Careers in Music Libraries IV

Edited by Misti Shaw and Susannah Cleveland
CAREERS IN MUSIC LIBRARIES IV
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CAREERS IN MUSIC LIBRARIES IV

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About the Contributors
As music library workers enter the middle and latter parts of their careers, change management becomes an ever-increasing requirement for their careers and for their institutions. Most librarians enter workplaces in need of change, big and small. A fresh set of eyes on a situation is invaluable, and recent hires can capitalize on their outside perspectives with the right strategies. These include learning local norms, connecting with constituent groups, and identifying peer and peer-aspirant institutions. The easiest changes to initiate include buy-in from the primary stakeholders. Of course, sometimes change needs to happen even when everyone is not on board. In these instances, working closely with library leadership, using all communication channels, and supporting proposals with data is essential. In this chapter—new to this edition of *Careers in Music Librarianship*—Stephanie Bonjack addresses setting the stage for change, advocating for improvements, and handling pushback when it occurs.
INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You followed all the advice from my fellow authors and successfully landed a new job at a new institution. While getting your foot in the door was a significant process, what happens next is significant as well. The process of transitioning to a new environment can be overwhelming and everyone has a different approach to finding their new normal. But this chapter isn’t about finding normal, it’s about retaining your outsider status and your power as change agent. This will help you initiate and advocate for needed changes.

There is a reason why many library administrations, including my own at the University of Colorado Boulder, bring in outside consultants to help guide strategic planning and reorganizations. A consultant is detached from the inertia of workplace practices and can see the full picture with a level of clarity that is hard to achieve from within. As you begin your new position, you are the consultant examining current practices and procedures, spaces and human dynamics. Only with this perspective can you envision the endless possibilities inherent in your new workplace. It’s exciting to think big! This is the part of a new job that I look forward to most, and I hope you will too.

For many individuals, once they have established a groove in their daily work lives, they stop seeing problems and areas for growth and fall into institutionalized norms. Phrases like “we’ve always done it that way” or “there’s no money for that” become internalized quickly (even if there is little evidence for these claims). This leads to decreased motivation to push for needed change. Beware of these patterns! Rarely does one walk into a workplace and find everything in perfect working order. In fact, your new employees, colleagues, and constituents may have been waiting for the new person (that’s you!) to address some long-standing issues. Make a conscious decision to retain your outsider status and objectivity. This will help you as you begin to navigate your new workplace and its various dynamics and environments. In order to develop a vision and put your vision into action, you will need to understand the people who will be impacted and their receptivity to change. You will also want to gather data, conduct assessments, and acquire some political backup. Let’s get started.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

The first month on the job is an absolute whirlwind. Depending on the size of your institution, you could spend the first two weeks just meeting key players in your workplace. Lunches, coffees, formal and informal conversations: what a fun way to spend your days! If your supervisor doesn’t arrange such a schedule for you, then you should do it yourself. This is true even if there
is immediate work to do. The process of getting to know your colleagues and constituents is a personalized one; you will have to tailor it to your specific work environment. You should request a copy of the organizational chart that shows you within the context of your administration. It is also helpful to have the same for the populations you serve (for example, the College of Music). This will help you determine who you need to meet initially, and whom you can plan to meet in the future. In your first couple of weeks you will want to meet the individuals with decision-making authority over you, all of your employees (if you have them), and anyone with whom you require collaboration in order to conduct your work. This can include your supervisor and the leaders above them, members of Technical and Metadata Services, administrators in the departments you serve, your Human Resources professionals, and the custodial staff who clean your spaces. All of these people will have some bearing on your work life and your success, so learn their names and make sure they know yours.

This initial meet-and-greet time is a great opportunity for you to listen. You should already know some things about the institution from your interview process, and you will want to build on that knowledge by asking open-ended questions about areas of your work. I like to ask three core questions:

- What is working well?
- What should change or be updated?
- What new thing would you like to see?

