
Perspectives on Building Consortia Between Libraries and Other Agencies

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at issues surrounding cooperative partnerships between different types of libraries, and between libraries and other organizations. The Ontario School Curriculum Resource (OSCR) and developments in Ontario and Canada are the focus of the article; however, it also provides perspectives on the cooperative experiences that are fundamental to many partnerships. The important benefits as well as the challenges of partnerships are considered, as is the future of cooperative resource sharing.

INTRODUCTION

It is no surprise that consortia are fast becoming a common approach to problem solving in order to seek joint solutions. Partnerships maximize funding opportunities and streamline information resources by linking technology and are often excellent vehicles for political lobbying. Costs of electronic journals and subscription databases continue to escalate, and the tangle of funding applications for small groups is a piecemeal solution at best. As fast as Internet subject lists are made, links go out of date. The “best source” is no longer static, as the mutability of information evolution makes nothing absolute or permanent. Partnerships improve productivity (shared workload) and expand funding opportunities. Public libraries, boards of education, municipalities, and postsecondary institutions are forming ad hoc and not so ad hoc alliances; joint projects, hence joint grant applications, promise bigger pieces of the funding “pie.”

This discussion article looks at some of the issues surrounding cooperative partnerships. While most of the focus is on the Ontario and Canadian scene where the authors work, the perspectives on cooperative experi-

ence are fundamental to many partnerships. The contributors have been involved in a number of consortia and continue to seek new partnerships for cooperative projects; despite the hurdles, each continues to find that the benefits outweigh the challenges.

The project discussed at length in this article is one that all the contributors have worked on together: the Ontario School Curriculum Resource (OSCR). OSCR is the product of a School/Public Library Symposium held at the Mississauga Library System in December of 2002. The theme of this symposium was school and public library cooperation and resource sharing. A steering committee was formed to address the results: this group has been called simply the Library Cooperative (appropriately dubbed TLC.) TLC currently has fourteen partners from public libraries, elementary and secondary school boards, and college and university libraries.

BACKGROUND OF THE OSCR

In order to provide context for the discussions that follow, it is useful to clarify the conditions that led to the development of OSCR through the partnerships forged between several school boards, public libraries and postsecondary institutions in central and southwest Ontario.

In 1998 the Ontario Government released a new province-wide curriculum for all elementary school students; after the curriculum was implemented it was very quickly realized that a great deal of work was needed to identify necessary resources. In many cases teachers had been presented with this new curriculum only weeks before the school year commenced. Independently, educators, public librarians, parents, and students scrambled to find resources that were age appropriate and relevant for assignments.

After the 2002 symposium the TLC steering committee met; it was decided that the best course of action would be to build a provincial database to house "best source" material (that is, print items; image, sound, and video multimedia items; Web sites; and electronic sources from available onsite databases) for each major curriculum topic. It is an important point that the prototype database service would be built from the user on up. A student, teacher, parent, or librarian would be led to the resource pages through easy pull-down menus beginning with the questions "What grade are you in?" and "What subject are you working on?" and then select from common assignment lists to access resources.

The next requirement of the database was that, if OSCR was going to be relevant and practical, it needed to be housed provincially but be adaptable to the local needs of each school and library. The local library or school would have the capability to add or remove the resources displayed, and the interface would have local branding. Most importantly, OSCR would be able to jump into the local onsite library catalogs to verify availability and the location of materials. The local administration of OSCR needed to be intuitive—one should not need to be a rocket scientist to adapt the

local interface. Added features of OSCAR included communication vehicles such as listservs and bulletin boards for professional information sharing, links to curriculum expectations on the ministry Web site, and also sections on how to do research, how to format bibliographies, how to format footnotes, etc.

Each of the TLC members had worked previously on a number of cross-cultural, cross-institutional partnerships to develop unified information access, so each brought a wealth of experience to the table that was as diverse as it was unique. Most notably, two of the committee members had been involved with two locally designed projects for the HALton Information NETwork (HALINET).

