Syracuse University

SURFACE

Libraries' and Librarians' Publications   Libraries

January 2008

Building a Bridge from the Research Office to the Moon

Linda M. Galloway
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/sul

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Galloway, Linda M., "Building a Bridge from the Research Office to the Moon" (2008). *Libraries' and Librarians' Publications*. 108.
https://surface.syr.edu/sul/108

Building a Bridge from the Research Office to the Moon

Linda M. Galloway, MSLIS
Assistant Librarian
Office of Research Programs Funding Specialist
State University of New York
College of Environmental Science and Forestry
Syracuse, NY 13210

Abstract

Creating an information services "bridge" – from the library to another department within an institution - serves as a conduit for exchange of resources and ideas. This bridge will strengthen the information services department and solidify its purpose as an integral part of the institutional whole. Within our small campus library, we were able to create a librarian position that links Moon Library to the Office of Research Programs in a mutually beneficial relationship. A modified librarian position was shaped that combines traditional academic library services with those of a grants librarian – collecting and disseminating relevant funding notices to the campus community. The link between the library and research office has served to enhance both departments and the campus community.

Introduction

F. Franklin Moon Library at the College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) is a specialized science library at a small PhD-granting institution within the State University of New York system. The campus community includes about 2100 undergraduate and graduate students and 282 faculty and professional staff (T. M. Blehar, pers. comm.). The library's professional staff previously consisted of four full-time librarians (including our library director) and one part-time archivist librarian. During a time of budgetary constraint, the fifth full-time librarian position was left unfilled. A part-time, temporary, visiting librarian position was created to attempt to provide the level of service our campus community expects and deserves. This job was filled by a succession of newly-minted librarians who provided necessary coverage but the constant turnover in this position strained staff resources further.

As the seventh part-time, temporary, visiting librarian I was put in the same position as my predecessors – gaining valuable academic library experience while looking for a full-time job. A series of serendipitous events helped shape the position we created while forging a new relationship with the Office of Research Programs. Some of the events that helped create this job are specific – my 16 years experience with the college, the Dean of Research looking in the library for space to house another staff member, the Library Director's idea to offer my services

part-time to the Office of Research Programs and the relationship working out well for all concerned. Other events that shaped this job are transferable - recognizing the need for a bridged information service, proposing a solution, implementing this solution and constantly improving delivery and services. Discussing these steps in a broader context while referencing my own experiences will illustrate the value in bridged information services.

Recognizing the Need

Information services professionals recognize that our services can benefit many different departments and institutional functions. Librarians have the ability to critically evaluate resources and provide informational products to an organization. Special librarians can add strategic value to an institution and need to make certain that their contributions to a collaborative workplace are noticed and appreciated (Albanese 2003).

Recognizing an unfilled information need often necessitates thinking beyond the traditional services a library provides. The capacity to link library services to another business function or academic department can both market and elevate the standing of the library. In our case, the unfilled need that is met by bridging the library and research office is providing relevant funding notices and opportunities to the campus community. Like many other academic institutions, our researchers receive notification of external funding sources via various methods. These discovery methods may include searching subscription databases, receiving funding notices via listservs and by other informal means including networking. While the library can assist by providing database training and access, the loose network of discovery does not facilitate the campus-wide collaboration increasingly necessary to secure external funding. We recognized that our researchers needed a single, reliable source of relevant funding opportunities presented on a regular basis.

In virtually every organization there is an informational service that can be provided by collecting, organizing and communicating relevant data. Look beyond the customary services your library or information center provides to find an unfilled need.

Propose a Solution

The Dean of Research, Neil Ringler, originally asked Moon Library's Director, Elizabeth Elkins, for space to house a staff member who would assist with the publication of the *Research Times*, a then infrequently published document listing funding opportunities. A consummate library marketer, Ms. Elkins suggested a part-time librarian for this position noting that information professionals have the skills necessary to locate, evaluate and synthesize information. She proposed a solution in the form of a junior library staff member with a part-time commitment to the college. As I began to work half-time for the library and half-time for the Office of Research Programs, I recognized that it was incumbent upon me effectively blend these two jobs into a permanent position.

