Thematic Digital Competence Centre - Social Sciences & Humanities

Self Evaluation Report 2023 - 2025

Design by van van Zanten for the TDCC-SSH funded project *"Beyond personal data: a new initiative to support early-career researchers with hard-to-share data"*

Main Author: Nicole Emmenegger, Network Manager TDCC-SSH

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Thematic Digital Competence Centre for the Social Sciences and Humanities (TDCC SSH) was launched in February 2023 with a clear mission: to strengthen digital research practices, foster open science, and support researchers and research data professionals across one of the most wide-ranging and diverse academic domains. In just two and a half years, the programme has become a trusted and visible presence in the Dutch research landscape, building bridges between individuals, institutions, infrastructures, and service providers, while ensuring that SSH perspectives are represented in both national and international arenas.

The need for such a programme is undeniable. The SSH domain spans more than 30 disciplines and accounts for over half of all Dutch university students. Yet despite this scale, FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) and open data practices remain unevenly adopted, infrastructures are fragmented, and incentives for sharing are weak. These systemic barriers restrict the reuse of research outputs and slow the sector's ability to respond to urgent societal challenges. The TDCC SSH was created precisely to address these gaps. By combining participatory funding, community-building, and targeted advocacy, the programme has fostered new collaborations, empowered data professionals, and produced practical outputs already being reused across institutions.

Since its inception, the programme has managed three funding initiatives in close collaboration with NWO, evolving in scope and ambition to reflect community needs. The Bottleneck initiative in 2023 addressed urgent barriers, while subsequent Challenge Calls have targeted larger, structural issues such as synthetic data, audiovisual workflows, and the responsible reuse of online public material. Together, these initiatives have shown the power of a funding approach that is inclusive, collaborative, and non-competitive - one that lowers barriers for smaller and less-resourced organisations while still demanding co-ownership through the 25% co-funding requirement. This balance is crucial: it safeguards broad participation and ensures that investments strengthen the sector as a whole rather than a small number of well-resourced institutions.

Beyond brokering funding, the TDCC SSH has invested in weaving together a strong national network. We work closely with infrastructures, service providers, data stewards, and research communities to tackle shared challenges, while also engaging with heritage organisations, libraries, and archives that expand the reach of digital practices beyond the university system. Our activist stance - constructively proactive, inclusive, and equitable - has helped us challenge entrenched practices, lower barriers to adoption, and amplify underrepresented voices within the SSH community.

Looking ahead, the task is one of consolidation, continued relevance, and sustainability. The programme is beginning to fully demonstrate its impact, but its long-term future depends on stable external funding and the structural embedding of core activities within our host organisation, DANS. With that foundation, TDCC SSH can grow into the national hub for digital SSH research: a catalyst for innovation, a steward of best FAIR practices, and an activist champion of inclusive and responsible open science in the Netherlands and beyond.

Introduction

Digital Competence Centers

The Thematic Digital Competence Centres (TDCCs) were established by NWO and the Dutch academic community as national, discipline-focused networks to strengthen digital competencies in research. They

complement the work of institution based Local Digital Competence Centres (LDCCs) and data stewards, who provide day-to-day support with data management, storage, sharing, and compliance.

Outlined in NWO's 2019 *Implementation Plan for Investments in Digital Research Infrastructure*,[1] the DCC model ensures sustainable progress in developing open and FAIR practices by combining local expertise with national coordination. The TDCCs scale up local work by:

- Connecting institutional practices to national infrastructures and policies.
- Funding projects that address common challenges.
- Representing Dutch perspectives in European and international fora.

This layered approach strengthens digital competencies from the ground up while keeping them aligned with national and global strategy.

There are three thematic TDCCs: Social Sciences & Humanities (SSH), Natural and Engineering Sciences (NES), and Life Sciences & Health (LSH). NES and LSH launched in September 2022, followed by SSH in February 2023. Since then, each programme has been building networks and funding projects to promote open science, strengthen FAIR data practices, and embed long-term expertise across their domains.

TDCC SSH

The TDCC SSH supports the increase the availability and reuse of research data and software across the social sciences and humanities. From the outset, the core team has focused on supporting researchers and data professionals with data collection, management, and sharing, while fostering digital literacy, collaboration, and innovation.

The programme is guided by the TDCC SSH Roadmap from 2022[2], which identified gaps in FAIR literacy, awareness, and implementation. Nationally, we align our work with the SSH Council, the Permanent Committee for Large-Scale Research Infrastructure (PC-GWI), Open Science NL, and other strategic initiatives. Our key stakeholders are:

- DANS - Research data repository, TDCC SSH consortium partner and host
- ODISSEI - Research Infrastructure in the Social Sciences and TDCC SSH consortium partner
- CLARIAH - Research Infrastructure in the Humanities and TDCC SSH consortium partner
- Institution based LDCCs, research data professionals, data stewards, etc.
- Researchers at universities, HBOs and other research performing organisations
- SSH service providers and infrastructures - eScience Centre, SURF, HuC-DI, EHRI, NICAS, etc.
- Netwerk Digitaal Erfgoed - Dutch national infrastructure for digital heritage
- Libraries, archives, museums and other heritage and memory institutions
- Experts in, for example, GDPR, copyright, data justice, etc.