The answers to these questions generally form patterns. It’s amazing what information people will volunteer with little or no prompt, and I find this is especially true when some kind of change is long overdue. I felt completely spent after my first week at my current job because so many people had so many things they wanted to tell me! It is better to listen than to volunteer suggestions at this stage. I’m a problem solver by nature and you may be like me in that you want to act immediately, but it is better to take it all in and form an overall picture of the dynamic landscape. Remember: each story has two (or more) sides and it will be up to you to digest and interpret the narratives you gather. I am always amazed to see consistently varied viewpoints from different constituents. For example, undergraduate students want very different things in library spaces than faculty members do. I have found it is best not to assume there is a unified narrative around desired change.

Your initial meetings are also good opportunities to determine where you can embed yourself. It may be that your predecessor (if there was one) had already exploited these opportunities effectively, and you just have to take that person’s place at the table. For example, if there was a student advisory board for the music library, then you need to determine who the members are, how the group functions, and start attending or convening meetings. Think critically about ways in which your position is currently embedded in the work environment and ways in which it could be more so. There are probably opportunities to serve on committees and task forces within your reporting line. These are good ways to make connections with your administration and understand how initiatives get funded and approved.

Additionally, look for ways to embed yourself with constituent groups. At two separate institutions, I have requested a non-voting ex-officio membership to the college of music leadership council. These councils are typically composed of the heads of all music departments as well as
the dean and associate deans. Most institutions have something similar. I have found attending these meetings to be incredibly useful in understanding areas that directly impact my work, like new music programs coming online, strategic priorities, and future projects. It is also a great opportunity for face time with colleagues and administrators you may not frequently see.

As you go through your initial meetings with colleagues and constituents and start to embed yourself in the workplace, pay attention to pain points as they arise. Pain points are areas of one’s work in which one experiences a lack of support, and it is a struggle to accomplish one’s goals. I think of pain points as existing in multiple frameworks, as they can be founded on perception or reality. Today’s reality may be very different from the reality of ten years ago, yet there are some people who will assume they are the same. A hard “no” in the past can stop an employee or constituent from asking for what they need today; they may assume the answer will be “no” because of that past experience. I have found the “there’s no money for that” rhetoric is often perception based on past experiences.

Here’s a great example: when I started my current position, I noticed many members of my staff had analog telephones at their desks, and we even had an analog phone at our circulation desk, which made transferring phone calls clunky and difficult. When I asked why we weren’t using digital phones, like the rest of the library system, I was told “phones are too expensive” or “new phones are hard to get.” Neither of these sentiments turned out to be true, and I procured new digital phones for everyone within a short time. But, if I had accepted the perceptions the library’s employees had internalized, we'd still be using analog phones. The messages they had received may have been true at one time, but they far outlasted their original context. I have found that a single individual’s decision-making practices can have a long-lasting effect on employees and workplace culture, even years after they leave the workplace. Be mindful that some pain points may be legacies of the past and something you can solve quickly—a win for everyone.

Not all pain points are based in perception; some of them are real. Workplaces in heavy transition, in which there are many departures, retirements, and interim appointments are unsettling for continuing and new employees. If you are entering such a workplace, your first job is to keep the boat sailing in the right direction and meet the immediate needs of your patrons and employees. Once you get a sense of what is on the horizon for the institution, you can start addressing areas in need of change. Sometimes a shakeup in staffing and administration opens up new doors and windows that didn’t exist before. Even in situations in which budgets are contracting, there may be an openness to try new approaches to old problems.

AN APPETITE FOR CHANGE

One of your jobs, as you get to know your constituent groups, is to get a sense of the tolerance for change. This will vary wildly from one group to another. For example, many undergraduate students have a high tolerance for change because their lives are full of it! Each semester is different, with new professors, classes, buildings, and projects. Also, some work environments normalize change and have a lot of flux. If innovation is valued and supported at your institution, then there will be a relatively high tolerance for change because many employees will be involved in it routinely. The challenge lies in work environments in which there has been very little change
over a long period of time. This can be reflected in curricula, physical spaces, and faculty and administration rosters.

As you get to know your various constituents, change will be something for you to investigate. It is helpful to ask what has changed in the time that your colleagues have worked at your institution and how that went. You should be asking yourself if you’re hearing an aversion to change or a desire for change. In an ideal situation, your predecessor acclimated your constituents to a healthy rate of change through regular upgrades and initiatives. Policies, collections, services, and facilities should reflect the present state of our profession and the ways in which current users discover and access information. But this may not be the case, and it is up to you to bring practices into the present. For individuals with an aversion to change, anything that disrupts their autopilot will be upsetting, challenging, or both. If they were used to running to the library five minutes before class and grabbing a book or score that is always in the same place, then shifting the collection or moving items to off-site storage will be an adjustment for them. It is important for you to gauge the scale of that adjustment. Then, you can determine how much dialog and feedback gathering needs to happen so you and your constituents may come to a shared understanding.