HALINET is a consortium of libraries in the Halton Region just west of Toronto. It is an alliance representing seven information providers within the Ontario Regional Municipality of Halton: Burlington Public Library, Halton District School Board, Halton Roman Catholic School Board, Halton Hills Public Library, Milton Public Library, Oakville Public Library, and Sheridan College. The HALINET portal is a shared information network that is accessible by residents in the Halton Hills Region of Ontario with their library cards. It is an integrated information network that also searches multiple databases and houses digital projects as well as resources through library Web pages (Bell & Lewis, 1998). Other members of the committee were and continue to be involved with Ontario Digital Libraries, the Ontario Library Association, and the Canadian Library Association and are active on various committee projects that all contributed to the vision that became OSCAR.

During 2004 and 2005 OSCAR's progression and development presented a number of challenges that are not unique to this project. Indeed, research indicates that all partnerships and consortia share similar hurdles. The rest of this article is a discussion of some of the challenges and solutions faced along the way. In true partnership style, this article is a product of each of our unique perspectives. The project coordinator provides the context, introduction, and conclusion. The academic librarian did the research and helped with the editing. The public librarian discusses funding challenges. Our technological expert speaks to technology challenges with multiple interfaces and diverse partner technical capabilities. An administrator addresses just some of the political issues that, while described from the Canadian perspective, are not uniquely Canadian.

FUNDING

OSCAR's roots came from a number of localized projects housed within HALINET. The first was called "The Curriculum Database" or "The School Project Application" and involved only two of the current Library Cooperative partners. As OSCAR evolved, it was found that, since this infrastructure was being used to develop OSCAR, these two member organizations ended

up bearing the brunt of the financial costs of development. As OSCR expanded and the vision grew, this funding situation was not sustainable. It became necessary to solicit seed money to offset development costs. It was also necessary to have additional partners to participate in evaluation and testing. A membership contribution was necessary to further fund the project. This was set at a low figure of \$500, so that the pledged amount was manageable for the smaller institutions. The collected funds, along with the in-kind contribution of members, kept the project afloat, and development could proceed. The contribution of these funds became an invaluable asset in subsequent funding applications because it showed a financial commitment from a larger group of organizations. A critical decision was made not to be exclusionary in terms of who could attend meetings and participate. Nonpaying interested parties were encouraged to attend. A greater number of partners and participants gave the project a relevance and validity that resulted in positive improvement and growth.

Funding Applications

Partnerships involving different types of institutional partners present unique challenges when applying for grants. Funding agencies tend to support certain types of institutions or projects while excluding others. For example, public libraries in Ontario may apply for a Writers Union grant for author visits but schools cannot. Library Strategic Development Fund (LSDF) grants, from the Ontario Ministry of Culture, are available to public libraries but not to educational institutions. The question for TLC was how to craft our first funding application so that no partners were excluded while still addressing the requirements of the funding agency. It is important here to note that research and direct contact with funding agencies often revealed that the parameters for application were not as rigid as first thought. As long as the lead for the funding application fit into one of the eligible applicant categories, the LSDF grant was not exclusive; other parties could be included. The lesson learned was to do the research and ask questions. It proved valuable to consult funding agencies to find out whether published constraints were negotiable.

A prime objective for the TLC was to emphasize partnership goals without compromising the project or sacrificing the vision. The perspectives and issues of all partners had to be considered. At the same time, the group had to be careful not to complicate the project merely for the sake of funding requirements. The OSCR members are fortunate. The partnership is a natural one—libraries and education fit well together. By focusing on common goals, the differences in institutional cultures and administrative challenges were easily overcome.

Commitment from Diverse Partners

In a multitype consortium, inevitably there are differing areas of focus and priority. For OSCR, public librarians focused on matching local library

resources with diverse patrons (parents, students, and staff), both in person and online. School libraries were most concerned with resources for students. The focus was to empower students to do their own research and not to "spoon-feed" them. Academic libraries, on the other hand, needed to address growing numbers of graduating high school students they felt were ill-prepared for conducting research at the university level. The challenge was to meld different institutional expectations and cultural approaches to information access so that a single resource addressed all these concerns.

