

eDesiderata Forum 2019 - Strategies for Strengthening Collective Dealings

Summary Report

On October 30, 2019, the Center for Research Libraries hosted the [4th annual eDesiderata Forum](#), an annual online event to explore emerging challenges in the acquisition, licensing and enabling of access to databases and data services for scholarly uses. The Forums help identify priorities and shape CRL's agenda for supporting informed investment in electronic resources by CRL libraries.

Planned in cooperation with [NERL](#), the 2019 Forum focused on the topic of **strengthening collective dealings** within library consortia. CRL and like-minded consortia seek to expand the availability of content for member institutions by negotiating favorable terms for purchase or subscription to major electronic resources, leveraging the collective strength and purchasing power of participating institutions. With a focus on member engagement within (and among) consortia, the 2019 eDesiderata Forum explored how collective action could help CRL and NERL achieve greater strength in dealings with content producers and aggregators of primary source content and non-traditional resources such as data sets. All presentation slides are available on the event [webpage](#). What follows is a summary of the main points of each session and some suggested next steps for CRL/NERL and the library community.

Session I - CRKN's Member Engagement and Strategic Planning

Clare Appavoo (Executive Director, Canadian Research Knowledge Network) provided an overview on CRKN's recent strategic planning process for their licensing program. In August 2018 CRKN kicked off a consortium-wide planning process that employed deep engagement to gather, validate, and refine information. Through a series of member feedback loops, a set of recommendations was constructed and circulated within the membership. This report was subjected to several methods of verification to further ensure that the needs of the members would be met in the strategic plan. A final draft was presented to the membership for approval at CRKN's annual meeting in October 2019. Because there was such a strong engagement process, the new CRKN 5-year plan was enthusiastically accepted. The process led to a new approach for the organization toward partnering to transform scholarly communications and advance access to knowledge.

Craig Olsvik (Senior Content and Licensing Officer at CRKN) described how member institutions guide the licensing program at CRKN. A Content Strategy Committee comprised of representatives from Canada's regional consortia helps set negotiation objectives and oversee the licensing process. Members attend vendor negotiation meetings, review proposals from vendors and draft counterproposals. The CRKN licensing workflow relies on a cycle of engagement with membership, including surveys, teleconferences, data collection of usage statistics, and information gathering on how much publishing is happening at institutions. Based on member input and CRKN's new strategic approach, CRKN has changed its negotiation processes to set offer/renewal expectations ahead of time instead of following the lead of the vendor. Additionally, the membership recently contributed to revising the CRKN model license, which is an important tool in negotiations.

Session II - Jisc's Group Purchasing for UK Libraries

Paola Marchionni (head of digital resources for teaching, learning and research at Jisc) described Jisc's role as a member-based organization in providing digital solutions for education and research, including:

shared services for teaching and learning; savings on software, hardware, and content; and advice and consultation for higher education (HE) institutions. **Karen Colbron** (digital content manager) provided details on Jisc's **Group Purchasing Scheme**, a new initiative that facilitates collective purchasing of digital archival source materials from publishers.

Jisc was motivated to develop the scheme after learning that libraries were confronting issues in acquiring primary source content, such as lack of price transparency from providers and high annual hosting fees. Jisc began a pilot project with publishers to construct offers with the foundational principle of providing equitable access: open to all Jisc members, offers would feature transparent pricing (by “Jisc-banded list price”), predictable discounts, flexible offerings to allow “pick’n’mix” selections, and no subsequent hosting/platform charges. All products are offered under the Jisc model license, no matter what publisher, ensuring that the members would not have to deal with multiple, varying contracts.

The first pilot included the publishers Adam Matthew, Brill, and ProQuest, with a total of 24 products offered. The second pilot scaled up by one publisher and upped the total number of products being offered. The results showed that mid-sized institutions (Jisc band 4) benefited and participated at the highest level through the Group Purchasing Scheme, but there was encouraging participation from all bands. In November 2018 Jisc launched a formal service, in year one featuring nine publishers with 110 products on offer across the publishers.