On the flip side, it may be that your constituents have been waiting for your position to be filled in order to proceed with needed change. I certainly found this to be the case with some of my employees, who had many ideas they wanted to try, and were waiting for me to show up and enable them. There were also decisions that were delayed until my hire, and long-standing projects waiting for my feedback. This is a great opportunity to get feedback from your supervisor and library leadership on what an acceptable rate of change is for them compared to the rest of your constituents. All of this information will help you form a picture of how change will be supported and received. It should also give you a sense of how many iterations your initial plans might undergo. If your patrons are strongly against your big ideas, you need to understand why, and propose a path that you can walk in tandem.

**IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR CHANGE**

Every job is different, so only you know the full scope of your position. Depending on your workplace and position, you can have everything from the building to the printer within your purview. I recommend making a list of all the aspects of your work so you can begin to systematically assess them. The more granular you can get, the easier it will be to start addressing each area. Here are some areas you might consider:

**Circulation Policies**

While some library systems centrally manage circulation policies, I found this was not the case in my current position, even though I work at a large institution. My branch had many local policies that differed from the rest of the system. If this is the case at your institution, you should thoroughly review all of the current circulation policies connected to the collections under your purview. Consider the different format types in your collection. Do scores circulate for a different loan period than books? Is there a big difference in loan periods by patron type, and if so, is that problematic? One way to determine this is to look at commonly overdue items. Are overdue
books an issue for one patron type and not another? At more than one institution, I have encountered very short loan periods for media, like CDs and DVDs, which resulted in a high volume of overdue notices. Extending the loan periods decreased these issues.

Additionally, high demand items with restrictive loan periods often cause unnecessary confusion. For example, a second copy of a book or score housed in the reference collection might be better placed in the circulating collection if it is widely used in studios or classes. Wilson and Frazier’s article, “Circulation Policies in Major Academic Libraries” provides a useful snapshot of circulation policies across patron, but not format types, when they conducted a major survey on the topic in 2013.1

**Collection Management**

Fundamentally, collection management is about ensuring there is room on the shelves for the current collection while allowing room for future growth. Finite space means room must be freed up periodically to house new purchases. If space on the shelves is an issue in your library, then you will need to develop a plan to address it. The way in which this process is handled is important because of its impact on patrons. Someone who is used to seeing all editions of the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* on the shelf will have to do some advance planning if the previous editions are moved to off-site storage.

If you are part of a larger library system, there may be institutional norms that can guide you. It is common in many library systems for circulation data to inform stacks management. For example, are there items that have not been checked out for twenty, fifteen, or ten years? That might be a good place to start. Multiple copies or editions are another consideration, as is publication date. I identified dozens of items over one hundred years old in my library’s circulating stacks. These items were ultimately sent to preservation and special collections, where they are now housed in a climate-controlled environment.

Tackling collection management is a good opportunity for you to engage with your constituents. If you need to create space, build patron feedback into the process using online spreadsheets of proposed items to move, deliver presentations so constituents know what you’re doing and why, and use direct communication so nothing is a mystery. Pay attention to how patrons respond. It may be that someone uses all editions of a textbook in a class, so it would be better for them to remain on the shelf. Honor as many requests as you can.

1. Duane Wilson, Cynthia Frazier, and Diana Harter, “Circulation Policies in Major Academic Libraries,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41, no. 6 (November 2015): 798–803. Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library Circulation Committee studied the circulation policies of ARL members and like-sized academic institutions’ libraries. Access Services Department Heads or their equivalent at 165 academic libraries were surveyed. This paper reports on policies relating to circulation, renewals, fines, and recalls for these libraries. The majority of circulation policies are traditional (typical circulation periods, low numbers of renewals, and traditional fines).

