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# Public Library Collaborative Collection Development for Print Resources

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## Peer Reviewed Article

### Public Library Collaborative Collection Development for Print Resources

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*by Rebecca Nous and Matthew Roslund*

**A**bstract: This paper will explore collaborative collection development in public libraries for print monographs. It will present an argument for collaborative collection development (CCD) programs, and describe successful existing CCD programs. It will also explain how these programs can be used as a model for a CCD project involving public libraries in the Capital District of upstate New York utilizing the existing services provided by the Capital District Library Council (CDLC).

#### **Introduction:**

None of the three public library systems in CDLC (the Upper Hudson Library System, the Mohawk Valley Library System, and the South Adirondack Library System) currently coordinate a collaborative collection development program for print resources, although libraries within the systems do collaborate for purchasing downloadable audiobooks and databases. Partially because they are easier to share, public library CCD programs for non-print resources are common and well documented. The physical nature of print monographs – the fact that they can only be in one library at a time – complicates efforts to establish programs to purchase them collaboratively, and examples of libraries that do so are scarce.

EBooks can theoretically be in more than one library at a time; however, even though the number of books available electronically is rising, publishers are still acclimating themselves to the digital environment, and battles over standards and proprietary formats need to be fought before e-books gain wider acceptance (Thomas 2007; Pace 2005). The limited number of titles, combined with the public's current level of comfort with e-reader technology, should be enough to ensure that the physical circulation of print monographs will continue to be an important function of public libraries into the foreseeable future.

In spite of the difficulties of implementation a case can and has been made for CCD programs with books. First, the provision of books to patrons is limited by cost and the expense of a book goes beyond

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its cover price; books must be cataloged and processed, and they take up valuable shelf space. These expenses, when considered in light of the fact that a number of the books a library purchases “based on reviews or perceived needs” will circulate very little, if at all (Perdue and Van Fleet 1999, 24) highlight the need to make monograph purchasing decisions thoughtfully. At some point it is more efficient for libraries to share lesser used titles through the system's ILL service. Collaborative collection development would seem to be an obvious method of avoiding significant costs associated with purchasing and storing seldom used materials. Because of implementation difficulties, however, CCD has failed to catch on in public libraries.

We will focus on CCD with print monographs in this article, but those libraries that need to focus on building collections with audio/visual or other types of materials can benefit from collaboration as well. While more recent and popular items will be in high demand and should be the responsibility of individual libraries, documentaries and educational materials of interest to the library's community are ideal candidates for CCD. The first step, as with print, is to identify areas of overlapping interest and gradually build partnerships and ultimately long-term collaborative networks.

### **Rationale for CCD**

Collaborating to develop print monograph collections has been a common practice in academic and research libraries for many years (Hoffert 2006, 38). The reasons for this are partly practical and partly based on the criteria used to evaluate the quality of a library and its collection. CCD is almost a necessity in academic libraries, which require a wide range of research materials across many different subjects, making it difficult for individual libraries to collect with much depth in any one subject. Public librarians tend to see their collections as specially created to fit the the unique community their library serves, and question the value of a program that will ask them to spend money on materials that may go to patrons of other libraries. In fact, collaborating to build print collections does not require spending more money on books, rather, it is a method of using the existing budget more wisely. It is also the case that “most public librarians have a lot of trouble imagining other systems shopping around for their books” (Hoffert 2006, 39). Fears that a CCD program will lead to a loss of control over purchasing decisions and create expenses for materials that will be unjustifiable to the local community are the major barriers we identified in our research and discussions with library directors. We hope to show that these are misperceptions, and that collaborative collection development can be a way for public libraries to save money and offer an increased variety of materials to their patrons.

### ***Budget Challenges***

As public libraries remain responsible for satisfying their users' needs with both electronic and print resources, the impact of stagnant funding or budget cuts make it more difficult to continue serving patrons. To satisfy the needs of patrons, public libraries have gone beyond providing access to traditional resources such as books, magazines, and DVDs to e-resources, computers, and the Internet as well (Bourke 2007). Public libraries are in the position of trying to provide an increasing variety of resources to patrons while receiving less money to do so. New York State's proposed 2009-2010 Executive Budget included a marked \$13 million, or nearly 14%, reduction in funding to support libraries (Paterson 2008, 53). Governor Paterson (2008) cited the state's great “economic and fiscal challenges” as necessitating these hefty funding cuts, demonstrating the vulnerability of libraries to the economic conditions existing within the state (Paterson 2008, 1). With essential state funding becoming increasingly vulnerable during difficult economic times, the need to find increased efficiencies in the materials and services public libraries provide, including within collection development, becomes even

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more important.

