

# Consortial eBook Purchasing for the Rest of Us

*Heather Tompkins, Greg Argo, Rhonda Gilbraith, Ron Kurpiers, Meg Manahan, and Frances Singh\**

Consortial eBook acquisition has significant, and potentially transformative, implications for cooperative collection services. As a consortium of small to mid-sized academic libraries, we have decades of experience sharing printed materials, but the emergence of eBooks have challenged the future of this model. If sharing a print collection was central to the consortium, might we facilitate sharing an electronic collection? How can a group of libraries with modest budgets develop a strategy for moving into an electronic consortial environment?

CLIC is a consortium of seven small to mid-sized academic libraries in the Twin Cities. Sharing resources and saving costs have been chief among our guiding principles since our inception, forty seven years ago. Over the decades of our consortial existence, we've taken advantage of our geographical proximity, shared library system, and professional expertise to stretch our modest budgets and provide a higher caliber of services and resources to our user communities we can offer on our own. While we've never had a formal policy, we've collected informally over the years in relation to each other. We know that if other CLIC schools own a title, we may not need to purchase it, and our unique curricular offerings and emphases have ensured that there's a wide representation of materials.

This system has worked smoothly & effectively for over 40 years, but eBooks have shaken up our model of sharing. While we've been able to freely share our physical materials, and have negotiated to retain ILL rights for our electronic journals, overly restrictive lending rights for eBooks seriously compromise the future of our resource sharing mission. This realization led us to begin a process in 2014 for acquiring shared eBook collections. We reached out to a few publishers, and were able to negotiate what felt like good and reasonable terms with three companies: Palgrave (pre-Springer merger); Springer; and Business Expert Press. We thought of these first three collections as experiments.

In January of 2015, the CLIC Board of Directors asked the CLIC Collection Development Committee to develop a more formal consortial ebook acquisition process, with a charge to develop criteria for selecting and evaluating shared eBooks collections. This paper draws on on this experience of developing a process for acquiring eBooks cooperatively. We have learned that committing to a process does not preclude the ability to be flexible and improvisational.

## Literature Review

To contextualize our work, we explored the literature on consortial eBooks purchasing. This brief literature review encompasses the three areas important to our task force work: PDA/DDA models, funding and group

---

\* *Heather Tompkins is Head, Library Collections Services at St. Catherine University, [htompkins@stkate.edu](mailto:htompkins@stkate.edu); Greg Argo is Associate Director, Access & Digital Services at University of St. Thomas, [gargo@stthomas.edu](mailto:gargo@stthomas.edu); Rhonda Gilbraith is Associate Director/Collection Development at Bethel University, [rhonda-gilbraith@bethel.edu](mailto:rhonda-gilbraith@bethel.edu); Ron Kurpiers is Collection Management Librarian at Augsburg College, [kurpiers@augsborg.edu](mailto:kurpiers@augsborg.edu); Meg Manahan is Associate Director for Collection Management & Services at University of St. Thomas, [mkmanahan@stthomas.edu](mailto:mkmanahan@stthomas.edu); Frances Singh is Head of Resource & Acquisition Management at Hamline University, [fsingh@hamline.edu](mailto:fsingh@hamline.edu).*

composition. Garskof, et al., from Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, Inc (PALCI), describes its experience with several different models of PDA/DDA programs, including a negotiated multiplier project, a project where equal funds and similar publisher profiles were used, and a project that resulted in each library in the consortium purchasing a copy of each title triggered. This last project included all libraries in the PALCI consortium, whereas libraries could opt in for the other two projects. The PDA implemented by the University of Colorado (CU) library system (Lu and Chambers) was based on pre-selected titles made available to the patrons of all their libraries. The Orbis Cascade Alliance, a highly organized consortium of 36 very diverse libraries (Hinken and McElroy), employed an informal Request for Information from vendors asking for pricing information for a number of DDA/PDA models, which resulted in a demand driven acquisitions program using a short term loan option.

