Library Consortia: Models for Collaboration and Sustainability
by Valerie Horton and Greg Pronevitz
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Having participated in various local and national library consortia myself, I was interested in what perspective this book could add to my experience, and wasn't disappointed. The scene is set with a good definition of consortia and an overview of the history of various types, from combined catalogue and interlibrary loan services to large journal and article delivery collectives. The content is American and focusses on libraries within the USA but I found it highly relevant to my situation. It's clear that libraries the world over face similar economic issues and during tough times they can also struggle to survive; that is when consortia can provide maximum benefit. Survey data are provided about consortia in the USA – numbers, total budget spend and the different areas of collaboration. The chapter on consortium management divides the consortia into different types and describes the various governance and structure options that can be encountered. It covers the complexities of budget management in this environment, and also the human resources challenges associated with differences in employment status for people working within libraries who are employed by a consortium. Most of the suggestions apply fairly generically but there is an acknowledgement of trends towards sharing staff among consortium members. Paragraphs about strategic planning, advocacy, public relations and communication cover these concepts and when this coverage is superficial readers are directed to other resources for more depth in those areas. The needs of the participating libraries can be quite diverse, and the book demonstrates that a consortium manager needs to be able to focus on the conflicting needs with a clear strategic vision. The chapter on consortia services revisits the six areas of cooperation listed earlier in the book and provides a few paragraphs about each. From there the focus moves on to the delivery of different types of content, including group licensing and the management of e-content. Today's fast-changing technology and the ongoing development of discovery tools and authentication systems continue to challenge us all and the book gives a good focus on that. Before moving to the case studies that form the second half of the book, there is one last chapter on service delivery, which again gives more depth on topics that have been touched on earlier. I feel that this is important as technological advances in our ability to deliver information whilst staying within copyright and licensing boundaries is a fast-growing challenge. The second half of the book is devoted to case studies that demonstrate the benefits of both innovative and traditional approaches to collaboration. They are well laid out and at about five pages

each are useful without being too long. Was the book a good read? Yes, if you are interested in the subject. Did I learn something? Yes. Was what I learned relevant to my work? Yes, it gave me a better understanding of how to utilise the consortia that will undoubtedly continue to be a part of our lives as librarians.

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