DH2024 Conference Report

Reinvented Responsibly (With Memes)

This report covers the activities of the Program Committee (PC) and Local Organizers (LOs) for the ADHO DH conference in August 2024 hosted by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University in Arlington, Virginia.

The PC Co-Chairs were Jajwalya Karajgikar and Andrew Janco, who were appointed in April 2023. The full PC additionally consisted of Tully Barnett, Alex Wermer-Colan, Nadezhda Povroznik, Kyle Dase, Arjun Ghosh, Rooweither Mabuya, Jan Horstmann, Daniel Alves, Peter Stokes, Chifumi Nishioka, Wonhee Cho, Adán Lerma, and Richard Tzong-Han Tsai.

The LO Chair was Jessica Otis and the LO team additionally consisted of Bridget Bukovich, Donna Baker, Kristin Jacobsen, Alison Langford, Amanda Madden, and Luz Mueller.

The conference was largely a success, with significant positive feedback from attendees, especially with regards to the innovative and hybrid elements of the conference.

By the Numbers

543 submissions
80 requests for technical review
84% of submitters planned to attend onsite
16% of submitters planned to attend online
72% overall acceptance rate across all submission formats

Acceptances by submission type:
– Long Papers: 94 of 152 submissions accepted (61%)
– Short Papers: 120 of 214 submissions accepted (56%)
– Posters: 77 of 112 submissions accepted (69%)
– Panels: 28 of 40 submissions accepted (70%)
– Pre-Conference Workshops: 15 of 22 submissions accepted (68%)
– Mini Conference Submissions: 3 of 3 submissions accepted (100%)

526 early bird registrations (through May 15th)
236 regular registrations (through July 15th)
74 late/extended registrations (through July 24th)
40 late/onsite registrations (after July 24th)

70% registered as onsite
30% registered as online

Key Links

While much of the conference content was originally made available through the Whova app and thus was not publicly available—nor will it continue to be made available after 2025—key content has been put online in several places and is expected to remain there indefinitely.
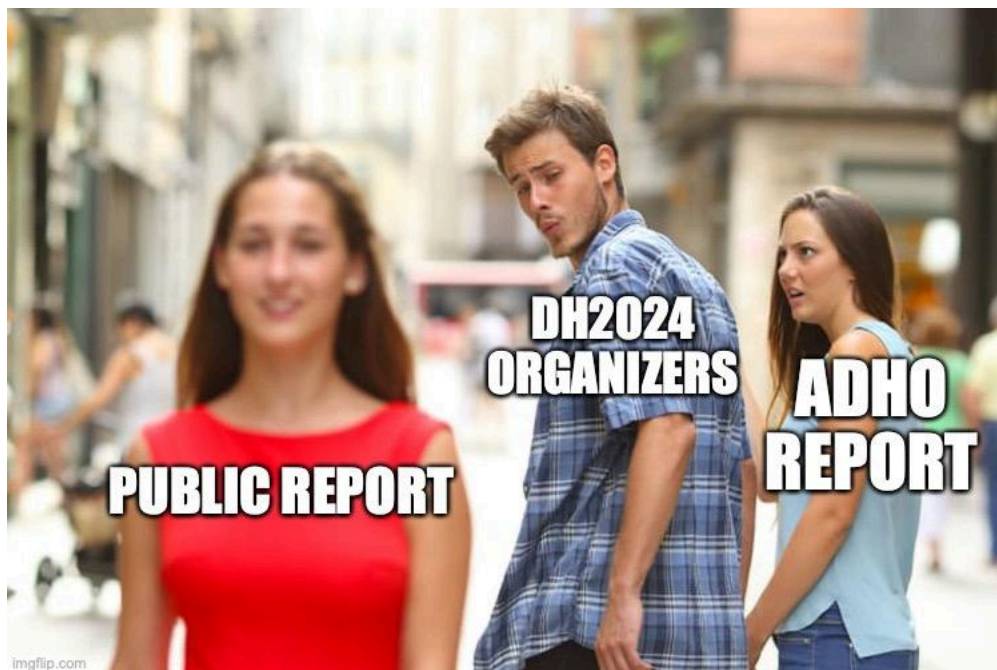
DH 2024 Book of Abstracts: https://zenodo.org/records/13761079

