Life with Grant: Administering Manuscripts Cataloging Grant Projects

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Abstract

Administering manuscripts cataloging grant projects requires planning and flexibility. The author uses three separate retrospective conversion projects for personal papers at the Library of Virginia (formerly the Virginia State Library and Archives), the University of Virginia, and the Virginia Historical Society as the basis for discussing staffing, training, record quality, workflow, and quality control. The author points out the problem areas and the successes, and makes suggestions for future manuscripts cataloging retrospective conversion projects.

Introduction

Retrospective conversion of finding aids and typed catalog cards to machine-readable cataloging in local and national databases often requires outside funding and additional staffing. Many repositories, from small one-person shops to large research institutions, benefit from cooperative grant projects. Funding agencies look more favorably on applications that offer access to nationally important collections, with a thematically organized focus, and that combine the resources of several institutions. Proper and adequate planning before writing the grant proposal can avoid most problems with staffing, workflow, cataloging, and quality control. This article examines three manuscripts cataloging grant projects in Virginia repositories to discover the problems encountered, explicate lessons learned, and make recommendations for managing future retrospective cataloging projects.

Literature Review

There is a paucity of documentation in the archival literature on managing grant projects. Instead we find fragments that can be applied to writing grant proposals—practical applications of processing times and technical discussions

about MARC AMC cataloging and subject access.[1] Articles dealing with processing times cover initial arrangement and description but not the work involved in analyzing the resulting finding aid's suitability as the basis for retrospective conversion. Karen Temple Lynch and Thomas E. Lynch discuss rates of processing manuscripts and archives, and conclude "a rule-of-thumb rate for processing personal papers might fall into the range of 0.5 to 2 linear feet per full-time processor per week."[2] Thomas Wilsted provides formulas to compute the total cost of archival processing, including personnel, supplies, and shelving.[3] From benchtests, Lyndon Hart estimates how long it would take one archivist to fully process one cubic foot of pre-1800, pre-1900, and post-1900 personal papers.[4] A comparable study remains to be conducted on retrospective conversion of finding aids and catalog cards to machine-readable cataloging for personal papers collections.

Mark A. Vargas and Janet Padway noted that "retrospective conversion of archival cataloging and original cataloging of archival materials are resource-intensive enterprises and should be undertaken only after thorough planning."[5] Part of the preparation includes identifying staff with archival cataloging experience or aptitude for learning. In the Milwaukee Urban Archives at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Vargas and Padway realized that "the archivists had little experience as catalogers but found themselves in that role."[6] They pinpointed areas of concern that surfaced during the retrospective conversion project which could have been avoided with pre-planning. Understanding the quirks of the local online public access catalog (OPAC), deciding whether to create authority records in the local database, selecting collections needing improved description, and educating the library's general reference staff about the archives' collections all raise questions that need to be answered before writing a grant proposal.

The literature on grant writing does not deal specifically with managing an archival project, and the library literature concentrates on the technical aspects of outsourcing, quality control, and upgrading the existing catalog card information to comply with current cataloging standards and practice. There is little guidance for evaluating the existing finding aids for their inclusion of information for the required MARC fields, for redescribing or reprocessing a

[1] Karen Temple Lynch and Thomas E. Lynch, "Rates of Processing Manuscripts and Archives," *The Midwestern Archivist* 7, no. 1 (1982): 25–34; Harriet Ostroff, "Subject Access to Archival and Manuscript Material," *American Archivist* 53 (Winter 1990): 100–105.

[2] Lynch and Lynch, "Rates of Processing Manuscripts and Archives," 25, 32.

[3] Thomas Wilsted, *Computing the Total Cost of Archival Processing*, Technical Leaflet Series No. 2. Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, 1989.

[4] Lyndon Hart, 26 August 1994, "RE: Archival processing times [Discussion]," ARCHIVES listserv, available at <http://listserv.muohio. edu/archives/archives.html>.

[5] Mark A. Vargas and Janet Padway, "Catalog Them Again for the First Time," *Archival Issues* 17, no. 1 (1992): 49.

[6] Vargas and Padway, "Catalog Them Again for the First Time," 53.

collection to provide a relevant on-line record, or the decision-making process for what level of staff is necessary to handle the conversion.

We are all aware of the changes in finding aids as they have evolved over decades. Older finding aids suffer from the repository-specific focus, judgmental comments on the usefulness of an item or collection for research purposes, assumptions that a reference archivist would interpret the contents, and the "dead white men" orientation that ignored the records of women or minorities buried within larger collections. David Stoker editorialized that "providing network access to catalogue records of hitherto under-used materials will inevitably have the desirable effect of encouraging their use by individuals who had no idea they existed."[7] Do we, as archivists entering our catalog records into national databases, provide researchers with the outdated finding aid information simply to make them aware of our collections or do we redescribe the collections to provide meaningful records? Can we afford the time and staff to examine selected collections and reprocess them if necessary before cataloging?

Should we accept the personal, family, and corporate names as written in a finding aid or do the authority control work to maintain consistency in searching the database? James Maccaferri states that authority control "seeks to assure that the name . . . and subject headings used on bibliographic records are unique, uniform, and correctly formulated . . . and involves editing headings on existing bibliographic and authority records to achieve consistency."[8] Archivists accustomed to transcribing the names as used in the collection often rebel against authority control. Avra Michelson argued that archivists "cannot ignore the greater costs associated with excessive searching or failed retrieval" despite the high costs of implementing authority control.[9] But the consistency for researchers who can locate all collections dealing with one person without having to guess the variant spellings or nicknames far outweighs traditional practice within the institution. Archivists must learn to think beyond the needs of their own institution when embarking on a retrospective conversion project.

