Designing and Implementing a Consortial Approval Plan: The OhioLINK Experience

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Abstract: This paper explores the basic tenets of cooperative collection development including

barriers and characteristics of success as those apply to the OhioLINK consortial approval plan

project. The paper explains the vision for the OhioLINK consortial approval plan project and reports

on its current status and implementation. Future plans and the utility of this project as a model for

others is also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In a 1993 article on the history of cooperative collection development in the Triangle

Research Libraries Network (TRLN), Patricia Dominguez and Luke Swindler define the rationale

for success as the achievement of interlocked collections. "The resulting interdependent collections

provide a breadth and depth of coverage that would be impossible for individual institutions to

achieve on their own." [1] There is no question that the ever-increasing cost of library materials drives

libraries to search for ways to extend their buying power and increase the availability of diverse

material for their patrons. Dan Hazen argues that a cooperative collection development project must

meet one or several of the following criteria (all of which are not necessarily compatible goals):

- Broadening access – acquiring a broader variety of material;

- Containing cost – saving money by reducing redundancy;

- Improving coverage – attempting to ensure complete coverage; and

- Ensuring the exotic – buying material that is not used frequently or at the
  present time but will be needed in the future. [2]

It is also important for the purposes of this paper to draw a distinction between cooperative

collection development and resource sharing. When drawing this distinction, Patricia Bril defines

resource sharing as taking advantage of past decisions about what was purchased whether the initial

decision was made with sharing in mind or not. In contrast, cooperative collection building is

defined as intentional present actions intended to promote cooperative collection building. [3]

Shreeves' review of the cooperative collection development literature leads him to two conclusions:

· There is widespread agreement about the factors leading to success.

· Of all the many efforts over the past 50 years, only modest successes can be found.

"How reliable are the success factors identified, if successes to date have been only modest?

Are they so rarely found together in sufficient strength and quantity that most efforts are doomed to failure? Or is there a missing critical factor–yet to be clearly identified–which would serve as a catalyst to enable the rest to result in substantive achievement? ... Finally, how will librarians and scholars know if they achieve success? How is success in cooperative building of collections to be measured?" [4]

Based on his experience in Ohio with the OhioLINK consortium, David Kohl cites five landmarks for successful resource sharing: joining a consortium, integrating the catalogs and circulation components, providing physical delivery of print materials, providing electronic delivery of electronic resources, and finally, integrated collection development. "What the OhioLINK experience seems to clearly demonstrate is that coordinated collection development must be the last, not the initial, step in the formation of a superlibrary consortium. Until librarians can demonstrate to patrons that an actual working system is in place that allows them to conveniently, speedily, and reliably get the materials they need from other locations and institutions, it is difficult to make any kind of truly serious case for not just coordinated, but integrated collection development."[5] Thus, true integrated collection development is a second generation of resource sharing which may be more achievable today than ever before.

BACKGROUND

What is OhioLINK?

Much has been written about the history, founding and goals of OhioLINK.[6] For the purposes of this paper, the About OhioLINK section of the consortium's home page provides the

most accurate and up to date summary of its composition and structure. "The Ohio Library and Information Network, OhioLINK, is a consortium of Ohio's college and university libraries and the State Library of Ohio. Serving more than 500,000 students, faculty, and staff at 74 institutions, OhioLINK offers access to more than 24 million library items statewide. OhioLINK also provides access to 67 research databases, including a variety of full-text resources.

OhioLINK offers user-initiated online borrowing through its statewide central catalog. Users have the ability to electronically request items while searching the OhioLINK central catalog. It also provides a delivery service among member institutions to speed exchange of library items. To date, the OhioLINK central catalog contains almost 7 million master records from its 74 institutions, encompassing a spectrum of library material including law, medical and special collections. ...

OhioLINK serves faculty, students, staff and other researchers at member institutions via campus library systems, campus networks, and the Internet. The system provides access to more than 4,500 simultaneous users at 113 locations, serving more than a half-million patrons. The OhioLINK central catalog is available to outside users through the Internet. However, access to the research databases is restricted to OhioLINK member users (valid patrons at OhioLINK member institutions). OhioLINK's membership includes 17 public universities, 23 community/technical colleges, 33 private colleges and the State Library of Ohio."[7]

Why a Consortial Approval Plan?

OhioLINK's successes – electronic resources including databases, fulltext, electronic journals, image and data files, a central catalog of all member library holdings, and patron initiated borrowing and delivery via private courier – were but one part of the initial mandate for the project

dating back to the consortium's founding in the 1980s. Another fundamental tenet was cooperative collection building. Despite its many successes, the consortium still needed to find a way to advance goals for cooperative collection development for traditional materials. Efforts had been made to investigate use of the RLG Conspectus in particular subject areas but the effort involved was considerable with relatively little gain. By 1997, the time had come for some different approach to the issue.

Tom Sanville, Executive Director of OhioLINK, had been tracking various trends within the consortium. When looking at the percent of items held by number of libraries between 1996 and 1999, the percent of titles held in only one library was dropping and the percentage held in more than 5 libraries was growing.[8]

Year	1 library	2 libraries	3 libraries	4 libraries	5 libraries	5 or more libraries
1999	55.9%	14.0%	7.0%	5.3%	3.5%	14.3%
1998	56.0%	14.0%	7.8%	5.0%	3.4%	13.8%
1997	56.5%	14.8%	7.3%	4.5%	3.3%	13.6%
1996	57.1%	15.9%	7.9%	4.7%	3.3%	11.1%

Table 1 — Percentage of unique titles held by OhioLINK libraries

In a 1996 article by Greg Byerly, on average 22.8% of each library's collection was unique when added to the central OhioLINK catalog. This percentage has confirmed one of the original premises behind the consortium's founding — that each of Ohio's universities had unique and diverse holdings. [9]

