
Minting a New Brand: Coordinating the Marketing and Promotion of a Large-Scale Grant Project

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Abstract: This article discusses the organizational logistics of marketing a large-scale Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership Grant project, including the details of the marketing plan development and its implementation, which resulted in dividing the team into smaller subgroups, as well as the advantages and challenges of working with such a large team. Finally, lessons learned and recommendations are shared for others interested in marketing library projects undertaken on limited and/or fixed budgets.

Keywords: marketing campaign, graphic design, newsletters and blogs, social media marketing, web site marketing

Introduction

The success of library projects depends on the planning and implementation of marketing and outreach. Even when projects meet the set goals, they can falter when it comes to public outcomes, such as continued engagement and sustainability. This article discusses the organizational logistics of marketing a large-scale Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership Grant project. Grant funding enables organizations to implement and fund special projects including expanding resources, technology, and services; supporting communities, initiatives, and events; and sponsoring research, invention, and development. Libraries utilize grant funding to supplement collections, renovate spaces, pay salaries, develop innovative programs, and more. However, without the inclusion of a marketing component in grant projects, the knowledge gained, systems created, and events planned, will be unknown to the intended audience and general public.

The IMLS National Leadership Grant project discussed in this article expanded and rebranded the Diverse BookFinder (DBF), an existing web resource. The original mission of the DBF was to develop a free, searchable, online database of children's picture books published in the United States featuring Black and Indigenous Peoples and People of Color (BIPOC) characters and information about how these characters are represented (Diverse BookFinder, 2025f). This project expanded the DBF's scope to include early readers, graphic novels, chapter books, and middle grade and young adult novels.

The DBF's searchable collection is unique in that books are categorized by the dominant message in the story (Aronson et al., 2018). DBF's categories include: Any Child/Teen; Centering Culture & Identity; Cross Group; Biography/Autobiography; Folklore; Incidental; Informational; Oppression &

Resilience; and Race/Culture/Identity Concepts. Users can search the collection by these categories, as well as other audience, book character, and content facets such as race/culture, gender, religion, and many more, to locate specific books (Diverse BookFinder, 2025d). The DBF's catalog of books can help teachers, librarians, parents, and students find books that mirror identities as well as provide windows into the lives of others (Bishop, 1990). To date, the DBF includes over 6,000 picture books published since 2002. In July 2024, an expanded version of the DBF launched that continues to collect picture books and now also collects early readers, chapter, middle grade and young adult books, and graphic novels published since 2022. Since the re-launch, over 1,000 books for these older audiences have been added to the collection (Diverse BookFinder, 2025e). Additionally, the DBF includes a Collection Analysis Tool (CAT) that enables users to analyze their children's and young adult collections based on the intersection of the dominant message categories and the race/culture facet (Diverse BookFinder, 2025c). To aid others that might embark on a large-scale grant project that includes the promotion of the project and its deliverables, this article discusses the process of marketing this IMLS grant project, as well as lessons learned from the team.

Literature Review

As libraries continue to innovate and provide new resources to meet the evolving needs of their patrons, the literature reflects an increasing emphasis on the importance of marketing. Libraries must promote their services, technologies, and resources effectively to stay relevant and reach their audiences. However, most libraries and library-led projects lack a comprehensive marketing plan, as well as the personnel, time, and funding to support sustained marketing efforts. These challenges have been highlighted throughout the literature, demonstrating continued shortfalls in library marketing practices (Bhardwaj & Jain, 2016; Kennedy, 2011; Wang et al., 2025).

Built on previous research, Bhardwaj and Jain (2016) conducted a structured review with findings that reinforced the absence of formal marketing strategies in libraries. Their analysis made a case for adopting user-centric models, such as relationship marketing, to foster connections between libraries and their patrons. The study also pointed to the potential of digital tools like user-friendly websites and social media platforms as effective channels for outreach.

The most effective marketing strategies are user-centered and involve either hiring trained personnel or investing in staff development, which are two challenges that can be accomplished with grant funding (Bhardwaj & Jain, 2016; Fourie & Ball, 2012). Germain's (2009) framework emphasizes the strategic integration of marketing activities within the early planning stages of library grant initiatives. Rather than treating outreach and promotional efforts as secondary, Germain advocates for their inclusion as foundational components of project design. This approach highlights the critical role of marketing in not only raising awareness of new services and resources but also in ensuring the long-term impact and sustainability of grant-funded programs. Embedding marketing into the core of project planning allows libraries to more effectively engage stakeholders, demonstrate value, and foster continued support.