Internationally, we connect with the work of the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), the Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities (DARIAH), the Research Data Alliance (RDA), and others to ensure alignment and representation of SSH needs in global developments.

---

[1] https://www.nwo.nl/sites/nwo/files/documents/Uitvoeringsplan%20investeringen%20digitale%20onderzoeksinfrastructuur.pdf
[2] https://www.nwo.nl/sites/nwo/files/media-files/Roadmap%20TDCC%20SSH.pdf

Evaluation Time Period and Framework

This report covers the period from 15 February 2023 - 15 August 2025, representing 2.5 years of activity. The evaluation is divided into three sections:

- **Our Relevance**: the alignment of activities with the needs and demands of the SSH domain, and the demonstrable impact of our interventions.
- **The Quality of our Work:** the extent to which TDCC SSH builds networks, facilitates collaboration, and transfers knowledge effectively.
- **Our Viability**: the sustainability, governance, flexibility, and efficient use of resources to ensure the programme's continuation and growth.

Our Relevance

Demand in the SSH Domain

The demand for digital competence in the social sciences and humanities is high and continues to grow. The TDCC SSH Roadmap confirmed persistent challenges: insufficient awareness and uptake of FAIR principles, weak incentives for data sharing, and a fragmented infrastructure landscape.

The Dutch SSH domain is vast and diverse, spanning more than 30 disciplines (see Appendix 3). As outlined in the Roadmap, together these fields include 52 faculties, around 16,000 academic staff, and nearly 150,000 undergraduate students - 56% of all Dutch university students in 2021, according to the SSH Council's Sector Plans[3]. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of FAIR and open science practices, fewer than half of SSH researchers consistently apply them. This limits opportunities to access, build upon, and verify existing research, and reduces the sector's ability to address urgent societal challenges. As the Sector Plans emphasise: *"the SSH domain provides crucial knowledge and skills for Dutch society and is a foundation for the service economy... indispensable expertise is provided to tackle major societal challenges, such as safety, digitalisation, energy transition, circular economy and sustainability, social inequality, (mental) health, education, prosperity and earning capacity."*

CLARIAH, ODISSEI, DANS, the Netherlands eScience Centre, and SURF provide essential services for data management, analysis, training and advice. The Netwerk Digitaal Erfgoed (NDE), along with cultural heritage institutions such as the KB (National Library) and Sound & Vision, extend digital services and support into the heritage sector. Yet these services are not always visible or accessible to researchers. Disciplinary silos, varied traditions, and the inherent complexity of SSH data - multimodal, multilingual, and often sensitive - complicate adoption. This underscores the need for a broker such as the TDCC SSH to unify infrastructures, streamline support, and embed best practices across the domain.

LDCCs and data stewards have made important strides in promoting FAIR practices within their institutions, yet significant hurdles remain to bridge gaps in digital readiness, sustainable data management, metadata standards, and interoperability. The percentage of shared SSH data in the Netherlands remains comparatively low, leaving much untapped potential.

Unlocking this potential would enable reuse of previously unavailable datasets, foster reproducibility and - where possible - replicability of SSH research, and open new opportunities for interdisciplinary discovery. Meeting this demand requires not only continued investment in infrastructure and training but also

---

[3] https://sshraad.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/1179/2025/06/Bijlagen_SSH_SECTORPLAN_FEBR2023.pdf

targeted initiatives such as the TDCC SSH, which can connect communities, infrastructures, and policy to drive systemic change.

Project Brokering

A distinctive strength of the TDCCs is our ability to broker NWO funding into projects that directly address urgent, community-defined needs. To date, each TDCC has brokered three funding schemes - one Bottleneck Initiative and two Challenge calls. Unlike traditional NWO grants, these initiatives are participatory, transparent, and community-driven, ensuring that funded projects reflect shared priorities rather than isolated interests. While each TDCC has its own nuances, the core principles are the same.

Currently, the TDCC SSH Challenge Call process begins with an Expressions of Interest (EoI) phase, where applicants briefly outline their ideas. These EoIs are published on our website, increasing visibility and enabling connections across institutions. Proposals are then discussed in matchmaking sessions and workshops, where applicants receive peer feedback and refine their plans.

Applicants then develop detailed project proposals, which are reviewed by a committee of up to seven experts. Reviews ensure fairness, consistency, and alignment with SSH-wide priorities, while applicants receive constructive feedback regardless of the outcome.

This iterative, participatory approach offers several advantages:

- Lowers barriers for first-time applicants and non-academic staff such as data stewards.
- Encourages co-creation across disciplines and institutions, bringing together researchers, infrastructures, and heritage organisations.
- Strengthens transparency and trust by making idea development visible to the community.
- Ensures investments directly address priorities from the TDCC SSH Roadmap and emerging stakeholder needs.

By embedding collaboration and openness into the funding process itself, the TDCCs have pioneered a model of grant-making that not only delivers strong projects but also builds community capacity and fosters a culture of FAIR and open science. It is a learning process in its own right — one we continue to evolve and strengthen together with the community.