**Collection Development**

Collection development encompasses all policies and processes around what you are collecting and how those selections are made. This can include approval plans, firm orders, subscriptions, and donations. Ideally, the collections you steward reflect the teaching and research conducted at your institution and support patron work through the highest degree offered. Ask yourself if this is the case in your library. Sometimes, as new programs come online in the departments served by the library, changes are not made in collection development to include or bolster those areas. Conversely, programs may have faded out, but the library is still receiving items on approval in their support. Spend the time comparing the supported degree areas to what is coming into your library’s collections and make adjustments so they reflect one another.

**Technology**

Music libraries can easily turn into museums of technology because of our history of collecting sound formats (and their players). If equipment is within your purview then some review is needed. Does the available technology reflect current practices, needs, and the specific media collections at your institution? Some libraries also lend equipment or accessories, like laptops and headphones. Make sure that these are as current as possible and deaccession outdated items.

**Services**

Libraries offer a broad spectrum of services to their patrons. This includes instruction and reference but broadly speaks to how we are teaching and assisting our patrons. Do library employees answer research questions at the desk, over email, or chat? Are library instruction sessions taught by your positions or others in the library? If so, are all of the different departments you serve receiving library instruction? If not, why? Consult the edited volume *Outreach for Music Librarians*\(^3\) for more information on this topic. This book is a treasure trove of information about how to build bridges with patrons and ensure the services you offer are matching up with need.

Some services address physical needs, like accommodation. The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) prohibits discrimination based on disability, and provides regulations for physical access to public buildings and businesses.\(^4\) These are good starting points for learning about how to make your library accessible. Additionally, I recommend learning more about universal design and thinking about how you might incorporate those principles into your library’s services and spaces. Universal design is “the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.”\(^5\) The DO-IT Center at the University of Washington has an excellent universal design checklist for libraries on how to make them more welcoming and accessible.\(^6\) It covers everything from physical environments to training of library staff.

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Lastly, safe spaces should be considered here. Many college campuses facilitate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ) ally programs. These exist to help LGBTQ students identify faculty, staff, and students whom they can talk to without fear of judgement or shaming. At my institution, the Center for Inclusion and Social Change runs safe space training that is co-facilitated with an enrolled student. After completing the training, attendees receive a “safe space” sign they can put in their office window or in their cubicle.\(^7\) The Human Rights Campaign has an excellent site on how to develop a safe space program if your workplace doesn’t have one.\(^8\)

**Facilities**

Physical spaces and everything inside them fall under the umbrella of facilities. This can include ceilings, walls, furniture, lighting, windows, and carpet. It can also include the heating and cooling system and sprinklers. When facilities aren’t working well or fulfilling the needs of current patrons, it dramatically influences how patrons perceive the library. Is it welcoming as a library—or a workplace?

There is plenty to unpack in each area! Fortunately, this work is a marathon, not a sprint. Also, the conversations you have with colleagues and constituents will draw your attention to specific areas. There may be general satisfaction in one area of your work and strong pain points in another. But fleshing out for yourself the areas under your purview is an excellent first step toward making changes and improvements. It will also help you identify areas in which you may have input but no direct control. Virtual spaces, like the library website and social media platforms, may not be managed directly by you but will have a relationship with your work. Do they accurately reflect important information about your library, services, and collections, or are they outdated and in need of an overhaul? There may also be tangential websites, like the college of music faculty and staff page, where you will want to have a presence, if you don’t already.

**PUTTING YOUR WORK IN CONTEXT**

Now that you have an idea of the full scope of your purview, you can begin addressing areas in which you want to make changes. Laying the groundwork for your decisions in the form of contextualization and assessments will make your process transparent as well as easier to explain, defend, and get others on board. The experience of change initiation and management happens in multiple stages. If you have already spoken to a broad range of constituents about what is working well, what needs to change, and potential innovations, then you have taken the first step toward bringing about something new.

Coupled with this process are your gut feelings about what you should do. Don’t dismiss those; they are incredibly useful. Your training and experience help inform your gut feelings, and they are honed by time spent in the profession. Eventually, you will be able to quickly identify

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areas in need of change and know what needs to be done and most of the steps to get there. In
the beginning of your career, putting your work in multiple contexts will help you make those
determinations.

