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Everything You Need to Know about Grants: Beginning, Middle and End

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Everything You Need to Know about Grants: Beginning, Middle and End

Jamie Henricks, Holly Rose Larson McGee, Melissa Nykanen, Katie Richardson, and Gregory L. Williams

“Everything You Need to Know about Grants: Beginning, Middle and End” was a 90-minute session presented at the Society of California Archivists Annual General Meeting in Berkeley, CA, on April 13, 2013. As a part of the archival community, many of us know that grants are an excellent way to reduce backlogs or accomplish projects we don't have the resources to tackle. However, what many of us may not know is how much work goes into successfully implementing and completing a grant. The purpose of this session was to assemble a group of individuals who have been involved in various aspects of the grant application and implementation process to share their expertise with the archival community. The session utilized a question and answer format with a moderator asking pre-arranged questions. This article provides excerpts from the panelists' responses.

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Panelists:

Gregory L. Williams (GW), Director of Archives and Special Collections at California State University Dominguez Hills, who shared his experience as a Project Director and Grant Reviewer

Melissa Nykanen (MN), Head of Special Collections and University Archives at Pepperdine University, who shared her experience as a Project Director

Jamie Henricks (JH), Project Archivist at Pepperdine University from October 2011-March 2013

Holly Rose Larson McGee (HM), Project Archivist at the Institute for the Study of the American West at the Autry National Center and the Braun Research Library at the Southwest Museum of the American Indian (2010-2012) and the Getty Research Institute (2009-2010)

Pre-Grant

KR: Please discuss the purpose of a grant and provide examples of the types of projects with which you have been involved.

GW: The general purpose of the grants that I've worked on is to complete a project. The project needs employees to achieve its objectives and the institution needs funding to get those employees hired. It was my job to create a project that was justifiable and deserved funding. The grants, for which I've applied, include a group of collections that are not accessible or parts of a collection that need digitization. More likely though, at medium-sized institutions it relates to creating an environment that awakens a slumbering archive.

At the New Jersey Historical Society I applied for several grants to process various collections. This resulted in the hiring of project employees and led to the re-housing of over 100 collections and the creation of an equal number of finding aids. The Historical Society's archival program had been dormant for many years. Basic finding aids were necessary to allow researchers access to the collections. At the San Diego Historical Society's Photograph Collection I wrote and received funding for at least three grants that enhanced access to a photograph collection. The grants allowed for the creation of a digital collection and several finding aids. At California State University Dominguez Hills, a National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant allowed the archival program to be revived. Not only did the grant result in the creation of many finding aids and a digital collection, it also freed up time for the permanent archival staff (one person) to arrange and describe a good deal of other collections. Thanks to the grant, nearly 80 percent of the backlog was processed. Close to 100 finding aids were created in a year. One of the grant employees became a permanent employee. Finally, grants have had an enormous impact on scholarship at the ONE Archives where I served as a grant consultant. After six years and two NHPRC grants, two National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grants, and a Council on Library and Information Recourse (CLIR) grant, the ONE Archives went from having zero finding aids on the Online Archive of California (OAC) to over 450 finding aids. This was due to the work of three archivists and their ability to create grant projects deserving of funding.

In addition to writing grant applications, I've also served as a peer reviewer which is both an instructive and important activity for archivists who want to write grant applications.

Reviewing applications opens a window into what some of the best projects look like. It also allows for an understanding into how proposals are constructed and what is consistent in all grant writing activities despite the variety of requirements from differing agencies. I've served as a reviewer of large grants for archives (around \$100,000 to \$400,000), and smaller grants for archives or museums (between \$10,000 and \$25,000). Serving on a panel requires not only reading the grant applications, but also justifying your opinions in front of a group of well-established professionals. While serving on a panel is constructive in discovering if your opinions about a proposal are shared by the other reviewers, it can also reveal important points that might have been overlooked. The reviewers can be very critical analyzing every detail in an application. It can also be a frustrating exercise knowing that there are so many well-written, well-constructed proposals that won't receive funding because of a lack of agency funding.

While most of the work of reviewing applications for smaller grants is solitary and time-consuming, it is also enlightening and frustrating. It is a given that for small grants there will be a mix of poorly constructed projects, projects devised by the same consultant (looking for work), and well-thought out projects. The frustration, of course, is that the good ones won't all get funding. The next frustration is that the grants that aren't perfect are sometimes the projects most in need. A \$15,000 grant, with the possibility of transforming an archival repository, may not receive funding because it is written by individuals who know nothing about grant writing, proper archival terminology, or project management. These flawed applications, at times, bring to light why grants are needed in the first place. Nonetheless, the peer reviewer can only state his or her opinion and strongly point out the issues. Do you give a perfect score to a proposal from an established organization that knows what it is doing? Or, do you vigorously defend a flawed grant because the disorganized collection is important?

