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Action plan for keeping EHRI users connected

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Abstract (for dissemination)	<p>During the course of EHRI's previous Integrating Activities, more than 200 researchers participated in EHRI's trans-national access and training activities. However, we have so far not formalised a strategy on how to keep these users affiliated to EHRI long-term, systematically monitor their scientific outputs enabled through EHRI, and increase collaboration between EHRI's research users. By using information available through evaluation exercises produced in past phases of EHRI, and by discussing shared experiences with partner institutions, this task has developed such a strategy. The strategic goal is to further EHRI's research and innovation potential by ensuring that research insights developed by its users will be optimally exploited, integrated and disseminated.</p>
Management Summary	(required if the deliverable exceeds more than 25 pages) [Max. 500 words]

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1. Introduction

Since its establishment, EHRI has developed a broad range of services offered both in person and online. These services have attracted a large and growing body of users. The users include researchers of a variety of backgrounds, collection holders, digital humanist specialists, educators, and media professionals. With a growing number of users from a range of backgrounds, the purpose of this deliverable is to formalise a strategy on how to keep these users affiliated with EHRI long-term, systematically monitor their scientific outputs enabled through EHRI, and increase collaboration between EHRI's users. This deliverable will focus on users of Physical Access Programmes offered by EHRI which include a Trans-national Fellowship Programme as well as Training Seminars and Interdisciplinary Workshops.

2. EHRI Trans-national Access Programme

The Trans-national Access Programme is currently being offered through two services. The *Conny Kristel Fellowship Programme (CK Fellowship)* grants users trans-national access to facilities and resources available at EHRI partner institutions and cooperating partners which constitute the most important Holocaust-relevant, collection-holding institutions and centres of excellence. It allows users to access the geographically dispersed resources and expertise they need to complete high-quality research. *Training Seminars and Interdisciplinary Workshops* enable users at different career stages to expand their networks, to acquire the skills they need to excel in the digital world, and to enable new interdisciplinary, trans-national and other innovative research avenues.

3. User Engagement

User engagement is an important way to not only understand whether users find value in EHRI activities, but also whether EHRI will continue to be relevant for them after completing a Trans-national Access programme. Users who value EHRI programs and find the infrastructure relevant for them long term are more likely to continue to be active, recommend EHRI to colleagues and peers, and credit EHRI in their academic work while continuing to use EHRI services and apply for programmes.

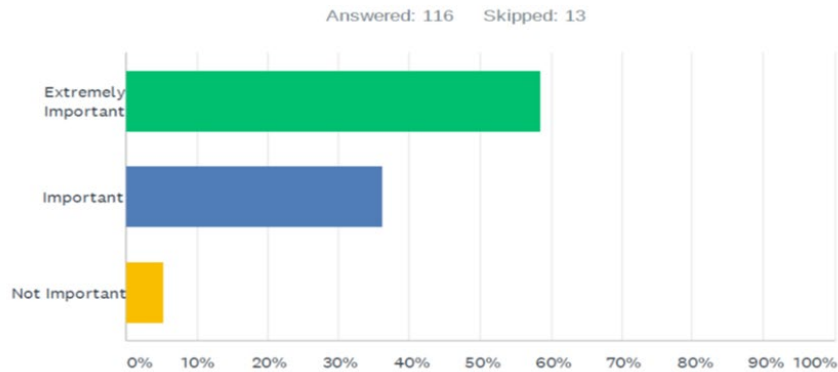
An important aspect of user engagement is the networking possibilities it enables. The importance of networking was expressed by users in a survey conducted in March 2021, where networking was identified as a prominent need among all EHRI user groups. The EHRI Access and Training Strategies Survey was distributed amongst current as well as potential future users of EHRI services.¹ The survey aimed to gain a better understanding of the needs of the EHRI user community and to assess whether the existing services provided by EHRI answer these needs. The results of the survey have shown the importance to users to engage and to establish long term connections with one another. When asked *How would you evaluate the importance of ongoing/long term connection with*

¹<https://www.ehri-project.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/D5.1%20-%20User%20Needs%20Analysis.pdf>

The survey was disseminated widely on the EHRI website and other social media platforms and distributed among former participants of EHRI physical services. Efforts were also made to distribute the survey among additional potential user groups identified, such as M.A students, Educators, and Media Professionals. A total of 129 responses from 26 countries were received.

your peers? 59% of respondents indicated that a continued ongoing connection with peers was extremely important, 36% important, only 5% not important.