The key to OSCR's success is communication. Communication within the steering group grew as the prototype was developed. Communication channels were also built, reaching out to the greater communities that each of the partners represented. Presentations were made at conferences, and information sessions were offered to the stakeholders' institutions. Feedback was constantly sought, needs were expressed, and features and functionality were added to the project "wish list." The advice of the project programmer was constantly sought. Promotional literature was produced, and new partners were sought. The funds contributed by the partners kept OSCR going so that a mock-up for presentation could be completed. Each development step was integral for positioning OSCR to seek further funding and support. Research for this article revealed that the Library Cooperative, while innovative, is not unique. For an example of a similar project model see Alexander and Goodyear (2001).

Getting Commitment from the Authority Behind the Partner Representatives

Typical of many consortia, TLC members attending meetings were not the decision makers for their institutions. This often meant that members had to go back and convince their institutions' administrations of the value and relevance of the OSCR project. This also meant that it sometimes took longer to get the support for staffing and the financial commitment necessary to proceed. However, an advantage was that, in discussing necessary approaches, members were forced to examine and deal with the different characteristics of each institution. An unexpected benefit of these discussions was a better understanding of each other and the respective institutions. This bodes well for more cooperative and mutually beneficial projects in the future.

Demonstrating Potential for Success

For OSCR it was imperative to have a demonstrable product. The prototype application served several purposes: it was a practical demonstration tool to show what OSCR would do, it gave the partners something to work with to provide evaluation and feedback to the programmer, and it was concrete proof of the return on investment for the financial contributions. It also provided steering committee members with tangible progress for reports to home institutions.

TLC has found a workable model, and having supported the developmental stages through partner financial contributions, an LSDF grant has now ensured that OSCAR will soon be a fully working application. The last stage of the project will be to seek sustaining funding and a partner group able to keep the resources current and relevant.

TECHNOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF CONSORTIA PROJECTS

Technology for the TLC was a double-edged sword, for the same technology that made OSCAR's dynamic attributes possible also presented many cross-institutional challenges. Technological issues were a central aspect in the development of OSCAR. The goal of the project is to allow local teachers and librarians to provide links from location-specific recommended resources to their library's online catalog. But, in order for this to be possible, each institution's networks and computers had to be able to "talk" to each other. The software, platforms, intranets, and structure of networks within individual institutions offer unique challenges when one tries to build bridges to enable them to reach out to each other.

Fortunately, a couple of the OSCAR partners had addressed similar challenges before in several previous applications including Halton Images (HALINET n.d. b) (a consortium partner in Images Canada) and the Halton Newspaper Index (HALINET, n.d. a). These challenges proved that building bridges between different and varying hosts was possible and indeed ultimately well worth the effort.

Each new project also utilized improvements of the former. Each time this type of application is developed, new technology challenges us to make improvements, especially with respect to its usability by a wider range of people and institutions. A fundamental principle of HALINET is that the software is always open source so that users can benefit from shared improvements. But the application must also be basic enough to be delivered as an application service provider (ASP) application to partner institutions with little or no technological know-how or support in their own workplace. These previous experiences proved invaluable during OSCAR's development.

STANDARDS

The standard network tools that underlie the World Wide Web, email, content transfer using HTTP, and image formats like GIF and JPEG are increasingly taken for granted by most users, but they are critical in allowing resource sharing and cross-platform communication. These common Internet standards are the basis for projects like OSCAR. They can be used to bring disparate partners into a common, shared environment.

However, Internet standards continue to develop and change in a cycle of rapid development. Cascading Stylesheets (CSS) and Javascript in par-

ticular suffer from different implementations in different versions of user software. The development of the OSCR software had to take into account that different consortia partners would have different versions of software and different deployments of these changing technologies.