Fourie and Ball (2012) underscored the importance of tailoring promotional strategies to meet the needs of diverse academic stakeholders. They recommended approaches such as student focus groups and ambassador programs to gather user insights and address user-specific needs. Their work emphasized the value of flexibility, designing marketing initiatives based on the attributes of individual resources, and incorporating user feedback. Wang et al. (2025) explain that libraries and non-profits (which would include grant

projects) require a specific application of marketing plans as they have different stakeholders driven by public service outcomes.

Overall, the literature consistently highlights the need for proactive, sustained, and strategic marketing practices that align with ongoing changes in the library profession. It also reveals that many libraries lack formal and consistent marketing plans, often relegating marketing to an afterthought. The tendency toward reactionary efforts suggests that without a unified strategy, libraries struggle to leverage marketing as a tool for engagement and growth.

Recognizing the value of effective marketing strategies, the DBF grant project team allotted significant funds and labor to marketing efforts. In alignment with Germain's (2009) model, the DBF grant project leveraged outreach opportunities, including issuing formal press releases, to publicize the launch of the expanded database and redesigned website. These efforts exemplify the assertion that deliberate, early-stage marketing contributes significantly to the visibility and perceived legitimacy of library-led innovations.

The DBF adhered to the segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) framework applied by Wang et al. (2025). Early in the development of the marketing plan, the marketing team identified target populations including organizations, groups, publishers, authors, schools, and news outlets that would be important connections, then worked to create content that would appeal to each group.

Furthermore, Henry (2021) discusses "tags" as a way of engaging on social media and as one pillar of a marketing plan. The DBF uses tags in WordPress to code the books and to engage on their social media pages as a way of introducing new additions to the collection and highlighting things of importance to the audience, which was mentioned previously in Wang et al.

(2025) as one of the foundational parts of a library marketing strategy.

Throughout this grant project, one main focus of the marketing team was on highlighting the usability of the DBF database and website as well as the discoverability of the books collected. This was done through social media and blog posts, tutorial videos, webinars, trainings, and conference presentations. This article highlights not only the detailed marketing plan and process that was initiated for the DBF grant project, including successes and challenges, but also recommendations for other libraries interested in implementing a large-scale marketing project like this one.

Project Details

From the inception of the grant proposal, the DBF grant project included the creation of an Editorial/Marketing Advisory Group (EMAG) to plan and manage awareness building and recruitment to the existing user community and beyond. The EMAG was one of four advisory groups in the larger grant project, also including the Metadata Advisory Group, Collection Development Advisory Group, and Community of Practice Advisory Group (Caponegro et al., 2024). This article focuses on the processes and outcomes of the EMAG. The charge of the EMAG was to take inventory of promotional opportunities through organizations associated and not yet associated with the project, conduct outreach and disseminate content, and have a continued presence on social media and the DBF Blog through the work of interns and the EMAG members. The EMAG would also create policies and best practices for social media posts and marketing materials, including guidelines for inclusive and culturally competent design, language, and visual literacy standards.

A comprehensive marketing plan was developed, complete with a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), clearly defined SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, and Time-bound), details about target audiences and marketing channels, and a budget (Helms, &

Nixon, 2010). The fourteen-member EMAG initially planned to work collaboratively as a group to achieve these goals. However, once the project began, the EMAG realized that, logistically, smaller groups would be needed to deliver a more focused approach for each of the established goals. To form these subgroups, each team members' expertise, interests, connections, and lived experiences related to the project were discussed to find where they best fit. Professional expertise was not a prerequisite to project contribution. Team members who enjoy and are interested in what they are working on are more likely to stay engaged with the project and want to connect their networks to extend the project's reach. By utilizing this asset-based mindset, the larger EMAG was split into five smaller subgroups with the following narrowed focuses: (a) Strategy and Policy Development, (b) Social Media, (c) Website, (d) Blog, and (e) Outreach. Each of these subgroups developed their own set of goals, met regularly, and worked together to move the project forward.

To support the work of all five subgroups as well as the larger EMAG, several logistical and creative tools and resources were obtained for free or purchased with grant funds. These included Microsoft Teams, Google Suite (now called Google Workplace), Canva, Airtable, MailChimp, WordPress, Linktree, Bookshop, Figma, and Zoom. Collaboration, teamwork, and communication skills were vital to the success of the EMAG.

