



Office Relocation for Nonprofits

In the second article of this series we talked about what to take into account when deciding whether to go ahead with a facility project. This entails recognizing that a major project represents risk to your organization, and that due diligence should be exercised so the full scale and nature of the risk is understood before you make the decision to proceed.

This guide describes the moving process. It discusses who is involved when, how to manage a schedule and budget, how to prepare for the move, select a mover, and manage the move. It is written primarily for executive directors of small and medium-sized nonprofit organizations.

Your nonprofit group needs to make a series of decisions before moving. For the purpose of this pamphlet, it is assumed that your organization's board and management have determined that the move you are making is the best choice for you, given your mission, programs, and funding capability.

Introduction

Moves vary because each organization, project team, building, and locale is different. Organizations may move because they expand to accommodate a new program, shrink due to a reduction in funding or consolidate from multiple locations into one for greater efficiency. A group may renovate an existing structure, build a new one or move into a facility "as is." An organization may own a building or lease a facility as a tenant or sub-tenant.

The cost of a move depends mainly on its complexity and duration. These two variables are most affected by the amount and type of furniture and equipment involved and whether or not the new location requires renovation or construction. If the space is small (e.g. under 5,000 square feet) and no renovation or construction is needed, the move can occur within a month and the total cost can be under \$10,000. If the space is large, furniture and equipment are involved, and renovation or construction is needed, the relocation process can last several months and the overall cost could run into tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars.

For the sake of simplicity, this pamphlet describes the process of relocating an office with typical furniture and equipment such as desks, chairs, tables, and file cabinets. While this approach can apply to moving any program, if your relocation involves moving specialized program-related furniture and equipment, such as theater lighting, medical devices, or art objects, specialist movers may be necessary and the process can be more complicated and costly. Moving your programs may also involve coordinating the relocation schedule with clients and audiences.



Regardless of the scale and type of relocation, there are many details to keep track of and coordinate. Moving is often fraught with cost overruns and time delays. It is all the more complicated because all the component tasks are interlinked. There are many opportunities for things to change and go wrong - and they will. When one problem occurs, it affects many other tasks. Critical factors that contribute to a successful move are advance planning, clear decision-making authority, budget and schedule control, appropriate outside assistance, close coordination, and continual communication.

Who Is Involved With The Move?

A move is a discrete management task, similar to a fundraising event. A single person needs to be in charge. At the outset, a project manager should be appointed. The project manager coordinates the players, makes decisions or implements the decisions of others, and reports to management. This individual is responsible for budget and schedule control, approvals, staff communications, information distribution, and building management relations. The project manager develops a comprehensive list of all things that need to be done, makes clear assignments and decides who should be responsible for carrying them out.

As the move progresses, the executive director (or designee) and the project manager will want to keep staff informed about the move. Everyone wants to know where he or she will sit in the new space and when the move will occur. Staff insights are valuable to decision making. The staff's input on space layouts and floor plans should be listened to and considered before making final decisions.

In the course of a move, your organization may need to call on outside consultants and contractors to provide help and expertise. The project manager determines the need for outside helpers, selects them, and supervises their work. A space planner or architect plans the design of the new space and determines where the furniture and equipment will go. If the new space is being built or renovated, construction contractors are needed. The movers pack and move furniture and equipment and contents. Computer and telephone installers lay cable and hookup equipment. Relocation consultants help with overall management or specific tasks.

Schedule

The main phases of a move are: "before," when planning is critical, "during," when communication and coordination are key, and "after," when any remaining problems are resolved. The sample Moving Schedule shows a sample schedule that includes major tasks, their duration, and the typical order. Tasks include: arranging phone service, ordering new stationery, purging files, planning furniture layouts, hiring the mover, taking inventory, packing, moving, unpacking, and cleaning up.



The project manager should make clear assignments and decide who is responsible for completing each task. The project manager schedules the move with all players: the mover, architect, construction contractor, building managers, staff and any others involved. Since changes can occur frequently, the project manager should check and update the schedule regularly and reissue it to all team members.

