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Introduction to Law Library Consortia: The State of the Art*

Gregory E. Koster**

Consortia are one of the more promising approaches to the sharing of resources and expertise that have been developed in the library community over the last century or more.¹ Law library consortia run a wide gamut, from informal groups whose "chair" is the rotating host of the next irregularly scheduled meeting to formally incorporated I.R.C. § 501(c)(3) organizations with bylaws, dues, and perhaps even a salaried administrator, and from a membership of two or three neighboring law schools to a roster of hundreds of libraries of all types throughout the world.²

The Council of Law Library Consortia was created in 1984 when Eileen Searls invited representatives from the fourteen identified law library consortia to an organizational meeting at the American Association of Law Libraries Annual Meeting in San Diego, California.³ Twenty-six librarians representing eleven consortia attended the meeting. Marian Gallagher of the University of Washington School of Law Library, the featured speaker, recounted her experiences with interlibrary cooperation and offered concrete suggestions for successful projects. Topics discussed by the group included the then-new technology of telefacsimile, with a resolution to seek inclusion of library fax numbers in the *AALL Directory and Handbook*, and an experimental teleconference based at Dalhousie University. The major discussion concerned the need for creation of the Council, and a consensus developed that it would serve a worthwhile function as a clearinghouse of information about consortia organization, projects, and finances. The continued operation of the Council was facilitated by a grant from Jerry Dupont of the Law Library Microform Consortium, which has continued to underwrite the Council's expenses.

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1. See Sarah K. Wiant, White Paper on Consortia, Phase II: A Report to the Association of American Law Schools Committee on Libraries (1989) (available from AALS Headquarters).

2. See Gregory E. Koster & Frank G. Houdek, *Law Library Consortia: The Compleat Experience*, 85 LAW LIBR. J. (1993).

3. COUNCIL OF LAW LIBRARY CONSORTIA NEWSL., Dec. 1984, at 15, 15-18 (Council of Law Library Consortia, minutes of the first meeting, taken by Charles R. Dyer (June 30, 1984)).

The Council of Law Library Consortia has continued to meet at each AALL Annual Meeting since 1984. Eileen Searls served as coordinator from 1984-85 to 1989-90; Frank Houdek was coordinator from 1990-91 to 1991-92; and I assumed the role in 1992-93. The *Council of Law Library Consortia Newsletter*, edited by Professor Searls throughout her term, reported on the status and activities of the member consortia, listed grant opportunities for consortia and other library cooperation projects, and solicited grant proposal dossiers for a clearinghouse maintained by Professor Searls at St. Louis University Law Library. The *Newsletter* was expanded into a *Quarterly Report* under Professor Houdek, and continues as such today.

The Council cosponsored a program on law library consortia at the 1987 AALL Annual Meeting in Chicago. The need to seek a cosponsor, since the Council had no official status within AALL, began a series of discussions that ultimately led to the creation of the new category of AALL "caucus" groups. Under Professor Houdek's leadership, the Council adopted a constitution and bylaws and registered as an official AALL caucus group. The Council was thus able to sponsor on its own the 1992 Annual Meeting program, "Consortia: Ask the Librarian Who Owns One," which led to this symposium article.

The next three parts of this article are revised and edited versions of the presentations at that program. Martha Berglund Crane has been the coordinator of the New England Law Library Consortium for the past four years, and currently has the title Executive Director. She discusses the origin, structure, and major projects of what is probably the most successful law library consortium in "The New England Law Library Consortium Experience."

Judith Meadows, the State Law Librarian of Montana, was a founding member of the Northwest Consortium and was a Board member from 1988 to 1991 and its final President in 1990-91. She examines the reasons for the failure of this far-flung but unfocused regional group in "The Northwest Consortium of Law Libraries Experience."

Sara Ellen Robbins, Law Librarian and Professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School Library, and I constitute two-thirds of the executive committee of a small, tightly focused consortium of three law schools in New York City, which we discuss in "The New York Joint International Law Program Experience."

Richard Amelung, Head of Technical Services and Professor of Legal Research at St. Louis University Law Library, was involved in the development of a CD-ROM union catalog for the Mid-America Law School Library Consortium. He discussed the technical aspects of the project and its impact on staff and patrons in the program "The Nuts and

Bolts of Developing a CD-ROM-Based Union Catalog” at the 1991 AALL Annual Meeting. His revised version of that presentation follows as “The Mid-America Law School Library Consortium Experience.”

Finally, to complete this survey of state-of-the-art law library consortia, Frank G. Houdek, Law Library Director and Professor of Law at Southern Illinois University School of Law, and I present a compilation of information about the status, history, membership, and activities of the sixteen member consortia in “Law Library Consortia: The Compleat Experience.”

Surveying the state of the art in law library consortia, I have reached two major conclusions. First, I am impressed and excited by the strength and diversity of the cooperative activities represented in these projects, especially in the four consortia experiences described at length, but also in the mosaic of the sixteen biographies. Second, the true benefits of consortia and cooperation are in improved service and efficiency, not in quick cost savings. Sally Wiant noted this fact of life in 1989,⁴ and all our experiences since then have confirmed it. But we have also confirmed her conclusion that cooperative endeavors do provide real benefits, and the record of these varied law library consortia suggests that the state of the art will continue to improve.

4. Wiant, *supra* note 1.