Vargas and Padway commented that "before automation, if users were to discover the archival collections, they had to presume that such material existed even though it was not in the OPAC and make the effort to inquire at the general reference desk, where the staff may or may not have known something about the archives."[10] This also assumed that a researcher knew which institution to write to or visit.

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[7] David Stoker, "Editorial: Computer Cataloguing in Retrospect," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 29 (December 1997): 177.

[8] James Tilio Maccaferri, "Managing Authority Control in a Retrospective Conversion Project," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 14, nos. 3/4 (1992): 146.

[9] Avra Michelson, "Description and Reference in the Age of Automation," *American Archivist* 50 (Spring 1987): 198.

[10] Vargas and Padway, "Catalog Them Again for the First Time," 53.

How has subject access been addressed in finding aids, if at all? Avra Michelson concluded in her 1986 study of archival indexing practices that archivists inconsistently chose and constructed subject headings.[11] How does the choice of subject headings affect useful retrieval in a stand-alone archival OPAC and in a national database? As Jackie Dooley has noted, "increasingly, archival descriptions are found in the same databases as books, periodicals, visual materials, museum objects, and other media."[12] Will we provide general or specific subject access? Dooley stresses that "if high recall is paramount, archivists should focus on providing broad subject access to all collections. If precision is also required, they must learn to assign specific subject descriptors in a consistent manner."[13]

Do we take what is typed on a catalog card, assume it is an accurate description of the collection, and reproduce it in an on-line database? How should we handle accretions—as separate catalog entries or should we combine them into one record? When catalog cards contain subject headings, do we check the latest version of *Library of Congress Subject Headings* and *Cataloging Services Bulletin* to verify that the headings haven't been updated, superceded, or cancelled? All of the above questions should be, but are not always, addressed before undertaking a grant project.

Ruth A. Inman suggests that "two types of skills are needed by catalogers for retrospective conversion and cataloging in general. The 'composing skill' used in the course of cataloging is much different from the editorial skill needed for proofreading."[14] This same difference can apply to archivists who create a narrative finding aid in a prescribed format but lack the technical skills to translate the contents into MARC coding. The project manager needs to ask if the processing archivists can learn and correctly apply cataloging principles, if book catalogers can adapt their knowledge and skills to encoding collections rather than single items, or if student assistants can be taught to fill in a preprinted workform from finding aids and catalog cards. Jane McGurn Kathman and Michael D. Kathman suggest that performance measures for student assistants "assist managers in planning and monitoring activities . . ., enable the students to know what is expected of them and decrease the need for constant supervision while improving the quality and quantity of their work."[15] How the students—or volunteers, in some cases—fit into the grant project should be part of the preplanning research.

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[11] Michelson, "Description and Reference in the Age of Automation," 192.

[12] Jackie M. Dooley, "Subject Indexing in Context," *American Archivist* 55 (Spring 1992): 347.

[13] Dooley, "Subject Indexing in Context," 351.

[14] Ruth A. Inman, "Are Title II-C Grants Worth It? The Effects of the Associated Music Library Group's Retrospective Conversion Project," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 39 (April 1995): 175.

[15] Jane McGurn Kathman and Michael D. Kathman, "Performance Measures for Student Assistants," *College & Research Libraries* 53 (July 1992): 300.

Case Studies

Three research repositories—the Library of Virginia (formerly the Virginia State Library and Archives), the University of Virginia Special Collections Department, and the Virginia Historical Society—each applied for and received grant funding between 1990 and 1994 to catalog selected manuscript collections. The Library of Virginia negotiated a two-year cooperative grant through the Research Libraries Group funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to catalog a portion of its personal papers manuscript collections relating to its strengths in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century southern history.[16] The University of Virginia received United States Department of Education Title II-C funding for one year for a projected three-year grant project to catalog all of its manuscript holdings.[17] The Virginia Historical Society, following its success with a cooperative rare books cataloging grant, received a Title III.2 Library Services and Construction Act subgrant to catalog a minimum of four hundred manuscript collections for itself and seven other small repositories in the Commonwealth that lacked the resources and staff to catalog their own collections.[18]

Project Organization

Building on the expertise gained in the two-year Governmental Records Project[19] to catalog state government records in the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) MARC AMC national database, the Library of Virginia participated with nine other repositories in a cooperative project to catalog manuscript collections.[20] The preplanning included identifying the major

[16] National Endowment for the Humanities, "An RLG Retrospective Conversion Project for Manuscript and Archival Collections," September 1990–August 1992. NEH funded the overall grant at $200,000 of which LVA received $11,093 and provided $16,054 in cost-sharing to create 525 MARC AMC records.

[17] U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Act Title II-C, Strengthening Research Library Resources Program, "Retrospective Conversion of the University of Virginia Library's Manuscripts and Archives," October 1992–September 1993.

[18] Virginia Historical Society, "History Library Network Manuscript Retrospective Conversion Project," October 1993–June 1994. The Virginia Historical Society received $19,355.12 from Library Services and Construction Act and contributed $26,164 in cost-sharing. The LSCA funds covered part of the cataloger's salary and benefits, telecommunications costs to connect to OCLC, and equipment (one computer for Gunston Hall and one for the Virginia Historical Society). The participants in this History Library Network project included the Charlottesville-Albemarle Historical Collection at the Jefferson-Madison Public Library, Gunston Hall, James Monroe Museum, Lloyd House of the Alexandria Public Library, Mariners Museum, Mount Vernon, Valentine Museum, and Virginia Historical Society.

