

Managing Electronic Resources

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SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The management of electronic resources has become an increasing challenge for libraries as the quantity, complexity, and variety of these resources has increased. Developing efficient and effective ways to manage the staff functions related to the acquisitions, licensing, cataloging, payment, and maintenance of these resources has become essential for academic and research libraries. This has often required restructuring positions, units, departments and divisions, and creating new positions devoted to electronic resources. A particular challenge for technical services departments is how to integrate the management and processing of electronic resources into existing organizational structures.

This survey was distributed to the 123 ARL member libraries in February 2004 to gather information about organizational and staffing issues related to the management and processing of electronic resources. In addition, the survey asked questions related to staff training and the use of committees/ teams for electronic resource management. Sixty-nine (56%) libraries responded to the survey; sixty (87%) indicated they had made personnel or organizational changes in response to the demands of processing and managing electronic resources.

Electronic Resources Organizational Changes

The survey asked what types of organizational changes they had implemented. Most libraries

have used a combination of methods including creating new positions, reassigning positions, rewriting positions, and merging units. Seventy percent of respondents reported the creation of new positions dedicated to electronic resources. Slightly more than half of these (22 or 52%) created positions in collection development. Cataloging had the next highest number of new positions (19 or 45%), followed by acquisitions (12 or 29%) and licensing (9 or 21%).

Reflecting a trend towards mainstreaming electronic resources, 62% of respondents reported that positions were rewritten to include new responsibilities. Most of the changes occurred in cataloging (65%) and acquisitions (54%). Not quite a third of the changes were in licensing (32%) and collection development (30%) positions. Fifty-eight percent of the survey respondents reassigned positions. About half (18 or 51%) reported reassignments in acquisitions; fifteen (43%) reassigned positions in licensing and cataloging; nine (26%) reassigned collection development positions.

Eighteen libraries reported the merging of units or departments. Seven of these mergers resulted in a new "Electronic Resources Unit" or "Electronic Collections" unit. Two libraries merged serials sections with electronic resources sections and one library merged electronic resources cataloging with federal documents cataloging. Another library reported the experimental implementation of a new

“virtual department” comprised of members of three existing departments. Members of the virtual department remain in their current positions and locations but focus most of their work activities toward the management of electronic resources.

Management Responsibility

The survey asked who had responsibility for selecting, acquiring, and cataloging electronic resources; negotiating and signing licenses; and maintaining URLs and resolving problems with access to electronic resources. All but 2 of 68 respondents distribute selection, cataloging, and/or acquisition across a number of library staff. (A library staff member has primary responsibility for those activities at one of the two institutions that don't distribute responsibility; library and consortium staff share responsibility at the other.) Selection is the responsibility that is most often distributed (63 responses or 93%). The number of selectors per institution ranges from 5 to 250 with a median of 25. Cataloging is distributed at 52 institutions (77%). The number of catalogers ranges from 2 to 70 with a median of 6. Acquisitions activity is also commonly distributed (44 responses or 65%) though across fewer staff; the range is 2 to 15 with a median of 3. More than half of these 66 libraries report that their consortium has full or partial responsibility for selecting, acquiring, and cataloging electronic resources. Consortial activities include arranging trials, distributing MARC records, coordinating pricing discounts, and archiving publications on a shared server, among others.

Thirty-two libraries (47%) reported that one person has primary responsibility for selecting, acquiring, or cataloging electronic resources. At 22 libraries one person has primary responsibility for electronic resources acquisitions; at three others there is an individual with this responsibility but in a distributed environment. At 16 libraries one person has electronic resources cataloging responsibility; at three of these the person is in a distributed environment. Only five respondents reported individuals with primary electronic resources selection responsibility and three

of these are in a distributed environment. All of these individuals, with the exception of a few acquisitions staff, hold an MLS degree.

In contrast, the majority of libraries reported that one person had primary responsibility for negotiating (72%), signing (72%), and managing licenses (59%) for electronic resources. Of the 49 libraries where one person has primary responsibility for negotiating licenses, 28 share the responsibility with their consortium. Eleven of the 18 libraries that distribute negotiating responsibility across a number of staff also share that task with their consortium. The situation is similar for signing licenses for electronic resources. Forty-nine respondents have one person who is primarily responsible and twenty-one share the responsibility with the consortium. Two of the nine libraries that distribute signing authority share that authority with the consortium. Managing the executed license is slightly more distributed than either the negotiation or signing responsibility. One person has this responsibility at 40 of the responding institutions (60%) while at 27 (40%) management is distributed across staff. In both situations, 30% of the respondents share license management with their consortium.