The literature revealed a wide variety of funding models that relied on factors such as FTE, budget size (determined a number of different ways), use, spend levels, and more. Several consortia split all or some of the costs evenly among member libraries. For example, Orbis Cascade did extensive research on consortial eBook purchasing. They started with a 20/40/40 formula, with 20% of costs evenly split among the institutions, 40% of the cost based on each institution's use, and 40% based on the size of library materials budgets. Any associated fees were split evenly. As of 2015, this was revised, with costs split 30% based on FTE, 30% based on institutional materials budget, 20% split equally and 20% based on use. In contrast, the much smaller Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) consortium, consisting of ten libraries at four institutions in North Carolina, decided to have each institution contribute a set amount off the top of their materials budgets based on their historical print spend with various publishers. Finally, the six-libraries of the United Kingdom Serials Group consortium decided on a model that allows the member institutions to buy eBooks for the whole consortium using a price multiplier that was negotiated with the provider. Each library could then decide on its own how many consortial eBooks to buy. In most cases, the model was developed over time and with experience, and tweaked as factors changed.

Hazen, in an article on research library collections and the digital age writes about consortia being “ beholden to each participant’s priorities and claims.” In the literature, composition of committees determining which PDA/DDA models is not often detailed. Arch et al., from Orbis Cascade, describe a Collaborative Technical Services Team whose members had a collection development and technical services backgrounds. The Ontario Council of University Libraries has an eBooks Committee whose members represent a wide range of interests and circumstances of the consortium, but Horava does not describe the actual composition of the group.

The increasing number of PDA/DDA programs described in the literature informed much of our guidelines discussion as did the literature regarding budgeting for consortial purchases. The composition of our committee and our awareness that any future digital consortial project requires the commitment of both technical services and public services adds richness to the process and will make our work sustainable.

## **Developing a Consortial eBook Framework**

Because eBook packages are diverse and not easily comparable to one another, it is important to have a systematic way to assess these packages. The stakes for decision-making are higher with limited budgets and multiple institutions involved, and as such experimentation and flexibility can be difficult. As a group, with representation from each library, we developed three tools to help us in this endeavor: a shared disciplines scoresheet, a selection rubric, and an evaluation rubric. This heuristic approach, which takes into account both quantitative and qualitative factors, helped us in making sense of and building context for these collections, not just in comparing their offerings against an “objective” set of criteria.

### Shared Disciplines

While our institutions have some similarities, our curriculum and courses of study vary widely. When we think about meeting curricular needs, we asked ourselves to what curricula were we referring? Our list of shared collection priorities was an attempt to identify collection development priorities for eBooks. A basic points systems allowed us to first identify which programs we shared among the institutions. Education, Health Science, and Psychology were all disciplines that ranked highly across institutions. It is important to note that we considered to what extent the faculty and students in these areas were interested in or already relying on eBooks.

The collection priorities, like other areas of the framework, provided an avenue to compromise and collaborate. Even with our long consortial history, it remains important to manage our expectations about the extent to which each purchase will equally serve each institution. When we expanded the number of subject packages we purchased with a particular vendor, we looked beyond subjects common to all CLIC institutions. Together, we decided to move forward if a majority of the subjects included were relevant to an individual institutions curriculum.

### Selection

In many ways, content remains one of the most important factor for us in considering eBook packages. Our initial selection of three packages were made mostly taking subject areas into account. However, as we've developed a framework for moving forward, there a number of other factors we are considering, including: openness for sharing, ease of administration, reproduction of non-textual elements, and vendor relations.

