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Shared Print Initiatives

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the history, issues, challenges, opportunities, and obligations associated with shared print programs. Many of the library operational activities associated with participating in a shared print program have precedents or shared concerns with other operational work around collection development, preservation, and staffing in general. Activities at Emory University serve as examples for participating in shared print programs.

Introduction

Many libraries have joined shared print initiatives. They may have joined a program directly or through membership in a library consortium. At the most basic level, libraries that have joined a program have entered into a formal agreement to retain and share specific titles. Obligations vary from program to program.

Early Shared Collections Work

Libraries have a long history of sharing library resources through interlibrary loan. Shared print programs build upon those efforts by explicitly leveraging obligations to retain and share materials. In 2012, OCLC published two studies on the issues and challenges facing the management of print on a large scale, summarizing current thinking and pointing to future directions.

Typical Shared Print Program Characteristics

Shared print programs typically share some or all of the following characteristics:

- Leverage existing networks
- Often built upon less formal agreements
- Often regional
- Time-bound retention commitment for a given title, for example, 25 years
- Frequently based on memorandums of understanding rather than formal contracts
- Priority ILL

Background/Problem Space

In recent years, shared print/shared collections programs have grown. There are a number of motivations for this, but primarily the reasons fall under the umbrella of “managing down” collections in the interest of freeing library space for other uses, saving money by minimizing deduplication of holdings, and leveraging ILL (particularly through electronic document delivery and disintermediated borrowing, e.g., BorrowDirect) to meet user needs.

The focus is generally on widely held titles and volumes, though there is now some interest in rare and unique titles.

Generally, preservation isn’t a consideration but at the same time, many activities associated with shared print management echo activities and concerns associated with large-scale preservation reformatting. Most notable among these are concerns with best or last copies, albeit without yet a formal, shared, and standard understanding of what those terms mean.

For librarians involved in shared print, the lack of a shared vocabulary, standards, decision-making tools, and established priorities can make the work challenging, particularly in the following areas:

- Managing programs across libraries and consortia
- Developing an infrastructure for decision-making
- Identifying the scale or “right size” of programs
- Determining the nature of materials to be retained

Motivation for Participating in a Shared Print Program

Libraries are motivated to participate in shared print initiatives because doing so benefits collection development by expanding the complexity and extent of a library's collection (bibliographic diversity), creating possibilities for filling collection gaps, and reducing costs by relying on other libraries to retain titles. When another library agrees to retain a title, other libraries in the consortium may choose to withdraw the same title to create physical space for other purposes. Shared print also confirms its relationship to preservation when libraries formally declare to retain copies of specific titles.

Micro, Macro, and Mega Shared Print Programs

Scale is an issue with which many shared print programs wrestle. Larger programs face the question of potential significant collection overlap and how to fairly share the responsibilities for retention and sharing.

Shared print programs may also be challenged with issues raised by the existence of possible

side agreements among some but not all member libraries. These agreements may have existed prior to those libraries joining a consortium. Similarly, libraries may be members of more than one shared print consortium.

In short, what is the right scale for these programs? What is the ideal level of collaboration?

Many programs are vying for support from research libraries, who must consider the scope, scale, and purposes of the programs, which vary in depth and breadth. For example (see Figure 1):

- Rosemont (Scholar's Trust, WRLC, FLARE, EAST, WEST Alliance) focuses on serials, collaboration, and coordination of many large regional partners
- HathiTrust focuses on establishing a shared print collection to mirror the HT digital corpus; around 75 libraries
- SACOOP or South Asia Cooperative is a small initiative focused on retention of specialized South Asian publications, both serials and monographs

Figure 1. The shared print/collections landscape.

- GPO Physical Preservation Stewards focuses on physical preservation of notable government documents

Precedents for Shared Print

Libraries have a history of collaborating on collection development plans, with one library agreeing to acquire materials in particular subjects, for example, and another library agreeing to acquire materials in other subjects. Libraries have a history of cooperating, most notably through ILL, making some of the aforementioned collaboration possible.

