Library Networking and Consortia

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Column Editor's Note. This new column in the *Journal of Library Administration* will focus on formal collaboration and networking among libraries through consortia. The column will offer in-depth examinations of issues facing modern library consortia including (but not limited to) e-resource licensing, ebooks, next generation integrated library systems, shared print archiving, shared digital repositories, governance and other relevant topics. Contributions are accepted for this column and must be submitted to George Machovec (george@coalliance.org). Contact the column editor for suggested topics, deadlines and formatting.

LIBRARY CONSORTIA: THE BIG PICTURE

INTRODUCTION

Libraries have been collaborating, ever since their inception, to share resources on behalf of their patrons, implement new technologies and extend their purchasing power. During the 1970s through 1990s the focus was on interlibrary loan, collaborative collection development, shared cataloging and the introduction of shared integrated library systems. By the late 1990s it became clear that digital resources were the future of libraries and that cooperative purchasing, in order to save money or extend what libraries could acquire, was the big new trend in the library landscape. Today most academic libraries belong to many different consortia each of which offer different benefits of membership. These organizations are part of the library landscape and considered fundamental to cost effective library management.

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DIFFERENT AND YET ALIKE

No two library consortia are alike. Like fingerprints or snowflakes, they may look similar from a distance but close examination reveals many nuanced differences. Although every group has a reason for being, each partnership has its own unique history, characteristics, and combination of programs and services. That being said, library consortia do have some common characteristics and they are usually combined in different ways to make a successful group enterprise. Some of the most common programmatic areas with consortia are shared purchasing, shared technology, extending influence and better services to libraries who serve their patrons.

The *buying club* is a consortia with a focus on group purchasing of electronic resources. These groups may or may not have central staff and the purpose is to either save money on e-resource group purchases or allow libraries to spend the same amount of money but receive additional content. Although some consortia do this as their exclusive activity, more often this is just a key component in a broader suite of services. As most academic libraries now spend a huge portion of their materials budget on e-resources, the group purchasing function of any group often provides the greatest cost/benefit ratio for members. Beyond money, some other important goals of shared licensing is to create leverage with vendors and publishers to get concessions for library interests and to develop shared licenses with better terms and provisions for the group.

Shared integrated library systems have been the core feature for many groups over the last thirty years. The shared ILS is an interesting phenomenon. In the 1980s and early 1990s the cost of computing resources in terms of servers and storage was very high. This drove libraries together to share the costs of not only the software but also the cost of the infrastructure. In some cases these were commercial solutions but in other instances, libraries actually developed their own software solutions which were then commercialized (e.g., CARL Corporation, NOTIS, VTLS). By the late 1990s into the 2000s, many libraries moved to standalone commercial solutions each running their own separate environments. Cloud-based computing and storage have caused libraries to reconsider the next generation of remotely hosted multi-tenant library systems, supported by vendors and consortia. The new next generation systems are not being developed to save money on hardware infrastructure, per se, but on the need to share in other areas such as cooperative purchasing, shared metadata, and other staff intensive operations.

Shared discovery and delivery systems have been a major feature of many consortia in the last fifteen years. With the rise of locally hosted integrated library systems in the 1990s libraries have made a concerted effort to provide a unified interface for searching across multiple catalogs coupled with the ability to request items. Systems such as the INN-Reach union

catalog (Innovative Interfaces) were developed in the 1990s and became popular in many regions that have had a large number of local Innovative systems (non-Innovative sites can also join but typically cost extra). By the early 2000s, many consortia also deployed federated (aka metasearch) interfaces that could launch multiple searches into many different targets such as catalogs and other databases and bring back results in a common interface. In the last three or four years, discovery interfaces such as Summon (Serials Solutions), Primo (Ex Libris), WorldCat Local (OCLC) and EBSCO Discovery Service have emerged and these services allow a single unified search bringing back results from both catalogs as well as many of the publisher, aggregator and abstracting/indexing services. One interesting note regarding this technology is that one advance does not always completely replace earlier technology. In many cases, libraries and consortia are now running multiple services as each is optimized for different situations.

Shared digital repositories services and hosting have become an important rallying point for some consortia for both open source as well as some commercial solutions. Open source repositories using solutions such as Fedora and DSpace are free to download but take significant effort to configure, launch and host. Many libraries are turning to hosted solutions for these types of repositories either through companies specializing in these services or consortia. This somewhat mitigates the effort involved in operating a local platform and allows libraries to focus on ingesting content. Although the local operation of repositories is still popular, the move into the cloud for both hosting and support services is a growing trend.