DH 2024 YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm25VOILhzMes8dFMrTcvHA/
presenters who opted in to sharing their presentations publicly after the close of the Whova app will be have posted on this YouTube channel in 2025

Opening Ceremony and Keynote, Susan Brown:
https://youtu.be/P0j2HA5lMCo?si=atqlqisOzMkbJwUh

Wednesday Keynote, Linda Ngari:
https://www.youtube.com/live/PEoV7upIsxQ?si=MscKjbLKu8--wjkj

Closing Ceremony and Keynote, Shannon Mattern:
https://www.youtube.com/live/fqRYSg7OzmA?si=BPaYl2K3Nar2laXA

DH2024 Website: https://dh2024.adho.org/
Program Committee Submissions Report: https://dh2024.adho.org/dh2024-submissions/
Program Committee Acceptances Report: https://dh2024.adho.org/acceptance-numbers/
DH2024 Conference Report: https://dh2024.adho.org/final-report/

Timeline and Program Committee

ADHO's Conference Protocol assumes that conferences will be planned on a 3-year timeline. Due to the interruptions of the COVID pandemic, the DH 2024 Local Organizing team bid for the conference knowing that we would only have 2 years to plan the conference. While we believed it was possible (and obviously pulled it off!), we have recommended that ADHO return to the 3-year timeline as soon as possible. They have agreed and are working out the details.


One of the places the shortened timeline caused difficulties was in assembling the Program Committee and publishing the Call for Proposals (CFP). ADHO Conference Protocols call for the release of the CFP the August prior to the conference, but our Program Committee was only assembled in August. Thanks to the heroic work of our Program Committee and other volunteers, the CFP was produced on an extremely expedited timeline. To speed up this process, the CFP was translated into the official ADHO languages by paid, professional translators before being reviewed by the ADHO Multi-Lingualism and Multi-Culturalism Committee, instead of the traditional process relying solely on volunteer translators from the same committee.


The CFP was available for slightly less time than most DH conference CFPs and so the Program Committee Chairs agreed to extend the deadline. However, the submission data makes clear that most members of the DH community wait until the last minute to submit their proposals and that an extension means that they will wait until the new last minute:

