Collaborative Librarianship

Volume 10 | Issue 4 Article 4

3-19-2019

A-Z List Migration: Employing Collaborative Project Management at the University of Guelph McLaughlin Library

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Keywords

subscription databases, electronic resources, LibGuides, project management, collaboration, access, migration

From the Field

A-Z List Migration: Employing Collaborative Project Management at the University of Guelph McLaughlin Library

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Abstract

From 2003 – 2016, the University of Guelph McLaughlin Library maintained a custom ColdFusion database of databases. Motivated by a myriad of issues, a project working group set the goal of decommissioning the ColdFusion A-Z list and migrating to SpringShare LibGuides platform A-Z list feature. This article focuses on our A-Z list migration, highlighting the collaborative approach we took to curating our list of journal databases and operationalising and distributing this shared task across several teams within our library. This article describes our project and approach, lessons learned, recommendations and best practices, as well as future directions.

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Introduction

Libraries are stewards of information, but more importantly, they strive to provide access to these information stores. In the pre-digital world, libraries had a single system, the trusty card catalogue, which contained a card for each physical resource held within the library. In the post-digital world, libraries struggle to provide authorised users with access to the array of digital and non-digital resources. While these various categories of electronic and physical resources may be clear to library staff, library users are often confused by these artificial silos. For example, in academic libraries, much of the journal article content sought after by students and researchers is locked away in vendor databases. When library staff use the term 'database', they are referring to something very specific, yet this nebulous term is often quite meaningless to our users.

At the University of Guelph Library, we struggled with precisely this issue. Users came to our

website looking for 'journal articles', which vendors had locked away in 'journal databases' which we, in turn, struggled to advertise in a way that was meaningful to users. These vendor journal databases often used terms and categories which were unfamiliar with our users, adding to the complexity and confusion they experienced.

This article discusses the history of our journal database list struggles, from integrating into the catalogue, to the creation of a custom ColdFusion database of databases, to an A-Z list of databases within our SpringShare LibGuides platform A-Z list feature. While we touch on the technological changes, the focus of this article is not on the SpringShare LibGuides platform, but on the collaborative approach we took curating our list of journal databases, and operationalising and distributing this shared task across several teams within our library.

Literature Review

A-Z Lists in Libraries

Hoeppner notes that there is very little literature specifically focused on A-Z lists and this is consistent with our findings.[1] A small number of articles discussing A-Z lists show libraries migrating their A-Z lists from custom applications to vendor solutions such as SpringShare LibGuides platform A-Z list feature. This trend is demonstrated in articles by Hoeppner[2], Tobias[3], and Arnold[4]. There are a few articles discussing libraries maintaining two parallel database lists. For example, Arnold notes that prior to migrating to one single A-Z list, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Libraries maintained and updated both their in-house system and the LibGuides A-Z Database List.[5] Similarly, Tobias describes maintaining both the homegrown system and the LibGuides A-Z Database List at Michigan State University Libraries' to complete necessary clean-up tasks.[6]

Challenges of A-Z Lists

There are many challenges inherent in the construction and maintenance of A-Z lists, including determining what resources should be added to the list and dealing with ongoing maintenance. A few articles highlight the importance of policies, criteria, and workflows to deal with these challenges. Tobias discusses the selection criteria that Michigan State University Libraries' used to determine which free resources would migrate to their new A-Z list.[7] Similarly, Hoeppner provides tips for managing A-Z lists, including creating selection criteria, weeding outdated entries, and dealing with database name changes.[8]

Project Management

Project management skills are necessary to successfully manage a large project in an academic library. Pinto and Slevin define projects as having a specific start and end, predetermined goals, a group of "complex or interrelated activities", and a contained budget. They further suggest that there are four stages of the project life cycle: conceptualisation, planning, implementation, and termination.[9] Atkins confirms these assertions in his article where he states that project management includes three components (knowledge, techniques, and tools) which are used to achieve a project's goals.[10] Specific tactics, such as Bourne's four-step guideline, highlight the importance of "...identifying, prioritizing, mapping the stakeholders and then implementing various communication strategies."[11] When executing projects in academic libraries it is beneficial to understand the strategic approaches of more formalized project management methodologies.

