In April, we celebrated our tech baby’s first birthday! Her name is RLLL Mobile, short for Ruth Lilly Law Library Mobile, and she resides at mlib.indy.law.indiana.edu. RLLL Mobile’s first birthday is a fitting occasion to reflect on the project and, perhaps more importantly, on how we delivered her. Though we will not start with the all-too-familiar “once upon a time . . .” perhaps outlining her development will be just as compelling and inspiring for those of you who also have wished for a mobile site or other seemingly unattainable project. Little did we know it would all start with a handshake and a promise to buy a cup of coffee.

The Right Time
In today’s demanding legal environment, law libraries are no less immune to the buzz and allure of technology than any other institution. Exploring and implementing emerging technology for instruction and services is one of the many things a law library must do to stay relevant. It can, however, be difficult to decide which technologies are worth the time and effort. We are often tempted to add services for the sake of being on-trend, as long as the cost is not prohibitive. But implementing a program that users have not expressed a desire for nor will use can bruise a library’s reputation. Even worse, there can be negative implications when the library staff cannot fully deliver or support the newly implemented program. Yet, at the same time, it can be equally damaging to appear to be lagging behind the pace and direction of other libraries.

In the midst of these competing considerations, we determined that a mobile site is an important service to offer our users. Research by Educause indicated that technology and online access were having the beneficial result of reversing the declining library usage trend and actually increasing student use of libraries. The Chronicle of Higher Education and other sources warned that colleges and universities were failing to keep pace with their students’ mobile needs and interests. Mobile apps for legal information, legal research, legal practice, and legal office management were becoming readily available. Similarly, Westlaw, Lexis, FastCase, Bloomberg, and HeinOnline, the primary legal research vendors used by our students and faculty, were releasing mobile apps. It was apparent that our users were part of the rapid and overwhelming expansion that mobile technology was experiencing. These findings confirmed our decision to develop a mobile site for our law library. We also viewed it as an opportunity to promote our value to the greater law school community.

The Right Place
Indiana University released IU Mobile, its campus-wide mobile site, in September 2009 and was continuing to add services. In June 2010, Catherine joined the Ruth Lilly Law Library as the head of information services. Shortly thereafter, she volunteered for a university-wide mobile advisory group because of her avid interest in emerging technology. Organized by the IU Mobile team and with representatives from the libraries on all nine Indiana University campuses, the advisory group focused on developing a library presence within IU Mobile. Specifically, the library advisory group was charged with identifying services for an initial rollout and recommendations for additional services as the platform evolved.

The group met for the first time in November 2010 on the Indianapolis campus to review a mock site and discuss content and functionality. At the conclusion of the meeting, the group
anticipated that the university’s libraries would go mobile in early to mid-2011.

Due to personnel changes and the priorities assigned to other projects managed by the IU Mobile team, the release date was later postponed to September 2011, the start of the fall semester. As things often happen, the fall semester of 2011 eventually started without further notice of mobile service for libraries.

IU Mobile is, at its core, a project driven by student demand, and this constituency wanted easy access via their smart phones and other mobile devices to bus schedules, cafeteria menus, building hours, athletic events, class schedules, and IU’s online course management system. These immediate information needs became the priorities that the IU Mobile team focused on delivering in 2011. Students, on the whole, did not voice the need for mobile library or research services. Although the demand may well have been there, it was not clearly articulated.

In addition to being student-service driven, the IU Mobile team had developed a native app for the iPhone and was working toward an app for Android to extend IU Mobile’s functionality. Ultimately, releasing apps for various platforms proved to be unfeasible due to the different requirements of the various mobile devices in an endlessly expanding market. In August 2011, IU Mobile moved to an open-source software, Kuali Enterprise Mobility (utilizing JQuery Mobile), which would accommodate various mobile devices, smart phones, and tablets. It was developed by a consortium of universities and companies (including Indiana University, University of Cambridge, Cornell University, University of Michigan, HTC Global Services, Inc., and VivianTech, Inc.) and would be a major turning point for IU Mobile.

In November 2011, one year after the initial advisory group meeting attended by Catherine and a few months after the proposed rollout, another group convened with a different group structure and organized by a different university department. The goal remained the same, to develop a library presence in IU Mobile. Catherine attended the meeting and learned that University Library (on the Indianapolis campus of Indiana University) had gone “rogue.” University Library had actually developed and hosted its own mobile site outside of IU Mobile since 2009. The university mobile site was created using a module in Drupal, the library’s content management system. She also learned that University Library was working on a site revamp written in JQuery, consistent with the look, feel, and (most importantly) software now being used by IU Mobile. This move by University Library would facilitate linking its mobile site from the comprehensive IU Mobile site. Before leaving the meeting, Catherine talked at length with University Library’s technology team about their mobile initiative.