In a 1995 paper on OhioLINK, Randy Dykhuis concludes that cooperation within OhioLINK will be tempered because more than 60% of the combined collection is held in only 1 library with

almost 85% held by fewer than 3 libraries. He concludes that the OhioLINK libraries have already been doing an excellent job of focusing on their individual missions and avoiding unnecessary duplication.[10] However, as the uniqueness of the collection deteriorates, the need to facilitate and encourage cooperation re-emerges. Dykhuis also reveals elsewhere in his paper that his data was compiled before some of the largest libraries in OhioLINK had yet to contribute to the central catalog including Ohio State University, University of Toledo, Kent State University, and Cleveland State University. Once these databases were added, the uniqueness percentage continued to fall. As Table 1 reveals, the percentage of unique titles has continued to decline from a high of 57.1% in 1996 to 55.9% in 1999. In addition, the Database Management and Standards Committee of OhioLINK has sampled the duplication of bibliographic records within OhioLINK. They found that approximately 5% of the titles in the database could actually be considered duplicates of other records in the database. If this 5 percent of records were combined with the correct records, the uniqueness number would likely fall even further.

Much earlier in the early 1980s, Paul Mosher and Marcia Pankake proposed a model in which the total collection development efforts of the ARL libraries would result in a comprehensive national collection among those libraries. " 'This approach presumes that the total collecting activity of ARL and other major research libraries achieves, on a national scale, reasonable depth in every area of interest to research in the United States, both in the present and future. It is the total of the collections of research libraries which approaches comprehensiveness' (p. 424)." [11]However, by 1994, there was clear evidence that the range of resources was growing narrower and more homogeneous. In spring 1994, Anna Perrault's landmark research on the shrinking of monograph collections was released. She concluded the following:

"The national collection is shrinking. .. There is an overall 27.76% rate of decline in nonserial imprints from 1985-1989 for the collective resources base of the 72 ARL libraries whose holdings are included in the 1991 edition of the OCLC/AMIGOS Collection Analysis System.

A decline in total number of monographs purchased and proportional declines in number of unique titles indicates that there is a concentration down to a core of titles occurring in U.S. academic libraries. ... Instead, the 1.14% decline in unique titles for the period under study suggests that the core of titles academic research libraries select in common is increasing, resulting in less diversity in title and subject coverage among those libraries. ...

The suspicions and fears expressed by the ARL that a drastic reduction is occurring in foreign-language purchasing are borne out by the results of the research reported in this article. The number of foreign language imprints experienced an overall 43.33% reduction while English language imprints declined 12.34%. ... United States research libraries are acquiring a smaller and smaller portion of the world publishing output. The danger is that the unavailability of a diversity of cultural as well as research materials could foster a narrowing of education and inquiry."[12]

Armed with this research and the concern that the OhioLINK collection was becoming too homogenous, Sanville explored the OhioLINK duplication issue in a different manner. He constructed statistics based on the availability of material to meet actual patron requests. First, he

found that a large proportion of titles requested by OhioLINK users and also published in the past few years (recent imprints) had 5+ copies available at the time of request. Second, a significant number of requests went unfilled because no copies were available. As Chart 1 depicts [insert Chart 1], in October 1998, in just over 10% of requests, no copy was available to fill the request. The number of unfilled requests had grown steadily from 5% in March 1995. In contrast, in Oct. 1998, for approximately 30% of requests, 5 or more copies were held within the consortium. This percentage had grown from 21% in March 1995. When this data was shared with the Library Advisory Council in June 1997 (the primary operational governing body of the consortium composed of library directors), the LAC attributed the growth in the over 5 copies range to the homogeneousness of approval plans. As a result, the Cooperative Information Resources Committee (CIRM) was asked to explore the idea of a consortial approval plan.

PROJECT DESIGN

CIRM charged a three member task force to investigate the feasibility of a consortial approval plan. There was clear agreement that the consortium could be doing a better job of purchasing current monographs. In essence, the question was how could OhioLINK improve its buying patterns to purchase fewer duplicates and to acquire more of the material held by no one in the consortium? The task force synthesized the problem into two questions:

· Through cooperation in monograph purchases via approval plan(s) could OhioLINK build a more heterogeneous consortial collection? The project was also intended to assist with firm order purchasing for those consortium members for whom approval plans were not a viable

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option.

·   Would a joint contract allow OhioLINK to collectively purchase more books than OhioLINK libraries currently did?

Preliminary investigation with vendors revealed five areas of concern on the vendors' part:

1.   Volume of business – would the volume of business be enough to interest the vendors? Did the consortium have firm commitments for participation or was this strictly exploratory? Would the vendor bid be based on a volume of business which might not materialize?

2.   Potential for phasing of the adoption of the plan or pilot projects – would OhioLINK expect to implement 74+ approval plans on the same day within a very short time period of the bid completion? Could the implementation be phased to allow the vendor time to prepare and staff for the operation? Depending on the intentions of the plan, would OhioLINK consider pilot projects to test the more exploratory aspects of the plan?

3.   Possible negative attitudes about the project – did OhioLINK already have the buy-in of its consortial members? Did OhioLINK recognize that any attempts to limit the number of copies purchased would have to be based on policy adopted by the consortium to be successful?

4.   Availability of existing data on collection strengths – did OhioLINK have existing data on which to build a central profile? If the vendor was expected to provide this, did OhioLINK recognize the time and effort involved?

5.   RFP and bid requirements – what exactly would the terms of the RFP and bid requirements

be? Was OhioLINK expecting a extraordinary discount as well as development efforts and outstanding service?

