Fostering Radical Collaboration: The OCUL Collaborative Futures Project

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Abstract

This paper was first given as a poster presentation at the Ontario Library Association (OLA) Super Conference in 2016. Building on decades of successful cooperative work, the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) Collaborative Futures project aims to select and implement a shared next-generation library services platform (LSP), to manage and preserve print resources in a sustainable system, and to effectively and efficiently use a shared system for the management of electronic and print resources. Phase One of this project was completed in Summer 2015. This is its story.

Keywords

Consortia, collaboration, Ontario Council of University Libraries, library systems, workflow, print management

Introduction

The Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) is a consortium of libraries from all 21 Ontario universities. An affiliate of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), OCUL has helped libraries leverage and develop their collections, staff expertise, services, and resources in pursuit of learning and research excellence since 1967.

OCUL is driven to meet the information needs and expectations of Ontario's knowledge community by providing easy-to-use tools and systems and ensuring barrier-free access to the wealth of information resources held across the province. OCUL members leverage their collective resources to negotiate, purchase, and steward a large collection of electronic resources. OCUL also provides access to its textual, data, and image collections through its technological infrastructure service, Scholars Portal, and is committed to ensuring the preservation of these learning and research materials through sustainable and responsible stewardship.

In 2012–2013, the idea of a next-generation library services platform (LSP) was taking hold within OCUL, as member libraries were anticipating replacing their library management systems. OCUL was aware that other libraries and other consortia had made the decision to proceed with next-generation systems but felt the need for further information before deciding what path to follow. A number of conversations were started within OCUL and a summit was held in February 2013 to discuss the topic. The summit led to a report to OCUL Directors and then to the formation of the Collaborative Approaches Task Force to identify various opportunities for OCUL. The work of this task force and its consultations throughout OCUL in 2013–2014 eventually led to the multi-phased Collaborative Futures project. This project aims to maximize the existing expertise and resources of OCUL members while fostering a deeper and more comprehensive collaborative venture among Ontario's academic libraries.

The Vision

The vision for the project was set out in the *Collaborative Futures Project Charter* in 2014. It outlines an environment where OCUL is focused on users (students, faculty, researchers, and staff) and their experiences of Ontario-wide library collections:

They can move seamlessly between different types of content (electronic and print, books and journals, etc.) using multiple interoperable platforms whose design is evidence-based. Via search engine optimization and advanced authentication, many experience OCUL resources from outside of Ontario. Users have access to more books and specialized content than ever before, and these resources are incorporated into their research, learning, and teaching workflows. (2014, p. 2)

The project vision also looks to an even more collaborative work environment across Ontario's university libraries:

The vision also sees OCUL library employees working in an environment in which collaborative work is a given—they are part of a network and work naturally within it. They collaborate routinely with staff at other OCUL libraries, and are familiar with OCUL-wide standards and policies, and they may be doing work on local projects or on behalf of another institution for the good of the OCUL community. (*Collaborative Futures Project Charter*, 2014, p. 2)

OCUL already conducts much of its work within this collaborative mindset. This project seeks to leverage and extend this mindset.

The Project

Collaborative Futures has three phases: a feasibility study, a pre-procurement phase, and a procurement and implementation phase. OCUL member institutions can choose whether to participate in each of these phases as the project progresses. The project

allows for participation by all or a subset of OCUL libraries at each stage, and its success is not dependent on full participation.

The first phase of the project involved a feasibility study, which was ultimately presented to the OCUL Directors as a business case in July 2015. The feasibility study sought to: demonstrate the benefits and costs of the initiative; determine the needs of member libraries regarding the ongoing management and preservation of print collections; gain an initial understanding of the next-generation library system market; and identify library workflow practices, commonalities, and opportunities for collaboration.

The Crew

To complete this work, OCUL drew together a project team consisting of 46 people from 17 of OCUL's 21 member institutions, the Scholars Portal Operations Team, and the OCUL office. A dedicated Project Manager was also hired to keep everything on track. The project team provided a broad range of experience and expertise from Ontario's university libraries and ensured the collective as well as local perspectives were constantly in mind. The project is led by the Shared Vision Task Force (SVTF), which for Phase One included chairs of the five project working groups, a number of library Directors, and the Project Manager. The individual working groups were responsible for scoping, researching, and consulting with the OCUL community on a specific topic:

- Market Research,
- Shared Print Management and Preservation,
- Shared Workflow/Business Processes,
- Total Cost of Ownership, and
- Communications.

With members spread across the province, the project team relied primarily on virtual communication tools to conduct its work, including a wiki, working group listservs, and regular teleconferences. Communication between working groups was facilitated by in-person meetings, dedicated communications liaisons, and working group updates delivered at monthly SVTF meetings. The project's Communications Team also ensured the broader OCUL membership was kept up to date with project developments through monthly webinars, the project wiki, and regular announcements.

From November 2014 to July 2015 the project moved through a number of stages.

The Scope

Once the project team was in place, it began defining the boundaries of the project through consultation with other library consortia who had been through a similar process. The Shared Vision Task Force completed this initial scoping exercise at an intensive one-day workshop in March 2015.

