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# Processes and Strategies for Collaboratively Purchasing Electronic Resources

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## Abstract

Academic libraries collaborate to enhance and expand library services. However, libraries may not pursue collaborative electronic resource acquisitions due to complexity and the lengthy negotiation process. Two University of Minnesota campus libraries conducted a year-long pilot project to investigate intentional and proactive cooperative e-resource acquisitions. This article discusses the key strategies, processes, and lessons learned for collaboratively purchasing content, along with recommended best practices.

Keywords: electronic resources, e-resources, collaboration, cooperation, negotiation, licenses, relationship building, acquisitions, collection development

## Introduction

Collaboration touches nearly every area of libraries. Academic libraries collaborate to enhance and expand services beyond what one institution can do physically or financially on its own. The emergence of popular, yet expensive, electronic resources makes collaborative collection development attractive. However, joint electronic resource acquisitions are difficult due to complicated licenses governing use and multiplex or opaque pricing models. Once e-resource subscriptions begin, libraries may renew resources with little or no resistance, conceding to anticipated annual increases (more than expected, but too small to cancel) rather than renegotiating. As a result, libraries may not pursue collaborative acquisitions, ultimately spending more money on less content.

The libraries of the five campuses of the University of Minnesota (UM) have previously collaborated on e-resource purchases and subscriptions,

but routine deliberate collaboration was not typically pursued. The impetus for past system or multi-campus acquisitions came via vendor initiated offers, campus initiated requests, or system-wide pursuit of content, all to reduce costs and increase access. While the e-content amount shared by all UM campuses is substantial, gaps continue to exist at the smaller campuses.

The implementation of the UM's new unified resource management system rekindled conversations about proactively seeking collaborative opportunities in the areas of licensing, ordering, invoicing, cataloging, and accessing electronic resources. Additionally, budget cuts throughout the UM system prompted a reexamination of potential library collaborations. These circumstances called for more proactive collaboration. To address this need, two UM campus libraries, Twin Cities and Duluth, began a year-long pilot project to investigate and test intentional and proactive cooperative e-resource acquisitions. The pilot was charged with developing tools



and processes to evaluate current and future electronic resource acquisitions. This article will describe the key processes and strategies the two campus libraries adopted to achieve this goal and recommended best practices pertaining to: coordinating and developing a collaboratively minded team, devising shared goals and expected outcomes, identifying and properly prioritizing relevant e-resources, building inter-library and vendor relationships, and establishing negotiation and licensing strategies suited towards collaborative purchases.

## Literature Review

### Collaborative Electronic Resource Purchases

Library collaboration is not new; libraries have participated in collaborative activities since the late 1800s. As libraries have evolved so has the definition of library collaboration. For today's libraries, the authors have chosen to define *collaboration* as a relationship between libraries that is mutually beneficial and works towards a common goal. Collaboration is synonymous with cooperation and partnership.

Library collaboration history has been well documented and is important to understanding these joint ventures.<sup>1</sup> Technology and transportation advances provided the means for collaborative activities among libraries which have developed throughout the last century and a half. Finding a library service untouched by collaboration is difficult. Collaborative e-resource purchases started in the 1990s resulting from the adoption of the Internet and World Wide Web, and an increase in published e-content and their high costs.<sup>2</sup>

Consortia can provide the greatest advantage to libraries through collaborative e-resource purchases.<sup>3</sup> Consortia consist of "groups of collaborating libraries", also referred to as "cooperatives, networks, collectives, alliances, and partnerships."<sup>4</sup> The number of library consortia has

grown to such a degree that there is a consortium dedicated to consortia worldwide, the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). ICOLC, an informal and self-organized group, encompasses approximately 200 library consortia worldwide with more than half in North America.<sup>5</sup> ICOLC "publishes best practices or statements regarding topics which affect libraries and library consortia. This gives a strong voice to consortia and their members in order to influence the marketplace and library community."<sup>6</sup> Organizations, such as ICOLC, make it possible for libraries to create a consortium and get continued support, which will lead to their success as a consortium and encourage cooperative purchasing.

Cooperative purchasing of e-resources typically consists of databases or journal packages discounted due to a higher volume of sales.<sup>7</sup> Cooperative purchasing groups can be formal or informal, include few to many partners, and be geographically distant or close.<sup>8</sup> In 2015, Ann Okerson discussed the emergence of the wide deal, a cooperative purchase where multiple consortia join forces to obtain the best deal possible at deeply discounted rates.<sup>9</sup> The reasons for entering into a collaborative partnership, through a single consortium or a wide deal, rings true for cooperative purchasing at any scale, large or small.

