Carpenter: NISO and Collaboration

NISO and Collaboration: A Place at the Table for all Players

Todd Carpenter, Managing Director, National Information Standards Organization

(Interviewed by Valerie Horton, Executive Director, Colorado Library Consortium and Co-editor, *Collaborative Librarianship*)

Abstract

Todd Carpenter, the Managing Director of NISO, the National Information Standards Organization, is a leading player in promoting research through the creation of standard and best practices related to information exchange and management. NISO provides the environment for bringing key organizations together to reach complex and often difficult agreements. As Carpenter says, "One of NISO's most important principles is ensuring all the relevant players have an opportunity to sit at the table, in an open and fostering environment that is supported by participatory and well-established rules for engagement."

Introduction

This article continues a series of interviews with the Advisory Board for *Collaborative Librarian-ship*. Todd Carpenter, the Managing Director of NISO, is a leading player in promoting research through the creation of standard and best practices related to information exchange and management. NISO provides the environment for bringing key organizations together to reach complex and often difficult agreements. As Carpenter says, "One of NISO's most important principles is ensuring all the relevant players have an opportunity to sit at the table, in an open and fostering environment that is supported by participatory and well-established rules for engagement."

Given Carpenter's role, he is uniquely positioned to look at the big picture and see how collaborative efforts are impacted during difficult financial times. While he identifies concerns for the future, Carpenter also describes how collaborative projects can save time and money for organizations across the information market-place. He also sees hope for the future in newly formed projects like the Digital Library of America.

CL: What is NISO?

Carpenter: NISO is a non-profit industry trade organization that develops technical standards for the creation, description, exchange, discov-

ery, delivery, and curation of media in all forms. Supported by about 120 organizational members, NISO works with the publishers, library organizations, and system suppliers to develop and promote the adoption of consensus standards. NISO is accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to undertake this work. In addition, NISO represents United States interests internationally in the areas of Information and Documentation (TC 46, that is, Technical Committee #46) within the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) as the Technical Advisory Group to ANSI. It also serves as the Secretariat on behalf of ANSI for ISO's technical Subcommittee on Identification and Description, the group that maintains widely known and applied standards, such as ISBN, ISSN, DOI and ISRC.

CL: How does NISO support library collaboration?

Carpenter: The complex interchange of information, especially in a digital environment, requires standardization to function. NISO supports this collaboration by not only maintaining existing standards, but helping to foster the development and innovation in our community, and by helping to promote the solid work and best practices of community members. NISO provides a neutral forum where libraries can collaborate together, but also engages publishers and the systems suppliers that are contribute to our community. NISO is involved from the



production of file structures to bibliographic data creation; and from discovery to delivery and eventually preservation. This chain of information sharing requires consistent adoption of structures and systems.

One of NISO's most important principles is ensuring all the relevant players have an opportunity to sit at the table, in an open and fostering environment, that is supported by participatory and well-established rules for engagement. No single community member has a particular advantage over another within the context of NISO's development structure, nor can any one community impose its will on the others over sustained objection. In this way, NISO provides a framework for community collaboration.

CL: What values do you see in collaboration?

Carpenter: From my perspective there are three key values of collaboration. They are:

- Open and Frank Communication
- Shared and Agreed Goals, and
- Mutual Success.

The first and most critical element is the principle of openness and frank communication. It is critical for all parties in the collaboration to have a clear understanding of the expectations and aims of the other contributors. Aligning participant's goals, expectations and motivations will avoid challenges and possible resentments later in the process.

This is tied to the second element of a successful collaboration, having shared and agreed-upon goals. If these elements don't align and if they are not discussed in an open and frank manner, it could inhibit the successes of the project. Understanding the aims each contributor has in the project helps to ensure ongoing contributions and participation.

The last value is that each member of the collaboration should achieve some measure of success from the project. This doesn't mean that outcomes need be equally beneficial, but there should be at least some reward that accrues to all participants in the collaboration. Each member of the collaboration should be considering

not only how their own organizations' benefits measure up, but they should also consider the benefits the other parties will receive in the collaboration. Understanding how the projects benefit others, should give all the contributors a better sense of the output and how its value extends beyond his or her own institutional context. This also helps to make the outcome more broadly adoptable or extensible.

CL: Tell us about your experiences collaborating with others?

Carpenter: Almost all of NISO's work involves collaboration with various community partners. One of the true joys of NISO is being able to bring together community members who wouldn't normally agree to work together or wouldn't normally have shared interests. Much of my career has been focused on these crossorganizational partnerships. From my work on Project MUSE and my time at the Johns Hopkins University Press, to BioOne, and now at NISO, getting a variety of publishing organizations and libraries to work together toward common goals has been particularly gratifying.

One of my career's most positive collaborative experiences was the time I was working at BioOne. BioOne was formed as a collaboration of libraries, society publishers and a commercial printer to provide low-cost society journals in the biological sciences. Particularly given the environment when libraries and publishers were focused on pricing battles, open access policies, and the long-term sustainability of the independent society publishers was in question, BioOne is a unique collaborative effort. Initially funded by the library community (led by SPARC), BioOne has been able to develop and provide an electronic platform for independent bioscience publishers where their science can be distributed worldwide while returning significant publisher royalties that keep those programmers relatively financially stable and independent. BioOne grew rapidly and now supports more than 150 publications and is available in more than 2,000 institutions. It has succeeded by remaining true to its collaborative mission that seeks to "serve its stakeholders equally, without placing the needs of one group over other participants."



CL: What challenges do you see ahead for collaborative ventures?

Carpenter: One of the biggest challenges ahead is the lack of resources to contribute to collaborative projects. Increasingly as libraries have had to cut their services in response to budget pressures, organizations have had to focus on their core activities and making do with the diminished resource environment. These cutbacks have caused a variety of organizations to pull back on their collaborative work, despite the fact that the output of collaboration is often greater efficiency.

When development or support of internal systems is lacking, contributing the limited resources an organization has to outside priorities is often a difficult choice. Many institutions become inwardly focused on their own activities as opposed to building community collective projects that build efficiencies across many institutions. One can hardly fault this internal focus. Unfortunately, the number of people and organizations willing and able to contribute to collective work is declining. This eventually puts the community collaborative activities at risk because those organizations with an outwardfacing, collaborative philosophy are increasingly pressed to lead the many initiatives underway. The "usual suspects" increasingly take on the burden of the collaborative work, which skews the contribution/benefit ratio. Unfortunately, I don't see this period of belt-tightening improving significantly in the near future. Hopefully, more organizations will determine that outward collaboration is in fact more beneficial than the internally facing attitude that has become so prevalent.

CL: What do you see happening in the future?

Carpenter: I see great potential opportunity in the relatively newly formed Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). Although it is likely too soon to tell of its eventual success or even scope, DPLA does hold promise for transforming library information distribution. This could happen in a variety of ways. The first would be in collective sharing of information about local collections. In some ways DPLA could be an extension of traditional libraries into a new paradigm of distributing library content on the internet. A virtual library of content available to all based on the aggregate collections of hundreds or thousands of institutions could transform the library communities. In the end, I see something akin to DPLA as I see its potential as being transformative. There are pitfalls and risks associated with this potential vision of DPLA and I should share that this is not necessarily the view of DPLA's leadership or participants. However, if something like this were planned, it would be the ultimate in library partnerships and collaborations.

