Oregon's Statewide Database Licensing Advisory Committee Tries New Approach to Support Oregon Libraries

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by Jane Nichols
Teaching & Digital Humanities Librarian
jane.nichols@oregonstate.edu

Jane Nichols has worked as a librarian at Oregon State University Libraries & Press since 2003 where she focuses on teaching and digital humanities.

Proposal Overview and Background

Oregon State Library's Statewide Database Licensing Advisory Committee (SDLAC) recently announced a unique approach to supporting academic libraries. The SDLAC's role is to advise on Requests for Proposals (RFPs), typically resulting in one vendor winning a contract to provide content for all types of Oregon libraries. A one size fits most approach means some libraries' content needs, such as Oregon academic and K-12 libraries, are ill-fitting. In an attempt to address this, the SDLAC recommended working with the Orbis Cascade Alliance (The Alliance) to off-set the cost of its group subscription to Ebsco's Academic Search Premier database package. This came about as a result of the 2014 statewide database contract being awarded to The Gale Group, Inc. with highly favorable terms and because the Committee sought new ways to meet academic libraries' content needs rather than persisting in a one-size fits most approach. The recommendation to partner with The Alliance in support of Oregon academic libraries mirrors another SDLAC recommendation: that the State Library explore partnering with the Oregon Department of Education to meet the K-12 community's need for a general encyclopedia. This article shares a short overview of how and why the SDLAC changed its thinking about the Statewide Database Licensing Program (SDLP)'s structure.

The SDLAC's primary aim is to make recommendations about the SDLP. The SDLAC advises on the drafting of requests for proposal, reviews proposals, recommends database(s) to license, and advises about cost allocations. As a committee of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Advisory Council, the SDLAC submits recommendations to the LSTA, which, in turn, advises the Oregon State Library Board of Trustees. Once the Board passes a recommendation, State Library staff acquire electronic resources using LSTA State Block Grant Program funds.

Previously, from 2005 to 2009, the SDLAC worked to meet as many users' content needs as possible through a single vendor approach. At that time the Program's contract was awarded to Gale/CENGAGE Learning and LSTA funds not only provided for a 50 percent subsidy for academic and public libraries but also fully funded school and tribal libraries. In 2009 the contract was renewed and LSTA funding of just under $400,000 fully subsidized all 22 Gale/CENGAGE Learning databases. LearningExpress Library was added the following year.

Surveys Inform RFP Process

To inform the most recent Request for Proposal SDLAC members distributed two web-based surveys to ask constituents' about their content needs and to gather their input for the RFP process. Surveys were conducted January 2012 and March 2013. The first survey inquired about content needs at a broad level and asked whether respondents felt a single database model still meets their needs. The majority recognized Oregonians disparate content needs and that relying on a single database or vendor can only meet these needs to varying degrees. In other words, librarians totally get that one size fits most.

The second survey asked how constituents would rank categories of content. The categories were informed by the 2012 survey responses and a ranking exercise done by SDLAC members. Another objective of the March 2013 survey was to gather more feedback about the database funding model, would constituents prefer more expensive database(s) where libraries contribute to the cost or less expensive database(s) available to all libraries for free? The March 2013 results, summarized here, truly guided the SDLAC as they developed the RFP. Results led the SDLAC to construct the RFP around the ranked content categories. Constituents ranked general periodicals as the most important category for the statewide program to make available and the majority responded that they preferred to have less expensive database(s) that would be available to all libraries for free over more expensive ones where their library would contribute to the cost.

Table 1: March 2013 Summarized Results

Question 2: Please rank the following categories of resources in order of importance to your library to have available through the Statewide Database Licensing Program. (1 = the most important, 7 = the least important)	
General Periodicals	3.02
Research/Reference Resources	3.54
Career, Job and Computer Skills Resources	4.07
Newspapers	4.10
Contemporary Issues Resources	4.18
Peer Reviewed Journals	4.49
Ebook Collections of Nonfiction Books	4.60
answered question	258

Table 2: March 2013 Summarized Results

Question 5: Electronic resources vary significantly in cost, and funds available for statewide licensing are limited. If the Committee had to choose, which of the following options would you prefer?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
More expensive database(s) in which your library may need to share in the cost.	39.1%	90
Less expensive database(s) that would be available to all libraries for free.	60.9%	140
Other (please specify)		40
answered question		230
skipped question		35

