

Life-changing non-profit organization engaged Sequence to re-engineer its service delivery process, expanding its capacity to fulfill its mission.

Problem:

How to grant more wishes without overstressing staff or budget

The Make-A-Wish Foundation grants the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich their lives with hope, strength and joy. Sixty-five chapters and the committed grassroots support of more than 25,000 volunteers enable the Foundation to serve children in every U.S. community. The Make-A-Wish Foundation of Illinois (MAWFI) serves the entire state of Illinois and has granted more than 7,500 wishes since 1985.

In mid-2008, MAWFI found itself in an unusual situation: fundraising efforts had been so successful that its wish granting team was challenged to keep up. The organization's territory had grown exponentially through chapter mergers over the past decade, and with this expansion came a surge in wish requests and complexity. MAWFI staff worked harder and longer, but the wish backlog continued to grow, causing frustration.

"As the demand and funding for wishes increased, we set an aggressive volume goal of 700 wishes for the year," said MAWFI Chief Executive Officer Stephanie Springs. **"But it seemed that to achieve this goal, all we could do on our own was run faster or throw more people at the problem. Neither was really a viable option for a resource-constrained entity like ours. It got to the point where we had to do something else, or this organization would completely break."**

Solution:

Turn to Sequence to help rethink the process from top to bottom

The MAWFI executive team knew that the complexity of the wish granting process contributed to the slow pace of execution, but with time-sensitive wishes at hand, the problem seemed too big and overwhelming to solve. **"We knew what the problems were, and we had tried to fix them ourselves in the past,"** said Renee Davis, MAWFI's Director of Program Services. **"But we wanted to do it right and didn't know how to get there."**

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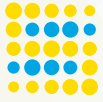
Challenges Addressed:

- Scarce resources
- Inefficient processes
- Roadmap needed

"Sequence was just fantastic to work with. They're very sharp and their process work is excellent. They are able to take the most complex situation and break it down so we could have clarity."

—Daryl Thomann

Chief Operating Officer
Make-A-Wish Foundation of Illinois



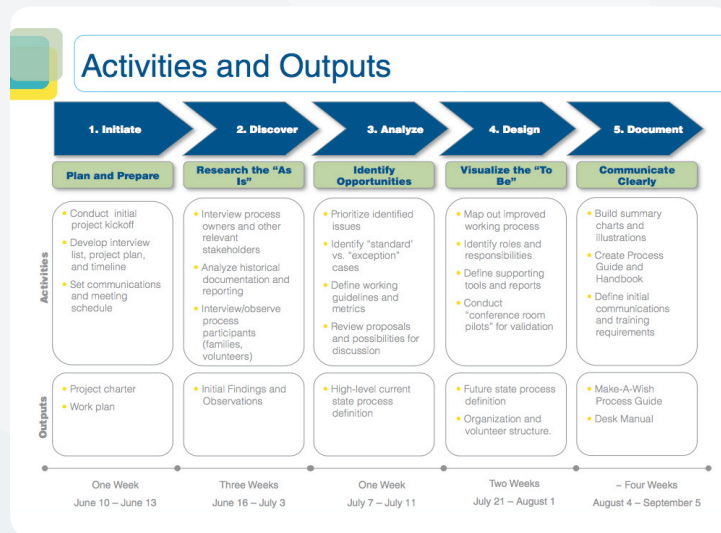
MAWFI decided to hire consultants to attack the problem and ultimately Sequence was chosen over several much larger firms. Daryl Thomann, MAWFI Chief Operating Officer and sponsor of the project, explained why: “Sequence understood the non-profit culture and business model very well. The key players had done process redesign work for non-profits before. Sequence was willing to commit top-caliber resources to the project—people we found to be sharp, likeable and approachable. **We were comfortable with the approach Sequence defined, and we were struck by the clarity of the presentation. It was impressive without unnecessary rigmarole. And it wasn’t cost prohibitive.**”

The Sequence team launched its twelve week approach to process redesign. The first stage: comprehensive discovery that entailed interviews with and observation of all stakeholders. COO Daryl Thomann found this non-intrusive methodology to be important to building consensus and buy-in. **“Sequence involved people in a way that was not overly burdensome. They posed key questions so that problem solving incorporated staff members’ input.”**

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“The classic complaint about consultants is that they repackage what you’ve told them as ‘recommendations.’ That was never the case with Sequence. They quickly understood the underlying issues and challenged us to focus on the things that could make a difference. Sequence provided a roadmap to help us make change happen.”

