

Digital Project Management



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What is a project?



“A unique undertaking composed of interrelated activities which has a well defined beginning and end, often involving staff from cross-functional groups, that operates under specific constraints of resources, schedules, and requirements.”

- Tito Sierra, MIT Libraries

Five Parts of a Project



- a question, problem, or provocation
- sources (primary or secondary)
- an analytical activity
- an audience
- concrete products

- devdh.org

Starting Out



At the start of any project:

- Draft a statement of the project's purpose and goals.
- Refine this statement as you form your team.
- Do environmental scans for similar projects, collaborators, and resources
- Have a clear conversation about whether the project is worth doing, uncover issues, and modify your plans accordingly.

Why wouldn't a project be worth doing?



- It has already been done (not innovative)
- You don't have the resources to do it (out of scope)
- Your team cannot agree on goals and purpose (not well organized)
- You have no one willing to take on the role of project manager (it will fail)
- Your project has no audience (lack of significance)

Some questions to consider in planning



- Does this project require funding?
- At what stage of development will the project be ready for an initial launch?
- Who will maintain/sustain this project and for what period of time?
- What do the perceived audiences of this project tell you about a good outreach strategy?

Develop a team and roles



- As you develop project goals, make a list of expertise required to meet these goals.
- Form a team of **collaborators** who cover this list and have the time and desire to be involved
- Encourage these team members to participate actively in revising goals and purpose, defining their own roles and responsibilities, and building the project schedule. **Everyone** on the team needs to agree on these before proceeding.

Project roles



While there is no one-size-fits-all model for a project team, here are some common roles on digital projects:

- Project manager
- Content lead
- Technical lead
- Outreach coordinator

The same team member may play multiple roles.

Set up agreements about credit and attribution early on in your project.

What is project management?



A set of skills and methods of planning, managing, and organizing a project from inception to its successful completion.

Project manager: the role responsible for leading and coordinating the project effort from its inception to its successful completion, i.e. the person responsible for making things happen.

How does the project manager fit in?



- The project manager is the center of the wheel to which all spokes are connected through regular communication.
- The project manager is responsible for doing whatever it takes to help team members meet deadlines and deliverables (even if it involves grunt work).
- The project manager is responsible for managing conflict on the project, giving out lots of public credit to team members, taking blame, and making hard decisions.

Project Management and Hierarchies



It is important to give careful thought to where the project manager fits in hierarchies of power.

The project managers should have a lot of decision-making power since they are taking on a lot of responsibility for the project, and it is their job to keep a holistic, long view of all parts and people.

Projects can founder when the project manager is disempowered by a content lead.

Develop a schedule and deliverables



A good project schedule involves time for 3 phases:

- Planning (what and how)
- Implementation (get it done)
- Testing (was it done right?)

Kinds of projects:

When might you allocate more of the project schedule for planning phase activities?

Implementation?

Testing?

Breaking out the schedule



In initial project team meetings, break these large phases into smaller ones with articulated goals. Everyone needs to participate so they understand the interrelatedness of activities.

Different members of the team will be the best estimators of the time it takes to finish each. Allow them to negotiate their own schedules.

Responsibilities



Take the schedule you've made and the roles you have agreed upon, and design a clear set of responsibilities for each person. At the end your scheduling document will include:

- Macro and micro stages of work
- The people primarily responsible for work at each stages
- Deliverables at each stage

This list of responsibilities should resonate with the description of roles you established earlier.

Deliverables and Concrete Products



Deliverables are completed stages of work that are “provably” finished. Ex. a technical component that works, a plan agreed upon in writing, implemented feedback from user testing.

Concrete products can also be deliverables or the culmination of smaller deliverables. These tend to be shareable with a broader audience. Ex. a project website, a published article, a launched digital project, a white paper on process.

Document



- Make your project goals and purpose (a project statement), your schedule, and major deliverables consistently available to the members of the team, as well as institutional stakeholders and funders
- Consider building a blog or other project website, social media account, or other platform to publicize your work-in-progress
- Use the project-in-progress outreach to build an audience and hold you publicly accountable for delivering

Project Management Software



Good project management is much more about staying attuned to what's actually happening with human beings than about monitoring a dashboard.

Nevertheless, the right tool can be helpful.

Some popular choices:

- [Basecamp](#)
- [Trello](#)
- [Microsoft Project](#)
- [Open Atrium](#)
- Google docs!

Communication



Good project communication consists of:

- Formal communication, such as project meetings to discuss issues and interrelated activities
- Records of those formal meetings including revisions or agreements made in them
- Informal communication between the project manager and team members (email, etc.)
- Shared documentation

Gathering Institutional Support



- If you are using institutional resources (release time, software, computers, etc) for project work, it's important to have institutional buy-in.
- Meet early on with relevant administrators to outline the project and get consent to proceed
 - Consider the degree to which you want or need to incorporate institutional branding or credits
 - Send relevant administrators updates about project progress when you complete major goals (can be forwarded public communications)

Funding?



If your project requires funding to complete, decide when this is appropriate.

- At the planning stage?
- At the implementation stage?

Consider the burden of time involved in applying for funding.

Research local as well as national options.

Project Completion and Outreach



When your project is completed (or launched), be sure your plans for maintenance, sustainability, and future additions are still realistic, including outreach tools.

Publicize your project to relevant communities. Write a press release you can use for institutional announcements, blog reviewers, or sites that might promote it. Announce on social media.

Find conference forums in which to discuss it and build your audience. You might find future collaborators too.

Failure



ALL PROJECTS EXPERIENCE FAILURE AND CONFLICT.

It is not a question of if, it is a question of when and how and whether the project can recover. Maintaining clear expectations and communication is the best insurance for recovery.

Document what didn't work along with what did. This is very helpful to others and makes you look honest and appropriately self-reflective (not bad).

Resources



A list of resources from this workshop can be found on the posting for this workshop at our THATCamp site:

<http://alabama2013.thatcamp.org/2013/08/02/workshop-digital-project-management/>

THANKS FOR COMING!