



Report to the Alliance Executive Committee

from the

Collaborative Tech Services Task Force

October 9, 2009

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Charge to the Task Force

Consider potential projects, weigh impact, cost, and propose a specific pilot project and proof of concept. The initial emphasis of the CTSTF will be on quick action rather than a global or more theoretical analysis of issues. As background for their work, it is expected that the task force will review [The Extended Library Enterprise: Collaborative Technical Services & Shared Staffing](#), a white paper prepared for the strategic planning retreat.

Executive Summary of Recommendations

1. Implement a *Shared Best Practices* working group that will focus on developing the most efficient and effective methodologies for tech services operations throughout the Alliance.
2. Create a Task Force to address issues associated with the collaborative processing of eBook collections. The work of this group will occur alongside the work of the Task Force developing the purchasing component.
3. Consider implementing the *Collaborative Cataloging of Difficult Foreign Language Materials* proposal or the *Cooperative Cataloging and Identification of pre-1976 Federal Documents Holdings* proposal in addition to the above.
4. Evaluate the completed projects to determine the ongoing viability of collaboration in the area of tech services.

Background

The Orbis Cascade Alliance has made a commitment to cooperatively develop a collection for the Pacific Northwest that will ensure strong support for the academic programs, researchers and students associated with each member institution. These 36 colleges and universities know that, while individually they can't collect everything that our constituents may need, together we can build a collection that does. For the past few years, the Alliance has taken additional steps to support this primary goal by implementing cooperative subscriptions to eResources, identifying a common monographs vendor, and developing the Distributed Print Repository.

With the overall success associated with developing and sharing this unified collection, the Alliance has begun to look at other areas which might benefit from additional cooperation. As documented in the R2 white paper (noted above) the area of technical services is an obvious choice.

At the Spring 2009 retreat, the Alliance Council authorized the creation of the Collaborative Tech Services Task Force, charging it to develop and propose a specific collaborative pilot project and proof of concept that would initiate this type of activity amongst Alliance libraries. The Task Force was appointed in May 2009 to prepare a report by October 9th.

The members met numerous times via teleconference from June through September. The initial meetings focused on developing a number of viable proposals for further consideration. Task Force members found that their ability to identify proposals that were large in scale with broad appeal was limited by the lack of a shared ILS/ERMS infrastructure.

Eventually, a total of eight proposals were developed by the Task Force. It was also decided that a survey should be sent to Council members so that they might distribute the survey to relevant personnel throughout their organization. The survey asked respondents to:

- Review and rank the proposed projects developed by the Task Force
- Suggest additional projects for consideration
- Indicate whether they would be willing to serve as a participant in a trial project

The results of the [survey](#) as well as [comments](#) associated with it were reviewed at the end of September. There were a total of twenty-nine responses from twenty different institutions. Based on feedback from the survey as well as a subsequent discussion by the Task Force, it was determined that the Task Force would recommend one proposal for consideration by the Council. The Task Force also believes that a number of additional proposals merited consideration. The proposals are presented in rank order.

Assumptions

In making these recommendations to the Alliance Council, the Task Force made these basic assumptions:

- Any collaborative tech services effort that is undertaken by the Alliance must demonstrate cost savings so that either funds or people can be reallocated to other initiatives within a library's operation.
- In order to maximize efficiencies, the Alliance must make the best use of the expertise that resides throughout its member libraries in any collaborative effort.
- The initial project(s) need not be something that everyone has to do. A small group of institutions can initiate a project and model the way for others.
- The ultimate goal is to develop a comprehensive approach to collaboration in tech services operations that will attempt to accommodate all Alliance libraries.

Task Force Recommended Proposal: Create a pilot project for Shared Best Practices. This proposal would make tech services operations more efficient by developing best methodologies for ordering, cataloging, and processing library material. Task Force members believe that this project proposal also serves as a plausible stepping stone to further collaborative projects.

To implement this proposal as a pilot project, the Collaborative Technical Services Task Force proposes that we identify three to five Alliance institutions of varying size and type (liberal arts college, research university, community college, etc.) interested in designing and implementing a relatively narrow set of best practices over a six month period from January through June 2010. Prospective participants in the pilot would send a letter to our task force in which they would express their interest and convey their expertise in current technical services practices. The scope of the pilot project best practices would include monograph ordering, receiving, cataloging, and processing in an Innovative Interfaces/OCLC environment. Once the participating libraries got together and discussed common needs and goals, the scope might narrow further to some aspect of these activities. Institutions that participate in the pilot project would commit to do their best to come to agreement on a set of best practices that all could implement. However, each institution would retain the right to selectively implement the agreed-on best practices depending on local circumstances.