Working Collaboratively

Engaging in projects is not new to libraries, however, in the past it might have been less formalised and less focused on collaboration.[12] It is important to recognise the connection between

strong project management approaches and a productive collaborative relationship. According to Hurwitz and Hurwitz, collaboration is necessary when any of the following criteria are met: the challenge is complicated, necessitates the knowledge and skills of many people or buy-in from various stakeholders is essential to implement the resolution.[13] All these criteria were present in this project. A successful collaboration requires that appropriate partners are identified and that the relationships are supported through the collaboration.[14] Horwath highlights that by implementing a project management approach the project will flourish with more clearly defined roles, stronger reporting, a clearer understanding of the project as well as an environment that is more cooperative and collaborative.[15]

Our project team undertook an approach to collaboration that focused on consensus building among group members. While one individual took the official role of "Project Manager" and was responsible for sharing communication and facilitating all meetings, the entire group took collective responsibility for addressing concerns and working towards the objectives of the project. To work towards consensus, the group focused on identifying points of agreement first. From there, the group focused on identifying points of disagreement and determining the pros and cons of different options. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each option the group was able to identify alternatives that were acceptable to the entire group. Bojeun describes a successful team as one which displays qualities of healthy and positive communication, successful conflict resolution abilities, and collaboration as well as having the proper skill sets and training.[16]

Our Context

The University of Guelph is a research-intensive institution with 23,000 undergraduate and graduate students.[17] Guelph, just an hour drive from Toronto, is medium-sized city with a population of 151,984. The University of Guelph Library supports the research and programs at the University of Guelph by procuring and providing access to millions of resources. We work in a team-based environment as opposed to a liaison model which includes five functional teams (Archival & Special Collections; Collections & Content; Discovery & Access; Learning & Curriculum Support; and Research & Scholarship.)

Like many libraries, the University of Guelph Library has a myriad of systems to provide access to paid resources, including our catalogue (Ex Libris Voyager), our link resolver and A-Z journal title list (Ex Libris SFX), and our proxy service (OCLC EZ Proxy). Through these various applications and services, access to vendor databases, the most important resource type, was less than ideal. At the time, we had been adding proxied links to vendor databases within our catalogue. This was counterintuitive for our users who had largely used our catalogue to find physical resources, not electronic ones. It also meant that users were expected to know the names of these databases to find them, which was a nearly insurmountable hurdle for novice users. We were also not able to tag these databases in ways that were meaningful to users, such as using university subject area names or course codes.

In 2003, a library staff member developed a custom application to better store, display, and provide access to these vendor databases. This application, written in the ColdFusion programming language which was quite popular at the time, addressed many of our needs: it allowed the library to enter titles, links, and custom tags for each database; it allowed us to pull lists of these resources based on these tags and present these lists on webpages; and finally it allowed us to integrate a check for proxy into every click on a database link to ensure that users who needed to be proxied to access the resource would receive the proxy challenge prior to arriving at the

vendor database. This worked quite well for many years, meeting the needs of the library and researchers.

However, one of the challenges that arose over time was a lack of coordination. This led to inconsistent tagging, lack of naming conventions, outdated descriptions, dead links, and a lack of a shared understanding around the intentions of the list. It was clear that the database list was suffering from a lack of care and attention from a dedicated group of staff. In addition, we had completed a round of user experience testing in 2011, where we found that participants were tentative and unsure about naming specific journal databases. They could name one, or at most two and were sometimes uncertain whether they had named a journal database. These results demonstrated a need for the library to increase its focus on users. These problems were exacerbated by the loss of in-house support for the ColdFusion programming language.

Around 2008, the ColdFusion programming language had seen a dramatic decline in use by developers, who began to favour newer programming languages and as such, it became more difficult to find programmers with ColdFusion experience. The licensing fees for the ColdFusion programming language had increased steadily over the years, making this solution unaffordable. Finally, new provincial legislation required compliance with WCAG 2.0 AA accessibility for all web content, which would require a complete overhaul for this publicly-accessible, web-based application. It was time for change.