SEPARATING CONTENT AND PRESENTATION

A key to success in individual projects, as well as consortia projects, comes in the separation of content from presentation. The OSCR project is based on Model-View-Controller (MVC) principles and has an n-tier architecture. On a practical level this translates into the content being stored as an XML document or in a relational database that supports Standard Query Language (SQL). Between the end-user and that content are a set of business rules and templates, which transform content into something to be presented to the user's program.

The end-user's program has traditionally been thought of as a browser running on a personal computer, but this perspective needs to be broadened. End-users may run Web-enabled cell phones, PDAs, and assistive technologies of various types. And the request might be initiated by another program, such as a Web search engine's indexing bots, RSS aggregators, the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) harvesters, or similar programs that index materials for location on the Web or otherwise facilitate access.

Today many libraries and consortia are investing in federated searching technologies and Web services, which may use protocols as diverse as Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) and Z39.50. To support these technologies across a set of partners, it is particularly important to separate the content because the presentation may be in a wide array of styles. Even for the most common end-user connecting to the application server via a "traditional" personal computer and browser, the separation of content and presentation is essential.

It is also useful for combining local content and local presentation to fit local needs. In the various cooperative projects that members of TLC have been involved in, local branding has always been a key factor. Branding is the ability of local Web pages to display local frames and banners of the library and school boards along with shared display and content. For this, it is ideal to have those elements that select content (for example, scope of a search to a particular subset of records) and those that manage presentation (for example, headers, footers, stylesheets, etc.) both be stored dynamically in a central database rather than being hard-coded. The business rules (which we have written in a variety of programming languages) look at the requesting Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and determine which set of presentation rules are to be used to organize each location's content set. Even for common Web browsers this requires alternate rules for browser versions that use CSS or other services. The results are cooperatively

developed server-side tools that are “skinned” according to the member’s preferences. The same content can be delivered using another set of rules to another kind of Web-accessible device or to other Web services.

At the other end of the content management spectrum is the matter of data entry. One part of this is data upload, either of files or of structured content. This is fairly simple to manage with common online methods and technology. The second part of data entry is online entry by local staff at the partner institutions. An HTML interface has been provided for this.

Given that the people doing content management are typically using an up-to-date Web browser, it is possible to add some elements of client-side programming for data entry validation. A succession of additional server-side rules are in place to check content before it is placed in the data store, which may have a further set of rules to ensure data integrity. Depending on the risk to the organizations, various strategies for securing the login and encrypting the sessions also must be considered.

There are technological issues that are faced by many library and multi-library projects, not just TLC’s OSCR. A common consideration is the question of using internal or external developers for a project. As each project is unique, it brings with it a unique learning curve, and external contractors may be the only strategy that makes sense. Obviously, a clear agreement is needed about ownership and intellectual rights to the resulting computer programs. For projects built by using internal developers, we often find that there is much computer program code that can be reused or adapted from project to project. Internal development also makes it simpler for a library to share its applications and programming code with other libraries in an open source arrangement. An open source arrangement allows all institutional partners, and other libraries, to customize, develop, and enhance the software, so this is a particularly effective approach with library partnerships and consortia.

The application tools that are used on a particular project can also be open source or commercial software solutions. The challenge is often one of choosing a commercial package or paying commercial rates to have software developed, or of using open source software and locally developed software solutions, which are often ever-evolving and never seen as “finished.” An important objective of any online project, however structured, is to ensure that the members of the consortium can—hopefully at any time, and with limited cost—get all of the content, including all of the associated indexing, abstracting, and other metadata, out of the project when a better way to deliver it comes along.

POLITICS OF COLLABORATION

Despite varying needs and working environments, libraries of different types have often been able to form successful partnerships to develop and

deliver joint services such as OSCR. Libraries and their partners traditionally work together for “selfish” but positive reasons: to leverage shrinking budgets, to learn from each other, to build better tools together and, most importantly, to serve their common users better by taking advantage of one another’s collections.