I like to think of my work as it relates to others in the form of ever-widening concentric circles,
starting with local practices and moving slowly outward, to the department, institution, region,
and profession. You want to place the work you do within multiple contexts, as it forms your
narrative and the narratives of those around you (like the staff and administrators who champion
your work). The way you frame your work is by understanding how and why things are done the
way they are at the local level and then finding comparison points across these concentric circles
that make sense to you and your constituents. From this position, you can initiate changes and
explain them within these multiple contexts. This process demonstrates clarity in your decision
making and provides a framework in which you can engage your constituents and administration.

Let’s consider an example. When I began my current position, the music library staff brought
collection management as an issue to my attention right away. The stacks were at capacity, and
with new items arriving on approval every month, some decisions needed to be made. I sought
to understand this local situation within multiple contexts. I spoke with the library employees
about how the collection had been historically managed and why were we at this critical juncture.
I met with the Director of Access Services to understand how collections were managed in the
main library and in the other branches. I came to discover that ours was the only library in the
system not fully utilizing the off-site storage facility we had at our disposal for collection overflow.
I also learned that the music library was not lending significant portions of our collection through
interlibrary loan, which would also have an impact on available shelf space.

All of these conversations and pieces of information helped to form a picture of what we were
doing in the music library and how it was at odds with local practices in the rest of the library sys-
tem. This formed the foundation for my decision to conduct a large-scale collection weed, create
new collection management policies that allowed for sustainable growth, and begin lending more
of our collection through interlibrary loan. Building on this example, here are some avenues to
pursue when you need to compare an area within your purview to established norms, best prac-
tices, and avenues for innovation.

**Local Level**

No matter the size of your library or institution, there will be local norms to learn and ques-
tion. Here is where the individuality of your workplace can be discovered, as well as practices that
may deviate from broader norms. Often, unusual practices can be pinned to a single individual
or administrative team, and they may have outlasted their original context. To understand how
things are done locally, you need to determine who the administrators or point people are who
are involved with the issue you are trying to address. The organizational charts you obtained
at the beginning of your hire will be helpful as will the conversations you had during your on-
boarding. At small libraries and institutions, a handful of people will be the point persons for a
spectrum of issues. At larger institutions, there is typically a point person or team for every aspect
of library services and administration. One thing to remember is music faculty and library em-
ployees can have very different perspectives on library issues. You need to get a sense of the local
norm from both the library system and the music department.
Regional Level

If your library is a member of a library consortium (or more than one), then it should be easy to find a list of participating libraries. For example, my institution is a member of the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries, which maintains a list of member libraries participating in the union catalog. It is more difficult to discern which libraries have significant music collections from these lists, but you can talk to your interlibrary loan specialists about which libraries are lending the music materials your patrons request. Then you can compare your library with your regional peers, to understand their collection strengths and what they are doing well. Reach out to those music librarians and visit their libraries, if you can. It’s also helpful to understand your institutional relationship with them. I request lending and borrowing data periodically to see where my institution stands in relationship with the other libraries in the consortium. This gives me a sense of how meaningful regional data will be with my constituents, particularly music faculty members.

Institutional Groups

At both my current and previous institution, I learned that there were multiple peer and peer-aspirant lists. These should be fairly easy to acquire; the deans and their assistants typically have this data on hand. At my institution, comparisons are publicly available. My colleagues and I use this list routinely for all sorts of comparisons, from service models to faculty salaries, and it is often referenced in research. The music department will also have their own list, which is used by their accreditors. At both my current and former institutions, the music department maintained an internal list of peers and peer-aspirants. These are the institutions with which they are competing for students or they would like to be. I have found this list to be far more useful than references to regional institutions, as they may not be regarded as peers by the faculty.

Profession at Large

There are multiple organizations that serve the music library community. These include the Music Library Association, the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives, and Documentation Centres, and the Music OCLC Users Group, among others (see chapter 5 for more information). One of the wonderful things about our profession is the community of help

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and support these organizations facilitate. Email distribution lists like MLA-L are a great way to ask for information about how things are done at other institutions.15

**Current Research**

Peer-reviewed research provides weight and heft when making the case for change. I have found this to be especially true in work environments that are research-producing (like R1 institutions). Backing up statements, plans, and ideas with references to research demonstrates you have done your homework and have a sense of what the field already looks like. It will also give you examples from other institutions that you want to model.

