

## 19. Project\_Kids

**00:02 Maria Gomez (S3):** In the first three months, there was just kid after kid, hundreds of kids a week. In less than six weeks, we got almost 500 kids. And so that puts a burden...

**00:11 Karen McLoughlin (S4):** The spirit of Share Our Strength is very much innovation and growth, and don't be afraid to try something new. And if it doesn't work, let's learn from it and move on. So, the fact...

**00:22 Katrina Hill (S5):** We are big play advocates at KaBOOM! , and I think the best you could do if hear this and feel inspired, just get out and play.

[music]

**00:30 Kendall Lott (S1):** We have seen project management used in many fields. And we know that it comes in differing levels of formality. This podcast focuses on how project management is being used to provide services to kids in need. And each story has a project management formality all its own. We start with an ad hoc project set up to handle a sudden influx of unaccompanied and traumatized immigrant children, who arrived in the DC Metro area in the summer of 2014. We move on to a conversation about one organization's more formal and unique project management fundraising efforts to feed the nation's children most in need. We end with a project manager using a highly structured project management approach in the service of play. For the certified PMPs in our audience, this podcast can be counted for one PDU. Information to record your PDU is provided at the end of the podcast.

**01:18 S1:** Final Milestone Productions presents 'Project Kids'.

**01:24 Speaker 2:** In the Washington DC chapter of the Project Management Institute, this is PM Point of View, the podcast that looks at project management from all the angles. Here's your host, Kendall Lott.

**01:33 S1:** Maria Gomez is President and CEO of Mary's Center, a federally-qualified health center that provides healthcare, education and social services to individuals and families in the DC area for over 25 years. In the summer of 2014, as a result of confusion over proposed changes in US immigration policy, coupled with extreme violence and instability in certain Central American countries, the Department of Home and Security, DHS, was suddenly faced with thousands of unaccompanied children coming across the United States' southern border. When hundreds of these children began to show up in the Washington DC area, the staff at Mary's Center found themselves developing a project in the middle of the crisis, trying to help kids that not only needed physical relief but also legal intervention as they began to tell their stories of their trauma.

[music]

**02:31 S1:** In the news last summer around July and August, there was a lot of news about a lot of children coming across the border without their parents; about how different communities had had

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to suddenly come up to speed to handle this, while the policy-makers tried to figure out what to do about it all. Mary's Center had a key play in trying to figure out how to respond to this situation. And in fact, that was like a project.

**02:54 S3:** The reality is that we've been seeing these kids all the time. But it became an issue because there was the immigration bill that was coming up, the folks that make money crossing those kids, or adults, set out the message in these countries that: "Come all, come now, because there's gonna be an immigration bill that's gonna make all of you legal in this country," because it was in their self-interest, right?

**03:20 S1:** It created a market. [chuckle]

**03:22 S3:** And so the fact of the matter is that these poorest of poorest of people who might have had a little piece of land where they were growing maize or corn, or had a cow or had a sheep, or whatever, sold everything, to get their kids across the border. It was the immigration piece, the opportunity to be legal. The other piece was that when the kids crossed the border, they got caught by the Homeland Security, they began to tell government themselves the tortures that they've experienced.

**03:56 S1:** In terms of the travel?

**03:57 S3:** Right, and in terms of their home countries.

**04:00 S1:** In their home countries as well?

**04:01 S3:** But this are the same stories that we have heard for the last, what? Since the war in El Salvador, which was in the '80s. This is why Mary's Center got started. What was new for us was that there were just too many at one time. So, all of a sudden, within three months, we got over 600 kids.

**04:18 S1:** Right here in DC?

**04:19 S3:** And some of them in Maryland. It was bigger by almost 300%.

[music]

**04:28 S3:** Where the project here at Mary's Center had to change was to say: Okay, how do we organize two things? One is, how do we organize the philanthropic community and the local governments? Because unless we told them the need, those two folks that have the ability to give us funding would've never known. So, I think that unless we were able to start securing some funding and some support, we knew that we were not gonna be able to see all these kids, because we needed to hire some folks. So, while the money was taking place, we were actually putting the project together. But what was beautiful about it is that we've been doing all this along. So, we had the tools. We had the social workers. We have partners in the legal field, which is the biggest thing that these kids needed. We knew that these kids had seen trauma. They had seen their parents being killed. They had seen their classmates being killed. They had not been in school for many, many, many years. All this trauma, we knew that that was happening.

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**05:38 S3:** Once they got here, they're here now. They have nothing to go back to. So, we knew that we had to make sure that besides the physical taking care of these children, the biggest thing that we needed to make sure is to get them a lawyer, so that Homeland Security said, "If these kids can demonstrate that there's a danger, or that there's nothing to go back to, and they can get a lawyer, the process can move forward. So part of our job was also to advocate, to say, okay, how do we get a whole bunch of lawyers deployed?"

[music]

**06:12 S3:** This is a very interesting project in that most times we in the non-profit sector, we're always advocating for ourselves, for what we run, or what're president of.

**06:26 S1:** For our mission.

**06:27 S3:** Right, for our mission. In this case, I spent a lot of time and energy making sure that other partners, that are not part of Mary's Center, got the money to make sure that we were able to fill in that whole spectrum of care. So what we said is, we went to the philanthropy, we went to the legal services and said, "Look, I know that this is Maria Gomez running Mary's Center, but at this point I'm trying to advocate for Ayuda and for CARECEN."

**06:56 S1:** For those who don't know, Ayuda and CARECEN are local nongovernmental organizations dedicated to supporting immigrants in the DC area.

**07:04 S3:** You have got to give them money to make sure that they can answer to the needs of these kids. Because that's the most important piece. If those kids do not get into a legal system and their paperwork taken care of, everything that we did will be for nothing, because they will get deported back to their country.

[music]

**07:26 S1:** Actually, let's define the project for a second. It was to care for these kids, but it was more than that. You were actually orchestrating the legal issues for them.