Of course, the task force had its own set of issues to be investigated and addressed. As a result of these preliminary discussions with vendors and further discussion within the consortium, the initial task force recommended proceeding based on the following findings:

1.   The vendors had the necessary systems available.

2.   Those systems would allow libraries to share ordering and approval shipment information.

3.   The vendor systems could generate consortial collection development reports.

4.   The vendors were interested in developing consortial elements and reports where they did not already exist.

5.   Library involvement could be phased in.

6.   Measures to limit duplication could be phased in later or could be made voluntary.

7.   Sales volume would guarantee a substantial discount.

THE VISION

The next step was to develop a vision of the project which could be used to foster extensive discussion within the consortium. The project envisioned that a contract would be signed by OhioLINK on behalf of all participating libraries with a single vendor for the provision of English language approval plans. A discount based on the size of this contract would be equal to or an

improvement over existing approval arrangements. Excellent service would also be an expectation. Libraries not involved in approval plans would be able to place firm orders via the same vendor. Libraries would have access to shelf-ready options, PromptCat services and standing orders plans from the same vendor as desired (but likely at a different, yet consortial, pricing structure). Approval profiles include options to send a book automatically or a notification slip in lieu of the book. Some plans are entirely notification slips and this is an option that might be beneficial to the two year colleges or smaller libraries.

Each local library would control its own approval profile. The profiles would be accessible to all OhioLINK institutions via a Web-based vendor tool. This tool would enable collection managers at each local library to look at their own profiles online as well as those of their colleagues in other OhioLINK libraries. Staff could search, view a list of books that matches their profile and see what action was taken for their library and other OhioLINK libraries on each title, e.g. received as book, notification slip, etc. In one possible scenario, forthcoming titles would also be pre-profiled by the vendor to determine probable action. This information on action expected could appear in the database as soon as a title was identified for inclusion on the approval system (prior to publication). Collection managers would be able to review titles and mark for shipment on approval. Staff would be able to place firm orders online and that data could be transferred electronically into the Innovative Interfaces system.

The system would keep track of the number of copies of each title profiled for or ordered by OhioLINK libraries. As a result of this calculation, the user could be alerted if their order surpassed a pre-defined threshold for copies but would not be prevented from placing the order or approval shipment flag. The system would provide collection management reports as another tool for

cooperative collection development endeavors. These reports could be used to identify overlaps or gaps among OhioLINK libraries' profiles or materials shipped. As a result, profiles could be modified to address areas of intense need, to fill gaps or to reduce unnecessary overlap.

Based on this vision, the consortium accepted the recommendation to proceed. An expanded task force developed an ambitious timeline (see Appendix A). In essence, in an 8 month period (between Dec. 1997 and August 1998), a RFP was developed, reviewed, bid, and awarded. Focus groups were held to discuss barriers to success and review the RFP. The RFP was released and bids reviewed by the task force. Open meetings were held to review the leading bids. Consensus was built to support the project and member libraries were surveyed to determine their preliminary interest in participating in the project. In August 1998, a recommendation on vendor was made to the LAC and the contract was negotiated for implementation with shipments in January 1999.

BARRIERS

In the early stages of the project evaluation, the original three member task force and the OhioLINK staff spent considerable time and effort meeting with prospective vendors to see if the plan design was a viable idea. As a result, the thinking of those five individuals (Tom Sanville and Anne Gilliland from OhioLINK, Carol Diedrichs from Ohio State University, Linda Brown from Bowling Green State University, and Kent Mulliner of Ohio University) was considerably ahead of others who had not been privy to those initial conversations. One of the key pieces of advice that Sanville provided to the task force was to consult with a wide range of the stakeholders in the process to identify as many of the perceived barriers to success as possible. Only then would the task force be able to determine if those barriers could be eliminated to the satisfaction of the consortium

so that the project could proceed.

One of the key points of discussion in most of the professional literature on cooperative collection development is an explication of the barriers to success. Two of the most critical potential barriers to this particular project were commitment to the project and infrastructure support

Commitment to the Project

To be successful, commitment to a cooperative project must come from all levels within the consortium and individual institutions. At the most basic level, the consortium and its leadership must believe that the project is important. Clearly, for OhioLINK since the request to explore this option had come from the Library Advisory Council, the directors of the individual libraries were supportive of the idea. Although the front line management of the consortium occurs via the LAC, the Governing Board of OhioLINK is staffed by university administrators under the jurisdiction of the Ohio Board of Regents which governs all of higher education and is the funding authority for OhioLINK. Since one of the founding tenets of OhioLINK was cooperative collection development, the groundwork was already in place to advance this agenda. The consortium's commitment to cooperative collection development did not mean that individual library budgets would be cut as a result but rather that the aggregate buying power of the consortium and the individual institutions would be increased. The ability to advance this agenda was also eased by the fact that the individual participants would be funding the approval plan from their own materials budgets rather than through central funding. OhioLINK provided funding to overcome some barriers to the project such as the software for the III system which makes the transfer of data simpler.

In many ways, this high level support and commitment was the easiest to attain since it

occurs at the idea and principle level. Commitment from the individual libraries and, in particular, the faculty and selectors was more complicated. The early focus sessions identified some misunderstandings that could be overcome easily by rewriting the vision so that it dealt with these concerns. As a result, a second section of the vision was written titled: what it is and what it isn't (the full text of that document is included as Appendix B). The key misunderstandings which needed to be clarified follow:

- participation would be entirely voluntary;

- the discount would be excellent but the selection of a vendor would also be determined based on service;

- each library would control its own profile;

- each library could continue to make independent selection and return decisions;

- no library would be prevented from buying anything it required for its collection;

- outsourcing of cataloging was not required; and

- there was no mandate to make titles purchased through the plan circulating copies.