[19] For a description of this NHPRC-funded cooperative grant project, March 1989–February 1991, see Marie B. Allen, "Intergovernmental Records in the United States; Experiments in Description and Appraisal," *Information Development* 8 (April 1992): 99–103.

[20] The other participating repositories were the American Antiquarian Society, Cornell University, Emory University, Hagley Museum and Library, Louisiana State University, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, University of Minnesota, University of Pennsylvania, and Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

strengths of the repository, selecting the collections, preparing a work plan and budget, and writing the Library of Virginia portion of the grant proposal. Because of the overlap between the end of one grant and the beginning of the second, for three months the project manager administered the two Research Libraries Group grants simultaneously.[21] While the archivist who would do the manuscripts cataloging wrote the grant proposal for the Library of Virginia, the University of Virginia and Virginia Historical Society administrators wrote their grants to hire an outside project cataloger.

At the Virginia Historical Society, administrators first planned to have the project cataloger train staff in each repository to catalog their own collections. During the two training sessions it became apparent that the project cataloger could catalog all of the collections more efficiently. Half of the repositories had librarians overseeing the collections, and the other half had curators or archivists. None had cataloging experience, but two were willing to try. The training sessions became orientations to the kinds of information needed from each repository to create catalog records, rather than training to create such records.

Funding

Funding agencies specify what they will pay for as part of the grant. Grant funding presents a challenge to institutions to match external dollars with either in-kind services and/or monetary contributions. Will the grant pay for salaries, equipment, and/or computer connection charges? What unanticipated hidden costs might a repository incur? Will the grant pay for what you actually need or are you adapting yourself to the grant's requirements? How the balance is struck between cost-sharing and grant dollars requested can contribute to feeling that the grant was worthwhile or that it cost more than the repository received. In order to reach the percentage of in-kind services cost-sharing required by the funding agency, for example, the Library of Virginia needed to purchase one computer and printer and contribute the prorated time of five archivists. The University of Virginia's costs were more substantial: five computer workstations, furniture, and OCLC dial-up charges. The Virginia Historical Society covered two-thirds of the salary and benefits of the project cataloger and travel to the other repositories for site visits. The choice between using grant money to purchase computers or for salaries often depends on what the funding agency will allow.

Funding agencies require written reports and documentation on how the money is spent. For the personal papers project, as with the Government Records Project, the Research Libraries Group received the grant money

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[21] Although the Government Records Project grant ran through February 1991, the Library of Virginia completed its contracted 2,624 records in November 1990 leaving three months for the evaluation phase. The overlap required a separate spreadsheet to account for the time the same people worked on both grants.

which it reallocated to the participating repositories. Each institution received a different amount of money based on its calculated cost to catalog the collections specified in the grant proposal. The Research Libraries Group set quarterly goals based on production and reimbursed the institutions their share of the grant each quarter when they reached their goal.

Part of the project manager's responsibility at the Library of Virginia was to prepare the quarterly statistical report to the Research Libraries Group, listing the number of RLIN records created. The project manager designed a spreadsheet to track the hours worked and wages earned in order to keep the project within the budget. Both the University of Virginia and the Virginia Historical Society received lump-sum payments at the beginning of the projects, and the project cataloger only needed to write one end-of-year report on accomplishments.

Staffing

Whether to use existing staff or hire a project cataloger often depends upon the organization's structure, regulations governing the hiring of contracted employees, the salary and benefits (or lack thereof) to be offered, the expertise and availability of internal staff, the external pool of qualified applicants, and what the grant will allow.

Can the existing staff absorb an increased workload? Is there enough staff to meet the quota set by the grant? What other work can be postponed during the grant period? Does the staff need additional training to work on the project? Between the time of submitting a grant proposal and notification of the award, internal, unpredictable staff changes can seriously affect the best-laid plans of grant writers and administrators. It is imperative to consider carefully who is going to actually do the day-to-day production work and have contingency plans in case that person is promoted, reassigned, or quits. By the time NEH notified the Research Libraries Group about the successful funding for the personal papers project at the Library of Virginia, the project manager had assumed supervisory duties that precluded devoting 100 percent of her time to processing, cataloging, and working on the grant.[22]

The Virginia state government allowed agencies to hire part-time workers for a maximum of 1,500 hours per year and paid no benefits (health insurance, sick or vacation leave), but charged a percentage against the grant to pay social security and federal taxes. Archivists were not included on the state-approved list of positions for which temporary employees could be recruited. These restrictions limited the level at which an employee could be hired and paid. Those

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[22] The original grant request from NEH was $355,045 of which the Library of Virginia would receive $31,695 to create 1,500 records. They had to proportionately decrease their goal by the 65 percent drop in funding.

hired would have to be willing to work twenty-eight hours per week for fifty-two weeks or forty hours a week for thirty-seven-and-a-half weeks a year. To supplement the permanent staff, the archives hired the part-time cataloger who was completing the cataloging on the Government Records Project grant. Hiring an experienced cataloger required only minimal orientation when switching from the government records to personal papers workform. The University of Virginia and the Virginia Historical Society, however, could hire a professional archivist at a competitive salary plus all benefits, because they were not bound by state government hiring regulations.

One of the drawbacks of hiring a project archivist is not having that person's input into the initial planning process. What the administration conceives as a realistic plan on paper does not always work once the project archivist assesses the goals and compares the production expectations with the catalogability of the finding aids. The University of Virginia retrospective conversion of 10,873 literary and historical manuscript and archival collections expected one full-time cataloger, two paraprofessional staff, and four student assistants to create three to four thousand MARC AMC records each year from catalog cards created over a forty-year period. It became apparent that this was unrealistic. Conversely, the Virginia Historical Society underestimated the number of collections that could be cataloged during the grant project because they hired an experienced project cataloger/southern historian who needed no orientation or training before becoming productive.