Jisc is conducting a formal review following the first full year to assess how the framework meets the needs of the stakeholders: in addition to assessing how it serves member libraries, Jisc is providing publishers the opportunity to review the framework to evaluate how it can better suit their business needs. Jisc will revise the framework based on the member feedback. Jisc must maintain engagement from the publishers by demonstrating how the scheme will be of value to them and is soliciting engagement of publishers not currently on the scheme. Currently, Jisc is also working with the publisher Wiley to test a new approach for digitization of historical science collections, based on member input, resulting in Jisc-wide access to the collections.

Session III - NERL's Negotiation Committee Outcomes

Christine Stamison (director, NERL) presented an overview of the role of NERL’s Negotiation Committee. NERL, which moved to CRL in 2013, has 30 core members and 110 affiliate members. NERL recently conducted a strategic planning process in which several means of strengthening NERL’s commitment to collective action were recommended, including better internal and external communications, stronger member engagement, and, finally, more effective negotiation processes with publishers.

The NERL Program Council Executive Committee formed a “Committee to Improve Negotiations” to survey licensing strategies employed by NERL and to suggest a framework to improve negotiation processes. The committee conducted interviews with stakeholders and performed an environmental scan of negotiation best practices by other organizations. A report of the findings was submitted in August and is under review for final approval.

NERL’s current negotiation tactics prioritize member interests in setting terms, including caps on price increases, but also addressing accessibility compliance, fair use, text and data mining, privacy issues, and

moving to the NERL model license as much as possible. NERL also emphasizes effective management of the negotiation lifecycle (e.g., making sure decision-makers are at every meeting). The Negotiation Committee recommended several additional steps aimed at improving the process, for example starting 1.5 years out to provide more prep time, gather more data and establish NERL's priorities. Additionally, rather than awaiting new offers from providers, the new process ensures that NERL will now make the first offer and take control of the process. The committee recommended establishing a checklist for negotiation objectives that all members can access, providing much needed transparency. Communication throughout the negotiation process is critical, and NERL will develop an explicit plan for each negotiation so that there will be more membership buy-in and a more transparent process.

NERL seeks to speak as one voice to vendors, even though individual members have local interests and priorities. In considering what exactly "one voice" means within NERL, all members must agree on principal objectives and use the same talking points with to the publishers. This makes it harder for publishers to "splinter" the membership in discussions and dealings.

Session IV - ABLD & AALL: Member Advocacy and Vendor Relations

Two representatives of professional library associations—**Jason Sokoloff** (Vendor Relations Liaison, Academic Business Library Directors and Head of Foster Business Library, University of Washington) and **Deborah Heller** (Vice Chair, Committee on Relations with Information Vendors, American Association of Law Libraries and Acting Director of the Law Library, Elisabeth Haub School of Law, Pace University)—shared their perspectives on various advocacy methods that can be utilized by member organizations that do not negotiate directly on licenses.

The Academic Business Library Directors (ABLD) takes an informal approach to vendor negotiations and dealings; the processes are not systematic and rely more on personal relationships and one-on-one conversations. Business information licensing presents unique challenges, as business publisher arrangements are often at odds with traditional library acquisitions and access models. Access models in licensing agreements are more applicable for commercial clients, and standard conditions often raise concerns about privacy for academic users.

ABLD hopes that through their relationships with vendors the group can provide a unified voice. They promote standardized pricing, licensing terms, and a shared understanding of expectations. Members compare notes and report out to each other on information about how individuals are being approached by information providers. The ABLD invites vendors to spend a day with members to talk to and hear the perspective of librarians. ABLD has had success in pushing vendors to have more simple and standard pricing models.

The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) is an association of varying types of law libraries, including law firms, court libraries, and academic libraries. Under AALL, the CRIV (Committee on Relations with Information Vendors) guides member dealings with vendors. CRIV does not directly negotiate, but advocates for better terms and communication between members and vendors. The CRIV committee liaises with large information vendors and holds twice yearly phone calls to share information on new products while bringing up advocacy issues. CRIV also maintains guidelines on fair business practices and licensing practices for members and vendors on their website.

In terms of advocacy, CRIV consults vendors on issues of transparent pricing, format issues (concerns about preservation of old materials and archiving of digital materials), methods of communication, and making terms and offers easily understandable. CRIV also supports members by providing assistance in their vendor relations. Members can ask for help via email or the form on the AALL website. When members ask for help, AALL is usually able to mediate a resolution.

Session V - Panel: How Can CRL and NERL Best Serve Members' Interests?