Our Project and Approach

In 2013, the University of Guelph purchased an instance of Springshare LibGuides. We populated our new LibGuides with a list of databases using the assets feature and duplicated this work in the ColdFusion A-Z list. From 2013-2014, we conducted updates in both platforms with Electronic Resources staff updating the ColdFusion A-Z list and the Digital Media Librarian updating the Springshare LibGuides asset list: a clear duplication of effort. Upon migrating to LibGuides 2.0 in 2014, Springshare included a robust A-Z list tool at no additional cost. Between 2014 and 2016, we created and maintained a parallel A-Z database list using the A-Z list feature included in LibGuides. Running these two lists in parallel allowed us to ensure that this no-cost solution would meet our needs.

In March 2016, we struck a project team to implement the SpringShare A-Z list tool as our sole public-facing A-Z list, replacing our old ColdFusion A-Z list application. We recognised that our project team membership needed to reflect the shared the ownership necessary to ensure that the A-Z list was maintained collaboratively and reflected the diverse uses of this tool. Therefore, our project team included members from various teams across the library, with representation from 3 of 5 Library teams. Our project team included the Manager of Collection & Content; Web Development Librarian; Digital Media Librarian; and Metadata Librarian. The goal of this project was to move away from the ColdFusion A-Z list, which had proven to be outdated, difficult to use, and inefficient. The public front end of ColdFusion A-Z list did not meet accessibility requirements. In addition, there were marked differences between the content of the ColdFusion A-Z list and the LibGuides A-Z database list.

The project working group decided to decommission the ColdFusion A-Z list for the start of the Fall 2016 semester. Staff determined that this project would provide an opportune time to build a shared understanding within the library of what resources should be included in our list of databases and what kind of metadata would be required. In addition, the project offered the chance to reimagine how databases were tagged, and we decided to align the subject categories with the subject areas offered at the University of Guelph to improve findability and the

user experience. We decided on a set list of applicable tags (e.g. open access, alumni, media) to provide a variety of methods for browsing and searching resources. This migration also offered an opportunity for us to rewrite database descriptions to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to these descriptions.

Finally, from a technical perspective, the way LibGuides A-Z list handled proxy authentication was less complicated than the way we were forced to handle this in the ColdFusion application. In the ColdFusion application, we had developed an additional ColdFusion sub-application to handle the proxy-checking, and our desire to move away from the ColdFusion programming language meant that we would lose this functionality as well. The LibGuides solution integrates proxy checking, simplifying the workflow and solving our proxy needs.

The project team was formed as "Project Makeover." We used this name to create a sense of fun and excitement amongst staff. By nurturing this atmosphere, through group events and by encouraging team spirit, the project encouraged collaboration.[18] In March 2016, an initial library-wide communication shared the goals of the project:

- To create an A-Z list that can be searched and browsed by subject and applicable tags
- To create a shared understanding within the library of what is included as a database and what kind of metadata is required
- To develop a more consistent and coordinated approach to how we describe and present databases to our users.

In late March 2016, we held an open face-to-face session for library staff to share with the project team how they use the A-Z database list in their work, what criteria they felt should be included in the A-Z database list, and what metadata should be included for each item. This information was gathered and used to begin planning for the rewriting of the database descriptions and compiling relevant metadata.

We held three staff lunch-and-share activities throughout April 2016 which gave staff the opportunity to collaboratively assign databases to University of Guelph subject areas. During these sessions, we placed chart paper with all subjects offered at the University of Guelph around the room. Staff from various library departments walked around and added selected database titles which they felt were useful for these subjects to each of these pieces of chart paper. Staff were also asked to indicate "Best Bets", identifying the top choices for research for the identified subject areas. The project team was interested in using the "Best Bets" feature that was added to LibGuides 2.0. Our goal was to provide a prioritised list of databases by subject. This allowed staff with in depth subject knowledge an opportunity to contribute their expertise to the project; we were essentially crowdsourcing metadata for this project. We then used the results from these lunch-and-share activities to tag databases with subjects in the A-Z list. We complimented the work completed in these lunch-and-share sessions with an environmental scan to ensure consistent coverage across our university subject areas. Staff unable to attend the lunch-and-share sessions were invited to participate electronically using a public Google Doc.