Catalogers

In some repositories, one staff member catalogs all materials from books to manuscripts; in others, the technical services department maintains cataloging as its sole responsibility but excludes manuscripts and archives; in still others, the duties are split along material format lines.[23] The integration of the archives within the parent institution often determines its relationship with the cataloging department. During the grant project, the library and the archives at the Library of Virginia occupied the same building but in opposite wings with separate staffs, stacks, reading rooms, and access to collections. The historic separation between the two divisions led to the archives joining the Research Libraries Group to catalog its archival and manuscript collections in RLIN, while the library side provided access nationally via OCLC. For its OPAC the library used the Virginia Tech Library System (VTLS). The archives also decided to use VTLS, but to create a separate catalog for the archival and manuscript collections to be able to customize the public display screens and to provide keyword searching, a feature that the library did not offer.

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[23] Vargas and Padway, "Catalog Them Again for the First Time," 50.

To move from a paper-based finding aid environment to an on-line system, the Library of Virginia archives division hired a cataloging librarian to become the processing section's automation archivist. The original plan to have all the processing archivists funnel their finding aids through the automation archivist who would transfer the information to MARC AMC workforms and enter them in VTLS worked for current accessions but would create a bottleneck during a grant project.

When the archives joined the Research Libraries Group, three processing archivists who were formerly librarians attended week-long training on how to catalog in MARC AMC for RLIN. The four remaining archivists—three of whom came to the profession with history degrees only—preferred to remain outside the automation thrust.

At the University of Virginia, however, because the Special Collections Department organizationally reported to the assistant director for technical services, the manuscripts cataloger and the cataloging department staff communicated much more openly. Not until the grant project promised to add over ten thousand new records to the database did the cataloging department take an active interest in the manuscript contributions to the shared on-line catalog. The manuscripts division within Special Collections separates the processing from the cataloging. The processing archivists do not catalog, but forward their finding aids to one professional manuscripts cataloger to create MARC AMC records and enter them in the OPAC. Combined with new accessions and the backlog, this presented much more work than one cataloger could handle. While the Library of Virginia book catalogers knew nothing of the cataloging grant projects the archives pursued, the University of Virginia catalogers contributed their time and resources to the manuscripts cataloging grant project.

The Virginia Historical Society had a fully developed technical services department for books and serials and a separate processing section for manuscripts. The society's library professionals—both catalogers and manuscript processors—prepared detailed catalog cards for their collections. In the early 1990s the catalogers began adding their book records to OCLC, and the processors soon followed with manuscript collections. But because the library did not have its own OPAC until 1998, they continued to have OCLC generate card sets. The other seven small repositories forming the History Library Network with the Virginia Historical Society joined OCLC to provide access to their holdings, but none had a local OPAC and only one had an OCLC terminal.

Deciding who will catalog the manuscript collections depends not only on the availability of staff but on in-house expertise and support. While the lack of communication between archivists and catalogers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee hampered Vargas and Padway,[24] the archivists had the expertise of catalogers to call upon had they expressed their needs and expectations more

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[24] Vargas and Padway, "Catalog Them Again for the First Time," 51–52.

clearly. The Library of Virginia archivists relied on the staff at the Research Libraries Group and archival colleagues outside the institution to answer their questions. The University of Virginia and the Virginia Historical Society infrastructures supported the project cataloger.

Record Quality

When designing a retrospective manuscripts cataloging grant project, it is important to consider the source for the cataloging record. The older a repository, the more likely that the finding aids were written following outdated formats and styles and may generally lack the components needed to create a modern MARC record. Evaluating the collections to be cataloged not only for their topical, temporal, or geographical relevance to the project, but also for their compliance with current standards of description will give a realistic idea of the magnitude of the preparatory work needed in the pre-grant phase. From minor to major amounts of reprocessing may be necessary before collections can be cataloged. Given the increased workload archivists face as repositories lose staff positions to budget cuts or attrition, or as the number of collections accessioned increases, each repository must choose between creating minimal level cataloging records in the hopes of someday enhancing them or creating full-level records the first time. Archivists no longer have the luxury of spending days conducting research for a single collection's record. The decision to create minimal-level records ensures that this is all that will ever be done. Striking a balance between the two extremes by selecting which collections will receive full treatment and which will receive minimal treatment is crucial to wise allocation of time and resources. In the last ten years, granting agencies such as the NEH and the U.S. Department of Education diverted funds away from initial processing and reprocessing. With the requirement to contribute the catalog records to national databases such as OCLC or RLIN, repositories must conform to national standards. For example, a catalog record needs to contain at least one Library of Congress subject heading. Bringing old finding aids up to current standards is a labor-intensive, time-consuming task.

In writing the grant application, the University of Virginia's library administration relied on the advice of an outside consultant who estimated that the retrospective conversion of the entire collection could be accomplished in three years working solely from the catalog cards without doing authority work, consulting the finding aids, control folders, or collections. The OPAC would simply replicate the card catalog with its outdated subject headings, minimal description, and inconsistencies and nonstandard forms of personal and corporate names. No attempt was made to evaluate the collections for the degree of difficulty in cataloging based on the completeness of the catalog card, the currency of the finding aid, the complexity of the collection, or lack of adequate description. After

submitting the proposal, the library administration instead wanted full-level, accurate records ready to tapeload to OCLC and RLIN, and that took a lot more time per record than the proposed workplan allowed.

