Field Reports | By Courtney Greene McDonald

Outsourcing Tech Projects

All too often, technology projects start out strong but aren't given sufficient long-term resources to ensure ongoing maintenance and essential upgrades. What can you do when you have too many projects and too little time, staff, or expertise? Consider outsourcing.

Stop me if you've heard this before: a library is maintaining a multiplicity of idiosyncratic legacy systems with outdated information, rife with potential accessibility violations. Nobody sets out to provide a bad user experience, so how does something like this happen? Answer: incrementally, over time.

Someone gets a grant and builds a digital exhibit, which stays in the same version of the application in which it was built because no funds were earmarked for ongoing maintenance.

There's a developer who's proficient in a particular programming language, but when they move on, there's no longer anyone with the knowledge to update or maintain the code. A site is needed on a short deadline to support an event, and some shortcuts have to be taken to make the date.

And so on. The tools and platforms we use to build our sites and applications will be outdated before long. To use technology is to commit to a lifetime of migrations and updates.

WHEN TO OUTSOURCE

What to do? Hiring permanent staff to help you dig out of a one-time backlog is costly and isn't strategic. Even for a high-priority long-term need, getting approval to add an ongoing position can be challenging. Before you do, be honest: Do you have the expertise to assess the quality of the candidate's technical qualifications and later to supervise and support their work effectively?

A very large project can require more human resources than may be practical to retain permanently. When I started my current position, I had a department of three (including myself) and a website that encompassed approximately 9,000 pages, existing within a somewhat idiosyncratic, locally developed infrastructure. Clearly, the technical demands of migrating to Drupal, a widely adopted open source

general maintenance for all locations. To help raise the necessary funds, the North Building could be repurposed, leased, or sold. The South Building, according to the study, is big enough to hold all public services, with operational functions to be relocated.

PLCHC's Board of Trustees approved the North Building closure on June 13. The plan was not formally announced at the time, however. Rather, it was revealed by the *Cincinnati Enquirer* after the paper filed a public information request.

PLCHC has no offers on the building. However, the library intends to go forward with plans to move public services, Director Kimber Fender said.

At an August 8 board meeting, some 20 protesters—many from the Our Library, Our Decision! Coalition—gathered to voice their displeasure to PLCHC's board. Coalition member Charles Campbell pointed out that board member William Moran's son, Michael Moran, is the senior VP of CBRE, one of Cincinnati's largest commercial real estate firms, which performed the initial building assessment. William Moran sits on a committee of 3CDC but holds no paid position there.

In addition, concerns have been expressed by coalition members, Cincinnati residents, and library staff that selling the North Building could eliminate important public space in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood and that the community has not been encouraged to weigh in.

A North Building staffer who wished to remain anonymous noted that while none of their colleagues object to moving services to the South Building or reorganizing the North Building's layout, they also feel that they have not been offered an opportunity for input.

BANNED, REINSTATED

On the afternoon of Friday, September 22, Campbell used the library's Maker space to make a sign saying, "3CDC: Hands off our library!" From there, he moved to the 9th Street overpass, where he took the opportunity to distribute coalition leaflets. A security guard approached Campbell and ordered him to stop, explaining that he was violating the library's standards of behavior. The guard also told him to reposition his sign so the message would not be visible.

Campbell agreed not to give out the leaflets, but refused to turn the sign around. The guard then told Campbell that he was trespassing and would have to leave. When Campbell refused, a second guard was summoned. Campbell was handcuffed, taken to the security office, cited for criminal trespass and given a court date, and banned from the library for six months, effective immediately.

On Monday, September 25, PLCHC officials held a press conference to discuss the incident—which they termed a "mix-up"—and to offer Campbell an apology. His ban from the library was lifted, and the security guard who first approached him was suspended. The guard has since been reinstated at the library, and when Campbell showed up for his court date, his name was no longer on the docket.

Library officials await the results of 3CDC's predevelopment service agreement, which will end in mid-January 2018. Previous appraisals of the building have ranged from $15 million to $7.7 million, with the most recent value set at $8.5 million. Fender asserts that no conflict of interest exists with the consultants retained by PLCHC.

The coalition has launched a Change.org petition, "Defend Cincinnati's Public Library Against Private Developers." Members continue to hand out leaflets—outside the library.—**Lisa Peet**

Academic

ASU To Partner on Citizen Science

Arizona State University (ASU) is partnering with Phoenix-area librar-

content management system, exceeded the capacity of available staff. But I couldn't justify permanently retaining the several Drupal developers we'd need for migration—we simply wouldn't have enough ongoing work for them.

