AAA has developed an innovative new platform that will accelerate the scholarly book review process within anthropology through the implementation of a totally digital system.

Built with the support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Anthropology Book Forum (ABF) speeds up the system of book reviewing so that more books are reviewed, and in a way that is cost effective for journal publishers, helps promote book publishers’ lists, and provides communities of scholars with the information they need about new research. The system is also unique in that it provides authors with a wider audience who now have the opportunity for social engagement, as readers will be able to comment on the book and/or review it immediately.

The software is available to any discipline or journal using the Open Journals System. Publishers upload book descriptions into the system along with digital versions that are electronically available to authorized reviewers. Reviewers then upload their reviews into the database for approval and publication online at the award-winning Anthropology News website (http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/book-review/).

The site includes sharing tools, so that book reviews connect to informal scholarly communications and comments. Instead of shackling readership of these reviews to the subscription base of the journal, the open access site lets anyone interested in the contents of the book to discover new works and launch virtual discussions. The time between book publication and review has been significantly reduced as reviewers will have access to the books electronically, in some cases before their publication. James Ferguson’s newest book, “Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution,” for example, was just published on May 20th, only five days before being reviewed on the ABF.

Currently, there are over 20 publishers participating in the experiment, including Berghahn Books, Duke University Press, University of Arizona Press, University of California Press, University of Chicago Press, and University of Nebraska Press. Two AAA journals, North American Dialogue and Anthropology of Work Review, have also expressed interest in using the prototype. We hope publication of reviews closer (if not simultaneous) to publication of the book and the ability to launch discussions will help realize the aim of reviewing books: to bring the scholarly contributions of monographs into digital and informal conversations.

Join this community, by commenting on reviews or volunteering to review a book. Contact the editor at anthrobookforum@gmail.com.