Those who have experience creating rubrics know that there is significant value in the process of building a rubric: the discussion, the process of defining what is valuable and worthwhile, and making explicit those things we may reflexively do or value, but not articulate. As we worked with our selection framework, some categories turned out to be more important than others. Perhaps not surprising, given our consortial context, DRM status weighed heavily in our considerations. Quality of user interfaces became less important to us as a selection criteria because we suspected that many of our users, rather than searching within a vendor site for the collection, were finding these books through our discovery layer.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Selection criteria for CLIC eBooks**

Selection Criteria Scoresheet		
Scale of 0-3 Worst=0 Best=3	SCORE	NOTES
<b>Total Score</b>		
Reminder: Does option conform to our preferred business models?		
<b>Cost</b>		
Reasonable cost		
Reasonable platform and maintenance fees?		
Reasonable multiplier?		
Reasonable "duplication of content" provisions?		
Reasonable deposit and/or requirements?		
Deep discounting available?		
<b>Vendor</b>		
Reputation?		
Length of trial?		
Plays nicely with other systems?		
Responsive reps?		

**FIGURE 2**  
**Selection criteria for CLIC eBooks (cont.)**

<b>Administration</b>		
Degree of centralized admin available to CLIC?		
Degree of admin available to each school?		
Quality of bibliographic records provided?		
Quality of representation in the Intota KB?		
Degree of COUNTER Compliance?		
<b>Openness</b>		
ILL provisions?		
Freedom from DRM?		
Downloading, printing, and copying options?		
Sharing of metadata with other platforms?		
<b>Functionality</b>		
Quality of export options?		
Level of ADA compliance?		
Quality of UX on different browsers?		
Quality of UX on mobile and tablet devices?		

## Evaluation

Though our evaluation of the first three collections in Spring 2016 included both qualitative and quantitative measures, we found that we gave quantitative measures more weight initially. Cost per use is the standard bearer for library ROI, and it was the bedrock and starting point for us. But injecting some creativity into that sort of thinking pushed us to look at other comparisons like cost per book, downloads per student, and budget spend verses usage, which provided a more concrete and meaningful context to our evaluations.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Evaluation criteria for CLIC eBooks**

Evaluation Criteria Scoresheet		
Scale of 0-3 Worst=0 Best=3		
Total Score	SCORE	NOTES
Quantitative Use Measures		
Standard Usage Reports		
Cost Per Use		
% used vs. unused		
Depth vs. Breadth		
Qualitative Measures		
Anecdotal user satisfaction		
Vendor responsiveness		
Administrative costs		
Review selection criteria		

Because we were developing our selection and evaluation rubrics as we were building our collections, we made revisions to both rubrics as we worked with them, which helped to simplify and clarify our criteria. We built revision of the selection rubric into our evaluation criteria; the final question on our rubric asks us to reflect on any changes that should be made to our selection criteria. For instance, we had our hope to analyze the breadth vs. depth of use dashed as the process to analyze that proved too complicated and time-consuming, as described later in this paper. We realized that terms like “reasonable” multiplier and “reasonable” triggers for PDA/DDA were relative, so assigning numeric values to these items would not be helpful. Finally, performing trials, which we had initially thought could be helpful in evaluating user interfaces were

either impossible or too complicated, especially for PDA/DDA models.

## Obtaining Usable Statistics

In January of 2016, we reached out to vendors to request consortial usage reports. The COUNTER 4 Code of Practice requires three consortial reports for compliance: CR 1 (Number of successful full-text journal articles or book chapter requests by month and titles), CR 2 (Total searches by month and database), and CR 3 (Number of successful multimedia full content unit request by month and collection). Though our vendors tried (some more valiantly than others) to supply consortial usage reports, none of the three we worked with were able to supply any of the standard COUNTER Consortium Reports, and we are yet to meet colleagues outside the consortium who have ever received such a report from a vendor. The errors in the reports we received revealed that the vendors were attempting to manually piece together reports, an activity we felt more confident in completing accurately and to our own specifications. This required downloading of all the different reports from each school for all of the years covered, and centralized analysis through the CLIC Collection Development Committee.