MN: When I started at Pepperdine, the Director for Library Advancement and Public Relations and I worked together on identifying potential grant opportunities. Knowing that a grant project would be a lot of work, I felt it was important to select a grant that met our most important needs, especially since I was the only staff in my department at the time. We approached the process by identifying our priority projects first and then finding grants that would allow us to complete those projects. That may seem like a small distinction, but it was an important one given our significant needs and limited staff.

The special collections department had been formalized shortly before I started working at Pepperdine, and there was a significant backlog of unprocessed archival materials. It was very important to us to take care of this backlog immediately. I was getting a lot of reference questions that I couldn't answer with unprocessed collections, and I was also hesitant to actively conduct collection development until the collections we already had were organized. That priority led to an NHPRC basic processing grant. As a "young" department, we also had the need for some baseline preservation actions, and this led to an NEH preservation grant.

We knew that NHPRC and NEH had great grant opportunities, and so we watched the websites for announcements of appropriate grants. For the NHPRC grant, we attended a webinar and proposed our project. We received good feedback from the project director, and felt confident to move forward. I believe that it is important to apply for grants that I would award to myself. If I don't think the grant is a good fit, likely the reviewers will agree with me. Since grant-writing is such a time-intensive process, I try to stay away from grants that I don't think I can get. On the other hand, sometimes it can be worthwhile to "go for it" and see what happens, especially for less time-intensive applications or where there are multiple people to share the work.

KR: What was the grant-writing process like at your institution? Did you write the proposal or did another department within your institution? Who submits the grant application?

GW: At the universities that I've worked at, the grant-writing process consisted of creating the grant project, deciding what collections or images would be included in the project, writing the proposal, passing along the budget numbers to the finance office, and the grant application to the Research and Funded Projects Office. The research office sent the application to the appropriate agency, generally through grants.gov. At the historical societies I've worked at, the entire process was left to the grant writer. The fundraising departments at the historical societies I've worked at were plagued with frequent staff turnover and the archivists on staff were the only ones who really knew what agencies like NHPRC or NEH were looking for. This meant that I was not only responsible for writing the grant, but also creating the budget and sending it out to the appropriate agency.

The collaborative grants I've written always start out with the maxim that collaboration is a really good way to get a grant. The truth, of course, is that all grants are collaborative even within a single institution because you have to work with several people across departments to shape a project proposal. Multi-institutional grants are popular with granting agencies presumably because it allows for discovery regarding the grant topic and interaction among a group of like-minded professionals. I've worked on two or three collaborative grants involving digitization projects. Each grant requires a buy-in by each institution and a promise that the work will be done. While a single institutional grant will need consultants, letters of support, project employees, and other aspects, a collaborative grant has a lot of extra-administrative detail but the proposal still has to be written like a single institutional project. The multi-institutional grant project will require a lot of emails, perhaps meetings at professional conferences, and phone calls. Most of the initial grant writing and grant planning is left to the sponsoring institution and the other institutions contribute where needed. If a multi-institution grant comes together and works, it can be a significant accomplishment.

MN: At Pepperdine Libraries, the librarians work with the Director of Library Advancement and Public Affairs to identify and write grants. We also collaborate with the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs for government-funded grants and with the Office for Corporate and Foundation Relations for grants funded by foundations. When we wrote the NHPRC grant application, the Director position was vacant, and so I wrote the application mostly on my own. Typically, the Director assists, but I often find that for more technical grants, such as archival processing grants, I need to do the bulk of the writing because I am most familiar not just with our collections and needs, but with the professional language and standards. Still, it is useful to have the review and support of the Director. The other offices assist with setting up the budget and doing the actual submission process, in addition to editing the narrative.

HM: At the Autry, the archivist authored most of the grant narrative and compiled and analyzed the metrics. The cataloger at the institute described the cataloging; the directors of the two libraries added descriptions about the respective collections. The director of the institute edited the final draft to make it more cohesive. At the time, the institute director was also the Government Grants Officer, so he submitted the paperwork.

KR: What kind of timeline was involved in preparing the projects with which you were involved and what kinds of changes or rewrites did you have to make during the application review process? How long before the application was due did you begin working on it? Did anyone review the application before submission (internally or an outside agency)? Was there anything you felt was unrealistic?

GW: In one instance, I started gathering information for a project after talking to a grant administrator at the Society of American Archivists (SAA) annual meeting in late August for an application that was due on October 1st of that same year. In another instance, I talked with another grant administrator at SAA a year before the grant application was due. The last grant project I worked on was a collaboration with six other archives and we started three months before it was due.