We opted to outsource and contract with a professional Drupal development company so that we could:

- Benefit from the experience of someone who specialized in the technology full-time
- Focus on our strengths and contributions to the project, namely our expertise in libraries, library systems, and library customers
- Allow the contractor to identify the talent to scale up the workforce as necessary to complete the project in a timely fashion
- Set and stay within a fixed budget without compromising the quality of the output or the time line for release.

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

RFP: More than likely, you'll need (and want) to issue an RFP, or request for proposals, to solicit bids from contractors who specialize in the technology you plan to employ. The RFP is the blueprint for your project: you want it to be as accurate as possible. Especially for larger projects, this can be unexpectedly difficult. I have yet to come to the end of a project wanting the same thing as I did at the beginning. You learn things throughout; situations change. TechSoup has some useful resources on writing RFPs, and Bluespark Labs (our Drupal partners) has a helpful, freely available document that may help you think through the process, whatever platform you are considering: Crafting Your Best RFP (ow.ly/IU1C30gi0XG).

Identifying firms: It's a good idea to have a sense of the market rather than blindly issuing an RFP. Attend relevant conferences and meet-ups in your area, and talk with the vendors and attendees. Do your research and peruse ratings issued by firms like Clutch. Ask colleagues in person and via Listservs and social media if they have recommendations.

In addition to saving time and money, there's another benefit of working with external contractors: it creates a feedback loop that extends outside your library. You have the opportunity to think through and explain your priorities—and this can be very helpful in ensuring that instead of (accidentally) building a site tailored to the needs of library staff, you are in fact putting the user first.

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ies to develop field-tested, replicable, low-cost toolkits of citizen science resources for public libraries. Funded by a 2017 National Leadership Grant for Libraries from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), researchers from ASU's School for the Future of Innovation in Society (SFIS) and librarians from ASU's Hayden Library, on its Tempe campus, have joined forces with the Arizona State Library, the citizen science hub SciStarter, and the National Informal STEM [science, technology, engineering, mathematics] Education Network (NISE Net).

The interdisciplinary team will develop toolkits to offer multiple entry points for different skill levels and to all kinds of patrons. Six public libraries will contribute their input and experience as well.

Darlene Cavalier, now professor of practice at ASU and principal investigator on the Libraries as Community Hubs for Citizen Science project, had no background—or even much interest—in science when she started doing business development. But in the process of writing educators' guides for *Discover*, a science magazine geared toward a general audience, Cavalier's interest was sparked.

Once her youngest child was in school, Cavalier earned a master's degree in science history and policy at the University of Pennsylvania.

ASU 2016 Citizen Science Maker Summit (l.–r.): Narendra Das, NASA Jet Propulsion Lab; Dan Stanton, ASU Library; Darlene Cavalier, ASU SFIS; Catherine Hoffman, SciStarter; Micah Lande, Polytechnic School; and Brianne Fisher, former ASU grad student

SciStarter—a National Science Foundation–supported hub for the recruitment and retention of volunteers in over 1,600 citizen science initiatives from hundreds of organizations—grew out of her master's project in 2010.

Cavalier joined the SFIS faculty in 2014. In 2016, she organized the ASU Citizen Science Maker Summit, which brought her together with ASU library faculty. Dan Stanton, associate librarian for academic services, developed a citizen science LibGuide page and helped organize a series of interviews with Cavalier and other ASU scientists. When he asked Cavalier how the library could support her various projects, she mentioned that one of the major issues that had come up in a

recent local partnership had involved equipment—people didn't want to invest in specialized tools that could cost hundreds of dollars.

FROM PROJECT TO PILOT

At the time of the summit, SciStarter had recently partnered with the Superstition Area Land Trust (SALT), a nonprofit community group in Apache Junction, AZ, and the Apache Junction Public Library (AJPL). SALT was concerned about the use of local land and wanted better access to the data informing those decisions; a citizen science program was a way to be a part of the process.

At first, SciStarter provided equipment directly to the participants, but they balked at having to store tools in their homes. AJPL and ASU were logical locations to hold and lend out the needed equipment.

However, the project turned out not to be a big draw at the university, so the partners decided to focus on public library participation. As AJPL continued circulating tools, ASU, AJPL, and Cavalier began to envision the project as a pilot for an ongoing collaboration.

Earlier that year, Cavalier had spoken with an IMLS program officer who encouraged her to develop a proposal promoting libraries as citizen science hubs. The partners submitted a proposal and in August 2017 were