**Making a Plan**

Now you have a sense of your workplace and constituents, and have put your work into multiple contexts. You have identified areas for change, and it’s time to think about short- and long-term projects and large- and small-scale projects. It is ideal for you to draft a one-, three-, and five-year plan for your library. In this scenario you can schedule large projects for the future and bring constituents along with you in the planning process. In the short term, smaller projects get your feet wet and still make meaningful change.

I am always surprised by how big an impact a small change can make. For example, in my workplace, I examined the technical services workflow from selection to purchase to processing to cataloging to shelving. In there, I found a couple bottlenecks that were sources of frustration to employees and slowed everything down. These were mainly unnecessary interventions by the subject selector (myself). By removing those bottlenecks, we sped up our workflow, stopped adding items to the backlog, and improved morale. Making changes in workflows can involve many conversations, but typically very few resources. As you think about the many things you may want to change in your workplace, look for low stakes, high-impact projects like this to start. It will give you experience in your current workplace initiating and conducting change, a good precedent as you move on to bigger projects.

Large-scale projects may be on the distant horizon or in the immediate future. Sometimes external forces prompt a large project, like a sudden building remodel that requires a collection move. However, most large projects take a long time to develop. This is good because it gives you time to follow all of the steps I have laid out above, as well as collecting data, and gathering feedback.

**Collecting Data and Feedback**

At this stage, it is helpful to gather local feedback and data, which will help shape and inform your plans. Feedback and data come in multiple forms, both formal and informal. Both are useful. Data is information in aggregate, which removes it from subjectivity and emotions. Some people

(like myself) respond very strongly to hard numbers when listening to arguments. For others, they want to hear personal stories and they find that kind of feedback more compelling. For this reason, collecting multiple forms of feedback and information is important.

The areas in which you want to make changes will dictate what kinds of data you will want to gather or generate. In my example of collection management, I asked my employees as well as the Director of Access Services to generate multiple reports from our integrated library system. I was seeking to identify materials that could be moved off-site with relatively little impact on the user population. I obtained lists of materials that hadn’t circulated in ten, fifteen, or twenty years as well as materials that had never circulated since the migration from the card catalog to the ILS. I also asked for lists of materials based on publication date, specifically items that were over one hundred years old. I had noticed these rare items on the shelves and wanted to transfer them to Special Collections and Archives to ensure they received proper housing, climate control, and security.

In addition to gathering data, patron feedback from a variety of constituents is important. Each constituent group will have a different response rate to feedback mechanisms, which is why a number of options should be given. There are many avenues here, ranging from formal to informal methods. Formal methods include tools like surveys and focus groups with carefully chosen questions to enable data collection. Surveys are a great start because they are easy to create and distribute via email. For assistance with this, see Miller and Hinnant’s excellent book *Making Surveys Work for Your Library: Guidance, Instructions, and Examples*. Surveys also make it easy to identify patron type and are an opportunity for both structured feedback through specific questions and unstructured feedback through open-ended questions.

Focus groups are a way to connect personally with constituents and give them a forum in which to express themselves. I conducted focus groups with a space planner when I was working toward a massive remodel of the Howard B. Waltz Music Library. We were looking to gather feedback on our overall plan as well as specific ideas about furniture and study spaces. We arranged these meetings by constituent type: faculty and staff, students, and library employees. These groupings ensured each group could speak freely, and very different feedback came out of each meeting. For a deep dive into how to organize and conduct focus groups, see Krueger and Casey’s *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*.

Internal structures for gathering feedback on projects vary by institution. It’s worth investigating to see if your library or institution provides this. At the University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, we have a working group that serves in an advisory capacity for individuals and units who want to try something new or initiate change. They will conduct usability studies, for example, or help troubleshoot new ideas that impact multiple units. If such a group does not exist in your workplace, it is worth creating a group that can advise you on your project and provide an outside perspective on your ideas.

