**Collaborative Technical Services: Strategies for Alliance Cooperation**
**Orbis Cascade Alliance Symposium on Collaborative Technical Services**
**December 8, 2011**

The Collaborative Technical Services Team has drafted the following statement on strategies for cooperative technical services to help create a dialogue among attendees at the Collaborative Technical Services Symposium.  Each attendee will be part of a discussion on one of these strategies, looking through one of four lenses:  acquisitions, cataloging, serials/ERM, or the entirety of technical services.  Our goals are to stimulate thinking those present and to help the Alliance move forward on defining key elements of collaborative technical services within the organization and its member libraries.  This document is a condensed version of one prepared for the Council for its November meeting.

**Collaborative Technical Services**
Collaborative technical services is a shared set of practices and staffing for acquisitions, cataloging, serials and related functions that maximizes the collective efficiency of these operations within Alliance libraries.  The goal is to bring a sense of oneness to Alliance collections while creating efficiencies which enable libraries and their staff to focus on expanding and improving library services and discovery.

The analogy of a pipeline is often used to describe technical services operations: orders enter at one end and pass along sequentially until they emerge at the other end as cataloged and marked volumes or accessible resources.  Thus the Alliance strategic focus on collaborative technical services can be framed as an effort to increase efficiency in the technical services pipeline.

**Shared Expectations**
A critical prerequisite for successful shared technical services is a clear set of shared expectations among the libraries involved.  This goes beyond simple procedures, such as how to place an order, and includes expectations for turnaround time, training, support, problem solving, and scalability along with the range of activities inherent in building and maintaining collections including database maintenance, authority control, and transfers and withdrawals of resources.  It touches on every aspect of this relationship between member libraries.

Foundational to the development of collaborative collection services are efficiency and standardization.  What is standardized can be shared easily; non-standardized resources and practices cannot be shared as easily.  The adoption and use of Alliance-wide practices across 36 individual libraries are central to planning for the shared ILS and other aspects of collaborative collection services, and may provide significant savings in the long run.  For example, the Alliance currently supports collaborative efforts such as the collection development print threshold and the development of best bibliographic practices.

**Collaborative Collection Services for Online Electronic Resources**
The case for collaborative management of online resources is strong and will only become stronger with a shared ILS and if cooperative purchasing and licensing of online resources, such as the Demand Driven Acquisitions of e-books pilot, increase.  The logistical challenges and temporal and financial costs of moving physical materials around in a collaborative environment are irrelevant when dealing with remote access resources.


**Potential Impact of Consolidation of Technical Services**
Although consolidating technical services has great potential for reducing redundant effort and freeing Alliance resources to contribute to other activities, there are possible costs to be considered. These include loss of institutional flexibility and local expertise in technical services areas.  Librarians with a solid understanding of technical services functions have an important role to play in the long standing dynamic within libraries, which have often relied upon librarians with public and technical services expertise to work in concert to provide quality services to end users.  If no one at a library has grounding in technical services, this perspective and the ability to foster communication about these issues within the library may be lost.


**Models for Implementation of Collaborative Collection Services**
CTST suggests three models as a basis for discussion.  While it is important to recognize that collection services dealing with tangible materials differ from those involving electronic resources, there are important commonalities and any approach should consider both formats. Each of these models could be an end point for collaborative collection services, or the first two could serve as steps toward a consolidated model as defined in the third option depending upon the success of early steps and the desirability of moving forward.


**The following are some options for consolidation:**

- Distributed collection services
- Regional consolidation of collection services
- Centralized collection services


**Distributed Collection Services**
One possible model for distributed collection services would be akin to the approach taken when the Alliance used Inn-Reach as its union catalog and direct borrowing system.  Requirements existed for records but not for internal processes and collection development.  An obvious drawback of this approach is that there is too much duplication of effort, e.g. for core titles that several libraries acquire.  But clearly in those days we were not operating in a shared ILS.  We had a shared union catalog based on what was in each member library's local

ILS.

Certainly with a shared ILS and effective workflows in place, much duplication could be eliminated.  There will be a single bibliographic record in the shared ILS for any title owned by any Alliance library.  For example, when a new title is acquired, the first library receiving it will be responsible for cataloging that item.  Other libraries receiving that title would attach their holdings to that single bibliographic record and also presumably attach any local information they deem necessary.  In some cases individual member libraries may choose to upgrade existing bibliographic records according to well-established Alliance guidelines.

Such a model would certainly eliminate much duplicated effort in cataloging.  However, it probably would not create efficiencies in other areas of technical services since each library would still be doing its own ordering, receiving, and handling of the materials to be cataloged.  Another possible model for distributed collection services may be for each member library to take responsibility for the acquisition, cataloging, and processing of materials in selected subject areas or selected formats, allowing other libraries to forgo the expense and effort of processing these materials.  This would have the advantage of playing to different member libraries' strengths and expertise in dealing with different formats, languages, etc.  It could also have the advantage of working hand in hand with shared approval plans.

Yet another possible model for distributed collection services would be to centralize (or regionally distribute) all collection service activities resulting from shared approval plans, while leaving each individual member library responsible for the acquisition and cataloging of their firm orders and specialized approval plans. In such a way, perhaps, an Alliance-wide core collection could be built and processed in a more centralized way while supplements to that core collection would be handled locally.   This might include the acquisition, cataloging, and processing of rare books and other special collections materials and the handling of donations.


**Regional Collection Services**
The core idea of regional consolidation is to move technical services activities to large libraries, e.g. the ARL libraries.  The size of Alliance libraries varies greatly, from small community colleges to some of the largest universities in the nation.  This approach makes use of existing economies of scale.  The marginal cost of adding to large workflows is relatively low, as increased size offers opportunities for greater economy of scale.

To serve the full range of needs represented by member institutions requires very specialized skills such as language and format expertise.  A model of consolidating to the large libraries would take advantage of existing expertise.  Most of the needed expertise is already in place.

For tangible resources, it may be possible to reduce the costs of moving materials by consolidating services at high-volume sites, so that redistribution occurs only for materials going to low-volume sites.

A regional approach reduces travel costs over centralized consolidation.  Shared technical services cannot take place without a good deal of communication between processing centers and the libraries they serve.  Much can be done electronically, but in-person meetings are a necessity.  If processing centers are located relatively close to client libraries, travel costs are reduced and occasional face-to-face contact certainly will increase the communication and trust that are essential for long-term success.

**Centralized Collection Services**
Under this approach, all collection services would move to a single processing center within each state or to one center, probably co-located with a regional storage facility.  Economies of scale increase, as do the costs of redistribution, travel, and the like.  As the percentage of material available in electronic format increases, the physical component of Alliance purchases will be reduced, and is likely to remain predominantly in exotic languages and scripts and specialized formats.

The challenges of implementing this model are greater due to the need to create the central processing center and to coordinate changes at all member libraries at once.  The size of such a combined unit would be quite large, on the order of a top-20 ARL technical services division.  All existing units like this have grown organically over time; a number of risks are inherent in creating such a unit from scratch on a short timeline.