Libraries also compete, mainly for resources, particularly grant money and sometimes staff. Many of the libraries participating in shared print programs have to navigate collaborating, cooperating, and competing. There are likely libraries that are members of groups, consortia, or agreements that complement each other or are perhaps even in competition with each other.

Parallels with Open Access

Shared print programs share some characteristics or parallels with open access initiatives. These include:

- There is the need to create a sustainable funding infrastructure.
- There are free rider issues. (Who funds? Who benefits?)
- There are multiple models for moving forward (economies of scale, sustainability, distribution of costs and burdens).
- There are vendor solutions (monetized).

Shared Print Programs and Preservation

Shared print programs share concerns and characteristics with library preservation. Library funders and stakeholders see libraries as stewards of library materials, growing and curating collections for both immediate and long-term use. Both of those terms imply the kinds of things typical of preservation programs.

Typical characteristics of a preservation program shared with shared print programs include:

- Interest in ensuring access to library resources

- Relying on standards or shared best practices
- Sensitive to collection development policies
- Working with stakeholder to identify priorities (we can't preserve everything)
- Keeping track of the decisions libraries have made

Microfilm—Shared Collection Precedent

It may seem odd to think about preservation microfilming as a precedent for or prescient of current shared print concerns or activities, but perhaps there's much to be learned.

Beginning in the 1980s, libraries began to think in earnest about how to use microfilm to solve three chief problems: books and serials deteriorating because of brittle paper; deduplicating physical print holdings of brittle publications; and doing so reliably based on a set of agreed-upon standards, guidelines, and funding.

The result was a call to action around the problems of brittle books. The film *Slow Fires: On the Preservation of the Human Record*¹ highlighted the problems of brittle paper. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) updated microfilming standards to improve consistency in image capture and film reproduction. The Research Library Group developed guidelines for libraries that provided methodologies for ensuring that items were filmed faithfully and completely, and that cataloging reflected the editions and holdings that were filmed. NEH stepped in with funding. As a result, many libraries were able to deduplicate their print holdings and rely on microfilm or rely on the knowledge that the camera negative was in cold storage and that another library could always supply a copy of the film at a reasonable cost.

Last Copy/Copies Agreements

Within shared print programs, there is frequently mention of best or last copy agreements. Often at a state level (Wisconsin and Illinois, for example), the idea behind such agreements is to:

- Set criteria for retention, deaccessioning, roles and responsibilities of participating libraries
- Provide a central function of ensuring at least one copy among participants/members

- Support goals focused on deaccession needs
- Ideally, ensure that last copies are distributed geographically

Consortial E-Book Plans

Shared print programs have the potential to complement consortia-based e-book plans. As libraries grow their e-book collections, print editions or lesser used earlier editions of e-books are either withdrawn or moved to off-site storage. Shared print programs can support these efforts by ensuring that one or more member libraries in consortia retain older, print editions.

Operational Realities

Libraries participating in shared print may often appear to be on different trajectories. Some programs and libraries are moving forward at a rapid pace, using locally developed decision support tools, while other libraries and programs are still in the planning phases. There may be a number of reasons for this, including the lack of decision support tools, insufficient staffing, and a lack of known, agreed-upon priorities.

Competing Needs

Libraries are finding that they have to balance a number of competing needs, including:

- Local vs. national priorities and needs (local collection development, national mandates)
- Identifying and resolving questions around cost, infrastructure, and general burden of responsibility among participants
- Negotiating mega vs. micro approaches, particularly for more specialized materials
- Finding the right number of copies of a title to retain, that is, overretention vs. “just enough” copies and deduplicating at the right level or amount across multiple libraries or groups
- Tension between local, geographic-based programs and national-level programs

Staffing

In order to meet the expectations of shared print programs, libraries have to assign staff in the following areas:

- Local curation and selection, which might involve ensuring physical ownership
- Coordination efforts with other members of the program
- Ensuring that interlibrary loan priority lending agreements are met
- Updating cataloging records to indicate participation
- Updating the general quality of records to minimum expectations set by the program
- Undertaking any preservation or conservation work to ensure that committed titles can be used

Selection

Libraries may face constraints or barriers to participation. Typically, these are about staffing. For example, at the individual library level staff will need to be available to update catalog records. Or staff may be required to carry out physical validation of holdings. At the consortia or national level, a library may have to invest staff time to participate in conversations that help set priorities for shared print efforts.