### *Collection Diversity*

Wolfe and Bloss (1998) argue that library collections are becoming more and more homogeneous because of budget constraints and the misguided belief that a single library's collection could sufficiently serve all of its patrons needs, with only an occasional need for interlibrary loan. With the increasing costs of acquisitions, libraries are spending more and more of their budget on the same core titles, which leaves them with fewer resources to devote toward developing a diverse collection. Burgett, Haar, and Phillips (2004) also note that “similar libraries tend to develop similar collections” because they are serving similar user populations (Burgett, Haar, and Phillips 2004, 44). Cooperative collection development helps to reduce this homogeneity by providing the framework for libraries to reduce duplication in their collections and focus on acquiring unique materials, thereby enhancing all collections in the cooperative (Burgett, Haar, & Phillips 2004).

### *Increased Efficiency*

Collaborative collection development can help libraries improve their financial efficiency. Because CCD allows libraries to focus a larger portion of their materials budget on acquiring unique materials and less of their budgets on unnecessarily duplicating other libraries' holdings, CCD moves the library toward optimizing its financial resources (Burgett, Haar, & Phillips 2004). Though libraries are allocating their funds more efficiently, this does not mean that “expenditures are reduced, only that they are realigned or redirected within a larger context” (Burgett, Haar, & Phillips 2004, 43). The same applies to each library's human resources such as subject specialists and catalogers as well.

### **Consortia**

Opportunities to collaborate abound in the library world. As budgets are cut and demand for new materials increases, it is natural for libraries to organize in order to gain negotiating power with vendors and pool expertise and resources. In fact, it is possible that library consortia have proliferated to the extent that they are beginning to compete with one another and create a “consortium conundrum” for librarians who wish to collaborate but are unsure which group can get them the best deals (Carlson 2003, 30). Librarians should be aware of the risks, sacrifices, and annoyances involved in entering into a consortial agreement: consortia make decisions slowly, require a serious time commitment on the part of library staff, are prone to falling apart before they accomplish anything, and require a certain sacrifice of library autonomy (Peters 2003, 111; Williams 2000, 13).

Much of the value of these consortia comes from their ability to obtain a “big deal” on an electronic database that is of equal value to the members of the group, since it can be accessed by any of them at any time. Sharing print resources works differently, however, because it requires “member libraries to relinquish the convenience of locating all these print items in their own collections in exchange for participating in an effort to broaden the group’s aggregate collecting strength” (Burgett, Haar, & Phillips 2004, 24). There is also considerably more risk, since if a member library loses a volume or drops out of the consortium, the entire group’s collection suffers a loss.

When libraries acquire print materials on behalf of a group, however, they eliminate *unnecessary* duplication, freeing up funds to purchase different materials that will increase the variety and depth of the group’s collection. Not all duplication is unnecessary; duplication of frequently-used core materials is both necessary and desirable as such books are already fully utilized. However, as frequency of use decreases, the possibility of reducing cost and increasing use by sharing increases (Kairis 2003).

Collaborative collection with print resources does require some degree of trust, organization, and acceptance of risk, which is perhaps why it is somewhat rarer. The successful examples of print CCD

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programs below, however, show that in appropriate situations the benefits can outweigh the risks.

### Models for Collaboration

#### *Subject-Specific CCD in Ohio: SWORCS*

The Southwestern Ohio Religious Cooperative (SWORCS) is a group of OHIOLink member libraries who collaborate to collect monographs in non-Judeo-Christian religions. From the beginning, one of the intentions of SWORCS was to serve as a model for statewide CCD (Jenkins 2004, 30). In 2002, Paul Jenkins began contacting libraries about the project with only the broad vision of a statewide religious CCD plan in mind. The libraries, five at first, mostly from colleges with Catholic affiliations, agreed to collect outside of the Judeo-Christian religions, since “cooperative collection development in any discipline will succeed only in areas peripheral to the core” (Jenkins 2004, 30).

The SWORCS libraries agreed to begin their collaboration slowly. Jenkins writes, “The fact that we could agree on general philosophy and ‘big picture’ decisions ensured that we did not get bogged down too early in the process by its details” (Jenkins 2004, 32). They did not write their mission statement until their fourth meeting, and purchases would not begin until the 2004-2005 fiscal year.

Each library was assigned a religion in which it would make purchases. Yankee Book Peddler’s Gobi2 software, which allowed the libraries to see the holdings and upcoming purchases of other OhioLINK libraries, was used to make purchasing decisions that would reduce duplicate titles. To help make purchasing decisions, OhioLINK shared its information about patron requests for religious monographs that went unfilled because no library in the consortium owned them.

