PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN THE LIBRARY WORKPLACE

ADVANCES IN LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION

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ADVANCES IN LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION VOLUME 38

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INTRODUCTION: PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN THE LIBRARY WORKPLACE

An important component of library administration and organization in the modern age is managing projects. Once the realm of technology and business gurus, formal project management tools, techniques, and schemas have become more commonplace in libraries. Using formal project management components can help libraries achieve their desired outcomes with less stress for employees. However, there can be an entry barrier to project management, since the concepts are still somewhat out of the range of the usual library administration experience. This volume of *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* attempts to put project management into the toolboxes of library administrators through overviews of concepts, analyses of experiences, and forecasts for the use of project management within the profession.

The volume opens with four chapters designed to develop an understanding of the various pieces of project management. Pre-project planning is presented in "Using Pre-project Planning to Manage Workload" as a process that helps develop ideas into actionable project proposals, smoothing the way to implementing project management principles. "Fostering a Culture of Project Management Practices – A Maturity Model for Libraries" looks at what workplace culture contributes to the success of formal project management practices. Next, we look at the common roots between librarianship and project management in "Common Roots, Different Systems: Project Management and Librarianship." "The Best-laid Plans of Mice and Men Often Go Awry: The Disadvantages of Project Management" looks at situations where project management might not be advantageous in a library setting. These works give the reader a good grasp on what project management is, how it relates to librarianship, and how it might (or might not) help in their individual settings.

Next, we proceed into an examination of how project management principles can be used to build community engagement and better relationships through the lens of faculty partnerships at the University of Kansas. This is followed by a look at how project management frameworks can be used by those without formal authority, based on project charters or the lack thereof. Then the book turns toward the development of project management processes

within a library, with a focus on the University of Minnesota Libraries' experience. These chapters focus on the setup and relationship side of project management and further develop the reader's understanding of how the concept may begin to be applied.

We then dive into a more traditional example of project management, regarding digital projects, in "Integration of Project Management Techniques in Digital Projects." The case studies offered for analysis involve the use of Agile and Waterfall project management methodologies. "Combining Project Management and Change Management for Project Success in Libraries" presents an overview of how project management tools can be combined with change management techniques in a library setting for improved efficiency. We then return to digital projects in "From Collection Silos to Digital Content Hubs: Digital Project Management in Special Collections and University Archives" with an analysis of how project management technique adoption has fundamentally changed collection service models in university archives and special collections, reducing silos and promoting collaboration. This look at how project management frameworks have worked with the rapid changes in digital offerings of libraries gives library administrators more tools and food for thought around project management in libraries generally.

"The Value of Full-time Project Management Positions: PMO Nuts and Bolts at Hesburgh Libraries" continues to broaden our thinking with a look at how we can and do devote personnel time to project management, by examining Hesburgh Libraries' full-time project management position. This is then followed by a look at how major project management protocols, such as Six Sigma, Lean, and Scrum, developed, and have been applied in libraries generally. The mindset provided by project management is the subject of "Using a 'Project Management Mindset' as an Administrative Approach to Creating Workplace Efficiencies & Building Employee Leadership Skills," which provides us with the benefits of using project management more generally as a managerial tool. "Accidental Project Management in a New Library Storage Facility" then takes on the vaunted "accidental project manager" trope, demonstrating that while on-the-fly application of project management tools worked in the context of moving collections to a high-density storage facility, a more formal application of project management would have improved the success of the project. These chapters provide the reader with guidance on the value of formal project management schema in both mindset of administrators generally and more intentional implementations.

The final chapters of this volume provide a deeper look at what project management training can offer for library professionals. "Effective Project Management Techniques to Prepare Information Professionals for the Future Workforce" presents recommendations for LIS professionals' training around project management, while "Projects, Programmes, Strategy and Leadership in the Research Library" provides a broader strategic look at how project management techniques can be implemented and embedded within a library.

We wrap up with a look at the benefits and drawbacks for training library professionals in the Scrum project management framework.

All in all, this volume offers readers an interesting overview as well as a selected deeper dive into project management concepts, tools, schema, and frameworks. Administrators reading this book will be able to say what the benefits and drawbacks of project management techniques are based on the concepts, analyses, cases, and theories presented here, and begin to work on their own implementations of whatever best matches their institutional needs.