A schedule should be created with the assumption that you won't be able to meet it. Understand which deadlines are critical, such as those that cost money or those that enable (or block) the progress in the next stage. You will want to leave extra time for the unplanned events that will affect your schedule. You may need to relocate to temporary ("swing") space if you have to leave your current space and your new space is not ready, or the previous tenant has not moved out. If your moveout deadline is critical, allow for slippage in the schedule by adding some extra time to each project phase. If construction or major renovation is involved, put additional time at the end of the project for your interiors installation. Between construction and move-in, allow time for corrective construction "punch list" work, installation and testing of telephone and other equipment, and new furniture installation.

You will need to decide whether to move over a weekend or during a weekday. Groups choose to move over a weekend because the move is large and/or complex and cannot be completed in less time. You may need the extra time to install telephones and computers. Another benefit of a weekend move is that employees lose very little productive time. On the other hand, a weekend move involves overtime costs for movers, installers, and contractors.

A weekday move may be appropriate if your move is relatively small and straightforward. In this case it is possible to move one day and be ready for business the next day. If most of your furniture is freestanding, it will not require lengthy assembly or installation. If you are buying new furniture or moving into furnished quarters and just moving contents, the move can be executed quickly.

For weekday moves, determine whether it will be during the day or evening. If you are moving into a building with easy access, you may choose to move during the day. However, many managers of buildings with multiple tenants will not allow you to move during the day and require moves to take place in the evening. When moving to a high-rise building, an evening move can reduce time and labor costs since you can enter the building from the street and use the passenger elevators, rather than only the freight elevators.

Budget

Developing the Budget

The executive director works with the project manager to create and update the budget. The main expenses are usually the mover, computer and phone installation, new furniture and equipment, and printing new stationery. Construction is an additional cost. Specific costs of moving include "hard" and "soft" costs. Hard costs are generally defined as materials and/or labor ("bricks and



mortar”) while soft costs are the fees and expenses related to a project. Be realistic and try to include everything when you are developing a budget for a move. You will want to maintain at least a 10% contingency for last minute oversights, unexpected glitches, corrective work, and new requests.

Tracking Costs and Managing the Budget

Aim to be under budget at the end of the project. Periodically compare the actual move costs to the initial budget to ensure that you are not overspending. If you are over budget, the contingency should cover it. If not, you will have to find ways to cut costs.

Move Preparation

Determining What Furniture and Equipment Will be Moved

Before you engage the services of a space planner or architect, decide if you will relocate your existing furniture and equipment. Furniture can frequently be repaired, refurbished, refinished, or reupholstered at a lower cost than buying new.

If you are not moving all of your furniture and equipment, the project manager should determine how to dispose of anything not being moved. Landlords usually require that a space be left “broom clean.” It is costly to store leftover furniture, or to engage laborers to throw things out. Sometimes it is possible to sell furniture and the telephone system to the next tenant moving in. Used furniture dealers will remove your old furniture and sometimes pay you for it. If you want to donate furniture to other nonprofits, check to see if your local United Way, or another nonprofit federation, has a centralized collection program.

If you have leased telephones, copiers, water coolers, or similar equipment, you usually cannot cancel the lease unless you pay it off or trade up. You probably do not want to abandon this equipment and continue paying for it. If you own your telephone and computer systems, you can sell them to a used equipment dealer.

Purging Files

The project manager should arrange an organization-wide clean-up and file purge before the move. It is not economical to provide space and file cabinets to store duplicate and dead records. Staff members should purge their files as early as possible in order to determine a realistic count of the file cabinets to be moved. Files that must be kept but may not be needed on a regular basis (such as old financial records) can be stored inexpensively at secured, outside storage warehouses where they can be retrieved when necessary.

Taking Inventory

A furniture and equipment inventory is a mandatory tool for coordinating a move. The inventory number, description, measurements, manufacturer, manufacturer’s model number, power requirements, finish, color, fabric, condition, and current and future location are listed for each item.



