Abstract: The aim of this document is to present a model for language program management which is adapted to the needs of current and future language programs, taking into account SIL strategic priorities. The model includes programs administration and management at the entity/national level, programs/ regional level and project level (component of a program).

Introduction

The motivation and purpose of SIL’s language programs, helping language communities develop their own languages to serve them in all aspects of life, have remained the same since its inception more than seventy years ago. The focus or objectives of specific language programs has varied according to the local and/or national environment, preferences of the assigned SIL team, government requirements, and the degree to which other stakeholders were included in program planning.

During the past 30 years, the situations in new fields, changes in existing fields, and lessons learned from 40 years of experience have led to changes in the way language programs are being conceived and carried out. The changes include: increased number of mother tongue speakers with secondary and university level education, greater presence of the church and/or mission work and their desire to work in partnership, increased resources through project funding, and other organizations that value and work with minority peoples and their languages. These factors offer SIL greater opportunities for working in partnerships for developing local, regional and national capacity as an aid in sustainability, and a possible means for multiplying efforts.

Future view

At SIL’s International Conference in 2008 the Executive Director of SIL, Freddie Boswell, stated:

... I find it inevitable that the SIL of the future will look quite different from the SIL of the past. We will not be different in terms of core values or purpose. But we will be quite different in the strategic allocation of resources, the intentional alignment of our work with that of our partners, the resourcing of our work, and the composition of our work force. As our strategies change, our structure inevitably changes.

Drawing from SIL’s current Strategic Priorities Boswell identifies the following implications for the way language programs will be developed and managed.

- Rather than SIL working as a collection of individuals working on their own somewhat loosely related projects in the same location, it is anticipated that the future will require SIL colleagues to work with others toward outcomes with shared accountability and motivation to see tangible progress.

- As SIL works more closely in partnership with other organizations it seems that we have to be able to fulfill organizational commitments to joint programs done with partners. That move will require less individualism. For these programs to be effective, we need empowered leadership.

- SIL must have more accountability to funders for organizational progress and metrics. As the expenses for more complex collaborative projects come from donors who invested with the
expectation that specific outcomes will be achieved, funding for SIL’s activities will come less and less through the accounts of individual members and thus be less under individualistic control. …

Considering the implications of the SIL strategic priorities, we need to ask ourselves what model for Language Program Management will contribute the most toward bringing about the desired results? How should we be structured organizationally? What competencies will managers need to provide the best planning and management for language development and translation work in the 21st century?

Planning and Managing Language Programs

Historically in SIL, each single language program has been primarily the responsibility of an assigned team of SIL members. The program has usually been planned and managed by the team independently of other programs within the same entity. The team has had the responsibility for finding the resources needed for the program. The organization’s responsibility has focused on setting standard language development and translation guidelines for programs, coordinating consulting resources, and organizing training/ workshop opportunities to help teams. This approach to programs can be compared to the independent franchise model used by many chain businesses such as McDonalds. It is a model that has served well for the particular environments SIL primarily worked in before 1980.

A major change in programs began to take place in the late 1970s, when field research showed illiteracy to be a significant limiting factor in the use of translations already produced. As a result, SIL began giving a greater focus to literacy and developed a systematic approach to planning literacy programs. A few years later this approach was extended to all aspects of language programs, and was named SPAR (Strategic Planning and Review). The primary focus of SPAR was to help the individual SIL team plan a program for a single language. In actual practice, program planning and review generally include only an annual review of the previous year’s activities and then planning the activities for the next year.

The current program management and planning models being used in SIL are not well adapted for working in partnership, for using cluster approaches, nor for funded programs led by local citizens. Entity administrators responsible for overseeing language programs are generally overloaded trying to provide various types of support (team support, planning, project funding, relating to stakeholders, etc.).

A New Model for Language Program Management

Given the changes and challenges we face, we need a different philosophy and model for managing language programs. Such a philosophy and model needs to include strategic and short term planning at the language level, coordination of resourcing efforts and documentation of the language and program. In addition the model needs to address the following among others:

- Multi-language programs (clusters) and other strategies
- program continuity, sustainability and capacity development of communities, partners and other stakeholders
- stakeholder involvement and partnerships including an increased role of local citizens and others in program management, project leadership and implementation.

- organizational structure, accountability (both internal and external) and sharing of knowledge assets widely
Three Levels of Language Program Management

Currently the management of language programs is provided by the entity administration and the program team. Taking a broad view and considering all the program aspects listed above, programs management could be more effective and manageable by dividing the tasks and responsibilities among three levels.