Our Impact on the SSH Domain

Although our long-term scientific and societal impact will only become fully visible as our project portfolio matures, the first 2.5 years already demonstrate the urgency and value of our work. The funding opportunities designed together with NWO across all three TDCCs have been widely embraced. Our non-competitive, participatory approach encourages collaboration rather than competition, ensuring that projects address sector-wide challenges rather than isolated institutional interests. As one applicant noted *"[What I liked about the process was] the personal touch - non-competitive with a focus on collaboration with several organizations and solving a problem together rather than competing for funding. It was also useful to receive pre-review feedback. The flexibility, responsiveness and moral support from the TDCC was really great."*

This model fills a clear niche in the Dutch research landscape. It provides much-needed legitimacy and support for a different kind of project - those led by non-scientific university staff and research data professionals. Their ideas have translated into practical solutions, reusable resources, and stronger networks across the SSH domain. The response to our calls underscores this demand:

- Bottleneck Initiative 2023: more than 30 ideas submitted, with 7 projects funded

- Challenge Call 2024: over 20 proposals submitted, 5 awarded

- Challenge Call 2025 (in progress): 14 project plans submitted, 6 prioritised

Together these calls engaged staff from more than 55 institutions across the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands.

To measure our impact and relevance, we introduced a framework to evaluate not just project outcomes but also the application process. This reflective approach ensures continuous improvement of our calls, making them clearer and more accessible, while positioning the TDCCs as transparent and responsive.

Importantly, the funding model matters. The Bottleneck Initiative and the first Challenge Call were fully funded, which encouraged new and less-experienced applicants to apply, gain traction and succeed. The second Challenge Call introduced a 25% co-funding requirement, which has been largely manageable for applicants. However, this contribution should not be increased if the aim is to continue fostering ideas and solutions from data professionals, smaller institutions, and first-time applicants. Increasing the co-funding risks excluding precisely the voices and perspectives that make the entire TDCC portfolio distinctive and valuable.

Our Projects Portfolio

Since the TDCC SSH began brokering NWO funding into projects, there has been an evolution in both scale and ambition - from targeted Bottleneck projects (2023), through mid-sized collaborative work in the Challenge Call 2024, to the currently unfolding 2025 call. Together, these calls have yielded a diverse portfolio of projects that demonstrate the demand for tailored interventions, the creativity of the community, and the added value of the TDCC SSH as a broker of collaboration and innovation.

Bottleneck Projects (2023)

The Bottleneck Initiative was launched in mid-2023 as the first major funding instrument, designed to quickly address urgent barriers. The response was significant, with over 30 project ideas submitted. From these, seven projects were selected for funding, each running between 12 - 24 months with a maximum budget of €150,000 based on 100% funding with no own contribution required. All but one of these projects are now currently underway. Highlights include:

- SToRe – Reusing Oral History as Research and Heritage Data - developed a national Code of Ethics for Oral History practitioners, co-created with community organisations, museums, and archives, now being embedded into PhD training and community practice.

- Beyond Personal Data – Training on Hard-to-Share Research Data - producing training guides and reusable templates to support researchers handling sensitive and ethically complex data.

- Combatting Bias: Guidelines for Creating FAIR+ Data - produced guidelines emphasising fairness and inclusivity in data creation, extending beyond traditional FAIR principles.

These small-scale projects demonstrated how modest, targeted interventions can produce reusable resources, strengthen networks, and legitimise new practices in data ethics, FAIRness, and interdisciplinarity.

SToRe Project

The SToRe project, led by Professor Norah Karrouche (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), addressed the pressing need for more sustainable and ethical management of oral history data in the Netherlands. With targeted TDCC SSH funding, the project hired a specialist for 15 months to focus on developing a national Code of Ethics for Oral History practitioners - a resource long available in other countries but missing in the Dutch context. Through community-driven workshops, interviews, and collaboration the project will create practical guidance to support researchers and community organisations in responsibly collecting, storing, and reusing oral history data. By linking data management to ethical reflection, SToRe not only will improve confidence in depositing and sharing data, but also highlights how relatively small, focused interventions can generate real results.

As Norah states: "The TDCC SSH funding gave me the chance to approach a long-standing problem in a completely new way. By bringing in a specialist, we were able to experiment, adjust, and learn together with the community. It was refreshing to see how information managers and researchers could share responsibility in developing solutions. The project gave me a sense of fulfilment, and it demonstrated that sometimes well-targeted small interventions can greatly transform practices and have huge impact."

Challenge Projects, Round 1 (2024)

Building on the success of the Bottleneck Initiative, the first Challenge Call was designed to fund mid-sized collaborative projects. The call attracted over 20 proposals, of which five projects were awarded funding, each running for 12–24 months with average budgets between €200,000–€350,000 based on 100% funding with no own contribution required. These projects have started to kick-off in mid 2025 and will run until 2027.

Highlights include:

- Synthetic Data: Leveraging the Potential of Sensitive Data in SSH Research - exploring the use of synthetic data as a privacy-preserving tool, raising visibility of sensitive data issues and piloting techniques for secure data sharing.
- SYNAPSIS – Synergy Platform for Integrating Audiovisual Data Archiving & Analytics - bridging gaps between archiving and analysis of audiovisual data, producing tools and workflows for researchers working with multimedia sources.
- RIGHTS – Responsible Implementation of Gathering, Handling, and Treating Sensitive Digital Traces - providing much-needed frameworks for handling sensitive digital trace data, addressing ethical and governance challenges.