Q34 How would you evaluate the importance of an ongoing/long term connection with researchers/educators/archivists (Peers in your field)?



Several concrete suggestions on how to best enable networking were given in answers to the questions *How can EHRI improve its services? Are there any additional services you would consider particularly helpful?*

- *Network with researchers from your field*
- *Linking researchers*
- *Creation of some sort of online community for the participants and people of interest*
- *Some private forum to ask a question or discuss a topic or share experience*
- *PhD students research groups under EHRI supervision*
- *A group email of Holocaust researchers to ask questions and receive feedback*
- *Some kind of (maybe online) networking would be nice*
- *By giving the possibility to enlarge the network of researchers working on the same topics by personal contact of organising lectures discussions (online is efficient to avoid travel costs)*

There exists a notable link between the importance of networking as expressed by EHRI users, and the possibilities for user engagement. This deliverable will therefore introduce some measures that can help keep users engaged with EHRI while at the same time provide opportunities for networking. A look at user engagement policies throughout EHRI 1-3 will provide some context.

4. User Engagement EHRI 1-3

During EHRI's previous Integrating Activities, more than 200 researchers participated in EHRI's trans-national access and training activities. While there has not been a formalised strategy on how to keep these users affiliated to EHRI long-term, there have been various elements in place to facilitate user engagement.

4.1 Newsletter

Since January 2011, EHRI has issued a newsletter on a regular basis. The newsletter is distributed through email to subscribers of the mailing list. Today, the newsletter is sent out to

1,771 subscribers. The newsletter publishes news on services provided on the EHRI website, which enables an increase in website traffic. Calls for the Conny Kristel Fellowship Programme as well as information on upcoming conferences, workshops, and seminars are published, including information on eligibility and deadlines for application. Moreover, upon completion of a seminar, conference or workshop, brief reports on the event are included in the newsletter. The information available in the newsletter enables EHRI users to keep up to date with upcoming events, and opportunities, in addition to the information on virtual services.

4.2 Follow-up after EHRI Fellowships

Following completion of a Fellowship programme, the fellows were asked to write up a report on their fellowship and provide any updates on publications that were made possible by the EHRI Fellowship. In EHRI-3, a choice is given to Fellows to either provide a report on their Fellowship or contribute to the EHRI Document Blog. These reports enable continued contact with the users after completion of a Fellowship and are an opportunity for users to provide feedback on their Fellowship experience.

4.3 Document Blog Contributions

The EHRI document blog is a space to share ideas and research about Holocaust-related archival documents, and their presentation and interpretation using digital tools. Since the blog was launched (2016), notifications about each new contribution have been posted on the EHRI website and EHRI consortium members have disseminated the posts via their social media channels. Submissions have come from a diverse range of contributors; Holocaust researchers, archivists and digital humanists, including EHRI partners and fellows, document and share their research activities and approaches to digital archival content in the EHRI Document Blog. From the beginning on, EHRI-fellows have been encouraged to contribute to the Document Blog. Since EHRI-3, fellows can submit a blog post to the EHRI Document Blog on their research instead of a fellowship-report. Other contributors include past participants of seminars and interdisciplinary workshops. The opportunity for users to contribute to the Blog maintains a link to the EHRI consortium and helps to facilitate user engagement by offering a valuable platform to publish their own research/findings.