Taking a DIY approach to assembling usage statistics foregrounded many issues that arise out of the natural complexities of consortial efforts and the limitations of vendor-supplied COUNTER reports. From a strictly technical perspective, the COUNTER reports available for download by each institution’s vendor administration sites were not limited to just the consortial usage. Therefore, it was necessary to identify and separate usage statistics for the items not cooperatively purchased from those vendors. For instance, if the consortium purchased

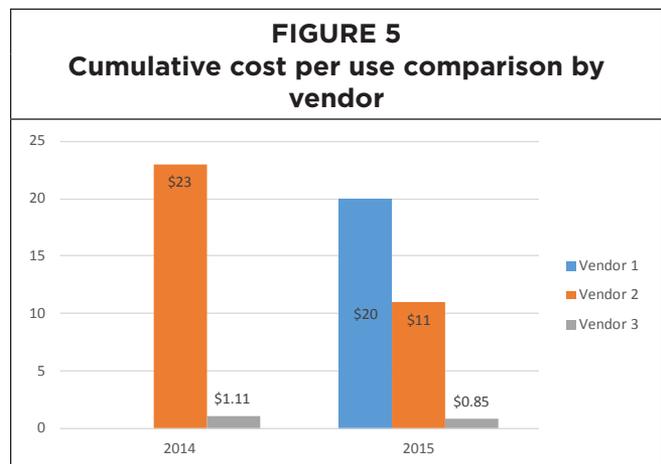
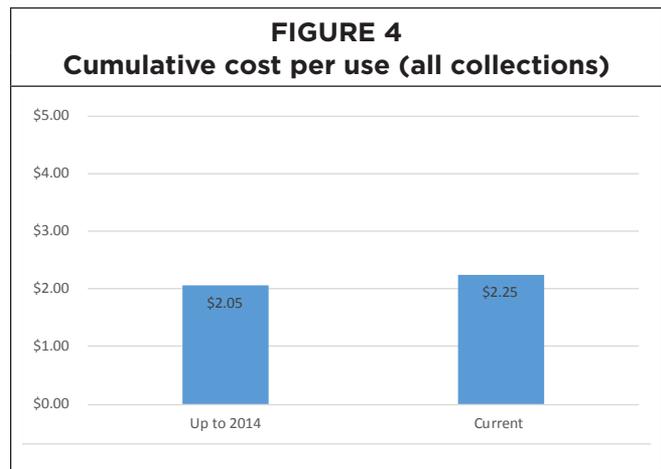
Collections A, B, and C from Vendor M, and an individual school had also purchased Collections X, Y, and Z from Vendor M on their own, the COUNTER reports would include usage from Collections A, B, C, X, Y, and Z from Vendor M (i.e., usage could not be filtered by particular collections). To get data about consortial purchases only, then, COUNTER reports from each school needed to go through a manual laundering process. This process involved acquiring comparison lists with appropriate comparative metadata (e.g., DOIs, eISBNs) from vendor MARC records sets or ERM collection information, and then running VLOOKUP comparisons in Excel to filter out titles and their usage from non-consortial collections.

