

From Failure to Success: Creating Shared Print Repositories

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The enthusiasm for shared print repositories at the state, regional, and national level waxes and wanes within the research library community in the United States. Based on a broader vision than multi-institution storage, proponents of shared print argue that creating such repositories makes economic and preservation sense. A form of cooperative collection development—prospective, retrospective or both—sharing print collections would allow research libraries to avoid the cost of collections space and processing paper materials, as well as expend precious dollars on developing less homogenous collections. Shared print repositories would ensure that monographs and serials are preserved for future generations of students and scholars.

Those who are indifferent or opposed to sharing print collections continue to solve collection management challenges in the traditional institution-by-institution manner. They argue that local collection building is still important for institutional competitiveness and pride, resource sharing and copyright fees can outweigh the cost of shared collection management, and

it is too difficult to ensure that libraries abide by their commitments.

The prevalence of digital technologies, severe funding pressure on higher educational institutions, and worries about the future of research libraries, propelled the idea of creating shared print repositories back on the research library agenda. The question is will the leaders of today's research libraries succeed where their predecessors failed?

Regional Shared Storage

The idea of sharing storage, but not usually collections, at the regional level in the United States is not new. In 1902, Harvard University President Eliot articulated the cost-avoidance argument when he proposed to relegate little-used books to storage and touched off what came to known as the dead books controversy (Eliot 1902). The “profession-wide brawl” (Orne 1960, 16) that followed his proposal overshadowed his recommendation to create three regional repositories in Washington, Chicago, and New York. He also foresaw a time when other repositories on the Pacific Coast

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and the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains would be needed. But economic times improved and many libraries built new facilities to house their overflowing collections. It was not until the severe space crises following the Depression and World War II that the regional repository idea resurfaced in the American research library community.

After years of planning, the New England Deposit Library serving Harvard University, Boston Public Library, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and other institutions in the area opened in 1942. The main achievement of the New England Depository was, according to Keyes Metcalf, low cost storage of little-used books and a demonstration that storing books at a distance was somewhat acceptable to scholars. (Metcalf 1954)

Another notable cooperative effort was the Hampshire Interlibrary Center established in 1951 by Amherst, Smith, and Mount Holyoke colleges in Massachusetts. The group initially had shared storage as one of its goals, and the center also achieved success in cooperative acquisitions and cataloging. This cooperative program has grown into the Five College Library Depository serving the original three members plus Hampshire College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. (Bridegam 2001)

The most widely known cooperative repository in the United States began as the Midwest Inter-Library Center (MILC) in 1949. The initial participating institutions, ten major universities, concentrated on establishing a storage facility to eliminate the expense of new buildings and the burden of maintaining local collections. (Naru 1998)

Another goal was cooperative collection development in that the center acquired some categories of publications, including foreign dissertations, from its own budget. In the 1950s the center became the repository for the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) Foreign Newspaper Microfilming Program and the National Science Foundation's program to purchase foreign science journals not owned in American Libraries. Changing its name to the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) signaled its transition from a regional to a national organization in the mid-1960s. (CRL 2002a) The members of CRL approved a strategic plan for 2002–2006 that reaffirmed its commitment to cooperative collection development and preservation of print and digital collections. (CRL 2002b)

Shared Collection Development, Management, and Preservation

Post World War II library history provides numerous examples of failed attempts to broaden the research library vision from shared storage to shared collection development, management, and preservation. In January and February of 1948, the presidents of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Rockefeller Foundation held two dinners in New York City for representatives of the governing boards of higher educational institutions and prominent libraries. The purpose was to establish agreements to achieve closer cooperation among the New York metropolitan libraries. (Gelfand 1950)

The foundation-sponsored dinners were followed by a rigorous planning effort led by Carl White, the Director of Libraries and Dean of the School of Library Service at Columbia University. The vision of many of the participants was to establish a regional library that provided services beyond storage of little used materials. According to White's report, the roles and responsibilities would include responsibility for organizing through voluntary participation complete coverage of research publications and delegation of responsibility for limited audience materials by voluntary agreements. The regional depository would also be responsible for sharing information about coverage, collecting in areas where voluntary commitments were not made, and serving as a reservoir, meaning storage facility, for limited-audience materials for the entire region. The regional library would collect one copy of every item of importance to research and keep it permanently. (White 1950)