These projects will tackle structural challenges in transparency, interoperability, governance, and reuse. A notable outcome of this round was the stronger emphasis on community legitimacy and engagement, with projects involving multiple institutions and disciplines, and outputs designed to be widely reused.

Challenge Projects, Round 2 (2025, in progress)

The 2025 Challenge Call continues the trajectory toward larger, more strategic interventions. The process attracted 14 viable project plans, from which six were prioritised to move forward as full proposals. Together, these projects represent a total budget of just over one million euros, with the process concluding

in November 2025 and the project starting from mid 2026. These projects included a 25% co-funding requirement.

Highlights of the selected project ideas include:

- Byte Me – A National Portal for Responsible LLM Use in SSH - developing tools and guidelines for the responsible use of large language models in SSH research.

- FORTES – Framework for Open Research on Trade and Economic Sources - building a framework to make economic and trade data easier to share, analyse, and govern.

- Unlocking Online Public Data for Research - creating legal and technical foundations for the responsible reuse of public data through web scraping.

This round demonstrates an engagement with issues such as generative AI, digital trace data, and governance frameworks, while also ensuring Dutch perspectives are embedded in international debates around responsible research and data infrastructure.

Beyond Personal Data: Training on Hard-to-Share Data

This project tackles a neglected but pressing challenge in SSH: how to responsibly share sensitive, non-personal, and ethically complex research data. Through three interactive workshops, the project has trained early-career researchers in handling sensitive datasets, sharing field notes, and applying CARE principles for community data sovereignty. The results are already visible: training materials, guides, and templates have been openly deposited on Zenodo, where they are accessible for reuse by the wider community and in under five months already viewed and downloaded over 1000 times. The project has gained momentum beyond its original partners - for example, Wageningen University has now also joined the initiative. Partners note that the project has legitimised ethical reflection as a central part of research practice, provided space for creativity in developing modular training resources, and supported researchers working with personal and often sensitive field data. By fostering collaboration across institutions and disciplines, the project demonstrates again how relatively small, targeted interventions can create tools, networks, and discussions with lasting national impact.

The Quality of Our Work

Network Building

Since our launch, we've established ourselves as a trusted and visible presence in the Dutch SSH research support ecosystem. From the outset, the core team has prioritised direct engagement with stakeholders, recognising that sustainable progress depends on building strong relationships across institutions and communities.

Our efforts have included:

- Repeat visits to all 13 universities and research-performing organisations in the SSH domain, fostering ties with Local DCCs and institutional research support services.

- Regular stakeholder briefings and community meetings, ensuring bottom-up input through our governance structures and informal exchanges.

- Participation in more than 20 national and international events, including EOSC Tripartite, International Data Week, IASSIST, DANS Open Day, SURF Research Day, and the National Open Science Festival.

The resulting network spans universities, research-performing organisations, cultural heritage institutions, infrastructures such as CLARIAH and ODISSEI, as well as community organisations. Through this, TDCC SSH has earned a reputation as a broker, advocate, and reliable partner. As Anna van 't Veer, Chair of OSC-NL, put it:

> *"As chair of OSC-NL, I see the TDCC SSH as an important partner in advancing Open Science practices in the Netherlands. By connecting our colleagues, providing targeted funding, building bridges across institutions, and advocating for FAIR practices, the TDCC SSH has quickly proven its value. I'm committed to give my sustained support to creating awareness and explaining this value to all relevant stakeholders. Together, we can ensure that SSH perspectives are embedded in the wider open science movement, from grassroots communities to national and international infrastructures."*

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Building and maintaining such a network has not been without its challenges. Some parts of the SSH sector have been harder to engage due to complex internal structures, competing institutional priorities, or uneven levels of digital maturity. Larger universities, for example, face coordination hurdles across multiple faculties and departments, making it difficult to ensure that communication reaches all relevant audiences.

Eligibility restrictions in the initial NWO funding calls presented another obstacle: HBOs and cultural heritage organisations could not apply directly for TDCC funding. This risked excluding important parts of the SSH ecosystem from active participation. Through joint advocacy by all three TDCCs, these rules have since been revised: HBOs are now eligible to receive project funding, and non-university research-performing organisations can apply for exemptions on a case-by-case basis. This was an important step forward in ensuring inclusivity.

Collaboration across the three TDCCs has been a key factor in overcoming such challenges. By presenting a united voice, we have been able to influence processes and coordinate outreach efforts. At the same time, disciplinary differences occasionally make it harder to agree on shared priorities or approaches. For example, expectations around data standards, ethics, or publication practices can vary significantly across our domains. These differences, however, have also been productive: they highlight where specific approaches are needed, and where joint action across domains adds value.

Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge transfer is woven into every aspect of our work, ensuring that insights, resources, and practices circulate widely and benefit the community. From the beginning, we embedded communication and dissemination into our activities, and often joined forces with the other TDCCs for greater reach.