Paper submitted by day
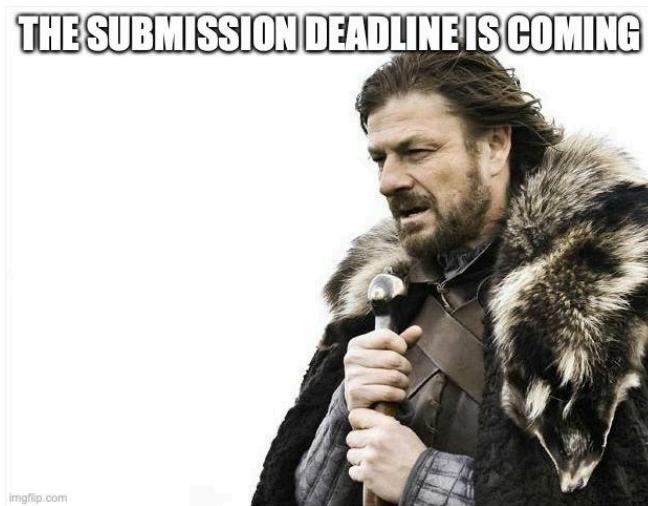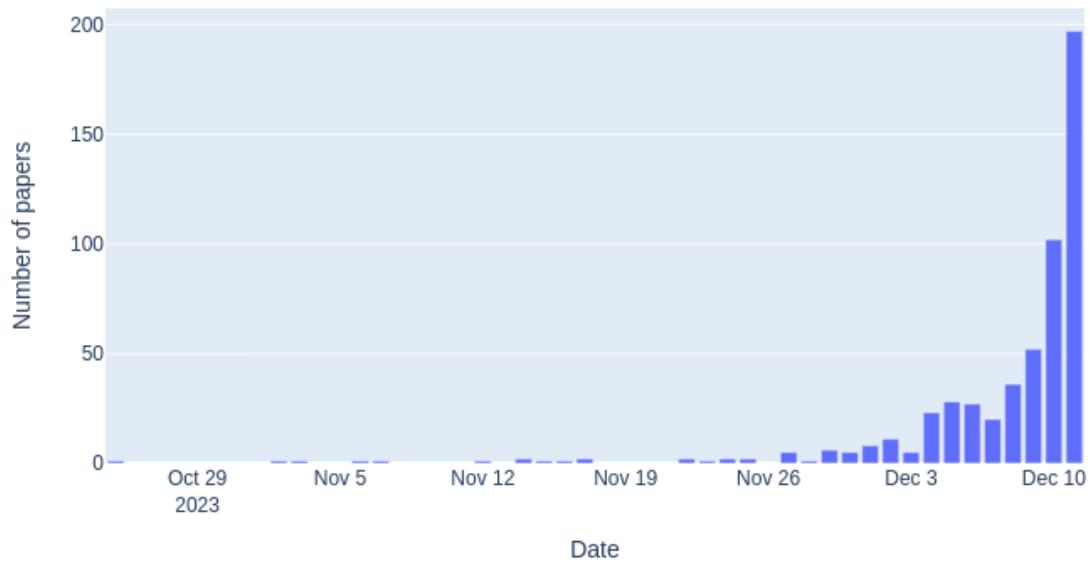
The DH2024 peer review process was conducted through ConfTool, as is traditional, and was generally very successful. DH2024 was the first conference to utilize the new revised peer review criteria. This is a welcome change but it will be some time before we're able to establish whether the new criteria have addressed the concerns and issues that motivated the revision.
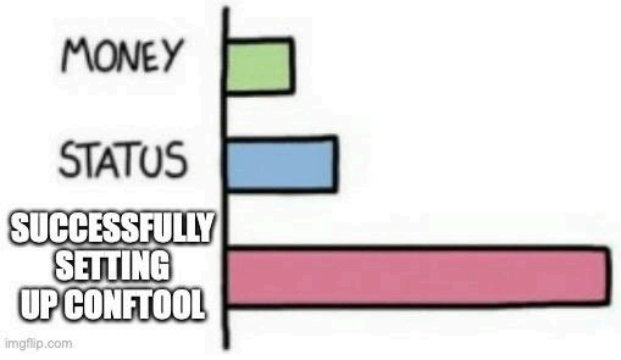
With a solid response of 545 submissions from the call for papers focused around the theme of Reinvention and Responsibility, the first task of the Program Committee was to match each submission with three or more reviewers. Finding the right match has significant consequences for both the proposal writers and potential reviewers. With the open review process and technical review option, in total, we matched 1820 reviewers with 543 proposals.

The next stage of the Program Committee's work was to make a determination to accept or reject submissions where reviewers have differing opinions. In line with Alex Wermer-Colan's work and Roopika Risam's documentation for ACH Conference, we aimed to conduct manual qualitative analysis of each of the reviews before we came to a final list for accepted submissions. A review response phase was not included this year and instead a qualitative analysis of reviews was conducted. We wanted to be mindful of the labor that reviewers are volunteering for the DH community, as we deliberated on acceptances.

No.	Submission Type / Conference Track	No. of Submissions	No. of Reviews Assigned	No. of Reviews Completed	Invited	Plenary	Accepted	Rejected	Poster	Short Presentation
1	Poster	112	442	386 87%	0	0	77 69%	35 31%	0	0
2	Short Presentation	214	853	744 87%	0	0	120 56%	60 28%	34 16%	0
3	Long Presentation	152	608	516 85%	0	0	94 62%	36 24%	19 13%	3 2%
4	Panel	40	156	127 81%	0	0	28 70%	12 30%	0	0
5	Pre-Conference Workshop and Tutorial	22	86	71 83%	0	0	15 68%	7 32%	0	0
6	Mini-conference	3	12	11 92%	0	0	3 100%	0	0	0
7	ADHO Bursary Application	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Sum	543	2157	1855 86%	0	0	337 62%	150 28%	53 10%	3 1%