These clarifications were in concert with success factors that others have identified. For example, in a presentation made at the 1997 ALA Annual Conference, Tony Ferguson updated and elaborated on a series of success factors that Robert Downs and Harvie Branscomb[13] articulated in founding the Triangle Research Libraries Network. In particular, he confirmed a perception the task force had for this project that "forced collaboration still fails. It is best to allow members of a cooperative to selectively participate ..., just as it was wise in the past to make sure that any agreement to purchase

certain materials for the cooperative would not restrict partners from buying whatever additional books and journals they wished for their own patrons."[14] These revisions to the OhioLINK vision eased what concerns existed with the individual libraries and, in some cases, their faculty so that the project could proceed. However, in order to take the project to the stage where selector decisions are impacted and influenced by the decisions of colleagues around the state, new incentives may be required.

Shreeves discusses another aspect of building support and commitment. "An often overlooked function of leadership here is the role of university and library leaders in selling the concept of resources sharing and shared collection building on campus, especially to faculty and other researchers. To accept reliance on other libraries' resources demands cultural changes among faculty, who must give up cherished notions about the self-sufficient collection, browsing, and immediate access. Leadership is required not only to persuade library staff of the merits, or necessity, of cooperation, but also to ensure that the message is delivered to the rest of the academic audience."[15] OhioLINK held focus sessions with faculty in the early stages of the consortium to deal with this issue of sharing resources across the state. Inevitably, the faculty at the smaller institutions were convinced that the larger institutions particularly Ohio State would borrow all of their material leaving the shelves bare. In contrast, faculty at the larger institutions were convinced that the smaller institutions would borrow all of the research, unique material from their libraries making that material unavailable when they needed it. Of course, neither of these expectations has eventuated. Instead, most faculty successfully request material and have it delivered to their offices regardless of where in the state it resides. Again, because of the success of the delivery mechanism, the current approval plan project is of little concern to most faculty. However, the task force still needs to

continue working with front line collection managers who still perceive their role to be anticipating what faculty need and have it readily available on the shelf at the home institution.

Infrastructure Support

OhioLINK has spent considerable time, money and energy developing the infrastructure to support cooperative collection development. Having a single integrated library system with a union catalog capable of user-initiated borrowing is the first step in providing adequate delivery mechanisms to support cooperative collection delivery. One of the first funding priorities of the consortium was also retrospective conversion of library holdings not in machine-readable form. There is no question that individual institutions such as Ohio State would have been hard pressed to find the money to complete this conversion without OhioLINK. And yet, the idea of cooperative collection development cannot fully proceed without full conversion. In addition, the union catalog displays up-to-the-minute circulation status of material so that the patron knows when making a request whether the material is available. The system has also been refined to balance the borrowing and lending activity so that all institutions share in the volume of requests generated. Second, the statewide courier system ensures that material reaches individual users quickly. "...repeated studies (unpublished OhioLINK internal studies) have shown that almost half (41-44 percent) of the requested materials are delivered within forty-eight hours while almost three-quarters (71-75 percent) are delivered within three days. Approximately 12 percent of the materials cannot be delivered for various reasons, primary among them: items missing from the shelves which the record lists as available. System enhancements already underway allowing local libraries to easily pass on such requests to other holding libraries are expected to reduce the no-fill rate to less than 5 percent."

[16]With this structure (or physical proximity as in TRLN), relying on the collections of others becomes possible and reasonable. Without this effective delivery mechanism, cooperative collection development may be perceived to be too difficult and time-consuming.

Other Barriers

At least six other barriers have been identified in the literature as significant issues for consideration when implementing cooperative collection development projects.

Turf protectionism

Richard Wood defines one barrier as "turf protectionism, or a desire to be self-sufficient."[17] Certainly, the Association of Research Libraries and individual libraries are struggling with the current environment which measures success often solely on the size of collections. Electronic resources are bringing this issue to the forefront but no easy solutions have been found. Until new mechanisms can be identified to measure success, libraries will have to cope with these conflicting messages. Budget realities, however, are a compelling mandate to provide better access and service often on reduced budgets. Because of the well founded statewide commitment to OhioLINK particularly at the library and university administration levels, this is not a serious issue for OhioLINK. However, for more loosely constructed consortia, it may be an important issue. It may also be a more critical issue on the local campus with individual selectors who work on the front lines with faculty members who still want their local library to serve all of their research needs.

Following a vigorous discussion on the success of cooperative collection development for electronic resources, Donna Heady reveals a nuance of this barrier in her summary of the question

and answer period of a program held at the 1995 ALA Annual Conference aptly named "Cooperation Works! Successful Models of Cooperative Collection Development". "Questions at the end of the program focused on the difficulties of translating the experiences described for sharing electronic resources into cooperative collection development for monographs. The major point discussed was that cooperation is a more difficult process when a decision must be made about which library will house the resources, thereby allowing that library easier access, than when a decision to share allows equal access to all, as is the case with electronic resources." [18] At various times within OhioLINK, it has even been suggested that the book be left at the institution borrowing it rather than returning it to its owner. There are certainly barriers to this suggestion, but it is also easy to see the merits in time and expense saved.

Expense of loaning rather than purchasing

Patricia Bril identifies the expense of loaning as another potential barrier. She cites an 1985 article by Joel Rutstein noting that few libraries experience interlibrary loan rates above 1 per cent of their total circulation figures.[19] "If resource sharing is pursued on a much grander scale in future, this percentage could increase dramatically. Libraries must then face the problem of determining when it is actually less expensive to purchase an item than provide access to it."[20] In 1996, Sanville compared the $40 average cost of purchasing a book (not including the cost of processing and cataloging) with OhioLINK's $8 per unit cost for resource sharing. Only 40 cents of that $8 cost is for inter-library transportation costs. Over half of the cost is in local library retrieval and circulation with about $3 or less in costs directly attributable to the OhioLINK central program's hardware, software and staff.[21] David Kohl (University of Cincinnati) revealed that in the mid-1990s, UC's

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OhioLINK circulations amounted to over 10 percent of UC's total circulation activity.[22] He anticipated the likely increase in that percentage in the late 1990s as more institutions were added to OhioLINK.