**07:32 S3:** To make sure that they got into a legal path, and then to actually get the facts out there. And another big piece of the work was to raise that consciousness with those countries to say, this is not something that these kids are making up. It's time that you really look at making sure that you as a country are addressing the needs of these families. This are real, real issues.

[music]

**08:01 S1:** The triggering event, was that when you began to see the kids and wonder, or did you anticipate it?

**08:06 S3:** Unfortunately I was in the midst of it, because...

**08:08 S1:** You didn't see it coming or hear it on the grapevine, this word is going out. You just suddenly went, "Why do we get 10 kids this week? Wait, wait, hold on. Why do we have 40 kids this week?" [chuckle]

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**08:16 S3:** Exactly, because also Homeland Security said that they were gonna be holding these kids for awhile.

**08:22 S1:** So you have pretty good communication with Homeland Security?

**08:24 S3:** Yeah. The question was Homeland Security had to make a decision. Do we put those kids back, or do we hold them over and see what's really going on?

**08:34 S1:** And they made the choice this time to see what's going on?

**08:36 S3:** Yeah.

[music]

**08:42 S1:** I remember hearing from the news that at the point where there with DHS, there was a lot of story telling and people were asking them, "What did you observe? What has gone on with you?" It sounded like there was more taking the story from kids than in the past...

**08:54 S3:** Yes, storytelling... And I think that they did that because I think the media was getting sort of from the public, like, "Who would do that?"

[music]

**09:07 S3:** Imagine with all the trauma you've already had, to cross the border and they just kinda dump you right there in the middle of a highway in LA.

**09:15 S1:** What was the age range?

**09:16 S3:** The majority of the ages were between 11 to 16, 17.

**09:23 S1:** How did they get funneled to DC area?

**09:26 S3:** The kids did come with a phone number. That's how they were dispersed. So some of the kids came with numbers with families that were in DC and North Carolina and Texas and Boston. So if DHS picks up these kids, and they don't automatically deport them, they get picked up. They get sent to immigration. They get sent to the Department of Homeland Security, whether it's Texas or LA or whatever. But DHS did a wonderful job actually. They gave the kids good health, the whole assessment. They gave them pretty good food, they clothed them. Because some of them came, and it was cold, and they came with nothing, and crossing the river they were sick and they were dehydrated or whatever. And so DHS took care of all of that. And then they got them well and they had schools. Once the kids were somewhat kids again, then they would start calling the family member.

**10:26 S1:** Then they would connect them?

**10:27 S3:** Yeah.

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**10:27 S1:** It sounds like government, and then the nongovernmental sector, the nonprofit sector, and also some of the corporate in the sense that that's where some of the legal teams came from probably, and some of the philanthropic, I would imagine...

**10:40 S3:** Coming together and saying, "Where can we put our money, urgent dollars, to make this happen?"

**10:45 S1:** How would Homeland Security reflect your role? Did they interact with you at all directly in helping to get the kids to you, to your service?

**10:51 S3:** Oh my gosh, yeah. It's Homeland Security that's making sure that these kids are safe.

**10:55 S1:** So they needed your part of this process, because they do have a turnover process, I mean, they release at some point.

**10:58 S3:** Right, they release people. But I think they care, in that they didn't want those kids to be victims again. To end up in the hands of crazy people. They should feel very proud at the fact that under such duress, they were able to arm this humongous agency, to actually meet a need in a very successful way.

[music]

**11:29 S1:** Did you see any risk as an institution, or risk to the project not being able to succeed, or fail?

**11:35 S3:** Well, I think the biggest risk that we had is, we're in a situation where morally, and also just because of the status that we have with a particular grant with the federal government, called the Federally Qualified Health centers, that once somebody walks in our doors, we gotta see them. Whether we can afford to see them or not. But when you have 600 kids coming in in less than three months, that put a huge burden on us. I mean actually it was at the tune of \$6 million that we spent on those kids.

**12:05 S1:** On 600 kids?

**12:07 S3:** On 600, because they needed specialists, they needed food, they needed housing, we had to put out medication. So that took us hiring more people, us putting out the money to make sure that they had the right lawyer, and these kids were extremely sick. Some of those kids that came would've probably never had come, had they not had that hope that they could become legal. These kids are very, very debilitated, not only mentally but they were also physically debilitated.

**12:37 S1:** Are there psychological or counselling services also part of this?

**12:40 S3:** Oh yeah, huge. This is a big part of our work here.

**12:48 S1:** We talked definitionally that a project is when you know that it has an end at some point, something you define has an end. How did you plan for when this crisis was over, or this project was over?

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**12:58 S3:** Yeah well, there wasn't a lot of planning time, that's the unfortunate piece. The project was unwinding when we listened to our staff and said, "Okay, we're not getting the kids anymore, what's happening? Where are they going?" So then we brought the collective of the community together, the nonprofits of us and said, "Are you getting the kids? Who's getting the kids?" Nobody's getting the kids. We also talked to Homeland Security. "Homeland Security, what's happening with these kids? Are your holding cells still full?" No, there's not an influx of kids coming in any more. And the reason is because the message went out, we actually talked to community here through the media and all that, to say, "Even if you send kid here, even if immigration reform took place tomorrow, none of those kids are gonna get papers by now. It's not worth you selling the little piece of land that you have. It's not worth... "

**13:55 S1:** So you message back essentially into the market saying, "No, this isn't what you..."

**14:00 S3:** Through Univision, through Telemundo, because people listen to this. The good thing about this community is that people are still traveling back and forth. The media's a really good messenger, but so is the foot path.

**14:11 S1:** And did you count on the foot path? That's part of your communication plan? [chuckle]

**14:13 S3:** Oh yeah, very much so. But we also worked with those countries, Honduras and El Salvador, and Nicaragua, three countries finally, to say to those embassies, "You have got to really begin to address the issues that are happening in your community right back home."

**14:34 S1:** How do you measure how effective it was?

**14:36 S3:** It's an outcome, but I'm not sure I would jump up and down and celebrate. But the outcome is that at least people are not selling their last penny for what? For nothing.