At the same time, Keyes Metcalf, Harvard Librarian, was leading an effort to create a regional depository for little used materials that would serve the entire Northeast. Meetings were held with representatives from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, New York Public, University of Pennsylvania, and Cornell about the Metcalf Plan. (Metcalf 1950)

Both these initiatives continued to April 1950, when the two ideas were discussed and debated at the New York Library Association meeting with the idea of bringing the groups together. After two more years of work, a consultants report on the cost was issued in New York City and then all the conversation and planning appear to have ceased.

Several prominent librarians in the 1960s and 1970s articulated the need for sharing collections in order to preserve them. In 1965, ARL unanimously adopted in principle a plan of action for preservation based on a report by Gordon Williams, Director of the Center for Research Libraries. The report recommended that libraries seek to preserve one copy of every book in its original form, depend on film copies for everyday use, rely on a central agency to coordinate local programs, and store books deposited by research libraries at the lowest temperature possible. (Williams 1966) This plan was endorsed again 5 years later by ARL, but nothing came of the recommendations.

In 1976, the Library of Congress issued a proposal for a national preservation program for libraries. The recommendations centered on preserving the intellectual content of collections published since 1800 by microfilming and storage at low temperatures in warehouses or underground caves. (National Preservation 1981) This plan too went nowhere.

More recently, two research library task force reports call for cooperative collection management for preservation purposes. The 2001 report of the Collections Assessment Task Force of the Center for Research Libraries outlines the reasons for retaining paper copies of library materials—for items that have not been digitized, as safety copies for digitized collections, and because the material has artifactual value. The report calls on CRL to “begin to provide leadership for a national program for the coordination of the future archiving of traditional materials” (Atkinson et al. 2001, 10).

The *Evidence in Hand: Report of the Task Force on the Artifact in Library Collections* recommends that research libraries organize cooperative collection management and storage of resources. The task force advocates the creation of shared repositories for original materials. (Nichols and Smith 2001). To follow-up on the recommendations of the task force, the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) commissioned the Center for Research Libraries to study progress on regional and national repositories.

In the report of the CRL study, Bernard Reilly and Barbara DesRosiers provide an overview of how consortia and university repositories achieve varying degrees of cooperation in the management of collections. The authors evaluate the characteristics of the various models of cooperation, the possibility of regional or

state-based programs becoming a network, and the relationship of such a network to national efforts of the American Antiquarian Society and the Library of Congress. Their list of critical success factors includes a history of cooperation and strong institutional ties, formalized and transparent agreements, homogeneous scale, type and governance of the participating libraries, equitable investment, high level engagement with the governing authority, and adapting to changing economic realities. Among the obstacles they note are the concerns of library directors and staff as well as local faculty reactions to removing materials from immediate access. Reilly and DesRosiers state that creating a network of regional print repositories is a possibility, but it requires that the “national-level repositories must agree on the respective domains of library materials for which each of them bears preservation responsibility.” (Reilly and DesRosiers 2003, 39–40)

Following publication of the report, CRL organized in July 2003 a conference and planning meeting on preserving America’s print resources with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The draft action agenda from that meeting includes synchronizing and expanding print archiving and “collections of record” activities and enabling informed local preservation and retention decision-making by libraries and consortia. The conferees agreed that the characteristics of a national print management effort require that it be visionary, comprehensive, inclusive, sustainable, collaborative, distributed, voluntary, international, accountable, transparent, standards-based, trust-based, and equitable. The various stakeholders reviewed the draft report on the conference and planning meeting and CRL continues to make progress on implementation in the areas of identified need—news-papers, government publications, and journals. (Reilly 2004)

Recent Progress

The University of California, the Center for Research Libraries, and the Government Printing Office stand out as leaders in recent efforts to create shared collections in the United States. The University of California libraries currently are building on their long history of collaboration and their shared storage program, which features the Northern Regional Library Facility and the Southern Regional Library Facility. Both buildings are supported by the University of California system,

have clear policies on collections and offer a number of services.