Rigidity of definition

In the introductory materials for ARL's August 1998 SPEC Kit, "Collaborative Collection Management Programs in ARL Libraries," inclusion in the survey was confined to programs which could meet the following definition: "a formal collaborative collections management (CCM) program was defined as one for which there were written agreements, contracts, or other documents outlining the commitments and responsibilities of the participants."[23] Scientific surveys require concise definition for credibility but this very rigidity may constrain thinking about how to advance the cooperative collection development agenda. Certainly, OhioLINK has written agreements and documents which govern participation in the consortium and there is a contract with YBP for the provision of the approval project. However, individual participating libraries have no specific contract or documents which govern their participation in this particular program and thus, the OhioLINK approval project might not qualify for inclusion in the ARL survey. OhioLINK has intentionally not required elaborate documentation to participate in the approval plan project in order to overcome concerns about individual library autonomy in making vendor decisions. The task force continues to educate and build the components of the system so that participation will be compelling on its own merits rather than coerced.

Budget issues

There are two primary areas where budget can be a barrier to successful cooperative collection development. Where a consortium has no central funding, individual libraries must contribute to support any initiative often in competition with local initiatives. Reaching consensus in this environment particularly for book materials can be a challenge. The second issue is the potential for a difference in budget cycles which makes for awkward if not impossible sharing of costs. Again, the design of the OhioLINK approval project makes these barriers moot. Each library controls its own approval profile, the funding of that profile and the timing of its participation in the project. The state institutions in OhioLINK share a common fiscal year (July 1 to June 30). Approval profiles often run January 1 through December 31 to coincide with publisher imprint years. Thus, individual libraries have the lead time to plan for a change in vendor and the budget support for that change. Because the aggregate purchasing power of the initial participants in the plan was great enough to ensure a strong discount, most of the larger participating libraries were able to match the discount that they had achieved on their own or saw some improvement. in their discount under the new plan. However, most of the smaller institutions saw a considerable improvement in discount as a result of their participation in the project.

Strained Consensus

Cooperative collection development projects can encounter difficulties if the participating institutions serve varying user populations so that consensus is difficult to reach. This can be particularly true when selecting electronic resources some of which are of most utility to research institutions while others are most useful to undergraduates. In a consortium like the CIC, consensus is easier to reach because the nature of the institutions is very similar. For OhioLINK, the user base

covers two year community and technical colleges as well as ARL libraries. Thus, electronic resources have focused on those which support the greatest number of institutions leaving the research libraries with freed resources to purchase databases of lesser use to others in the consortium – a true win/win situation for all involved.

Reaching consensus on the vendor to be selected for the OhioLINK approval plan project was much easier to achieve because all of the institutions in OhioLINK serve higher education in some form. Thus, the consortium was looking for a scholarly approval vendor who could provide a substantial discount, excellent service, and a automated system which could support cooperative collection development. Also, because all OhioLINK libraries used III systems,the interface issues were modest. In February 1998, the approval plan task force conducted a survey to collect data from OhioLINK libraries regarding current approval expenditures, receipts, discounts, vendors and interest in participating in the project. A number of libraries expressed interest in participating in the project depending upon the vendor selected. As the task force expected, some individual libraries were reluctant to sign on to the project until the vendor was determined. However, a number of other institutions (University of Akron, Bowling Green State University, University of Cincinnati, Miami University, Ohio State University Libraries, and Shawnee State University) were willing to commit to the project regardless of the vendor selected. It was on the basis of these institutions that the RFP went forward. The task force also had full confidence that once the vendor was selected others would come on board quickly and that has, indeed, proven true (see appendix C – list of current institutions).

Turnover in membership

A possible barrier to cooperative collection development is turnover in membership which is more common in loosely constructed consortia. Consortia which come together for the sole purchase of aggregated buying power may experience considerable turnover in membership which will inhibit projects which require a long-term commitment for success. A project such as OhioLINK's approval plan project is a multi-year project whose fruits will only be seen after many years. Certainly, there is a quick payoff for many libraries in the improved discount immediately available. But, the goals of the cooperative collection development portion will be seen only if libraries maintain their commitment over many years. As a centrally funded and state-mandated consortium, OhioLINK members have already established their long-term commitment to the overall project. The approval plan project is still vulnerable to a change in participants if the plan and vendor do not work as expected. However, early experience has seen only growth in participation rather than any withdrawal from the plan. And, the task force included an item in its timeline: Summer 1999, review current satisfaction with approval plan. This will enable the task force to identify any dissatisfaction early and attempt to remedy it as quickly as possible to avoid withdrawal from the project. The only other aspect of this issue which OhioLINK must deal with is the addition of new OhioLINK members on a regular basis. These libraries must be brought up to speed on the history of various projects, their goals, and the member agreements.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESS

It is almost impossible to talk about barriers to success without also talking about how those barriers were and can be overcome. However, in addition to the information in the previous section, the literature of cooperative collection development has articulated a number of characteristics of

success in cooperative collection development (CCD) projects. In particular, Patricia Dominguez and Luke Swindler identified seven major factors which promote successful CCD. [24]

Propitious Circumstances

This is defined as a need for library resources without adequate funds to acquire them. One of the founding principles of OhioLINK was CCD; the approval plan project was the logical extension of a consortium which had created solutions to identifying and delivering resources within the consortium and had taken an aggressive stance in acquiring electronic resources. With the several years worth of data about the consortium's ability to fill requests for material, there was a clear need to improve the statistics for material which could not be delivered and to decrease the ownership of too many multiple copies.