**14:47 S1:** Let's take it for those that came through the 600, do you follow their cases now? Are you still engaged?

**14:51 S3:** Oh yeah, very much so. Because the work that we do, they're still coming in for their healthcare, this whole social service piece. So we're helping them to make sure they get hooked up into school, that they stay in school, make sure that some of those kids that are already of child-bearing ages, that they don't get pregnant, that they are conscious about what they're doing.

**15:18 S3:** I think that piece that the positive outcome that I see of course, is that under the US statute of our law, that says that every kid under 18 needs to be in the school system, that every kid needs to go to school and that every kid needs to graduate, that's not a policy of every country, right?

**15:39 S1:** Right.

**15:40 S3:** So that to me is an outcome, and to see those kids thriving in a school system, not seeing trauma on a daily basis, having that protection as a child, that you can go to school, that you have certain rights. And part of what we do here when we took them in, is to say to a kid, "If you're not going to school, if you're being abused, if you get put on the street, you have rights in the country, you know. Just here's our number, call us."

**16:05 S1:** Call you back.

**16:07 S3:** So, that's a tremendous success.

**16:12 S1:** If you want to learn more about Mary's Center and its services, go to [marycenter.org](http://marycenter.org), that's one word [marycenter.org](http://marycenter.org).

[music]

**16:27 S1:** Share Our Strengths No Kid Hungry Campaign raises money to launch school breakfast programs and empower families to shop for and prepare healthy meals. It also provides grants to the most effective hunger-fighting organizations, to help them end child hunger in their communities. Karen McLoughlin is the operations manager for culinary events, and her job is to organize and manage Taste of the Nation fund-raising events across the nation. Working with teams of dedicated volunteers, she hosts major events that typically draw 1,500 to 2,500 attendees. The teams may be volunteers, but the project management is highly structured and it works.

**17:02 S4:** I'm the operations manager for culinary events at Share Our Strength, our largest program is the No Kid Hungry Campaign, which is a national campaign to end childhood hunger in America. And our culinary events are fund-raising vehicles to raise the dollars that it takes to connect kids with meals.

**17:19 S1:** What did you do to prepare for this role yourself?

**17:22 S4:** My background is in political organizing and culinary arts. So I spent 2008 and 2010 election cycles in progressive politics doing communications, organizing, all of that down-and-dirty in the trenches. And then went to culinary school and cooked for awhile, and actually came to Share Our Strength through one of our No Kid Hungry programs called Cooking Matters, which is a cooking class for low-income families.

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**17:57 S4:** Way back when Taste of the Nation was the primary activity of Share Our Strength, we are very much grounded in the culinary community. Chefs have always been central to our work and so this great tasting platform has grown up all over the country. We do about between 20 and 30 events a year in different cities, and chefs come and donate their time and their talents and bring delicious food. And everyone can come together and have the best bites from a city, an experience they can't have anywhere else and raise a lot of money.

**18:27 S1:** So, describe what one of the events actually would look like, the actual execution.

**18:31 S4:** Yeah so, our events are driven by a combination of our staff here at headquarters and volunteers in the community. So it starts with a committee kick off meeting where they start planning, roles of responsibilities among staff and volunteers, who's gonna be in charge of the auction, who's working with sponsors, who's working with chefs. Our team is a weird combination of fund raisers and volunteer managers. Which is a unique skill set. So they work very closely with the volunteers and try to suss out where their strengths are and how we can best use their time and

talents.

**19:06 S1:** How do they do that? That's an interesting team build you have there.

**19:09 S4:** Most of it is just direct conversation and gut feelings. [chuckle] You can quickly figure out, like once someone gets in the door that's a big step, by just not sending an email but actually showing up. And then asking them what their interested in, what's their past experience, where do they have connections with the community. Someone works in the chamber of commerce, we want them working on sponsorship. If one of our partner's at a soup kitchen, we want them working on recruiting day of volunteers. So figuring out what they want to do and what roll they can fill. It's usually a pretty easy conversation. And then as volunteers come back year after year, you can have the conversation about them taking on more responsibility or helping mentor other people, bring more people in.

[music]

**19:56 S4:** We always do a calendar comparison of what are the other tasting events in the area, dates to avoid, big sporting events, things like that. And start narrowing down the venue, lock in a date, lock in some times and then start securing chefs and restaurants.

**20:11 S1:** That sounds like there's some risk at stepping on other events, or being stepped on by other events perhaps.

**20:14 S4:** That's right, yeah. 30 years ago we were the only game in town, but that no longer is the case. [chuckle]

**20:19 S1:** What is considered a Taste of the Nation event, is it looking like it did 30 years ago?

**20:24 S4:** Yes, I would say the bones of it are the same. What changes is the type of chef, the number of chefs. Some markets are chefs that come from more casual places or from multi unit chains. Some places focus purely on four or five star chefs. Who's the hot new chef in Atlanta? We have to have him here. So each market looks a little bit different year by year, in terms of what the chef lineup is. And that also dictates who's in the room, attendee wise, and who that interests. There's always a speaking program, because it is very important to us to always connect this fabulous event back to the reason we're here. We usually have a member of our executive team or a local chef celebrity, an MC who welcomes everyone, takes them through the importance of the event, highlights important things that have happened this year, or, "It's been 10 years, we've raised a million dollars. Let's congratulate everyone in the room for their hard work." We show a video. Sometimes there's a live auction. And so getting all of those audio visual components to go smoothly, making sure all the speakers are well prepped.

**21:38 S1:** How many people typically attend one of these?

**21:41 S4:** Our major market events are between 1,500 and 2,500 people.

[music]

**21:50 S1:** So, is it an easy thing to put together with a 30 year history?



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**21:55 S4:** [chuckle] That depends who you ask.

**21:57 S1:** Well, so you're in charge of these, right?

**21:58 S4:** Yeah.

**22:00 S1:** So you're the project manager of the project managers?

**22:01 S4:** That's right. So I'm the operations manager and I have an operations team that works on all of the super exciting things, like contracting, insurance, buying swag, moving people, moving equipment, things like that. And then we have regional managers who work with specific markets, who work with the volunteers in that market.

