Final Reflections

The first iterations of this project began over a year and a half ago as a new intern with the Tempe Grease Cooperative. With my previous background in research, I took an active role in identifying and addressing the gaps of the Tempe Grease Cooperative through my introduction to the administration of the program. As my time in the internship ended, I had felt that a lot of the groundwork I had created for the pre-Infrastructure Assistance Program was largely unfinished and I chose to continue with the project as part of my Culminating Experience. As it draws to a close now almost two years later, I feel more confidence in my abilities to design, lead, and implement complex projects that mitigate our most challenging sustainability problems. In this reflection, I will discuss the project and how it evolved, my own growth within the MSUS program, and my final thoughts on my project management development and accomplishments.

The Project

Originally, I had estimated the project to take seven months from October to April and the actual timeline remained on-time with this tight schedule. New components of the project, such as the FOG Resource Packet and program recommendations, were also added into the scope and better evolve the deliverables from the final phases. The change in the timeline was due to a number factors, such as overestimating timelines, having industry experience, and crafting a very specific project charter and set of deliverables. By laying as much groundwork as possible prior to the start of the project, the project roadmap and deliverables were developed almost seamlessly. Even with the small changes to scope and certain deliverables due to outside variables, the project was accomplished early, on budget, and within scope.

In the final report, I discuss some of the challenges and scope changes that occurred during the evolution of the project. The majority of the challenges I encountered during this project were usually minor and from outside processes and forces, such as finding funding for the Grease Infrastructure Revolving Fund and adjusting documents for the correct, liability-adverse language of a government-run program. Additionally, some of the original deliverables were adjusted to better reflect the research and interview process of the Pre-Development Phase. This change was minor and did not alter the timeline, but was an important adjustment to make to be a more useful tool for the compliance team and the TGC.

My stakeholders and client were not heavily engaged during the content development portion of the project, by design. But, stakeholders and the client were utilized for both organizational
information, deliverable review, and weekly status meetings. This engagement was successful because it allowed a single vision to drive the creation of the program content while also remaining flexible to adjustments and changes as they appeared to keep the content relevant for the client. There was an important balance established early-on between myself and the client which clearly outline expectations and the needs of each stakeholder. This carried the project through to success and ensured that all parties involved were satisfied with the final products.

As a project manager, I was challenged in my ability to be adaptive in my project leadership because of a combination of the governmental process and missing academic support. I was least surprised by the hurdles presented in the process of creating new government programs, as I had previously had a year of experience in this type of professional environment. While it can be frustrating at the time, in the end the finished product is generally much stronger and comprehensive than it would be without such a lengthy, detailed review process. In the more academic portions of my project, I had to rely heavily on my own ability to self-educate and the experiences of my client to find solutions to academic research hurdles. This was extremely frustrating, because I did not have the active engagement from graduate faculty to fully understand my project and the associated challenges in order to provide the guidance from an academic advisor perspective. However, this did lead to my growth as a project leader by fostering new skills for myself in order to find the solutions I needed to make the project happen. The difficulty gaining academic support was the most surprising part of this project and the most disappointing.

Overall, the project was successful due to the intensive, detail-oriented planning that I did prior to beginning the Pre-Development Phase. While the drafting of the project charter seemed over-the-top at times, in the end it resulted in a stronger project with plenty of buffer room for the necessary scope changes and challenges that inherently happen in these big projects. Even in the extremely minor details, such as communication plans or risk planning, became useful at some point during the project. I am very glad today that I spent so many hours working on a proposal and project charter that was detailed, specific, and well-thought out. Without that as a tool, the project would not have been so successful or with so few challenges.

**Concluding Thoughts**

In the end, I am proud of my accomplishments as a sustainability professional and the growth I have achieved throughout this project. This project challenged me to form new tools for self-reliance and confidence in my ability to create meaningful interventions for big sustainability issues. While I
was disappointed in the level of faculty engagement, I was able to find meaning and develop skills through the opportunity to lead this project for the City of Tempe. I feel that this project has helped create opportunities for me within this industry through my contacts at the City of Tempe and the skills I developed by working with a governmental organization. The biggest takeaway I have from this experience is that education is a lifelong experience that doesn’t end with the conclusion of a project and I intend to continue to find the projects and positions that challenge my ability to grow as a sustainability professional.