Under the leadership of the California Digital Library and librarians on the various University of California campuses, the UC libraries have a plan, remarkable for its broad strategic vision, to purchase and preserve both print and digital collections. As articulated in the framework document released in November 2004, the UC Libraries shared print program seeks to realize several objectives that focus on broadening and deepening UC library collections in the “service of research, teaching, patient care, and public service, offer economies not available through traditional models of collection development, and enhance access.” The plan covers types of shared print collections, including print serials that are also available online, retrospective print serials with digital equivalents, retrospective serials without digital equivalents, and prospective specialized monograph collections. The program looks carefully at the lifecycle of print and costs, as these issues will have a major bearing on the long-term success of the program. (Developing a Planning Framework for UC Libraries Shared Print Collections 2004).

The Center for Research Libraries is actively engaged in promoting shared print repositories. Building on its program with JSTOR to create and preserve archives of print copies of journals available electronically, in 2002 CRL began a cooperative program with several major research libraries to develop a federation of print archives that are housed and managed by individual libraries of record. Other institutions and consortia including the University of California system, Harvard, the State University Library Consortium of Florida also are beginning to develop plans for archives and shared repositories of print copies of journals available from major electronic publishers. (CRL 2004a)

The Government Printing Office (GPO) is actively encouraging the formation of shared repositories and housing agreements for U.S. federal documents. (U.S.GPO 2004) The Superintendent of Documents contracted with CRL to develop a framework for the preservation of government publications in its “Collection of Last Resort” that includes detailed criteria for preservation and access. Building on its previous work on depository agreements for the distributed print archive project, CRL provided a decision framework for the preservation of documents in light, dim, and dark archives. The document defines detailed require-

ments for storage environments, physical plant, spatial configuration, physical maintenance, disclosure of holdings, validation of holding, storage and integration, maintenance and physical handling, user assistance, staffing, and accessibility. It also includes assurances such as redundancy of holdings, geographical distribution of repositories, governance and finance, charter, auditing and certification, storage commitment, and control. The decision framework will be used to set the specifications for a network of regional repositories of federal government documents. (CRL 2004b)

The Future of Shared Print Repositories

Given the history of cooperative collection development, management and preservation in the United States, it is easy to dismiss the current enthusiasm for shared print collections as unlikely to succeed. Past efforts such as those described earlier failed to achieve the ambitious goals of the library leaders who championed them. Although there is no written record about why these promising attempts failed, the most likely explanations are that funding for construction and operation improved such that individual research libraries took care of their own acquisition and storage problems, the value of collaboration was not fully articulated or understood, and perhaps most important, the academic institutions that were expected to fund these cooperative ventures placed them as a lower priority than their institutional goals.

This is not to assert that American libraries have not achieved significant cooperation in the past 100 years. Libraries throughout the U.S. ensure advocacy through organizations such as ARL and the American Library Association (ALA). They operate complex interlibrary loan relationships at many levels with varying degrees of effectiveness. They readily share project and program ideas and establish standards for a variety of services. Recent successes in cooperative purchasing of electronic resources result in expanded access and some measure of cost predictability.

The conventional wisdom about why cooperative collection development, management, and preservation has not succeeded in the U.S., but has in Europe and Australia, is that government and major private funding organizations have not consistently supported these efforts. Unlike many other developed countries, the lack or unevenness of U.S. government and private sponsorship and the tradition of institutional, state, and

regional independence means that universities, both private and public, are expected to organize, manage, and fund cooperation from their own resources. They are thus forced to choose between local priorities and the larger public good, as well as trust their partners to make good on their promises for many years into the future. This is especially true for the larger, better-funded institutions.