TLC is an example of how local initiatives can grow to form the building blocks of state or provincial and national shared services. The partners in TLC have discovered that, when they all work toward a common goal of serving a common user group (students and their parents), libraries of different types can harness human resources, creativity, and the unique value of local collections.

In some cases there are roadblocks at the political and governance level that make consortial behavior even more vital. Ontario, unlike most jurisdictions, has no provincial library. To compensate, the grassroots library community in Ontario is working to bring into being a new virtual organization called the Ontario Digital Library (ODL). ODL is seen as a way of achieving at least some of the functions (joint licensing, coordinated service delivery, provision of electronic tool sets to expedite digitization efforts, and more) that are normally provided by a provincial library but without the legislated governance structure.

The roots of an ODL go back at least as far as *One Place to Look*, produced in 1990 (Ontario Public Library Strategic Planning Group, Ontario Library Association, & Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications, 1990) and the more recent *Building Value Together* strategic planning documents from the public library community (Ontario Public Libraries Strategic Directions Council, 2002), both of which focus on the merits of collaboration among all types of libraries in an “Ontario Library” rather than an “Ontario Public Library” alone. *One Place to Look* gave every librarian a glimpse into the then-distant future:

Every Ontarian will have access to information resources within the province through an integrated system of partnerships among all types of information providers . . . No one library has the resources to meet the information challenges of any given community, but all communities hold resources that are unique and usable by others. It is necessary, therefore, to create a comprehensive and compatible set of databases that define the resources and capabilities to Ontarians wherever they may live in the province . . . The bibliographic strength necessary to meet today’s information needs comes from the cumulative value of the collections in Ontario’s public, school, college, university, and other libraries. (Ontario Public Library Strategic Planning Group, Ontario Library Association, & Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications, 1990, p. 16)

In the early 1990s the Ontario Library Association Task Force on Public Library/School Library Cooperation worked “to improve communication and to foster ideas which would enhance the library service to your people

provided by the two library communities” (Ontario Library Association Task Force on Public Library/School Library Cooperation, 1995, p. 8). The task force studied a wide sampling of collaborative projects throughout Ontario. One example is a highly successful partnership between the public library and the school libraries in Peterborough to purchase and share a common library automation system. The task force found so many successful examples of cooperation that they asked themselves, “what if shared activity were the new economic paradigm?” (Ontario Library Association Task Force on Public Library/School Library Cooperation, 1995, p. 7). They were able to develop some conclusions about factors shared and demonstrated by all successful models that they studied:

- Presence of strong, sustained field leadership
- A history of cooperation and interorganizational understanding: the longer the history, the more agreeable the climate
- Jurisdictional manageability—complex geographic jurisdictions have less success than simple (symbiotic) relationships that have existed over long periods
- Committed personal, professional relationships among key persons who can make decisions to act jointly (Ontario Library Association Task Force on Public Library/School Library Cooperation, 1995, p. 9)

In Ontario today, according to the ODL Business Plan document, cooperation is very strong among libraries within the college and university sectors. Within each sector, libraries have worked together on a large number of projects that have resulted in a greater equality of resources and services being available to students across the province. The same level of cooperation has not been possible among public and school libraries, although the results of some current cooperative projects such as OSCR indicate that working together will have significant benefits for Ontarians. Even though libraries often serve overlapping constituencies, cooperation between the sectors has been hampered by different mandates and focus and different funding mechanisms (Ontario Library Association, 2003, p. 2).

The ODL steering committee recognizes that other provinces and numerous U.S. states have successfully met the information needs of their citizens by providing a coordinated approach to the purchase and delivery of digital information and services. Key to the success of these initiatives has been leadership from state and provincial governments working in partnership with the library, education, academic, health care, and business communities.

Some of the best examples of these include digital library programs in Georgia, Michigan, and Ohio. The Colorado Virtual Library and the Heritage Colorado Web service (Colorado Digitization Program, 2003; Colorado State Library, 2005) are typical of what can be achieved. They represent functioning multitype consortia including all types of libraries.