Some of our achievements to date include:

- Growing our network mailing list to over 250 subscribers with regular monthly updates
- Organising informational workshops to support proposal development, including the *Project Idea Generator* in April 2025, where 35 participants shared and refined early-stage ideas.
- Setting up a TDCC SSH Zenodo community, where funded projects deposit materials to ensure open availability and reuse, with over a 1000 downloads in its first six months

- Delivering high-impact events, notably *Teaming Up Across Domains!* (February 2024), co-organised with the three TDCCs, LCRDM, and other partners. This event attracted 230 participants, with 84% rating their satisfaction at 8/10 or higher, confirming both demand and the value of our convening role.

Together, these efforts demonstrate the quality of our work in translating strategy into practice, and in enabling researchers, data professionals, and institutions to learn from each other. By embedding knowledge transfer into every activity, we are creating not only projects and outputs but also a culture of collaboration and reuse.

Our Viability

Our Position in the SSH Domain

The TDCC SSH team sees itself as data activists - with both the privilege and responsibility to advance digital practices in the social sciences and humanities. This role reflects our commitment to digital competence, equitable access to data, and the principles of FAIR and Open Science. But it also speaks to our determination to lower barriers, challenge inertia, and advocate for the many researchers and support staff who often work in resource-constrained or under-recognised contexts.

Our activism is constructively proactive. We aim to create a collaborative and equitable environment where stakeholders feel empowered to innovate and take ownership of digital practices. By emphasising inclusivity, we ensure that underrepresented disciplines, smaller institutions, and early-career researchers share in the benefits of a more open and robust digital research ecosystem.

In practice, this means being both catalyst and connector: sparking collaborations, surfacing shared challenges, and brokering scalable solutions that are sensitive to disciplinary needs. Our project calls have been central to this - uniting established infrastructures with smaller or less traditional organisations and showing how collective action produces stronger outcomes.

We are increasingly recognised as a hub where expertise, resources, and communities converge. Our engagement with cultural heritage institutions extends our reach into domains where data is often multimodal, multilingual, or sensitive, helping to make such materials more accessible and reusable

We're also shaping the conversation nationally and internationally. Within the Netherlands, the TDCC SSH is poised to contribute actively to future national SSH policy, plans, and infrastructure development. Internationally, our presence in EOSC, DARIAH, and RDA ensures that Dutch SSH voices are represented in global debates and that international frameworks reflect the diversity of SSH practices. This dual role - connector at home, representative abroad - enhances our ability to influence both infrastructure and policy.

A strong vote of confidence came when Open Science NL allocated each TDCC €1 million to tackle issues around interoperability, metadata, and ontologies[4]. For SSH, this resulted in the *Interoperability Missions* project (2025–2029), which underscores trust in our mandate and our ability to address systemic gaps. As Marta Teperek, Programme Leader FAIR Data at Open Science NL, notes:

> *"One of the greatest strengths of the TDCCs is their ability to bring various entities together - from established infrastructures to smaller institutes and emerging groups. This network-building approach is exactly what is needed to make FAIR and open science principles a reality. At Open Science NL, we see the TDCC SSH as a strong catalyst for advancing systemic change in the social sciences and humanities, which is why we awarded funding for their Interoperability Missions project. Its relevance extends from national policy frameworks to international infrastructures, and our continued partnership will ensure that SSH perspectives are embedded in the future of open science."*

Our ambition is for the TDCC SSH to be recognised as the national expert on digital research practices in SSH: a champion of interoperability, inclusivity, and sustainability that complements the efforts of Local DCCs and research infrastructures. By continuing to embody the role of data activists, we aim to ensure that the SSH community not only adapts to but also helps shape the future of digital scholarship in the Netherlands and beyond.

Governance

The governance of the TDCC SSH is deliberately designed to balance operational effectiveness with broad stakeholder input. The programme is managed by a Leadership Team (Network Manager and Community Coordinator), overseen by an Executive Board composed of representatives from CLARIAH, ODISSEI, and DANS. Strategic advice and horizontal insights are provided by a streamlined Advisory Board of six members, while Network Sounding Boards and Committees are convened on specific themes to ensure targeted expertise and community input. The most important of these is the Assessment & Selection (A&S) Committee, which plays a central role in evaluating project ideas submitted under the NWO TDCC calls. See appendix for an overview of who's who at all levels of the governance.
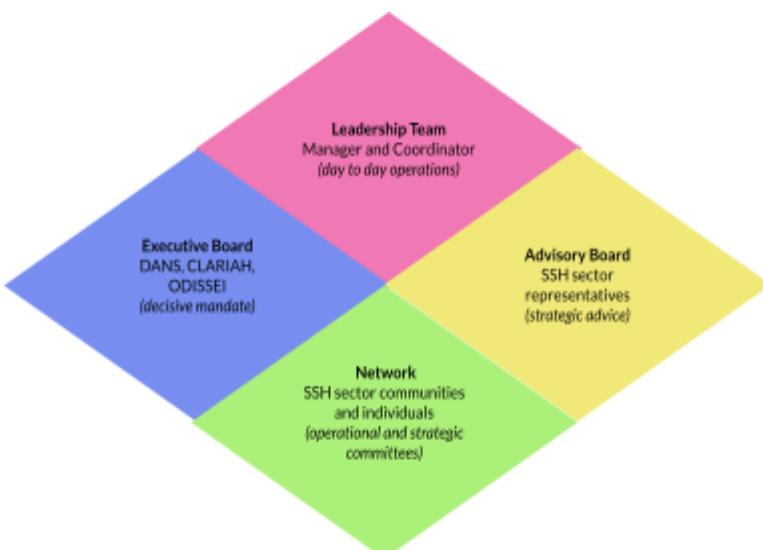
The A&S Committee brings together experts from across the SSH domain. Members are appointed for the duration of the call and commit around 15 hours to the process. Their task is to review project plans, provide feedback, and advise on which proposals should be prioritised for funding. To ensure fairness and transparency, all members adhere to NWO's codes on conflicts of interest and inclusive assessment. This committee-based approach ensures that funding decisions reflect the needs and priorities of the SSH domain as a whole, rather than isolated institutional interests. It also embeds inclusivity and collaboration into the heart of the funding process - one of TDCC SSH's defining innovations compared with traditional competitive calls.