Given the law library’s commitment to our mobile project, we did not want to be deterred when the university-wide process was delayed. An idea started to percolate. If University Library had started an independent mobile site, perhaps the law library could as well. Inspired by her conversations with University Library’s technology team, Catherine initiated conversations with other members of the law library staff to identify anyone with an interest in working on a mobile site for the law library. Although no one at the law library had worked on a mobile site, there were some basic HTML and other web skills among the staff. Most importantly, there was enthusiasm for the project and a willingness to participate and collaborate. As we developed the team for the mobile project, our goal was to find the right talents. Skills, enthusiasm, and interest were more important than titles. Hannah joined the law library staff in April 2011 as a senior circulation assistant. She had a strong interest in technology, informatics, and communication design, and she volunteered for the project.

As part of our homework, we read books and other materials on HTML5, PHP and Drupal. After familiarizing ourselves with some of the software basics used for mobile, Catherine contacted Chip Dye, director of information technology at University Library, for additional advice. As an incentive, she offered to buy the coffee and walk across campus to his office. She sought advice on what skills the law library might need to hire and what these skills might cost in the marketplace. Alternatively, she hoped for confirmation that the law library could replicate what University Library had accomplished even though the law library did not have its own onsite technology team. At the end of the meeting, Chip Dye offered to investigate with his dean, David Lewis, how much technological support and training University Library could provide to other units within the IU system.

The result of these conversations was that Chip and his lead programmer on the project, Andy Smith, created and shared mobile templates with the other units on campus. In addition, University Library developed two webinars to explain the basics of developing and hosting a mobile site. Catherine and Hannah attended the webinars in January and February 2012 and felt encouraged that, with their basic skills and background research on mobile technologies, they could develop and maintain a mobile site for the law library.

Organizing and Using Available Resources and Skills to Develop the Mobile Site

We began with basic project management. First, in early January 2012, we defined the scope of the project. To keep it manageable, we decided to start small and provide a mobile site covering the basics: law library hours, building access and location information, contact information, and catalog and database links. We also took the long view. Although we were going to be a stand-alone mobile site at the beginning, our goal was to eventually link from IU Mobile. As a result, we wanted to create a site technologically compatible with IU Mobile. This led to our decision to build the mobile site using HTML5, JQuery Mobile, PHP and XML.

We set a completion date for the end of first quarter 2012. Our guiding principle for the project was “no harm,
anyone involved in the project. It is important to be cognizant of everyone's experience with the project when setting project deadlines. Catherine had been working this project for more than a year with little or no progress. In her mind, the project delivery date was therefore reasonable. Having joined the project much later, Hannah thought at the time that it was an aggressive deadline but was willing to work with it given the "no harm, no foul" strategy. Hannah volunteered to take the lead in writing the code and designing the site. Catherine would troubleshoot coding issues and manage other aspects of the project.

We next assessed our resources. Indiana University provides Adobe Creative Suite to all its units. This software package provided us with Dreamweaver for coding and transferring files to the server and Fireworks for graphics and creating icons. Indiana University staff and faculty also have access to a wide variety of free on-campus and online software and technology training opportunities. Hannah enrolled in five half-day workshops, which eventually led to her earning a certificate in website development fundamentals.

In managing staff assigned to new projects, management must adjust current work obligations and provide the necessary support. The mobile project was driven by Catherine's belief that a mobile site was a service that the law library needed to offer to its users. Catherine, as Hannah's supervisor, had the ability to adjust the circulation desk schedule and workload to ensure that Hannah had adequate time to work on the project. Fortunately, Hannah was equally persuaded of the value of the project and the value of working the project as a means of professional development, which would add to her resume. She also took some comfort in knowing that there was no downside if the project failed.

Hannah eventually assumed the coding and design work as well as interfacing with the University Library staff as the project moved to the "going live" stage. Catherine encouraged Hannah to make decisions regarding the organization and workings of the mobile site. As a result, Hannah developed the confidence that enabled her to own the project. Catherine focused on the big picture while keeping the project on track, reviewing coding issues, and serving as a sounding board. This provided the necessary dynamic to successfully complete the project.