The project would be run by a work group made up of an Alliance staff member and a representative from each of the participating institutions. If Council is willing to appropriate funds, we also recommend that a consulting firm such as R2 be used to help evaluate current workflows at the participating institutions and design the best practices workflows. At the end of the six month period, the group would submit a report to Alliance Council evaluating the pilot and outlining potential next steps.

Shared Best Practices Concept

When it comes to acquiring, cataloging and processing materials, a major challenge in running an efficient technical services operation is designing the best workflows possible to get the job done. Efficient workflow design encompasses relatively major decisions such as: whether to use electronic invoicing, automated cataloging services, or physical processing services. It also encompasses relatively minor decisions that can have still have an important impact on efficiencies such as: how to check for duplicate requests, how to match a physical item with a bibliographic record, where to place a barcode or a spine label, etc.

Libraries often find that they are bogged down in idiosyncratic practices in these areas that owe more to personal preferences and historical circumstances than current needs. Even if a library has strong conscientious

leadership in technical services, it is hard to find the time to research the best methods of doing things, test those methods, put them into place, and document them in a timely fashion.

This proposal would make tech services operations more efficient by providing best practices for the processing (from ordering to final cataloging and processing) of common types of physical items: monographs, serials, standing orders. In the spirit of a collective collection, Alliance Libraries participating in the project would develop common practices for adding these types of materials to their respective collections. In a way, this could be thought of as expanding Alliance practices surrounding Summit resource sharing, in which very specific steps are prescribed to maximize efficiency at participating libraries. It might also be likened to the way a franchise business operates, with franchisees following a very consistent set of business practices.

Some of the benefits of the project would be:

- reduced staff time through the use of more efficient workflows
- less time spent planning, evaluating, and documenting technical services procedures by librarians and staff
- easier transitions to future library management systems (because workflow for the new systems would be developed collaboratively)
- more consistency in physical materials and ILS records across Alliance institutions.

More broadly, it would reduce time devoted to relatively mundane tasks that are shrinking in volume yet are still very important, freeing up staff resources to pursue strategic initiatives in other areas.

In addition, one of the greatest obstacles to changing procedures is often inertia. In practice, this often appears in the form of resistance due to a perception that the implications of the change have not been thought out properly. By being able to advocate for efficient practices known to work well in similar institutions, managers and staff are given a useful tool that makes implementing efficiency gaining changes easier.

Perhaps there would be two ways of participating in this program. A library could be a member of a core best practices group that would agree to implement all best practices in their operation. The benefit of being in this group would be a right and obligation to participate in the design and upkeep of the best practices. Other libraries could participate by using only those best practices that suited their needs.

Proposal #2: Collaborative Cataloging of Consortial Packages of e-Book Collections:

The goal of making resources obtained through the EBook Consortial Purchasing Model available to users at all member institutions is a proposal that has recently been adopted by Alliance libraries. Another Task Force would be able to begin work on a consortial approach to cataloging consortial packages of e-books in conjunction with the development of a consortial purchasing model. Once we identify ways to batch attach holdings in OCLC for all Alliance libraries and deliver MARC records to these libraries, it will save a significant amount of staff time.

Possible approaches include:

1. Work with OCLC to implement the OCLC symbol for the Alliance. Each Alliance library includes the OCLC symbol for the Alliance in its OCLC profile so that consortial packages of e-book collections will be included in its holdings in OCLC.
2. Utilize the same practice as we did for NetLibrary books: OCLC automatically attaches holdings in WorldCat for the Alliance and delivers OCLC records to Alliance libraries to load into their local systems.

3. Develop efficient workflows in cataloging consortial packages of e-book collections.

Proposal #3: Collaborative Cataloging of Difficult Foreign Language Materials

Libraries receive the occasional title in difficult foreign languages and in non-roman scripts, such as Slavic, Middle East, Asian and African, where they lack the needed expertise to catalog it in-house. An Alliance project in support of cataloging these materials allows libraries to ask for help with cataloging tasks such as romanization or translation of bibliographic data, which would allow the holding library to create a cataloging record.

In this project, a core group of libraries is recruited to organize an exchange of expertise. Basic policies are described, e.g. the holding library is responsible for creating the cataloging record, and libraries are free to decline a request for help if the workload is too great. By means of a survey or other tool, information about language expertise and willingness to share it is gathered from Alliance libraries. A web page with, for example, individual's names, e-mail addresses, their institution, languages and level of expertise is created. When the policies and web page are done, an announcement is made to the Alliance. After that, the project will not require much effort, other than maintenance of the language expertise table.

Proposal #4: Cooperative Cataloging and Identification of pre-1976 Federal Documents Holdings in the Alliance

Alliance holdings of pre-1976 federal documents are not well represented in the OCLC database and, therefore, not visible in Summit. These materials represent a wealth of information on the nineteenth and twentieth century history of the United States and include westward expansion, relations with native peoples and both World Wars. The collaborative proposal is two pronged: cooperatively provide cataloging for pre-1976 federal documents, and distribute the OCLC numbers to members so that they can add holdings in OCLC as needed.