In May 2016, staff were invited to help draft descriptions of databases that would allow for a consistent representation of library databases for users. The original set of descriptions varied significantly in length and tone, with many coming directly from vendors leading to many descriptions sounding like a "sales pitch". We collected current database descriptions from vendor websites to provide a starting point. Staff were asked to commit to three to five 1-hour working meetings over the course of two months where they

would work to draft new concise descriptions using the following criteria:

- Avoid vendor speak
- Avoid 'last updated'
- Watch for mention of specific numbers of items contained, and future-proof by using language like 'contains more than…'
- Limit descriptions to approximately 20 words
- Use plain language
- Avoid abbreviations (if you use one, be sure to define it)
- Remember to keep descriptions focused on user needs

Throughout the summer, nine library staff collaborated to revise the descriptions for all 355 library databases. The collaborators included a diverse group of staff from such groups as scholarly communication, collections, user experience, access services, communications, and information literacy. This group worked collaboratively, each drafting their own descriptions and acting as peer-reviewers for the descriptions of others. The goal was to make the descriptions more user-friendly.

We created a Microsoft SharePoint site with a custom list (Appendix A) to facilitate the peer-review process by allowing staff to update the list online and track progress of their peers in real time. This list also included several fields that allowed us to capture more metadata to ensure we had adequate information to support our user needs. Some of these fields included subject matter time frame, dates of coverage, and technical requirements.

The SharePoint list was then used in conjunction with our environmental scan, and informal consultations, to populate the LibGuides A-Z list.

Key features of the revised database list included: databases tagged with subject areas aligned with University course subject areas; databases tagged with resource type, such as open access, geospatial data, streaming video, etc.; revised, updated, and user-friendly database descriptions; WCAG-compliant simple interface; alternate names; and dramatically improved searchability, including keyword searching.

We decommissioned the old ColdFusion A-Z list in late August 2016 and established a new workflow with the Electronic Resources Management team, giving this team responsibility over the care and maintenance of this list. The Metadata Librarian created training and documentation to ensure consistency and to encourage cross-training and shared ownership.

After being in use for one full academic year, the project team returned to assess the user experience of the updated A-Z list. In Fall 2017, the project team partnered with the Library's User Experience team to assess the A-Z list to better understand how users were using the list and how we might improve it. We then implemented improvements based on the feedback we received.

Lessons Learned

With a project of this size and duration, we allotted time for reflection and securing buy-in. To ensure that this list continues to be maintained and improved, we integrated this work into the mandate of the Library Guides Working Group. This group is a cross team which leverages the expertise of staff from several units across the library, including Collections & Content; Discovery & Access; Learning & Curriculum Support; and the Communications Team. The project team learned a lot from this project, including: sharing work with collaborators reduces the burden of a large project – many hands make light work; the importance of focusing on structure; and developing a process for peer review.

Many Hands Make Light Work

We leveraged teamwork and cooperation throughout this project to help keep the scope and size of the project manageable and to build a sense of shared ownership in the final product. We integrated collaboration within several key areas of the project, including the three lunch and share activities that allowed staff to assign databases to University of Guelph subject areas, as well as the revision of the library database descriptions. We continued this approach in Fall 2017 by partnering with team members in Collections & Content and Learning & Curriculum Support to ensure regular maintenance and review of resources within the new A-Z list, and in conducting discussions about how to expand the new A-Z list. For example, librarian co-op students and subject experts worked together to create metadata and write descriptions for geospatial and government-specific resources, expanding our original list of mostly journal article databases to include these types of resources as well.

By embedding collaboration throughout the project, we were able to share the ownership of the new A-Z database list rather than forcing this huge task on an individual. This shared approach ensures alignment with our team-based structure and ensures that this list receives ongoing care and maintenance to keep it relevant. From providing information literacy instruction in the classroom, to answering questions at the research helpdesk, to the purchase of new electronic databases, it became evident to us how a project of this nature could benefit from a collaborative approach. The shift from merely a list of databases to a more fulsome list of electronic resources was the impetus behind wider collaboration. The size of this list increased substantially with this expansion: we now have over 500 resources on our current A-Z list. With the decision to expand the breadth of resources, it was imperative that we embrace this collaborative approach to ensure that we were harnessing the expertise of everyone in the library.