4.3 EHRI 3- focus groups

Currently within the EHRI-3 project, a task is dedicated to user engagement. The task is conducted within Work package 4, Localisation and Capacity Building, T4.1 Develop an international community of experts in preserving, mapping, cataloguing and curating Holocaust collections and linked data. The purpose of the task is to establish a community of experts that work with Holocaust documentation and enable networking between a specific community of experts. Two groups have been established, one for Archivists dealing with Holocaust-related documentation and providing reference and information services to users, and the other for Holocaust researchers and archivists dealing with Holocaust photographs. The groups will include participants from across the globe. A series of meetings will be organised for each expert group, with joint learning sessions, networking possibilities and the opportunity for cooperation and integration into the EHRI network. The first meetings are expected to take place in March 2022 and will be conducted via Zoom. The two focus groups established within the EHRI-3 project will run for approximately two years and the groups will meet every two to three months. In addition, the basecamp platform will be used to facilitate ongoing contact among the members of the groups and will allow for continued networking beyond the meetings themselves.

EHRI intends to identify additional relevant groups of experts in sub-specializations of Holocaust documentation and create networks and platform where such experts' group can meet exchange information and consult.

In addition to the examples listed above, it should also be pointed out that continued user engagement often happens on an individual level. There were cases where participants of EHRI seminars continued their exchange, which finally led to a joint conference. It is also noticeable that participants of Seminars and Workshops are more likely to apply for an EHRI-Fellowship or other EHRI-offerings.

To go beyond these rather uncoordinated and serendipitous occurrences and develop a strategy for user engagement, we invited partner institutions to share their experiences and strategies to continue the exchange with users and to help to continue the networking between them.

5. Best practices from other institutions

A meeting was held in January 2021, with representatives from the WL, YV, IFZ, WZI, INSH-RH, USHMM to discuss common practices of user engagement for in-person programs in these EHRI partner institutions. The in-person service provided in these institutions are mainly Fellowship programmes as well as Seminars and Workshops. There were several common practices and general guidelines that were shared among the institutions.

1. Dedicated staff member for user engagement

The importance of having a staff member that is dedicated to the question of user engagement was expressed as being a crucial component to a successful user engagement programme. User engagement can be time consuming as it requires constant follow up with users. Having one staff member whose role it is to enable continued user engagement and exchange between users is essential to a successful engagement programme. Moreover, it was highlighted that the personal connection is important to user engagement. For example, having a list of past participants in in-person programmes with relevant research topics, and then reaching out personally for participation in additional programming.

2. Contributions from users to various initiatives

Several institutions indicated that a way to keep in touch with users is to continue to engage with them in programmes and activities relevant to their work. Asking users of past programming to take part in specific initiatives and projects that concern their research fields, was expressed by several institutions as a successful way to engage with users and keep them engaged. Contributions can be in the form of written articles, blogs, or consultations on different projects that relate to the users' specific field of research. Involving the users in specific activities is helpful in facilitating long-term user engagement.

3. Digital tools for user engagement

Many of the institutions pointed to the use of digital tools and platforms for user engagement, i.e. to use social media such as Facebook to connect alumni of past programmes. Using social media has become a fundamental part of being a customer, in our case a user. Social media sites allow you to go far beyond simply broadcasting news, they provide the opportunity to create two-way conversations. The users can get in touch with EHRI representatives and their colleagues, creating a dialogue and sharing thoughts. Some institutions use specific platforms for Seminars and Workshops where the programmes are uploaded, and participants can ask

questions and converse. The possibility of leaving a dedicated seminar website open after the end of the seminar was also mentioned as a way to keep users engaged after completion of a specific programme. This allows them to keep in touch, ask questions they did not get a chance to discuss and exchange book recommendations, share Call for Papers, etc...

