The Unfinished Project

Fictional scenario

All people, amounts, estimates, and events are fictional. No successful outcome is assumed.

Maya coordinates a neighborhood oral-history website. Over nine months the group has spent $8,000 and 240 volunteer hours. Only 12 of 30 planned interviews have signed publication consent. The developer estimates another $4,000 and 60 hours for the original launch, but has not tested the estimate against the remaining consent and accessibility work. Available new funding is $1,500 and volunteers can offer 30 hours over six weeks.

Maya feels that stopping would waste prior effort. Those costs are already incurred. The current decision concerns future spending, responsibilities, and the value of what can still be delivered. The committee controls funds; interviewees control consent. Maya can propose a smaller accessible archive of consented interviews, but cannot authorize publication or extra spending alone. A smaller release may provide public value while disappointing people who expected the full site. Stopping avoids further costs but leaves the collected material requiring secure stewardship.

Completed Decision Brief

1. Define the decision

Decision owner, date, and decision needed by

Maya, project coordinator; Monday; committee decision due in seven days.

Choice and intended outcome

Continue the full website, redesign as a limited archive, or stop development. Preserve useful local history within funding, consent, and volunteer limits.

Principles, responsibilities, and authority

Committee authorizes budget and scope. Interviewees must consent. Maya safeguards unpublished recordings and cannot commit unapproved funds or volunteer time.

2. Examine the situation

Verified facts and sources

Treasurer ledger: $8,000 spent and $1,500 available. Volunteer log: 240 hours used; availability survey: 30 hours over six weeks. Consent register: 12 of 30 interviews cleared. Developer email: original launch estimate $4,000 and 60 hours, unverified.

Assumptions and important unknowns

The limited archive may still exceed capacity. Accessibility effort, hosting demands, and interviewees' acceptance of a smaller release remain uncertain.

Decisive gap and how to investigate it

Ask developer to quote a fixed limited scope and ask two volunteers to check accessibility requirements by Thursday. Confirm hosting and stewardship costs with treasurer.

Pressure and constraints affecting judgment

Prior investment and public expectations encourage continuing. New funds and volunteer time cannot support the current full estimate. Consent is a firm publication constraint.

3. Compare realistic options

Option A: approach, main benefit, and risk or trade-off

Continue full scope. Preserves original ambition; current estimate exceeds both money and hours, with unresolved consent.

Option B: approach, main benefit, and risk or trade-off

Redesign for up to 12 consented interviews. Offers bounded public value; reduces scope and still requires a credible cost and accessibility plan.

Option C: approach, main benefit, and risk or trade-off

Stop development and secure materials. Avoids further build costs; delays access and retains stewardship obligations.

4. Test the preferred option

Preferred option, strongest objection, and condition before proceeding

B if a fixed scope fits $1,500 and 30 hours including accessibility and stewardship setup. Strongest objection: a small archive could still generate unbudgeted maintenance.

Right: principles, responsibilities, and required agreement

Publish only with consent. Tell contributors the reduced scope before committing. Committee approves funds; volunteers agree to tasks.

Smart: evidence, uncertainty, and reasons over alternatives

Require a written scope and cost breakdown. Compare value of consented content with the cost of secure storage alone. Past expenditure does not justify more spending.

Sustainable: capacity, recurring demands, and acceptable limits

Cap new spending at $1,500 and work at 30 hours over six weeks. Name a custodian and cover hosting within the cap or do not proceed.

5. Commit to a next step

Decision, rationale, and condition before proceeding

Recommend redesign conditionally. If the cost, accessibility, or stewardship checks fail, recommend stopping development and secure storage with committee approval.

First action, owner, and deadline

Maya obtains the limited-scope quote and accessibility assessment by Thursday and submits the recommendation Friday.

Communication: who needs to know, agree, or act

Committee decides in seven days. Treasurer confirms budget. Volunteers accept named tasks. Contributors receive a clear scope and consent explanation before publication.

6. Set the review point

Observable trigger for reconsideration

Reconsider before further work if quote exceeds $1,500, forecast exceeds 30 hours, or consent or accessibility conditions fail. No automatic extra funding.

Review date and what evidence to bring

Two weeks after committee authorization, then at six weeks. Bring actual and forecast costs, hours, consent register, and accessibility checks. No result is assumed.