

Using a Project Manager to Improve Your Team

A project manager is someone who helps organize a team and keeps the team moving forward. Feedback indicates that faculty and students alike find this role to be extremely beneficial. Moreover, it provides a valuable professional development opportunity for master's and graduate students or post-docs.

Benefits of Using a Project Manager

- Helps keep the team organized and on track
- Reduces the time burden on faculty
- Gives students a singular point of contact for questions and administrative matters
- Provides a valuable developmental opportunity for master's and graduate students or post-docs

"Having a graduate student or postdoc to interface directly with the undergrads is absolutely critical. It doesn't diminish the experience for undergrads, but rather enhances it, and honestly I could not have led the team without my grad student." – Team leader

Common Tasks of a Project Manager

- Work with the team to set milestones and a timeline for the project
- Track progress towards milestones
- Set up and manage a shared infrastructure for team communications and document sharing
- Schedule meetings
- Capture important notes from meetings, such as next steps
- Communicate with the team in-between meetings to ensure progress
- Mentor undergraduate students (intended to complement, not replace faculty engagement)
- Identify problems in the team's operations and filter those up accordingly
- Make arrangements for site visits and travel
- Correspond with external partners/clients
- Respond to requests for information from the themes and other campus administrators
- Manage the project budget
- Identify opportunities to share the team's work
- Organize team building activities
- Help with grading and crediting
- Capture and share the outcomes from the project

Identifying a Project Manager

Anyone can play the role of a project manager. Data from past years indicate that staff, faculty, master's/graduate students and post-docs have all served in this role. That said, where possible, we encourage teams to recruit master's/graduate students for this role. We have received positive feedback that this is mutually beneficial: faculty have found that graduate students are up to the task; undergraduates value the opportunity to get to know more advanced students and learn a lot under their mentorship; and master's and graduate students find that this opportunity provides a valuable and enjoyable developmental opportunity.

Ideas for recruiting a project manager include:

- Let [Bass Connections](#) know that you are seeking a project manager and we will help publicize the opportunity
- Contact relevant DGSs and ask them to share information about your project with their students and/or ask for student recommendations – to find contact information for the DGSs, click [here](#), and then navigate by department
- Advertise the project through listservs and student groups in the master’s programs and professional schools
- Encourage master’s and graduate students who have participated in Bass Connections to recommend the program to their friends
- Consult with your theme leaders/administrators for suggestions

Ensuring Developmental Opportunities for the Project Manager

Putting a little time into making this a valuable experience for the project manager can go a long way:

- Meet with the project manager at the beginning of the project to set clear expectations and goals
- Ask what his/her developmental goals are
- Provide advice on mentoring students
- Identify opportunities for the project manager to present or write on the team’s work
- Provide regular feedback to the project manager
- Create opportunities for the project manager to lead parts of team meetings or client/external interactions

“As a graduate student, I got invaluable experience mentoring undergraduates and leading them as a team, especially over the summer. I also established new interdisciplinary collaborations that allowed me to learn new skills and new topic areas, and was important for my professional development.”



James Herrera, project manager and recipient of the 2019 Bass Connections Award for Outstanding Mentorship, with his team and community partners in Madagascar.

Have a great project manager?

If your project manager turns out to be critical to your team’s success, please consider nominating them for the [Bass Connections Award for Outstanding Mentorship](#). Nominations are solicited every February.