Research and analysis on the history of why these cooperative collection development efforts failed is sparse. The literature generally highlights successful projects, often small-scale, and ignores those that were abandoned or collapsed for other reasons. Ralph Wagner's *History of the Farmington Plan* is an exception. (Wagner 2002) He presents a detailed history and analysis of the Farmington Plan from its early roots in the national collection idea in 1876 to its disappearance in 1972. He ties his argument to contemporary strategic management theory and asks if the plan ultimately was a failure.

Assessing the program of subject responsibility, Wagner asserts that the flaws in the initial strategic planning and absence of management control meant that assessment of goals and results were never conducted. Librarians relied on anecdotal evidence to determine the value of the program. Little attention was paid to the failure of the libraries to fulfill their obligations under the plan to catalog and make materials available through interlibrary loan. In addition, ARL as the administrative body overseeing the plan could discipline vendors, but not participating libraries. Wagner assigns the greatest failure in the subject responsibility program to the lack of leadership and organization by ARL and its Foreign Acquisitions Committee.

In terms of the country responsibility portion of the Farmington Plan, Wagner identifies a poorly conceived strategic plan as the reason for its limited results. He notes that the use of library funds for common projects faced both legal and political obstacles, including primary commitments to parent institutions. In conclusion, Wagner states

The failure of the Farmington Plan to progress continuously toward the goal of a universal national library collection may amount to a failure of marketing. Librarians could envision the goal and define ways of moving toward it, but funding depended on marketing it to scholars, university administrators, government agencies, and foundations. Scholars affirm the value of

having resources available through interlibrary loan, but when this is at the expense of having resources available locally, their enthusiasm diminishes. University administrators affirm the value of cooperation, but their management sense usually leads them to demand tangible evidence of benefits. Government agencies that know the value of library collections to the national security may question the relevance of, say, publications on the arts. Foundation officials pursue a myriad of diverse goals and control only a portion of the funds spent on education and research. (Wagner 2001, 403)

Collaboration Lessons from Other Communities

Although research librarians view themselves and their libraries as part of strong cooperative networks and often cite resource sharing as proof of how well organized their community is, they have rarely managed to succeed at cooperative collection development, management and preservation. Perhaps it is time to look outside the research library community for collaborative models and successful partnership strategies.

Bernard Reilly proposes that the research library community look to the national energy grid for guidance on infrastructure. (Reilly 2002) As a vast system of interconnected but mostly privately owned resources and services, the national energy grid is a remarkable response to consumer, commercial, and strategic demand. Consisting of three interconnected transmission systems and complex capabilities for power generation, the system works well most of the time. However, when it fails, as it did throughout the Northeast on August 14, 2003, it does so spectacularly.

In the U.S. and Canadian government report on the transmission failure in 2003, the U.S.-Canada Power System Outage Task Force reported that the blackout could have been prevented and the governments concerned would begin by ensuring that the reliability rules were made mandatory and include penalties for non-compliance. This means that the private companies concerned will have to expend more resources and therefore decrease their profits to assure the U.S. and Canadian governments that they can prevent a similar cascading event in the future. (U.S.-Canada 2004) The lesson for research libraries in this example is not that developing a cooperative energy grid model is flawed, but that the preservation and economic benefit of creating a network of shared

repositories must be based on earned trust and certified reliability.

Brian Schottlaender suggests an organizational model for the University of California's shared collection based on grid computing. He explains that essential characteristics are common to grid systems including distribution of utility components across multiple sites, network connectivity between sites, site-specific policies, and seamless, uniform and secure access. He argues that these architectural components will be necessary in distributed, shared collections. The Distributed Collections Model (DCM) that he proposes envisions local libraries in the primary services layer, regional repositories in the secondary service layer, and archival repositories in the tertiary service layer. (Schottlaender 2004)

Both electricity and computing grid organizational models help the research library community conceptualize how a national or regional cooperative shared collections network might be structured. They address emerging technological developments and potential divisions of responsibility. However, they do not provide guidance on how to make the political and policy changes necessary to achieve productive collaboration among the research libraries in the United States in collection development, management, and preservation.