Samantha Schmehl Hines
Editor

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USING PRE-PROJECT PLANNING TO MANAGE WORKLOAD

Twila Camp, Barbara Laufersweiler and Sarah Robbins

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *Pre-project planning can be an important process for libraries managing large project portfolios. The process allows anyone within an organization to put forth a potential project, and it clearly articulates the process both for developing an idea into a project and for approving and prioritizing projects.*

Methodology/approach – *Drawing from experience, the authors introduce a preliminary step for proposing projects before the project management principles are applied.*

Findings – *Benefits of the process include: promoting stakeholder input; preventing organizational overwhelm; documenting the library's project portfolio; and improving communication, transparency, and decision-making. Libraries implementing this process should define a project for their organization, build buy-in among those involved, and ensure that approved projects advance library goals.*

Originality/value – *This chapter is largely practical and derived from experience. It provides an in-depth look at pre-project planning, a concept largely ignored in the project management literature.*

Keywords: Project management; pre-project planning; library administration

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INTRODUCTION

To stay relevant in today's era of rapid change and constant evolution, libraries are adopting project management tools and techniques to execute all that must be done as efficiently and effectively as possible. However, to prevent overwhelming personnel and the organization as a whole, a library must also manage its project portfolios to ensure that it is only investing in the projects most relevant to advancing its strategic initiatives. Adopting a pre-project planning workflow creates opportunities for anyone within an organization to develop an idea into a project proposal and allows for multiple layers of approval to ensure that only projects most suited to the needs of the library are resourced.

PRE-PROJECT PLANNING VERSUS PROJECT INITIATION

Books written about project management often include extended discussion of each phase of the project life cycle and outline key components and outcomes of each phase. Often, the project management cycle begins with the project initiation phase and moves forward from there. However, given the significance of the initiation phase on the ultimate success of the individual project and on portfolio management within the organization, adding a pre-project planning phase that overlaps somewhat with the initiation phase may well serve larger organizations.

The PMBOK Guide (2000) succinctly defines initiation as "the process of formally authorizing a new project or that an existing project should continue into its next phase" (p. 53). The inputs for initiation include: product description, strategic plan, project selection criteria, and historical information. The outputs from the process are a project charter, an assigned project manager, project constraints, and assumptions (pp. 53–54). In the proposed pre-project planning phase, historical information and the strategic plan become key inputs and product description is the output. The set of project selection criteria is actually built into the project approval process itself and is neither an input nor an output.

Buser, Massis, and Pollack (2014) mirror and expand upon the PMBOK guidelines. They encourage systems thinking to evaluate potential projects. New projects should align with the library's strategic plan and advance library initiatives (pp. 24–26). While the authors devote two chapters to evaluating projects and calculating return on investment, they indicate the "first step in management for any project is planning to plan. By identifying the key components of the project, the initiation groundwork is laid for planning in the next phase" (p. 36). Activities during project initiation include developing a charter, assessing constraints, and identifying key stakeholders (pp. 37–43).

Implementing an entire pre-project planning process further emphasizes the importance of "planning to plan" and guides information gathering to build a project prospectus to inform the eventual project charter.

In the eXtreme Project Management model put forth by Thomsett (2002), the first phase of the project management process is project justification, approval, and review, and is usually undertaken by administrators. Thomsett notes, "eXtreme project management requires an investment of effort before the project formally commences. Project initiation is the first filter. This process involves a fairly quick analysis of the potential project's scope, objectives, benefits, costs, and risks. Often this is a relatively informal review to eliminate obvious duds" (pp. 55–56). The pre-project planning process allows for a grassroots approach to submitting project proposals by clearly outlining a path forward for ideas to become projects. Also, in the pre-project planning process, the tier one and/or tier two reviews serve as filters even before the project initiation phase. This provides ample opportunities for the organization to close the project and minimize efforts on projects that are not feasible. Even projects that are not "obvious duds" but are simply not a good fit for the organization for whatever reason can be eliminated before substantial investment is made.

In *Project Management: Tools and Techniques for Today's ILS Professional*, Allen (2004) comes close to including a full pre-project planning process in her outline of the project life cycle. In her model, the project life cycle begins with project analysis. Project analysis encompasses project initiation, defining the project, and engaging others. It is also during this phase that Allen proposed identifying the project management structure to be used, planning project communication, performing a risk analysis, and producing a project brief based on the information gathered. The brief is used to inform decision makers and gain approval before project planning truly begins (pp. 18–35). Perhaps the biggest difference between Allen's project analysis and the proposed pre-project planning workflow is that the workflow does not include any sort of emphasis on defining the project management structure or planning project communication, as those are only necessary if a proposal is approved and advances to a fully supported project. In large organizations managing multiple projects, terminologies such as "project analysis" may imply an approved project ready to move forward, whereas in the pre-project planning process, the focus is on an idea being proposed to become a project rather than an approved project.

