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Review of *Library Consortia: Models for Collaboration and Sustainability*

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Horton, Valerie, and Greg Pronevitz, eds. *Library Consortia: Models for Collaboration and Sustainability*. American Library Association, 2014. 202 p.

Library consortia in the United States have weathered and adapted to tremendous shifts in the face of serious financial challenges in the past decade. After an explosion of initial growth in the sixties and seventies, consortia experienced routine cycles of growth and retrenchment based on the changing landscape of library services as well of the economic realities facing non-profit and publicly funded organizations. The Great Recession beginning in 2007 was disastrous for many consortia, leading 65 consortia to close or merge. The economic challenges also created opportunities, leading to increases in membership for some consortia, and greater efficiencies realized through mergers or the innovation required to effectively meet member needs.

Valerie Horton, Director of Minitex, and Greg Pronevitz, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Library System, have tapped their own wealth of experience and expertise in consortial leadership in assembling this volume, as well as the experiences of consortia leaders across the United States. Their timely examination, based in large part on a 2012 survey of 66 United States consortia in the period following the Great Recession, makes the case for the viability of library consortia in carrying libraries through their own financially challenging circumstances by the significant economies of scale they offer. While major shifts and stresses continue, this book provides compelling evidence of solidification and innovation in consortial services over the past several years.

The text is evenly split between chapters summarizing various components of consortium activities of interest to students and new library or consortium staff, and sixteen case studies of widely varying projects of terrific value to both new and seasoned consortia staff and leaders. Aiming to provide a snapshot of the services and activities involved in operating a library consortium today, as well as offering ideas and inspiration to those currently working in consortia, this slim volume covers significant ground.

The first six chapters provide a comprehensive introduction to the services offered by consortia and the realities of operating a consortium, incorporating a perspective on general trends and issues in library services that directly impact consortia. The first two chapters describe the history and current landscape of over 200 library consortia in the United States, revealing a vast spread of size (from two to 4,250 members) and services offered. Most common services are training, shared digital content, group purchasing, and physical delivery, with other services including consulting, shared ILS platforms, cooperative collection development, digital repositories, mediated interlibrary loan, and document delivery. Pronevitz notes that two key priorities of consortia are local needs and efficiency, and observes a trend of multi-consortia collaborations rising in order to ensure maximum value when carefully administered, giving consortia even greater efficiencies of scale and purchasing power.

In the third chapter, Horton describes the many facets of consortial leadership, including governance and legal status, finances and budgeting, human resources, planning and assessment, advocacy and public relations, and communica-

tion. While consortial leadership strongly resembles library leadership, there are aspects that add complexity, and Horton argues that the hard economic times have been a growth opportunity for consortia managers, presenting considerable challenges to creatively overcome.

The following three chapters provide high-level overviews of consortia services, taking deeper dives into discovery, e-content delivery, and resource sharing, as well as physical delivery – enlisting Lori Bowen Ayre for her expertise in the latter. They construct a big picture of the ways consortia operate in the changing landscape of library content, considering the spectrum of discovery to delivery, viewed through the timely lens of digital content and resource sharing, and including the limitations imposed by various stakeholders and the challenges of authentication. These topics are multi-faceted and constantly shifting, and their respective chapters skim the surface of the many issues.

A key element of this book's value is in the sixteen case studies presenting innovative and timely projects in consortia throughout the United States. The case studies range from common consortia services like multistate delivery, shared catalogs, online instruction, and digital content, to shared human resources and personnel initiatives, and open content textbooks. Standout case studies include Ann Okerson's treatise on "wide deals" for e-resources, the Open SUNY Textbook Program, and 2CUL – Cornell and Columbia's efforts in research library shared staffing and cooperative collection development.

The book concludes with two brief essays from Horton and Pronevitz, imparting lessons learned from their combined decades of experience, and forward-thinking wisdom for consortial leadership in today's reality. They offer insights on leadership, mergers, staffing, and openness to collaboration, innovation, and risk-

taking. The historical tenacity of library consortia, and the many creative projects that successfully meet a wide range of member needs, speak to the sustaining value of the collaborative relationships they represent. Consortial leadership is hard work on a constantly shifting foundation, but Horton and Pronevitz's exploration of the subtleties and potential of library cooperation, with active commitment from all parties, makes a strong case for the ongoing value of consortia.