Making Sure Everything is in Place Before Going Live

When operating within a larger organization, it is important to view a project from the perspective of the broader institutional context. We needed to think about which other departments needed to be informed and possibly even give approval prior to the rollout of the mobile site. Because the site was developed locally using a test server, the law school webmaster was consulted early on about whether the law school servers were compatible and able to host the mobile site. One consideration would be the type of server-side software necessary to run the site. Although the law school was in the process of moving to new server technology that would support the mobile site, the server would not be available by the end of first quarter 2012. University Library agreed to host the site for the short term until the law school server would support PHP. Catherine organized a short presentation of the site for the members of the law school’s Information Technology Department and External Affairs. She also interfaced regularly with the External Affairs Department to assure them that the project met all the branding and other external communication standards.

A Replicable Plan and Project Management Strategy

Throughout this project, we did a few simple things to keep it moving forward. First, we networked; that is, we made connections at the university-wide mobile meetings. Other librarians were equally interested in developing mobile services and equally disappointed in the repeated delays in the university-wide project. From among these individuals, we identified possible partners and collaborators. Second, we thoroughly investigated other successful projects to better understand what we would be getting into if we decided to create our own mobile site. Third, we did our homework. We knew that in order to be successful, we had to understand the project and what each of us could contribute to the process.

We were not afraid to ask for advice. We studied other successful mobile sites in order to understand them, but there were basic questions we needed to have answered. We were open and honest with possible collaborators. We described our technological and human resources. We were not shy about describing where we might fall short in our skills. The University Library mobile team was under no obligation to help, and any assistance given to us was going to require effort above and beyond their existing workload. We wanted to be respectful of their offer by making sure they knew what they were getting into.

In the end, we delivered a mobile site, even though it looked on paper like a project beyond our capabilities. The strategy we employed to deliver the mobile site is easily replicable in other similar "you can’t do it" situations. In addition to the above advice, there are a few important steps to keep in mind.

First, keep your library director or supervisor informed. Our law library director, Judith Ford Anspach, was supportive of our project. We explained how we meant to proceed and kept her updated as the process evolved. Similarly, the University Library team engaged their dean. If you are putting together a team that crosses departments in your library or involves individuals you don’t supervise, you have to engage those other department heads or supervisors.

You also have to be able to pitch your idea effectively. Get that elevator speech ready. In January 2011, Catherine gave a presentation to the law library staff titled Tech-Tidbits: Three+2 Technology Trends We Can’t Afford to Ignore. The hour-long presentation featured mobile services, QR2 codes, Second Life, and other technologies. Although we still don’t teach legal research using Second Life, the law library has implemented mobile services and QR2 codes in the library. Two out of five isn’t bad!

In our case, the collaborative partners fell into place somewhat naturally. We were lucky in that regard. As you think about your projects, don’t limit yourself. Ask what you need and go out and find it. Always keep in mind that your collaboration partners have their own jobs and goals. The goals and responsibilities of all the parties should be clear from the start. Agree upon project timelines with responsibilities noted and clearly delineated deliverable dates on the front end of the project. Doing this work on the front end prevents any surprises. Candid discussions will give all parties the opportunity to leave the project if it is not consistent with their understanding of what they can or want to deliver.

Lastly, make sure to acknowledge and thank your partners. The “thank you” should also extend to heads of departments and other units who allowed their staff to participate in the project. Most importantly, make sure the (continued on page 35)
A key feature of this book is that it addresses the work environment on a personal level. Strategies can be successfully adopted by one person, a department, or the whole organization. Miller starts with the premise that outstanding organizations are so because each individual who works there is outstanding. In plain language and with relatable stories, he can help anyone pick up an idea or two on how to get one step closer to that ideal. —Joy M. Shoemaker (Joy_Shoemaker@LB9.uscourts.gov) is branch librarian at the United States Court of Appeals in Pasadena, California.

Pay it Forward!
The Ruth Lilly Law Library was fortunate in that there was a unit on campus that had the requisite experience that we could reach out to for assistance. We were equally fortunate that University Library was willing and able to help out the other libraries seeking to develop mobile services. We understand that many libraries may not be in such fortunate circumstances and are happy to extend an offer to contact us. We are willing to share what we know about building a mobile site from the ground up.

Every story has a back story. Through telling the back story of the development of RLLL Mobile, we hope we have encouraged others and reinforced that collaboration and creative problem solving are important tools in serving our users and promoting our value to our communities.

—Catherine A. Lemmer (calemmer@iupui.edu) is head of information services and Hannah Alcasid (halcasid@iupui.edu) is senior circulation assistant at Ruth Lilly Law Library, Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law in Indianapolis.