**Agile for Special Collections**
**Strategic Initiative Review**
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1.  How we got to where we are (brief history)

    The Archival Description & Access unit (ADA) is responsible for coordinating with each of the Special Collections (SC) units to perform some or all of the technical service work for the materials in that SC unit's holdings not under bibliographic control.  ADA's scope of work and services include:
    - Coordinating with donors to schedule the shipment or other receipt of incoming new materials
    - Accessioning new materials
    - Preparing deeds of gift and gift in kind reports for new donations, and routing these between donors, AD for Special Collections, and Development
    - Coordinating transfer of materials between THO and Assurevault (off-site storage), including preparing new materials for ingest at Assurevault and ensuring accuracy of record information for materials at Assurevault
    - Providing weekly transport of SC materials between all SC locations and LTC
    - Ongoing migration of any existing description of archival holdings into Archivists' Toolkit
    - Ongoing assessment of existing physical holdings, including comparison to existing description for necessary accuracy corrections
    - Ongoing creation of archival description for existing holdings in the backlog for which description has not previously been created
    - Full archival processing for selected collections
    - Shelf/mapcase/other location assignment and maintenance for materials stored in THO
    - Minor conservation and preservation treatments, including constructing specialized housing for both new and existing collection materials
    - Administration and oversight of Archivists' Toolkit for all ADA and SC users
    - Publishing and overall maintenance of most content added to the Special Collections Registry

Each SC unit utilizes some or all of the above services ADA provides.  Because each SC unit has very different collecting scopes, needs, and past practices framing the existing state of that unit's collections, ADA largely needs to separate each SC unit's materials from each other unit when preforming the work above and manage each SC unit's queues of each discrete task or service separately (for example, accessioning of new materials for TRI is a queue managed separately from accessioning of new materials for the Polar Archives; at the same time, accessioning of new materials for TRI is a queue managed separately form the ongoing migration of existing description for TRI to Archivists' Toolkit).  The above circumstances mean that ADA is consistently managing 25-35 discrete queues of work, needing both to keep track of what is in each queue and balance the relative priority of all queues.

ADA has a further challenge of a staff constantly in flux; in the past 4.5 years, ADA has had as few as 3 and as many as 10 staff at one time (12 different staff members overall), with between 1-3 permanent and the remainder in term positions.  ADA heavily relies on student employees to support our work, with between 6-18 student employees working for us at a given time; additionally, ADA typically hosts 1-3 interns (undergrad and/or grad) per semester.  The above have left ADA with a combined staff (regular/student/intern) that has varied in number and personnel makeup from month to month for every month over the past 4.5 years, which is challenging enough to keep track of but which further complicates the challenge of also simultaneously tracking and balancing the varying 25-35 incoming work queues ADA is responsible for.

AD&S and ADA have had a standing weekly meeting for several years to discuss ongoing archival systems support needs and other technical project assistance ADA needs from AD&S to do our work.  Through the course of discussing our daily work with AD&S to help them better understand how to support our systems needs, they became aware of the challenges our unit had keeping track of and managing work, and suggested the Agile method that they successfully use might be an appropriate fit for us, as well.  ADA was eager to investigate this option, but knew that Agile methods are not used widely in archival work (further investigation indicated perhaps not used at all), so we knew that to make Agile work for us, we would have the added challenge of having to figure out how to do it without any archival peers to solicit advice or suggestions from.

AD&S provided significant support and training in helping ADA set up Agile and think about how to adapt Agile to archival work.  ADA began a trial Agile implementation in late spring 2017, and a full implementation was launched in July 2017.

2.  Where we are now

ADA has been continuously using the Agile method since July 2017 to track, schedule, manage, and report out about our work.  From July 2017 through August 2018, ADA ran the first iteration of our Agile implementation.  Though planning and anticipation of needs was done as thoughtfully as possible during the trial implementation in spring/summer 2017, there were several workflow and structural considerations that we did not encounter until we were fully operational during our first year.  These necessitated a revision to our implementation, which AD&S worked with ADA on to identify solutions to challenges we were encountering, as well as provide training through our transition from the first iteration to the second iteration. ADA began our second iteration of Agile in September 2018, and continue to use this iteration successfully (with a small group of revisions introduced in February 2019 to address challenges not anticipated with the launch of the second iteration, but which became apparent in the early months).

ADA continues to rely on AD&S as a partner to support our Agile implementation, including assistance with identifying and addressing challenges in our Agile structures, as well as supporting our learning of how to best use JIRA to support our workflows.

ADA has continued the search for other archival institutions using an Agile implementation, and have located two repositories that were considering it, but none

who had actually implemented Agile. ADA and AD&S would welcome the chance to share and learn about Agile experiences with peers in the archival field, but to date do not know of any other archival repositories with an active Agile implementation.

3. Is the project/initiative succeeding in meeting its intended objectives? How is success being measured against strategic priorities (measures of success)?