Julie Linden (Director of Collection Development, Yale University Library), **Monica Ward** (Head of Collection Strategy, University of Ottawa) and **Nancy Godleski** (Associate University Librarian for Collections and Core Services, Vanderbilt University) served as panelists to reflect on the issues discussed in the presentations, with a specific focus on how CRL and NERL could improve practices to best serve members' interests. Valuable comments and questions included:

- How can CRL and NERL use sustained member engagement to help set CRL & NERL at the program and project levels – and how do we make processes transparent to the membership?
- If we want to make progress in transforming scholarly publishing, we must work collectively towards finding alignment and common ground among institutions and consortia.
- We can strengthen our collective action by establishing a clear mandate of what we want and identifying/focusing on key issues. We must allow our consortia to do bold things that don't meet institution's every local need.
- If CRL and NERL could drive a collectively devised framework that clearly advanced certain principles, would members be willing to pursue acquisition of materials via group purchasing instead of directly with vendors?
- Consortia have a critical role to play in advocacy: individuals cannot alone fight against global policies.
- As CRL and NERL potentially branch out into licensing new types of resources, how do we find and incorporate domain expertise to optimally inform negotiations?
- What bigger questions might we effectively address? For instance, CRL could become more of an advocate for preservation and provide a voice in the digital preservation world.

Next Steps

There is a great deal to be learned from the processes, structures, and approaches to member engagement utilized by the organizations represented at the Forum. Presenters shared valuable information on successful models and strategies that facilitate collective action within the library community.

As CRKN's organizational structure demonstrates, many consortia represent a diversity of voices in the academic library landscape, even as each institution within these groups balance multiple perspectives and priorities across campus. To advance the greatest good for the entire collective in regards to electronic resource acquisitions, it is vital to develop structures to effectively engage the full range of members in strategic planning and decision-making processes. In the coming year, CRL & NERL will evaluate their **communication and member engagement** strategies, seeking to incentivize individual

contributions and ensure maximum member participation. ABLD and AALL presented attractive models for member information sharing, advocacy and library/vendor relationships.

NERL has demonstrated the advantages of using a negotiation committee to promote proactive discussions among members and with content providers. Indeed, many of the presentations stressed the importance of designing **strategic approaches to licensing partnerships** (rather than awaiting producers' initial offers). NERL's work in this area breaks new ground in illuminating best practices and developing tools to promote collective intelligence and concerted action. CRL is assessing its current framework for pursuing partnerships to leverage its unique position in the landscape to originate new models between libraries and third-party providers (commercial and non-). Jisc's [collaboration with Wiley Digital Archives](#) and CRL's [charter alliance with East View Information Services](#) on the *Global Press Archive* demonstrate powerful opportunities of such innovative partnerships.

Panelist Julie Linden noted that negotiation teams may have the greatest impact when **advancing significant terms** that institutions and consortia want to improve. Linden spurred the audience to consider what kinds of work currently being done in an operational or one-off fashion at CRL and NERL—or even at several individual member libraries—could be brought together into a “strategic project” framework. As CRL and NERL pivot to **provide stronger advocacy** on behalf of their members on issues of community importance, the critical themes of last year's eDesiderata Forum on “[Investing in Open Primary Sources](#)” ([summary](#) and [video presentation](#)) could provide areas of fruitful exploration.

Finally, Nancy Godleski asked whether there were opportunities for greater alignment between CRL and NERL. As the demands of collection building and electronic acquisitions grow more challenging, the two organizations could benefit by **pursuing complementary agendas** to advance both of their interests (for instance, CRL's focus on primary source collections and news resources and NERL's recent focus on Open Access and scholarly communication tools).

As a platform for collective action, CRL welcomes the different perspectives and shared expertise of its partners and like-minded communities. The outcomes of the 2019 eDesiderata Forum will be folded into CRL's agenda-building conversations over the next several months with multiple stakeholders (member representatives, directors, committees, CRL Board, and others) leading up to CRL's annual governance meeting in April 2020. We welcome [feedback](#) from Forum participants on these findings, as well as further thoughts from CRL & NERL members.

Report submitted 17 December 2019

Event details, participant bios and presentation slides available at:

<https://www.crl.edu/events/strategies-strengthening-collective-dealings-edesiderata-forum>