### Benefits and Challenges of Collaboration

Collaboration benefits include improved services, altruism, increased buying power, licensing efficiencies, and more content for lower costs.<sup>10</sup> Cost savings seem to be one of the most popular and measurable benefits; however, the idea of joint subscriptions may be pushed aside when dealing with an economic crisis and trying to afford the most basic of library resources. As Karen L. Roth stated, "Librarians may forget about the power of the purse, especially in difficult economic times."<sup>11</sup> Librarians focus on their own electronic resource needs and budgets as

they worry about continuously cutting resources. Roth goes on to discuss the power behind parties with shared interests and how they are more likely to reach a favorable deal by combining efforts and negotiating firmly with the vendor(s).<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, collaboration is not without its challenges. The cost of collaboration can be the greatest obstacle to overcome; the monetary input one library can provide may not equal another. Additional challenges may include the differing integrated library systems used at each institution, the contractual obligations of a license, balancing collaboration benefits with cost, meeting the needs of varied institutions, and addressing capacity and logistics concerns (e.g. who will negotiate the deal, how will invoicing be handled, will a participation fee be charged by the consortia lead, etc.).<sup>13</sup> Each party must be willing to work through challenges encountered during collaborative endeavors to ensure a successful partnership.

Despite the diversity of collaborative groups, their underlying goals for joining efforts remain similar. "Cooperative arrangements and consortia are further reshaping the institutional environment. Economies of scale, aggregated expertise, new synergies and unexpected opportunities, and strengthened political coalitions and operational capacities are among the potential benefits."<sup>14</sup> Surprisingly, libraries and librarians do not desire local autonomy as much as they had in the past. Instead, as the benefits of collaboration and cooperative subscriptions continue to grow and outweigh the challenges, libraries actively pursue joint subscriptions with other institutions.

### Collaborative Relationships

*Library to library relationships.* Building solid external relationships among libraries is a complex process. The University of Central Florida system's Min Tong and Cynthia Kisby provided a

framework for creating a high-level multi-campus partnership.<sup>15</sup> The potential partners should discuss the following topics as they relate to their own institution: mission, goals, organizational structure and staffing, hours of operation, collection development and acquisition, cataloging, reference and library instruction, circulation, interlibrary loan, and facilities and equipment.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, efforts should be made to build a sense of community, strengthen communication, provide supportive leadership, train staff, and integrate technology, as well as define and measure successes and share goals.<sup>17</sup> This work should be evaluated and continuously improved upon to build successful collaborative relationships among libraries.

Relationships take some effort, especially new and untested relationships. Bruce Tuckman wrote "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups" in 1965, and his four relationship building stages are still used today: forming, storming, norming, and performing.<sup>18</sup> During the four stages relationships are developed and trust is fostered (forming), challenges appear and are overcome (storming), and regular routines are established (norming). The last stage, performing, "is when effective collaboration truly occurs," allowing the group and the individuals within it to flourish.<sup>19</sup> These same approaches can be used for initiating library to library relationships.

Consortium participation and sharing responsibilities across libraries requires trust. As stated by Lorraine Busby, "most librarians . . . trust the consortium to do its job. This trust leads to the untested belief that the best deal possible comes from a consortium."<sup>20</sup> While collaboration can be beneficial for all libraries and have added benefits for librarians, it might not be suitable for every resource nor every vendor. Consortial purchasing demands both shared goals and a clear understanding of responsibilities. For example, negotiation skills may be stronger at one institution than at another. The consortium can

take advantage of these skilled individuals, instead of needing a skilled negotiator at each library.

There is no need to limit consortial and collaborative purchasing to libraries within the same system or geographic area. Electronic resource librarians need to “[demonstrate] the ability to work collaboratively with other units and staff, establishing and maintaining effective working relationships.”<sup>21</sup> This is not limited to colleagues at one library or campus but instead expands to other campuses, institutions, library types, and even to vendors. Libraries need to reach beyond their typical consortial relationships and explore more possibilities.

*Vendor to library relationships.* Building library to library relationships can be challenging even when libraries have common goals; differing goals makes building vendor and library (or library consortium) relationships even more difficult. While a vendor wants to sell a resource and a library wants to acquire one, the approach each party takes for a successful business transaction will vary.

