

Messages from previous NDSR Host Supervisors

Howard Besser

Besser-NDSR Potential Hosts 12/11/2015

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Student-run Symposium



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Enrichment Sessions



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Enrichment Sessions



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Focus Groups



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Focus Groups

- Separate groups for Residents and Mentors
- 2+ hours of focused discussions
- Held at end of Residency

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Importance of the Program to the Hosting Organizations

- program was both important and valuable to both participants and to the institutions involved
- value was much broader than learning skillsets; it also included anthropological, cultural, educational, and organizational dimensions
- Supervisors repeatedly used terms like “transforming” and “transformational” to describe the results of having the Resident embedded in their organization for that length of time
- one Supervisor referred to the Residency period as “a big win” for both the organization and the Resident
- another organization felt that the Residency was so important that they created a separate tab for it in their annual report to their Board.

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Quotes from Hosting Supervisors

- “a generational dimension to this—older professionals learning from younger; a generational impact”
- “we can learn from her, she can learn from us.”
- having a Resident embedded in the organization for so long became “like an anthropological study; holding up a mirror to our organization.”

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Effect on the Hosting Organization

- The prestige of being selected by LC and IMLS to host a Resident had an internal effect on a number of the institutions. The endorsement of being selected by these outside bodies in a competitive process raised the profile and priority of digital questions within the organization.

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Supervisors on positive institutional effects of just having a resident dedicated to digital curation issues

- this provided an “extremely valuable” function of raising the awareness of these kinds of issues within the institution as a whole (not solely one department or committee).
- the value of having one person who could focus on these issues fulltime, without having to worry about other duties
- having the Resident made it easier to answer questions from management
- the value of having a fresh person coming from outside the organization to ask both naïve and probing questions, but who became close enough to the organization to transcend being an outsider
- the Resident brought a knowledge base and skillset that was not previously present in the organization

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Departments within Hosting Orgs

- One of the most important effects of the Residency cited by multiple Supervisors was “silo-busting”
- Because a number of the Residents had cross-departmental responsibilities, the Resident was able to cross departmental silos in ways that even a long-time employee given new cross-departmental responsibilities was not able to (because other departments continued to identify them with their prior departmental home)
- Residents were often seen as fresh faces with no alliance to the culture and perspectives of a particular department, and thus were able to seriously cross borders between previously isolated departments
- And in some cases their recommendations for inter-departmental sharing were taken more seriously than they would have been coming from veteran employees

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Residents are not Interns

- More than one Supervisor had initial fears that hosting a Resident would involve “baby-sitting”, but they were instead surprised that they ended up hosting “a well organized and formal person”.

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Mentors learned from Residents

- In general, the Supervisors felt that their Resident helped them learn more about the complexity of digital stewardship
- One said that they now know that it involves a large learning process, with the need to balance challenge and expectations
- Another said that the Resident helped them learn about the digital world and what types of platforms are out there; sometimes confirming what outside consultants had previously said, and in other cases defining the landscape in newer ways
- Another said, "Before we can even think about the technology, we need to put in place workflows and communications."

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Hosting NDSR events benefited the Mentor

- One Supervisor felt that hosting an NDSR event at their institution had both "strategic value as well as important programmatic value". He said that it had significant impact on higher-level administrators that "will pay strategic dividends for us down the road".

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Not only helping the Hosting Org, but helping a much wider field

- Some Supervisors saw their mentoring of a Resident in a national context: "Not only a chance to contribute to an individual, but to contribute to the profession on a national scale."

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Residency Goals

- The Supervisors were all in general pleased with the Residency, feeling that all their initial hopes and goals had been met. Their consensus was that the Residency delivered at least as much as it had promised at the outset. But they were unclear as to whether the Residency had met LC's goals.
- Since then, we have done more to clarify LC's goals.

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Post-Resident

- a number of the Sites did focus on handing over the Resident's findings and continuing work to regular staff, but not all were able to mainstream these into regular organizational activities.
- In some cases this was due to staffing issues (not enough staff, no staff with the proper training or background, a time gap between when the Resident left and when they would be able to hire for a new position), and in other cases it was due to poor planning.
- *the importance of a transition plan that makes sure that the Resident's work will be picked up after the Residency ends*
- *part of being a good digital steward requires planning the transition of their own departure.*

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Recommendations from 1st Supervisor cohort to subsequent Supervisor cohorts

- Be honest in your self-evaluation of your own organization; are you ready? Do you have the buy-in from your organization? Is your organization really ready?
- In writing your initial proposal, add an "if time permits" clause—particularly looking beyond the initial project
- Future hosts need to clearly understand what the program aims are
- Be careful where you situate the Resident within your organization. Do not place them where they will be too closely identified with a particular department that does not command respect from other departments. Ideally locate them in a department that has already built bridges with other departments. And make sure that they have good access to the IT department.
- All sides need to be aware that teamwork and a well thought out work environment are a goal
- As a host, you should be prepared for the unexpected: government shutdown, snow days. Be flexible.
- Allow for ownership and flexibility; things may not go the way you think they will

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<http://besser.tsoa.nyu.edu/howard/Talks/>