Work Flow

Because the Library of Virginia processing archivists lacked an in-depth understanding of MARC AMC and cataloging rules, the automation archivist reviewed the printouts both for typographical and coding errors. This created a bottleneck and would have posed a potential workflow problem had the quota of records been larger. The archives acquired, processed, and cataloged new accessions throughout the two-year grant period; but the grant work received priority handling because of the quarterly quota and reimbursement for salaries.

Even though the Library of Virginia renegotiated the number of records to be created from 1,500 down to 525, proportional to the decreased funding, it still could not meet this goal with one part-time cataloger. Therefore, it enlisted other full-time archivists to assist with the cataloging. The project manager assigned each archivist five years of the *Annual Report of Accessions* to identify recent personal papers collections to catalog. The part-time cataloger and project manager cataloged the collections specifically named in the grant application. The project manager already had devised a printed, encoded RLIN workform for personal papers collections to fill in and give to the data entry person. For the grant a revision of the workform provided prompts and hints for catalogers accustomed to dealing with maps, and state and local government records (see Appendix). To relieve the catalogers from repetitious writing, certain key fields that appeared in every record, the structure within each field, and the field order to maintain consistency across records were preprinted on the form. The same form was adapted from RLIN-specific coding to NOTIS for the University of Virginia and then to OCLC for the Virginia Historical Society. Even though the workform contained preprinted fields and their definitions, not every archivist wrote the information in the correct field. The project manager reviewed the workforms created by the archivists to ensure their completeness, the use of appropriate subject headings, and adequate and relevant description.

Prior to the arrival of the project cataloger at the University of Virginia, the department head hired the two library assistants, and the project supervisor (who was the permanent manuscripts cataloger) hired and trained the student assistants. The project supervisor had the students start photocopying the shelf list cards beginning with the earliest accessions. This created a problem: the oldest cards contained the least information and necessitated consulting the control folders, finding aids, and often the collections themselves. The added research slowed down the cataloging process. The project staff had to flip the process and catalog the recent accessions that had the

most accurate and most complete description, then work backward to come anywhere close to creating three thousand records the first year. By examining the shelf list cards and control folders, the project staff realized that they could not breeze through this retrospective conversion project the way the consultant had suggested. The project cataloger trained the library assistants in manuscripts cataloging and set monthly goals for each employee, goals which all found impossible to meet.[25]

The majority of shelf list cards needed extensive revision and fuller description before they could be entered into the OPAC. Some needed separate descriptions of unrelated items grouped together that were purchased from one dealer, while others needed to be combined with later accretions. The intricacies of separating and combining left the catalogers with a skewed count of collections described. As the project staff moved further back in accessions, work proceeded more slowly as they unraveled and rewove descriptions. Necessary, but not realistically foreseen, was some amount of reprocessing even if it were only a matter of redescribing from the original documents what the shelf list card failed to record. Extensive reprocessing was set aside for the processing unit to complete separately from the grant project.

Collections previously reported to NUCMC were separated from later accretions not reported; the accretions were then cumulated and described together to create a separate record while maintaining the integrity of the original NUCMC record. The project staff searched RLIN to obtain the printouts of University of Virginia records described by NUCMC and entered into that national database. Midway through the project they found out that the RLIN NUCMC tapes were being downloaded into OCLC and had to adjust their procedures to prevent tapeloading the same record from the OPAC to OCLC.[26]

A variety of approaches needed to be instituted for the History Library Network project at the Virginia Historical Society. Some of the repositories had finding aids or card catalogs of their holdings. Others (Mount Vernon, Gunston Hall, James Monroe Museum) interfiled all accessions in one chronological order because the collections dealt with one person, one family, or a succession of property owners. The project cataloger visited Gunston Hall and the James Monroe Museum to survey their collections and determine how best to create logical groupings of the manuscripts, then returned to catalog them onsite. Lloyd House and Mariners Museum librarians mailed their workforms to the project cataloger based at the Virginia Historical Society. The project cataloger visited

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[25] For 3,000 records, the project cataloger divided the work among four student assistants and two library assistants to average 40 records each per month plus the project cataloger's contribution of 120 records. The complexity of the collections thwarted this goal.

[26] The initial ninety-six records on the tape stayed in the test database and were never dumped into the main database. Tapeloading to RLIN and OCLC continued until the University of Virginia switched from NOTIS to SIRSI around September 1996. When the systems staff solves a technical problem, the University of Virginia will resume tapeloading.

the Charlottesville-Albemarle Historical Collection and Valentine Museum to assist them in selecting the collections and returned to examine problematic collections. Mount Vernon hired a part-time graduate student to write descriptions of the papers of individual Washington family members and of discrete parts of the collection that they then sent to be cataloged. The Virginia Historical Society provided a list of targeted collections to encode in MARC AMC from their detailed shelf list cards.

Quality Control

Because of the relatively low number of records being created for the personal papers project at the Library of Virginia, the library used one data entry person whose work the automation archivist proofread and corrected in daily batches. The data entry person made the corrections to the saved RLIN record, passed it into the production mode, and batch downloaded them to the local OPAC.[27]

At the University of Virginia the library assistants and project cataloger proofread and corrected the students' work before two other student assistants entered the data from the workforms into the OPAC. The staff set up macros on the OPAC terminals to speed up data entry and to eliminate the need to proofread every field. The project cataloger edited the final printouts every night at home and corrected them on-line the next day to save an extra proofreading step instead of returning them to the student assistants to correct. One of the library assistants specialized in MARC MAP and both assistants combined accretions with existing OPAC records as well as created MARC AMC workforms for the more complex collections which were beyond the students' abilities.