PRE-PROJECT PLANNING WORKFLOW

Developing a rigorous pre-project planning workflow is an effective method of vetting ideas before they become fully formed projects. While the pre-project planning workflow should be customized for the needs of individual libraries, Fig. 1 illustrates the general steps involved in this process.

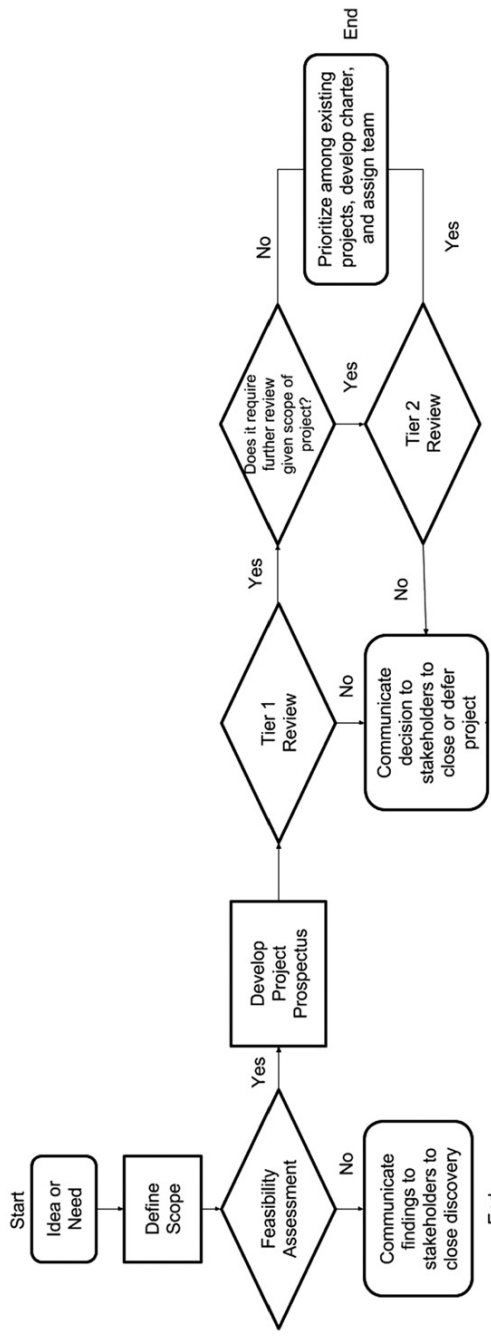

Fig. 1. A Workflow for Pre-project Planning and Decision-making.

Define Scope

Defining the scope of an idea during pre-project planning is different than defining the scope of a project for a formal charter. For the purposes of pre-project planning, defining the scope means fully exploring what problems need to be solved, how a possible project could address these problems, who benefits from solving these problems, who needs to be involved in the potential project, and how long the organization has to address the problem and/or complete a possible project. Typically, this work is done by the individual or team that is experiencing the problem or has had the idea.

As this individual or team develops the idea and defines the scope, it is not uncommon to have false starts or to chase leads that take you nowhere productive. This phase might take weeks of investigation and inquiry. Time invested during this step will reap dividends later, but it can be tedious as ideas evolve and the scope morphs into a seemingly different idea altogether.

Questions to consider while defining the project scope:

- What is the big idea?
- What problem needs solving or what needs to be accomplished?
- What is the business case for addressing this need or moving forward with this idea?
- What are the potential consequences of not solving this problem?

Once there is a firm understanding of the big idea or the problems that need to be addressed, who needs to be involved, and what the desired outcome is, it is time to assess the feasibility of undertaking the project within the organization.

Assess Feasibility

To assess the feasibility of the potential project, the individual or team must be completely honest about the organizational realities in which the project would be undertaken. The reviewers must consider: the skill sets and limitations of existing personnel; the financial and resource costs of the project, with allowances for unexpected problems; and how a completed project would fit into the organizational infrastructure regarding use, maintenance, and upkeep. This is not the time to be overly optimistic or view the organization with rose-colored glasses. Teams set themselves up for potential failure when the pre-project planning assessment focuses on an ideal rather than the reality.