Several respondents indicated that, due to the complexity of licensing electronic resources, their institution's legal departments reviews licenses. In one instance, library staff received training in license negotiation by the university legal department. In addition, due to the high cost of some electronic resources, at some institutions the purchasing or procurement departments are involved in the negotiation and licensing of electronic resources.

The position that was most frequently cited as having primary responsibility for maintaining the accuracy of URLs was a variation on Electronic Resources Librarian (18 responses) though titles range from graduate student staff and library assistant to department head and assistant university librarian. These positions are fairly evenly distributed across acquisitions, cataloging, collections, electronic resources, reference, and serials departments, among others. The majority

of these staff hold the MLIS/MLS degree (33 or 72%) and report to a department head or assistant library director. Several libraries indicated that the responsibility for maintaining URLs is distributed among various staff with assignments in various departments and divisions. The profile for staff who are responsible for responding to and resolving problems related to accessing electronic resources is almost exactly the same as above. This responsibility is also commonly shared by a number of staff across various departments.

Management Committees/Teams

Survey respondents were asked if their libraries had committees or teams with responsibility for establishing policy related to electronic resources; a large majority (71%) did. At 34 institutions a single committee or team has this task; at 12 there are multiple committees or teams. Some libraries indicated that several groups address different aspects of electronic resource policy and management while others mainstream electronic resource policy into their existing committee structures. Names of the committees/teams vary widely among libraries. Most names contain some variation of the phrase "electronic resources" or "electronic collections."

Committee membership ranges from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 25 staff with a mean of 10. Responses indicate that members are most often selected based on their specific library departments (94%), or positions (91%), or because they have the appropriate knowledge and skills (89%). Sixty percent of respondents reported that members were appointed by library administration. A smaller number (26%) indicated that members volunteered. Appointments for members include both open-ended and fixed-length terms ranging from two to three years. Committees and teams most often report to an assistant/associate director or the dean/director.

Training

When asked if technical services staff had the skills they needed for processing and managing electronic

resources, the majority of institutions (87%) responded that additional training was necessary. Additional training was needed in the areas of licensing and related legal issues, cataloging rules for integrated resources, metadata, and database programs. The three top methods used to gain the necessary expertise and knowledge are on-the-job training, attending conference presentations, and workshops sponsored by professional organizations.

Evaluation

All but a few of the responding libraries are attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of electronic resources processing. The evaluation techniques they use most often are informal feedback (89%) and tracking the number of items processed (56%). Other methods include tracking the processing time for an item, focus groups, and staff surveys. A few libraries also solicit feedback from users.

Fifty-one libraries described changes they implemented as a result of their evaluation. While several libraries added new positions, the majority of the responses indicate that libraries are using a combination of technology, procedural changes, and streamlining of workflow to improve processing time. Several libraries have implemented the use of Serial Solutions and locally produced databases to track electronic resources and generate A-Z lists. Several libraries reported making changes to the bibliographic record including improving public notes and holdings information. Many report the modification of procedures and workflow. These include creation of e-mail lists and online forms; cross training between units and departments; and improved communication.

Challenges

When asked to identify the three top challenges related to the processing and management of electronic resources that technical services staff face in the next two years, everyone had an answer. The three most cited challenges were workload (ensuring sufficient staffing levels to cope with increasing numbers of electronic resources), the need for an electronic resources management module to assist

in managing and tracking electronic resources, and the accessing and cataloging of electronic resources. Additional challenges include maintenance of URLs, licensing of electronic resources, and staff training.

Conclusion

It is clear from the survey that libraries are changing as a result of the proliferation of electronic resources. A very large majority of responding libraries has made personnel and/or organizational changes directly related to the processing of electronic resources since 1999. These have included changes in organizational structure, staff positions, and job responsibilities. Comments from a number of respondents indicate that changes are ongoing and continual. Many libraries reported that they were currently involved in reorganizations and/or job description revisions. As one respondent commented, "The survey form does not allow us to adequately describe exactly how the positions in electronic resources work across the functional areas of acquisitions, cataloging

and licensing, and collection development. On the other hand, this is a continually changing environment and difficult to describe!"

Although the focus of the survey was technical services, responses indicate that many of the responsibilities for managing electronic resources reside outside of the traditional technical services departments. In particular, responsibilities for selection and licensing often are located in another unit. Comments from respondents indicate that many libraries have abandoned traditional divisions in favor of more cross-functional organizational structures where staff are cross-trained to address changes in workflow as needed. In those libraries' cases, job descriptions do not have to be rewritten because they are generic enough to facilitate necessary changes. The survey identified a need for libraries to implement technical solutions—such as electronic resources management systems—to meet the increasing demands of processing and managing electronic resources.