6. Suggestions for long-term user engagement

User engagement is about the interactions between the institutions and its users and the possibilities for connection between the users themselves. These interactions can happen on a variety of channels and help strengthen the relationship with users. There are several tactics and methods to create these interactions. In this Deliverable we offer some new strategies based on our experience (EHRI 1-3), our partners' experience (Best practices from other institutions) and users' opinions (The users survey). The suggestions for long-term user engagement listed below can help provide a variety of (face-to-face and online, long-term and short-term) interactions, tailored to the specific needs of EHRI's growing and diverse user community. Some of the suggestions listed below are being piloted within the EHRI-3 project and, if successful, will be embedded in the future EHRI-ERIC. The feedback received for this DL also underscores the need for staff positions in the future EHRI-ERIC dedicated to the long term engagement of EHRI users.

1. Establishing dedicated positions that will include the task of User Engagement

User engagement while a crucial component to ensure a successful RI, is time consuming and requires constant interaction between with the users. Thus, in order to ensure that a formal user engagement programme can be implemented, it will be necessary that staff positions (at least part-time) be dedicated to user engagement. In addition to facilitating the implementation of the suggestions listed below, having a dedicated staff member who connects with the users, also offers the users a contact person for EHRI related activities.

2. Focus-groups

As the EHRI user community is diverse and includes both academic researchers, collections holders, media professionals, and educators, it seems appropriate in order to create sustainable user engagement, to establish focus groups that are geared towards specific users, with their common disciplines and professional backgrounds as well as offering interdisciplinary focus groups that can bring users together from different backgrounds and disciplines. In this way, EHRI also creates a networking platform for those users who can learn from one another, share common challenges in their work while at the same time staying connected and engaged with EHRI.

3. Alumni groups

The establishment of Alumni groups allows for continued and long-term contact among participants of a specific Trans-national Programme. Whether it be Fellows working on a PHD, or professionals who participated in a Workshop dealing with a specific field, the possibility to continue to be in touch upon completion of a programme is an important aspect of user networking. In order to enable continued discussion without taking too much time from an

EHRI employee, the use of basecamp as a platform could facilitate communication. Connect alums of in person programs to unique alumni groups on EHRI Basecamp Platform. Basecamp is a great platform that can provide real value to our users, on the platform they can get relevant updates from the user community about the latest researches, news, and events. The users can easily map their network and contact each other directly, they can participate in discussion, send links to their studies and more. An additional platform that is being tested within EHRI-3 is a forum (or topic-based discussion board), where users who are registered on the EHRI portal can communicate with one another and gain relevant information on their research interests.

4. Acknowledgment of EHRI in publications

The acknowledgement of EHRI in publications that are a result of a Conny Kristel Fellowship is another important tool in keeping EHRI Users connected to EHRI. Since it is difficult to track the acknowledgment, clear guidelines on how to properly acknowledge EHRI will be provided to Fellows. In addition, they will be further encouraged to deposit such outputs in the EHRI publication repository. In EHRI-3 a publications repository at <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/EHRI> has been created which will make EHRI publication easily findable and facilitate user engagement by offering a space for uploading publications.

5. Academic connection

Providing ways for PhD candidates to connect with more senior academics/mentorships from the EHRI Consortium offering opportunities for users to learn from those with some seniority in their field is an important component of support to the user community. The possibility of offering a process through which younger and less experienced researchers are offered support, advice and encouragement in their PhD. Establishing direct/personal connections will encourage students to progress with their dissertation, connect current PhD candidates with alumni and people from other research institutions, and support academics and researchers in their professional development.

6. Book Club

An EHRI An EHRI Book Club is an opportunity for users to have a platform that they can share and talk about their own books and publications with other (former) users and members of the EHRI consortium. The main goal is to encourage users to share their own materials, have an academic discussion about it and create a dialogue among the users themselves.

7. Newsletter

As described above, the EHRI newsletter has since 2011 been a means with which EHRI has been able to keep (potential) users and in general individuals interested in EHRI, informed on upcoming activities and new services. An additional component of the Newsletter could be providing readers with information on new publications of past fellows or other participants of in-person programmes. Another option would be an interview series with researchers, giving them a platform to share their recent accomplishments.