The solution I could offer was to collect funding information, be a clearinghouse for funding opportunities and provide a product to the university in the form of a pertinent, readable publication. The *Research Times*, while at its infancy was a relevant and worthwhile document, was not published regularly and not promoted sufficiently to its target constituency, ESF faculty and staff. The desired outcome for this blended position was to produce a document that would be read by research faculty at our college who would then apply for and subsequently be awarded research funds. While I do not help individuals with grant applications, nor do I have influence over who receives funds, I can provide an interesting, relevant document that is read by the majority of our research faculty. Therefore my goal is to make this product, the *Research Times,* more widely read and theoretically more researchers will find, apply for and receive external funding.

When proposing a solution to an informational need, recognize that differing factions compete for limited financial resources in every academic or business environment. Your solution will help the library to prove it's relevance to the success of the organization. Market the solution to your target audience and constantly reinforce the link between the library and the service provided. The library literature is filled with methods to market your library and library services including some very innovative techniques (Ursin Cummings 2007). Adeyoyin (2005) describes the five P's of marketing (product, promotion, packaging, place and price) within the context of library services and this context serves as a very interesting way to describe unfilled needs in a business or campus environment. Once the informational need has been identified and a solution proposed, the solution must then be promoted and marketed to the intended customer.

Implement the Solution

My first task was to establish a regular publication schedule for the *Research Times* and adhere to this schedule religiously. We now produce this document on a twice-monthly basis. The publication includes most relevant funding opportunities for campus researchers. In addition, we include some meeting notices and workshop information, have a monthly feature that details newly awarded research projects, provide research-oriented news items and also have established a regular feature called a "Note from the Moon". This news item specifically describes a library resource, service or function and again ties the library to research activities on campus. While this is a natural connection made by information professionals, it is good practice to consistently reinforce the link to the campus community between the library and research success.

The next task was to establish a training program for faculty, staff and students to use our funding databases to their fullest potential. To that end, I provided group training in the use of these databases and maintain a web site that describes how to use these resources. Originally I provided grants seeking workshops for our core constituency. These workshops attracted between 10-20 participants and it was very difficult to walk people through searching and registering for funding alerts on these databases. The funding resources are much less user-friendly than the databases we regularly encounter in a library setting. Participants in the workshops became frustrated with the extremely slow response of one of our most valuable funding databases and in general did not become proficient at utilizing these resources or

receiving the funding alerts they desired. The funding alerts are crucial to an individual receiving the most current funding notices as they are daily or weekly emails specifically tied to an individual's research needs. We improved the delivery of this solution by limiting workshop size to five participants and promoting and providing individual training sessions.

In addition to publication of the Research Times and providing training to the campus community, I provide just-in-time funding information to campus leaders, primarily the Dean of Research. While these information requests often occur with little notification and under severe time restrictions, they have enabled me to become aware of emerging research trends on campus and in turn this has helped me provide relevant funding notices to the campus. And once again, the library has a presence in top-level research discussions and in meetings with campus leaders.

Effective librarians recognize that they must adapt solutions and procedures to each unique situation encountered. When implementing the solution to an identified informational need, it is important to remain flexible and open to new and revised delivery of the product or service.

Improve Delivery and Services

In order to stay relevant and current, it is important to constantly strive to improve service and delivery of your informational product. Collecting, vetting and disseminating funding notices provides a value-added service to the core constituency of faculty and other researchers. We have determined the best method to search these tools and publish a concise document for the campus community. However, like all other goods, a stale product is more likely to be overlooked.