Informal methods for collecting feedback are wide-ranging, from social media engagement to questions on whiteboards to sticky notes used in informal polls. I think of these more as forms


of outreach to indicate to patrons, especially students, that we care about their input and want to interact with them. An excellent place to learn more about techniques for connecting with patrons is the edited volume *Outreach for Music Librarians*.\(^{18}\)

**TELLING YOUR STORY**

A major component of initiating and managing change is storytelling. It is very easy to forget how important communication around a project can be, especially when you are deep in the weeds of logistics and planning. Communication can be an afterthought because once a project starts going, there are often multiple players or departments to work with, looming deadlines, and not ever enough time. However, communication in advance of a project, during the project, and after the project will help ensure success and give your constituents the opportunity to fully understand your vision and plan, and for them to feel like they’re a part of what’s happening. Remember, you may respond strongly to the data behind your decisions, but it is the story around the end goal of your project that constituents will respond to. For example, if your goal is to create spaces that enable learning and collaboration, then that should be the focus of your message, not how many volumes you are moving out in order to accomplish this goal.

It is ideal if you can plan large-scale projects well in advance. This will give you time to work directly with the communications team or specialist at your institution to create a communications plan, manage feedback at various stages of the project, and create learning and engagement opportunities. A communications plan should include your project schedule and the types of communications you are going to use at different stages of the project. For example, it is ideal to introduce a project to constituents in person, like at a faculty meeting, so you can answer questions in real time and avoid miscommunication. Once you have laid the groundwork for the project, then you can send email updates to constituents to keep them posted on your progress. Communication avenues include everything from scheduled emails, blog posts, posters, and social media platforms. The use of all available outlets means your message will reach the greatest number of constituents, and I highly recommend both print and digital media for messaging. Additionally, the data you collected to frame your project can be put to good use in a communications plan, especially in short bursts of information in a Facebook or Instagram post. A communications specialist can also help spin the project in a positive light should you encounter challenging feedback.

If you work in a small environment and a dedicated communications professional is not available to you, then you should create a communications plan for your project yourself. There are many resources to guide your work, including the recent series in *Library Leadership & Management* that focuses on creating communications plans. The first in that series, “Creating an Organizationally Embedded Strategic Communication Plan for Libraries” by Doralyn Rossmann, is an excellent place to start.\(^{19}\) Fundamentally, you want to be talking about your project early and often. You should take each opportunity to present on your projects and plans. This is a way to educate your constituents, acclimate them to change, and gather feedback. Ask constituents

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how they want to be involved and how they prefer to hear about what’s happening. This will help guide your communications strategy as well.

HANDLING PUSHBACK

Generally speaking, large-scale projects are disruptive and arresting to patrons, even if the outcome will benefit them. In my library, I needed to initiate a large-scale weeding project not long after my hire in order to deal with acute collection management issues. My team and I used data to develop a weeding plan and created a feedback mechanism for music faculty once we had generated a list of items we proposed to move. Still, the relatively short timeline I had to impose meant that many constituents did not have an extended period of time to adjust to the change that was happening. I wasn’t able to plant the idea of change long before I initiated it. Also, for the first time, music faculty would not have the entire collection at their immediate disposal, as thirty percent of the collection was moved off-site to make room for the existing and growing collection.

From my perspective, a library with overflowing stacks represented a problem to be solved. I assumed my constituents shared my desire to solve this problem and would support my efforts to address it. They did in theory, but immediate access to library materials and never having to plan one’s library use was of greater value to some members of the music faculty than were my attempts at effective collection management. As I write this, many years after the fact, I still field occasional complaints about parts of the collection being housed offsite and the inconvenience of having to request items in advance of use.

This is a great example of a change that was absolutely necessary but guaranteed to generate tension. Being new to the university, I was unaware of just how adverse to change the music faculty were on library matters. This is why it is good to ask pointed questions about change when you start a new position or are about to embark on a new project that will impact patrons. As much as possible, you want to be able to anticipate how constituents will respond to your initiatives. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t initiate change, but it means you will need a very solid narrative supporting your work.

I looked for data in the professional literature to support my weeding project, and consistently found recommendations that shelves be at seventy to seventy-five percent capacity. I also spent time talking to collections and access services colleagues in our main library to understand what the system norm looked like and what was required to bring the Music Library into alignment. The Music Library was the last library on campus to begin using off-site storage, which meant faculty members on the rest of campus had long ago acclimated to requesting items in advance of use. This bit of campus history has become part of my narrative, but I will admit that it is not persuasive. The individuals who want to get a score from the Music Library five minutes before class but now may need to request it two days in advance do not care that everyone else has to do it, too. It is not possible to please everyone, but in these moments, I am assured by the fact that I did my homework and backed up my decision-making with data, facts, and administrative support.