Questions to consider when assessing the feasibility of undertaking a new project:

- Is the project aligned with the library's strategic priorities?
- Will the project involve leveraging existing infrastructure or building a new one?

- Is in-house expertise available to complete the project or will it require building or hiring a new skill set?
- What is the overall cost of the project? Be sure to include the investment of human resources as well as the financial investment.
- What long-term maintenance will be required once the project is complete? Can the organization sustain it?
- Can the project be completed within the time frame allocated?
- Who needs to be involved in undertaking the project? Do those individuals have the capacity to assist during the allocated time frame?

After reviewing the data gathered during the feasibility assessment, the team will be faced with the decision to continue with developing the project, rethink the project, or close the project altogether. If the assessment indicates that the library can indeed support the proposed project, the team should move forward with developing the project prospectus to formalize the project in a way that can be shared with the others.

If the assessment indicates that the library is unable to support the proposed project, the team can decide either to rethink the project or to simply document the findings and close the discovery. To rethink the project, the team should begin by redefining the scope of the project so it becomes feasible within the organizational realities. If that is not possible, then the team should document their findings of the feasibility assessment and communicate those findings with interested stakeholders. Documentation and communication are critical to properly stop ideation on the proposed project; without it, interested stakeholders may be tempted to continue to pursue a project that has been deemed unfeasible for the organization. Documentation also provides historical context when new personnel are hired and they need to understand decisions made before they joined the organization.

Develop Project Prospectus

Assuming the feasibility assessment indicates that the proposed project is possible within the realities of the library, it is time to formalize the idea into a project by developing the project prospectus. This document will be used to communicate the idea to those who will sponsor the project and ultimately to decide whether or not the proposed project becomes a fully resourced project with the support of the library administration. The project prospectus should be detailed enough to create a compelling case for moving forward with the project from the problems solved to long-term benefit to the organization.

Items to be included in the project prospectus:

- *Project lead*: This is the individual who has the best understanding of the project scope and who will lead the project.

- *Project description*: This is a written, detailed description of the project as determined by defining the scope.
- *Resources needed*: This should include human resources, technologies, and financial resource.
- *Time line*: At a minimum, the time line should include the total time the project will take. If known, it should factor in time to complete any projects that are dependencies for the proposed project.
- *Project dependencies*: Knowing what future projects are dependent on the completion of this proposed project is critical information to have available when proposals are approved, as it helps in prioritizing projects and resource allocation.
- *Intended users or audience*: The intended users or audience for the proposed project may include internal or external customers or some combination of both. Identifying who benefits from the project completion is useful for forming a project team that includes representation from stakeholders as well as determining who should be involved in the communication protocols established for the project.
- *Success measures*: It is never too soon to consider what it means to successfully complete the project. This can be as simple as answering "What does 'done' look like?" and as involved as identifying ways of assessing the success of a project long term. While determining success varies by project and organization, documenting what data will be collected to show return on an investment demonstrates its importance from the outset.
- *Articulation of tasks that are out of scope:* While it is important to define the scope of the project, it is equally important to articulate what is beyond the scope of the proposed project. Defining what is out of scope during prospectus development can help manage expectations, reduce overwhelm, and minimize feature creep. This is critical for projects that are likely to grow with customer input over time, such as facility remodeling or website development. Articulating what is specifically out of scope provides a resource for project team members to refer to when stakeholders start making demands once a project is approved and underway.
- *Risk factors*: This may require some brainstorming from those who will be directly involved in the proposed project, but it should include all of the scenarios that may prevent a successful completion of the proposed project. For capital projects, this could mean lack of funding, slow delivery of furniture, or unforeseen problems from the contractors. With a technology-related project, this could be updates to infrastructure software, security risks, or building in-house expertise for a new programming language.
- *Long-term plan beyond the life cycle of the project:* This portion of the prospectus requires thinking beyond the project itself and considering how the completed project will be integrated into the organization itself. For service- or facility-related projects, this should be straightforward to identify as completion will likely result in a new way of being for the organization.

For technology projects, this step is a bit more tricky yet even more critical to consider: Who will be responsible for updating the content on the website or maintaining the technology as hardware and software are upgraded?

Once the project prospectus is complete, it is ready for review by those who will ultimately be responsible for sponsoring the project if approved. While approval is not guaranteed, going through the process of defining the scope, assessing the feasibility, and writing the project prospectus situates the proposed project to be well-received by those ultimately charged with making the decisions.