---

[4] https://www.openscience.nl/en/news/funding-awarded-to-strengthen-digital-competence-centers

Governance Review

The Advisory Board has been an integral part of TDCC SSH since our inception, providing strategic insight and ensuring that the perspectives of the broad SSH domain are represented. Initially consisting of 18 members, the Board was deliberately diverse but proved too large to operate efficiently. In 2024, a series of structured conversations with members confirmed the value of the Board but highlighted two challenges: its size and the limited use of individual expertise.

In response, the Advisory Board was refreshed in 2025. The Board was streamlined to six members, selected for their broad knowledge of the SSH domain, experience in digital research practices, and connection to Dutch infrastructures and services. This smaller group meets quarterly, providing sharper and more actionable advice to the Executive Board and core team.

This refreshed model has been positively received by stakeholders, who report more effective discussions, clearer roles, and a stronger link between advice and implementation. As Claudia van Oppen, one of the long-standing members, notes: *"Being part of the TDCC SSH Advisory Board has been an engaging and rewarding experience. I appreciate the openness of the discussions and the way different perspectives are genuinely taken on board. It feels meaningful to contribute to a programme that is making such a clear difference for the SSH community and research data management practices more broadly."*

Organisational Robustness

The TDCC SSH is delivered by a small but highly effective core team — Network Manager Nicole Emmenegger, Community Coordinator Nils Arlinghaus, and Events & Project Assistant Layan Nijem — embedded within DANS. This arrangement provides stability, access to in-kind contributions, and close collaboration with Data Station Managers for the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Archaeology. It ensures that TDCC SSH is anchored within a trusted national research service provider rather than operating in isolation. At the same time, the limited team size remains an inherent vulnerability — the so-called "bus factor." To mitigate this, responsibilities are shared across DANS colleagues, reporting lines are clearly defined, and knowledge is systematically documented and institutionalised.

Accountability and Performance Reviews

Accountability is safeguarded through a KPI framework that links directly back to the bottleneck areas identified in the Roadmap: the need to increase FAIR data and software, raise awareness of good practices, make digital tools more visible, address pressing legal and financial challenges, and build an open and inclusive network.

These priorities were distilled into four areas around which our KPIs are organised: Build Alliances, Invest in the Sector, Shape the Network, and Influence & Change. Together they provide a balanced framework that captures both operational delivery and long-term impact.

These KPIs, together with a living Risk Assessment and Action Plan, are reviewed at every Executive Board meeting and updated in detail twice a year.

Finally, accountability is not only procedural but cultural. Governance details and programme updates are openly published on the TDCC SSH website, and stakeholders are regularly invited to contribute feedback. This openness builds trust, reinforces legitimacy, and reflects the activist ethos that underpins the programme: transparent, responsive, and committed to strengthening the SSH community through collective action.

Strategic Flexibility

A defining strength of the TDCC SSH is our ability to adapt quickly to emerging needs and changing circumstances. Although launched nearly six months after TDCC LSH and TDCC NES, the SSH team quickly caught up and played a full role in shaping national collaboration, co-developing the first joint Challenge Call within our first year.

The process will continue to be iterative, with formats refined in response to community feedback. Improvements in the second Challenge Call included simplifying application forms, making evaluation criteria more transparent, and introducing a peer feedback round. These changes lowered barriers for first-time applicants and encouraged broader participation.

Flexibility has also guided risk management. The programme adjusted to shifts in NWO processes and timelines by revising internal planning, providing extra applicant support, and communicating expectations clearly. This proactive stance helped limit delays and maintain community confidence.

Looking ahead, adaptability remains essential. Plans are underway to amend and expand the TDCC SSH Roadmap into a living document, updated regularly with stakeholders to reflect evolving needs. The recent governance review has also streamlined structures, enabling more agile decision-making and better use of expertise. Together, these steps position us to respond rapidly to both opportunities and risks in a dynamic research environment.

Finally, flexibility is as much about mindset as process. By modelling openness to feedback, transparency in decision-making, and a willingness to experiment, the TDCC SSH has built a culture where adaptation is a strength. This culture will be critical as the SSH community faces fast-changing digital challenges.

Programme Sustainability

DANS is willing to host the core elements of the TDCC SSH in the long term, but only if continued external funding is secured. The integration of the TDCC SSH into DANS provides a strong institutional home and the basis for long-term continuity. This is particularly vital in the current academic climate of budget cuts and staff reductions, where research support professionals are often the first to be affected.