**22:19 S1:** And you worked with an integrated master schedule of some sort, where you know where all those parts are and how they fit into the big picture? So how early do you start the planning for an event?

**22:28 S4:** So, Taste season is March through June. Summer is pretty quiet, 'cause everyone's on vacation. And then the fall is dinner season, where we do smaller events. The Taste planning season starts in October/November. We like to have an idea of the big events by Thanksgiving, and then the rest of 'em firm up by February. And that's, when I say 'firm up', I mean like sign a venue contract. A lot of planning and chef recruitment, auction item recruitment has started since the week after the last event.

[chuckle]

**23:08 S1:** So it starts very quickly?

**23:09 S4:** Yes.

[music]

**23:15 S1:** For the program to be supporting the kids, who represents that?

**23:19 S4:** So that's our, we call them the program team, like our chief strategy officer.

**23:24 S1:** Do you view those as one of your stake holders or are you removed from them?

**23:29 S4:** I would say yes, more than just a revenue generator, some of these events are an engagement opportunity for communities where we aren't necessarily doing a lot. This allows them to come in and feel connected, so they recognize that there's a lot more going on in the room besides just dollars being raised. So, from that perspective our communications team is involved, the money raisers, the money spenders, volunteers. Especially committed volunteers that have been engaged for 20 plus years are intimately involved in the finances, in the general flow of things and have their own personal goals. So, I guess an important thing to note is that a percentage of the proceeds from each of these events is granted back into the local market. So a percentage of it comes to the national, operating fund, to do work, to help fund work in places we don't have

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culinary events. But a percentage of that is granted back to local grantees that are highlighted at the event.

**24:25 S1:** These are other non-profit organizations?

**24:26 S4:** Mm-hmm. Food banks, community centers, women's shelters, local YMCAs. Any number of groups that work with us. They set standards for how the funds are gonna be spent, benchmark number of meals or number of families touched, things like that.

[music]

**24:47 S1:** How does your budgeting work? Is that an annual budget that you look at and you get to apportion it per project?

**24:51 S4:** It is an annual budget that we work on, based on projected revenue of a specific event. We try and keep our expense to revenue ratio at about 5%. So, we set a budget based on projected revenue with growth over last year. And then also take into account any outlier expenses that we know that we have to change venues and that's gonna be an additional X thousand dollars, or we've lost a huge sponsor, so we know the revenue's gonna go down. So, we really go almost line by line through all 50 events. [chuckle]

**25:23 S1:** Does the general economy affect any of these projections for you?

**25:26 S4:** It definitely does. And we do re-forecasting on a monthly basis almost. And I get updates from my team every two weeks.

**25:35 S1:** Has this grown over the 30 years, then?

**25:37 S4:** I think the most we were doing was upwards of 50 events a year. And that was, I wanna say, maybe five or 10 years ago. And that was when the majority of events were run purely by volunteers. There was very little staff involvement. We would send them some buttons, we would send them some swag, but it was all on them.

[chuckle]

**25:54 S4:** In the last few years, we've made a concerted effort to spend more staff time and resources on growing events that have the most potential, and making sure that it looks like a Taste of the Nation event and feels like a Taste of the Nation event. And so that resulted in some events not renewing. So we are looking at about 25 events this year.

**26:20 S1:** Do you plan for the branding aspect?

**26:22 S4:** It is very planned. Our communications and brand team, we work very closely with to develop the artwork, all of the signage and templates, and PSAs, and press releases. They do the design and they also do the language to make sure that it's as strong as possible, that it's clear as possible, and that it aligns with the communications coming out of the No Kid Hungry campaign.

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**26:49 S1:** So, how do you know if you've done a quality event, who are your checks and balances?

**26:53 S4:** There's so many pieces of each of these events, that it's hard to look at as a whole without looking at those individual pieces. I look at registration. Were we able to get 2,500 people in the door in 30 minutes? How many issues were there? Did everybody get wristbands? How long did the lines go? Were people...

**27:11 S1:** Do you count all that in the metrics?

**27:12 S4:** Mm-hmm. That was like, "Was registration a win or a fail?"

[chuckle]

**27:17 S4:** "Was the silent auction a win or a lose? Did we hit... "

**27:20 S1:** What does that mean?

**27:21 S4:** Did we hit our revenue goal?

**27:22 S1:** I see.

**27:23 S4:** You know, some of these auctions have upwards of 100 items.

**27:26 S1:** So one of the big areas I wanna look at then is risk. So when you're looking at this about to all happen and unfold during the year in this regular routine that you have, where do you see your biggest risks and how do you accommodate those with your team?

**27:38 S4:** I think in recent years the biggest risk has been the changing economy. And a combination of individuals not necessarily having as much disposable income, and corporations not having as much... I think that that is a very hard thing to pin down when you're trying to set revenue goals and make guarantees to the people spending the money that you'll be able to deliver.

**28:03 S1:** Right.

**28:03 S4:** So, that has what's grown into our basically bi-weekly revenue forecasting...

[chuckle]

**28:10 S4:** So that we can give them an up-to-the-minute picture of what we're looking at.

**28:15 S1:** It's a very ongoing adjustment in your budget process.

**28:18 S4:** Right. So we...

**28:19 S1:** Your target process.

**28:19 S4:** Right. We set goals and we have goals that we are measured on individually, as

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employees. But as you get closer and closer that final target might look different, and it might be way above your personal goal...

[chuckle]

**28:34 S4:** And it might be way below your personal goal. But at a certain point it becomes not about you, it becomes about the funds that are being guaranteed through our organization.

[music]

**28:48 S1:** You talked about somebody coming in as a volunteer and being interviewed. Showing up was the first part of the interview, or the discussion.

**28:54 S4:** Yeah. That's right. [laughter]

**28:55 S1:** If they came in talking about, "I'm really good with detail and tracking things and maybe working a dependencies chart for you and working at resourcing and things." Would that be a valuable piece, or do they need to know something about their actual community or something about food?