After acceptances were sent out, the next responsibility of the Program Committee was to work on the conference schedule. Early on, the Program Committee and Local Organizers decided to give equal status to panels where the presenters were primarily online and those where presenters were mostly in person. Nonetheless, this distinction required that we account for a presenter's mode of presentation when forming sessions.
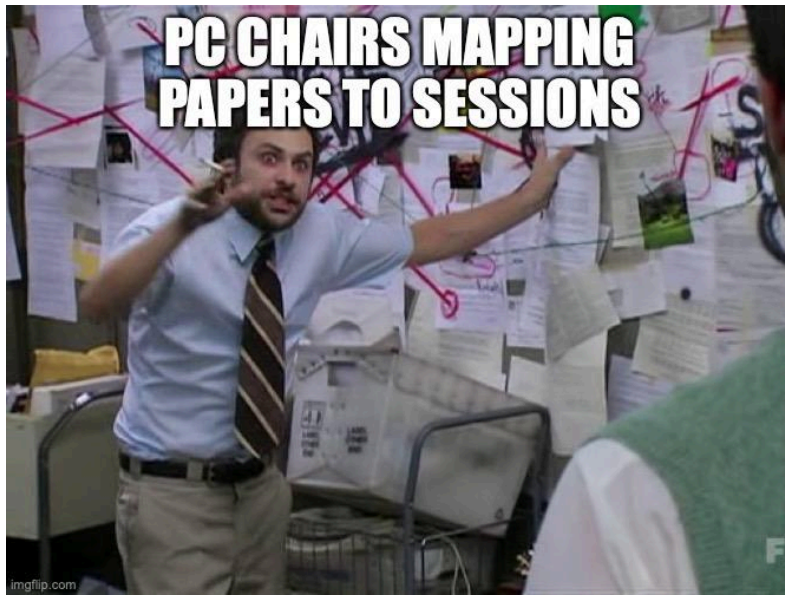
This capability does not exist in ConfTool, so we needed to create software that allowed us to form sessions of papers based on mode, format (long paper, short paper), similarity of subject matter and presenter time zone. Additionally, we took measures to decrease the likelihood of competing papers on similar subject matter during the same time slot. The Program Committee Chairs are completing a detailed report on this work to be published at a later date.

The Program Committee also worked to collect final abstracts of accepted presentations to be published in the conference Book of Abstracts. There were delays in producing the Book of Abstracts, in part because a significant number of accepted presenters did not meet the deadlines to submit their finalized abstracts, or failed to submit their abstracts altogether. All abstracts had to be run through ADHO's custom "Convalidator," to TEI encode them, which was also a major friction point in this process.

The other main task of the Program Committee was to select the keynote speakers. The Program Committee began soliciting keynote speaker nominations shortly after it was formed,

then met in January 2024 to discuss a wide range of criteria and considerations for evaluating the nominations. After several rounds of an anonymous voting process on surveys, nominations were sent to ADHO representatives for approval. Selected keynote speakers were allowed to choose whether they spoke in person or online, although the organizers hoped to have both in-person and online keynotes. Originally, two keynotes were going to be in person and one online, however visa issues meant that we ended up with two online and one in-person keynote.

Hybrid Elements

A key element of DH2024 was our plan to be hybrid from the start. Unlike DH2021, DH2022, and DH2023, whose planning cycles were interrupted by COVID, we were already in a global pandemic when the team bid to host DH2024. This was reflected in our conference theme, Reinvention and Responsibility, and in all of our planning. While there was a significant amount of angst amongst a subset of DH2024 participants about the hybrid format, we believe this will decrease as hybridity becomes the norm for future DH conferences. The majority of attendees expressed gratitude about the ability to attend in person or online.

Among people submitting to present at the conference, a full 16% indicated that they would be attending and presenting online. Anecdotal evidence indicates that a significant minority of such presenters would have been completely excluded from the conference had they not been able to present online, making this an important form of access and inclusion.

A full 30% of conference participants attended wholly online. Some participants who had initially intended to attend in person switched to online due to travel, health, or family issues. Some onsite participants attended individual sessions online from their hotel rooms due to fatigue, the weather, etc., making the online options a crucial element in supporting onsite attendees' experience as well. While hopefully no future conferences will have to deal with an early morning tornado warning, the flexibility of being able to choose not to go out in the rain or the heat or other weather conditions was an important factor for event inclusivity.

The initial plan for the conference was to host a significant number of sessions in flipped formats, with pre-recorded talks, so that synchronous time could be

reserved for conversation. Concerns were raised about participants watching so many talks in advance that they would be unable to remember each one when the time came for these conversations, which we considered a valid issue. We therefore made the "flipped" format optional and several participants opted into it. While we believe these were successful presentations and panels, the uptake among members of the community was small enough that we do not think this is an important format option to continue providing in the future.

Mixed panels of online and onsite presenters ran successfully and there is no need to worry about modality when creating panels in the future. Online chairs were a bit less successful and it was useful to have at least one chair, presenter, or other authority figure in each room.