This combination of bibliographic access (from the vendor’s Gobi2 software), cooperation from the “main consortium,” (in the form of OHIOLink’s circulation data and interlibrary loan system), a source of funding (in SWORCS’ case, a financial commitment from the member libraries), and a willingness to start slowly are the common factors in successful CCD projects.

#### *Statewide CCD in Illinois*

In projects where the subject is not so narrowly defined, a further step of collection assessment may be needed. In the early stages of the statewide Illinois Collaborative Collection Management (CCM) project, quantitative and qualitative assessments were conducted in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the region’s holdings (Shales 1996, 50). Once this step had been completed, the Cooperative Collection Management Coordinating Committee (CCMCC) began to award grants to allow libraries to make purchases for the CCM program. The money for these grants came from, among other institutions, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois State Library, and the member libraries.

In 2005 the CCM libraries joined with the Illinois Digital Academic Library and the Illinois Library Computer Systems Organization to form the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI). CARLI now has 153 member libraries, and coordinates and funds a number of collaborative collection projects, many dealing with environmental issues (CARLI web site n/d).

The preliminary assessments and the grants, when combined with the bibliographic access provided by ILLINET Online (Illinois’ statewide union catalog) and ILDS (the statewide delivery service) create a complete and successful statewide CCD program that includes and benefits large academic and small public libraries (Shales 1996, 52).

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### *State-Mandated CCD in Minnesota*

The decision to collaborate is not always initiated by librarians. A 1998 bill passed by the Minnesota State Legislature awarded \$3 million to libraries in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU) System with the stipulation that the money be used for cooperative purchasing. Fearing a loss of autonomy in purchasing decisions and the extra work imposed by a collaborative collection program, some of the schools were hesitant about participating at first (Richards 2002, 81).

The written plan that followed made it clear that the state universities, with their larger staffs and budgets, would undertake a larger part of the workload. Smaller schools would play a smaller role, but would still benefit from full access to the new materials, since all materials purchased with the new money would be made available for interlibrary loan. Under the plan, print monographs of interest to researchers in the region would constitute the focus of the new materials, although a loophole was included to allow libraries to use some of the money for library equipment.

To prevent libraries from diminishing their budgets for core materials and attempting to fill in the gap with the new funds, the plan included a “maintenance of effort” statement that placed responsibility for core materials with the individual campuses. In other words, libraries were to use the money for *supplemental* materials that would build the statewide collection. A mandatory annual assessment, prepared by each library, would reveal their adherence to this part of the plan.

The plan was carefully written, and with many of the fears assuaged and stumbling blocks removed, MNSCU librarians began to see that CCD would actually benefit all libraries in the system, and that “it really did seem that libraries would not have to give up anything essential in order to achieve the benefits of collaboration” (Richards 2002, 83).

Over time the guidelines for the use of the funds became more flexible, allowing libraries to use the funds to purchase electronic resources and serials. Interestingly, the state-mandated collaboration, originally opposed by some, led to increased communication and cooperation among Minnesota librarians, extending into areas beyond collection development such as virtual reference and information literacy (Richards 2002, 87).

### *A Local Example: Crandall Public Library and Glens Falls Hospital Library*

When the librarian at the Crandall Public Library in Glens Falls wanted to begin a consumer health education collection, she approached the librarian at the Glens Falls Hospital about collaborating to broaden their collections and reduce duplication. The collaboration was informal and consisted of frequent conversations in which the two librarians discussed their needs and upcoming purchases. The hospital library was able to devote more of its funds to professional-level resources, and direct inquiries and requests for consumer-level materials to Crandall.

This style of collaborative collection may appeal to librarians who are hesitant about joining CCD consortia: there is no bureaucracy involved, no scheduled meetings, and not a great deal of additional work involved. All that is needed are two library directors with the same goals who help each other to build better collections, and save time and money in the process.

However, such two-person partnerships can be fragile. When the director at Crandall moved to another job, the collaboration, which had involved several telephone calls each day under the old director, was reduced to several per year. The value of the collaboration was not lost, since the two libraries continue to share materials and assist one another, but the two collections will continue to grow independently

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and become less complementary over time.

A more formal and organized system would help to keep a CCD program alive through the changes in personnel and funding that are inevitable in all libraries, but such systems do not spring up overnight. Small-scale, informal cooperation is perhaps the best way to build support and enthusiasm for collaborative collection development until more public librarians recognize the value and results CCD can deliver.

