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## Coffee, Condiments and Collaboration

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## Coffee, Condiments and Collaboration

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Long road trips I find very appealing. They give me the opportunity to enjoy amazing landscape vistas and the chance to ponder the great and small questions of life. I also take these opportunities to listen to some pretty engaging books on CD. While David Sedaris was going on about some trip he took a while back to Vancouver, British Columbia, about halfway through Utah I happened to notice a road sign on Interstate 70, "Rest Stop, 1 Mile." The sign also reported that the rest stop was a "Public/Private Partnership." I was intrigued by the idea of a public-private partnership for such a thing as a roadside rest stop. How many of these partnerships exist? Why has such a partnership occurred? Could not various levels of American government on their own provide the needed coffee machines and condiments to operate these roadside oases?

Upon my return to Denver, I decided to do some digging into this particular "rest stop partnership." I was amazed to discover these partnership operations were all over the place. In fact, there are rather active divisions of State Transportation Departments that govern highway rest stops. This seems to be a pretty big deal. Policy papers are written. National conferences on rest stops are held. Who knew? For example, the Minnesota Department of Transportation sponsored the "2006 National Safety Rest Area Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 4-6, 2006." Over three days, participants from around the county gathered to discuss matters related to highway rest stops. High on the agenda of this conference was precisely the topic of the public-private partnership. Presentations included, "Top of Iowa' Public/Private Partnership," "Minnesota's Brainerd Lakes Area Welcome Center Partnership" and "Utah's Public Private Partnership Program (Oasis): Another Tool in the Toolbox." In scanning the syn-

opsis of the Utah session, I quickly realized that it was about more than some community group making sure that coffee machines were well supplied and that toilet paper was stocked for the lavatories. It was about "a continuing spirit of innovation and exploration." It was about "expanding options and developing policies related to Utah's highway safety facilities for the next 20 years." As I thought more about this nationwide phenomenon, its good sense and significance became clearer. While on one level there are the practical needs that are met through collaboration, on another level this partnership phenomenon exemplifies impressive and compelling aspects of social policy that recognize both private and public interests can sometimes be achieved better through partnerships.

While there are basic and practical benefits to collaboration, often there is a much larger vision of the common good at work. It is this larger vision that should really be the driver in collaboration. In this issue of *Collaborative Librarianship*, incidentally completing its first year of publication, Stephen Abram emphasizes precisely this point. "I despise puny visions," he states. "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 neighborhoods grow." Read more on what this important thinker has to say on library collaboration; in certain respects his insights tie together this issue of the journal.

The article on Tennessee's collaborative digitization project called "Volunteer Voices" among other things exemplifies Abram's point that successful collaboration depends

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on thorough planning. Another article on developing multi-campus library services in Florida illustrates how collaboration unfolds through formal agreements – a social philosophy, essentially – that must be embraced at the highest institutional level. Abram refers to the current economic challenge as an impetus for libraries to engage in collaboration more widely and deeply. The report on the recent Wyoming-Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries conference dealing with tough economic times reveals the depth and complexities of these realities, as well as the opportunities. The ICOLC statement (introduced by our “From the Field” editorial team, in case you have not heard of ICOLC) addresses the current global economic crisis and suggests more effective modes of library-vendor collaboration, again a point made by Abram.

Our “Viewpoints” section presents columns by Nicole Engard and by Mitchell Davis. They address different but related topics. Engard explores the “open source” phenomenon – a topic of current debate sparked by Abram’s recent article cited in his interview. She provides a profile of open source software development – and how the library world can learn from this form of global collaboration. Davis raises the important question of sustainability underlying the principle of “open access” in libraries and suggests that “managed access” may still be the business model needed. This issue of *Collaborative Librarianship* is rounded out by

two reviews, one on the open source web management system, Drupal, and a review of the special edition of *Library Technology Reports* (May 2009), “Collaboration 2.0.”

Sometimes long road trips can cause the mind to slip into neutral while the engine spins on at 3,500 rpm. With a good cup of coffee in hand, sometimes road signs along the way can spark musings that can get a person through miles of landscape heightened by thoughts on rest stop collaboration, and collaboration of other types.

In addition to its quarterly issues, *Collaborative Librarianship* publishes a news blog on the journal site. Consult this regularly to keep abreast of developments in the world of collaborative librarianship. If you are interested yourself in promoting library collaboration, become a “fan” of the Collaborative Librarianship Facebook page. Visit: <http://www.facebook.com/CollaborativeLibrarianship>

*Collaborative Librarianship* welcomes submissions to any sections of the publication. All submissions can be made through the journal’s website: <http://www.collaborativelibrarianship.org> or by contacting the section editors. The journal invites your comments; please forward these to the General Editor at [igaetz@regis.edu](mailto:igaetz@regis.edu).