*Key Measures*

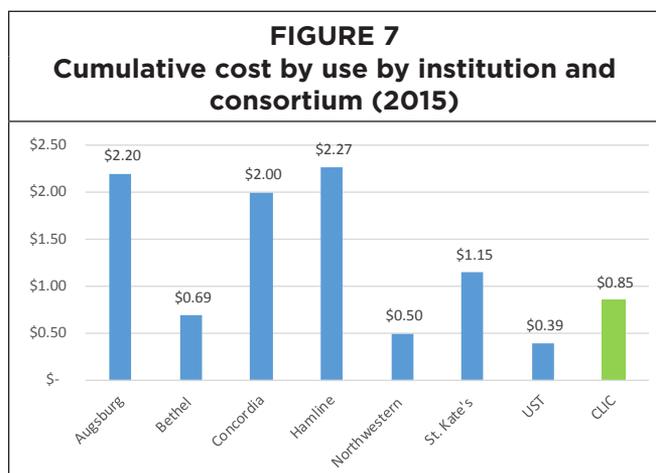
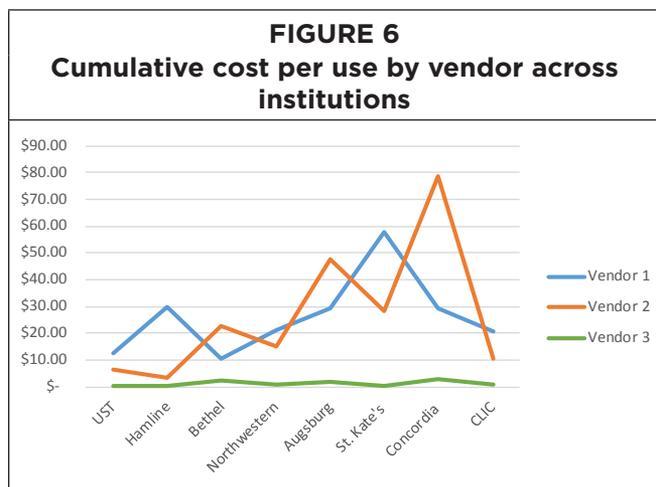
Initially, we were most interested in three measures: cost per use, percentage of collection used, and breadth versus depth of use. Put another way, we were looking for a standard ROI treatment using cost per use calculations supplemented by home-cooked measures that would allow further comparisons between different collections and consortium members. While the time invested for such work is heavy at approximately 40 hours total, this analysis yielded an impressive data set, which helped us evaluate these consortial purchases. Ultimately, it helped us ask new questions, like the relationship between the percentage of budget expended and collections used, helped us revise our selection criteria, and heavily influenced our decisions for eBook purchasing in second year of our pilot.

Due to the questionable accuracy of search and session information, our cost per use measures focused only on downloads. This required downloading of COUNTER Book Report 1 (BR1) and Book Report 2 (BR2) reports; BR1 reports measure full book downloads while BR2 reports measure book chapter downloads. Two of our three vendors offered both reports, while the third vendor only supplied BR2 reports. BR1 and BR2 reports represent different types of usage, so one could argue that comparing them would be “like comparing apples to oranges,” though the idiom in this case would probably be more accurate as “like comparing clementine to navel oranges”. For the purposes of our analyses, BR1s and BR2s were considered “fruit” and were lumped together into one overall measure that was then used to calculate cost per use. Though we forfeit some direct comparative information about how each collection is used, we can assume that if either type of usage provides more utility to the user, this will be reflected along with the relevance of content in the final measure of the collection being evaluated in relation to other collections.

Additionally, cost per use (cpu) is typically tied to expenditure and usage during one year of a licensed subscription. With book purchasing, an expenditure is tied to a specific year, but the use (and value) connected to that expenditure continues into the future. By adding all usage and cost for a subject collection through the end of the current calendar year, cumulative cpu became a way to capture a ratio which represents the value of the entire investment over time.



After Spring 2016, our cost per use across all collections was \$2.25, with Vendor 3 performing the best at \$.85 cost per use. Vendor 2 improved some in the second year (\$11), falling from \$23 in the first year. By comparing cpu across collections, we were able to ground our assumptions about what constituted “good” use and “reasonable” costs.



*Consortial & Institutional cpu: Whose cpu?*

For each measure, we looked at both the institutional and the consortial level. At the CLIC level, the measures combine all the cost and usage as if CLIC was one entity ignoring the differences in performance between institutions. At the institutional level, these measures compare performance between all CLIC institutions. The usage and collection data for consortial and institutional cpu raised questions right away for us about how we were valuing cpu. In the cases where significant disparities in collection use existed between institutions, we had to determine if an overall low consortial cpu was more important than low cpu throughout the consortium.