These services are standards based. They provide centralized search portals for end-users, as well as supplying organizations with training and tools to enhance their digitization abilities.

Summarizing an in-depth analysis of cooperative projects in the United States, William Potter wrote:

For most academic *libraries*, statewide cooperation offers distinct advantages and incentives. The state provides a predetermined political and geographical grouping of *libraries*. There are often common governing agencies for publicly supported institutions of higher education, perhaps a board of regents or a coordinating board for higher education. State government also exercises control over the publicly supported colleges and universities and, of course, provides much of the funding. The extent of direct interest that the governor or legislature takes in the operations of the *libraries* varies by state, but this interest is always a factor. The fact that a group of *libraries* shares a common funding source, be it directly through elected officials or through a board of regents or oversight agency, is an important reason to build statewide cooperative systems. There is great appeal in efforts to pool resources and in cooperating to control costs. (Potter, 1997, p. 416).

Leadership at national levels has never been needed more. An exemplary model for the past nine years is the American Memory project. "Beginning in 1996, the Library of Congress sponsored a three-year competition . . . to enable public, research, and academic libraries, museums, historical societies, and archival institutions . . . to digitize American history collections and make them available on the Library's American Memory site" (Library of Congress, n.d., para. 5). This service, under the guidance of the Library of Congress and with the help of private- and public-sector funding, has assisted a number of important collections to be digitized and found through collective finding aids.

In Canada, since 2004, a new institution has been in the making consisting of the former National Library and National Archives. The newly created Libraries and Archives Canada (LAC) is seeking to define a new and more proactive leadership role for itself. In June 2004 it issued a document, *Creating a New Kind of Knowledge Institution: Directions for Library and Archives Canada* (Library and Archives Canada, 2004b), which declares that the LAC will no longer be a passive repository and will instead focus on access, a capacity to interpret, and the provision of innovative services that will encourage Canadians to discover, learn, and share knowledge and culture. The new LAC has promised to bring together a wealth of networks and partnerships. LAC plans to work to connect Canadians with their documentary heritage through Canada's 3,600 public library service points, its 800 archives, its strong network of academic libraries, its school libraries, and other cultural institutions across the country. LAC recognizes that one of its challenges will be to understand its essential role as a

national institution and how best to play it. LAC has reaffirmed its belief that activities such as policy, preservation research, standards development, international collaborations, and the development of national strategies are among its roles. The Canadian library community is anticipating a national digitization strategy to be announced by LAC before the end of 2005. It is anticipated that locally developed tools such as OSCAR will play a vital role in a unified national approach to the provision of sophisticated public access to information through value-added portals such as OSCAR.

Working in parallel to Library and Archives Canada is the Canadian Initiative on Digital Libraries (CIDL). CIDL is a voluntary alliance of Canadian libraries and organizations, formed in the 1990s, that recognize the growing importance of digital information. CIDL now includes fifty-five members: large and small, academic and public libraries, as well as special libraries and like-minded organizations such as museums and archives. The CIDL mission is to promote, coordinate, and facilitate the development of Canadian digital collections and services in order to optimize national interoperability and long-term access to Canadian digital library resources.

Over the past eighteen months, CIDL has been formulating and promoting a national vision for collaboration dubbed "Digital Canada" (Library and Archives Canada, 2004a). The Digital Canada vision is a blueprint in which every type of library has a role. It will feature a set of integrated search portals, such as OSCAR, geared toward users of different ages and educational and cultural backgrounds. OSCAR, which started as a local initiative in Ontario, will be adapted to the curriculum requirements of each province to become a national educational resource.

Digital Canada will also build on the model of already successful national-level services such as Images Canada (Library and Archives Canada, 2002), a national portal for photographs developed by the LAC and inspired by Picture Australia (Picture Australia, 2005). CIDL will facilitate the creation of a series of similar meta-search engines that can be built on existing successful national projects such as Our Roots (Our Roots, 2003), Early Canadiana Online (Library and Archives Canada, 2005), and Virtual Museum Canada (Virtual Museum of Canada, 2005). Like Images Canada, a union catalog of metadata will provide users with links to separate databases of unlike types of data that are joined by common themes or document types.

