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# Envisioning your e-portfolio initiative



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Over the last several years I've noticed a gradual shift in how Taskstream users are thinking about e-portfolios. When I first started helping clients implement e-portfolios on their campus, many followed a pretty traditional model where students showcase their exemplary work. However, as interest and use of e-portfolios has grown over the last few years, many institutions have recognized how powerful a tool e-portfolios can be and their use in supporting student learning in different ways.

Whether you're considering adopting e-portfolios or need to kick start an existing e-portfolio initiative, there are several key questions to consider:

## **What are you trying to achieve with your initiative?**

I am willing to bet if I asked 50 faculty members what an e-portfolio is and how using e-portfolios can benefit their institution, I would get many different answers. I'm sure we can all agree that at a basic level an e-portfolio is a tool that allows students to compile and document their work electronically (agreed, right?). But when we dig past that brief definition and start to think about how using e-portfolios can benefit your community, we start getting a multitude of perspectives. Do you want students to use their e-portfolios as a professional portfolio for their job search or graduate school applications? Do you want students to engage in reflective learning? Do you want to integrate service learning or extracurricular activities into the e-portfolio? Before you start thinking about how you want the "e" part of e-portfolios to work, you'll want to decide what you want to achieve

Once you've set your intentions for what you want to achieve and now you want your students to benefit from using e-portfolios, you will want to consider how you want to integrate e-portfolios into the educational experience. We have all seen initiatives fall flat if students don't understand the benefits of the initiative or don't have sufficient motivation to participate. We know that "do this because I told you to" is rarely enough.

In my experience, the most successful uses of e-portfolios are initiatives where e-portfolios are woven into the students' educational experience. Creating an e-portfolio transforms from just a task that students do into a part of what it means to be a student. There are many different ways to embed an e-portfolio initiative in the students' learning and many questions to ask to help you formulate your initiative. Knowing how the e-portfolio will become part of your students' educational experience early will drive how you develop and design your initiative. This knowledge will also help identify other stakeholders and help you communicate and engage them in the initiative.

### **Do you want to involve assessment into your initiative?**

e-Portfolios are a powerful way to show what students know and are able to do and are often used to support a wide range of assessment from student learning outcomes to extracurricular and service learning activities. e-Portfolios can give you the flexibility of assessing work more holistically with a set of learning outcomes, or allow you to assess components of the portfolio. If you would like to leverage your e-portfolio initiative to support assessment then there are several decisions to make. You will want to think about what skills or outcomes you are assessing, how you want to set up the assessment measurement, who will assess the work, and whether the e-portfolios will be assessed and graded or if the measurement is the same for both.

Some universities don't envision their e-portfolio initiative as related to their assessment plans. However, even if you are using e-portfolios to support other goals, you might want to consider if assessing the e-portfolios can strengthen your initiative. Adding assessment to your e-portfolio process can provide powerful insight into what your students are learning.

Once you've defined your initiative, decided how you want to weave e-portfolios into your students' experience, and created your assessment plan, there are just a few more areas to consider. I won't go in depth here, but communication is key to the success of an e-portfolio initiative. Not only should students understand the benefits of an e-portfolio, but faculty and staff should too. Having the support of your community will greatly influence the success of your initiative. While we may think about e-portfolios primarily as a technological tool, it is most important to think about the non-technical considerations.

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