To support our hybrid elements, we used classroom technology and Zoom meetings embedded in the Whova app. All classroom technology was started up and checked first thing in the morning and checked again between every session. The classroom technology largely functioned as designed but a few rooms had auditory issues due to redundant microphone systems. Some participants also failed to screen share their presentations to Zoom. While we had volunteers in many of the rooms and the Local Organizers conducted regular online audio and video checks, the intermittent nature of these checks meant problems were not immediately apparent if a single panelist failed to screenshare but the previous and subsequent panelists did screenshare.
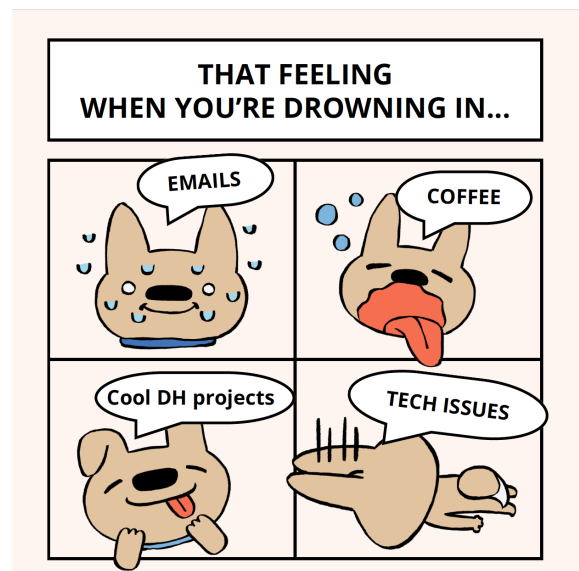
To support virtual poster presentations, we paid for the Whova artefact center add-on which enabled people to upload their posters to the Whova app for general viewing. Not all poster presenters uploaded their posters as required, in keeping with the conference-wide trend of people missing deadlines. However, most poster presenters successfully uploaded their poster for discussion and feedback by online participants. Online poster presenters were additionally required to send high resolution, digital copies of their posters to the Local Organizers, who had them printed and hung them onsite for in-person participants to see. The Local Organizers also created QR codes that they hung beside the posters to help direct onsite attendees to the artefact center to interact with the poster presenters online during their sessions.

Even on the first several days of the conference, the Local Organizers were still getting questions or encountering people who were surprised at the conference's hybrid elements. We expect ongoing education and the gradual development of consistent hybrid conference standards will help reduce confusion over time.

Communication and Online Systems

Because ADHO is a decentralized organization, it does not directly email the members of its Constituent Organizations the way other professional societies that run conferences have regular, direct email communication with its membership. Lacking existing infrastructure for emailed communication, the Local Organizers created a centralized email through which we were able to send out mass emails to lists of previous conference participants pulled from Conftool and later lists of people registered for the conference. The DH community clearly responded well to this, and shared our email with friends and colleagues who had questions. Towards the last few months leading up to the conference, we were getting dozens of individual emails per day with specific questions.

The implosion of Twitter negatively impacted our ability to communicate with the DH community at large, which is now spread thinly across various social media platforms. While the Local Organizers continued to use Twitter/X, it did not have nearly as much traction as it did for DH2023 or DH2022. There was some engagement on Bluesky and Mastodon, but there was not a critical mass of engagement on either platform.

During the conference, we did post on Twitter/X and Bluesky, but largely utilized Whova announcements. This is because we knew we could better reach attendees directly, which we were not doing on social media. Whova announcements were helpful too because we could choose to send them to all attendees, in person attendees only, and online attendees only.

The main conference website was a WordPress installation hosted via ADHO systems and using a subdomain of adho.org as is traditional. Because DH2024 chose not to have an official conference language, but did not have the resources available to maintain five versions of the conference website in the five ADHO languages, we employed the WordPress Google Translate plugin to continuously translate the website into dozens of languages,

including but not limited to the official ADHO languages. This WordPress site will be flattened to static HTML after the final conference reports are posted, to enable its long-term sustainability and ability to serve as a record of the event.