Tier One Review

Depending on the size and organizational structure of the library, tier one review may be a supervisor reviewing a prospectus from an individual, or a division head reviewing a prospectus from a department within the division. Some libraries create teams to conduct a tier one review. With a team approach, the teams should be composed of members from across the library who have a broad enough understanding of the organizational priorities and resources to accurately assess projects and who have the authority to approve or reject a project.

Questions to consider during the first review of a project prospectus:

- What is the anticipated return on investment from completing the project? Is it worth it?
- What is the anticipated value to the organization?
- Can the organization afford the project?
- Can the organization successfully complete the project?
- What are the opportunity costs for completing this project?
- What are the long-term benefits of completing this project?
- Is the impact of this project such that it needs further review from library administration?

Tier one review could have three results: (1) project is approved to move forward without further review, a charter is written, a team is appointed, and the project is prioritized within the project portfolio, (2) the project meets defined criteria to refer the project to the next level of review, or (3) the project is closed and the decision is documented and communicated to stakeholders.

While each organization will want to define the scope of project requiring administrative review based on its own situation, some general considerations include: the human resource requirement for completing the project, number of units impacted by the project, anticipated time investment for project completion, and the overall cost of the project. If a project requires personnel from multiple units to complete or the work of multiple units is impacted by the project, it should probably be reviewed by library administration or a team that

is authorized to operate on behalf of the library administration. It is also important to define the project cost that triggers a tier two review, even if only one unit within the library is impacted by the project.

Tier Two Review

Proposed projects subjected to tier two review should be large projects requiring substantial investment of library financial or human resources and should have far-reaching impact for the library. Given the required investment, library administration must review the proposed project within the broader context of library priorities. This requires an understanding of the evolving external landscape and consideration of whether or not the proposed project positions the library to advance organizational priorities.

Questions to consider during an administrative review of a project prospectus:

- What is the overall value to library for completing the proposed project?
- What is the overall value to library's community for completing the proposed project?
- What is the likely return on investment?
- How will completing the project impact the organizational culture?
- What is the potential impact on key stakeholders?
- Does the project support strategic initiatives within the library and/or within the larger community?

These are the high-level questions most library administrators routinely use to make decisions. A project prospectus is more likely to succeed if it answers these questions well because it will articulate the project's value to the success of the organization. Tier two review should result in either a project being approved and moving forward or a project being rejected and the results communicated to stakeholders, similar to the possible results of the tier one review.

Prioritizing Projects

Approved projects must be prioritized within the library's existing project portfolio. Taking time to prioritize new projects within the realm of the entire project portfolio is key to making sure resources are available and directed to the most important projects, preventing the organization from being overwhelmed with too many top priority projects, and communicating to the entire organization what is most important for advancing library initiatives.

Factors to consider when prioritizing projects:

- Are there other projects in the portfolio that must be completed before this project can begin?

- What projects are dependent on the completion of this project for their own successful completion?
- When are the needed human resources available to work on the project?
- Does the completion of this project advance organizational priorities to an extent that warrants prioritizing it over existing projects?
- What internal politics are at play with this project that may impact prioritization of this project?
- What are the potential consequences of delaying other approved projects in favor of the new project? Do the benefits outweigh potential costs?

Prioritization of projects should be done by the body responsible for the highest level of review for the project. Many newly approved projects will simply be added to the list of projects to be completed and will not require reprioritizing the existing projects. However, on occasion new projects are of such importance or timeliness that other projects must be delayed and resources reallocated to the new project. It is important that the project sponsors fully consider the consequences to the organization of such a decision. They must also communicate the decision to those involved so all understand the new priorities and respond accordingly.

Moving an Approved Project Forward to Project Initiation

Once a proposed project is approved and prioritized, it becomes a project that can be managed using standard project management tools and techniques. Next steps involve appointment of a project manager, using the project prospectus to develop a charter, and appointing a team composed of key stakeholders.

PRE-PROJECT PLANNING IN LIBRARIES

The pre-project planning workflow provides a general overview of what should be considered during pre-project planning. However, pre-project planning will vary depending on the type of project being proposed as well the library in which the project will be undertaken. Projects with clearly defined stages and tangible outcomes will adhere more closely to the workflow than those projects tied to implementing services. Pre-project planning is easily integrated into the project management life cycle at libraries where project management principles are applied as a matter of process to all new projects. In a library where the implementation process is largely determined by whoever is selected to lead the project, adoption of pre-project planning varies greatly from project to project.