—Stephanie Springs
Chief Executive Officer
Make-A-Wish Foundation of Illinois





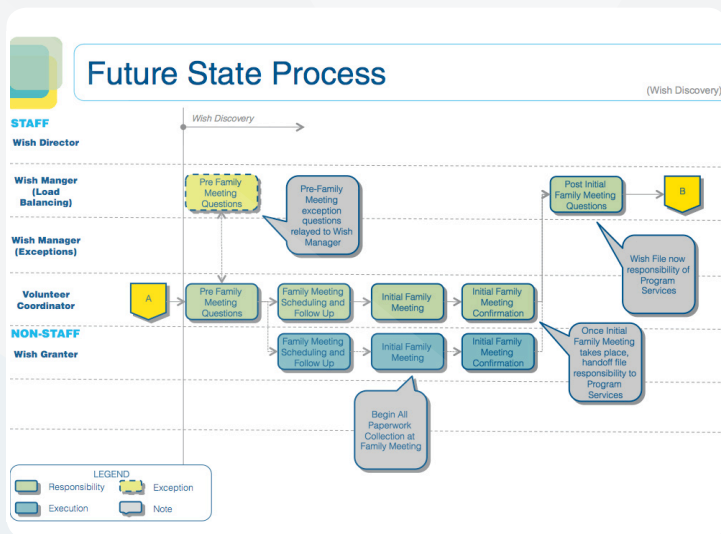
Sequence then analyzed findings to understand the many distinct wish granting procedures currently in play; identified wish granting best practices; and uncovered ten key issues and decision bottlenecks hindering wish granting efficiency. One pivotal insight: “Our wish granting involved too many people and everyone did things differently. No one had complete ownership. It wasn’t scalable,” explained Director of Program Services Renee Davis. “This led to additional challenges involving training.”

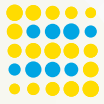
Together with the MAWFI team, Sequence designed a streamlined, standardized future state of wish granting. Key changes were made to provide full responsibility for each wish to a single Wish Coordinator, and empower Wish Managers to handle budgets and keep the process moving. A Wish Assignment Model was established to guide Wish Managers in allocating new wish cases among employees, using a scoring system that takes into account current and anticipated workload, wish type, family dynamics, medical complexity and other factors. Sequence wrote a Wish Granters Manual to document all processes, roles and responsibilities. “They gave us a roadmap that we used to build out and execute on a detailed plan on our own,” said COO Daryl Thomann.

“Sequence brought the structured intelligence you expect from a consulting firm, but they delivered with heart and understanding. And that was the difference. They’re not the consultants you avoid. They’re likeable. They got to know us. They showed sincerity. They wanted to help us. That goes a long way in our organization.”

—Daryl Thomann
Chief Operating Officer
Make-A-Wish Foundation of Illinois

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Results:

More wishes and happy employees.

After implementing the new wish granting roles and processes, MAWFI began to see immediate results. “We made 640 wishes last year,” said CEO Stephanie Springs. “**Nine months into the fiscal year, we had completed 700 wishes, exceeding our annual wish goal. This is the first time the team has met its goal in four years. We are now the top wish granting chapter in the Make-A-Wish organization.**”

Cycle time for wish completion has dropped dramatically as well: MAWFI has seen a 28% reduction in the amount of time required to complete each wish. Additionally, with Sequence’s help, annual wish capacity has climbed by 46%. Much of this success is attributable to the creation of a comprehensive Wish Granting Manual, which helps to define and accelerate the core wish granting process, standardize training of new and promoted staff, and clearly articulates the organization’s objectives and goals.

MAWFI leadership, including Director of Program Services Renee Davis, also has noticed a cultural change in the organization. “There is far better work-life balance. There is now virtually no overtime. There is no longer a sense of ‘I’m really busy and she isn’t.’ This sense of equity makes everyone happy. It means less stress, less frustration. All of this will positively impact the quality of the wishes we grant.” CEO Stephanie Springs attributes improved morale to the empowerment felt from owning the “whole wish.” “Coordinators are emailing the team to share positive wish granting stories. This wouldn’t have happened before, when they were only involved in a little bit of a wish. **Now they have the vantage point of an entire wish from start to finish, and all the responsibility, so they can take pride in the results.**”

Sequence Managing Partner Chris Vaughan is effusive about the efforts of the MAWFI team, and the change effected. “They did it. The team managed the organization to do a total 180. They implemented the plans on their own, to the schedule we provided. They’ve actually improved on our work, which was exciting to see. Executives are now working on other initiatives like cost containment. Micro-management is no longer necessary or happening. **The team has cleared its whole backlog of 100+ wishes. No additional staff was needed to drive the results seen. It was a home run.**”

“Sequence took the time to truly incorporate our organization’s input, involve everyone in problem solving and communicate throughout the process. As a result, at the end, everyone got it. People weren’t upset or scared about making changes. They just wanted to do it. It was a wonderful relief.”

—Renee Davis

Director of Program Services
Make-A-Wish Foundation of Illinois