

Library, Archival and Museum (LAM) Collaboration:  
Driving Forces and Recent Trends

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**Abstract**

The information presented in this article is an overview of recent trends in library, archival and museum (LAM) collaboration. Sources utilized to compile the information for this article highlight different types of collaborative efforts to include the creation of digital collections and integration (library-museum partnerships), identifying and fulfilling patron needs, and relationship building. In addition, this article can offer LAM professionals understanding how integrating collaborative practices can improve lifelong learning for patrons. Despite the fact that collaboration between libraries, archives, and museums is not a new phenomenon, this is an especially important topic because of technological advances, and budgetary issues which has influenced the way information is delivered to patrons.

## **Introduction**

Library, archive, and museum (LAM) professionals are idiosyncratic demographics with a diverse need to perform complex tasks. Their tasks are becoming more complex as a result of collaborations that lead to overlaps in information science and cultural heritage concentrations due to organizational changes and technological advances (Edwards, 2003). The merging of skills and resources allows professionals to transcend the traditional boundaries of well-established library and information science (LIS) concentrations to allow forward thinking application of collaborative models. This collaboration extends access to a more diverse group of users than in the traditional sense (Falls, 2009).

As noted above, libraries, archives, and museums are three distinctive cultures; nonetheless, the boundaries between them are being slowly blurred due to the use of integrated access systems. Because of their divergent cultures, LAM collaborations must be aware of varying levels of technology that hold the potential to enhance user experience when implemented across disciplines.

Each institution offers a unique experience to a defined set of users; however, a collaborative effort on the part of the LAM will provide open access to a wider range of records. It is because of this that the traditional OPAC may fail to fulfill the needs of a LAM collaboration wishing to offer greater exposure to library materials, refined access, and simpler discovery methods. This is where integrated access systems and specialized interfaces have the potential to come into play (Deng, 2010).

## **LAM Collaboration**

Collaboration makes it possible for institutions to take advantage of professional customs and the expertise across a far-reaching continuum. Collaborative models are expanding the user

populations of libraries, archives, and museums to improve their chances of learning their associated community's languages and practices, establish common interests, and serve a greater good to the community.

Zorich, Waibel and Erway (2008) discuss the inevitability of the convergence of LAM collaborations due to their organizational commonalities. The authors offer an interesting view into the collaborative environment, which allows the viewer to deduce that collaborative efforts serve as a catalyst which will allow long-term projects of greater importance to be developed and released to a more diverse audience (p. 18). Recent studies reveal that the overwhelming goal of collaborative activity is preservation. This goal is followed by joint storage of holdings, coordinated and joint exhibition, exchange of holdings, processing materials and other activities that when performed in a collaborative environment between LAM professionals and organizations might make them idyllic cohorts in joint ventures (Tanackoviæ & Badurina, 2008, p. 565). It is also important in these collaborations that libraries incorporate museum and archival pieces into their collections and/or exhibits to create a more customer-centric experience. Dilevko and Gottlieb (2011) suggest that museum-library partnerships allow libraries to include museum objects into library collections thus allowing them to offer their patrons an interdisciplinary learning environment and outreach to new audiences.

It is suggested that, in a networked age, collaboration is no longer a choice. Although libraries and museums operate in different structures, they have similar goals and are each adopting aspects of the others' operations. For example, while libraries utilize technology and standards and museums are practiced with presentation, collaboration is allowing them to merge these skills to create a unique experience (Wythe, 2007, p. 54). Collaboration brings about unique opportunities such as the ability to share research and allows access to different

disciplines. In keeping with this theme, Timms (2009) makes an argument for integrated access systems that will allow for the unification of traditional and electronic media while maintaining artifact and informational value. What is to become of archival materials that have been digitized in a collaborative effort? There seems to be no question as to the continuity of museums, but rather with continued digitization efforts and budget constraints within public libraries. The question remains: who and how will we safeguard physical collections that need to be preserved for posterity (Lester, 2001).

The Smithsonian Institution is a prime example of an organization that engages in LAM collaborations. It is a member of The Commons, which is a Flickr-based consortium of 50 worldwide institutions to increase access to publicly held photography collections and to provide the public a way to contribute information and knowledge. Adding tags and comments to photos that are posted on The Commons in which a viewer may have subject matter knowledge or interest encourages public contribution. This collaboration brought content to the online community, and utilizing the Web 2.0 platform has allowed the Smithsonian to develop its collection in a way that is appealing to visitors. In an ever increasing digital age, The Commons allows visitors to interact with one another online and permits them to see content that they may not have otherwise have been able to view during their lifetime. As an added bonus, there are no copyright restrictions on the content at The Commons, and this allows visitors to save or reproduce photos without fear of legal repercussions. An innovative aspect of this collaboration is the time taken prior to beginning the project to develop goals related to marketing and establishing an online presence (Kalfatovic, et al., 2008).