Renovating a Library Facility

Many of the tools used in project management originated from the construction industry and have merely been tailored to serve other industries. Therefore, library renovation projects, whether a remodel of existing space or new construction, are perfect candidates for project management techniques, including pre-project planning. For a library planning a renovation, working through the pre-planning workflow helps prepare library personnel for the questions asked by those who will approve the prospective renovation, from the big idea for a renovation to advance library initiatives to more practical matters like cost and impact to services. It also gives the library an opportunity to gather information required by architects and interior designers that ultimately shapes the facility design.

During pre-project planning for renovation projects, the library should engage their community to identify needs and aggressively collect usage data if they are not already doing so. The qualitative and quantitative data gathered during pre-planning can help persuade those who review the project prospectus of the need for change and provide valuable information on potential community support for the proposed renovation. Once a renovation project is approved and initiated, community engagement and data collection will likely continue, if not intensify, but it will be easier to build on what was done during pre-planning than start from scratch.

Redesigning the Library Website

The process of defining scope is important to library website redesigns and other technical projects because of the clarity it brings to the process. A redesign might originate within public services, information technology (IT), or even library administration. Depending on where the idea originates, different aspects of the project will be emphasized. An IT team might emphasize platform upgrades, whereas a public services team might emphasize the user interface. The pre-project planning process helps teams to communicate and form a consensus about expectations. Yet, in addition to defining what tasks lie in scope, it is equally important for libraries to define what tasks lie outside of scope. It helps solidify expectations even further. The project might include a new look and feel to the overall user interface but it might not include a brand new virtual reference service or changes to the integrated library system.

The pre-project process encourages communication between implementation teams and stakeholders, which can help clarify roles and even time lines. Public services and IT teams can work together to make sure the redesign does not go live during peak instruction times or during summer reading. It can also help define roles before a project begins. For example, public services may agree to

gather user feedback while technology teams focus on accessibility measures. The pre-project planning process gets teams thinking through these issues and outlining who will do what before the project ever begins.

The clarity that the pre-project planning process fosters can also help alleviate stress on IT teams that often maintain existing projects while developing new ones. Priorities can be set ahead of time so that teams know exactly where to expend their time and energy. The more a project is defined in these ways, the more predictable and manageable it becomes for implementation teams.

Not all libraries have in-house IT teams. In this case, it is doubly important to define the project completely through the pre-project planning process. This can help save the library money in contracted hours for web development and increase the level of success for the redesign.

Implementing a New Service

Using the pre-project planning to propose a new service can be beneficial, but its application and adoption could vary widely depending on the individuals involved, resources available, and the library's structure. Unlike many projects with clearly defined starts and endings, service-related projects tend to involve more extensive feasibility investigations, with an emphasis on long-term sustainability.

Scenario A
In a library where front line employees are autonomous and have discretionary time for professional development and innovation, pre-project planning may be a slow, deliberate process where those on the front line spend time gathering data and exploring service options to inform prospectus development. In this scenario, the front line employee sees a need for a new service based on day-to-day interactions, assesses feasibility, gathers user input to support the proposed idea, and takes a fully formed idea forward for tier one review and approval. If approved, the time line for project initiation would be relatively short as it would simply involve implementing the plan already developed.

Scenario B
In a library where front line employees have less autonomy or discretionary time for innovation, it might be necessary to appoint an exploration team to gather data, assess feasibility, and identify an appropriate solution to a given service issue because this type of work would be too time intensive for a lone individual or department, given library resources and other work duties. In this scenario, pre-project planning would likely be fast and rather minimal as the prospectus would only briefly outline the problem and the need for a solution.

If the prospectus was approved to move forward as a project, the first phase of the project would be undertaken by an exploration team to gather data, assess the local feasibility, and put forth a recommendation for a new service to solve the problem outlined in the prospectus. The result of that project phase would simply be a recommendation. The second phase of the project would include approving the recommendation and appointing an implementation team to develop policies and procedures and resource the service. In this scenario, the pre-project planning is quick but the exploration and implementation time lines would be much longer than in the first scenario.

