Blender for Visual Investigation: Proposal for Funding

Executive Summary

Blender for Visual Investigation emerged from a successful collaboration with the Border Violence Monitoring Network & Oxford University, providing students with essential Blender skills applied to real-world investigations. It addresses a critical gap in specific, beginner-friendly resources for using Blender in visual investigation, despite the software's free, and open-source nature and proven capabilities.

Our solution is blendervisualinvestigation.com, offering a free, constantly evolving knowledge hub with structured learning paths from 3D basics to advanced use cases. While the knowledge base is freely accessible, we offer paid services for direct implementation, training, and teaching. Our aim is to empower individuals with Blender's versatile visual presentation abilities, ultimately democratizing access to crucial investigative tools. We seek funding to accelerate the creation of high-quality, original educational content and support direct training.

Introduction & Background

In today's data-saturated world, visual investigation is paramount for transforming complex information into understandable narratives. It enables investigators to cut through noise and present findings clearly to diverse audiences—from legal teams to the public. Complex relationships, timelines, and spatial data become instantly comprehensible through visuals, which are also vital for reconstructing events like accidents or human rights abuses.

Blender is an ideal tool for this field primarily because it is **free and open-source**, making advanced capabilities universally accessible. Beyond its robust 3D modeling features, Blender is a powerful 3D animation tool, allowing users to directly create high-quality images, videos, and animations from their models. This versatility significantly enhances the scope and impact of visual evidence.

The project's foundation was laid by a successful course for the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), where a group of students learned to build 3D models of detention centers using open-source data. The positive reception and tangible outputs—five distinct models, including interiors where possible—validated the demand and the effectiveness of teaching Blender for real-world investigative applications.

Project Description

"Blender for Visual Investigation" is built around a multi-faceted approach to address the identified educational gap:

- **YouTube Channel:** Serves as an initial entry point, offering videos to pique interest and guide viewers to the deeper resources.
- **Landing Page** (blendervisualinvestigation.com)**:** Acts as the central portal for all project information and direct access to the knowledge hub.
- **Knowledge Hub:** The core educational resource, freely accessible and constantly evolving. It is structured progressively:
    1. **Introduction to 3D Methodology:** Foundational concepts to understand the principles underlying Blender.
    2. **Introduction to Blender:** Beginner-friendly tutorials covering the user interface, modeling, and rendering basics.
    3. **Tools & Techniques:** Tutorials on specific techniques and integrating various external tools with Blender with a focus on visual investigation.
    4. **Use Cases:** A collection of real-world projects, starting with the BVMN collaboration, showcasing integrated workflows.

Project Goals & Objectives

The project aims to speak to **anyone with an interest in adding Blender to their investigative toolkit**. Our goal is to lower the barrier of entry into both 3D and the investigative space for "complete beginners" (e.g., journalists, human rights researchers, students), enabling them to apply Blender while adhering to sound investigative methodologies**. Or in other words: the democratization of access to visual investigation tools and the ability to apply them.**

Specific objectives include:

- **Integrated Content Creation:** To continuously develop high-quality, practical educational content for the knowledge hub, directly leveraging insights and output from student training and real-world project use cases.
- **Maintain Educational and Production Standards:** To consistently produce content that meets a higher-than-average standard in both production quality and educational clarity, ensuring its utility for beginners.
- **Empowerment through Application:** To enable learners to not only grasp Blender basics but to critically apply these skills in diverse investigative contexts, empowering them to present information visually in virtually any imaginable way.

Methodology & Implementation Plan

The project operates with a lean and responsive methodology, currently managed solely by the project lead.

- **Content Development:** New content is developed internally, drawing on expertise in visual investigation methodologies, extensive Blender experience, and a commitment to integrating new technologies. Content quality is ensured by continuously monitoring developments and needs within the visual investigation community.
- **Platform Management:** The YouTube channel, landing page, and knowledge hub are maintained by the project lead. Promotion relies primarily on **organic reach**, aiming for YouTube videos to be recommended when users search for Blender techniques relevant to visual investigation, directing them to the comprehensive knowledge hub. Select knowledge hub videos are also available on YouTube.
- **Community Engagement:** Within specific course contexts, a **constant feedback loop** between teacher and students ensures immediate content refinement and relevance. Broader community engagement is a future consideration, to be explored as the project gains wider traction.
- **Timeline:** Project acceleration is **directly dependent on securing funding**, which will provide dedicated time for faster content creation. However, the knowledge base is committed to continuous growth regardless, sustained by ongoing dedication.

Expected Outcomes & Impact

"Blender for Visual Investigation" is set to deliver significant outcomes and impact:

- **Increased Capacity:** Users will gain the ability to present investigative data in almost unimaginable ways—from 2D images to full 3D animations—once they master Blender's versatile capabilities for data manipulation and visualization.
- **Accessibility:** Providing free, high-quality resources and leveraging Blender's ability to run on relatively low-end computers democratizes access to advanced visual investigation tools for a broad audience.
- **Innovation:** By demonstrating Blender's vast capabilities and suggesting novel applications, the project will inspire experimentation and contribute to new, innovative workflows in visual investigation, with future aspirations including AI-assisted scripting and AR/VR applications.
- **Case Studies/Success Stories:** The initial BVMN course, resulting in detailed 3D models of detention centers, stands as a strong example of the project's tangible impact. Testimonials will further illustrate positive outcomes.

Sustainability & Future Plans

The project's long-term vision is to accelerate the creation of original, high-quality tutorials, produced faster and with a focus on optimal educational delivery and adherence to investigative methodologies.

Sustainability is driven by a model where **paid services** (one-on-one coaching, workshops, and courses) directly fund the expansion of the free knowledge hub and the creation of new content, including detailed use cases. We are also actively exploring **grant funding** as a crucial avenue for growth and have a **donation system** in place for future implementation.

Budget

The budget primarily covers the dedicated time of the project lead for **course creation, specific content development, teaching (including flexibility for course duration, with 4 additional weeks factored into pricing), and overall project management.**

Given Blender is free, there are no direct software licensing costs. Platform and hosting costs are minimal, utilizing free tiers (Notion for the hub, Google Drive for sharing) and low website hosting fees, with plans to explore self-hosted open-source alternatives. Marketing and outreach are currently not a priority, relying on organic growth. While not fixed, a **contingency fund (e.g., 5-15% of the total budget)** would provide a necessary buffer for unforeseen expenses, hurdles or opportunities.

Team & Qualifications

The project is led by **Boudewijn**, a creative technologist and visual storyteller with over 7 years of Blender experience. His background spans two bachelor degrees, one in philosophy, the other in interactive media design, and a decade of freelance graphic design and motion work, providing a unique interdisciplinary approach. Driven by a desire to use emerging technologies for positive change, he believes in making investigative (3D) workflows accessible and adaptable. His ability to teach in Dutch, English, and German further enhances the project's global reach.

Conclusion

Blender for Visual Investigation fills a critical gap by providing a unique, free, and comprehensive educational resource that empowers complete beginners to leverage Blender's versatile capabilities for visual investigative purposes, thereby democratizing access to crucial analytical and presentation tools in a rapidly evolving information landscape. To truly unlock the full potential of this project and accelerate the creation of high-quality, original content, we are seeking dedicated funding. We believe a **discovery call** would be the ideal next step to discuss this proposal in more detail, explore how our vision aligns with your goals, and answer any questions you may have about how your support can make a tangible difference in the field of visual investigation.