Literature abounds covering vendor and library relationships, primarily written from the librarian's perspective.<sup>22</sup> These articles describe vendor and library relationships as frustrating, exhausting, stressful, and overall time consuming. Each article concludes with helpful suggestions for improving the relationship: maintaining open lines of communication, being honest about budgets and pricing, setting aside a particular day of the week to speak with vendor/sales representatives, negotiating without emotions, and compromising. However, librarians cannot be the only ones to follow this advice from the field; communication and relationship building requires work from both parties. Dissatisfaction with the relationship will continue if libraries and vendors do not work towards a better relationship together.

Perhaps the easiest way to start improving vendor and library relationships is to let the other party know which communication form is preferred (phone, email, in-person, etc.). In 2015, Kirsten Ostergaard and Doralyn Rossmann surveyed vendors and librarians and found librarians prefer email and telephone calls when communicating with vendors.<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, a vendor representative may use a variety of communication methods to convey specific information to suit their goals of a sale, renewal, or to meet company requirements (such as a mandatory monthly check-ins); these methods may be in direct conflict with the preferred communication methods of librarians. Small changes to improve relationships and communication can result in smoother discussions about all aspects of e-resources such as licenses or price negotiations, sale call frequency, or access issues.

Negotiation plays an important part in the library/vendor relationship and skilled negotiators can help both parties reach a mutually acceptable agreement. A vendor may be firm when it comes to a particular license clause because they “value their content as a source of revenue and are understandably concerned about ways it will be used . . . These concerns are manifested through clauses in license agreements.”<sup>24</sup> However, a librarian may also have terms they need to adhere to due to consortium needs or general counsel requirements. The librarian should be firm when needed. Tools, such as the Center for Research Libraries' LIBLICENSE Model License Agreement, can “be used by university librarians in negotiating particular licensing agreements and, more generally, serves as a statement by the academic library community.”<sup>25</sup> Generally, vendors and libraries are able to come to a compromise on licensing language.

In addition to license agreements, librarians find themselves negotiating for a better price. Many libraries experience budget woes ranging from

outright budget cuts to minimal budget increases outpaced by inflation. When e-resource renewals come with a high price increase, libraries can ask for a justification of the increase with the hopes of eventually reaching a compromise.<sup>26</sup> Understanding the other party's needs and how to compromise (when negotiating license terms and/or content cost) is an essential piece of the vendor/library relationship puzzle.

Fortunately, vendors and librarians mutually want to improve their relationships. The Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, a division of the American Library Association, created a group called the Publisher-Vendor-Library Relations Interest Group (PVLRL) for the sole purpose of improving vendor and library relations. PVLRL originated as a "long-standing interest group with roots in fostering communication and [discussing] issues of mutual interest."<sup>27</sup> The group examines the issues and trends of these relationships, with emphasis on library business aspects including topics such as communication and negotiations between the two entities. PVLRL allows librarians and vendors alike to raise issues and reach mutually beneficial solutions.

Additionally, vendors and librarians have worked together to ease license negotiations. NISO's Shared Electronic Resource Understanding (SERU), originally created in 2008, "embodies a desire by publishers and libraries for a cooperative and collaborative relationship that recognizes that the provision of timely, high-quality materials and their protection is in the mutual interests of all parties."<sup>28</sup> SERU is simply an alternative to a negotiated license that can be applied to e-resource acquisitions. During a 2009 NASIG Annual Conference panel discussion three librarians and two publishers discussed their experiences with effective negotiations and SERU.<sup>29</sup> It became apparent that while "each party looks to protect its own interests, it is also clear that librarians and publishers generally op-

erate in a relationship of trust and mutual goodwill."<sup>30</sup> SERU eases the relationship between a vendor and library by eliminating the need to negotiate over license terms, saving time and money. While SERU is not the solution for all e-resources, it does ease the burden of tiresome negotiations and results in quicker sales for vendors and access for libraries.

Understanding vendor to library relations and relationships among libraries is a step towards taking advantage of collaboratively subscribing to e-resources. Collaboration is not without its challenges, so lessons learned from one institution can help smooth the way for others. Two campus libraries developed key strategies, processes, and best practices for cooperatively purchasing e-resource content, outlined below.

