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**From Temporary to Transformative: Leveraging Externally-Funded Special Collections Projects as Organizational Learning and Development Opportunities**

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From Temporary to Transformative: Leveraging Externally-Funded Special Collections Projects as Organizational Learning and Development Opportunities

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This poster proposes an academic library approach to addressing temporary project staffing in Special Collections and Archives with a focus on organizational transformation, professional development, and mentoring.

The strategy includes both managerial perspective and insights from a visiting faculty librarian on key aspects of hiring, supporting, and leveraging temporary professional staff for impactful organizational development. While the focus of temporary projects is often completing deliverables on time, this poster presents three areas of layered learning outcomes that leverage project work as a catalyst for organizational development, managerial development, and new professional mentoring.
Special Collections and Archives is uniquely poised to leverage external funds and pilot projects to move the organization forward. These include:

Organizational benefits of project-based grants include higher output without commitment to permanent salary lines. Examples of this type of project include: The Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project (http://digital.library.unlv.edu/jewishheritage).
NDNP Grant

The National Digital Newspaper Program has funded:
3 rounds of digitization;
8 contract employees over 5 years.

This grant program has been particularly impactful for new librarians
Organizational benefits of federally-funded grants project include the opportunity to truly ramp up production levels, an increase in library visibility and prestige, and access to the support of a national program to gain experience with new formats or challenging issues in the field. Examples of this type of project include the Nevada Digital Newspaper Project (https://nvndp.wordpress.com/tag/ndnp/).

Temporary Contracts
Organizational Growth

Temporary Student Supervisor
Linked Open Data
Social Media and Outreach
Pilot Projects

Organizational benefits are also gained through temporary contracts for internal pilot projects where the dedication of resources allows for the testing of a new service, exploration of a new staff role, experimentation with new technologies, or extension of a program in a new area. Examples of this type of project include UNLV's first efforts with Linked Open Data (https://www.library.unlv.edu/econnections/2017/06/digital-collections-research-connects-university-libraries-collections-using), web archiving (https://archive-it.org/organizations/755), social media (https://www.flickr.com/photos/unlvdigitalcollections/) and outreach, and statewide collaboration (https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1358&context=lib_articles).
MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

The key challenge for managers supervising contract or temporary employees is to take challenges and transform them into opportunities by using the following strategies:

- **Library as Laboratory** - Develop a research question for each project customized to the contract employee and organization's needs
- **Smart Supervision** - Use the following acronym (SMART) to design positions for contract employees that allow and encourage them to: Study issues in the field, Make mistakes safely, Act with authority, Receive recognition for a job well done, and Transform them from contractor to expert.
- **Sprint Mentoring** - Embrace the time-bound nature of projects with a form of mentoring that sequences project competencies, soft skill development, and career development in phases.

Through this work, the contract employee improves, but so does the manager! Some key managerial skills that can be acquired:

- exploration of management styles
- expansion of leadership skills
- development of mentoring toolkit
- growth in labor issues and inclusion

Many of the contract staff working at our organization have found full-time permanent employment in the field.
Note: This chart includes current contract employees and reflects the smaller library job market locally in Las Vegas, NV.
INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

WHY

recent graduates benefit from temporary positions?

Temporary roles are a great opportunity for recent graduates to acquire a wide array of technical and soft skills that will help them advance in their professional career.

Short-term projects encourage new professionals to

- sample different flavors of librarianship
- get first-hand experience
- make informed choices regarding their professional aspirations

Seizing opportunities and taking several evolving roles in the same department, is added benefit that reveals nuances of the librarian work in a narrow field of librarianship.

Short-term evolving roles in the same department bring advantages to people who pursue a career in a specific area by providing

- fundamental work details
- job peculiarities
- technology training
- competitive marketable skills for job search

By sharing the individual perspective, a recent library school graduate emphasizes why temporary positions had a huge impact on her career.

WHAT

are her top takeaways?