Organizing a cooperative cataloging project requires the involvement of both federal documents and technical services librarians. The federal documents community can facilitate the effective distribution of cataloging responsibilities and identify and prioritize significant collections. It will be important to involve the regional depositories and regional depository librarians of both states.

At the same time other Alliance libraries would utilize that cooperative cataloging to expand the Alliance holdings represented in the OCLC database. To facilitate the addition of holdings each cataloging library would generate a list of OCLC numbers for holding libraries to batch load.

Additional Survey Proposals

The following projects were considered by the task group and included in our survey of Alliance members. Based on responses and our evaluation of them, we do not recommend action on them at this time.

WorldCat Cataloging Partners Consulting

WorldCat Cataloging Partners is a service provided by OCLC in cooperation with library book vendors that returns fully cataloged bibliographic records in conjunction with shipments of books. It is often combined with electronic invoicing and vendor physical processing of books to achieve greater speed and efficiency in processing monographs. A service like Cataloging Partners can allow libraries to move multiple tech services functions to a larger scale provider, thus freeing up staff time for other uses and speeding up turn-around time for incoming materials. Implementation of cataloging partners is complex, however, for it involves moving data between three different systems: that of the book vendor, that of OCLC, and the library's own ILS. There are also many different ways to adjust workflow to take advantage of the service, some of which involve more gains

in efficiencies than others. It is hard to come by expertise in implementing the service that encompasses a holistic view of all three systems and all possible workflows.

An Alliance project supporting WorldCat Cataloging Partners could involve the following activities to help member libraries best take advantage of Cataloging Partners:

- development of a wiki where workflows in receiving/cataloging/processing using Cataloging Partners were shared
- creation of an established network of recognized "experts" in Cataloging Partners implementation, who would be available to help other libraries exploring or implementing the service
- organized "consultations" where staff members from one library using Cataloging Partners would visit a library in the midst of implementation and provide consultation and advice.
- "consultations" between staff members at libraries already using Cataloging Partners, with the aim of optimizing workflows around the service.

This type of project would allow Alliance member libraries to gain efficiencies in technical services without the Alliance needing to build up our own centralized infrastructure.

Ramping Up AMPS

The white paper, "The Extended Library Enterprise" prepared for the Alliance Council by R2 Consulting for its February 2009 Retreat mentions the concept of Alliance Mobile Project Services (AMPS) teams. These teams would specialize in large-scale holdings and item maintenance to support weeding, Distributed Print Repository, cancellation, and other projects. The R2 document acknowledges that these types of projects are a major challenge for libraries as they transition from analog to digital and endeavor to redeploy space for various uses. This variation on the AMPs idea would revolve around creating work teams from existing staff members at geographically contiguous Alliance institutions. The teams might include librarian and paraprofessional level positions.

The pilot project, perhaps a large scale deselection effort, would involve staff members from multiple libraries spending a week or two working on a project at a single library. If this project were successful, a system of Alliance bartering credits (see proposal on this topic) would be created to allow each of the participating libraries to be the beneficiary in a future project.

ABS - Alliance Bartering System

Alliance Council often mentions the idea of sharing expertise among member institutions as a desired goal. This proposal attempts to develop a bartering system for staff time as a means of sharing value between institutions. The system could be used to exchange expertise and labor in a variety of different areas between Alliance libraries.

Perhaps the system would be based on "Alliance Points," with each point worth an hour of work performed. Libraries could post help wanted ads and ads for services offered on a kind of internal "Craiglist" for the Alliance. Libraries might seek consultations on such things as III load tables, web design, Cataloging Partners, electronic resource management or WorldCat Local implementation. Or they might seek several trained paraprofessional staff for a lengthy deselection or reclassification project. Libraries interested in earning points would advertise the services that they could offer.

This idea might be coupled with one or more of the previous ideas.

Collaborating on Purchase of Supplies

The physical processing of material is an activity which takes place throughout all Alliance libraries. The use of barcodes, security strips, due date slips as well as other items which make material shelf ready is fairly commonplace. Given this reality, should Alliance libraries work to identify the best and most cost-effective products for processing, shelving, and circulating books, videos, etc.?

Cost savings: Some materials are purchased routinely, in small or large quantities. Savings may be achieved through group purchase in larger quantities.

Performance issues: Some products work better than others, and having knowledge of other members' experience, similar to sharing best practices, could benefit all. Some materials may be purchased infrequently, and the latest information on what works (and what doesn't) would be readily available, empowering staff at multiple libraries to make sound purchasing decisions. For example, which removable label stock leaves residue on books, and which does not? which is the best binding repair tape? where can you get courier bags for sending items to and from branch libraries? Which plastic cases for DVD's are brittle and break more often?