Additionally, the grant included a funded project manager position. The project manager was tasked with developing new workflows, assisting in supervision of interns, and liaising between working groups. If possible, it is highly recommended to assign or hire a project manager. Having a project manager can alleviate many of the challenges that come with a large-scale marketing campaign. The person in this role can act as the connector between groups, manage communication channels, and assist with scheduling. They oversee the big picture, keep the project moving, and motivate the team. If

hiring a project manager is not possible, it is still strongly recommended that the work be divided between subgroups or individual team members. Additionally, without a dedicated project manager, there should be a clear strategy for communicating project goals, progress, delays, and deliverables between each subgroup or team member. While the division of labor makes large-scale projects more manageable, it is important to continuously keep the overall project scope in mind. What follows is an explanation of each subgroup's goals and outcomes, concluding with lessons learned and recommendations for others embarking on a similar large-scale marketing campaign.

Strategy and Policy Development

Once the larger EMAG had been divided, the Strategy and Policy Development subgroup (SPD) met to create a list of goals and objectives which were more narrowly focused on the expansion of the DBF. The SPD was tasked with developing an overall marketing strategy and goals, which included an evaluation of current marketing methods and discussions of what should be done differently as the project transitioned from a focus on picture books and an audience of mostly parents, educators, and librarians to a broader audience including middle and high school students.

The SPD subgroup's main deliverables for direct implementation were the creation of an internal organization-wide style guide and a grant-team-focused communication strategy. The SPD subgroup, with input from experts in accessibility, marketing, advertising, copywriting, and inclusive language, developed a comprehensive style guide which includes policies, best practices, and guidelines for general marketing, graphic creation, the blog writing process, responding to criticism or feedback from external sources, and an internal intern handbook for social media content creation. Additionally, the SPD established a communication plan for internal information-sharing. This

included the creation of a monthly bulletin sent to everyone on the grant project. Each advisory group (AG) chair, including the other three AGs in addition to the EMAG, reported their updates, goals, and action items to the project manager, who compiled and distributed the monthly bulletin via MailChimp. The bulk of this subgroup's work was at the beginning of the project so that their results and deliverables could be utilized by the other subgroups to accomplish their goals. This included the outside group hired to lead the rebranding and website redesign.

MINT Studio collab & Rebranding

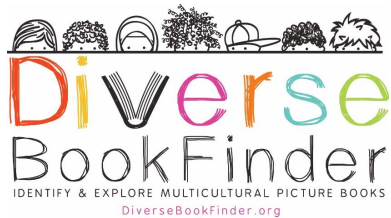
Due to the specialized expertise required, the EMAG planned to hire a professional team to lead the DBF's rebranding and website redesign. After researching the options and conducting interviews, the EMAG selected the MINT Design Studio to develop an updated branding package that would reflect the expanded DBF content and audience. The MINT Design Studio, based at the University of Florida, is a faculty-supervised and student-run graphic design studio that provides upper-level design students with real world project experience (Mint Design Studio, 2025). Four students from MINT chose to work with DBF on this project.

Utilizing an iterative and agile design approach, the DBF team met weekly with the MINT students over a ten-week semester. Each week, the students presented design concepts for logos, color palettes, typography, and iconography for feedback and refinement. Overall, more than 40 designs were considered and refined or discarded throughout the process. The team carefully considered elements such as symbolism, composition, and color. DBF's commitment to inclusion guided each decision, thus centering accessibility in the final design, which also needed to find a balance between being friendly and professional. Typeface legibility and strong color contrast were of utmost importance. Since the logo would be used across digital and

print media, the MINT students developed designs with high contrast that would be legible at various sizes. Additionally, they developed grayscale options that ensured accessibility for various printing needs. Through multiple mood boards and discussions, the EMAG agreed on a logo that was accessible, modern, colorful, and reflective of the expanded content beyond picture books. The final deliverables included a redesigned logo (Figure 1), a complementary color palette, and icons that identify the main components of the DBF website.

Figure 1

Old Logo and New Logo



One main benefit to working with students is that they are newer to the field but excited to work on projects, like this one, which results in great communication, acceptance of feedback, and skilled work while being able to keep costs lower than hiring a full-time professional. Additionally, by serving as clients to the MINT Studio students, the DBF supported their professional development and provided valuable experiential learning opportunities. Both team members and MINT students expanded their knowledge of accessibility in design. Moreover, the DBF achieved a new visual identity that reflected the expanded mission. At the conclusion of this part of the project, the students shared their experience with the project on the [DBF Blog](#) (Vardanyan, et al., 2023).

