated and effective.

Feedback noted the ambition of the project and asked about the development and audience for various technologies being developed. The AIO project team includes expertise from across a range of disciplines, including computer science and engineering, digital media and communications with experience developing cutting edge data donation systems and machine learning tools. The project will build on and extend existing research infrastructure already in development at partner organisations including the Australian Digital Observatory, Facebook Ad Observatory, Image Machine and RAPID as well as open source tools where available. We are confident that there is widespread interest in being able to access, learn and apply these technologies across academia and the community more broadly.