Barriers also exist because of a lack of shared priorities or consensus on how to move forward because of unresolved dilemmas. As an example, consider some of the issues related to selection of materials for inclusion in a shared print program:

- Should we focus on titles that are widely held, rare/unique, or both?
- How many copies are necessary? Who keeps the widely held copies? Is this an undue burden to one or more libraries in the program?
- Which copies should be retained? Does there need to be some quality control mechanism to identify the best copy?
- Is there a danger in overselection/overretention?
- Do rare editions/versions deserve special consideration?

Monographs vs. Serials

Serials present possible barriers to participation because they require extra bibliographic work to

ensure that title changes and changes in publisher are recorded accurately. In order for shared print programs to succeed at the volume level, holdings information must be accurate and complete. Holdings statements along the lines of *1980–1995 [gaps]* prevent other libraries from making withdrawal decisions because specific holdings information is lacking.

Signaling Participation in a Shared Print Program

In addition to perhaps having to update catalog records, libraries also need to indicate to other libraries that they are participating in a shared print program. Typically, this is achieved through updating administrative metadata in the catalog record.

- Adding a Shared Print participation notice using the OCLC shared print symbol
- Applying standardized language to aid local and national decision making, for example:
 - Use of MARC 583 Action note to indicate titles that are being retained and by whom
 - Complete bibliographic records and holdings to minimize questions about specifically which titles, editions, and holdings are being retained

Role for OCLC Worldcat and Other Union Databases

In order for shared print programs to be effective, tools to record the aforementioned decisions must be available. Therefore, bibliographic databases would ideally allow for:

- The ability to share and manage print retention decisions and update commitments over time to accommodate changes in additions, deletions, and other kinds of general disclosure about retained titles
- The ability to share copy/condition quality, storage conditions, loan restrictions, and so on to enable informed collection management decisions
- Description of the interrelationships between consortia, individual institutions and cultural organizations, and vendors and the obligations associated with agreements

Role of Digital Surrogates

Shared print programs are focused physical holdings. At the same time, digital surrogates, particularly titles held by HathiTrust, newspapers digitized as part state or national digitization projects, and perhaps even current e-journals can inform collection development decisions in determining which titles to commit to a shared print program. Libraries have yet to recommend or formally identify a role for digital surrogates in a shared print context.

Implications for Interlibrary Loan

If shared print results in fewer physical holdings for a given title, might this create issues and challenges for interlibrary loan? For example, if a few large libraries retain a majority of the titles, does that lead to unexpected costs associated with being a net lender? Can digital surrogates be created to supply the need? If so, there are costs associated with creating those. At this time, shared print programs are focused on lower use materials and there is insufficient data to answer such questions.

Who Pays to Support the Infrastructure?

As programs scale up, identifying and managing costs will become an issue. To that end, it is likely that in the next few years, libraries and consortia will develop cost models for shared print programs and their impact on individual libraries, consortia, and users.

Emory University Strategies

The libraries at Emory University are involved in a number of shared print programs, including:

- HathiTrust Shared Print
- Scholars Trust, which itself is part of the Rosemont Shared Print Alliance
- SACOOP (South Asian Cooperative)
- Agreements with Georgia Tech involving mainly collections at the Library Service Center

Key elements of the Emory and Georgia Tech agreement include:

- Deduplication efforts (general materials and specialized materials such as the Federal Depository Library Program)

- Leveraging the Alma fulfillment network
- Priority lending and borrowing
- Priority electronic document delivery

Conclusion

In recent years, libraries and consortia have begun to explore the issues and challenges associated

with shared print programs. Informal agreements and geographically localized efforts have evolved into programs with more members and more collection materials. Libraries are currently identifying the need for better decision-making tools and also learning about the staff resources required to effectively participate and benefit from such programs.

Note

1. The film is available from the American Film Foundation at http://www.americanfilmfoundation.com/order/slow_fires.shtml