Generally, I leave a couple of months to plan, think, and write to bring the proposal together. I try to get the application done two weeks before it is due because of potential issues during the submission process. In most cases, the application is not reviewed by any particular office. It is passed around to various Deans, historical society presidents, archivists, and others to weigh in. With collaborative grants, the proposal is sent to all participating institutions and comments are incorporated into the final application.

MN: For the NHPRC grant, we began working on the application approximately three months before the grant deadline. During that time, we submitted a draft to the California Historical Records Advisory Board (CHRAB) and to the program officer from NHPRC. Both offered helpful suggestions. Because our department was so newly formed, we also hired a consultant to assess our entire archival program and provide formal recommendations. As part of his visit, he offered suggestions on our grant application as well. We found we really needed the three months to learn enough about our collections to write the application, but this was partly due to the newness of the department.

About five months after the submission, we received feedback from several grant reviewers, including the program officer. We responded to this feedback with several changes to our project, and clarifications on other points. A couple of months later, we got word that we

were being awarded the grant, but at a reduced budget and timeline. We had initially planned on a two-year project, with three phases. We were asked to remove the third phase of the project that had been focused on collection development, to remove one of the student assistant positions that we had initially requested, and to scale the project back to 18 months. We then resubmitted the project narrative and budget. The project started a few months later, 15 months after the application process had started.

The project resources available to us became leaner through the multiple levels of review, which resulted in a very ambitious project. I respected the agency's need to have us scale back and be as efficient as possible. However, now that we finished the grant, I see that the time and personnel that was cut from the grant project would have been really nice to have. We did successfully finish the grant on time and with all objectives completed, and we were pushed to do it very quickly and efficiently. Long-term, I think this likely helped us develop some efficient practices that will serve us well.

KR: How did you identify project objectives? How did you identify materials and supplies needed for the project? How did you determine a timeline for the project? How did you identify who would be involved in the project within your institution?

GW: The focus of most of the grants I've worked on has been to reduce the backlog of uncataloged archival materials. In other instances, I've written or collaborated on digitization projects. With both types of grants it is essential that the scope of the project allow for significant accomplishment. The larger objective of the archival grants I've written has been to transform an archive. After that, the goal is to get a good number of finding aids online and on a site like the OAC, in order to make those collections accessible to scholars worldwide.

In regards to the digitization projects, the proposals I've written have generally been to start an institution's digital collection. Prior to the time when institutions were implementing "More Product, Less Process" (MPLP) standards, archival supplies were an essential part of transforming an archive. Funds for supplies were built into the application and it was hoped that those funds would allow for grant collections to be re-housed and even have money left over to order more supplies for other collections. In institutions with medium-sized collections (2,000 to

5,000 linear feet), it is important to stress that with the combination of staff and supplies, an archival program can be well on its way to improvement with one or two significant grants.

Smaller grants also play an important role in modernizing an archive. A preservation/conservation assessment by a qualified consultant or preservation group can instantly improve the chance of receiving a bigger grant. Other small grants can help an institution digitize materials or purchase supplies or shelving.

One small but key aspect to each project is its name or topic. The title should relate to the collections of the institution and the subject of the grant. The subject has to be saleable to reviewers and the granting agency. It has to attempt to catch their eye. It is important that the project title is either intriguing or simply describes what the project is about. The title “Early Los Angeles/Rancho San Pedro History Cataloging Project” has elements of both and also, hopefully, sparks an interest. The title “New Jersey Health Care Collection Project” focuses on an important topic. The title “California Border Region Digitization Project,” highlights a topic (the U.S. Border) but is general enough (with the word “region”) to include any number of topics adjacent to the border. The title “New Jersey Economic and Social Transformation Collection Grant” is quite a mouthful but with the use of the word “transformation” at least implies that the project will deal with important economic and social issues. The project title “California Explores the Ocean” didn’t let the readers know it was a collaborative digitization project between several institutions, but it does grab at the reader’s imagination.

MN: We had selected some project objectives during the application process for NHPRC, but the program officer also suggested more at the time of the award. He informed us that whether our project was considered successful or not depended on the percentage of objectives that we completed, so more objectives were better. Some of the objectives he suggested were pretty standard, and others were a bit more of a stretch, but we did accomplish them all.

Identifying supplies needed and the timeline during the application process was a challenge, having never participated in a project like this before. We made rough estimates on the amount of boxes and folders needed, based on what we could see of deteriorated or acidic boxes. Since this was a basic processing project, we didn’t intend to work much at the folder-level. We used the numbers referenced in “More Product, Less Process” to help determine possible processing rates. However, these decisions were approximations and we had to design

our project accordingly. More boxes would have been great – but we asked for what we thought was reasonable within the grant guidelines, and we can always replace more boxes as internal funding becomes available.

