

STICK TO THE PLAN (OR NOT)

The Unique Challenges of Grant-Funded Projects

Sandy Rodriguez, Special Project Cataloger
Timothy Gieringer, Library Information Specialist II
University of Missouri—Kansas City

Agenda

- What are projects?
- What is unique about grant projects?
- Why do a grant project?
- UMKC's Mellon Foundation grant
- What are the challenges?
- Advice

What we're *not* covering

- Writing a successful grant application
- Administrative tasks such as managing grant budgets

What we plan on covering in our presentation

- Primary focus on project management for *grant-funded projects*:
 - How they differ from other library projects
 - The challenges that are specific to grant projects
 - Experiences from our grant project as an illustration of the various challenges
 - From the perspective of manager and staff member
 - Offer advice for addressing unique challenges that arise

What are projects?

- Has a definite start and end date
- Produces results
- Moves in unique phases

Revels, I. (2010, March 10). *Managing digital projects*. Retrieved from <http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/features/03102010/managing-digital-projects>

Has a definite start and end date

- Length can vary, but will eventually end

Produces results

- Once the product or service is delivered, the project ends. Products can be any number of things (i.e. web sites, computer labs, cataloging records)
- Also leaves behind "artifacts" which are the documents created to complete the project (i.e. workflow, statistics, correspondence)

Unique phases of a project

- ◉ Phase 1: Initiate the project
- ◉ Phase 2: Plan the project
- ◉ Phase 3: Execute the project
- ◉ Phase 4: Control or monitor the project
- ◉ Phase 5: Close out the project

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Moves in unique phases

- Phase 1: Initiate the project: several people may be involved in the decision-making process to initiate a project (organizational administrators, managers, and other supporters)
- Phase 2: Plan the project: a project is a solution; identify stakeholders
- Phase 3: Execute the project: Resources are staff, equipment, software, and any necessary tangible item required to carry out project tasks.
- Phase 4: Control or monitor the project: communicating project status, milestones, and other concerns. Communicating resource needs. Control activities involve following up on activities, containing costs within the parameters of the budget, monitoring changes, and managing risks.
- Phase 5: Close out the project: assessing project outcomes and evaluation.

Our project has not yet reached Phase 5; our presentation focuses on Phases 3 and 4

What is unique about grant projects?

- ◉ Prescribed goals and objectives
- ◉ Prescribed timeline
- ◉ Separate funds
- ◉ Separate marketing component
- ◉ Formal reporting
- ◉ Creation of artifacts

Prescribed goals and objectives

- They are self-contained and focused with project goals, objectives, and plan already in place; many decisions already made
- Set parameters result in less flexibility

Prescribed timeline

- Time is a priority when you have a hard deadline
- There are known expectations with predictable milestones facilitating ongoing evaluation

Separate funds towards travel, training, equipment, staffing

- In the context of our current situation, grant positions are recession-proof

Separate marketing plan for that collection

- Granting agencies like to see that their funds are having a measurable impact
- Implications for future funding opportunities

Formal reporting required

- At the end of the project or annually (depends on granting agency) with clear instructions
- Assessment of project success

They require document creation (workflow, training needs, performance measures, reporting)

- Don't have to reinvent the wheel; just depends on the uniqueness of your project
- Make decisions to utilize the most appropriate delivery platform for your project docs

Why do a grant project?

Why libraries pursue grants:

● Limited resources

- 83% percent reported either budget cuts or no budget growth during the 2009-2010 year
- 36% applying for more grants

● Limited flexibility in staffing structure

● Prestige

● Enhanced service

Ebsco library collections and budgeting trends survey. (2010, May 21). Retrieved from <http://www2.ebsco.com/EN-US/NEWSCENTER/Pages/ViewArticle.aspx?QSID=360>

Oder, N. (2010). PERMANENT SHIFT?. *Library Journal*, 135(1), 44-46. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Limited resources in research institutions with growing collections

- No secret that libraries have been hurt by the economy
- Administrative pressure to apply for grants

Limited flexibility in staffing structure

- Not easy to shift staff for new projects
- Libraries' inability to adapt quickly to change: while we quickly adapt technology for services, our staffing structures do not easily change to reflect those changes

Prestige: Grants can bring exposure to the library ...

