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Adventures in Digitization: A New Librarian Shares Five Hard Earned Tips to Avoid Project Management Pitfalls

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ADVENTURES IN DIGITIZATION:
A new librarian shares five hard-earned tips to avoid project management pitfalls

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MISSION:
YOU’VE BEEN ASKED TO WORK ON A DIGITAL PROJECT. WHERE DO YOU BEGIN?

1. **Strategic Communication Skills are Still the Most Important Tool of the Trade**
   - Communication styles can differ between librarians and IT professionals.
   - Policies between departments (in library, on campus, with regional partners).
   - Job is more than technology skills; presenting to groups, writing project plans, authoring grants.
   - Communication & be an advocate, but know when to say no.
   - As digital collections become more common, more resources are being allouled. Expect to be asked what you do and why it’s important.
   - Make sure conversations go in two directions. Listen and respond.

2. **Strategic Marshell Resources Internally and Externally**
   - Both program planning and project planning identify key people and their roles.
   - Development of timelines. Milestones:
     - Plan project timelines.
     - Identify key personnel.
     - Define standards and roles.
     - Identify resources.
     - Identify key personnel.

3. **Strategic Ask the Right Questions and Tap the Community Knowledge Base**
   - Key questions for project proposals:
     - Rights
     - Content
     - Data: agreements resources involved
     - Impact
     - Long-term sustainability
   - Seek out standards, but remember that “best practices” are not always the right decisions. Be willing to adapt. Locally.
   - Every institution has their own unique materials, unique challenges.
   - Product to your current listeners, RSS feeds, conferences, informal phone calls and e-mails, publications, etc.

**Tip 1:** **Diligence at the Onset is a Sign that You are Going to Need a Thoughtful Plan.**
* Pitfall to avoid: Misspent planning and it will come back to haunt you throughout the project as you need work, deadlines snowballs and staff loses steam.

**Tip 2:** **Collaboration means that you will probably have to work with someone difficult along the way—talk to key people early on in the process.**
* Pitfall to avoid: Don’t over commit (know thyself) and realize differences in cultures early.

**Tip 3:** **So what if you didn’t sign on as a cataloger? Metadata is still going to consume your waking life.**
   - Pitfall to avoid: Canister metadata equals spaghetti search results. The end of the project is not the best time to start thinking about the user’s search strategy. Talk to content experts, catalogers, metadata experts and web designers early.

**Tip 4:** **There is no perfect system. If you are responsible for overseeing the records (in say, CONTENTdm), understand and advocate for what you’ve got.**
* Pitfall to avoid: To know the system is to love the system. One person needs to work and take responsibility, otherwise projects languish in vague technical difficulties.

**Tip 5:** **The project needs to end in your lifetime. Evaluate, make changes, and then share the success. Market the new collection and remember that there is always time for Phase 2.**
* Pitfall to avoid: If you don’t learn, you are doomed to repeat. Be brave enough to ask the questions. Projects can’t be perfect and aren’t ever complete. Digitization is an on-going adventure!

**Goals for the Future:**
- **UNLV** is committed to exploring collaborations and partnerships to increase access to unique materials.
- **UNLV** is committed to creating long-term sustainable and reusable digital objects.
- **UNLV’s** digitization program will continue to mature in the coming years.

**Abstract**
Many institutions are feeling pressure to embark on digitization projects to provide greater access and visibility to their unique materials. Digitization initiatives have numerous benefits, but they can also drain staff time and resources if they are not planned and prioritized well. As new librarians are hired into increasingly technical entry-level positions, they are often expected to contribute to or lead digitization projects requiring a diverse skill set. Learn five key tips to help recent grads and new digital project managers to avoid pitfalls. Topics include: the importance of the planning process, involving key people at the right time, never underestimating the challenges of metadata, learning to love the tools at hand (the CONTENTdm digital media management system is highlighted), and successfully launching a completed project.

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**Digital Collections:**
http://www.library.unlv.edu/exhibits/index.html

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