Early in the project, the staff realized that the consultant's recommendation not to do authority work did not fit into the library's need to have a clean catalog. The project cataloger and library assistants searched the name authority file in OCLC and downloaded authority records not already in the OPAC. Adding this step increased the uniformity of names in the catalog but also added to the workload of the catalogers. Philosophically, they knew that to do a quick-and-dirty job of data entry with the assumption that someone in the near-to-distant future would go back and clean it up was unrealistic. So they opted for fewer but more accurate records in the database.

Although the student assistants were remarkably prolific in creating workforms, their inexperience produced a substantial amount of work to proofread and correct before data entry. Their work always required extensive revision. It

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[27] The archives hired temporary data entry people through Kelly Services. During the Government Records Project they went through a succession of people totally unfamiliar with cataloging until finding an intelligent, sharp young man who quickly recognized coding errors or omissions and corrected them.

was more efficient to sort the shelf list photocopies by degree of difficulty and topic (literary or historical) and assign batches to each student assistant based on his or her interest and ability. By the end of the project, the staff had created 2,079 workforms but entered only 1,384 in the OPAC.[28]

For the History Library Network, the project cataloger created the MARC records with OCLC's Cataloging Micro Enhancer (CATME) software on separate diskettes for each repository, printed the records, and mailed batches of them to the contacts at each repository to proofread and edit. When they either returned the proofed copy or phoned in their corrections, the project cataloger made the changes in CATME then batch-loaded the records to OCLC, keeping separate statistics for each repository and reporting the monthly progress to the whole group.

Public Access

Designing how the records will display on-line may be an adjunct benefit with a grant project, especially when the institution is in the early stages of automation. At the same time that the Library of Virginia embarked on the Government Records Project grant and became a member of the Research Libraries Group, it also negotiated with VTLS to customize its OPAC to accept archival records. Because the library division at the Library of Virginia already used VTLS as its book catalog, the archives division decided to use it as well. Rather than integrate the archival records, the administration opted to set up a parallel catalog with customized field displays such as "creator" rather than "author" and to offer keyword searchability that the library's database did not yet have. Until at least three thousand archival records filled the database and the archives and VTLS resolved all the display problems, the catalog was not available to researchers.

The administration felt that researchers would be frustrated by the meagerness of the database and would be set up for disappointment when their expectations of finding collection records were not met. During this period the project manager also faced the task of educating the reference archivists in how to use the archives OPAC and sought their help to refine it for better reference use. RLIN was only available on one computer in the processing section, and the data entry person received priority access. The project manager planned and executed training and orientation sessions with the reference archivists, most of whom were unaccustomed to, or at least uncomfortable with, using the OPAC and printed a guide sheet to help them with their searches. The opportunity to

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[28] Of the 2,079 workforms created (69.3% of the annual goal of 3,000), 1,483 were proofread and corrected (71.3%), and 18 records were combined with existing records in the OPAC; 93.3% of the workforms proofread and corrected were entered into the OPAC.

work on the grant focused attention on the personal papers and afforded the archives the chance to share information with researchers across the country via RLIN about a portion of the historically significant manuscript collections in the Library of Virginia.[29]

At the University of Virginia, the project staff coordinated with the screen design committee to customize the OPAC display screen for manuscript materials in its integrated catalog. The library already had help screens on-line to assist patrons in recognizing the component parts of a catalog record. The Virginia Historical Society did not have an OPAC until 1998. The manuscripts processing section typed voluminous, copiously detailed catalog cards for the public card catalog in addition to preparing finding aids for large collections. The retrospective conversion project created MARC records for OCLC, which provided printed catalog cards; only two OCLC terminals were available in the technical services department.

Outcomes

The Library of Virginia insisted that every processing archivist also catalog his or her own collections, and the level of competency varied widely among the staff. Of the three archivists who received the initial week-long MARC AMC cataloging training from an RLIN staff member for the Government Records Project grant, only one remained employed at the Library of Virginia when the personal papers grant project began. The non-librarian archivists needed a crash course in archival cataloging. Despite sending everyone to the two-day "Understanding the USMARC Format for Archival and Manuscripts Control" workshop[30] to provide them with the same basic information, each archivist absorbed the information and practiced it with different degrees of skill. The reluctance of some to do what they considered library work manifested itself in inadequately described collections. Consequently, closer supervision and review of their work was required of the project manager. Two archivists accidentally cataloged the same collection with intriguing results that exemplify the inexact science of manuscripts cataloging, as Avra Michelson documented.[31] One wrote an excellent description of the collection in the 520 scope note field but failed to assign appropriate and sufficient number of subject headings. The other wrote a cursory description but selected pertinent subject headings. Combining the best of both created one good record. The necessity to catalog daily

[29] The ten institutions added approximately seven thousand records to the RLIN database as part of the grant project.

[30] The workshop, taught by Kathleen Roe (New York State Archives) and Debbie Pendleton (Alabama Department of Archives and History), was offered by the Society of American Archivists at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference meeting in Alexandria, Virginia, on October 31 and November 1, 1990.

[31] Michelson, "Description and Reference in the Age of Automation," 192–208.

during the project reinforced the skills learned in the workshop, and the repetitive, regular practice coupled with positive feedback increased some of the archivists' confidence in their cataloging abilities.