Digital Canada will also provide shared, simple-to-use applications and tools for any partner that opts to use them as an alternative to building local digitization systems repeatedly from scratch. These Web-based tools, like OSCAR and the newspapers and images tools developed by HALINET, will be built to the highest standards and designed specifically for interoperability. These tools will be hosted on regionally located servers throughout the country.

This will eliminate the need for many libraries to have to invest in redundant network and server capacity and to acquire the skills necessary to

support them. The toolsets will enable even the smallest libraries and their partners to digitize and create metadata for their collections and contribute the content to the regional and national fabric. The CIDL concept is much like sewing a virtual “national quilt” to which every contributor brings a single standardized square. They will be provided with the tools of framework, the needle and thread, and be empowered to contribute the cloth of their own local content.

In conclusion, the OSCR project is typical of an evolving Canadian approach to a national digitization strategy. Local partners think globally, then develop locally, building tools that are scalable in nature and built with interoperability and standards in mind. The ODL and Digital Canada initiatives will combine the best of grassroots tools and content with provincial- and national-level portals and gateways to provide seamless access to the digital collections of libraries and their partners throughout the country and around the world.

SUMMARY

It is a testament to the tenacity and dedication of information professionals that we continue to strive for mutually beneficial projects with colleagues in other fields, in spite of institutional and political divides. Despite the hurdles, whether it is building technological bridges or drawing up creative funding applications, the driving force continues to be customer access to “best source” information in an easy-to-use environment. While this article examines issues, benefits, and hurdles to cooperation and partnerships, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the corollary—the scary reality if we do not build partnerships and pool resources. Simply put, if we let funding, technological challenges, or politics interfere with the goals of information access, and compromise our professionalism by letting the obstacles become insurmountable, are we then obstructing information access? Information is an essential building block of life and will help to determine the world in which we all live. Wouldn't we inadvertently be limiting our own future? In this light, what are a few petty hurdles along the way?

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Brian Bell is Director of E-Services Development at the Oakville Public Library. He has been with the Oakville Public Library since 1987. He is now responsible for the library Web site, all Internet-based services to the public, technology planning as well as Information Oakville, and other types of community content delivered by the library. He has published widely and spoken at numerous conferences, including ALA and PLA. He has worked with many provincial and national associations. This includes terms as the Vice-President of the Ontario Library and Information Technology Association and President of the Ontario Library Association in 1998. Brian currently serves on the boards of Canadiana.org and Inform Canada and is the current chair of the Canadian Initiative on Digital Libraries and of the Community Information Online Consortium.

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Association and Access. She is also Webmaster for the Empire Club of Canada and for an ever-changing number of nonprofit groups. She is active in the Milton Historical Society, the Halton Region Museum Foundation, and the Waldie Blacksmith Foundation. She assisted Walter Lewis as one of the co-authors in "Expediting the Work of the Indexer with XML" in Roy Tennant, *XML in Libraries*.

Walter Lewis is Manager of Systems and Technical Support at the Halton Hills Public Library, where, among other duties, he is responsible for the administration of the servers of the Halton Information Network (HALINET). He was a founding director of the Community Information Online Consortium (CIOC) and is currently Vice-President of the Ontario Public Library Network (OPLN). He has spoken at conferences of the American Library Association, Public Library Association, Canadian Library Association, and Ontario Library Association, as well as Access, Inform Ontario, and the Library and Archives Canada's Metadata Forum. His articles include co-authoring "Expediting the Work of the Indexer with XML" in Roy Tennant, *XML in Libraries*, as well as articles in *Beaver*, *Horizons Canada*, *Ontario History*, the *Northern Mariner*, *FreshWater*, and *Inland Seas*.