BENEFITS OF USING THE PRE-PROJECT PLANNING PROCESS

The effort that is needed to complete pre-project planning might seem like a barrier to the process, or it might seem that the process of gathering this information should come after a project is approved or else all efforts will have been wasted. However, there are numerous benefits to spending time on pre-project planning that affects every level of the organization from administrators to implementation teams. These benefits have both immediate and long-term effects that can impact how a library understands a project and how it is implemented. Understanding the project at this level smooths the way throughout the entire implementation process and makes project management strategies more successful during the life of the project. It is useful to think of this time and energy as an investment into a successful outcome and as the foundation the project will rest on as it is shepherded through its many stages.

Promotes Stakeholder Input

One of the benefits of investing time and energy in pre-project planning is that the process defines a way forward by gathering input from multiple individuals. Discussing the project idea with the potential implementation team before it becomes approved makes key individuals aware that a new project is being discussed, while giving them the opportunity to shape the conversation around the project. Teams can also discuss budgets, resources, and staffing so that a realistic picture of the project's impact is developed. They can also assess the practicality of leveraging existing resources and whether additional resources would be needed. By thinking through issues ahead of time, a project can begin almost immediately once it reaches the approval phase. Projects can also move forward with more confidence that hidden risks to the organization such as unknown costs or pitfalls will be minimized. Getting early stakeholder input, especially

from potential implementation teams, helps team members become invested in successful project outcomes.

Improves Communication and Transparency

One caveat for large libraries is the volume of new projects being initiated from various units, both internally and externally. Projects can often become hidden without a centralized way to approve and manage them. Communication issues between units and across divisions can sometimes mean project collision. The pre-project planning process emphasizes the need for transparency and centralized management of projects through the development of a project list. This gives units that may not interact frequently the opportunity to see each others' current project workloads. The project list can give a library clarity on workloads as projects are being developed, which can head off conflicts of interest before they begin. Transparency at this level benefits every part of the organization from library administration to project teams.

One of the additional benefits of increased transparency with a formalized process is the tremendous equalization effect it has on the organization. Any member of the organization with an idea can go through the pre-project planning to propose a new project. It shifts project approval from one of organizational politics and networking to one where project ideas are judged on merit. As long as the process is well documented with a streamlined workflow, anyone can submit a project for consideration. Smaller units or teams have access to the same resources as large departments. Projects are assigned a priority level based on the project's impact, feasibility, and overall benefit. All project originators have equal access to the organization's resources, time, and staff and can help hidden or small but impactful projects come to light.

Prevents Overwhelming the Organization

The project list allows new projects to be scheduled into one master calendar, without which a library runs the risk of overwhelming itself with too many projects. Libraries can then schedule maintenance and routine tasks alongside new projects, which creates opportunities to work on strategic priorities. The workflow introduces a level of control that can significantly reduce a sense of overwhelm plaguing some teams. It is much easier for teams to push back with the support of data if they are given too many or incompatible projects. In this way, the pre-project planning process eliminates project fatigue for teams that are repeatedly involved in implementing projects from across the organization.

Improves Decision-Making

Decision makers and library administration receive some of the biggest benefits of the pre-project planning process. The effort to properly develop a project idea and assess its impact on the organization before asking library administration to approve a project helps decision makers fully understand the unique commitment of resources that each project requires. It clearly defines the risks, if any, and the known constraints that must be considered.

Pre-project planning encourages libraries to respect constraints that might make a project impractical. When assessing the feasibility for a proposed project, the library should consider the overall cost, workload of existing teams, and the availability of in-house talent. It is possible that projects can be right for an organization, but constraints like these might mean the project needs to be delayed or modified. By respecting these constraints, the organization sets itself up to succeed in a much more tangible way than without a pre-project planning process.

Armed with this information, library administration can decide whether a project should be approved or if there should be modifications to time lines, resources, or overall cost. Decision makers can also look at the existing portfolio of projects and decide how a new project fits with existing projects. Possibly the new project would need to be worked into the schedule in a way that shifts others around. It also gives decision makers enough information to assign a priority level, which can in turn affect time lines and access to resources.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PRE-PROJECT PLANNING

Define a Project for the Organization

Project Management Institute (2000) defines a project as "a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service" (p. 4), but each organization must create its own working definition for what it considers a project. When the organization does not distinguish sufficiently between projects and other activities, ambiguity will arise about which ideas enter the pre-project planning workflow and which are exempt. Such ambiguity has far-reaching consequences.