**29:09 S4:** No, I mean that's tremendously valuable.

**29:12 S1:** That's right PMs. There lies the beauty of project management. Our skill-set is useful even without industry or sector expertise.

**29:20 S1:** Do they need to have culinary skill to be able to be in a role that you're in now?

**29:24 S4:** It's not required, but it is definitely helpful. At the very base to understand the chefs and the history, it is also really helpful to be able to scale a recipe and understand [chuckle] how many butane burners you need to feed 4,000 people.

**29:43 S1:** On the other hand, as we've heard from previous guests, expertise along with critical thinking that comes with experience, will definitely enhance your effectiveness.

[music]

**29:56 S1:** Do you use a common set of tools to monitor and to engage with the regional level, and then the regional level with their volunteers? Are you using charts? Are you using software?

**30:06 S4:** We have trainings and weekly meetings with our staff, where we review the current state of things. And we'll do trainings. We'll do national updates if there's something that's affecting all of the managers. And then they work with their individual committees in the way that they best see fit. We provide them all of the template resources, so all of the messaging, all of the design materials, programs, art. We have a resource center for volunteers. It's an online library of, "This is the best way to do auction checkout. This is the best way to recruit a brand new restaurant." That's more of the qualitative, "how do you make this happen".

**30:52 S1:** So a project management office library?

**30:54 S4:** Mm-hmm.

**30:55 S1:** Do you have a regular process improvement then, where you're checking how it worked each time to change it each year?

**31:00 S4:** Mm-hmm. We do...

**31:01 S1:** Is that structured and formalized?

**31:02 S4:** Yeah. So we have a couple different reports that are due.

[chuckle]

**31:07 S4:** The financial report is due at noon the day after the event, Eastern Standard Time.

[laughter]

**31:14 S4:** And then...

**31:14 S1:** That's 9:00 in the morning for somebody out west, right? Okay.

**31:16 S4:** That sure is. And then there's a secondary report that is a handful of checkboxes for sponsor reports, 'cause they are definitely stakeholders in terms of what we need to deliver to them in terms of visibility, engagement. So checking those boxes: "Was this banner displayed?", "Was this displayed?", "Which logo did you use?", "x, y, z." And then more of the descriptive: "Two weeks after the event how are you feeling?", "What went well?", "What went poorly?". And then we'll schedule meetings with the event managers and talk through that.

**31:50 S1:** Do you see trends?

**31:52 S4:** Aside from the sponsorship struggles and economic challenges, a lot of the pluses and minuses from each event are totally unique.

**32:02 S1:** Oh.

[laughter]

**32:04 S1:** So what does that do for you? [chuckle] What does that make you engage with?

**32:07 S4:** It keeps things interesting.

[music]

**32:14 S4:** Honestly, one of the things that I love about this job is that every event is so different, and the spirit of Share Our Strength is very much innovation and growth, and don't be afraid to try something new. And if it doesn't work, let's learn from it and move on. So the fact that all of the events are different and they all operate in different ways is not seen as a bad thing.

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**32:36 S1:** So that's interesting. When you talk about innovation and being able to take risks, it sounds like that that's... Is this invited here? .

**32:41 S4:** Yes.

**32:42 S1:** You're expected to do that?

**32:42 S4:** We actually have two different innovation departments.

**32:45 S1:** How does that work? [chuckle]

**32:46 S4:** We have a revenue innovation department and then we have a programmatic innovation department. So obviously one is focused on identifying new fundraising vehicles, and the program innovation department is working on capturing the very best in innovative practices, from summer meal sites in Arkansas, and after school programs in Baltimore, and finding ways to standardize those and push those all out across the country. Because a lot of the issues, when it comes to actually connecting kids with meals, is they don't have the training, they don't have the resources. So we try to be able to provide those to them. Share Our Strength just generally is really an incredible place to work.

**33:27 S1:** What makes that incredible?

**33:28 S4:** The spirit of innovation, I think, the spirit of community and support. We are one big team doing a lot of different things, but we are all singularly focused on achieving the goal of No Kid Hungry.

[music]

**33:43 S1:** For more information go to [nokidhungry.org](http://nokidhungry.org). Click the "Take Action" link and you can get information about local and national organizations combating hunger in your neighborhood.

[music]

**34:00 S1:** Play Matters, that's the tagline for KaBOOM! , a DC based non-profit that also recruits volunteers all over the nation to build playgrounds. The idea is to create great places to play and inspire communities. Our final milestone in today's podcast is about this interesting organization, which has standardized projects, but with a standard of execution down so well, that they have a near production line level of project control. Amazingly, it involves little professional staff but a whole lot of volunteers and volunteer management and power tools. KaBOOM! Project manager, Katrina Hill, brings neighborhoods together to design and actually build their dream playground.

**34:37 S5:** Our mission is to ensure that all children have access to the balance and active play that need to thrive at home, in schools, and in their communities. My job at KaBOOM! Is to help manage our community built playgrounds, so leveraging the power of communities and then linking them up with great funding partners to build these great community play spaces.

**34:54 S1:** And then so we're looking for communities that typically don't have access, and that's

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what you're trying to fill in?

**35:00 S5:** A lot of the times, yes. At least one arm of what we do, but certainly leveraging the power of communities to help create these great play spaces.

[music]

**35:10 S1:** So tell us how that interaction happens?

**35:12 S5:** On the project management side of things, what we're doing is matching these corporate funding dollars with community partners that need and deserve a great play space.

**35:19 S1:** So other parts of your organization have identified through various means funders, corporate or private or grants, or whatever.

**35:23 S5:** Yes.

**35:26 S1:** And then another part of your organization has established the communities. So by the time you're kicked off, these two groups are handed to you.