For example, the cpu for Vendor 2 ranged from \$3.00 (Hamline) to \$79.00 (Concordia), with a consortial cpu of around \$10.50. Similarly, cpu varied widely for individual institutions across collections. At St. Catherine University, cpu ranged from \$.49 (Vendor 3) to \$58 (Vendor 1). Three of the seven institutions (University of St. Thomas, Northwestern, and Bethel) had cumulative cpu below the CLIC-wide cpu, which was \$.85. Because we did not anticipate such variances, our evaluation rubric did not account for this range or complexity. However, this variation gave us an opportunity to affirm the value of these

shared eBooks collections for the consortium beyond our individual institutions.

*Breadth v. Depth: What are we actually measuring here?*

To learn more about how these collections were being used, we had hoped to learn something about the breadth and depth of use. Are many books being used or are a few books being used often? Because of the difficulty in discerning consortial usage statistics, and the time involved in completing a comprehensive ROI analysis of consortial purchases, it would have been difficult to execute a full comparison of breadth versus depth of use of different collections. Such an analysis would have required an even more time intensive downloading of non-COUNTER reports or requesting from the vendor information about number of pages accessed, number of prints, and time spent browsing titles.

However, we were able to get some picture of the extent of use across the consortium. For example, once accurate COUNTER reports were created, we could use pivot tables to sum similar columns and determine that 64% of books were used at least once.

Further, we could break this down to determine the percentage of books used by multiple institutions. We learned that a quarter of the collections overall were used by one institution only, about 30% were used by two or three institutions, and 9% of books were used by four or more institutions.

These measures persuaded us that as a consortium, the risk of the investment was worth the opportunity, because even the lowest performing collections were still within an acceptable range of what has become accepted as the ratio of used/unused print collections.

*Budget v. Use*

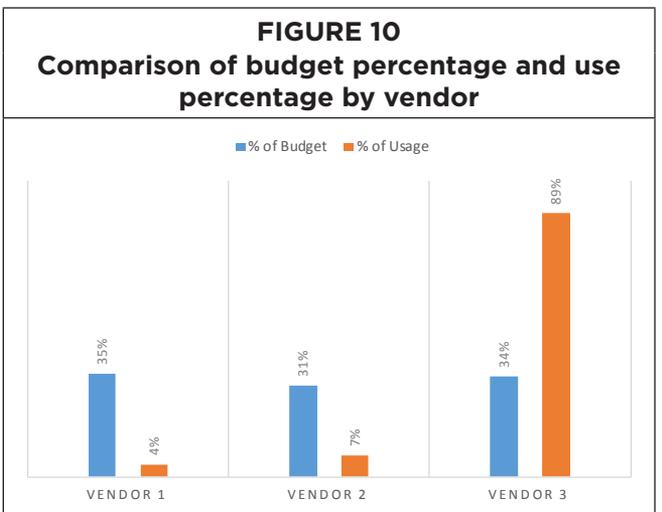
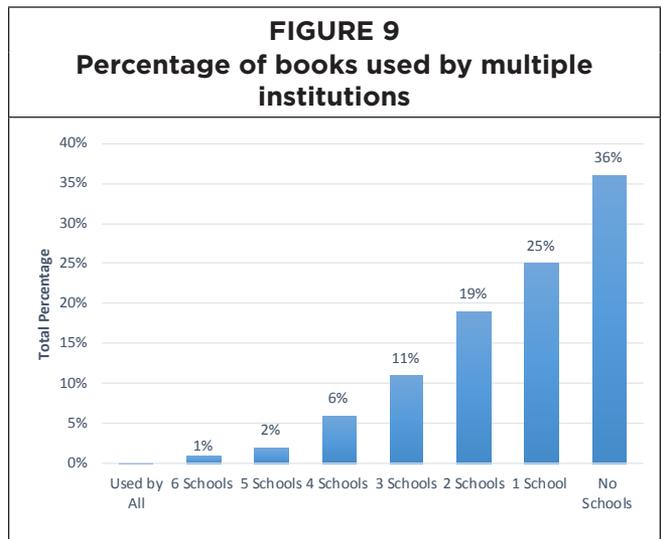
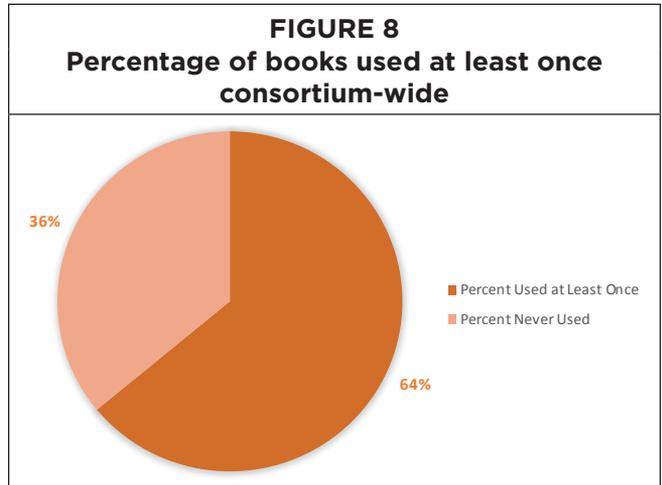
Finally, by comparing the percentage of the collections used with the percentage of the overall expenditure, we were able to evaluate the correlation between budget outlay and usage. We saw that these attributes are not correlated, with Vendor 3 accounting for almost 90% of use and only one-third of our investment.