- From the granting agency (doing well can increase the likelihood of more grants)
- From prospective donors (collections, money)
- Within the library community (possible collaborations)

Enhanced service

- To better meet the needs of the patrons, whether they be students, faculty, or community

Why do a grant project?

Why staff choose grant projects:

- To gain experience
- The unique nature of projects

To gain experience

- For new librarians, grant projects are a way to get library experience to add to your resume as well as a way to get your foot in the door, possibly resulting in a permanent position
- Can help you decide on what type of librarianship you might want to pursue
- For aspiring librarians, they are a way to decide on continuing studies and career paths

Much of what makes the project unique is appealing

- Opportunity to work on a possibly fascinating collection or project
- Having a set timeline can be appealing
- Will have solid, concrete evidence of work performed (i.e. numbers to show, documentation to show)

What are the challenges?

- ⦿ Personnel issues
- ⦿ Set-up and training issues
- ⦿ Addressing unforeseen issues
- ⦿ The balancing act

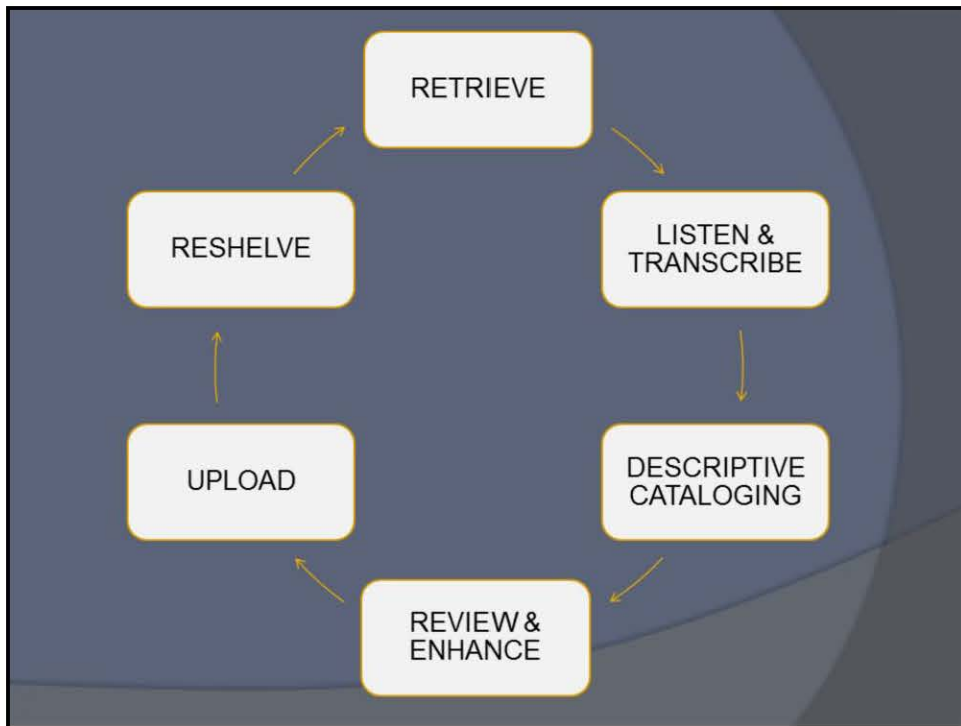
J. David Goldin Project

J. David Goldin



- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- 3-year (2008-2010) \$502,000
- *Objective:* Catalog 9,949 16" transcription discs
- *Staff:* 1 Project Manager, 3 Technicians, 2 Students

- Cataloging project over 3 years to provide bibliographic records in Worldcat and Merlin of important historical materials
- Transcription discs are a recording format during the 30s-50s that were used for radio broadcasts; 33 1/3 rpm; variety of programming; material types: vinyl, metal-base lacquer, glass-base lacquer
- Staffing was originally 1 project manager, 2 technicians, and 2 students (3rd staff member added in February 2009)



Simple workflow:

- Retrieve discs from the Sound Archives
- Students listen to the discs and transcribe information for access point provision
- Technicians provide descriptive cataloging and name access points
- Project Manager reviews work and enhances records with subject analysis and authority work
- Project Manager uploads to Worldcat and exports to Merlin
- The discs are re-shelved in the Sound Archives

Personnel issues

- ◉ Identifying roles as temporary staff
- ◉ Balancing involvement in activities
- ◉ Hiring decisions and turnover
- ◉ Navigating the workplace dynamic
- ◉ Developing a commitment to the institution

Identifying roles

- How much orientation do temporary staff receive?
- Acceptance and integration: Temporary staff are adjusting to a new environment while permanent staff are adjusting to changes in environment
- How does project staff fit into the department, the library, the university?
- Are there different expectations for temporary staff?