## Background

### University of Minnesota System

The University of Minnesota (UM) system consists of five campuses: Twin Cities, Duluth, Crookston, Morris, and Rochester. The campuses share library resource management and discovery systems but are otherwise autonomous and have separate budgets. The Twin Cities has more than 50,000 students (the largest campus) and Duluth has fewer than 10,000 students (second-largest campus); the Twin Cities campus also has significantly higher library staffing levels. The libraries at the smaller UM campuses have come to rely on the Twin Cities campus for their staff capacity and specialized skills to assist with processes such as record loading, campus-wide invoicing, and complex and large-scale tasks such as demand driven acquisition setup.

Collaborative licensing is not a new concept at the UM as most campuses participate in licenses brokered by consortia, such as Minitex (a local tri-state library cooperative), the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA; formerly the CIC), NorthEast Research Libraries (NERL), and the



Center for Research Libraries (CRL). The campus libraries have understood the benefits of jointly licensing content and have acquired some content together (primarily through package deals and add-ons to BTAA licenses), but routine deliberate collaboration was not typically pursued. Collaborative licensing, while not intentionally avoided, was often not accomplished due to poor timing, financial strain, and momentum of the status quo.

In 2013, the libraries of the UM transitioned to Ex Libris' unified resource management system, Alma. After switching to Alma and creating cross-campus working groups, increased collaboration between campuses was inevitable.

#### Electronic Resources Management Pilot

In July of 2014, the libraries of the UM Twin Cities and Duluth campuses began a joint year-long project called the Electronic Resources Management Pilot (ERMP), which investigated intentional cooperative subscriptions by negotiating joint licenses and creating practical e-resource workflows and procedures. ERMP membership consisted of eight full time staff, five from the Twin Cities and three from Duluth. The ERMP group charge included the following tasks:

- Identifying existing e-resource collections licensed by both campuses and e-resources for future joint subscriptions.
- Identifying and documenting requirements and resources needed for collaboration.
- Developing a formal plan for vendor communication and license negotiation strategies.
- Developing workflows for the acquisition, cancellation, and management of e-resources across campuses.
- Evaluating the pilot and providing future recommendations based on project outcomes.

ERMP began by comparing each campus's e-resource subscriptions with two primary goals. First, identifying commonly held subscriptions for which a joint license did *not* exist. Second, identifying subscriptions uniquely held by one campus, which the other campus was interested in acquiring. Additionally, the process revealed resources neither campus held. From the hundreds of databases, abstracts, indexes, and journal packages subscribed to by the two campuses, ERMP discussed nearly thirty resources.

After identifying commonly held electronic resources, the ERMP members prioritized the list beginning with resources that might be easier to consolidate and finishing with resources that might be more difficult. The group considered two primary factors signaling potential ease of a subscription consolidation: the subscription period of each campus and the similarities between subscription content.

Over the twelve-month pilot, ERMP identified and investigated 28 collaborative opportunities and completed 22 (79%) of them. Of the 22 collaborative attempts, 11 cases (50%) ended successfully, a significant achievement. A successful case concluded with a joint license, a single Alma order, one invoice, an activated Alma e-collection, and access for both campuses. The completion time for each of the 22 cases investigated ranged from a few days to a few months, with an average length of 24 business days (from the initial request to final process or decision).

The strategies adopted during ERMP moved the Twin Cities and Duluth campus libraries towards proactively collaborating on the licensing, acquiring, and management of library e-resources. The libraries of the UM plan to foster a collaborative environment for e-resource purchases by applying ERMP strategies to system-wide collaborative opportunities and expanding collaboration to other electronic resource formats such as individual serials, ebooks, and

streaming videos. The key strategies, processes, and lessons learned for collaboratively negotiating content, along with recommended best practices, will be discussed in more detail below.

## Collaborative Processes and Strategies

### Internal Processes and Logistics

Embarking on a collaborative process with another institution demands coordination and planning for a smooth, efficient, and successful partnership, especially when trying to develop a collaboratively minded team. Collaborations can begin with a formally appointed committee or can be accomplished through several in-person or virtual meetings with a handful of individuals; it depends on the needs and requirements of the parties involved. A group charge or charter, whether formal or informal, provides structure to the collaboration endeavor. A charge can consist of background information, purpose, scope, sponsors (usually administrators or directors), members, goals, expected outcomes, deliverables, and timeframe. An associate university librarian (Twin Cities) and a library director (Duluth) sponsored and formally charged ERMP.