**35:32 S5:** Mm-hmm.

**35:33 S1:** What types of groups are those often?

**35:35 S5:** So non-profits. No matter what, there's always a non-profit...

**35:39 S1:** A local non-profit?

**35:39 S5:** Mm-hmm.

**35:40 S1:** Okay.

**35:40 S5:** And sometimes we'll work with municipalities, but we always ask that they bring a non-profit partner on board. So we see pretty good partnerships formed even amongst the community partners that way. Schools, we see lots of boys and girls clubs, like Salvation Army sites, YMCAs...

**35:54 S1:** So the space has to already be in somebody's possession. Presumably it's a public space?

**35:57 S5:** Well, so yeah. When we find the community partners one of the requirement is that they own the land or can at least get some sort of agreement to utilize the land.

**36:04 S1:** They bring that to you before?

**36:06 S5:** Mm hmm. So that's all part of the application and the vetting process.

[music]

**36:12 S5:** So after they've applied, and they've been screened and they've been accepted, both on

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our end and then by the funding partner as well, then they get handed off to me. Literally... And it's called a hand-off call, so that's when I get the download from our outreach department about this great community. I also get a download about the funding partner, just so we're aware and all on the same page. And that's about eight to 10 weeks out from their build day. And then at about the eight week mark on average, we do a design day. So it's really, really fun. At this point, their build date's usually been locked in, but two months prior, I get to travel out for design day. And we meet with the community and I get to see the site for the first time. We usually start out with a site walk. And it's also just checking for things like, can we get a big truck in here? Just running through the logistics, talking about obstacles and just setting the tone for the whole process. Also thinking about utility lines, are we gonna run into anything, stuff like that.

**37:02 S1:** This is construction?

**37:04 S5:** Mm hmm. The first part of it, yeah.

**37:05 S1:** It may be playgrounds, and maybe you have been going deep into the ground, but these are not like building a building with a foundation probably.

**37:11 S5:** Yeah, so we are digging holes two, three feet deep. So we wanna make sure that the lines underneath are clear. So a little bit of that. We also check the soil to make sure it's gonna be safe for construction and for the kids to be on it and near it.

**37:23 S1:** And you do this along with the community partner, or are there multiple people from KaBOOM! Working on this?

**37:27 S5:** So for design days, it's typically just the one project manager. And then you get to meet your community. And we'll ask for specific people to be there on-site with you if they have decision-making power or if they just have some knowledge of the space. After we do the site walk typically we'll get to do what we call a children's design session. So we ask the community partner to identify a group of local children. If it's a school or a boys and girls club, kids that probably attend that site, or if it's a public park, kids that will be future playground users.

**37:55 S1:** So like a focus group?

**37:56 S5:** Sort of. Designers, that's what we... We think at KaBOOM! , kids are the playground experts, they know what they like, they know what's fun, they know what's cool way better than the grown-ups do. So we do just sit 'em down and talk about all the ways they like to play. And we're building playgrounds, is part of my job, but also thinking more broadly about how play affects them and what their favorite things to do are, and knowing that playgrounds are not the only way that you can play, that there are tons of ways to play.

[background conversation]

**38:24 S5:** But the kids get to just sketch their dream playground with all the colors that they can use, and just go to town. And that's where we start, is just what the kids wanna see. They get pretty whimsical with it, we see lots of unique stuff. But we take those designs and then we hand 'em over to some grown-ups in the community. So that's the final portion of this design day, is when the grown-ups take those kids' designs and try and match them up with real-life components. So we



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have a PowerPoint show and then actual printed boards that have the equipment that's available through our manufacturer. So then they'll try and line up... If every single kid picked a tall, twisting slide on their design, then we're probably gonna pick a tall, twisting slide. We can do nautical themes or we can do castle themes. We actually work almost exclusively with Playworld Systems. So they're our playground manufacturer, so they get the sketch and some more information from me about the space.

**39:12 S1:** Are these a fairly unified cost?

**39:15 S5:** I think they're sort of an average price for a standard build. I'm doing air quotes on a podcast, but yes.

**39:20 S1:** She's doing air quotes right now, standard. It's standard, but not really standard.

**39:25 S5:** There's that sort of standard project, which is the 2,500 square foot playground. But we do have a lot of flexibility. So I know a few weeks ago, we did a really big project, or two really big projects in California, that were quite a bit larger. So if the funding partner wants to go bigger, we'll do what we can to accommodate it.

[music]

**39:45 S5:** So the whole idea with the community builds model that we utilize, is that the community is a part of the process every step of the way. So yeah, they're picking up the playground pieces, but we're also kicking off the planning process with them that day as well. So just giving them a general overview of what it is that they've signed up for. So our main points of contact, they've been vetted and they've been through an application process, they usually have a lot of information. But we invite local community members out, and so that might be their first opportunity to hear about the project. So just letting them know ways that they can get involved and what's expected of the community to get from design day to your build.

**40:17 S1:** So a key communication milestone for you there?

**40:18 S5:** It's like the kickoff day, so you're just generating a lot of excitement about this build and thinking about ways that we can plug people in. And a really important aspect of that design day with the adults is brainstorming, and also asset mapping, is, I think, a term that you get thrown around sometimes.

**40:34 S1:** What does that mean?

**40:38 S5:** We do asset-based community mapping, we call it, but essentially what resources exist in the community. So not like, "Where are we deficient?", but "What resources do we have right in our own backyard, that we can utilize and leverage for this project?" So part of what the community signs up for with these builds is this great big build day. And we invite about 200 volunteers out on average, and we ask the community to help provide breakfast and lunch for all the volunteers, to put a tool in the hands of the volunteers that need it. You have to find the bodies themselves, the actual volunteers, and just all the little elements that go into it. And so I'm thinking about, "Okay, if we have to feed 200 people, what restaurants exist in the community, or what church groups have a really nice... "

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**41:18 S1:** Who does that planning?

**41:20 S5:** We throw that back on the community. So I'm with them every step of the way helping to manage and keep them on track, but we'll break it down. Each committee has subcommittees or teams, and so there's a food team, a recruitment team, a construction team.