When ambiguity exists, several scenarios are possible: some ideas do not enter the pre-project planning workflow but should; unexpected types of ideas do enter the workflow; and individuals and teams lack clarity as to when to use the workflow. To reduce ambiguity, the library needs to be clear about how to distinguish its projects from feature requests, service requests, routine tasks, or maintenance needs. Developing clarity about what constitutes a

project and what does not enables all ideas to be appropriately developed and reviewed.

Indicators of organizational ambiguity regarding what constitutes a project:

- *Does an idea advance slowly, stall, or skip a step (or more) in the pre-project planning workflow?* If so, the individual or team responsible should check whether the idea fits within the library's definition of a project. If the idea is not considered a project, they should remove it from the pre-project workflow and reevaluate how to meet that idea's development, review, and approval needs. If the idea is indeed a project and ought to be in the pre-project workflow, the individual or team responsible should assess whether a return to the development stage is needed, i.e., scope and feasibility assessment.
- *Was an activity begun and then found to be lacking sufficient organizational awareness or resources?* If so, this is a sign that the activity needed additional development, review, approval, and/or prioritization before it was started. One possible reason is that the library expects this kind of activity to be treated as a project and enter the pre-project planning workflow. When appropriate, the organization should further clarify what activities it expects to approach as projects.

As ambiguity about project definition is minimized, the whole organization better understands and agrees on how to develop project ideas and it becomes easier to advance ideas through the pre-project planning workflow. In the same way, ideas that do not meet the library's definition of a project can advance outside of a project-oriented development and review process.

Gain Sufficient Buy-In

An idea for a project must be well understood and supported by all of the necessary team members and stakeholders. When that understanding or support is insufficient, the impact is felt at every step in the workflow – from scope and prospectus development to review(s) and prioritization. The pre-project planning workflow can reveal areas where buy-in needs more attention.

Symptoms of insufficient buy-in include: an idea that stalls in the scope or feasibility assessment step; resistance during prospectus development; a review closing an idea or returning it to the scope or feasibility steps; and projects competing for resources within the project time frame. Depending on the situation, these may indicate that key stakeholders and, possibly, team members were not included, did not fully understand, and/or did not fully support the idea. Lack of buy-in can become evident in any stage; if it is not recognized and addressed before the final review of the proposed project, the project might be approved but struggle due to its prioritization among projects in its time frame.

Indicators of insufficient buy-in for the project:

- *Is an idea is struggling at an early stage of development?* If so, the individual or team responsible should look for weak areas in the scope and address them. They also need to look for gaps in the team membership or stakeholders. It is imperative to seek out those needed team members or stakeholders and work with them to incorporate their contributions and gain their support.
- *Does a project have insufficient project resources?* If so, the individual or team responsible for the project needs to assess its stakeholders and address any gaps in representation, project understanding, and project support, and then, if possible, request a new prioritization. If under-resourced projects are common in a library, despite using a pre-project planning workflow, the organization should examine its prospectus review process carefully.

As project ideas are better understood and supported by their stakeholders and team, prospectuses and projects are significantly improved and become more successful in every respect.

Address Organizational Priorities

The library must address its top priorities when it commits resources. It is essential to encourage and emphasize project ideas that address the organization's primary goals and needs. During charter formation for approved projects, the organization should assign resources and schedule the projects appropriately for success. On the other hand, the organization should offer judicious encouragement to project ideas that focus on new ideas or secondary goals of the organization, taking into account resource limits. This ensures that the portfolio of approved projects represents and contributes to the library's established priorities.

In pre-project planning, the library's goals and needs are necessarily part of the feasibility assessment, reviews, and post-approval prioritization. Indicators of lack of attention to the top library priorities include: ideas that slow or stall the feasibility assessment step; a prospectus that is a surprise to some team members or stakeholders; a review returning an idea to the scope/feasibility steps or closing it; skipped workflow steps; and active projects competing for resources within the project time frame.

In all of these situations, the library should assess how well it communicates and supports its key needs and goals. In the pre-project planning workflow, the goal is a combination of clear emphasis on the most important organizational priorities and selective support for other ideas. This clarity about library needs and goals enables the pre-planning process to more effectively produce projects that will make key contributions to the library and its success.

CONCLUSION

Overall, a pre-project planning process is a critical first step for all potential projects. The process does not need to be elaborate and stressful for a library. It does need to be well documented and well communicated across all units so that everyone may have equal access to the process. Many of the benefits discussed are only realized when the entire library commits to following the process.

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