

NINES Prospectus: Free Culture Resources



IN CONSIDERING whether to enter a liaison with NINES, free culture projects in the humanities face **two important questions**: Why is it in the interest of my project to liaise with NINES? and Would my project be ceding any control over the content it produces and distributes?

First, a liaison with NINES will greatly increase the exposure and use of your website and its materials. The core of NINES is a set of three editorial boards comprising more than sixty scholars of nineteenth-century British and American literature and culture. These boards are directly connected to a large, dedicated, targeted group of readers who will have a special interest in your resource.

Federating with NINES will greatly increase the population of scholars and educators who would be using or wanting to use your materials. When scholars and educators of “the long nineteenth-century” work in the NINES environment, they can find, access, and use a vast body of trusted (i.e., peer-reviewed) scholarly materials. They enter a research environment with enormous range and flexibility. Projects and “content” federated within NINES get exposed to the user-community with the greatest interest in that content.

NINES software allows scholars who work online to find materials they might not have known about and to see relationships among materials that are located in different places (i.e., in a widely distributed array of web resources that would not otherwise have functional connections with each other’s content). When a user locates something of interest, NINES makes it easy for that person to visit the resource and facilitates the fair use of the materials.

In answer to the second question, we can say that in no case is the content of NINES-federated resources brought under any NINES control or transferred to

any NINES server. NINES is essentially a clearing house and a search engine directed at a set of scholar-validated materials.

All editorial control of resources that federate with NINES remains entirely in the hands of the resource creators. Simply, the materials stay on your server and are presented as you designed them. You also have full control over the representation of your materials in the NINES search results

These questions lead to **another important question:** Supposing my project were interested in a liaison with NINES, how difficult and/or expensive would the move be? Briefly, the requirement – at least from a technical/operational point of view – is minimal. A few lines of metadata must be extracted from NINES-indexed files, and the process is easily automated. Most XML-encoded archives use a simple set of XSL commands to produce NINES-conformant metadata. Examples of these are available from NINES.

We should add that the cost of designing and building the NINES system was considerable. But these costs were underwritten with funding from the NEH, Mellon, and other such agencies who gave the money so that we could build the software that powers NINES. The software is completely open source and once built, easily maintained. In any case, no NINES participant has to bear any cost of such maintenance.

One final point: NINES is such that its participants can be either revenue-generating entities (like JSTOR or U. of Virginia Press, both of which are NINES partners) or open source venues. The participants are completely autonomous. Indeed, NINES was founded with the specific purpose of supporting independently created online scholarly work. And its software has been designed precisely to insure the independence of each participating resource.

For more information about NINES, visit: <http://www.nines.org/> and to examine our online research environment, visit: <http://www.nines.org/collex/>.