Visionary and Committed Individuals

From its earliest days, OhioLINK has enjoyed the sort of leadership any group would envy. The Ohio Board of Regents shepherded the project through its initial stages of funding with the Ohio Legislature. Individuals such as Don Tolliver and Greg Byerly (Kent State), William J. Studer (Ohio State) and now executive director, Tom Sanville, provided the vision and leadership in the early, most critical stages of the project. The core 18 institutions have invested heavily in the project both financially and through use of their staff resources. Decision making has been highly collaborative resulting in mutual dependence of the consortial offices and its member libraries. The approval project plan has been led by a series of committed individuals who were willing to commit their institutions to the project early, to work diligently to build consensus and support for the project

and eliminate barriers. In turn, the approval vendors contributed ideas and time to the initial phases

of the project. The project is now well served by the leadership and vision of the vendor ultimately

selected, Yankee Book Peddler, as we jointly develop the plan and the tools needed to advance the

goals of the project.

Supportive Organizational Structures

OhioLINK has a highly collaborative decision-making process through its standing

committees. This particular project was developed by a task force formed by the Cooperative

Information Resources Management Committee (CIRM) but also included participation from the

Database Management and Standards Committee (DMSC) which represented the technical services

aspects of the project. Through this collaboration the task force was able to consider and address

the goals of collection development in the context of the issues presented by the acquisitions

professionals. The vendors were also generous with their time and expertise. In the early stages of

the project, several vendors were invited to the OhioLINK offices for a brainstorming session. The

vendors spoke candidly and presented novel and agenda-stretching alternatives to consider. In

negotiating the initial contract with YBP, YBP was as anxious as OhioLINK to enter into a joint

development process which would initially deliver a standard approval plan to the participants but

would also develop a set of enhancements to the system which furthered its CCD goals.

Appropriate Staff Participation at the Operational Level

As always, the OhioLINK institutions were generous in the amount of time and energy their

individual librarians committed to participation on the task force, in focus groups, and in open

vendor sessions to help select the vendor. Once the plan was in full operation with at least the

original participating libraries, YBP and the task force (now renamed the Collection Building Task

Force to better reflect the full range of its goals) held a brainstorming session in May 1999 with

frontline selectors to determine ways in which the vendor's GOBI system could be enhanced to

provide them with the information needed to make better informed selection decisions. The project

is now at a critical stage of ensuring that the system performs in such a way that it supports the

primary agenda. All of the infrastructure issues have been addressed, now changes in individual

selector behavior must be encouraged for the goals of the project to ensue.

Bibliographic and Physical Accessibility to Collections

In 1997, Gay Dannelly (Assistant Director for Collections at Ohio State) was already seeing

changes in behavior: "Although the project is still very young, the influence of OhioLINK in the

local selection process is becoming clear. Large, expensive purchases are regularly reviewed at the

local institution with the holdings of the state in mind. Decisions to purchase such materials are

beginning to be made in concert with institutions who hold complementary or supplementary

collections. While this process is tentative at present, it is becoming more a part of the purchase

decisions process at many of the member institutions, and it is certainly part of the process at the

administrative level. The ability to see readily what other institutions hold certainly changes the

selection process, as does the ability to count on the actual provision of the materials to the patron

at a location remote from the owning library."[25]

The task force wanted to build on this obvious use (expensive purchases) where the extra

effort of looking at the central catalog was worth the potential dollars saved. From the earliest days, the OhioLINK central catalog has included on-order records to encourage cooperative collection development. However, for item by item book selection searching the central catalog was less effective and not convenient. Instead, the current project puts this information together in the vendor's database at an earlier point – either for shipment on approval or placement of the firm order. In addition, some libraries such as Ohio State are using the features of the YBP system to allow selectors to tag titles for order in YBP's system as a part of traditional selection rather than submitting order requests into the III system. The individual selector is allowed to search and construct reports in GOBI for review, select the title for purchase while also being able to see if the title had been shipped on approval as well as how the title had been ordered or treated on approval for all participating OhioLINK libraries (Appendix D shows the display in GOBI which facilitates review of the receipt of titles within the consortium). At some stage, the task force hopes to select a threshold of orders which would serve as an alert. For example, if an individual selector tagged a title for order and that was the fifth title tagged for purchase (or sent on approval), an alert would be displayed for the selector indicating that information. Selectors would be educated about the goals of CCD so that in these circumstances they could reconsider whether they should actually purchase the fifth copy or decide to rely on the other copies in the state. During the RFP process and the vendor open sessions, one bidder, Academic Book Center, suggested one strategy for reinforcing or rewarding such behavior. In the Bonus Program suggested by Academic Book Center, each library would deposit a portion of its book buying funds in a central pool. If a library purchased a copy of a book which surpassed the OhioLINK pre-defined threshold, they would accumulate points. On a regular basis the central pool of funds would be distributed to individual libraries with those

libraries with the fewest points receiving the most funds. Libraries would be able to purchase whatever they saw fit but libraries that bought fewer additional copies would receive extra money to broaden their collections.[26] Again, Gay Dannelly, has articulated the importance of this aspect of the project: "The most important enabling factor, however, is to convince the selectors and the faculty that academic institutions must recognize mutual dependence as a normal part of the academic process and a survival mechanism in the shrinking higher education economy. In addition, the library reward system should recognize and provide incentives to selectors who participate in cooperative projects at the behest of their libraries." [27]

Outside Funding

In this particular case, outside funding is not a compelling factor since the libraries will continue to use the funds they have always devoted to approval plans and firm orders. However, for libraries where the new discount is a considerable improvement, their buying power has been enhanced. OhioLINK has also used its central funding to overcome barriers for individual libraries. Where III approval loaders were needed to move bibliographic records and orders from GOBI to the local system to improve participation in the system, OhioLINK has funded those purchases. Should OhioLINK adopt some incentive program the funding for that could come either from the central system or through a cost-sharing among the participants.