**41:32 S1:** And do they talk to you directly then, during that eight week period til design day?

**41:37 S5:** It kinda depends on the group, but design day we do the first initial brainstorming and that's how we set the tone for the rest of the time. I don't get to go back to the site until the build. So for the eight weeks that's intervening, we set up a time once a week where everyone can phone in. In between those weekly calls, they're talking to each other, maybe the little teams are meeting individually.

**41:57 S1:** How many teams do you actually work?

**42:00 S5:** Let's see, food, recruitment, construction, logistics, public relations, fund-raising, play. I feel like I've named them all, it's seven.

**42:06 S1:** That's seven. That's a lot of teams. And they don't work for you, that's the interesting things.

**42:11 S5:** They're all volunteers.

**42:11 S1:** Highly matrixed, and they're volunteers.

**42:14 S5:** Volunteers are sometimes staff from the community part organization we'll support, but their goal is actually to reach out to neighbors of the playground or parents of future playground users. And that's, again, part of this whole community build model. Just because if you help to physically build the playground or are really involved in the planning of it, then you've got that deep tie to this particular space. And so, our communities take really good care of the spaces and teach their kids to take really good care of the spaces as well.

[music]

**42:46 S1:** Okay, so this goes on for eight weeks, and now we're closing in on the day that's been picked, which is a hard date.

**42:52 S5:** Yes.

**42:53 S1:** 'Cause you had to be specific. Now, I assume weather has something to do with what happens here now.

**43:00 S5:** Yes and no. There's very little that slows us down. So we really emphasize to the communities that unless there's really extremely extenuating circumstances, we will build on that date.

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**43:10 S1:** What's your guess in your portfolio then, of the 150-ish that you do a year, how many do not hit their picked date?

**43:17 S5:** I was gonna guess, I'd say less than five.

**43:20 S1:** Hold it! PMs, let's contemplate this for a second. KaBOOM! Delivers about 150 projects a year with almost all volunteer management and with volunteer labor. Project slippage is essentially only in the schedule execution, and yet, 97% of the playgrounds are delivered on schedule every year.

[music]

**43:38 S1:** So what do you attribute that success to? That is unusual, I think, in a lot of project management environments.

**43:45 S5:** Just expectation setting. I think that's a big part of it. From day one, we need that community at that design day and sort of dive into planning. We tell them that there's not a back-up day, that that is the day, and if it's raining, if it's snowing, "We'll be out there, so you should be out there with us." So I think that's where we start. And I think also, just the way that we do these community builds, we're hoping that we can reach out to many different individuals, but also community groups. So I think you've got a lot of people that become stakeholders in the project, and so that's the date that's then fixed for them. And so, we'd like to try and keep it fixed as much as possible, 'cause knowing that you get to change the date, it might also affect other things. Maybe they could do food on that date, but not another date. Or maybe, the tools will be available for this day, but not that day. And so, knowing that all that's sort of possible, we try and stick as close to those dates as possible.

[music]

**44:36 S1:** So 200 volunteers show up, but how many people from KaBOOM! ?

**44:39 S5:** Typically, two. So you get your project manager, that's the person you met at design day. And then, there's one other person from KaBOOM! , we call him a 'Second.' But they're essentially an assistant for the week.

**44:50 S1:** And then a lot of the muscle labor's being provided by those volunteers though, the 200 volunteers, entirely, right.

**44:55 S5:** Entirely.

**44:57 S1:** So are you directing? Or are you also out there drawing, punching things into the ground and connecting things?

**45:02 S5:** [chuckle] I was definitely, I think project managers, you're serving on a leadership capacity, so you sort of just...

**45:06 S1:** Managing?

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**45:07 S5:** Yes, exactly, overseeing just the broad picture stuff. We do get, as part of the project, our playground manufacturer Playworld Systems. They contract an installer for us, a professional playground installer.

**45:16 S1:** I see.

**45:17 S5:** Yes, so they're the ones that really know how to put it all together. And I think we, as project managers, definitely pick up that knowledge the longer you do the job. We actually call it a 'build week,' which is... So the project manager recruitment is five days, essentially. So let's say your build's on a Saturday. So Wednesday, you would fly out to the community, and then, Thursday is prep day one, where you do a smaller group of volunteers, maybe 30 people is what we typically recruit. That's actually when we're gonna drill out the holes for the playground, just because we do use heavier machinery like a Bobcat or some sort of skid steer. We do have a restriction on power tools on build day. So we cut all of the lumber, whatever materials on that prep day, when it's a smaller, sort of more manageable crowd. So on build day, they're just assembling, and then, the only power tools we have on build day are drills. So that's prep day one.

**46:02 S5:** And then, prep day two, that's our 'just in case' days that we always have as... So we recruit a standby crew of volunteers. We'll have meals on standby if we need to feed them. So build day, project manager is on-site usually about 6:00 in the morning. 6:30, we invite a smaller group of volunteers, we call them team leaders. They come out and do site setup with us as well. So the goal is before the big group of 200 volunteers arrives, the site is completely setup for them. So all the materials are out and organized and arranged. The registration table is pitched. And we're feeding people, so getting the food area set up. They like to have music, so making sure the DJ's there on time. So a lot of...

[chuckle]

**46:41 S1:** Wow! Construction site, but don't forget the DJ. That may be the quote for this.

**46:44 S5:** Of course! That's the KaBOOM!

[chuckle]

**46:47 S5:** I think that's our little piece of flare.

**46:49 S1:** So music, food, it's a festival. But people are working.

**46:53 S5:** It is! Yeah, it's an active construction site; we're all about play at KaBOOM! , so we wanna make sure that there's a little bit of fun built into the day. So get that DJ set up, get the music pumping.

[music]

**47:07 S5:** So team leaders are also volunteers. They just get a short little training with me before the build, and they get to pick out what project they wanna lead. So that way if they have a certain skillset that they wanna highlight, that's their opportunity, but primarily, they're there to help manage these smaller groups of volunteers. And then, they split off onto their teams, and then pretty

much everyone's off to work by 9 o'clock in the morning.

**47:25 S1:** Wow! You keep it moving along.

**47:26 S5:** We try to. We crank the music back up, they powered up their drills, their ratchets, and then we go through about 2:30, and that's the target time for the closing ceremony.