Focus on Structure

Throughout the collaborative processes, our project management team built in structure to help ensure consistency. For example, during the collaborative revision of the library database descriptions, collaborators were given structured templates to help ensure consistency. We used a SharePoint template to allow all collaborators to see what required fields were needed for each database entry. We standardised this form to ensure that collaborators included all the required information and to permit the project management team to review these entries for gaps. Collaborators attended an introductory session which highlighted the controlled metadata fields (i.e. resource type) and we provided instructions and examples demonstrating what the final edited descriptions should look like. For example, using plain language, ensuring descriptions were less than 20 words, and future-proofing descriptions. By using a SharePoint custom list and outlining expectations in an introductory session, the project management team was able to gather the required information in an organized and consistent way, while allowing the collaborators to share their expertise (see Appendix A).

Peer Review

As part of the collaborative effort, the project management team incorporated peer review to improve consistency, encourage a shared sense of ownership, and build capacity to receive constructive feedback. One example of how we incorporated peer review into this process was during the revision of the library database descriptions. During this process, collaborators acted as peer-reviewers for the database descriptions created by others. Peer reviewers were tasked with ensuring the database descriptions adhered to the guidelines provided in the initial

drafting phase. Collaborators checked descriptions, keeping the following questions in mind as they worked:

- Is there any vendor-speak? This should be avoided.
- Is there any mention of 'last updated'? This should be removed.
- Is there any mention of specific numbers of items contained? This should be avoided and future-proof language like 'contains more than…'should be used instead.
- Is the edited description approximately 20 words? Descriptions should be edited to be approximately 20 words or less.
- Does the edited description use plain language? Jargon should be removed.
- Are any abbreviations used? If so, they should be defined.
- Do you think the description would be helpful for the users? Descriptions should target the users point-of-need.

At the University of Guelph Library, peer review has become standard practice for database list maintenance and additions. For example, when the co-op librarians worked on adding geospatial resources to the database list, they reviewed each others' work in a similar way.

Alignment with Institutional Structures

The working group recognized the importance of aligning with institutional structures. The database subject tags used in the new A-Z list came directly from the university academic course calendar, including the course prefixes that students use in their everyday conversations, how they understand and identify their courses and what appears on their schedule and transcript; for example, "ACCT" is the prefix used for all Accounting courses. We did this for two main reasons: one, to increase database findability by using the subjects students are already familiar with; two, to provide consistency with the course and subject guides in LibGuides. At the University of Guelph Library, we were already using the course prefixes as the naming convention for course and subject guides. This consistency assists in streamlining the library's workflow.

Learn from Others

Although the working group had gathered a great deal of information from the collaborative lunch-and-share sessions, we used environmental scans to fill in the gaps. Our project team used the LibGuides community page (https://community.libguides.com/) to find subject guides (i.e. accounting) to see what databases other libraries had been recommending for that subject. To further supplement database descriptions, we conducted Google searches, searching for the "database name" + library to see how other libraries described certain databases. In this way, rather than reinventing the wheel, we were able to build off the user-friendly descriptions other institutions had already started.

Streamline Processes

As new formats and producers of information gain traction in academia, the definition of a database is expanding. Libraries have seen tremendous growth in free and non-traditional electronic resources. We see this especially in grey literature and open access resources reflected in local and global initiatives. The project team recognized the need for the traditional A-Z database list to expand beyond paid databases to include other electronic resources. To streamline this process, the working group created a form that any staff member can use to request new additions to the database list. This form allows collaboration to continue and helps create and maintain a current and constantly updating

knowledgebase of all relevant electronic resources that reflect our work.

Break it Down

Post migration, the project team recognized that larger maintenance projects needed to be broken down into smaller tasks and spread out over semesters. For example, in the summer of 2017, we initiated a maintenance project to review the A-Z list metadata. This was in response to staff noticing that several database types were underused and inconsistently applied, limiting the search and refining the features that used that metadata. The project team tasked a librarian co-op student with reviewing all the database types and updating as needed, ensuring that no database type tags were unused or redundant. The project team recognises that maintenance will continue to take time, but for it to be more manageable and thoughtfully done, these projects need to be broken up into smaller tasks. This continues to be a big project with ongoing requirements for maintenance, which needs to be built into our regular workflows to avoid staff from having to duplicate efforts.