The Southern Oregon Digital Archives (SODA) adds a new perspective to the notion of LAM collaboration when one examines the partnership between a Native American Indian tribe,

University library, and state and federal governments. SODA, funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), formed two digital collections: the Bioregion Collection and the First Nations Collection (Cedar-Face and Hollens, 2008, p. 116). The Bioregion is a collection of ecological materials related to the Siskiyou-Klamath-Cascade bioregion while the First Nations Collection is an ethnohistorical, governmental, legal, linguistic, and cultural collection of documents on the indigenous people of the nine federally recognized Oregon tribes of the bioregion. There are more than 1,600 fully searchable digital documents between the two collections. Cedar-Face and Hollens (2004) article brings ownership issues to the forefront as they relate to relationship building. In addition, SODA is preserving digital documents from federal websites such as the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management in an effort to permanently preserve them (p. 117).

### **Barriers to Collaboration**

Education is a common barrier to an effective LAM collaboration. For instance, in recent years, a librarian must obtain a master's degree in library and information science in order to work in the field. This is a shared common education level among peers. In the case of archival and museum professionals, this has not been the case. In most instances, an archivist or museum curator will have a degree in history. Because of this lack of educational common ground, LAM collaboration can become a bit more taxing. Libraries, archives, and museums use the same or similar database programs; this similarity decreases frustrations in collaborative efforts. No matter what the cultural differences, libraries, archives, and museums share a common goal of collecting and preserving of our cultural heritage for the education of the public.

Copyright and fair use must be considered for a digital image database to be created. Digital information provides new challenges to LAM collaborations in regards to licensing,

copyright, and fair user as well as access and service of different formats. While librarians and archivists may be sensitive to these issues because of experience in providing photocopies to users for personal use, museum professionals may not have not been exposed to this type of access issue.

Collection development presents more of an issue to libraries and archives because of the breadth and depth of their collections. While an archive might not have the breadth of a library collection, their depth is frequently similar. Each institution entering into LAM collaborations must make a decision as to which material it will select for digitization and inclusion.

Theoretically, a museum would have a much easier time determining what should be included for online consumption because they would digitize an entire exhibit when possible so as not to leave out anything. Although electronic documents and digital representations of objects or exhibits will be used more frequently in the future, online users of a LAM collaboration will not notice a difference because the content of the websites looks alike and serve similar function but they will have access to more information.

Although metadata is essentially an information resource that describes certain characteristics about data, it is also being used to link data within the context of the medium being utilized as well as the collaborative project itself. In particular, archivists are using metadata to add contextual elements to the information at the creation point to ensure authenticity and provenance of digital records (McInnes, 1998). In LAM collaborations, three different standards and practices need to be reconciled into one collaborative project. The table below provides a brief glimpse of standards and practices that are available to online users as a direct result of technological advances in an integrated library system (Allen, 2002, p. 2).

|                  | <b>Users</b>                        | <b>Online Standard</b>        | <b>Use</b>   | <b>Examples</b>                              |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Libraries</b> | Education<br>Research<br>Recreation | MARC                          | Capture bibliographic information                  | Books, manuscripts, photographs, maps        |
| <b>Archives</b>  | Research                            | EAD                           | Mark up archival finding aids                      | Digital Image Surrogates (archival material) |
| <b>Museums</b>   | Education<br>Research<br>Recreation | Collection Management Systems | Search automated collection management information | Digital Image Surrogates (exhibits)          |

Collaboration cannot occur without support; however, that is occasionally the challenge. Key supporting functions for collaboration that require integration are finance, staff, community and public relations, and document/collection management. While collaborative projects can be created and accomplished, supportive functions must remain diligent for projects to continue. Successful management of internal support function can result in increased hours, operating budget, positive impact on human resources, and project support. According to Raab and Roth (2001), once collaboration has been achieved, the urge to return to business as usual must be fought and relationships must continue to be groomed.

Funding has become an issue to public LAM alliances over the years especially with federal and state budget cuts. One of the greatest incentives of these collaborations has been grant awards provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009). Since 2000, the IMLS has awarded over \$3 million in funds to technologically minded LAM collaborations (Dilevko & Gottlieb, 2011, p. 160). Cole and Shreeves (2004) go on to provide pertinent statistical information regarding digital collaborations and grants awarded by the National Leadership Grant (NLG) program. In many

ways, the NLG program promotes collaboration through research on partnership activities and needs.

Moving forward, LAMs should continually work to seek opportunities to collaborate and cultivate relationships to enhance patron experience. Rodger, Jorgensen, and D'Elia (2011) offer statistical information regarding the driving forces and impact of partnerships and collaboration on the lifelong learning of patrons and to build upon their collective strengths to improve products and services. Gluibizzi (2009) states that developing outreach programs through partnerships and collaborations will ensure the continued success of LAM collaborations.

One of the most important aspects to be taken away from the LAM collaboration is the focus on how alliances help to deliver the information that patrons are looking for. Although the methods of delivery will continue to change with digital and technological advents and collaborative efforts, the constant will always be delivering service to patrons.

### **Conclusion**

The extent of research related to collaborative project between libraries, archives, and museums is to a certain degree limited; however, available information is diverse and innovative. This research exemplifies how traditional institutions can improve their products and services through collaboration and cooperation. LAM collaborations enable digital resources to be integrated and accessed on a wider scope than basic asset management tools used on an institution level. Collaboration not only raises the capacity of libraries, archives, and museums to share on the digital front, but it also proves to be cost-effective in the end to both the LAM collaboration partners as well as library patrons. Working in collaboration will give participating institutions the opportunity to develop more practical software and standards for broader content sharing (Rinehart, 2003).

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