[music]

**47:40 S1:** Would it be parents and children, as well?

**47:42 S5:** So not children. Our volunteers need to be 18 and older, but we do allow children on-site. We'll just have a separate area for them on-site where there'll be activities for youth. So that's one of our sub-teams on this committee, it's the play team. Part of that is just in using play just more broadly into the work that we do, so even making our planning meetings a little bit more fun.

**48:02 S1:** This has come up in that project management body of knowledge, discussions that I've had with some others before, which is, it's been noted that there's not a lot of fun in it. It sounds like that's an important aspect here of engaging volunteers, but is fundamental to what you're driving here, right, as KaBOOM! ?

**48:19 S5:** Fundamental with a capital fun.

**48:21 S1:** With a capital fun, right. Is that outlined somewhere, what types of activities that you'll engage with?

**48:26 S5:** We definitely will provide a little bit of guidance if the play team is sort of lost or don't know where to start.

**48:29 S1:** Because they may not know what to do, right?

[chuckle]

**48:33 S5:** It's true. But, also I think the kids add to that element of fun, and I think having the kids on-site that are gonna benefit from the playground, I think it helps with motivation throughout the day too. So, when you've been moving mulch for five hours, you might be thinking like, "What is this all for? And I'm so tired. I just wanna take a bath." But if you can see right on the other side of the site that there's these kids that are really gonna benefit from what you're doing...

**48:54 S1:** Are they watching what's happening?

**48:56 S5:** Oh, they always are. They're always kinda peeking through, sorta keeping an eye on us.

[music]

**49:04 S1:** What risk do you face, and how do you handle it?

**49:08 S5:** I think just like physical safety, is of course, I mean that's always top of line for us.

**49:13 S1:** During the build and for the playground itself?

**49:17 S5:** Mm-hmm. And so as part of our process, the communities agree to take on some of the liability after the build. So, we ask them to provide proof of insurance for the space, should a child be injured on the play space after the build. So, there's that piece of it. Of course, everybody signs a waiver when they get to our site, but also with the builds, if you're out mixing concrete and it's hot outside, just thinking about just people's physical well-being on-site. Like heat can always be a big factor, or just some of the things that we're doing, maybe you have to climb a ladder for it. So, we as project managers are of course always looking out for that. But we do also include on those properties on the build day a safety provider on-site.

**49:54 S5:** So, someone that's at least first aid, CPR certified, that can staff a safety station with the first aid kit. We also have the communities put a safety plan into place before the build ever happens. So the safety and an evacuation plan. So, we make them map out the route to the closest hospital, we ask them to alert local emergency services that a large event is taking place in the community, just to have it on their radar...

**50:16 S1:** You've documented all this beforehand, this is what you'll do when you're on this committee.

**50:19 S5:** Yeah, so there's the list of 16, there's a safety component that's built in.

**50:22 S1:** I see. What other risks do you face?

**50:26 S5:** Well, I guess what I'm thinking about, just things that could impair success. And of course, like you said we work with a lot of different partners, and so I think making sure that everyone's as well prepped as possible, that everyone is living up to their end of the commitment. And so we're asking to recruit 200 volunteers, and that's part of my job, is making sure that that recruitment team is on track for all of the volunteers that we need. But there is that little bit of it, sometimes you get to build and you don't have quite everything pulled together. And that's where we as project managers come in, I think we all have a lot of knowledge and just past experience. So hopefully we can help them, sort of coach them through it.

**50:57 S1:** Do you end up without enough volunteers sometimes?

**51:00 S5:** It happens. But even that, we have a little bit of a fail safe built into it. So when we do those team breakdowns we always sort of build in a minimum number that we need per team, and then a maximum number.

[music]

**51:14 S1:** So take me through the closing ceremony.

**51:17 S5:** Oh, sure. It's quick, but we do make sure that we celebrate. I think that's another part of KaBOOM! , just sort of celebrating all of our accomplishments and making sure we get a time to just cheer everybody on. So, we get everybody back together and then a lot like kickoff, we'll have someone from the community partner, someone from the funding partner, just to sort of speak and

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thank the volunteers for their efforts. I always like to go through and just highlight each team and sort of let them have a nice little shout-out, and the mulch team always gets a big round of applause for their efforts. And then, I think the signature thing is we get everybody into that playground footprint without touching anything, 'cause the concrete's still wet. But they sort of fill in around this newly built playground and we take one big end-of-day photo, and it's always hands up in the air. That's our KaBOOM! Signature move.

**51:58 S5:** We're just one little organization, but if you consider how many people we touch with each one of these projects, if you can leave a project and have 30 more advocates for this play movement, then it's much more exponential growth. I think one of the biggest measures of success for us is how many people have we then converted into play advocates, that are gonna go spread that message.

[music]

**52:22 S1:** KaBOOM! , beyond standardization. The success they have comes from their stakeholder involvement, building continual support and commitment. To find out more about KaBOOM! , visit their website [kaboom.org](http://kaboom.org), and there you can also get tools to help you start your community on a path to play.

[music]

**52:39 S1:** I hope you've enjoyed these stories of project management improving the lives of children. A special thanks to my guest Maria Gomez, Karen McLaughlin, and Katrina Hill. Also, a personal thanks to Audrey Smith and Georgia Gillette for connecting me with the executives of these amazing organizations, so that we could bring you their project management stories. I'm your host Kendall Lott, and until next time, keep it in scope and get it done.

[music]

**53:11 S2:** Our theme music was composed by Molly Flannery, used with permission. Post-production performed at Empowered Strategies, and technical and web support provided by Potomac Management Resources. This podcast is a Final Milestone production distributed by PMIWDC.

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**53:30 S1:** PMPs who have listened through this complete podcast may submit a PDU claim with the Project Management Institutes CCRS system, by choosing the REP chapter sponsored PDU education category, currently category A, searching under C046, the Washington DC chapter. And submitting code PMPOV0019, entitled Project Kids.