A project manager or office manager can take the inventory. If two people do it, one person can label and measure while the other writes. Tag each item with pre-numbered labels. Instant photos with inventory numbers on the back can be helpful. For any item that will be disassembled, remember to number the parts separately.

A space planner or architect uses the inventory to create furniture layouts. For each item being reused, he or she will draw the item on the floor plan with the inventory number and note the new room number in the “relocate to” column of the inventory sheets. In the case of construction, the inventory helps the architect, engineer and construction contractor be aware of power, ventilation, exhaust or air conditioning requirements. If you pay close attention to these details, telephones, computers, and other equipment are more likely to work properly the first day after the move.

The project manager uses the inventory to check that all items are used and that none are used twice. Items that are drawn on the floor plan but not numbered represent items that have to be acquired. Anything left on the inventory sheets needs to be sold or discarded.

A project manager also uses the inventory to write moving and refurbishing specifications. The project manager gives the inventory to movers for tagging furniture and to used furniture and equipment dealers for making offers.

Making Notifications and Ordering New Stationery

At least a month before the move, you should notify your: Post Office, local telephone service, long distance telephone service, building managers, insurance company, suppliers, clients, funders, members, banks, and government regulatory agencies.

You will need to order new letterhead, invoices, and business cards with your new address imprinted on them. Make sure that your local telephone company guarantees your new telephone and fax numbers before printing any stationery or move announcements. If the telephone company installs a different number than the one promised, reprinting can be costly.

Arranging for Security

The project manager determines security requirements for the move. You may want to engage a guard service to prevent theft and protect your employees if you are doing a night or week-end move.

Mover Selection

Identifying Prospective Candidates

Before beginning the selection process, you will want to finish your furniture inventory so that you know the quantity of items to be moved. Identify and hire a mover whom you can trust and engage the mover early to assist you with the logistics of the move. The best way to identify potential movers is to obtain recommendations from other nonprofits who have done similar moves. A



relocation consultant or an architect can also assist you, if you have retained one. You do not want to find your mover in the phone book.

Ask the landlords of your present and new locations if you are required to use union movers. If there is union building staff or an ongoing union construction project in either building, you will frequently need to use union movers or risk a labor dispute. The rates charged by union movers are usually higher since they are regulated by law, but they may also be more consistent. A good quality non-union mover, however, may save you money.

Identify three to five movers to bid on your move and then review their track records. You will want to ask references whether there was breakage, loss or damage and whether the move was accomplished on time and within the original cost estimate. Then, verify that each bidder is available for the date that you want to move.

Requesting Proposals and Getting Bids

In order to obtain competitive prices from movers, the project manager should write a request for proposal (RFP) and specify the physical move in detail. The RFP requests a proposal of how the mover would accomplish the work and what fees would be involved. The covering letter, or invitation to bid, asks the bidder for a proposal, delineates any requirements of the proposal, such as sealed bids in duplicate, and notifies bidders of the date, time and location for the bid meeting, tour of the present space and new premises, and bid submission.

The RFP's specifications describe the scope of work. You will want to include the coded floor plans and inventory, and enumerate your requirements for the mover's plans with regard to tagging, packing, labor, furniture placement, unpacking, supervision, inspection, clean-up, and terms and conditions of the contract. The specifications should include a list of all general information you want from each mover such as: location of their offices and warehouses; number, type, and age of trucks owned; number of full-time employees and length of service; insurance coverage for your contents; union affiliation; and at least three move references and three credit references.

The RFP lists the project-specific information and any applicable costs included in the total cost, such as anticipated duration of the move; number of movers for each day or phase of the project and their hourly rate; number of "tally" (truck) loads estimated and the cost per tally load; amount of materials and the cost of each; cost to provide, install and remove floor, wall, and elevator protection; cost to tag all items; packing and unpacking costs and disassembling, reassembling, leveling, and bolting costs. There may be other costs depending on your specific situation. You want to know the total cost with no surprises. A relocation consultant can provide samples of typical specifications.