DANS is closely linked to the TDCC SSH as host, project partner, and provider of in-kind contributions. Embedding the core elements of the programme into the permanent structure of DANS would anchor it more securely and ensure mutual reinforcement: DANS strengthens the TDCC SSH with its infrastructure and expertise, while the TDCC SSH expands DANS' community reach. As Anja Smit, Director of DANS, notes:

> *"The strength of the TDCC SSH programme lies in its ability to bridge gaps: between infrastructures and communities, between local and European developments, and between established practices and*

emerging needs. For DANS, this makes TDCC SSH a natural complement to the work of our Social Science, Humanities and Archaeology Data Stations and enhances our role as a national centre of expertise. The programme's inclusive, community-driven approach reflects the same values that underpin DANS' strategy, and we are dedicated to supporting its continued development as part of our long-term plans."

At the same time, strengthening collaborations with EOSC, DARIAH, and other European infrastructures will open further opportunities for knowledge exchange and alignment. Ultimately, sustainability will depend on both financial stability and the continued trust of institutions - demonstrated through improved practices, stronger collaborations, and increased visibility of Dutch SSH research.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
▪ Small, flexible, and skilled core team that can adapt quickly to evolving needs and challenges ▪ Strong recognition and support from key stakeholders across the SSH domain for progress made and future plans ▪ Financial backing from NWO for the current period ▪ DANS has made a long-term commitment to hosting the programme, providing a solid foundation for continuity ▪ Strong connections with key Research Infrastructures (RIs) partners and stakeholders, enhancing collaboration	▪ The TDCC SSH roadmap is becoming outdated and lacks clarity, which hinders the development of long-term goals and priorities ▪ Undefined incentives for participation in network activities; may lead to lower engagement ▪ Inconsistent branding and messaging weakens the joint TDCC identity and recognition within the broader landscape ▪ The small size of the team creates a vulnerability (low 'bus factor'), risking project continuity if key members are unavailable
Opportunities	Threats
▪ Influence policy and practices within NWO and the broader SSH research community ▪ Address gaps in national large scale programmes through our projects and activities ▪ Potential to align more closely with Recognition and Rewards initiatives ▪ Establish ourselves as a national SSH hub in EOSC/EU initiatives ▪ External influences such as AI and shifting geopolitics present opportunities for us to lead in adapting digital research to the SSH landscape	▪ Increasing the project co-funding requirement above 25% risks excluding viable applicants ▪ Due to our novel programme format, unclarity can arise within NWO around elements of the programme's execution causing miscommunication and delays ▪ Diverging strategies among the TDCCs may hinder cross-domain collaboration and integration ▪ Conflicting expectations from Research Infrastructures (RIs), LDCCs, and project teams may create misalignment and tension

Conclusions

The TDCC SSH has made solid progress in our first 2.5 years. To sustain momentum and ensure continued relevance, the programme must consolidate achievements, address risks, and set a clear agenda for the medium and long term. This evaluation highlights the unique contribution of the TDCC SSH while also pointing to areas where adaptation is needed.

- **Inclusivity and community reach:** Expand engagement into underrepresented communities and institutions, building on the strong national network already established.
- **Funding model:** Maintain the project co-funding requirement at its current 25% level to safeguard participation by smaller and less-resourced organisations.
- **Roadmap expansion:** Amend the static 2022 Roadmap with a living document that is regularly updated with stakeholders to reflect emerging topics such as linked data, and generative AI.
- **Sustainability:** DANS is willing to host TDCC SSH long term, but only if continued external funding is secured. Without this, continuity, staffing, and impact are at risk.

Looking Ahead

The coming period until early 2028 will focus on further refining our core activities with an eye on long-term sustainability. Core priorities include:

- Continuing the Challenge Calls through an iterative, community-driven process.
- Demonstrating clear return on investment through projects that develop improved research practices, new collaborations, and practical solutions to systemic challenges.
- Deepening integration with DANS, embedding coordination, community engagement, and interoperability expertise in a stable institutional structure.
- Strengthening international positioning to ensure Dutch SSH perspectives shape European and global infrastructures and policies.

Beyond 2028, the TDCC SSH must be structurally embedded at DANS with dedicated external funding, recognised as the national hub for digital SSH research support. In this role, we'll be able to incubate and scale best practices in FAIR data, sustainable software, and inclusive infrastructure, serving as both a catalyst and steward of change. By doing so, the TDCC SSH will help ensure that the digital transformation of SSH in the Netherlands is technically robust, socially responsible, and internationally visible.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1 - Projects Portfolio**
- **Appendix 2 - Overview of Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines**
- **Appendix 3 - Governance Who's Who**

Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Social Science and Humanities disciplines

- ❖ Archaeology
- ❖ Area Studies
- ❖ Art and Architecture
- ❖ Behavioural Science
- ❖ Business Administration
- ❖ Communication Sciences
- ❖ Computers and the Humanities
- ❖ Cultural Anthropology
- ❖ Demography
- ❖ Development Studies
- ❖ Economics
- ❖ Environmental Science
- ❖ Gender Studies
- ❖ Geography and Planning
- ❖ Historical Sciences
- ❖ History
- ❖ Humanities
- ❖ Language and Literature
- ❖ Law
- ❖ Linguistics
- ❖ Media Studies
- ❖ Music, Theatre and Performing Arts
- ❖ Pedagogy
- ❖ Philosophy
- ❖ Political Science
- ❖ Psychology
- ❖ Public Administration
- ❖ Religious Studies and Theology
- ❖ Sociology