By itself, this does not mean that we would not move forward with purchasing additional collections from Vendors 1 and 2. However, it was clear to us that we wanted to purchase more collections from Vendor 3. Again, we used the comparison between collection performance as a way to build context and adjust our expectations.

**Iteration and Improvisation**

Based on the results of our initial evaluation, we added subject collections with Vendor 3, maintained our collection with Vendor 2, and did not renew the collection with Vendor 1. While we suspected that the metrics for Vendor 1’s collection might improve with additional holdings and the subject area was one shared across the consortium, we wanted to expand beyond subject collection purchasing and experiment with PDA/DDA. We met with a few vendors who had active PDA programs for consortia and decided to add the Project MUSE EBA pilot program to our collections.

Managing multiple models (purchase, subscription, single publisher, aggregator, PDA/DDA) is a complex proposition. We are committed to finding the right mix for CLIC. While we don’t know what that looks like, we



strongly suspect that we will discover this through continued intentional experimentation. The framework we have developed may turn out to be more suited for subject-based collections or single publisher collections rather than PDA/DDA models. We will likely revise our evaluation criteria after we have evaluated our PDA/DDA trial.

There are many additional questions that remain for us after our second year of consortial eBook purchasing. Chief among these questions is securing sustainable and equitable funding. We followed the lead of many consortia who divide costs evenly. This is simpler and allowed us to put energy and focus on other aspects of the project. However, we have differing sized institutions, budgets, and usage rates. As we continue to purchase eBooks as a consortium, we wonder what happens if a majority of our eBooks collections are shared. Will our decisions continue to be driven by need and the availability of resources? While we don't have a clear sense of how we will answer these questions, we are confident in our process and our ability to be flexible.

## Implications Beyond eBooks

Our success in being able to extend our collection sharing mission to the eBook world has created positive energy that holds promise for more wide-ranging consortial collection plans. The tools we developed to help us with our shared eBooks collections have obvious broader applications, both cooperatively and at our home libraries. The conversations that arose around this project raised other collection priority issues. We're now seriously considering more deliberate and formal cooperation in things like physical collection profiles and a last copy agreement. Something else that's arisen from our various conversations has been a revived interest in a daunting but promising arena—cooperative collection services. We're still not sure what that may look like, but we have more confidence to experiment in this direction after our eBook cooperation.