TOP 3 TAKEAWAYS

Embraced iteration
Constantly improving knowledge, tools and resources allow revisions of workflows and improvement of the quality in the next iteration

iteration improves imperfection

Embraced challenges
Positive approach to dreaded challenges encourages leap to the next level and creates positive work environment

challenge = learning opportunity

Embraced imperfection
It is a strategy to accomplish the best possible quality with the resources you currently have on hand.

imperfection ≠ poor quality
HOW did temporary roles expand author's library school competencies?

The graphic visualizes author's

- highlights from library school
- UNLV employment timeline, positions, scope
- how they enriched her professional toolbox with valuable technical and soft skills
- how they prepared her for the next career leap
SURVEY RESULTS | TESTIMONIALS

A video testimonial with UNLV employees complements the survey results and provides the individual perspectives and the unique perceptions about the impact on the career growth of the participants.

[VIDEO] https://www.youtube.com/embed/q6FijeNCMGg?feature=oembed&fs=1&modestbranding=1&rel=0&showinfo=0

A 3-question survey was sent to 21 current and former contract employees to highlight the advantages they gained in their temporary roles at UNLV Libraries, Digital Collections.

Survey response rate: 76%

Returned responses: 16 of 21

What are you most proud of accomplishing?

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
...starting off the Nevada Digital Newspaper Project and establishing workflows for future staff...
...successfully managing and completing the large-scale digitization of the Entertainment Collection...
...successfully completed a grant funded project...
...developing efficient large-scale digitization workflows and timelines for outsourcing vendors and staff for Nevada Digital Newspaper Project...

FULL DIGITIZATION CYCLE
...digitizing, describing and making accessible online three significant collections...
...selection, preparation, scanning/conversion, processing, metadata record creation, and asset management of historical materials to preserve them and provide access...

PROVIDE ACCESS TO RESOURCES
...making tens of thousands historic Nevada newspaper pages freely accessible online...
...getting the collection Historic Landscape of Nevada online...
...proud of the project exhibits...

COLLABORATION | CONTRIBUTION
...contributing on a specific project...
...successfully collaborating on the African American Experience in Las Vegas project...
...social media contributions...
...collaborating on meaningful projects...
What skills did you acquire?

Technical skills:
- Digitization: 13
- Metadata: 12
- Specialized equipment: 11
- Controlled vocabulary management: 11
- Workflow development: 9
- Specialized software: 7
- Project management: 5
- Supervisory experience: 3
- Marketing or Outreach: 2
- Archival collection preparation: 2
- Social media: 1
- Digital analysis: 1

Soft skills:
- Collaboration | teamwork: 16
- Initiative and independent judgement: 12
- Communication skills: 9
- Facilitation | meeting management: 8
- Research | scholarship skills: 4
- Scheduling: 3
- Public speaking skills: 2
- Employment skills: 2
- Multitasking: 1

Skills acquired on the temporary position
(in participants’ own words)

Workflow development | 3
Collaboration | 5
digitization | 5
Controlled vocabularies | 4
Project management | 5
Competitive technical skills | 5
Research skills | 1
Archival skills | 2
Digital archives | 2
Supervisory experience | 1
Digital history | 1
Programming skills | 1
Grant management | 1

Networking | 3
Confidence | 1
Marketable job skills | 3
Resume skills | 1
Troubleshooting skills | 1
Quality control skills | 1
Academic library experience | 1
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusions

Temporary projects can have a transformative role in organizations, manager development, and contract employee career development.

- **Embrace the challenges that come with time/resource-bound projects in order to leverage them for transformation.**

Transformation of this nature requires a manager's investment. Budget their time at the conception of the project and state up front what the manager sees as an opportunity.

- **Identify a research question for each project.**
- **Decide on one or more skills to develop.**
- **Build reflection and assessment into project to capture lessons learned.**

Contract Employees can benefit from temporary projects, but they are a vulnerable population and are at risk for exploitation.

- **Contract employees should ask employers targeted questions about mentorship, skill development, authority and decision-making**
- **Investigate job prospects of organization's contract workers post-contract**
- **Ensure there will be benefit from the work beyond the financial compensation.**

Future Research

- **What responsibility does our profession need to commit to in order to not only benefit from ... but give back to our contract employees?**
- **How can projects be better planned; by building in contract employee support and development?**
- **What are the most critically-needed skills of the future?**