Initially, I was the main person from within the institution who was going to work on the project. We had also set aside some of a cataloger's hours for creating MARC records. However, based on the feedback we received during the review process, we had removed that from the cost-share budget because of the fact that Archivists' Toolkit, which we use, converts the collection records to MARC. Looking back, we could have left those hours in, because the cataloger still had to convert the MARC XML and do some edits to get the records into WorldCat Local, our local catalog. In between applying for the grant and receiving the reviewers' feedback, a full-time, permanent archivist position was added to the department. In our response to the feedback, we indicated that we would add a percentage of time from this position as additional cost-share. This helped address some feasibility concerns for sustainability beyond the grant period as well.

HM: The project objectives were clearly stated in the goals of the grant:

1. To process and catalog a backlog of archival collections at the institution, consisting of 480 collections (roughly estimated at almost 2,000 linear feet), which represented about 80% of the backlog of both collections, and
2. To implement a streamlined set of policies and procedures for incoming archival collections ensuring future backlog will be less than 5% of the collections.

Implementing the Grant

KR: Please share with the audience what it was like to implement the project. How much time did you have to implement the project once you found out you received funding? Did the project start on time? Do you have anything to share regarding the hiring process?

GW: The best time to hire a project archivist is immediately after an institution has been notified of the awarding of a grant. There is generally a two-month period when the institution can proceed with hiring. Often the entire project staff is not hired at the start of the project, but at

times, granting agencies are flexible on the start and finish date. The first thing I look for when hiring a project archivist is someone who is smart. After that, I look for someone who has experience and an appropriate degree. In most cases (I've hired 20 archivists or so, most project archivists), the project staff works out. They know the requirements of the grant and have the skills. However, in some cases the wrong person is hired and it soon becomes apparent that there is a need to replace that person quickly. There aren't any second chances with grants; if it's not completed, chances are you will not receive funding in the future. The hiring process can take a couple of months. Whether fair or not, local candidates generally have a better chance of being hired because they can step right into a grant-funded position immediately.

MN: With the NHPRC grant, we had the option of starting the project at the beginning of the agency's quarters. We could have started almost right away, but we chose to delay our start to the next quarter to have time for hiring. With UCLA's graduate school in information studies in the area, we had a good mix of applicants for both the project archivist position and for the graduate student assistant position. We had some out of town applicants, but were not able to cover costs for interview travel, so we only ended up interviewing local applicants. Once the project archivist started work at the very beginning of the grant project, we worked together to hire the student assistant with whom she would be working closely.

Once the grant got underway, the project archivist worked on it full-time, and the student assistant worked on it ten hours per week. The archivist and I contributed a portion of our time to the grant as well. We met every other week to discuss grant issues, and every other month, we met with the Associate University Librarian for Information Resources, Collections and Scholarly Communication and the Dean of Libraries to report on our progress.

HM: The Autry was given two years to complete the NHPRC grant. The rest of the staff may have started their work on time, but I started a month late, due to finishing up a grant funded position at the Getty and being on a planned trip out of town. In the end, the Autry was able to keep me on for a couple extra months, and we adjusted our schedule so that I was able to take advantage of the extra time to complete the processing goals.

In the hiring interview, I met with the directors of both libraries and the sole archivist at the institution. The cost of benefits (sick time, vacation time, medical insurance) was absorbed

by the Autry. The Autry also contributed volunteer hours, technical supplies, cost-share hours, and computer costs.

KR: What training was involved for staff working on the grant? Did they attend workshops or was the training done in-house?

GW: When hiring staff for grant projects, I look for archivists with concrete skills, generally including experience with processing, digitization, and uploading finding aids to the OAC. Whether the project archivist has experience in an archive beforehand, or is just out of graduate school with an internship or two, it is important that the project archivist is able to efficiently process and produce finding aids. The project archivist must support the project. That's the bottom line. Direction is important, guidance is essential, but completing the grant objectives is most important. Training is more often than not coming from practical experience or internships. Practical classes in graduate school help but the ability to see published finding aids is often enough evidence of a good deal of training.

JH: Some grant money was set aside for training. It was envisioned that we would choose something that all Special Collections and University Archives staff would attend (the head, the archivist, and myself). However, by this time, the head had taken an Archivists' Toolkit class and the newly hired archivist was already proficient with the management system. A Society of American Archivists two-day workshop on Archivists' Toolkit was scheduled nearby about two months after I started working on the grant, so I spent most of the initial training budget on that workshop. It was a great experience and fit in our working timeline perfectly.