History of Successful Cooperation

Cooperation in Ohio dates back many, many years including the initial founding of the **OHIO** College Library Center (now OCLC) by Ohio public and private libraries. OhioLINK has

resolved problems which on the surface seem simple but which can become deal-breakers. For

example, the approval contract is signed and administered at the OhioLINK level; however, the

actual payment of invoices for approval shipments will be made by the individual accounting offices

on the individual campuses. Early in its development, OhioLINK recognized this potential problem

and worked with the individual campuses to determine how best to handle these central contracts.

Today, contracts signed by OhioLINK on behalf of all libraries are recognized by the purchasing

bodies on each campus.

Other Success Factors

Two additional success factors were articulated by Pat Iannuzzi at a 1997 program on

consortial licensing of digital resources at the ALA Annual Conference: marketplace clout and the

willingness to say "No" to a bad deal. Although mentioned by Iannuzzi in the context of consortial

licensing for digital resources, these were certainly factors in the success of the OhioLINK approval

plan project. In particular, the consortium recognized that it had the marketplace clout to make this

a viable proposition for a vendor even though there were no economies of scale in the initial design

of the project. This clout ensures OhioLINK of the opportunity to influence the development of the

vendor's database system to facilitate the project. Consortia are a hot ticket in the marketplace at

the moment particularly for digital resources. All of the vendors involved in this project recognized

that the future might hold consortial deals for print materials as well. OhioLINK's reputation as a

risk-taking consortium led the vendors to believe that whatever OhioLINK was investigating might

well be the harbinger of the future.

The second factor – the willingness to say "No" to a bad deal – is another hallmark of the

way OhioLINK does business. At the same time that the approval idea was being investigated, a second task force was investigating the viablity of bidding for a central serials vendor. In contrast, that task force found few reasons to proceed with that agenda and many reasons to abandon it at this time. Once again, OhioLINK institutions made an objective analysis of two ideas and were willing to proceed with one while recognizing the limitations of another.

CHANGES IN PHILOSOPHY

Finally, both Downs and Branscomb and Dominguez and Swindler concur that one major success factor is restricting cooperation to material needed for graduate and research activities.[2829] This may be one area where the OhioLINK project flies in the face of traditional cooperative collection development models. Instead this model focuses on making more judicious choices of all materials purchased focusing particularly on English language, recent imprints, often used by undergraduates. As monograph budgets have shrunk, libraries have maintained their commitment to approval plans which bring in the mainstream material. In this environment, statistics reveal that collections have become more homogeneous. The OhioLINK project by design strives to make collections more heterogeneous. Again, it is the success of the delivery mechanism which may support this change in philosophy.

Shreeves confirms that "there is, however, widespread belief that cooperation in building collections can significantly improve the quality of library service by broadening and deepening the range of materials collectively available. Libraries–so the argument goes–can increase the portion of the information universe maintained within the national (or state or regional) collection through a planned and conscious division of labor in building collections. Thereby, users will have access

to a collectively richer whole than if that collection had been developed purely in response to local imperatives. ... A fairly standard model for cooperative collection development in the print environment divides the information universe into 'core' and 'peripheral' materials. A research library has a responsibility to maintain on-site a 'core' collection that serves immediate needs, especially those of its undergraduates. At the same time it will develop collections of 'peripheral' material in selected areas that respond to local priorities but also serve consortial needs. This collection, in turn, is backed up by the collections of consortial partners built through distributed responsibility for peripheral materials in complementary fields. Defining what 'core' and 'peripheral' really mean has always been one of the stumbling blocks to successful cooperative projects." Again, the OhioLINK Project flies in the face of this traditional model. These stumbling blocks have been eliminated by jumping forward to skip the process of defining who will collect what, to identifying, instead, what has been missed completely and purchase that material. OhioLINK has not yet taken the step to deal with the issue of purchasing the missing material, but it is easy to imagine that as the next potential step in the process particularly where central funding might be used for that purpose.

ACHIEVABLE BENEFITS AND CURRENT STATUS

As mentioned earlier, the OhioLINK Approval Plan Project is now at the threshold of success; the infrastructure is in place or developing quickly to support true cooperative collection development for print materials. What achievable benefits can be expected?

Development agenda with YBP

At the point YBP was selected as the vendor for the OhioLINK Project, they had already developed a series of reports designed to evaluate consortial book purchases. In one series of reports, a consortium can compare the coverage their approval plans by specific publishers and LC sub-class. For example, one report — approval presses with book coverage for at least one plan — lists a series of publishers/imprints and how that publisher is treated by each library in the consortium, whether they are receiving books, slips or nothing for titles from that publisher.   A similar report can be constructed based on LC sub-class or series treatment to identify areas of significant overlap as well as underrepresented areas. OhioLINK expected to be able to take this type of report and compare it to LC sub-class reports sorted by library and imprint year generated from the central catalog to determine areas of weakness.

YBP also had a report which they call a supra profile which was developed to help a consortium evaluate its goals. For example, if the consortium had a goal among its libraries to collect at least 70 percent of the English-language books distributed in the U.S., this report would help determine whether the goal had been met.   The profile shows the percentage covered by individual libraries within the consortium and then by the consortium as a whole. The combined profile takes into account the overlap so that you can determine whether as a group you have reached such a goal as collecting 70 percent within a subject. Ideally, the goal would be met by the consortium but would not be possible by any single library alone. By engaging in an joint development agenda with YBP, OhioLINK expects to develop a system which will result in reducing the level of current duplication within the consortium and to also collect that material not currently being made available.