Conference information and updates were posted to the website until conference registration numbers reached "critical mass" and we were able to transition to sending announcements through Whova, the official conference app. Whova was employed by DH2023 and proved to be a user-friendly app with significant built-in support for hybrid events and high levels of engagement from the DH community. Crucially, ConfTool only has existing workflows and documentation to support data export from that system to two conference apps, one of which is Whova. This enabled the Local Organizers to easily port over conference registration and presentation data, along with the conference schedule, to Whova. Through Whova, organizers posted the online schedule, video links for hybrid sessions, and final videos of sessions. They also used it to assist in the generation of the print program book and conference name badges.

Other Conference Logistics

Registration

The registration rates for DH2024 were set as follows:

Registration Type	Online	Early Bird On-Site	Regular On-Site
ADHO member	$100	$225	$325
non-ADHO member	$150	$325	$425
ADHO student	$50	$100	$150
non-ADHO student	$75	$125	$175

GMU requires that conference registration funds only be accepted through an approved vendor/system and so the Local Organizers used GMU's proprietary "Mason Marketplace" to accept payments. To ensure that the Program Committee Chairs had timely access to information, and that ADHO both had timely access to information and could retain registration records going forward, the Local Organizers chose to also employ ConfTool as part of the registration process. Thus, registration was completed in two steps:

1. Logging into ConfTool to fill out a registration form. Registrations could be later edited to opt-in to the swag bag, print program, workshops, and tours.
2. Paying for the registration through GMU's Mason Marketplace, which was linked within the ConfTool system and also in the ConfTool confirmation email.

While information about how to complete this two-step process was repeatedly conveyed to participants through email, the conference website, ConfTool, and the ConfTool registration confirmation email, a significant minority of people had difficulties with this two-step process. There was also a large administrative burden formed by the lack of connectivity between the two systems, which required manual reconciliation.

Based on recommendations from the DH2023 Local Organizers team, we decided to not accept onsite registration to enable better advance planning and simplify onsite logistics. However, due to dozens of people missing the registration deadlines, this led us to be faced with the choice of creating individual exceptions or removing attendees (and their accepted submissions) from the program. After consultations with ADHO, we reopened registration with a higher "late/onsite registration" rate to ensure equitable treatment of all community members who had failed to register in a timely manner.

Catering and Banquet

To ensure conference accessibility, we made two major decisions with respect to catering: first, that we would avoid major allergens (shellfish, nuts) and religious dietary restrictions (pork) as much as possible, and second, that we would hold the conference reception partially outside so that people who wished to avoid airborne disease could (mostly) safely participate. Several members of the Local Organizers team have significant dietary restrictions, including being gluten free, which helped ensure that a wide variety of dietary restrictions were taken into account and that general food handling practices adhered to high safety standards.

Many people praised the quality and quantity of the coffee and tea in the coffee breaks and the significant amount of food that was available for snacking throughout the day. However, some people noted that there were not enough sugar-free options and we have advised future Local

Organizer teams to ensure there are diabetes-friendly food choices as well.

For the banquet, we chose to have a more buffet-style dinner to enable greater mixing and conversation among attendees. This was generally a success and a lot of people lingered for over an hour past the technical end time of the banquet because they were enjoying themselves so much. Feedback was generally positive but not so positive as to form a mandate to avoid formal sit-down meals in the future.


Volunteers

The Local Organizers offered volunteer opportunities for students in exchange for compensated registration. Students were able to volunteer online and in person. Online volunteers were new for DH2024. While well-intentioned, it created significant extra work and difficulty, especially when it came to accommodating time zones and connectivity issues. Initially, they were intended to be part of a paired set (one volunteer in person and one online) to monitor the hybrid sessions, but we did not end up recruiting a sufficient number of volunteers to set this up. Without a paired in person volunteer to communicate with, online volunteers were less helpful than we had hoped and are probably not worth recruiting for future conferences.

Conclusion

Organizing any conference, much less an international one, requires a tremendous amount of work. Doing so on an expedited timeline increases this burden. We are incredibly grateful for the efforts of everyone who helped make this conference a reality. As organizers, we also have appreciated the positive feedback from people who attended the conference. Like all acts of service, this work was done for the benefit of our community and we hope that we have helped chart a path forward for responsibly reinventing what the DH conference might be like in this post-pandemic era.
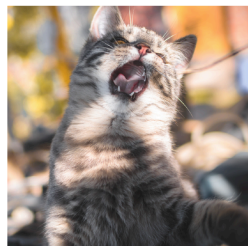
Me with my own DH project

Me, inspired, watching cool new DH projects & initiatives at DH24