The number of individuals working on a collaborative purchase should be limited; however, it may be necessary to have a large team involved behind the scenes to make the process work smoothly. Team members and leaders should be chosen for their skills, knowledge, and abilities pertinent to the task, especially in e-resource management, licensing, collection development, and metadata. Library leadership chose ERMP members for their expertise and historical knowledge of past collaborations. They consisted of two acquisition specialists, two electronic resources librarians (ERL), a metadata analyst, a collection development officer, and two department heads (one from reference and one from acquisitions). Following the project's conclusion, the ERLs and the collection development officer handle the majority of collaborative

negotiations. Acquisition specialists play a significant role after the contract is completed by setting up a single Alma order, processing payment for one invoice, and activating an Alma e-collection providing access for both campuses.

Basic preparedness consists of establishing team member roles, creating ground rules, policies and procedures, and documenting goals and expected outcomes. Write documents collaboratively so they can be vetted by each institution, put into everyday practice, and updated when necessary. ERMP initial meetings revolved around establishing guiding documents such as a project framework (a detailed goals and task outline), guiding principles, and a revised cost-sharing protocol. Policies and procedures create guidelines for how collaboration should proceed, how to share costs (labor and financing), and who will negotiate the agreement terms (for both legal and business terms).

### Goals and Expected Outcomes

Write goals and expected outcomes early in the collaborative process. They can be established in the group charge or during the initial interlibrary collaborative meetings. Discussion about each institution's goals, expected outcomes, and limitations can create a deeper understanding between institutions and help frame mutual goals and expected outcomes. Topics to focus on include current staffing and budget levels, institutional demographics, collection development policies, current e-resource holdings, and current procedures.

Creating joint goals has its limits, however. Factors negatively influencing the process include differences in local collection needs, institution type (e.g., undergraduate vs. graduate level), and funding levels. When limitations exist, libraries need to collaborate with an eye towards the lowest common denominator; collaborating when it makes sense and negotiating inde-



pendently when it does not. This creates a flexible environment for collaboration. Additionally, one cannot be limited by budget constraints. Cancellations may provide opportunities to renegotiate current contracts across all institutions (especially when one or more library needs to cancel), or to free up funds for new and different e-resources. The biggest challenge ERMP experienced was Duluth library's flat budget. The continuing Duluth campus budget constraints resulted in Duluth needing to cancel e-resources rather than collaboratively negotiating with the Twin Cities on new subscriptions.

Goals of collaborative e-resource endeavors usually include increased access to content and savings (both in staff time and money); ERMP had these goals as well. Establishing expected outcomes and mechanisms for evaluating success is important for determining whether goals have been achieved. Estimating staff time savings is difficult to do, but can be one way to measure success. Ways to reduce staff costs include eliminating redundancies, ensuring consistency, and building staff capacity across all institutions. While planning to enter into a joint subscription may require more initial consideration, the renewal and continued maintenance of e-resources will take less overall staff time. Alma, the current UM libraries' system, has afforded an opportunity to utilize shared technology in new ways, such as collaborative e-resource management, automated record loads, and system-wide ordering and invoicing. The ERMP project team asked staff to estimate time savings for ordering, activating, invoicing, and record loading based on their expertise in acquisitions, e-resource management, and metadata. The ERMP group compared time estimates for handling singly licensed e-resources to time estimates for handling jointly licensed e-resources. While processing joint e-resources added minimal time to each step, the process reduced total cross-campus staff time because a single staff member could do steps once for both campuses, reducing

duplicate effort on the other campus. However, the new cross-campus system was not without its challenges. Due to the UM libraries' Alma configuration some e-resource functionality, such as analytics (reporting), usage statistics, and automated processes (such as KBART holdings file loads), became difficult, if not impossible to utilize.

Switching to joint subscriptions for some resources also resulted in time savings when loading bibliographic records. One example involved a renegotiated ebook subscription resulting in a much simpler and more efficient MARC record import process. Previously, each campus subscribed to a mix of ebook collections (from one vendor); some collections were the same and some were unique (only one campus subscribed). This required multiple monthly ebook record loads by the Twin Cities library staff. The two campuses worked together to expand the ebook collections so each campus subscribed to the same content. The jointly negotiated license and terms resulted in minimal pre-import processing, and a single import job provided accurate access to licensed titles for both campuses. In this instance, significant staff time savings was enough to justify joint licensing even when there was no monetary gain.

