

PARTNERSHIP OR ALLIANCE?
AN INTERVIEW WITH MILLARD
JOHNSON AND C. RAY EWICK
YIELDS TWO PERSPECTIVES

partnership to fight crime.”

INDIANA LIBRARIES:

How do you define partnership?

EWICK:

I think of a partnership as an effective and strategic alliance between agencies to pursue a commonly held goal.

JOHNSON:

It used to be enough for a company to offer you the best quality product for the least possible price. Lately however more and more companies want to enter into partnerships with us. Database vendors, software giants, computer makers, even the telephone company, all want to partner with us to provide better library service. Partnership/partner! It is not bad enough that they turn a perfectly good noun into a verb, but they would have us believe that, in our special case, they are more a philanthropy than a commercial enterprise. It is little wonder that so many businesses want us to be their “partners” because a true partnership requires a level of trust, commitment and mutual interest that is impossible in a commercial transaction. It also requires that each party to the partnership have complete confidence that the other “partner” is not trying to gain profit from the other. Unfortunately, profiting from an exchange is exactly what a commercial transaction is. So, no thank you, we will buy telephone service from the company that provides the service that meets our needs with the greatest reliability, at the least possible cost. We will bargain for our greatest advantage, we will read the fine print, and we will trust the forces in the competitive marketplace to generate the products and services we need.

Another reason business likes the word “partnership” is because they recognize that true partnerships, such as the relationship between the Indiana State Library and INCOLSA, produce remarkably successful results from fixed resources. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, third edition, defines partnership as: “A relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, as for the achievement of a specified goal: Neighborhood groups formed a

For what reasons do your institutions seek partnerships?

JOHNSON:

There are good reasons for people and institutions to enter into partnerships and there are good reasons to avoid partnerships. Likewise, there are bad reasons to form partnerships and bad reasons to avoid them.

Over time, it has become increasingly obvious that individual libraries are becoming less able to provide comprehensive service or even be self-sufficient. The number of items published is growing, as are their costs. Technology becomes more essential and more expensive. New media emerges, requiring new expertise. The expectation of library patrons grows. Fortunately, as the world has grown more complex for libraries, the technology that created the complexity has allowed libraries to pool their expertise to solve their problems. To help libraries solve their problems they formed cooperatives. The first round of partnerships was formed by libraries of similar type and size where common interests were clear.

EWICK:

The Indiana State Library and INCOLSA are fundamentally different institutions. INCOLSA is a membership organization striving to serve the member libraries. The Indiana State Library is a government agency charged with studying the societal needs for library (and information) services, assessing the capability of the libraries to meet those needs and developing and participating in plans that would close the gaps. Therefore the State Library has primarily a planning and development function and INCOLSA more of an operational one. INCOLSA will suggest how technology can assist its members and implement the programs of most interest to the largest number of its members. And it must find the funding to carry on its programs. The State Library on the other hand needs to provide leadership in the adoption of promising technologies even before they become popular or in demand. Some of those technologies that need development can only be seen in the larger mosaic of the State as a whole.

INDIANA LIBRARIES:

Describe some of the partnerships in which the State Library and INCOLSA have participated or participate today.

JOHNSON:

It was not that long ago that INCOLSA was primarily a network providing service (especially OCLC services) to large public and academic libraries. There were always smaller public, school and special library members but the real strength of the organization was its support of larger institutions with major technical service operations. Providing network services to smaller libraries—particularly smaller public and school libraries—was the province of Indiana's other regional library networks. The Indiana State Library was the focus for networking of most of Indiana's public libraries. These early arrangements were beneficial to their members but the costs were large. As time passed, the cost of everything as well as the problems that spawned the networks grew faster than the income from state and other sources. Each network found itself spending a disproportional amount of its funding on overhead.

The consolidation of the networks was a traumatic experience not only for the staff of the networks but for their members and for anyone involved in multi-library initiatives in Indiana. The change which has occurred in Indiana networking with the merger of the ALSAs and INCOLSA was not so much the result of a power struggle as it was a thoughtful response to inevitable changes which were occurring in technology and financial support. Many dedicated people put the needs of the libraries statewide ahead of themselves.

One of the little known but still functioning entities created by the consolidation was the Network Coordinating Committee (NCC) which consists of the directors and three staff members of both the State Library and INCOLSA. For the first year, NCC meetings were held under the guidance of a professional facilitator. One of the committee's first tasks was to inventory services provided by both agencies. The object was to build on strengths and to eliminate duplications. As a result of the inventory both organizations stopped doing some things that the other was doing better. Both organizations learned a new respect for the abilities of the other. Finally, we learned some things that were not being done well by either. Perhaps the greatest benefit of the NCC meetings is that there is no longer a convenient scapegoat. It is impossible to dismiss problems when they are us.