Profile Comparisons

Blackwell Book Services' Collection Manager System has a well developed component which will permit individual selectors to compare their profiles to others on the system. OhioLINK would like to see features such as this developed within the GOBI system so that individual selectors could compare their profiles with colleagues working in the same subject fields in OhioLINK. At a higher administrative level, all of the profiles in a particular discipline could be compared by the collection development officers and their subject specialists to see if entire areas within a subject were being excluded by everyone participating in the project.

Enhancement of Approval Slips with OhioLINK Information

It was clear in the focus groups conducted that individual selectors continue to make active use of the printed notification slips provided by approval vendors. Because of the chronic understaffing of most libraries, it is not uncommon for much collection development work to be done at home in front of the TV with a stack of notification slips. Recognizing the reality of this approach to collection development, the approval project moved a step beyond having the information about what colleagues were doing available only in the online system. The YBP notification slips, as well as the slips which appear in shipped approval books, have been enhanced to include information about treatment of titles for OhioLINK libraries. Each slip now includes a notation such as OL: 1/5. This note indicates that at the point the slip was printed, 1 OhioLINK library would be receiving this book on approval and 5 would receive slips. Although there was no room on the slip to add the symbols for the libraries, this information is intended to provide an alert to the selector that they might want to check the system for further information if the number of

copies known to be going to OhioLINK libraries might affect their decision to purchase. Some smaller institutions also saw a use for this information on the slip because the slips are sent to faculty members for input on selection decisions.

CONSORTIA-SPECIFIC ISSUES

There are also a few issues related to this type of cooperation which may be specific to consortia such as OhioLINK.

Impact on the vendor

Is this a viable economic model for a vendor? Daniel Halloran, President of Academic Book Center, speculates that the model is viable only because of the promise of a certain volume of business for a period of time. "Consortia participants are unlikely to reduce their total number of book purchases (good news), but there are no operational economies of scale for the book vendor when he enters into a contract with a consortium (bad news). He still must work with each library individually to bill and ship materials. So, for the book vendor, the attraction of a consortial contract may be the assurance of volume business over some period of time. For the consortium, it's the expectation of standardized discounts (at the most favorable rate) for all members, as well as shared access to purchase information." [30]

Uniqueness of OhioLINK

Halloran goes on to speculate on the uniqueness of the OhioLINK consortium as a critical factor: "The OhioLINK statewide approval plan, awarded to YBP, was the first consortia contract

to address resources sharing and cooperative buying of books. However, the OhioLINK contract may be unique because OhioLINK is unique. The consortium shares a common integrated library system, has a sophisticated interlibrary lending infrastructure, and represents a highly diverse group of libraries. The OhioLINK contract is in its initial stages. We'll all be watching as it develops and we await its success or failure with interest. In the meantime, we know that other consortia are beginning to look closely at their relationships with book vendors."[31] Indeed, it is impossible to know at this stage whether the unique aspects of the OhioLINK consortium make this a viable model only for OhioLINK or whether the model can be extended to other consortia with different structures. Although Halloran clearly expresses some skepticism, John Berry paints a more glowing assessment of Ohio's libraries in an editorial titled "A Glimpse of the Future in Ohio."

"I saw the future in Ohio. It was only a glimpse, and it left plenty of room for many other new models and styles. Still, if you want to watch academic and public librarians hard at work creating the library of the future, be sure to take a close look at Ohio."

Berry goes on to talk about a variety of things including how public libraries are funded in Ohio, a joint branch of the Columbus Metropolitan Library and the Worthington Public Library, OPLIN (the consortium for the public libraries in Ohio modeled on OhioLINK), and OhioLINK's licensing contract for Elsevier titles.

"Sure, there are potential problems with all of these amazing innovations, but that's why we invented terms like 'risk-taker.' Rather than wait for the future to be imposed upon them, Ohio's librarians have boldly ventured out to create that

future."[32]

Survival of the Print Environment

It has certainly been suggested that cooperative collection development projects might not be worth doing because the print environment may not survive long enough to make them worthwhile. Shreeves likens this argument to that "sometimes made by campus planners that new library buildings will never again be necessary because of the shift to digital resources."[33] Again, the OhioLINK Approval Plan Project takes a broader brush stroke of attempting to limit excessive duplicate copies and to focus on purchasing items previously unavailable in any library. In this environment less effort would be involved to advance this agenda over earlier more labor intensive collection development approaches. In addition, OhioLINK has already agreed to test the netLibrary product for the supply of scholarly electronic books to libraries. "This service allows library patrons to search e-books online, view their full-text content, and check them out by downloading them to PCs using netLibrary client software it distributes at no charge."[34] The Collection Building Task Force has already been asked to consider how this product might interface with its goals and plans for the consortial approval plan.

SUMMARY

In an article about OhioLINK, David Kohl notes that "the nature of today's cooperation is a much more highly integrated operation where key central functions of the cooperating libraries are linked. The result is a blurring of the independent self-contained nature of the individual libraries, as individual institutions are transformed into distinctive elements of a superlibrary information

mosaic."[35] The OhioLINK approval plan project takes the consortium one step closer to this superlibrary concept.

In conclusion, Mary Moore ends her article on Washington State's cooperative collection development project with this insightful injunction to all librarians engaged in such endeavors:

"We know that it is not possession of materials that matters, but rather access to materials that is important. We know that sharing of what we do have is vital to our present and future success. We know that the average information customer doesn't care where the information comes from just as long as it is easy and convenient to get. When are we going to make that great paradigm shift that will allow us to start acting upon that which we profess to know?"[36]

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