Setting financial targets for consortial eBook purchasing also necessitates a different approach to material allocations at our individual institutions. We were able to fund our initial forays into shared collections through end-of-fiscal scraps, but going forward, we need something more predictable and sustainable. Now that we've decided to look for an annual financial commitment for the consortial eBook buys, we have to carve out money that's been allocated elsewhere within budgets that are already constrained. That's never a pain-free process. To cooperate more consortially, we need to be willing to give up some of our budgetary autonomy.

In spite of challenges, we are very pleased with what we've achieved so far and where we're headed. We've been pleasantly surprised at the willingness of some vendors to work with us, in spite of our small budgets and our commitment to sharing. The Nots we heard in the early days of consortial eBook negotiations have begun to move to Yeses. The lesson we've learned is that it pays to ask and it pays to persist. We owe it to our profession and to our users to keep pushing the conversation about what is permissible and how much it should cost, even outside the world of much larger and better funded libraries and consortia.

## Bibliography

- Arch, X., Robin Champieux, Susan Hinken, Emily McElroy, and Joan Thompson. "By Popular Demand: Building a Consortial Demand Driven Program." Charleston Conference, Beth R. Bernhardt, Leah H. Hinds, and Katina P. Strauch. 2012. *Something's gotta give: Charleston Conference Proceedings, 2011*. (pp. 609–619). West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314974>
- Austin Booth, H., and Kathleen O'Brien. "Demand-driven Cooperative Collection Development: Three Case Studies from the USA." *Interlending & Document Supply* 39, no. 3 (2011): 148–55.
- Fulton, Karin J. "The Rise of Patron-Driven Acquisitions: A Literature Review." *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 5, no. 3, (2014). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1770&context=glq>
- Garskof, Jeremy et al. "Towards the Collective Collection: Lessons Learned from PALCI's DDA Pilot Project and Next Steps." *Collaborative Librarianship* 8, no. 2 (April 2016): 84–98.
- Hazen, Dan. "Lost in the Cloud: Research Library Collections and Community in the Digital Age." *Library Resources & Technical Services* 53, no. 4 (October 2011): 195–204.

- Hinken, Susan, and Emily J. McElroy. "Chapter 2: Consortial Purchasing of E-books." *Library Technology Reports* 47, no. 8 (November 2011): 8–13.
- Horava, Tony. "Today and in Perpetuity: A Canadian Consortial Strategy for Owning and Hosting Ebooks." *Journal Of Academic Librarianship* 39, no. 5 (September 2013): 423–428. doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2013.04.001
- Martin, Jim, and Raik Zaghoul. "Planning for the Acquisition of Information Resources Management Core Competencies." *New Library World* 112, no. 7/8 (August 2011): 313–320.
- Orbis Cascade Alliance. *E-Books: Shared e-books across the consortium*. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.orbiscascade.org/ebooks>
- Shepherd, Jodi and Marc Langston. "Shared Patron Driven Acquisition of E-books in the California State University Library Consortium." *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services* 37, no. 1/2 (March 2013): 34–41. doi:10.1016/j.lcats.2013.08.001.
- Stern, David. "Ebooks: From Institutional to Consortial Considerations." *Online* 34, no. 3 (May 2010): 29–35.
- Swindler, Luke. "New Consortial Model for E-Books Acquisitions." *College & Research Libraries* 77, no. 3 (May 2016): 269–285.
- Wen-ying Lu and Mary Beth Chambers. "PDA Consortium Style." *Library Resources & Technical Services* 57, no. 3 (July 2013): 164–178.
- Woodward, Hazel and Helen Henderson. "Who are the Winners? E-book Consortial Purchasing." *Insights: The UKSG Journal* 27, no. 1 (2014): 82–86. doi:10.1629/2048-7754.132