In recent years in the United States, public policy-making and implementation is increasingly handled through multi-stakeholder collaborations. Similar techniques are used widely in the international development community. There are growing numbers of partnerships supported and funded by government agencies, non-profit organizations, private individuals and foundations, and businesses. These partnerships often focus on especially challenging issues such as environmental stewardship, sustainability, natural resource management, and economic development. The experience of these communities has something to teach the research library community as it works to cost-effectively sustain access to collections in the years to come.

A number of research studies about these multi-stakeholder partnerships that address societal problems highlight strategic thinking and management techniques that can be applied in the research library environment. First and foremost, the public policy and international development communities view multi-stakeholder partnerships themselves and the process

used for achieving cooperation to be as important as their overall objectives. They understand that it is not enough that the vision is shared and participants say that cooperation is important; they know that the steps toward achieving it require skill, attention, and evaluation. They continually assess their programs within a strategic management framework, evaluating successes and failures alike, and correcting problems as an integral part of project development and management. They honestly and regularly report on both positive and negative outcomes and understand that success can be partial, and still be worthwhile.

In addition, these communities use their assessments and evaluations to identify and analyze critical success factors such as building trust, individual and group commitment, effective leadership, developing human and organizational capacity, non-defensive negotiation and, of course, adequate funding. They function with a commitment to set strategic as well as operational goals and manage them carefully throughout the life of the partnership. A few examples from the public policy and international development communities illustrate these points.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) envisions public participation as a progression from outreach and information sharing through collaboration and recommendation to agreement and decision-making. (U.S. EPA 2000) From their extensive evaluations of stakeholder involvement and public participation, EPA notes that establishing trust is integral, providing credible data and technical assistance can be critical, recognizing the links among environmental, economic and social concerns is vital, and providing trained, expert assistance are all key success factors. In dealing with cleaning up Superfund sites, EPA used a number of strategies to build trust between communities and the agency including open information sharing and involving stakeholder and influential leaders early. (U.S. EPA 2001)

The Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), a membership association of government, bilateral donor agencies, private companies, civil society organization, networks, and multilateral institutions based in Malaysia analyzes case studies of multi-stakeholder partnerships, both productive and problematic, in support of expanding and enhancing information and communications technologies for sustainable and equitable development. GKP states, "The central challenge

(of multi-stakeholder partnerships) seems to revolve around the nurturing of a working relationship based on trust, mutual respect, open communication, and understanding among stakeholders about each others strengths and weaknesses.” (GKP 2004, iii)

GKP evaluates projects in terms of three phases in the partnering process. The partnership exploration phase includes identifying sustainable outcomes, design parameters of the initiative, and potential partners. The partnership-building phase includes scoping the range of resources and competencies available to deliver the design parameters, identifying the strategic interests of the partners, negotiating the partnering agreement, and building capacity to implement. The partnership maintenance phase includes implementing and monitor commitments, re-evaluating performance and renegotiating if necessary. GKP notes that the frequent error in partnerships is for organizations to initiate discussion with others before fully understanding their own interests and requirements. (GKP 2004)

When GKP’s analytical framework is applied to Wagner’s account of the history of the Farmington Plan, many of points at which a more positive outcome could have been assured stand out. Rarely were the university administrators who controlled library budgets included as stakeholders. In fact, Wagner says there were active efforts to ensure they did not participate. Individual partners appear not to have identified their goals and interests prior to entering the partnership. Formal partnership agreements were not drawn up between and among the participants. No formal evaluation mechanisms were put in place and performance of participating libraries was not addressed.

The United Nations Workshop on Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and UN-Civil Society Relationships identifies five important aspects of creating and maintaining successful partnerships including having the right actors around the table, providing a clear definition of commonly agreed purposes and rules, ensuring participation and power sharing, establishing accountability, and maximizing strategic influence for the partnership and individual partners. Achieving accountability is an especially high priority in terms of UN partnerships. These guidelines suggest to the research library community the importance of tying cooperative programs to agreed priorities and strategies of individual institutions, ensuring that partners

are anchored in their host institutions, and meeting the crucial need of setting strategic as well as operational goals. (Multi-Stakeholder 2004)