One of the benefits of the University of Virginia retrospective conversion project was the amount of new material discovered in the collections. Much of it had been unrecognized, deemed unimportant at the time of receipt, or poorly cataloged. For example, a Fitz John Porter document on the second battle of Bull Run in the Civil War originally contained a notation in the catalog record as "whining by a disgruntled Yankee." In another collection, John Randolph of Roanoke gave instructions to an "unidentified ship captain" who turned out to be the young Matthew C. Perry. The old cataloging emphasized politics and war, ignoring women, social history, economics, and slavery. The project's cataloging discovered materials relevant to current research topics, drew out local history connections, provided a breadth of subject access, and highlighted single items of unusual interest among larger collections.

The University of Virginia grant project staff produced records of uniformly high quality. They carefully reviewed previous catalog records, modern collection descriptions, and the collections themselves to provide succinct and accurate summaries designed to meet the needs of contemporary researchers in a variety of disciplines. The University of Virginia's statistics show a 17.5 percent increase in patron usage of manuscript collections during the grant project and an 11 percent increase during the following fiscal year. The number of research visits by these patrons increased 6.5 percent during the grant. Interestingly, in each year immediately after the first grant and a second one in 1994–95, the in-person patron registration and number of research visits steadily declined. The staff believes the use of manuscript collections continued to increase, but requests shifted from in-person to e-mailed, faxed, phoned, and mailed requests from outside Charlottesville. They did not begin keeping these statistics until 1995. The supposition that researchers discover the collections through on-line database searches and request either additional information or photocopies indicates a change in researcher habits and methodology.[32]

During a nine-month period, the History Library Network project at the Virginia Historical Society contributed 494 catalog records to OCLC. Although they originally expected each repository to contribute fifty records, some did not have that many collections and others exceeded the goal.[33] Because the pro-

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[32] Unfortunately, the big push to catalog the collections in MARC AMC was abandoned. The University of Virginia took advantage of an available grant to do encoded archival description for the finding aids. The manuscripts cataloger does the current retrospective conversion work at the rate of one to five records per day on the literary collections whose finding aids are now encoded and the historical collections with poor catalog records, no finding aids, or finding aids in need of rewriting.

[33] The final tally per repository shows: Charlottesville-Albemarle Historical Collection, 48; Gunston Hall, 48; James Monroe Museum, 33; Lloyd House, 54; Mariners Museum, 106; Mount Vernon, 50; Valentine Museum, 54; and Virginia Historical Society, 101.

ject cataloger completed the last six months part-time, it is conceivable that the Mariners Museum and Virginia Historical Society each might have been able to contribute one hundred additional records had she remained full-time. The challenge for Virginia Historical Society records lay in distilling the extensive catalog card descriptions into a cogent summary and including the most important subject headings.

Conclusions

The experience of these grant projects leads to several conclusions about administration, staffing, and record quality.

Administration:

- The staff must have input into the plan for the project in order for a work plan to meet or exceed its goals. For example, the Library of Virginia staff had control over development of its work plan and consequently the library created more records than were required.[34]
- When writing a grant proposal for manuscript retrospective conversion projects, it is important to consult with a manuscripts cataloger who is familiar with your collections if you plan to hire a project cataloger.
- Target specific collections rather than attempt to catalog the entire archives if the holdings are large and the finding aids were created more than ten year ago.
- Aim for a more reasonable annual goal. What at first glance appeared to be a simple retrospective conversion project at the University of Virginia proved over the course of one year to contain complex decision-making strategies and unrealistic expectations.[35]
- Be realistic about how many records can be created given the complexity of the collections and the adequacy of the existing finding aids.
- When selecting which collections to catalog, do a sampling of types of collections (level, age, and content of existing descriptions); and benchmark cataloging time for collections representing these factors. Despite

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[34] In addition to the required 525, they added 52 additional personal papers collection records, plus 1 organizational record, 17 business records, 6 church records, 77 genealogical records, 70 maps, 1 county government record, 19 state government and 55 agency history records, and 3,353 Bible records.

[35] The University of Virginia did apply for and receive another one-year Title II-C grant for $123,621 to continue the manuscripts cataloging, October 1994–September 1995 (with a six-month no-cost extension), but without the expertise of the initial grant staff who had all accepted permanent positions elsewhere. This grant focused on major historical collections processed before 1960, papers and architectural drawings of Thomas Jefferson, and collections that appeared in multi-collection guides such as the "Guide to Revolutionary War Collections." Because of the tighter focus, they cataloged 1,800 collections in the grant year plus another 601 during a six-month extension, still 99 records short of the original goal of 2,500.

the suggestion in the literature that an average of two to two-and-one-half hours work per record is the norm,[36] a realistic assessment of your own collections' needs will provide more accurate data for your retrospective conversion project.

Staffing:

- Hire an archivist with expertise in the subject matter of the collections. The project manager/project cataloger developed an expertise in Virginia and southern history over the course of four years that greatly facilitated the application of *Library of Congress Subject Headings*. The number of catalog records created per person increased with each project.[37]
- When dedicating 100 percent of work time to cataloging, productivity rose.
- The most knowledgeable and experienced cataloger did not always contribute cataloging records because of administrative responsibilities, thus depriving the project of these skills.
- Ensure that the archivists have and maintain cataloging skills through regular practice.
- Using student assistants who lack manuscripts cataloging experience to create workforms increases the proofreading and editing responsibilities of higher-level staff and creates a production backlog.
- Student assistant tasks should be geared to their ability.

