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Trends in Library Collaboration: Deeper, Wider, and Riskier

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Trends in Library Collaboration: Deeper, Wider, and Riskier

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For my first editorial as new co-general editor for *Collaborative Librarianship* I choose to reconsider what collaboration means in our new economic realities. The great recession has fostered change in how libraries collaborate over the past four years. As Tom Sanville of LYRASIS said, “for decades, libraries have developed the means to sometimes overcome and to sometimes simply cope with these hard realities. How do they do it? They employ the primary tools of cooperation and collaboration.” What’s changed recently is how we employ this tool. The future of libraries is at stake and collaboration is critical countermeasure.

By definition, consortia are all about collaboration. Consortia have been deeply impacted by the great recession with large numbers of consortia having closed, merged, or scaled back services in the past four years. In response, a new vision of deeper collaboration with more collaborators and more risk is evolving. As Stephen Abram, Vice President Strategic Partnerships and Markets at Gale Cengage, has said in this journal before, “I despise puny visions. Library collaborations aren't about 5% discounts, we must get to where we collaborate and set social standards, drive social cohesion and encourage an ecology where positive learning and community experiences, discoveries and social engagement in our social institutions, workplaces and neighborhood's grows.”

The changes in collaborate efforts brought on by the great recession are illustrated through two speakers from the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) conference held this past April in Denver. First, John Helmer, Executive Director of Orbis Cascade Alliance, spoke about his consortium's goal of creating a truly shared integrated library system for his 37 member libraries. This new system including exploring unified collections and shared technical services. John believes that the depth of a library's success rests upon the depth of their

collaboration. Orbis Cascade is attempting to break away from both legacy systems and legacy thinking.

Ann Okerson, Senior Advisor on Electronic Strategies, Center for Research Libraries, at ICOLC exemplified the new “wide deal.” Most academic libraries are familiar with the “big deal.” The big deal is a multi-library, consortia-based, e-journal purchase which aggregates many titles in a one-size-fits-all package typically costing millions. The wide deal according to Okerson, also called the multi- or cross-consortium deal, leverages the power of many consortia. The wide deal brings together hundreds of libraries from numerous consortia. The goal, according to Okerson, is to signal to publishers that “we aim to change the game” and use leverage to produce better deals for libraries. She argues that getting away for one-size-fits-all purchasing helps individual libraries.

In this issue of *Collaborative Librarianship*, several authors touched on subjects related to expanding collaboration. Pronevitz in an article on NISO's Delivery Recommended Practices focuses on how courier servers are linking at state borders, making ever larger regional delivery services. The interview of David Stewart looks at how theological libraries have fared in their collaborate efforts. These are examples of some of the many new collaborations taking place around the country as this issue goes to press. Hard times bring new vision, new risk, and new rewards. This Journal is committed to helping bring examples of these new collaborations to the library community.