Shared print archiving in which libraries work together to determine what to retain and what to weed has become a key initiative for many groups. As greater numbers of journals and books are digitized and offered through different venues, it opens the door for libraries to consider what to do with their legacy print collections. Regional and national efforts have been quite active with some efforts being coordinated by the Center for Research Libraries. "Through its Global Resources Forum (GRF), CRL promotes sharing of practices and information about print archiving initiatives around the world and especially in North America, with services including:

- Print Archiving Community Forum: Focused meetings and webinars with libraries and consortia to build community consensus on print archiving standards and best practices.
- Print Archives Preservation Registry (PAPR): This system provides online data about print archiving programs and archived materials, and analysis of library collections to support archiving and retention decisions." (http://www.crl.edu/archiving-preservation/print-archives)

Tackling the problem of legacy print is best accomplished through collaboration at the local, regional, and national level. Some of the issues being addressed include retention policies and commitment, recording and reporting what is being retained, delivery of print when requested, and determining local and regional standards for storage whether done in centralized or distributed facilities. How many copies of a monograph or journal should be retained in a region or the country are important considerations. The local library impact of these efforts are substantial as libraries are beginning to remodel or build new facilities to meet the needs of the patron in the digital age.

A BIT OF RECENT HISTORY

International Coalition of Library Consortia

In 1996, a group of consortium leaders informally began to meet at the American Library Association to discuss how to more effectively license materials and get publishers and vendors to be more agreeable to group purchasing. The group, initially known as the Consortium of Consortia (COC), eventually was named the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). ICOLC began biannual meetings which are now split between two continents—one held in Europe and one in North America (http://www.icolc.net/). These meetings keep consortia leaders informed about new electronic information resources, pricing practices of electronic information providers and vendors, and other issues of importance to directors, governing boards, and libraries. ICOLC supports participating consortia by facilitating discussion on issues of common interest. Occasionally, ICOLC also publishes best practices or statements regarding topics which affect libraries and library consortia. This gives a strong voice to consortia and their members in order to influence the marketplace and library community.

The original purpose behind ICOLC was to get publishers and vendors to lower prices, have better contract provisions, and work with regional and national consortia. After several informal ad hoc meetings of consortia leaders at the American Library Association the group had its first conference in Saint Louis in 1997. At that time, the overriding issue was e-resource licensing to consortia. The purpose was to meet with vendors and publishers and to explain to them what modern day consortia wanted in their licenses and to hear and complain about pricing and extant licensing practices. The early meetings of the organization were almost exclusively "grill" sessions where the vendor or publisher had a chance to describe their pricing and licensing models and then be grilled by the participants. These grill sessions became famous in the vendor and publisher community and top management was normally sent by companies as it was a unique opportunity to present a product to many of the top decision makers. As the years have

progressed, ICOLC has had fewer vendor grill sessions and broadened its scope to consortia management and other topics related to running a successful organization.

What is unusual about ICOLC is that it is a self-organized and informal group of consortial leaders representing almost 200 groups around the globe in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Asia, and Africa. There are no bylaws, no articles of incorporation, no written rules of engagement, no strategic plan, no staff, no office and no dues. The informal leader of the group, since its inception, has been Tom Sanville (originally the executive director of OhioLink and now with Lyrasis). He has helped organize meetings, been the moderator of many plenary sessions, and otherwise taken a lead. However, that is not to say that other consortial leaders have not taken leadership. Conference agendas are developed via a listserv through a group think process. Once topics are decided, participants decide who will organize each session and invite vendors or other consortia leaders to speak on topics. As the meeting topics are selected by the participants, the conference is very relevant and up to date. Most of the consortia leaders say that this is their most important professional association and conference.

Once a city is selected for future meetings, a local consortia is assigned the role of local host and they are responsible for local arrangements including meeting space, accommodations, and other local activities. A great deal of trust has been developed in the community since that local host must sign contracts guaranteeing hotel rooms and meeting space. No meeting has ever defaulted even during the economic crisis. A typical conference will have representatives from about 100 consortia in attendance with the spring North American meetings having a higher attendance from U.S. and Canadian participants and the fall European meetings having higher attendance from Europe.

A quick sampling of recent venues indicate the truly international flavor of the organization: Vilnius (October 13, 2013 to October 16, 2013), Toronto (April 21, 2013 to April 24, 2013), Vienna (October 14, 2012 to October 17, 2012), Denver (April 22, 2012 to April 25, 2012), Istanbul (September 18, 2011 to September 21, 2011), Austin (March 20, 2011 to March 23, 2011), Amsterdam (October 3, 2010 to October 6, 2010), Chicago (April 19, 2010 to April 21, 2010), Paris (October 26, 2009 to October 28, 2009), Charlottesville (April 9, 2009 to April 11, 2009), Munich (October 19, 2008 to October 22, 2008), San Francisco (April 13, 2008 to April 16, 2008).