MN: In addition to having Jamie attend the workshop on Archivists' Toolkit, the archival management software used at Pepperdine, the first phase of the grant involved the creation of a processing manual. This was completed by the newly hired archivist in the department, and was used to guide Jamie's work as well as the student assistant's.

HM: I entered both of my projects at the Autry and the Getty already well-versed in Archivists' Toolkit. At each institution, I had to learn their database and cataloging systems, but the more

highly-technical and programming functions were completed by their in-house systems staff. At both the Getty and the Autry, I attended in-house collections handling training sessions, as well as external workshops and webinars as my schedule allowed. Both institutions gave me the time to attend and participate in continuing education, and I was sometimes reimbursed for attendance cost and mileage. Upon my return, I would present a report to my colleagues on what new information and resources I had acquired. One of the continuing education opportunities I pursued was a disaster planning workshop taught by Barclay Ogden, who not only taught us a great deal on disaster planning but also on thinking about funding, our place within our institutions, and granting processes in general.

KR: Were there any unanticipated problems that came up with the project?

GW: Some unanticipated problems are issues that could have been anticipated. One Historical Society had a tremendous backlog and the first processing grant resulted in two outstanding issues. The first issue was that the generally inexperienced project archivists were focused on processing their first collections perfectly. In a grant that was supposed to complete 100 collections only three collections were processed in the first six months. A variety of techniques were used to get the project up to its goal over the next year and a half including “More Product, Less Processing,” choosing collections not on the grant list, and processing collections that were single accession collections that were physically together. Another issue concerned the state of total disarray that some collections were in. Two decades of misuse by librarians and volunteers resulted in collections being spread all over the institution. This forced the archivists to choose collections that were easier to process whether they were on the list of collections to be processed or not. A number of important collections were ignored or not processed and collections of lesser importance were prioritized ahead of the ones that really needed attention. The goals of the grant were reached, but many collections initially slated to be worked on were not processed. The granting agency was flexible in this regard, but it took a later grant to focus on these important collections.

In another instance, the project archivists hired at a university completed the grant goals three months before the project was scheduled to end. The extra time was spent creating a digital

collection. This allowed for scanning and metadata to be completed for several thousand images from the project and other collections.

JH: One issue that was tough to deal with was space. We moved the bulk of our materials to a new location in the middle of the initial two-month survey phase. In total, we had six locations where materials were stored. This presented challenges when trying to put collections together that were stored in physically separate areas. I did not understand the significance or relationships of some individuals and their materials until much later during processing, so sometimes related materials were overlooked during the survey phase.

There were also challenges with various individuals using the collections before and during processing. A former college dean and history professor was writing a book on the history of Pepperdine before, during, and after the grant period. While his knowledge of Pepperdine was absolutely priceless in helping me understand the history and organization of the university, it was a challenge to work around his research. I disrupted his methodical work by moving large amounts of the university archives and creating new collections. All of the prior inventories he and his research assistant had relied on were no longer useful, and nearly all of his footnotes had to change. I created detailed notes and crosswalks between the old and new organization styles to help them, but I know reference-checking slowed them and me down.

Another difficulty was understanding and incorporating many different levels of arrangement and description. The goal was to process collections rapidly using “More Product, Less Process” guidelines. I was supposed to work at a fast pace and only pass my eyes over large record groups, but sometimes I might spend a week trying to sort a handful of boxes. Some collections were already formed, but others were merely concepts we had to gather materials from multiple places for (such as the graduate schools or student life). The university archives were not broken into distinct collections, either, but individual files. About a month before the grant period started, the department’s first archivist was hired. Prior to this time, no one with formal archival training had held the position of archivist, which meant previous employees’ filing systems varied widely and usually did not follow any sort of processing standard. Arrangement and description ranged from item-level lists to random files in boxes.

When I tried to work quickly, I would inevitably forget to re-check one storage space, not realize I had missed something, or find out later that one box was half Person A’s papers but the

rest had no connection. Or, although all of Dr. B's papers were collected, for some reason two or three cartons were left in the general university archives records section. I would finish boxing a collection, write the finding aid, upload it, and feel proud of being done. Then the next day or a week or two later, I would be sorting a mislabeled box and find new additions to "completed" collections. Every time I stopped to add these additions, it would slow me down further.

Finally, about a month and a half before the grant period was over, I decided to stop adding these additions, and finish the rest of the unprocessed collections. I identified materials that needed to be added to existing collections, but set them aside for after the grant period ended. I had this luxury because we found out that the Project Director would be on maternity leave for the final two months of the project. It seemed intimidating initially to lose the director at the end of the grant period, but the library kept me on for three months after the end of the grant to keep two staff members available in Special Collections and University Archives through the maternity leave period. Luckily, this allowed me to focus on the main priorities of the grant and return to the additions after the end of the grant period.