A note of caution: movers sometimes underestimate, or "low ball," the cost of a move in order to get the job. A clause in the specifications that stipulates that the mover must guarantee that the final cost for the move will vary no more than 10% in either direction from the quoted price (unless there is a change in scope) will prevent this kind of misrepresentation from occurring. The bill at the



end of the job is based on the actual number of hours worked and can frequently be much higher than the estimate. If the 10% clause is included, the bidders will usually give you a realistic bid.

Have a bid meeting and walk-through for all bidders. Give them a tour of the present location and the new building and show them all items to be moved. They will be able to ask questions, see the same things and receive the same information. Give them the building requirements for all buildings involved, including elevator usage, hours of building access and insurance certificate requirements that must be filed with the building managers. You will then want to show them the loading docks, check the elevator size(s) and walk the routes to be followed during the move.

Evaluating Proposals and Bids

Request sealed bids and open them in the presence of two or three staff members, so there can never be any question of impropriety. You can reject bids that are late, unsealed, or incomplete. It is often difficult to compare bids from movers because there are so many details and variables, but do your best to compare the proposals. Afterwards you can call the bidders and get any questions answered. It may then be possible to select the two most qualified bidders. Have each bidder come in for a meeting to discuss the move methodology and strategy and to offer his or her “best” price.

Negotiating and Finalizing the Contract

After selecting the mover, use the mover’s proposal to set up a contract that includes the bid specifications, move schedule, inventory, job requirements, and insurance. The contract should also cover any site conditions that will affect the move and necessary coordination with other parties such as your employees, consultants, and contractors.

Move Management

Supervision

The mover will prepare coded moving plans that note room and piece numbers, based on the floor plans of the old and new spaces. These plans act as the map for the move. If the move is relatively large, the space will be divided into different zones, each with different color tags. The movers should be thoroughly familiar with all move plans and logistics.

During the move, each truck usually makes more than one trip, so have someone from your organization on both the sending and receiving end. This will ensure that everything to be moved is out before the movers leave and that things are being delivered simultaneously to the correct location in the new premises. After everything is out of the old site, the project manager can lock up and go to the new site to assist there.

The project manager supervises the mover and other contractors, troubleshoots, unlocks the space in the morning, and locks up at night. The project manager also handles any emergencies that require immediate attention and fast decision-making, such as a union jurisdictional disputes, power failures, accidents, or injuries.



Inspection

Just prior to the installation of wall and floor protection, your project manager should go on a tour of the present and new sites with the mover to determine if there is any pre-existing damage. If so, any damage should be noted on a set of plans for reference after the move.

During the move, the project manager should periodically check to see what the movers are doing on the loading dock, in the building lobby and on the street. If some of the movers are sitting around, the project manager should reassign them to a different spot where work needs to be done immediately. You are paying these workers by the hour, so keep the work in progress. The project manager should sign the workers out at the end of each day of the move. The paperwork will be the basis of later invoices, so make sure that everything is accurate before signing.

The project manager needs to inspect all areas for compliance with the floor plans and have the mover adjust anything that is not correct. Occasionally, an item will not fit where it is intended to go. If this is the case, set the item aside until after the move is over and you have time to think. Then see how the space can be rearranged or if another similar piece of furniture will fit.

After the move, the mover will remove the floor and wall protection. Then the project manager can go on a post-move tour with the mover to itemize any damage to furniture, equipment, walls, floors or elevators that the mover will be responsible for correcting. Before the movers leave, they should remove the move tags from furniture and equipment and fold and remove any empty cartons.

After the Move

A number of tasks remain after the move is complete. The previous space should be completely emptied, cleaned, and left in "broom clean condition for the landlord. The project manager should process any insurance claims and check all invoices carefully for accuracy, approve them, and process them for payment. After all invoices are in, a final move cost analysis should be prepared that compares the actual costs with the budget.

After the move, there are frequent complaints as well as new requests. Consult with staff after the move. Complaints can be grouped into such categories as: telephone, computer, construction-related problems, cleaning needs, and missing items. The project manager should arrange the complaints according to priority and notify the appropriate people to make corrections.

Finally, don't forget to celebrate! Have a reception at your new space for staff, volunteers, board members, and others who care about your organization.