### *Capital District Library Council*

The Capital District Library Council (CDLC) is an upstate New York Reference and Research Library Resources System supporting the ten counties of the Capital District. Their mission is to “promote and facilitate improved reference and research library resource services to the region through cooperation among member libraries and administration of funds allocated by the state and other organizations”. In accordance with this mission, CDLC supports a variety of programs and services available to members, including a Coordinated Collection Development program available to public and not-for-profit colleges, universities, and community colleges. Through the facilitation of this CCD program, CDLC already has the fundamental features of successful, sustained cooperative collection development between other types of libraries in place.

Sustained cooperative collection development requires a strong framework to facilitate acquisition of and access to materials by participants and CDLC provides this. Burgett, Haar, and Phillips (2004) identify several core components of any successful CCD program, including: leadership, integrated bibliographic access, expedited document delivery, and participants' willingness to devote their resources to the cooperative mission.

### *Leadership*

The Coordinated Collection Development Committee (CCDC), a ten-member advisory committee to the CDLC Board of Trustees, is responsible for “develop[ing], implement[ing] and evaluat[ing] plans and other activities for Coordinated Collection Development within the Capital District Region” (CDLC). The CCDC has developed guidelines for resource sharing and worked with member academic libraries to coordinate acquisitions. With this framework in place for academic libraries and with the experience of participants in their CCDC and CCD program, there would be a strong support system for public libraries interested in pursuing the same type of cooperative collection development agreement.

CCDC is part of CDLC's broader Committee on Resource Sharing (CORS), which is responsible for advising CDLC on its numerous resource sharing programs, including Interlibrary Loan Protocol, the Regional Union Catalog (CaDiLaC Online), the Union List of Serials, and the Direct Access Program (DAP). Unlike CCDC, which consists solely of academic libraries, CORS members include academic libraries, public libraries, public school library systems, and several special libraries. Public libraries are already serving in a leadership position with regards to resource sharing, an asset if they are to consider their own collaborative collection development project.

### *Integrated Bibliographic Access*

CDLC provides online access to its regional union catalog, Capital District Library Access Catalog, referred to as CaDiLaC Online. Through this catalog, users can search more than 25 lending

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institutions, including college and university libraries, public library systems, public school library systems and BOCES, and New York State special libraries. CaDiLaC facilitates easy access to participating libraries' monograph holdings, an essential component of any CCD program. CDLC also supports a Union List of Serials, providing users with holdings information for more than 36,000 titles. Access to the Union List of Serials is provided through CaDiLaC and also through OCLC, making searching for holdings information easy for users, an integral part of successful cooperative collection development.

### *Expedited Document Delivery*

All CDLC member institutions agree to freely share their holdings with other members. To facilitate the sharing of resources, CDLC has a sophisticated, clearly defined interlibrary loan protocol and offers an optional professional courier service to members specifically for sharing resources through interlibrary loan. Institutions may choose to receive the courier service anywhere between once and five times per week, ensuring timely delivery of requested resources. In addition to interlibrary loan, CDLC offers the Direct Access Program (DAP), which allows patrons of member institutions to go directly to other member libraries and borrow items themselves with a special library card. Unlike ILL, this gives users immediate access to the resources of other libraries, though it does require that they be willing and able to travel. With interlibrary loan and DAP, CDLC members are able to easily obtain resources from other CDLC member libraries in the method that best suits their needs and as quickly as they are needed.

### *Funding*

CDLC's academic libraries receive "Coordinated Collection Development Aid" under section 90.15 of NYCRR section 8. The guidelines for the program state that materials purchased with coordinated collection development aid funds must be made available for interlibrary loan, and that duplication of materials is acceptable to meet local needs. Applications for the funding are submitted annually, and must include evidence that the previous year's funds were spent on materials for library materials that are to be shared through the CCD program.

### **Discussion**

CDLC already has a strong collaborative collection development program for academic libraries. The structural framework is in place: the interlibrary loan protocol, the courier system, the regional union catalog, and the union catalog of serials are all currently operating to support CCD for academic libraries, making it feasible for public libraries to use the same framework. In addition, the intellectual resources needed to create an effective collaborative collection development program are readily available to public libraries. Not only are representatives from public libraries currently serving on the Committee on Resource Sharing, but their colleagues are participating in an existing CCD agreement, giving them the knowledge base necessary to create a program that meets their needs and the needs of their patrons.