HM: Due to many unforeseen administrative and personnel challenges, the library staff needed an extension to complete their work. In our second year of implementing the grant, the Autry cut the Institute's budget by such a degree that all permanent, non-grant-funded, full-time employees had to reduce their work time by 5 hours per week. This was a major blow to library and archive operations, affecting the project archivists (of which there were three, including myself), volunteers, and researchers (both remote and visiting scholars). In September 2012, NHPRC granted the Autry a 12-month extension to complete the goals of the grant. I was let go at the end of 2012, and the Autry staff completed their work on the project by October 2013. My work was done at two different locations, and my direct supervisor also had to split her time between the two locations, which made meeting needs challenging even before the mandatory cut in hours. My supervisors were much less available to me in my final stages of completion, which made some of the work extremely difficult.

We also lost a key member of the project for an unplanned medical leave, so that aspect of the work fell behind. Another staff member left and was not replaced, so all of those duties then fell to my supervisor.

In addition to all of the above, the institution planned to move the entire library and archive collections to a third location. All of our work had to encompass more meetings as well as plans for moving collections to the third location.

Short-term interruptions happened all the time, such as power outages, the internet going down for extended periods, switching phone systems, and work areas being shut down for movie and television filming. All of these were planned and unplanned, and are part of a dynamic institution situated in a large metropolis that affect the day-to-day operations of the library and archive staff so that we would have to make slight adjustments in our calendars.

But not all interruptions were bad. Both library locations have a heavy reference load and host frequent researchers and research fellows, not to mention interaction with other museum staff, such as curators, exhibition designers, preparators, and digital collections staff. The collections I was processing remained open for research during the project, and that would sometimes affect my workflow. I had to remain flexible in my processing duties, since access is a top priority for research libraries. But this was often a boon for both the collections and the researchers, as academic researchers got access to their desired material and as a result of their research, often helped us in the discovery process. The digital collections staff and I were often in need of each other at the same time, resulting in high quality digital representations of archival materials that collections needed to fulfill their digital repository requirements and which I used for documentation and for my blog requirements. Interaction with curators was also extremely beneficial, providing me with in-depth subject expertise to aid in my descriptive notes and in solving those unique archival mysteries that always pop up during processing, such as identifying names, dates, and places in unlabeled materials. As I got to know their areas of interest, I was able to share “gems” from our archival collections with them, which sometimes led to the creation of new exhibits.

KR: How did you make sure you stayed on track? Did you develop any tools to monitor your progress?

GW: The best tool to monitor the progress of an archival processing grant is to compare the list of collections to the finished finding aids online. Quarterly reports are also a good tool to make sure the project is staying on track.

JH: The best tool for tracking overall progress on the grant was an Excel spreadsheet (see below for example). The spreadsheet tracked collection number, collection name, linear foot count, whether the finding aid was reviewed or not, whether it was on the OAC or not, if it was labeled, if it was on the Pepperdine library website, if the MARC record was given to the cataloger, when the MARC record was online, and the link to the MARC record.

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For the survey phase, I developed my own tracking sheet (to assess preservation status, special boxing needs, current levels of description, and other variables). Then I found out there was the assessment module in Archivists’ Toolkit, which was fairly similar. I used that to document our survey information. I am very interested in statistics and for the first six months, I took an extreme approach to tracking my time. I broke down every task, for example “30 minutes browsing boxes” and “2 hours entering a folder list.” Though this information could be helpful in the long run, to collect data to assess variables affecting processing rates, I realized I was spending my time documenting and counting, rather than processing. After the first reporting period, I tracked at a broader level; for example, I spent the whole day processing collection A, or half the day on collection A and the other half on collection B.

Another statistic that was easy to keep track of and that I found interesting, was comparing collection sizes (in linear feet). The Project Director created a document during the grant-writing phase that estimated collection sizes. I compared that list to the final linear foot count after processing. Some collections grew dramatically as a result of finally reuniting bits and pieces, and others shrunk after discarding irrelevant files.

We decided on processing goals for each reporting period – to finish approximately 150 linear feet every two months (given that we had to process approximately 1,225 feet based on the numbers supplied in the proposal). Our early strategy was to process collections that had already been worked on to some degree (which were also the large collections), to get familiar with the materials, meet our goals, and save the tricky collections for last.