Record Quality:

- The more people engaged in the project, the more variable the quality of records, and the more time it takes to review them.
- The older a repository is, the greater the likelihood of significant variations in the quality and scope of finding aids, and the longer it will take to catalog the collections.
- These grant experiences demonstrate that we do a disservice to our staff and to researchers to force archivists with no library cataloging training to become intermittent catalogers. If processing archivists have an understanding of what makes a good finding aid and can write one, then cataloging archivists can create MARC AMC records that will

[36] Patricia Cloud, "RLIN, AMC, and Retrospective Conversion: A Case Study, " *Midwestern Archivist* 11 (1986): 125–34; Patricia D. Cloud, "The Cost of Converting to MARC AMC: Some Early Observations," *Library Trends* 36 (Winter 1988): 573–83.

[37] In twenty-four months, one FTE created 24 records per month at the Library of Virginia; in twelve months, four FTEs created 43 records each per month at the University of Virginia; and in nine months, one PTE created 54.8 records per month at the Virginia Historical Society.

provide enough information for the researcher to know if a collection potentially would be useful.

Preplanning will ensure greater success with a manuscripts cataloging retrospective conversion grant. Managing the project includes not only meeting the numerical goals but knowing how to reach them with proper staffing, a clear understanding of the complexity of the project, a realistic workplan, and the skills and tools necessary to do the job while creating an enjoyable experience.

A p p e n d i x

PERSONAL PAPERS WORKFORM

In house use:	Coded by: (your initials)	Verified:	Input:	Proof:

RLIN Fixed Fields
ID: is filled in by the Data Entry person.

PC = i-inclusive, s-single, n-no date, q-questionable date

BLT: b___ = a-miscellaneous bound collection *(if a, then a book workform must be completed first, complete fields 580, & 773 added to this workform.)* c-collection, [notes/charts].

PD = date(s), if single date item use first blank (1970/___); if inclusive but for same year (Jan. 1970/June 1970) put year in both blanks (1970/1970).

L = change if not English, mul for multi-lingual, etc.

RTYP:d ST:s EL:7 CC:9554 BLT:b__ DCF:a CSC:d PROC:b PP:vau L:eng
PC:__ PD:____/____ REP: __ MMD: __ OR:? POL: __ DM:__ RR: __
COL: __ RML: __ GEN: __ BSE: __

RLIN Variable fields (end all fields with a period)

Cataloging Source	041 ₿₿ Vi≠c Vi≠eappm
Author	100 __ ₿ _____
Title (≠f for inclusive dates)	245 00 _____
	_____
Physical Description	300 ₿₿ _____≠fv. (_____leaves,_____p.). [&/or]
	300 ₿₿ _____≠f leaves [or] pages. [&/or]
	300 ₿₿ _____≠fcubic ft.
Reproduction note	533 ₿₿ _____

(state if partial reproduction with ≠3, ex. ≠3In part, ≠aphotocopies, if entire collection is reproduced with various methods then, ≠aPhotocopies and negative photostats).

Biographical Note
(occupation/residence)

545 ₡₡ _____

Summary

520 0₡ [Summary]: _____

Finding Aid (item/
folder cross out
inapplicable term)

555 8₡ Inventory≠bavailable in repository≠citem/folder
        level control.

Access Restrictions

506 ₡₡ _____

Terms for Use

540 ₡₡ _____

Pref. Citation

524 ₡₡ [Cite as:] _____
        Accession _____, Personal Papers Collection,
        Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.

ADDITIONAL 5XX FIELDS

Subject/Name	600/610 ____	_____
	600/610 ____	_____
	600/610 ____	_____
	600/610 ____	_____
Subject/LC	650/651 ƀ0	_____
650 topical	650/651 ƀ0	_____
651 geograph.	650/651 ƀ0	_____
	650/651 ƀ0	_____
	650/651 ƀ0	_____
Occupation of author	656 ƀ7	_____ .≠2aat
Form/Genre	655 ƀ7	_____ .≠2aat
(alphabetical)	655 ƀ7	_____ .≠2aat
	655 ƀ7	_____ .≠2aat
	655 ƀ7	Personal papers.≠2aat
Added entry	700/710 ____	_____
	700/710 ____	_____
(alphabetical)	700 ____	_____ ≠ecorrespondent.
	700 ____	_____ ≠ecorrespondent.
	700 ____	_____ ≠ecorrespondent.
	700 ____	_____ ≠ecorrespondent.
	700 ____	_____ ≠ecorrespondent.
	700 ____	_____ ≠ecorrespondent.
	700 ____	_____ ≠ecorrespondent.
	700 ____	_____ ≠ecorrespondent.
Other title	740 01	Personal papers collection; ≠n _____ .
Location	851 ƀƀ	Virginia State Library and Archives, ≠bArchives and Records Division, ≠c11th St. at Capitol Sq., Richmond, Va. 23219.

ARC SEGMENT

(Process Control Display Permit) PCDP: N
(Process Control ID#) PCID: _____
(Accession#) ACCN _____ (Accession Date) ___/___/___
(Material Specified) MATL_____
(Source) SRCE_____
(Address) ADDR_____
(Method of Acquisition: i.e. Gift, Lent for copying)
     MTHD_____
(Owner: if different from source) OWNR_____
  [owner address]_____
(Action ID#) ACID __1__ (Action Display Permit) ADP____
(Action) ACT _____ Received_____
(Time of Action) TAC ____/____/____ (Time of Future Action) ____/____/____
(Action ID#) ACID __2__ (Action Display Permit) ADP____
(Action ACT _____ Described _____
(Time of Action) TAC ____/____/____ (Time of Future Action) ____/____/____
(Action Agent: Processor) AGT _____
(Action ID#) ACID __3__ (Action Display Permit) ADP____
(Action) ACT _____ Preserve _____
(Time of Action) TAC____/____/____ (Time of Future Action) ____/____/____
(Method) METH _____