Calculating purchase or subscription cost savings is easier than estimating staff time savings; however, savings may not be as lucrative as imagined. Factors influencing potential savings include historic spending, annual inflation, adding or removing e-resource content, requirements to purchase other content (e.g., backfiles), multi-year contracts, and price caps. At the UM, converting commonly subscribed resources into a joint subscription rarely reduces overall costs. Vendors typically combine what the two campuses each pay separately and add the regular annual increases.

Identifying Resources



The identification and prioritization of resources to pursue collaboratively is important to the process as well. The two resource types available for collaboration are: new acquisitions (neither institution holds) or current subscriptions (all or some institutions subscribe). The ease of entering into a collaborative relationship depends on many factors. New e-resource acquisitions (subscriptions or purchases) are the least complicated content for collaboration. New resources have no precedent for pricing structure, access methods, or usage rights, so the chance for all parties to come to a favorable agreement is high. Collaboratively licensing currently subscribed resources has more limitations, but can be done successfully. When all institutions subscribe separately to the same e-resources, a switch to a collaborative license seems natural; when only some institutions currently subscribe, determining feasibility of collaboration takes more time. Barriers to successfully combining shared resources include historical spending, technical limitations, vendor restrictions, subscription cycle mismatches, and budget constraints.

Reveal potential collaborative opportunities by compiling a list of commonly licensed e-resources along with a shared desiderata list from each institution. A priority rubric can be helpful to quantify criteria such as resource type, number of subscribing or interested institutions, and perceived likelihood of a successful negotiation. To determine which resources to tackle first, ERMP members created a list of commonly licensed resources and developed a mechanism to determine their priority, as discussed earlier. Following the conclusion of the year-long ERMP project, the Duluth campus has the responsibility of initiating collaborative purchases because of their current budget constraints. Throughout the year, as e-resources come up for renewal, the Duluth ERL investigates whether the Twin Cit-

ies campus subscribes (or has interest in subscribing) and begins conversations with the vendor about a shared license.

Reaching a collaborative agreement cannot always occur. During ERMP, while some vendors would not combine subscriptions on principle, other vendors were unable to do so. In one case, a vendor was willing to allow a joint subscription with the two campuses, but doing so would eliminate the vendor's ability to provide separate usage statistics for each campus. Evaluating campus level e-resource statistics is important in determining use, cost per use, and the need to renew. Therefore, in this example, each campus needed to continue their individual subscription.

#### Interlibrary Communications

Successful collaborative ventures depend on clear communication at every step of the process. The pre-planning activities discussed previously rely heavily on unambiguous and direct communication to build trust, increase transparency, and develop a collaborative mindset. Communications should be professional and respectful. There will be times when communication is limited to a few individuals, but this would typically be reserved for a specific need. Send communications as often as necessary considering there may be higher than normal communication traffic during active negotiation. Providing background information to other institutions or asking for interest in collaborations (even when the other institution is unlikely to participate) makes for stronger ties and builds trust. Communication methods can include email, virtual chat, in-person or virtual (e.g., Google Hangouts or Skype) meetings, and detailed documentation; telephone conversations should never be discounted and can be more productive than other communication methods in certain instances. Utilizing the carbon copy (CC) or blind copy (BC) and "Reply All" email features helps share information with other



team members. Documentation should be viewable by all staff, regardless of their role, to encourage transparency.

One of the largest ongoing benefits of ERMP is increased communication between the two campus libraries with regard to collaborative opportunities. ERMP members took full advantage of the UM Google Suite products such as Drive (e.g., docs, spreadsheets, presentations), Calendar, Gmail, and Hangouts to allow for seamless work across campuses, despite a 150-mile distance. Frequent communication remains an essential tool for collaboration across all campuses, instilling a sense of togetherness crucial for continued success.

#### Communicating with Vendors

Strategies for increasing library to library communication also apply to communications with vendors, but a few additional factors should be taken into account. Create a joint communication plan specifically for communicating with vendors. The communication plan might include standard information to provide vendors (e.g., FTE, institution type), talking points (concise statements meant to support or persuade), needs, goals, and contact information of primary staff who will communicate with vendor representatives. The plan may also contain information about preferred communication methods and internal policies regarding visits, gifts, etc. ERMP drafted a vendor communication document, which included guidelines focusing on identifying internal stakeholders (e.g., subject liaisons, acquisitions, or metadata staff), identifying vendor representatives (i.e., names for each institution's vendor representative(s); they may be different representatives for each institution), talking points, and demographics.