RFP Process

In addition to being guided by the survey results, the SDLAC reviewed previous RFPs as well as RFPs from Washington and Idaho to see how they handled diverse content and audience needs. The committee discussed at length, with significant input from the State Procurement Office Department of Administrative Services (DAS) representatives, how to organize the RFP and ultimately decided to create four categories of database packages: 1. General Periodicals; 2. Academic Journals; 3. General Reference; and, 4. Contemporary Issues Reference Material. State Procurement Office representatives recommended a key structural change from previous RFPs: vendors were allowed to submit proposals to one or more content categories allowing the State to offer the contract to one or more vendors. No more than one award would be made per category, though one vendor could be awarded more than one category and vendors who proposed in multiple categories would earn points. Evaluation included the awarding of points across two rounds followed by points awarded based on a cost scoring and points for multiple category offers. If needed, and in the State's best interests, further rounds of evaluation were allowed. The SDLAC hoped this approach would create flexibility to help meet Oregon libraries' distinct content needs.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Statewide Library Database Packages was issued in June 2013 and during late summer and fall 2013, the SDLAC conducted several rounds of evaluations. DAS representatives conducted an additional round asking for a Best and Final Offer option. This last round resulted in revised cost proposals from the three top scoring vendors: The Gale Group Inc. reduced their price by 23 percent, ProQuest LLC by seven percent and EBSCO Industries, Inc. by four percent making The Gale Group Inc. the successful proposer. While all vendors met the basic criteria established in the RFP; their costs (and proposed products) differed significantly as seen in this table. Despite scoring criteria weighted to emphasize content, price was still a significant factor in part because OSL is committed to providing the resources at no cost to smaller libraries and has been trying to

provide resources at no cost for school libraries. (Public libraries with a service population of less than 20,000 and any academic library with an enrollment of less than 1,000 will be subsidized in full by the State Library.)

Table 3: Best & Final Offers

Best & Final Offers	
Vendor	
EBSCO Industries, Inc.	$974,100
ProQuest LLC	$372,074
The Gale Group Inc.	$350,000

SDLAC Recommendation

The Committee recommended that the State Library move forward with negotiating a contract with The Gale Group, Inc. for the Statewide Database Licensing Program recognizing this would meet basic, though not all, information needs in Oregon. SDLAC further recommended that if contract negotiations resulted in significant cost savings, that it would identify additional resources to pursue to benefit the academic community. Thus, the recommendation to explore opportunities to partner with the Orbis Cascade Alliance to provide such a resource was devised. The SDLAC developed this recommendation in response to academic librarians previously stated concerns about their constituents content needs not being met by The Gale Group, Inc. database suite, unlike products such as EBSCO Industries, Inc. SDLAC hypothesized that off-setting even just a small portion of the cost for academic libraries to participate in the Alliance's contract with EBSCO would help those libraries. As of summer 2014, not only is this strategy being pursued but, four of the seventeen SDLP libraries that were not already participating in the Ebsco package signed up to take advantage of the subsidy. With a contribution of $50,000, the subscription cost for all of the participating libraries will be lowered by nine percent per library in the upcoming fiscal year.

During RFP evaluations, the need for a general encyclopedia product to support the K-12 library community became evident. In response, OSL staff suggested a possibility of partnering with the Oregon Department of Education to secure an encyclopedia and is now exploring this.

In the coming years the SDLAC may consider other approaches. Other statewide database programs have also recognized that one suite of databases may not meet their constituents wide-ranging content needs, some have decided to focus on funding periodicals or ebooks while others prioritized by user group, such as the K-12 community. These and other questions, such as "In three years, what resources do you hope to see in the Statewide Database Licensing Program?" were discussed during a presentation given at the 2014 OLA Conference (slides available on NW Central here: http://tinyurl.com/pdrvwph).

SDLAC Members

The SDLAC's ten voting members, who serve for three-year terms, represent all types of Oregon libraries. Two new members begin their term this summer: filling Position #1 representing public libraries serving under 25,000 people is Kirsten Brodbeck-Kenney from Driftwood Public Library (Lincoln City) and in Position #2 representing academic libraries from the Oregon University System is Emily Miller-Francisco from Southern Oregon University. Returning to serve in Position #3 (OASL Membership) is Garnetta Wilker, now retired, formerly of Portland Public Schools. Stephen Cox of Salem-Keizer Public Schools serves as the Chair; he sits in Position #6 which represents school libraries drawn from the OASL membership. These voting members are joined by three non-voting members who link to key organizations including the LSTA, The Alliance and the Organization for Educational Technology and Curriculum and by three Oregon State Library staff.

All constituents are welcome to contact their representative to learn more about the program or voice their thoughts, contact information is at: http://www.oregon.gov/osl/LD/Pages/technology/sdlp/index.aspx. If your library does not currently participate in the Statewide Database Licensing Program or if you have questions about this initiative, please contact Arlene Weible, Electronic Services Consultant at arlene.weible@state.or.us or 503-378-5020.