HM: We constantly monitored our work, utilizing multiple shared calendars, monthly meetings, and spreadsheets. The entire library staff shared a calendar to track when anyone was out of the office for any reason, which location staff members were each day (since we had two that are 20 minutes' drive apart), and grant project mile-markers. I met with my supervisor monthly, and we also met with the entire library staff and gave them our project update on a monthly basis. Spreadsheets tracked daily activity, linear feet, and number of collections, to name a few. Annual reports to the granting agency also helped us keep track of our progress.

Within the processing work itself, my supervisor and I used Excel spreadsheets almost exclusively and felt that was the most fitting software for our needs. For collections over 1,000ft, we created a large-scale Access database, and used location as box numbers. We used an Access database for tracking supplies for the various grants and permanent staff use.

Post-Grant

KR: Please share what it was like to wrap up the grant. Was everything accomplished that needed to be? Is there anything that you would have done differently? What were some of the take away lessons that you learned? What were the greatest rewards? Any other final thoughts?

GW: The best way to wrap up a grant is to reach all of the goals. Most grants are completed. All of the grants I've been involved in have been completed and reached their processing goals. I know of cases at other institutions where grant projects are completed but the quality of the arrangement and description have been lacking. I think this happens if there is little supervision or knowledge by supervisors. The way to avoid mediocre project results is to ensure that the finding aids and processing is consistent and thorough. It doesn't mean processing should take forever. It just means that the quality parts of the collection are revealed to researchers.

The most rewarding part of grant projects is not only the process of making inaccessible collections accessible, but the evolution of a dormant archive into a functional institution where collections are accessible and used by scholars, students, and the public.

MN: We did successfully meet (and exceed) all of our project objectives, but with little time to spare!

There were several takeaways from the grant-writing process in particular. First, I found it was really important to build a good relationship with the program officer. For us this started with attending a webinar and then following up with a phone call. Those conversations helped us to know how to be fundable, which helped us develop the project. That relationship also served us well throughout the grant, as we felt quite comfortable approaching the program officer with questions and concerns. I also found it was important to get feedback on the grant proposal from several sources. Each reviewer helped us to refine and articulate the project before submitting it to the agency. Finally, in my experience, it's important to follow the grant guidelines very closely and to respond to whatever feedback is provided.

Something I would have done differently is to establish communication with campus departments early in the process, possibly even during the application process. I worked with Human Resources and the finance department, in addition to the grants office on campus. Meeting as a group earlier in the project would have been beneficial for coordinating our efforts.

When I started working at Pepperdine, we had great materials but they were largely unusable. I wanted to be able to teach classes, encourage student research using the materials, and answer reference questions, but it was quite challenging to do any of these activities. I could hardly tell students to research the collections when so many of them were in unlabeled boxes. Having everything processed, even at a basic level, with online finding aids, seemed like a very

unrealistic dream, especially since I was the only person in the department at the time. But that dream has been realized. We are thrilled with the results and excited to be able to move forward with lots of other initiatives that wouldn't otherwise have been possible.

I would encourage anyone considering applying for a grant to go for it. Find one that really fits your needs and apply.

JH: At Pepperdine, our initial goal was to process 1,225 linear feet of materials and create 70 finding aids. At the end of the grant period, we processed 1,370 linear feet of materials comprising 101 collections. A finding aid for each collection was created and added to the OAC. All of the collections were processed at least at the collection level, but many were at the series and some were done at file level. In addition, a MARC record for each of the collections was created and added to WorldCat.

If I had to do the project over again, I would survey and organize as much as possible at the beginning. The entire university archives had no defined collections before I started. I had to decide which collections I would create (and what to do with leftover items), collect archival material from many different places, and divide it up into logical groupings. It took an incredible amount of time and effort by everyone involved to bring similar materials together.

I'd also say, don't be afraid to reassess to make your process more efficient. In addition, test your boxes out before you buy too many. The wonderful new sturdy boxes in our initial supply order turned out not to quite fit on a certain model of shelves that were ordered prior to the grant. This limited which shelving areas were available for which box type, and required a lot of shuffling of collections in the storage areas. I would also look for a more efficient and effective method of tracking statistics. I would have processed the three largest collections first, almost before doing a survey of everything else. In particular, one of the collections of a past university president taught me so much about large scale organization, and I learned a lot about the school's history and events, terms, etc. Perhaps if I had tried to collect all the university archives materials earlier, it would have been easier down the line.

Get creative with your space – use any available rooms or surfaces for processing! One lifesaver was using Payson Library's "Surfboard Room" for large-scale reorganization. We did have to schedule our time around various events held in the space, but it was the perfect place to spread out, and is conveniently located next to Special Collections. I spent one full week with

three other staff members organizing 50 boxes of folders. It would have taken lot longer to do in our much smaller processing room.