Website

Based on the success of the previous partnership with the MINT Studio, the Website subgroup invited two of the students to continue on the project as

paid website designers. This was an extraordinary opportunity for the students to continue to develop their professional skills and portfolio while carrying out their branding vision for the DBF. This also allowed the team to benefit from the established relationship and prior understanding and commitment to accessibility.

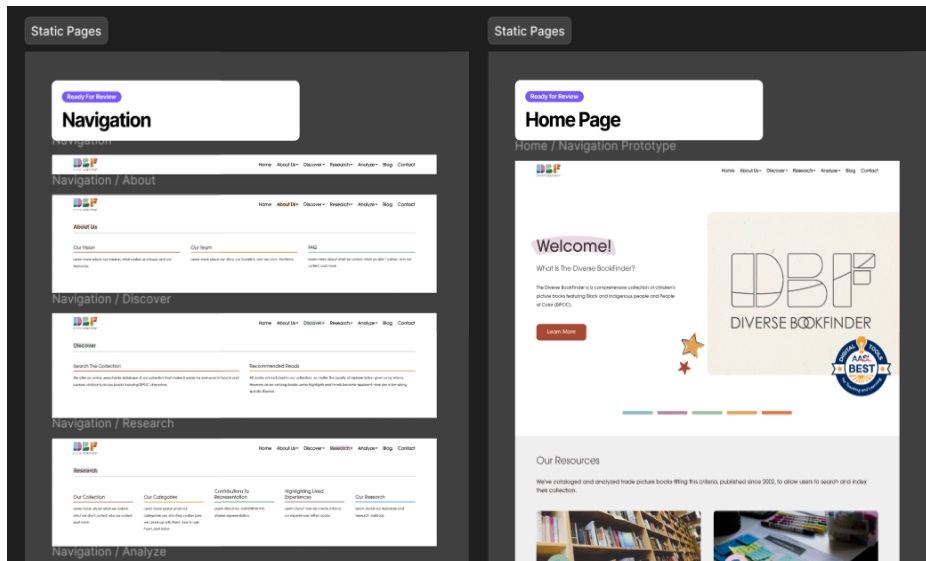
The Website subgroup began by inviting the graphic designers to prepare a project proposal including a letter of agreement. After an initial meeting, they prepared a revised proposal which included the deliverables for the end of the project and the amount of compensation based on expected hours of work. The scope of work included a total redesign of the navigation hierarchy, a re-imagination of the data visualization page, and wireframes (proposed layout) for seven pages with annotations for developer send-off. The team knew it was a risk to partner with students with limited web design experience but were confident in the decision based on the professional presentation and the expectations outlined in the agreement, as well as the results of their work on the brand redesign project.

The Website subgroup began by reviewing the existing sitemap and navigation hierarchy. The graphic designers used Figma, a standard tool for web design, which allowed them to create both wireframes and eventually high-fidelity prototypes (Figure 2). The team met weekly, following the model of the previous partnership, to provide feedback while the designers iterated the designs. This allowed the team to be very engaged in the website redesign process and ensure the final product reflected the vision of the newly expanded DBF.

Figure 2

Screenshot of Figma Wireframes

Note. This figure illustrates a partial view of the wireframes included as the annotated deliverables in Figma.



Once the subgroup received the deliverables from the graphic design team, the package was sent to the web developer to overhaul the WordPress site. As each section of the website redesign was completed, the Website subgroup conducted a thorough review. This included confirmation that the navigation and menu were functional and usable, that all links worked, text was correct and properly formatted, and that the design was implemented as intended. Once all of the pages were complete, the subgroup performed a final review and accessibility audit of the entire website. The redesigned website featuring the new branding and user interface officially launched in June 2024 (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Screenshot of Website

Welcome!

What is the Diverse BookFinder?

The Diverse BookFinder is a comprehensive collection of children's and young adult books featuring Black and Indigenous Peoples and People of Color (BIPOC). We've cataloged and analyzed picture books fitting this criteria since 2002 and have added early readers, chapter books, middle grade, and young adult novels published since 2022.

Learn about the [new and improved DBF!](#)



Social Media & Interns

The Social Media (SM) subgroup was tasked with the hiring and training of interns who would post on the DBF's social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook. Based on the time commitments of the team members and interns, as well as a decision from the DBF Leadership Team and on the higher popularity of the Instagram and Facebook accounts with target user groups, the DBF is not active on X (Twitter) or TikTok.