One especially interesting aspect of the UN work includes Simon Zadek’s discussion of endearing myths and enduring truths about partnerships. Several of his examples provide experience-based guidance to those who seek to create shared print collections. Zadek notes that it is a myth that successful partnerships are primarily shaped around a common or shared long-term vision or aims. Rather, he says, successful partnerships are shaped around common or shared activities that first deliver on the individual aims of the partners. He asserts that individual champions are less important than structures when a partnership becomes operational. Perhaps most instructive to the research library community, Zadek disagrees that partnership success is dependent on those most directly involved and those with the most at stake. In fact, he believes that success often depends on individuals and organizations not directly involved that can bring critical experience and financial leverage. (Multi-Stakeholder 2004)

The literature of policy reform for developing states is also instructive for research library efforts at cooperative collection development, management, and preservation. In what Brinkerhoff and Crosby call the multi-actor, nobody-in-charge world of policy implementation, participation, decentralization, and incentives are key. Basing their work with the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Implementing Policy Change Project, they provide a wide-ranging set of tools and techniques for achieving partnerships that include stakeholder analysis, political and institutional mapping, and policy characteristics analysis that could be applicable in the research library community. Recognizing that policy reform is often a lengthy process, they advise close attention to conflict resolution strategies throughout the process and urge that partnerships resist the desire to centralize when problems arise. (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2001)

Current Environment for Creating Shared Print Repositories

Some trends today that favor the development of shared print repositories, most likely at the statewide or regional level, include strategic concerns of governing boards about the cost of new construction, increasing availability and user enthusiasm for digi-

tal collections, and cost-effective preservation quality construction techniques. In addition increasing commitment to preservation of analog and digital materials in the library and archival communities and economic recession that focuses attention on cooperation will help keep the issue on the research library agenda.

The trends working against cooperation are many. Some are familiar such as institutional, regional, and national competition and rivalry for funding, faculty, students, prestige, and status and the difficulty of garnering support for initiatives that may benefit others more than the institutions supplying most of the funding and may limit individual institutional ambitions. In addition the challenge of balancing institutional library goals and professional preservation and access responsibilities, the lack of high-quality digital materials in some disciplines, existing political and legal arrangements such as regulations on the transfer of state property are also obstacles. Adherence to traditional library measures of quality such as the ARL statistics, the lack of understanding and commitment to preservation and stewardship by governing boards and library funding agencies, and economic recession which makes institutions wary of commitment add to the list of impediments.

Whether these obstacles will prevent research libraries from making progress on cooperative collection development, management, and preservation in the 21st century remains to be seen. Abby Smith believes that the problem of implementing the “elegant solution of regional repositories is one of competition trumping collaboration.” She contends that the University of California and other institutions have achieved some measure of success in sharing print because these organizations understand that if they do not cooperate they will not be able to serve their faculty and students in ways they are committed to maintaining, and they are building on histories of cooperation. (Smith 2004) The overarching challenge for research libraries is to build on these recent limited successes to create lasting change.

In the absence of research and analysis of failures as well as successes, it is hard to know what needs to happen for the goal of sharing collections finally to be realized. If the research library community pursues the initiatives with an understanding of how other communities create and sustain complex, multi-stakeholder

partnerships to share highly valued resources and address controversial societal issues, perhaps success will be achieved.

As part of the meetings of the metropolitan New York libraries in 1948, Archibald MacLeish, poet, statesman and former Librarian of Congress, was asked to provide an analysis of library cooperation. He stated that the important question in planning for cooperation is, “What is a library in our kind of world and what function does it exist to perform?” (Geland 1950, 246)

Observing that the underlying trouble with the American library system is that it is not systematic, MacLeish asked the participants how it could be made so. He argued that librarians have the knowledge to plan and control the function of this “most important” social function, but the problem of increasing cooperation will never be solved intelligently and with technical competence until librarians demand authority for themselves and exercise it. (Geland 1950)

Are shared print repositories, and perhaps a national network of them, a practical possibility or just idle dreaming? Responding to this question more than fifty years ago, Carl White of Columbia University noted that it depends on how much effort is put into making it so. The same answer applies just as well today.

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