Although we faced challenges, the rewards of the project were immense! The project essentially revitalized the archive. The department now has a processing manual, department procedures, and other policies in place. Proper shelving was installed and there are no more mystery boxes in the storage areas. It never ceased to make me smile when the archives received emails or phone calls after a finding aid went online. I loved writing blog posts and sharing new and interesting finds with my coworkers and the community. One special memory was when Special Collections and University Archives welcomed Helen Young, her family, and her friends to a party to celebrate her 94th birthday and the completion of processing the M. Norvel and Helen Young papers. Having the co-creator of the largest collection in the archives visit on her birthday to see the progress made and see old family photographs was a great experience.

Wrapping up the grant was a hectic experience though. I worry that despite my best efforts to document and keep notes for my coworkers, some of the important information I discovered about collections will disappear.

HM: Yes, the goals of the grant were accomplished and also surpassed. We exceeded our goals for both number of collections and amount of linear feet processed. The proposed goal was 480 collections, an estimated 1,750 feet. I processed 481 collections, measuring approximately 3,400 linear feet. In my final stages of the project, I processed the last 315 collections in 51 days, whereupon I declared this process “Turbo Archiving.” And yes, there was a lot of celebrating afterwards!

The biggest lesson I can take away from the grant work at the Autry is that I became much more comfortable with relaxing my intellectual grip on collections. The days of making box numbers coordinate directly with the order on the finding aid are over--no one has time for that anymore. And it's okay to let go of it, even though it disrupts our desire to have everything align perfectly. As long as a finding aid is well-written and complete, the physical order of the collection is inconsequential to intellectual discovery, especially when reordering of boxes or box contents causes preservation concerns. I've learned to trust my intuition in collections handling, gaining a light but expert touch in physical processing, blending speed with sensitivity.

The most important thing I learned about working with grants is that the granting institutions are always available to talk with you about your goals and difficulties. They are also usually willing to grant extensions when unforeseen scheduling difficulties arise. As I mentioned earlier, NHPRC was very understanding with us regarding our scheduling difficulties and granted us an extension to complete our work.

I cannot even begin to express how fulfilled I am by my work. I am thrilled to go to work every day and do what I do as an archivist. When I was at the Autry, I had almost daily moments of elation when I would make discoveries or connections within collections. Problem and mystery solving is the part of my job that I love the most. The most intense experience happened just as I was leaving my position. I had achieved the main goals of the project, so I was permitted to choose the last few collections I wanted to process from the remaining backlog. I chose to process a couple of collections the Autry held on a Depression-era trick-rider and horseman named Jack Case. He disappeared into obscurity in the 1960s, so the biographical note for my finding aid was sparse. We published the finding aid on the OAC, and soon after received an email from Case's daughter, whose family discovered the finding aid by doing a Google search. She said she had corrections to make to my biographical note, and I made an arrangement to interview her over the phone. We spoke several times over email and the phone, and it was extremely beneficial for both of us. Her father had disappeared not only from the public eye, but from his family as well. His daughter was able to share details with me that could only come from a primary resource like this oral history, and she was able to find comfort in new information that helped her feel closer to her lost father. This experience completely encompasses why I am so passionate about sharing information and making our collections accessible. This woman who lives in a rural area, miles away from the nearest metropolis was able to find the answers to a life-long quest just by sitting down at her computer and running a search on her father's name. You can read the full story here: <http://libraries.theautry.org/2012/12/20/final-thoughts-a-case-study/>

Although I have had extremely enriching and exciting experiences and growth during all of my basic-processing experiences at different institutions, I am left with several unanswered and unsettling questions: Where do we go from here? What are the long-term effects of these grants for basic-level processing, if the institution does not then follow-up with more in-depth processing of their collections? What are the long-term effects of these MPLP grants on our

profession? How much do we value our institutional memory? How much institutional memory are we losing each time we let a Project Archivist go? How do we compensate for a loss of intellectual and physical security of collections when we are forced to use basic-level processing? These are serious questions we need to examine, as individual archivists, members of our communities, and as members of the professional community.

Wrap-Up

KR: Hopefully, the excerpts provided from the session will help others in their efforts to apply for similar grants. In addition to the information provided by the panelists, I might also suggest seeking a grant-writing workshop. As Greg mentioned, there are a lot of institutions applying for grants and only the very best applications receive funding. Make sure you are familiar with the correct terminology and as Melissa suggested, have multiple reviewers look at the application, such as CHRAB members or colleagues. I would also suggest looking at successful applications, which some agencies provide on their website, or even reaching out to institutions who have received grants for guidance. Grants are a great way to revitalize an archive and the work that project archivists like Jamie and Holly do, really can be a turning point in the right direction for a repository.