The support of your upper level administrators when you undertake a large-scale project is important. Not everyone is accustomed to approaching their directors, deans and associate deans, or other administrators and telling them about projects they want to pursue, but this is exactly what you should do. While you are collecting data and research about your project, you should
be talking to your direct supervisor and upper level administrators to make sure you have their feedback and support, should tensions arise. Then, if you feel like you need some backup, you can invite one of your administrators to join you at a meeting with constituents in which you are discussing your project. Sometimes, the exact same words coming from an administrator has a greater effect than if they came from you. Also, you don’t need a tense situation in order to have a supervisor or administrator attend a meeting with you. Their mere presence lends authority and weight to your work and demonstrates that you are operating within a framework of support.

**PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

Much of what I have outlined here draws from the field of Project Management. In that field, there are five stages to follow in every project: initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, and closing. The Project Management Institute has a thorough and highly detailed guide to every step of the process, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge.* If one considers leading library change through the lens of these steps, I would say that the planning phase is the most important, yet is often rushed. It’s even rushed in my example. Everyone is excited to get to the *doing* of the project—the execution. However, it is at the planning stage that one can determine if there are any true flaws with the project. During the initiation phase, you are collecting feedback about what change needs to happen and how it could be done, and you may not connect with all stakeholders. It is easy to skate past the planning stage in which you should put into words what you want to do, the timeline in which it would happen, and then ask for feedback from all constituents. Ignoring this part of the process can alienate constituents and lead to further challenges later in the project, as there may be things you have overlooked.

Creating an iterative feedback process as part of your communications plan will help ensure that you are hearing all voices and able to respond to feedback in a meaningful way. It may be that the project as you initially conceived it must evolve based on feedback around the plan. Communication is key. It is helpful for you to return to your constituents and summarize how the iterative feedback was received. For example, “I heard from many of you that this part of the plan was problematic. After many conversations, here’s what we’re proposing instead.” This is a good opportunity to apologize if emotions are heated or some people feel as if they are not being heard. Any emotions that are communicated as part of the feedback process I would acknowledge and look for ways to amend. You want the majority of your constituents to be on board with your project before you head into the execution phase. It is to your advantage to continue working toward this goal.

**VOCAL MINORITIES**

Many management trainings teach the 80/20 rule, also called the Pareto Principle: eighty percent of one’s output will be derived from twenty percent of one’s efforts. It has been broadly


interpreted to also indicate that eighty percent of one’s challenges will be caused by twenty percent of one’s staff or constituents. I have found this to be true. As discussed, my work to address the collection management issues of my library generated tensions with some faculty members. They represented a small minority of my constituency, as the vast majority of constituents agreed with the project. But, the volume and frequency of their pushback was powerful. I couldn’t just ignore their feedback but at the same time I couldn’t allow them to completely derail my project either. So, I looked for ways in which I could incorporate their feedback into the project.

For example, during the weeding project, I moved hundreds of books and scores from our circulating collections to the Special Collections and Archives department. This move was necessary for many reasons, including preservation and security as they were all over 100 years old, but it presented a challenge for constituents who were accustomed to using those materials routinely. I approached the Head of Rare Books and asked if there was some way to allow these materials to circulate to music faculty members and grad students, so they could interact with the materials as they were used to doing. My colleagues were happy to assist. We now have a workflow for these materials, most of which are piano vocal scores for operas, and they have a special circulation of two weeks. I would have never envisioned this at the beginning of my project, but since it made some of the changes I initiated manageable for my constituents, I’m glad it happened.

**CONCLUSION**

Initiating and managing change is important work and necessary for maintaining the vitality of our libraries and our profession. It demonstrates good stewardship of collections and responsiveness to patron needs. Some changes will be lauded by your constituents, as you remove barriers and bottlenecks, increase access, and enable discovery. Other changes may be major disruptors and you will need to work closely with constituents to find an agreeable path forward. By laying the groundwork for change through the steps outlined in this chapter, you will be able to navigate the peaks and valleys one experiences when doing something new. Hopefully, you will come out on the other side with experience, perspective, and a willingness to rock the boat again.