Lessons Learned
Ad Astra Cloud Hosting

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Review of Project

- **Review project goals/objectives**
The goal of the project was to transition from the onsite hosted Astra Schedule environment to a cloud-hosted version, upgrading to the newest version of the software in the progress. Project was begun November 1, 2017, with the intent of completing by March 31, 2018.

- **Review deliverables and milestones**
Project main deliverables, excluding project management documents:
  - ASTRACLOUD service account created in all Banner instances for access to the Banner database.
  - SSO connectivity via Shibboleth InCommon for single sign on.
  - Astra Scheduler version 8.x upgrade.
  - Cloud hosted environment for the Astra Scheduler application, connectivity established through the creation of a VPN tunnel.

Review Project Communications

- **What aspects of communications of this project worked particularly well?**
  - E-mail status updates were sent out on a regular basis to all members of the Project Team in order to keep everyone informed of the current project status and any upcoming tasks or deadlines.
  - Vendor willingness to troubleshoot issues and work via Skype meetings to resolve problems with VPN tunnel connectivity, SSO challenges, and other issues that arose during implementation was extremely helpful.

- **How could communications or the communication process have been improved?**
  - Adhering to a communications plan would have kept updates more timely and on a scheduled basis.
  - Responses to questions and requests for information on task status were not sent in a timely fashion.
  - Communication was often sporadic, including members involved in a given task and requiring other members of the Project Team to catch up on things that had happened outside their direct involvement.

Project Planning and Implementing

- **What planning and implementing aspects of this project worked particularly well?**
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- The initial kickoff meeting was very helpful and worked well to have all of the Project Team members present and involved in the beginning stages of the project.
- Consistent involvement and troubleshooting by the main technical contacts, especially when resolving unexpected issues, was extremely helpful in keeping the project moving forward.

**What would you change regarding project planning and implementing on future projects based on your experiences with this project?**
- Some scheduling constraints were not made clear enough at the start of the project plan.
- Conflicts with other scheduled work, such as the switch to a new firewall vendor, during the project timeline were not appropriately accounted for by the Project Manager.
- Vendor buy-in for the stated project schedule was low and resulted in delays and confusion regarding the true hard deadline for the project.

**Overall**

- **Overall, was the project a success?**
  Despite delays and several complications with various aspects of the project, final cutover was completed on May 1, 2018. All deliverables are complete and the project is considered a success.

- **What worked very well for this project?**
  - Willingness of key technical stakeholders and Project Team members to resolve the issues that arose ensured they did not stop the project from moving forward.
  - Vendor assistance and willingness to assist with an additional backup when data was mistakenly entered into the onsite system rather than the cloud environment helped ensure the cutover could take place in a more seamless fashion.

- **What could have gone better?**
  - Cutover plan for transition from the onsite system to the cloud system was unclear, and handled poorly. This resulted in confusion regarding which system was to be used after the initial production rollout on April 5, 2018, causing the need for another backup to be restored to the production system and delaying the true go-live of the cloud environment until May 1.
  - Communications were not scheduled according to a communications plan.
  - Various team members and stakeholders were often not involved in all communications, leading to several times when one or more people had to “catch up” with what was taking place on the project.
  - Project status meetings were scheduled sporadically, and ceased to take place at all after the initial functional lead departed the project.
  - Some stakeholders did not communicate clearly the status of outstanding tasks and actions to the Project Manager, making it difficult to maintain the current information on all of the deliverables and parts of the project.
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- Project Manager did not account for the scheduling delay caused by the firewall system changes, resulting in the posted schedule falling behind by approximately one month at the start of the project.
- Communication to campus users regarding the change was unclear.
- Not all stakeholders were involved in the initial phases of the project, resulting in confusion during the later stages of the cutover.
- Project Manager did not fully invest in keeping all stakeholders involved in the project, did not restructure standing update meetings with functional team leads, resulting in miscommunication and confusion.

What recommendations do you have for future projects based on your experiences with this one?
Based on experience with this project, recommendations for future projects are:
- Ensure there is a well-defined communication plan, including all team members and stakeholders at the appropriate level of involvement, and adhere to that plan throughout the project.
- Analyze and determine the potential effects of any other ongoing or potentially conflicting projects, make sure any delay or possible delay of work is accounted for either in the initial schedule or in the risk management phase of the project plan.
- Keep lines of communication open and clear with vendors to ensure adequate level of buy-in.
- Ensure regular standing meetings are scheduled with core project team members, including additional stakeholders as needed and/or appropriate, to keep tasks clear and remain on schedule.