Make it User Friendly

One of the main goals of Project Makeover was to create a user-friendly A-Z database list. We accomplished this by:

- Ensuring databases were tagged by subject areas that aligned with University course subject areas.
- Using database descriptions that are short, used plain language, and eliminated vendor speak.
- Using visual tags to help educate users about different types of access (open access, alumni access, and limited users).
- Ensuring content was accessible to all users, including compliance with the WCAG 2.0 AA web accessibility standards, for example, ensuring the colour contrast on the visual tags met requirements.

In fall 2017, the project team partnered with the Library's User Experience (UX) team to assess the A-Z list to better understand how users were using the list and how it might be improved. The user testing explored the following questions: How do students experience the A-Z Database List? How do they discover them, use them, and respond to the layout, organization, tone, and content?[19]

The UX testing uncovered three key points of interest:

1. Users were skipping over the databases tagged as "Best Bets" for specific subjects. Users were bypassing the "Best Bets" because they appeared in a different colour and resembled advertisements and sponsored posts that users were accustomed to seeing on the web, such as in Google search result ads. Because of this finding, the working group removed the "Best Bets" in winter 2018.
2. Contrary to popular belief, users did read the database descriptions. This was an interesting finding since it emphasized the importance of the project, and the value in continuing to refine descriptions to meet users at their point-of-need. This will continue to influence future maintenance projects.
3. Users were confused about the "All Vendors/Providers" search facet and did not know what this was. While this feature might be useful for staff, these findings suggest that this feature is confusing for our users and adds unnecessary cognitive load to an already complicated interface. The working group is currently exploring hiding this tab from the public interface using CSS.

Recommendations and Best Practices

In taking on a large-scale A-Z list redesign, it is important to consider several factors:

1. **Project Working Group:** It is important that a single group oversees the project. This is key to providing a consistent approach and ensuring follow through. For our project, it was key to have one individual working as the project lead and representation from a variety of library units to ensure knowledge sharing and buy in.

2. **Project Management Plan:** Developing a plan for the project ensures that checkpoints and milestones are met and clear to all of those working on the project. This project used a project charter and work plan to ensure a shared understanding of the goals and expectations. Projects of this scale require a clear project plan to ensure members stay on task.

3. **Collaboration:** This project provided an opportunity to collaborate across the organisation. The project team sought out a variety of collaborators to form a working group that represented a wide variety of stakeholders. In addition, this diverse group aided in achieving wide buy-in through developing a shared understanding of the project and its goals.

4. **Communication:** This project impacted library staff from across the organisation, making regular communication important. The project team provided regular updates on the project, beginning with sharing the project charter to highlight the goals and timelines. Communication occurred in a variety of venues such as listserv emails to all library staff, as well as presentations at all-library staff meetings, library news items, and conference presentations. At many of these stages, staff were encouraged to participate and provide feedback through events, such as the lunch-and-shares, and calls to join the database description review team.

5. **Operationalising Maintenance using Documentation:** This project resulted in changes to library staff workflows and required ongoing maintenance. It is common to focus the energy of the project team on pre-migration and migration work and to lose site of the project's impact on the ongoing tasks required to keep the list relevant. This highlights the importance of developing new workflows and documentation to support the post-migration and maintenance plan.

6. **Understand Your Users:** For a project like this, it is important to understand how the result of the project is being used and to leverage evidence to implement improvements. In this case, it was important to review the literature and evidence that existed on how users use database lists. In addition, our project group felt it important to evaluate the A-Z list once the migration was complete. The feedback received through the user experience study proved invaluable in improving the tool and providing opportunities for future projects.

7. **Look for Exemplars:** As with any project, it is often the case that you are not the first to embark on such a task. In the case of this project, many institutions had implemented an A-Z list using LibGuides. Conducting an environmental scan was key in determining best practices and setting goals for the project. This also allowed the group to explore a variety of design choices which informed our own decisions.

8. **Sustainability and Vendor Tools:** Using a vendor supported tool such as SpringShare LibGuides requires consideration of updating and maintenance. For example, staff are currently exploring CSS customizations to

provide a better user interface, but staff labour and time commitments for ongoing updates must be taken into consideration. This must be considered since every vendor-initiated change to their product will require library staff to re-apply their interface customisations. Customisations to vendor products often result in considerable technical debt that must be managed going forward.