Collaborative Librarianship

Publishing about library collaboration has historically been spread throughout library journal literature and there has not been a periodical devoted to this topic. The first attempt to remedy this took place when Emerald Group

Publishing launched a title called *Library Consortium Management: An International Journal*. This journal lasted less than two years (1999–2000) and the publisher was hoping to pick up on the new enthusiasm in the consortial movement. It appears that the journal ceased due to a small number of subscribers and the challenge of getting manuscripts from those involved in consortia.

A more recent successful journal relating to library cooperation is *Collaborative Librarianship* (http://collaborativelibrarianship.org), which was started by Ivan Gaetz in 2009 when he was library director at Regis University in Denver (Ivan is now library director at Colorado College). The journal is now co-edited by Ivan Gaetz and Valerie Horton (executive director at Minitex). Although the journal began with strong roots in Colorado, it has broadened its editorial board on an international basis and manuscripts are received from around the world.

The reasons for the success of this journal are many. First, it has a broad scope accepting articles relating to any aspect of library collaboration. Second, as an open access journal there are no subscription fees. The journal has been funded through contributions from the founding organizations and the editors are not paid for their work. The journal is hosted by the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries using the Open Journal Systems (OJS) open source software. The journal is very widely read and authors do go through a full peer review process for the "Scholarly Articles" portion of the publication.

CONSORTIAL FUNDING

In the same way that consortia are programmatically unique there are many different funding models for success. A positive return on investment is very important for consortia that want members to recognize that dollars and effort invested in an organization are well spent. Some of the different funding models are due to programmatic needs, organization history, or mandates from a parent agency.

Consortial success through sweat equity is a very common model in some consortia where there typically are no dues, no dedicated office or staff. In this model, libraries contribute existing staff to group activities (such as e-resource licensing on behalf of a group) which benefit all participating libraries. The obvious benefit to this approach is that if existing library staff have sufficient time to work on the collaborative then everyone benefits without having to come up with fees or assessments. Many consortial activities start this way, and when the effort becomes too substantial for staff within participating libraries then the group will move into some type of dedicated staff in which each participating library financially contributes based on some agreed-upon formula.

Top down funding from a state or municipality to fund cooperative activities is also the origin for many consortia. This funding often covers staff, operations, and office space (or a group may even be housed at a member site). Sometimes these consortia remain very narrow in scope serving only the direct members of the group (e.g., state funded universities) but sometimes these organizations will serve both their direct constituent institutions and others as well (e.g., private universities, special libraries). This broadening of scope is often justified due to the value of having a larger group in order to get better licensing terms, recognizing that everyone in a state is a citizen even if going to a private university, or by allowing other libraries into the group by charging some type of surcharge or giving a special affiliate status. Often top down funding models cover only some portion of the cost and libraries pay additional fees to get into licensing programs or other initiatives by the group.

Many consortia are nonprofit 501c (3) corporations with a dedicated staff. The scope of programs will determine the size of staff, office space needed, technical infrastructure, and operations costs. These types of consortia have a multitude of different ways to divide costs among members. Typical techniques include:

- Equally splitting costs. This is most common when the participants are somewhat homogeneous in terms of budget, size or levels of participation in the group.
- Pro-rating assessments based on one or more metrics such as materials budget, areas of programmatic participation, student body FTE counts, Carnegie classification, etc. It is not uncommon for a consortium to have a fixed component and variable components so that costs can be balanced between smaller and larger libraries in an acceptable manner.
- Some consortia have very small fixed membership fees but have surcharges on e-resource licensing or other programmatic areas that cover costs as the consortium grows. This is particularly successful when dealing with a wide range of participating libraries so that all library types can afford to be a member and pay according to how much the consortium provides on their behalf.

Many consortia are regularly involved in cost/benefit or return on investment analysis to prove to participating libraries that their participation in the group provides more value than the direct money spent. This type of ongoing assessment is a key element in most consortia. Aside from the direct financial value of participating in a group, there are a number of non-monetary benefits in membership with most groups including closer working relationships with libraries in a region, training/education programs, joint ventures, committee participation advancing the cause of libraries, and greater

leverage with the publishing/vendor industry as a result of teaming up with others.