It has been said that INCOLSA is the technology arm of the Indiana State Library. This is not exactly correct. The Indiana State Library has its own technology capability and links to other agencies with technologi-

cal expertise. While technology is a focus of INCOLSA, and INCOLSA works in close cooperation with the State Library, it has its own priorities and programs not related to State Library initiatives.

Among the programs where the partnership between INCOLSA and the Indiana State Library has been most productive for Indiana libraries are continuing education, technology deployment to Indiana libraries, and Inspire.

EWICK:

The partnership or alliance with INCOLSA is built upon commonly-identified goals which are discussed through the Network Coordinating Council. The Council identifies the strengths of each agency, agrees upon a course of action that is not in conflict with other initiatives, and communicates an action plan. Communication, basic belief in one another, trust and mutual support are the essential ties which make the alliance or partnership work. One of the outstanding successes has been the development of Inspire. The idea for Inspire came from INCOLSA. The funding request was developed with the Indiana Library Federation and the Indiana State Library and secured from the Indiana General Assembly. The voluntary steering committee became a formal Advisory Committee to the State Library on the implementation of the contract which was made with INCOLSA.

The technological changes which affect INCOLSA and State Library also require alliances with other related but non-library organizations. These changes are affecting higher education, K-12 education, state and local government, and non-profit agencies such as museums, historical societies, etc. Each of these sectors wants to assure quality of service, affordable costs, and appropriate training in order to serve our common clients, the public. Therefore attending meetings and voluntarily serving on committees has led to achieving some common infrastructure that will be able to serve us all. One example is the Access Indiana State Backbone, the ATM high speed telecommunications backbone which links higher education, libraries, schools and eventually government in a managed network. Working with Intelenet, the quasi-state agency created by the Indiana General Assembly to broker telecommunications services for government agencies, has led to the State Librarian being statutorily appointed to the Intelenet Commission.

Because of libraries' knowledge of how people use information the State Librarian was subsequently appointed to chair the Enhanced Data Access Review Committee, which is responsible for overseeing the Access Indiana electronic gateway to State Government information. Open access to government information, protection of privacy, design of useful web sites, and

managing minimum commercial fee services which provide the funding for the free services are all areas in which the State Library provides some expertise.

Participation in Access Indiana also has brought libraries closer to the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunications System. IHETS obviously had demonstrated the technical capability to manage a high quality of network service. When simple leasing arrangements with telecommunications companies were unable to deliver services to our satisfaction, IHETS contracted to manage the State Backbone acquired through an RFP process. With schools, libraries and higher education using the single Backbone, some economies of scale are achieved as well as putting in place the infrastructure for tomorrow's telecommunication needs. As a result of this activity the IHETS Board voted to modify its mission and plans to include K-12 schools and public libraries. The Board has asked the State Librarian to serve on the expanded Board along with the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

INDIANA LIBRARIES:

What kinds of partnerships do you see in the future?

JOHNSON:

There is a new book by Spencer Johnson (co-author of *The One Minute Manager*) called *Who Moved My Cheese?* that is making the rounds of businesses. It tells a story of four characters (including "Hem" and "Haw") that describe how we handle (or don't handle) change. We are still dealing with the changes going on especially in the area of technology. Experience demonstrates that the rate of change and its impact on our institutions will continue to increase at an ever-faster pace. We will be challenged to find appropriate mechanisms to keep each of our institutions engaged in serving our patrons and we must be open to changing relationships to be effective. Partnership has some

specific legal meaning which is not the meaning that most of us have in mind when we say that we need to partner with someone to achieve our goals. Perhaps a better word would be alliance. When we ally ourselves with someone else, the alliance is not a merger where we lose our separate identity, but more a specified agreement to combine our strengths and differences to more easily achieve a common goal.

In the new partnership as we talk of it, the partners are committed to their common goals, not just loyal to each other. When the common goal is no longer shared, perhaps the need for the alliance will also end and each might be best served by moving on to other partners with which there is a new common goal.

EWICK:

These new alliances or partnerships are not permanent relationships as much as they are a recognition of current need to work together to achieve common goals. The future may change or alter them as the needs change. Probably the current alliances will serve us well as video conferencing and distance education become the hot topics. The libraries will be well positioned to offer a range of services not readily available before. The use of video caching to store and deliver short learning videos on demand

for just-in-time learning can further enhance the value of the library to the community. We will need to be ever alert to changing needs and the opportunities we should pursue. Unquestionably, more work with local government, museums and non-profit educational institutions will be required. As we describe some of our partnership opportunities, many of you also are engaged in similar opportunities within your communities. In the new partnership as we talk of it, the partners are committed to their common goals, not just loyal to each other. When the common goal is no longer shared, perhaps the need for the alliance will also end and each might be best served by moving on to other partners with which there is a new common goal.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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