Improving delivery of our services includes enhancing old and developing new products. We intend to experiment with providing a more visually interesting Research Times by creating the document in publishing software and then converting it to an Adobe Acrobat format. The email that is sent with the Research Times is now created in MS Publisher also and includes images and relevant news items that are tied to specific funding notices found in the accompanying *Research Times*. Blobaum (2007) suggests providing a brochure marketing the resources of his library's "Grants Information Service" to new faculty and staff. This is a simple technique to raise awareness of the service and information a grants librarian provides. One of my goals is to work with our publications department on campus to create a brochure detailing how we can assist faculty looking for external funding. I will certainly promote the library and our resources in this document to impress upon researchers the vital link between the information services the library provides and research success.

I have also begun training faculty, graduate students and staff individually and in smaller groups rather than in larger workshops. It is useful to have conversations with the individuals that are using the funding databases to insure that their research interests and needs are sufficiently covered in the *Research Times*. Most successful researchers are collaborating with other individuals on campus or other institutions and may be working on projects that are outside

the usual scope of business. It is vital to have both formal and informal conversations with faculty to assure coverage of all relevant areas in the *Research Times*.

An untapped area for our campus is gathering the intelligence to anticipate emerging trends in research funding. Placing the information gleaned from primary and secondary sources into the context of future funding trends is an area of potential growth as the Dean of Research would like more concentration on competitive intelligence gathering. In his article "The Competitive Intelligence Opportunity" Oder describes steps and skills that information professionals can employ to foster their competitive intelligence skills (Oder 2001). My service to the campus community would certainly be improved if and when I can provide the level of competitive intelligence service I would like to.

Future of this "bridged" position

After less than one year, the two part-time positions I held were blended into a full-time tenure track librarian position. Heavy lobbying by the library's director, coupled with much positive feedback by the Dean of Research, led to the creation of this new job. This job is challenging, interesting and engaging but like most information professionals, there are more projects and activities than time to complete these tasks. Currently, my position requires that I devote about 75% of the time to "library" duties – reference, teaching, research and other tasks. The remaining 25% of any given week is committed to Office of Research Program activities – monitoring funding sources, compiling the *Research Times*, training faculty and staff and various outreach responsibilities. While SUNY-ESF is a small institution, the Office of Research Programs could easily support (in terms of time required) a full-time librarian in this grants librarian/funding liaison position. There is plenty of work to do and much more than could be done in and with this job. Furthermore, the 25% of the time spent on these duties takes away from my academic librarian tasks and the library. Our library customers would certainly benefit from a staff member with more time to devote to the traditional library needs.

Conclusion

When building a bridge from the information services department to any other business or academic unit, it is important to articulate a series of steps to take that will benefit both departments and the entire institution. Recognize a need in your institution that a value-added information product can fill. Propose a series of steps to implement a solution to the recognized need. Put into action a solution or solutions to the identified need. Most important, constantly strive to improve the delivery of your product and the services you provide.

Through a willingness to adapt workplace proficiencies to a new model – integrating solid library research skills with locating funding opportunities and disseminating this information – we turned a former part-time position into a full-time tenure track librarian position with ties to the campus research office and central administration. This example can serve as a model for bridged information services linking the library with other vital business

interests. Promoting the connection between the library and academic, research or institutional achievement is vital to the sustained success of the information services department.

Endnotes

Adeyoyin, Samuel O. 2005. Strategic planning for marketing library services. *Library Management* 26(8): 494-507.

Albanese, Andrew R. 2003. Opportunity in the air: facing sweeping change, information professionals blaze new career paths. *Library Journal* 128(12): 36(3).

Blobaum, Paul. 2007. The Hospital Grantsmanship Center: A New Role for Hospital Librarians. *Journal of Hospital Librarianship* 7(1): 29-41.

Oder, Norman. 2001. The competitive intelligence opportunity. *Library Journal* 126(4): 42-44.

Ursin Cummings, Lara. 2007. Bursting out of the box: outreach to the millennial generation through student services programs. *Reference Services Review* 35(2): 285-295.