Library directors who are curious about the benefits of CCD but are unwilling to commit to a formal agreement might consider the very small step of increasingly using the tools provided by CDLC. With a union catalog in place and an ILL system available, libraries can engage in a kind of "informal CCD," in which no contact or communication of any kind between libraries is necessary. When considering a title for purchase, a librarian can check CaDiLaC for CDLC holdings. If the book is already in the system in sufficient numbers, the librarian may decide not to purchase the title and obtain it through ILL if needed, thereby reduce unnecessary duplication. This system has met with success at John



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Carroll University's library in Ohio, where titles requested for purchase by faculty are checked in OhioLINK's union catalog. If there are more than eight already in the system, the faculty member will need an exemption to get the library to purchase the book (Connell 2008, 22).

This is already a common practice in some CDLC public libraries, which already have strengths in different areas because of differences in the communities they serve. To serve patron demand, the Albany Public Library's main branch and the Schenectady Public Library both have a large collection of urban fiction, and several Adirondack libraries collect materials relating to Adirondack history. The Sand Lake Public Library has a large children's braille collection because of a fund-raising campaign by the mother of a blind child in that community. Librarians in the network generally know which libraries have such special collections, and tend to check the shared catalog before making purchases. Librarians who do this frequently may identify other libraries with which they can establish a more formal collection development relationship, similar to the one between the two libraries in Glens Falls mentioned above.

This system works to an extent, but the knowledge of which libraries collect in which areas is not collected in a central location. With a little bit of effort, public libraries who wish to have their special collections recognized could post information about them online. Not only would this make other librarians in the system aware of the collections, it would provide a gentle incentive for those libraries to continue purchasing titles in their acknowledged "specialties." A look at the CDLC web site shows that the academic libraries in the CCD program have their collecting responsibilities divided up by areas which have special relevance to the schools they serve (Albany Law School collects US and international law materials, and RPI collects in architecture, for example.)

One library's core is another's special collection – these libraries spend money on their collections not out of a desire to expand the holdings of the CDLC network or because they are "told to" by a CCD board, but because they want to meet the demands of their communities. There is no threat to autonomy when a library chooses its own area of special collection, and the librarian's duty to her patrons is not compromised. Considering the independent nature of public librarians, this may be an ideal first step towards building acceptance for public library CCD programs and overcoming directors' fears about losing control by entering into collection development partnerships.

### Conclusion

Although electronic resources are increasingly accessible and popular, it remains true that "money spent for books yields a capital asset in a community" (Parker 1991 as cited in Van Fleet 1999, 20). Libraries are struggling to keep their budgets balanced while maintaining a consistent level of service to patrons, and eliminating the needless duplication of book purchases is one way for libraries to spend their money wisely and add value to the larger collection. An unwillingness to sacrifice immediate access to a title for a larger overall collection is a major barrier to public libraries' involvement in collaborating with each other. Fortunately, a shift in attitudes about ownership is one of the main effects reported by successful CCD programs. Illinois librarians knew they were ready for formal collaboration when "libraries were able to think beyond serving a specified clientele and 'owning' certain books" (Shlaes 1996, 50). While libraries may begin special collections to serve their own patrons, the notion of what exactly constitutes a public library's "community" must continue to expand beyond its traditional boundaries. No library can hope to have an all-encompassing collection, even in an area it considers essential, so the "emphasis [must] shift from the number of core titles in the collection to the number of unique titles that a library brings to a consortium" (Connell 2008, 27). It is

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important to restate that this consortial attitude need not threaten the librarian's responsibility to her own local patrons. A library that chooses to collaborate can and *must* “preserve sufficient wiggle room to meet its institutional commitments and/or develop programs specifically to meet local needs” (Williams 2000, 25).

Taking small steps is important in any large undertaking, and the examples we have found suggest a “road map” to increasing collaborative collection development in the region. Increasingly, libraries should check titles they intend to purchase against the holdings in CaDiLaC. If a book is already owned by other CDLC libraries and is not one that is absolutely necessary to hold locally, the library could obtain the book through ILL and spend its money on another title. Through this process, librarians could identify other libraries with similar or overlapping interests, and a library-to-library cooperation like the one in Glens Falls could be established. If this method of collaboration becomes popular, an organization like CDLC may be needed to provide leadership and coordinate CCD efforts and possibly serve as a model for a statewide CCD program using tools such as NYLA's Aeon, Ares, and LAND.

We do not propose collaborative collection development as a cure-all for libraries' economic problems. It may not be appropriate at all for certain libraries, depending on their needs and areas of collection. Instead, we argue that collaborative collection development is a useful tool that has traditionally been overlooked by public librarians for reasons that are not entirely valid. Increased acceptance and realization of the proper uses of CCD can only come when more librarians embrace the practice and adapt it for the unique needs of a public library.

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