The grant budget included funding to pay two undergraduate interns at a time for the SM intern position. Applicants were recruited across disciplines. For the duration of the funded internship (three years) the SM subgroup had four total students. Those hired were majoring in graphic design, English, and communications; most already had experience creating social media content for school organizations or in a professional capacity.

Once they were hired, the interns went through an onboarding and training process which included sessions on creating accessible content and using inclusive language, finding the DBF voice while introducing their own

perspectives, and employing tools such as Canva and Airtable to create and schedule content. The SM subgroup met with the interns weekly or biweekly to brainstorm new ideas and review content prior to posting. To streamline the review process, the interns would first submit their content idea for approval. Once approved, they selected books from the DBF to feature in their posts. These selections were then added to a spreadsheet in Microsoft Teams, where the SM subgroup reviewed them for quality. Once the books were approved the interns would create their content and share at the following meeting (Figure 4). The final products were posted to the DBF social media accounts by the project manager.

Figure 4

Summer Stories Instagram Post



At the end of the three-year grant term, the project team applied for a no-cost extension to continue work on the project. However, the funds to pay the undergraduate interns had run out. To continue the current schedule for content posting, it was decided to recruit students from Master of Library and

Information Studies/Science (MLIS) programs that require internships to meet degree requirements. Outreach to MLIS programs around the country enabled the team to recruit students from a variety of backgrounds and interests. Two to three students were chosen each semester for the internship. Though the interns were unpaid, they did earn graduate course credits for completing the internship. They received similar onboarding and training as the undergraduate interns but were given more freedom in the content of their posts (Figure 5) and direct access to the social media accounts to post, reply to comments, and connect the DBF to other content creators. Though a large part of the internship was focused on social media content creation, the scope of work was larger and included collection development work for the DBF and writing blog posts, giving these interns a more well-rounded experience as they moved towards careers in librarianship.

Figure 5

Books for Weather Lessons Instagram Post



Blog

Members of the Blog subgroup were responsible for evaluating submissions to the DBF's official blog (Diverse BookFinder, 2025a). The blog encompasses a wide range of topics, including interviews with authors and illustrators, reflective essays, and resource recommendations from individuals involved with the grant, as well as a series dedicated to lesson plans for teachers instructing elementary students in the fundamentals of critical reading using books from the DBF.

Blog review was guided by the style manual collaboratively developed by the SPD subgroup with contributions from the entire DBF team. The review process required a careful balance between preserving the author's voice and ensuring adherence to stylistic and tonal consistency, as well as addressing necessary vocabulary corrections.

The Blog subgroup operated through both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration. Synchronous meetings were conducted via Zoom, allowing members to collectively evaluate submissions in real-time. Additionally, materials were posted to Microsoft Teams for asynchronous review, enabling team members to assess content at their convenience. A deadline was established for each post to ensure a thorough review process, focusing on grammatical accuracy, tone, coherence, and overall direction. The Blog subgroup welcomed blog topic suggestions from individuals who submitted proposals via a form linked on the DBF website and/or through a monthly grant team newsletter. Several members of the larger DBF team took this opportunity to contribute to the blog.

For interview-based submissions, the subgroup's responsibilities extended to formulating questions to enhance the quality and relevance of the discussion with the author. Each interview is tagged for ease of discoverability (Diverse BookFinder, 2025b). Members of the Blog subgroup noted that

reading the interviewees' books and formulating questions provided a meaningful opportunity to engage not only with a diverse group of authors but also with the DBF audience. One member reported that, through their involvement with the Blog subgroup, they were able to share books featured, along with the DBF tool, with library professionals and parents.

Outreach

Finally, the Outreach subgroup took the other subgroups' marketing efforts to the next level by focusing on relationship building—identifying key audiences and developing effective strategies to engage with those audiences. One of the first steps the Outreach subgroup took was to identify target users and outreach opportunities. For this project, the target users were school and public librarians, teachers, and educational researchers which meant the subgroup sought outreach opportunities at library and education conferences, sent press releases to library and education organizations, and networked with publishers, similar organizations, and book authors.