Communications between libraries and vendors should be professional and respectful; honest and direct communication begets increased trust

between both parties, while developing a productive relationship. Communications and follow-up responses to emails or phone calls should be timely and relevant. Libraries and vendors should determine if in-person meetings are necessary or if another communication form (e.g., email, conference call, virtual meeting, etc.) would be appropriate. If an in-person meeting seems fitting, develop a clear agenda beforehand. As a part of the UM's processes, both campus libraries regularly encourage vendors to communicate primarily with acquisitions and collection development staff rather than subject liaisons or selectors. To protect everyone's time, the practice of vendor check-in meetings is discouraged unless selectors have identified a specific need.

#### Collaborative Negotiation Strategies

In a collaborative environment, increase negotiation strategies and skills to handle compound relationships. A multiple library to vendor relationship is clearly more complex than a single library to vendor relationship. Libraries involved in a collaborative group need to form common goals, cost-sharing plans, talking points, and strategies for communicating with vendors prior to negotiations. The book *Getting to Yes* provides a strong framework for developing negotiation skills resulting in a positive outcome for both parties; it has been well summarized in literature.<sup>31</sup> *Getting to Yes* outlines the following approaches:

1. Do not bargain over positions.
2. Separate the people from the problem.
3. Focus on interests, not positions.
4. Invent options for mutual gain.
5. Insist on using objective criteria.

A key element to *Getting to Yes* is understanding the two important parts of reaching a deal: the people involved and the deal itself. Consider

these components separate entities. Vendor representatives may have no influence on high-level company decisions, so understanding this can help prevent confusing the person with the problem. Representatives are outward facing company messengers, but they can also advocate for and be an ally to a library from within their company.

Libraries should be prepared before entering into discussions with vendor representatives. In advance, libraries need to determine who will attend meetings, who will communicate with vendors on behalf of the libraries, and who will review contracts and terms. These individuals should have a prepared list of all involved libraries' shared needs and limitations. Creating a list of preferred license language (for both legal and business needs) will provide clarity to those reviewing and discussing the subscription contract and terms. The requirement of general counsel involvement varies at each institution, so determine ahead of time when to consult general counsel staff.

One or two individuals should review the terms of the license and subscription; suggested language changes and comments can be made directly to the license to track changes easily. Include individuals who want to stay abreast of the negotiation in emails. Currently, and even prior to ERMP, Twin Cities staff typically review contracts involving multiple campuses, regardless of which campus initiated vendor communications. The Twin Cities ERL copies collection development staff, the appropriate acquisitions and subject specialists, and the ERL from Duluth on email communication when working on the contract specifics of a shared license.

Libraries should also consider creating a *best alternative to a negotiated agreement* (BATNA) prior

to negotiating with a vendor.<sup>32</sup> A BATNA is an alternative option if a deal is not reached. Brainstorming and constructing a strong BATNA prior to negotiations will empower the collaborative group; whether to reveal a BATNA earlier or later in the process should be decided by the collaborative group. "Generating possible BATNAs requires three distinct operations: (1) inventing a list of actions you might conceivably take if no agreement is reached; (2) improving some of the more promising ideas and converting them into practical alternatives; and (3) selecting, tentatively, the one alternative that seems best."<sup>33</sup> Alternatives for negotiating e-resource licenses might include purchasing fewer titles, purchasing an alternate package, relying on pay per view to fulfill requests, demand driven alternatives, or cancelling a subscription. Remember that vendors have their own BATNAs as well.

## Conclusion

In summary, the authors encourage libraries to proactively pursue collaborative purchases with other libraries to reduce costs and increase access to e-resource content. Librarians can build from established relationships or create new ones. First steps would include establishing joint internal processes and administrative logistics, defining shared goals and expected outcomes, and creating clear communication lines to build trust and a collaborative spirit. Next, identify candidate resources and determine joint negotiation strategies to meet the needs of each library. Lastly, develop professional relationships with vendors based on clear and honest communication. Joint collaborations involve many steps and the hard work of many individuals, but the effort is well worth the potential gain.

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<sup>1</sup> James J. Kopp, "Library consortia and information technology: the past, the present, the

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