1. **Entity/ country level** – National and regional stakeholders are engaged and partnership(s) developed, strategic planning is carried out, potential strategies agreed upon, needed programs identified, and resources committed.

2. **Program level** – The partners (represented by the appropriate persons) develop language program plans and provide overall management of program implementation. These programs are designed to contribute to the national level strategic goals. Each program is designed with several shorter term results needed to accomplish the desired program results and impact.

3. **Project level** – A project is one or more sets of activities (1 month – 3+ years) designed to contribute to a result(s) within a language program. Some examples are: a set of activities for orthography development (including capacity development for local participation); a set of activities to develop local author competencies for literature and translation production; the ensemble of activities to bring about local institutional/organizational management of their language development.

Three Levels of Managers for the Organization’s Contribution

Staffing and responsibilities at the three levels would consist of the following: (see note for graphic illustration)

- **Entity level** - one Administrator for Programs and Partnerships who represents the organization in Strategic Planning with national (and some regional) partners and manages the entity's contribution to program implementation. He/she provides leadership for the Program Managers and may also provide leadership for technical domains.

- **Program level** - one or more Managers of Programs and Partnerships. Each programs manager would be responsible for a maximum of 5-9 language programs. The Programs Manager interacts with stakeholders (this term specifically includes representatives of the community / people group) in the region and participates in program planning and manages the entity's contribution to language development programs including translation. He/she provides leadership for the language project leaders and their teams, provides the Programs Administrator, the organization administration and stakeholders with information crucial to their decision-making processes and relays appropriate information to language program personnel.

- **Project level** - A Project Manager/ Leader for each project within a program. He/ she could be responsible for more than one project at the same time or for several projects sequentially. The Project Manager relates to appropriate project stakeholders including the local community, participates in planning the project and manages the implementation assuring that project activities align with desired results, (an Output in the program plan). He/she provides leadership for the project team members and participates in program performance reviews.
Advantages of the New Model

The three level model proposed here for language programs should enable SIL to better accomplish its goals. Such a structure, coupled with trained managers and with expected resources will allow the organization to address the issues cited above and:

- carry out integrated comprehensive planning at the various levels.
- have greater flexibility in assigning personnel to projects.
- establish and maintain relationships with stakeholders and partners at the proper organizational level.
- facilitate fuller partner participation in language development and translation programs
- have a greater focus on managing for results.
- provide a means for better documentation of languages, programs and lessons learned (organizational learning).

Implications for SIL

Implementing such a new language programs management model will require:

- changes in the way members think about assignments and language program work,
- learning new ways (models) of planning and management and allocating more resources to planning, program monitoring and review plus sharing control with others.
- working cross culturally to a greater extent at all levels and allowing more time for getting programs underway
- changing recruiting priorities and the content and delivery of training.
- changes in entity structures, language assessment and program staffing.

Cost of Not Adopting the New Model

If there is little or no change in the way we plan and manage language programs, it quite probably will result in:

- stakeholders’ perception that the program may well not meet their needs and desires, or that they have little or no ownership,
- partners may be less willing to commit personnel to language development programs, including translation,
- hindering SIL from engaging an increased number of local, qualified citizens to lead and to work in language programs,
- hindering the development of sustainability,
- lengthening the time to accomplish SIL goals.
NOTES

Changes in the approach to language programs include a change:

- from single teams of two people assigned to work exclusively with a single language to a multi-person team working with one language, and to a multi-person team working simultaneously with multiple languages;
- from team members being exclusively expatriates to a mix of expatriate and local citizens and to teams formed exclusively of local citizens;
- from the SIL team expecting to do all or most all of the work themselves in a single program to taking a role of facilitating, training, consulting or managing complex programs.
- from languages and language programs being considered as isolated and independent units to each language seen as being a part of a continuum or closely linked with other languages linguistically and/or by sociolinguistic factors.
- from SIL determining the program and working primarily independently to having a greater input from stakeholders (community, churches, missions, etc.) into the program planning and implementation.

Visually three levels

| Small single language program, 7 or less "staff" |
| Large single language program, more than 7 staff, 2 or more "projects" |
| Single language within a language cluster program |
| Administrator for Programs and Partnerships - manages and coordinates multiple groups of language programs. He/She relates "out" and "down" planning, organizing, motivating, monitoring, (shepherding) at this level. |
| Manager for Programs and Partnerships - manages the programs for a group of single languages or a language cluster. He/She relates "up" and "down" and "in" and "out" planning, organizing, motivating, monitoring, (shepherding) at this level. |
| Project Leader/Team Leader manages the implementation of one or more projects within a single language or group of languages. |