Future Directions

This project has led to opportunities that the project working group is considering implementing to improve user and staff experience. Future directions currently being explored include:

1. **Shift in Scope:** At the University of Guelph Library, we are becoming more comfortable with transitioning from a traditional A-Z database list to a major electronic resources list. We are constantly expanding beyond traditional notions of what a database list includes. This shift is pushing conversations about how we refer to this list and what its uses are. Current conversations include an exploration of what we call the database list - is it still a "database" list or is it time to rename it?

2. **Policy Development:** Given the ever-expanding list of electronic resources available to users, it is important for library staff to develop a framework for evaluating the addition of new resource.

3. **Future Planning:** We need to expand training to ensure succession planning. The A-Z list requires constant care and attention to ensure its relevance. It does not take many broken links before users lose trust in the tool.

Conclusion

Facilitating equitable access to information is a core responsibility of libraries. As information practitioners, we build expertise and familiarity with the lexicon used within our industry, yet our visitors often struggle with the terms we use. By purposefully using language, categories, and tags that resonate with the users of our resources, we are tailoring these tools to our users and in turn, these tools become more user friendly.

When developing lists of databases of information, we have shown that distributing this task across the organisation helps to ensure that word choice becomes more intuitive with our users. Departments across our library have varying degrees of interaction with the users we serve, and by involving staff from all these units, we are capitalising on the expertise of each of these groups.

We have seen a significant increase in the usage of our A-Z list of journal databases because of our intentional focus on improving this product (see Appendix B). Our user experience testing of the A-Z list has confirmed that directly associating resources with the course names and course codes our students are familiar with improves the findability of the most pertinent resources for each course. Using the course names and course codes to label resources within our A-Z list is not without risk: we must remain diligent in the regular care and feeding of these lists of resources to ensure that they remain pertinent as professors make changes to courses.

By operationalising the regular maintenance of the A-Z list, we can help ensure that this list remains useful as courses are changed, new course codes are added, and old courses are removed from the roster. Including regular reviews of recommended resources and ensuring that the content of vendor databases still align with the requirements of a course is an onerous task;

changes can occur on either side of this equation and this is what makes the regular review of these resources necessary to ensure this resource remains relevant.

The workflows we have implemented have helped to ensure the A-Z list continues to meet the needs of our students, and we have learned that this structured collaboration can have benefit in other areas of our enterprise. We are working to integrate other types of resources into our A-Z database list to deliver more types of relevant resources to our users based on the requirements of a course: if a course requires the use of datasets, we will integrate these into the A-Z list as well. While the thought of including non-journal database content in an A-Z database list might make some library staff cringe, it is intuitive for our users.

For our resources and efforts to remain relevant, we must be diligent in ensuring both align with the needs of our users. It may seem a simple problem at first glance: a resource is only useful if students can find it, and only if it contains resources they need when they need them. However, it is all too easy to find ourselves with databases, tools, and descriptions from vendors that do not resonate with the needs of our users. The efforts we engage in to present resources in meaningful and intuitive ways will always be a worthy endeavour.

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[6] Tobias, "A Case of TMI,"181.