The primary objectives of implementing Agile to improve the overall management of work ADA is responsible for is succeeding. All of the projects, requests, and ongoing work that ADA is responsible for is being tracked via tickets in our JIRA space; requests can be submitted from SC units to us through HUB tickets, though the majority of tickets are created by ADA to track and manage our work internally. Since spring 2017, ADA has entered (including receipts from HUB) over 2400 tickets; each ticket represents a discrete project coming out of one of our 25-35 queues and represents between ~1 hour up to many months of work to complete. ADA currently has 582 tickets in our queues in JIRA; including 119 tickets that are currently active (representing 28 queues), and 463 that have not been started yet and are waiting to be worked on. ADA creates ~50-75 new tickets per week, and completes ~45-60 tickets per week. ADA provides routine reports out to the Special Collections Forum listserv on the work accomplished during a designated period (1-2 weeks); prior to adopting Agile, ADA had a difficult time tracking and measuring completed work, but through Agile adoption, we're seeing overall a much higher volume of completed work and work moving from start to finish through our workflows at a significantly more efficient pace than prior.

Overall, use of JIRA to track and manage work being done on a daily basis has yielded multiple successes both internally for ADA and externally to ADA's partner units. Using a single ticket in the JIRA system to track each project's progress through workflows allows ADA to not only better keep track of a large number of simultaneous projects, but has enabled ADA to capitalize on the Agile concept of assigning people to work rather than the traditional archival work model of assigning work to people. The need to flexibly manage a greater number of queues of work than there are staff in ADA has meant everyone in ADA has had continual opportunities to cross-train, grow skills, lead projects or projects areas, and otherwise continually become a more versatile (and thus higher-contributing) member of the unit. The flexibility of a constantly more versatile staff has allowed ADA to also apply the Agile method of 'swarming' to an increasing number projects—that is, rather than assigning a 10-hour project to one person, using a group of five people to get the same project done in 2 hours—this method is a significant departure from the traditional archival model of most work being solo or otherwise independent, and has required creative thinking about how to approach traditional archival work in new ways.

Working together as teams on projects not only moves work more efficiently through ADA's workflows, but also provides a continual opportunity for staff to learn with and from each other, and to build increasing trust in working together. This trust has yielded very successful buy-in from ADA staff who all participate in providing peer QC on each other's work; peer QC mutually accomplishes the need for all work in ADA to be reviewed for quality and corrected, as needed, before being considered complete, while also allowing staff to grow skills and comfort with giving constructive

feedback to colleagues and allows staff to continuously learn from and provide instruction to each other.  I believe ADA is excelling in creating a continual learning environment that invests heavily in the ongoing development of every staff member, while simultaneously generating a high volume of finished work that adheres to standards and best practices of the archival profession, thus continually improving researcher access to SC materials in our holdings.

4. Were the resources allocated for the project/initiative adequate? If not, why?

ADA was very dependent on the time and support of AD&S to get our Agile application set up, and again when it was determined ADA needed to transition to a second iteration.  AD&S has been incredibly generous with their time and support to allow our unit to become successful Agile users—ADA could have made some progress on our own with less support from AD&S, but would not have progressed as successfully or rapidly as we have without them.

ADA has also been successful in this initiative due to the support from and space granted by our program lead (Morag), our AD (Karla), and our colleagues in SC to explore an Agile implementation, recognizing that it may not work for us, and that there were many unknowns going in that we would need to work through and couldn't predict success (or failure) on until we tried.  Introducing Agile to ADA came with a short-term decrease in our unit's productivity while everyone in the unit went through training and the early phases of getting comfortable with doing the work they were used to in very different ways, and we were given the support to work through this productivity decrease in order to determine if and how Agile could benefit us.

5. Are there successes/highlights to share?

ADA had completed 1843 projects using Agile since the spring of 2017, with ~8-12 SC collections each week either being made available to researchers for the first time, or being made newly available with enhanced/corrected description, improved housing, and other enhancement made to improve the research use of the archival holdings of SC.  ADA recently completed bringing University Archives' collections fully online through finding aids for the first time in that unit's history, creating more than 1800 new finding aids over a complex 4-year project that included many phases and sub-projects; implementing Agile greatly assisted in the management of this project over the past two years.

6. Is the project/initiative encountering any barriers to success? If so, what?

Not at this time; I believe most challenges were worked out during the initial introduction of Agile to the unit, and transition from the first iteration to the second.

7. Is the project/initiative on time? Have you had to alter timelines? If so, why?

This initiative did not start with a definite timeline or end date in mind; the goal of this initiative was to identify if the Agile methods would be a successful fit to allow ADA to better manage our ongoing, complex workflows and queues.  We knew that we

would need to try Agile for a while to know whether the fit was right or not, and because we could not reference the experiences of peers at other archival repositories, we also knew that we would likely not get our setup 'right' the first time, and would need to continuously learn and revise before being able to fairly determine if Agile was working for us. As ADA began to realize the benefits of Agile almost immediately, we have remained committed to learning from and growing our application to better meet our needs. We will continue to learn more and revise going forward, but our current iteration (2$^{nd}$, with revisions) is a fairly mature fit for our internal workflow needs, and further iterations are not anticipated to introduce significant changes.

8. Should the Libraries continue investments in this project/initiative? Why or why not?

ADA will definitely continue to utilize Agile methods to manage our work; Agile has proven to be a strong fit for the complex needs of managing our continuously shifting queues, priorities, and staffing. ADA's overall productivity has increased through our Agile implementation, and staff in ADA have embraced Agile as a tool that allows them to successfully self-manage their time on consistently changing queues, projects, and priorities. ADA has experienced only positive benefits from adopting Agile.