Since librarians were identified as one of the primary user groups, several DBF team members volunteered to table at the 2024 American Library Association (ALA) annual conference in San Diego as well as facilitated a poster session about the rebrand (Campbell et al., 2024). A small booth (Figure 6) in the ALA exhibit hall was reserved with funding from the grant's marketing budget and given high visibility in the "Diversity in Publishing" pavilion. The booth was decorated with DBF's updated branding and stocked with free swag such as pens, notepads, stickers, and buttons. There were also giveaways and raffle prizes including canvas DBF totes and newly published diverse children's books to attract attention. Team members engaged with a wide variety of potential target users and customized their messaging based on individual needs. For example, they shared with public or school librarians that DBF can help identify diverse children's books for collection development, readers'

advisory, and story time, while communicating to academic librarians that DBF compiles and visualizes data on representation in children's and young adult literature. One team member even talked to a representative from a non-profit and explained they could use DBF to create diverse booklists for soliciting donations. In the spirit of building relationships, table volunteers also spoke to several diverse children's book authors who later agreed to be interviewed for the blog. Many new volunteers for the overall project were also recruited after learning about DBF's goals and resonating with the mission. Overall, it was a very successful outreach effort.

Figure 6

Booth at ALA



After promoting the launch of the new and improved DBF at ALA and experiencing the vendor side of libraries, the Outreach subgroup also created two [video tutorials](#) to introduce the updated platform to the public (DBF Blog, 2025). Both videos are less than three minutes long and come with engaging audio narration and full transcripts. While one video took users through the new features of the website, the other went into more detail about searching

the collection. The videos are embedded on the DBF website, posted on social media, and shared on the blog.

In addition to the videos, the Outreach subgroup created a press kit in the form of a shareable [Google Drive](#) that was sent out to media outlets (such as *American Libraries Magazine* and *School Library Journal*), professional organizations, and listservs. The press kit included a full press release outlining the key selling points along with suggested social media posts and sample captions. It also linked to attractive printables such as branded bookmarks and a high-resolution version of the new DBF logo (Diverse BookFinder Google Drive, 2025).

The press kit was also highlighted in the DBF [newsletter](#), distributed through MailChimp, which was periodically sent out to subscribers of the website. The newsletter kept DBF fans and supporters up to date on the rebrand and included news and views, content spotlights, social media standouts, and links to the latest blog posts (Diverse BookFinder Newsletter Archive, 2024).

Finally, the Outreach subgroup found that one of the most effective ways to generate interest in DBF and to build relationships with potential users and stakeholders was to present about the project and platform at related professional conferences and meetings. As a result, team members representing a wide range of professions—K-12 teachers, teacher educators, librarians, children’s literature researchers, etc.—submitted conference proposals discussing or incorporating the DBF and received many acceptances. The DBF has been featured at venues including the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, National Joint Conference of Librarians of Color, American Association of School Librarians Annual Conference, National Convening on Children’s Racial Learning, and more. These conference presentations have been instrumental in creating

professional buzz around the new and improved DBF platform and the large-scale grant project that got it to this point.

Conclusion

Although this grant project was scheduled to conclude in September 2025, it was canceled early in April 2025 due to the defunding of IMLS (American Library Association, 2025). This early cancellation impacted the project marketing, led to the early termination of the interns, and halted planned collaborations and outreach efforts with authors and social media content creators. Luckily, the primary marketing goals of the project funded by the grant were almost complete.

Throughout the course of this project, the team encountered a variety of experiences and gained valuable insights into marketing for large-scale initiatives. Key takeaways included:

- *Identify target users and outreach opportunities early* – It is important to identify the groups of people that will benefit and be interested in the project as early as the grant proposal stage. This includes recognizing potential outreach channels to engage these groups.
- *Utilize asset-based collaborations* – When forming a team, ask potential members about their expertise, connections, and lived experiences related to the project to find where they fit best.
- *Employ focused small groups when managing a large number of team members* – On this project, the marketing team grew to nearly 20 members, while the overall project involved more than 150 participants. It was vital to the project to divide team members into smaller groups that focused on different aspects of the project.
- *Build in room for flexibility and modification* – Large projects rarely go as planned: timelines shift, roles change, and unexpected challenges and opportunities arise. Flexibility and adaptability are key for large-scale

projects, especially with large teams. Keeping calm during a challenging time and thinking creatively to adjust tasks or processes are invaluable traits for team leaders.

- *Hire/work with students/interns when possible* – Students/interns can be an amazing asset to a large-scale project and can be funded through grant proposals. In return, they can gain meaningful work experience in their field that can strengthen their portfolios or resumes as they move forward in their professional journeys.

Overall, this was a successful marketing campaign for a large-scale grant project that redesigned and increased use of the DBF website and CAT, enabled collaboration with organizations from many fields and book authors for varied age levels and genres, and connected hundreds of new users to the DBF.

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