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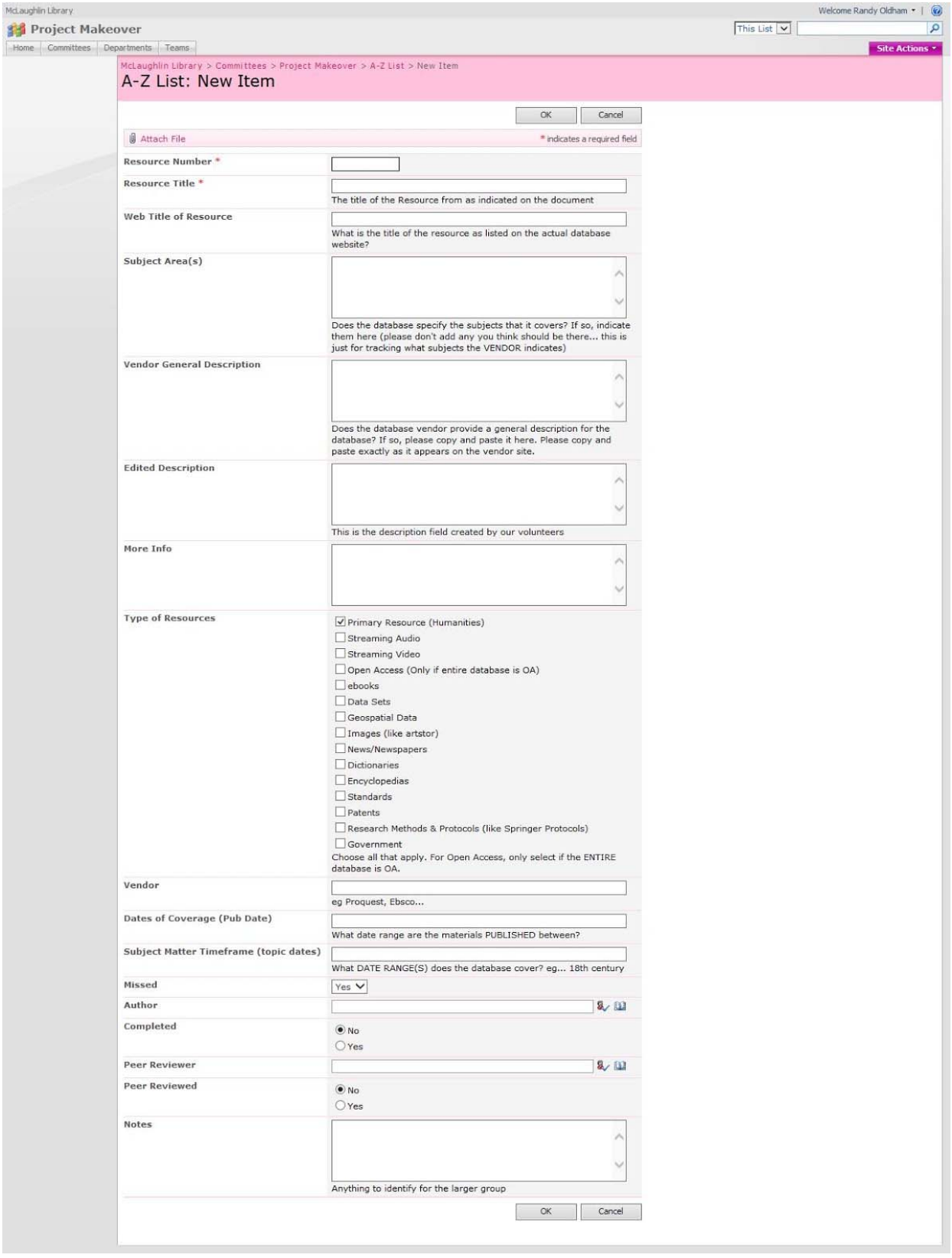
Appendix A – Microsoft SharePoint Template List



Appendix B - Communication and Staff Engagement Plan

Time Frame	Format	Task
Week 0 (Project Launch)	Library-wide email	● Share project overview ● Timelines and opportunities for engagement
Week 2	Information sharing meeting	● A general session to discuss: ○ How staff currently use the a-z database list? ○ What should be the criteria for inclusion on this list? ○ What metadata should be included?
Week 5	Series of lunch and share activities	● Hands on activity to collaboratively assign databases to subjects
Week 7	Library-wide email	● Invitation to participate in drafting of database descriptions that will be used when we migrate to LibGuides. ● Expectations ○ A commitment to participate in three to five 1-hour working meetings over a two-month period ○ Work with current vendor and existing descriptions to draft concise descriptions using plain language.
Week 8-16	Series of 1 hour working meetings	● Work with current vendor and existing descriptions to draft concise descriptions using plain language. ● Collaborative peer-review process
Week 9-10	Library-wide email	● Invitation to add comments and suggestions to subjects assigned to databases electronically
Week 11	Library-wide email	● Project update ● Thank all volunteers by name ● Highlight new features of A-Z list ● Notify of decommissioning date
Week 15	Library-wide email	● Project update ● Explain new workflows ● Alert that old list has been decommissioned
Week 24	Library staff presentation	● Project update ● Explain new workflows ● Share new features ● Share early assessment data

Appendix C - Usage Statistics

Database	Time Frame	Pageviews
Original A-Z Database List	September 1, 2015 - August 31, 2016	151,031
New A-Z Database List	September 1, 2016 - August 31, 2017	296,542