The Market

The Market Research and Shared Print Management and Preservation Working Groups conducted environmental scans of existing systems and shared print programs, while the Total Cost of Ownership Study Working Group began to build a picture of the costs of library systems currently used at OCUL libraries. In April 2015, OCUL issued a Request for Information (RFI) from software vendors and other organizations interested in and able to provide creative, innovative, and future-driven solutions to help achieve the Collaborative Futures vision. This RFI was developed by the Market Research Working Group in consultation with OCUL members.

The Check-in

Partway through Phase One, the entire project team met in person to discuss content for the Business Case. This meeting was useful for facilitating cross-working group collaboration. The subsequent outline for the Business Case was presented to OCUL Directors for feedback at their semi-annual meeting in May 2015.

The Consultations

The project team continued its consultations within OCUL using a range of information-gathering tools including surveys, follow-up communications to clarify responses, and in-person and teleconference meetings with specific interest groups.

The Business Case

The outcome of this work in Phase One was delivered to the OCUL Directors as a Business Case. It included an environmental scan of both the market and the situation at OCUL libraries, the findings of the project team's consultation within OCUL, lessons from other consortia, a risk assessment for the initiative, an initial cost/benefit analysis, and a number of potential models of collaboration for OCUL.

Collaboration Models

The models of collaboration presented in the Business Case were developed by the project team in three broad areas: Systems, Workflows, and Shared Print Management. Originally, the models spanned a continuum of five levels of collaboration from the lowest level of "coordination" to the highest level of "total integration." However, it was decided that only the three higher levels of collaboration were useful to consider as potential models. The two lower levels essentially described already-existing activities within the consortium and did not break any new ground for this initiative. The three desirable models are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below, one for each area of collaboration.

Table1.			
<i>Models of Collaboration - Systems</i>			
	Collaboration	Partial Integration	Total Integration
Instance	Individual instances of a common system, but systems begin to "talk" to each other	Separate instances aggregated into a single shared system	Single shared instance with multiple locations
Knowledge Base and Discover	Distinct data sets; no common knowledge base but possibly shared discovery	Shared discovery with logically separable "views" of a shared knowledge base	Consolidated data sets and shared discovery
Patron Data	Patron data hosted locally		Patron records are centralized, available to all staff; One library card

Table 2.			
<i>Models of Collaboration - Workflow</i>			
	Collaboration	Partial Integration	Total Integration
Technical Services	Shared tech service expertise in creating or editing some central records	Shared tech services helps make shared cataloguing possible	Shared catalogue and tech services - no transfer of records required
Authority Control	Common authority control is possible if individual institutions allow access to their bibliographic databases. A common authority control vendor (e.g., Marcive, Backstage) agreement may be negotiated via OCUL for all institutions.		One authority record across the consortium

E-Resource Management (ERM)	Increased benefit from shared ERM due to some centralized record loading	Shared ERM, but individual institutions maintain financial and renewal information	Centralized fulfilment of e-resources
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Table3.

Models of Collaboration – Shared Print Management

	Collaboration	Partial Integration	Total Integration
Holdings	Difficult to compare holdings across institutions.	Shared system makes holdings comparisons easier but individual datasets with disparate metadata remain a hurdle.	Single dataset in a common system facilitates consistent holdings information, streamlining comparisons across institutions.
Shared Collections	Shared collection begins to form around low-demand print serials and monographs. The collection is de-duplicated across the participants.	Fully shared low-demand collection of print monographs and serials. Collaborative work on low-demand materials in complex formats (e.g., government documents, scores, a/v, microforms) occurs.	Many print collections at participating institutions are fully shared, including new acquisitions. Collaborative work on complex formats is a normal feature of collections and tech services work.

Discovery	Unless shared discovery is implemented, user access to print collections at other institutions limited to ILL.	Shared discovery allows direct requesting of materials from the shared collection by users at all institutions.
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Next Steps

At the end of Phase One, OCUL Directors were asked to consider the Business Case, provide feedback and general direction for the project, and determine if their institution would like to participate in Phase Two. There was strong support from the Directors for OCUL to move forward with the project. This was due in part to the many potential benefits to users and staff, as well as the encouraging successes of other academic consortia in embarking on similar projects.

Eighteen OCUL member institutions are taking part in Phase Two (August 2015 to July 2016). This phase involves:

- engaging the LSP market,
- gathering user and technology requirements for a shared LSP,
- beginning to develop shared policies and participant agreements,
- writing a Business Plan for Directors' consideration, and
- a decision by OCUL Directors on whether to move to Phase Three—to acquire and implement a shared system.

If OCUL decides to go ahead with acquiring and implementing a shared system, this will roll out over approximately 17 months from August 2016 to December 2017. As the project progresses, the OCUL libraries move incrementally but substantially closer to achieving the vision of Collaborative Futures.

Information about this project can be found at www.ocul.on.ca/projects/collaborative-futures.

References

Collaborative Futures Project Charter (V. 1.2). (2014). Toronto, ON: Ontario Council of University Libraries.