

Librarians and Cross-Sector Teamwork

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Working in teams is one of the current popular management techniques, and it is becoming increasingly common for academic librarians to work with others on campus to solve problems, deliver services, develop information resources, create facilities, and formulate policies. Collaborative teams of librarians and computing professionals have created campus websites, offered workshops for staff and users, planned labs and instructional technology centers, and developed joint service desks. Teams of faculty, librarians, instructional technologists and others have created network-based learning experiences incorporating electronic information resources as an integral aspect of the curriculum. Faculty, student, librarian, and technologist teams have developed publishing projects such as electronic journals, electronic dissertations, and databases. Teams of librarians, technologists, and assessment experts are working to establish measures of the use and value of technology and electronic information resources on campuses.

As the article "[Changing Roles in Research Libraries](#)" (on page 15 in this issue of *ARL*) depicts, many of the existing or desired positions in research libraries--such as web master, digital library coordinator, and electronic public access services coordinator--include some responsibilities for electronic resources. As libraries recruit for these positions, they should keep in mind that many of the individuals in such positions will find themselves involved in cross-sector collaborations due to the nature of the jobs. Candidates' capability to be successful team members and to work well with other professional groups should factor into the selection process for these positions.

A driving force in the move to teamwork is the realization that many complex projects in today's information environment require expertise that is seldom available from one individual or even one professional group. To develop an electronic publishing program, for example, faculty may contribute content, university press staff may contribute technical standards and an economic model, librarians may contribute policy and preservation expertise, and information technologists may contribute a technical infrastructure for storage and distribution; no one group would have all the skills to adequately develop a publishing program in isolation.

Another factor motivating the use of teamwork is the increasingly intertwined nature of issues and concerns among professional groups. For example, in the past, librarians generally had formal or informal oversight of issues related to copyright policy on campus. However, in the networked environment, the information technology unit could, under certain circumstances, be held legally responsible if students violate copyright law by posting entire works on their personal websites without permission. Information technologists need to work together with librarians and others on campus, such as the faculty senate, to develop institution-wide policies that take into account values and legal requirements.

Characteristics of Teamwork, Partnerships, Collaboration

Authors who write for the management literature often interchangeably use the terms "teamwork," "partnerships," and "collaboration." These terms imply particular characteristics in regard to how tasks are conducted and how people work and relate to one another in pursuing goals.

Librarians have worked with many other campus units--such as the computing center--in the past and have contributed as well as drawn expertise from these collaborations. However, generally those relationships were not genuine partnerships; rather, they were relationships where talent was hired or compensated in some way. In a genuine partnership, each sector contributes something of value to the relationship, and each partner reaps some benefits.

One of the key hallmarks of successful partnering relationships, as identified by such writers as Katzenbach and Smith, Kanter, and Henderson, is the development of a common mission as the members of a team or partners in a project work together. For example, librarians and information technologists working together to develop an instructional program for students may step back and identify as the goal of the project teaching students information seeking, organization, and management skills rather than "library" or "computing" skills. Planning a computing lab in the library can become a genuine collaborative project if librarians and information technologists develop joint goals for the project, e.g., providing an information commons where students and other users can access information resources and receive assistance on content and technical issues from available staff. In traditional library instruction programs, the librarian is frequently regarded as a guest lecturer who supplements the core course material; in a collaboratively developed curriculum that incorporates networked information resources, librarians can become true partners with faculty, sharing in the development of the underlying philosophy, pedagogy, and assessment of the course.

Developing a common mission may seem like a simple task, but it is one too frequently skipped in cross-sector projects. Often the individuals on the team focus on their parochial interests, fail to open themselves to broader points of view, and become critical of the motives and work style of their teammates from other professions. At the beginning of their work, teams should spend some concerted time on developing a joint understanding of the project and a shared vocabulary of technical terms. They need to determine working styles and parameters acceptable to all parties and communication channels that will be conducive to an exchange of ideas and plans.

Working on a team does not imply losing one's professional identity. A second hallmark of successful teams is the high value placed by team members on the varied expertise that each member brings to a project. This is a particularly important point given the occasional rancor among some professional groups and the emphasis on stereotypes or status rather than on the positive contributions that each group can make to an initiative. In successful teams, individuals often learn new skills from their partners as well as contribute a unique level of ability in some facet of the project.

Librarians and Cross-Sector Collaborative Teams: Factors for Success

Staff that are chosen or assigned to team projects involving other campus sectors may need some training in teamwork in order to succeed in their project. While individuals are generally assigned to a team project because of their particular professional or technical expertise, some social skills are also necessary to succeed, including:

- willingness to shape a common mission, outside of the unit-specific mission;
- interest in sharing jargon and definitions of technical terms;
- willingness to learn aspects of the other partners' expertise; and
- ability to appreciate differences and not criticize or stereotype others' professions.

Administrators can assist their staff in succeeding in teamwork or partnership in a number of ways. They can:

- help staff think in broader terms and set institutional rather than library-centric objectives;
- allow sufficient time for collaborative projects in the staff member's portfolio of responsibilities;

- reward collaborative activities in performance reviews and in promotion and tenure reviews; and
- create positive relationships with other units at the administrative level and minimize turf wars.

Collaborative projects can result in substantial contributions to the institution and its goals due to the in-depth nature of projects and cross-sector involvement, decreased isolation of the individual units involved, and expanded skill sets for staff. Collaborations need to be developed with an understanding of their characteristics and of the types of skills needed by staff to succeed in them.

CNI Projects & Cross-Sector Teams

Working Together

New Learning Communities

Institution-Wide Information Services

Assessing the Academic Networked Environment

University Presses in the Networked Environment

Capture and Storage of Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Information on CNI projects that have emphasized use of cross-sector teams is available on CNI's website at <http://www.cni.org/>.

Resources

Some useful books and articles on collaboration, partnership, and teamwork:

Henderson, John C. "Plugging into Strategic Partnerships: The Critical IS Connection." *Sloan Management Review* 31, no. 3 (1990): 7-18.

Kanter, Rosabeth M. "Collaborative Advantage: The Art of Alliances." *Harvard Business Review* 72 (July-Aug. 1994): 96-108.

Katzenbach, Jon R., ed. *The Work of Teams*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998.)

Katzenbach, Jon R. and Douglas K. Smith. *The Wisdom of Teams*. (New York: HarperBusiness, 1994).

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