Appendix 3

Governance Who's Who

Leadership Team
- Nicole Emmenegger - Network Manager
- Nils Arlinghaus - Community Coordinator

Executive Board
- Anja Smit - Director, DANS
- Dirk van Miert - CLARIAH Principal Investigator & Director, Huygens Institute
- Tom Emery - Executive Director, ODISSEI
- *Pearl Dykstra – Director, ODISSEI; Professor of Sociology, Erasmus University (retired)*

Advisory Board
- Chair: Susan Aasman - Professor of Digital Humanities, University of Groningen
- Deputy Chair: Annette Langedijk - Research Partnership Lead, SURF
- Chantal Kemner - Professor of Biological Developmental Psychology, Utrecht University
- Claudia van Oppen - Director, Maastricht University Library
- Gijs van Dijck - Professor of Private Law, Digitalization, and Legal AI; Director, Maastricht Law & Tech Lab, Maastricht University
- Martijn van Leusen - Associate Professor of Landscape Archaeology, University of Groningen

Advisory Board, past members (2023–2025):
- Frédérique Belliard – Senior Publishing Officer, TU Delft OPEN Publishing
- Gijs van Dijck – Professor of Private Law, Maastricht University
- Hans Berends – Professor of Innovation & Organization, VU Amsterdam
- Margriet Miedema – Coordinator, LCRDM
- Martijn Kleppe – Board of Directors, KB (National Library)
- Martijn van Leusen – Associate Professor of Landscape Archaeology, University of Groningen
- meLê Yamomo – Assistant Professor of Media & Decoloniality, University of Amsterdam
- Pim Huijnen – Assistant Professor of Digital Cultural History, Utrecht University
- Puck Wildschut – Policy Advisor Research, Tilburg University
- Tim Reeskens – Associate Professor of Sociology, Tilburg University
- Valentina Azzarà – Section Head SSH, Netherlands eScience Center

Assessment & Selection Committees

- Ahmad Hesam – Project Manager Research Infrastructures, SURF (Challenge Call 1)

- Alec Badenoch – Assistant Professor of Media & Culture, Utrecht University (Challenge Call 2)

- Ana Martinovici – Assistant Professor of Marketing, EUR / Rotterdam School of Management (Challenge Call 2)

- Andrea Scharnhorst – Senior Policy Advisor, DANS; Chief Integration Officer, DARIAH (Challenge Call 1 and 2)

- Arja Firet – Humanities Librarian, Utrecht University Library (Challenge Call 1)

- Caspar van Lissa – Associate Professor, Tilburg University; Chair, Open Science Community Tilburg (Challenge Call 1 and 2)

- Costas Papadopoulos – Associate Professor in Digital Humanities, Maastricht University (Challenge Call 2)

- Eduard Klapwijk – Technical Advisor, SURF / Erasmus University (Challenge Call 2)

- Femmy Admiraal – Senior Data Management Expert, Leiden University Library (Challenge Call 2) Frans de Liagre Böhl – ICT Consultant Humanities, Utrecht University (Challenge Call 2)

- Jerry de Vries – Coordinator, KNAW Digital Competence Centre (Challenge Call 1)

- Kacana Khadjavi Pour – Research Data Steward, VU School of Business & Economics (Challenge Call 2)

- KasIa Karpinska – Scientific Manager, ODISSEI (Challenge Call 1 and 2)

- Kathleen Gregory – Researcher, Leiden University (Challenge Call 1)

- Lotte Belice Baltussen – Senior Data Manager, KNAW Huygens Institute (Challenge Call 2)

- Margriet Miedema – Coordinator, LCRDM (Challenge Call 1)

- Mart van Duijn – Curator, Leiden University Library (Challenge Call 2)

- Martijn van Leusen – Associate Professor of Landscape Archaeology, University of Groningen (Challenge Call 2)

- Maurice de Kleijn – Senior Research Software Engineer, Netherlands eScience Center (Challenge Call 1)

- Mira Stanic – Senior Partner Relations Manager, GÉANT (Challenge Call 2)

- Norah Karrouche – Assistant Professor, VU Amsterdam / CLARIAH (Challenge Call 2)

- Puck Wildschut – Policy Advisor, Tilburg University (Challenge Call 1)

- Rasa Bočytė – Senior Advisor, Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision (Challenge Call 1)

- Rene Bekkers – Professor of Sociology, VU Amsterdam (Challenge Call 1)

- Roeland Ordelman – Chief Technology Officer, CLARIAH (Challenge Call 1)

- Sarah Coombs – Research Support Advisor, Saxion University of Applied Sciences / DCC-PO (Challenge Call 1)

- Stephan Smeekes – Professor of Econometrics, Maastricht University (Challenge Call 2)

- Tom Bakker – Executive Secretary, Netherlands eScience Center (Challenge Call 2)