SOME OF THE KEY PROBLEMS FACING CONSORTIA

Aside from the obvious need for a stable and sufficient funding stream for successful consortial activities, library consortia have long faced a variety of issues. Every group will face its own unique combination of challenges but many of the issues are common to all. Problems come and go with changing member libraries, personnel, technology, and the general environment.

One of the long recognized issues with consortia is the problem of overlap and competition of consortia particularly over e-resource licensing. Virtually all libraries belong to many different organizations and it is inevitable that this type of problem would arise. As early as 2001 Tom Peters, then director of the Center for Library Initiatives at the CIC, noted "Service overlap across consortia, however, remains a problem. Most consortia continue to offer (or aspire to offer) a full palette of consortial services. Although the pursuit of consortial e-resource agreements reinvigorated many consosrtia in the 1990s, in the early months of the decade consortia have been trying to diversify their service offerings to their member libraries. As a group, library consortia should begin to collectively address the question: Do all library consortia need to develop and offer a full array of services?" (Peters, 2001). Peters then goes on to propose a number of solutions to avoiding this dilemma. Since Peters wrote this article, there has been some consolidation in the consortial marketplace. Several consortia, particularly some of the OCLC networks, have either gone out of business (e.g., BCR) or have consolidated under larger umbrella organizations (e.g., LYRASIS). At the same time new groups have formed (e.g., Greater Western Library Alliance) to meet other needs.

As the e-resource market has matured, some vendors and publishers have questioned the role of consortia and even put together licensing programs that exclude them or provide no consortial cost advantages. Although a local consortia may still choose to participate in some of these programs the motivations may be different such as the desire to have consolidated licensing under a single entity, the desire to put certain contract restrictions at arm's length, or just the convenience of letting someone else go through the licensing effort.

Internal politics and differences of opinion about technological solutions are commonplace. For example, it would make sense for a group to consider the move to a shared multi-tenant cloud-based integrated library system at the same time to take advantage of collaborative technology, better pricing, and shared training. However, this type of consolidated lock-step

move is sometimes difficult to orchestrate particularly with differences in opinion about preferred solutions and different contract cycles. Smaller libraries sometimes feel they are being forced down a path by the larger partners and conversely larger libraries may feel the drag of other partner libraries. The integrated library systems marketplace is particularly interesting with open source solutions (e.g., OLE, Koha, Evergreen), new solutions from long time vendors (e.g., Ex Libris, Innovative Interfaces), new players (Serials Solutions Intota), and re-emerging old players (OCLC WMS). Depending on where a library is in their ILS life cycle or perceived value or new solutions, the need to move will vary from library to library.

A particularly vexing problem for libraries and consortia is the migration from print to digital monographs and how it is changing the ways libraries are doing business. Libraries have a great interest in supporting the new format and with the burgeoning popularity of e-book readers, tablets, and smartphones the reader finally has many different options for convenient e-book consumption. For scholarly works, of course, users still want convenient laptop access for articles, monographs, reports, and papers. However, many concerns are still nagging librarians. One major danger for libraries is that commercial direct-to-consumer sales (e.g., Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Google Editions, Apple) leaves libraries and consortia out of the purchasing loop, something which publishers of popular materials particularly like. In an excellent editorial called "Ebooks on Fire" (http://www.infotoday.com/searcher/dec11/Hamaker.shtml), Chuck Hamaker posits many concerns, some of which include:

- The loss of historic privileges such as borrowing and lending rights as well as the ability to put items on reserve in academic libraries
- Contractual concerns with restrictive rules by publishers and aggregators
- Revocable rights
- Protecting the text (i.e., authors, publishers, or the government changing the written record)
- Paying a premium for library use of books or selling content by the use
- Concern about preservation and archiving.

As publishers and aggregators try new sales and distribution models with libraries many are growing concerned that the distribution of monographs is now taking on serial-like characteristics. Many academic libraries are concerned that their entire budget will be tied up in ongoing subscriptions. Many consortia have built substantial discovery and delivery systems built around the delivery of physical objects. As growing bodies of content are locked down by contract what will become of these systems? Can group licensing help mitigate the trend towards loss of sharing? In the end, if virtually all content is locked down by contracts, libraries will have lost the battle. Large

libraries will have access to greater bodies of material and small libraries much less.

As the modern library consortial movement matures it is apparent that library collaboration is stronger than ever. The integration of technology and licensing means that virtually every library needs to work in a collaborative environment to best optimize resource allocation and provide the best service for their patrons.

REFERENCE

Peters, T. (2001) Overlap and competition among consortia for e-resource agreements. *The Charleston Advisor*, *2*(3), 57–58.