Balancing involvement in activities

- Deadline-driven projects with added pressure to perform

Hiring decisions and turnover

- Going through the hiring and training process multiple times is time-consuming and can have a negative overall impact

Navigating the workplace dynamic

- Historical context and organizational culture important for decision-making and collaboration with supporting units

Developing a commitment to the institution

- Investment for both the institution and the temporary employee
- Institution should provide a positive experience for possible retention of the employee and the temporary employee should provide a positive experience for the institution so as to be a viable candidate for possible retention. If retention is not possible, at the very least, the employee is able to gather references for future job prospects.

Setup & training issues

- ◉ Executing the plan
 - Shared drive → Intranet → Intranet + Website
- ◉ Identifying knowledge gaps
- ◉ Seeking opportunities for training
- ◉ Continued assessment

Executing the plan

- Invest time in training so that you can hit the ground running (getting ready for training, setting up workflow, preparing work areas, etc.)
- Decide on the appropriate platform for communication, project materials, etc.

Identifying knowledge gaps

- Take background and experience into account

Seeking opportunities for training

- Formal and informal

Continued assessment

- Periodic evaluation of staff (don't become complacent)

Addressing unforeseen issues

- ◉ Determine the most appropriate response
 - Consider the impact
 - If necessary, contact the granting agency
- ◉ Monitor and evaluate

Determine the most appropriate response

- What issues will need to be addressed?
- What adjustments will have to be made?
- Consider the impact
- If the response lies outside of the scope of the project but utilizes project resources (staff time, equipment, etc.), you will likely need to ask permission from the granting agency

Monitor and evaluate

- Track progress and give honest assessments—are you biting off more than you can chew?
- Need to make additional adjustments?

Issue?



YES!



The need to take preservation measures was our project's major unforeseen issue. Our decision was not the ideal solution, but we did what we had to in order to complete the cataloging of the items. Specifically, we cleaned only the most affected discs and used the transferred audio (CD copy) for cataloging. This left a large number of discs still at risk of degradation.

The balancing act

- Balancing quality and quantity
 - Objectives
 - Deadline
- Ongoing evaluation
- Creative solutions
- Reporting

- Ongoing evaluation and judgment calls must be made in order to successfully complete the project objectives while doing so within the prescribed timeframe
- Creative solutions: Again, deadline-driven so decisions sometime must be made on what adjustments (perhaps, cuts even) to make to the existing workflow
- Formal reporting to grant agency so that they can track your progress and make sure you are achieving the project goals which include the *impact* of the project

Advice

- Communicate
- Enable staff to be self-sufficient
- Utilize the expertise around you
- Engage in work at any level
- Evaluate with a purpose
- Set priorities and strategies that work
 - Be flexible but realistic

Communication with project staff, staff that support the project, library-wide, and to the target community

- Participate in meetings library-wide and send out reports
- Be involved in the library: good opportunity to talk about the project, put yourself out there, be engaged with your fellow co-workers; important to have people behind you and to advocate for the project
- Solicit feedback from staff and give feedback
- Marketing

Give staff the tools to enable them to be self-sufficient

- Invest in training because staff should be able to operate without the manager

Important to utilize the expertise around you and in the library community

- Consider staff expertise and interests as well as networking opportunities at conferences

As a manager, be willing to engage in work at any level

- Shows that you're a part of the team and helps to guide you in solving workflow issues

Evaluate with a purpose

- Evaluation takes time so evaluate during project milestones and when making decisions when addressing issues

Set priorities and strategies that work (be flexible but realistic)

Grant projects have set plans and deadlines, but remember, as the manager of a grant project, you have to be flexible. The challenges you face on a grant project may be out of your control, but you do have the authority with the support from your institution, your staff, and sometimes from the granting agency to explore creative solutions in order to address issues as they arise. If you do veer away from the plan, be honest about the effectiveness and impact that those solutions have on your ability to successfully meet the project objectives on time.

QUESTIONS?

Sandy Rodriguez

rodriguezsan@umkc.edu

Timothy Gieringer

gieringert@umkc.edu

<http://sites.google.com/site/goldinproject/>