



Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries

c/o The Historical Society of Pennsylvania
1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia PA 19107
215-985-1445 voice, 215-985-1446 fax
<http://www.pacscl.org/>

Laura Blanchard, Executive Director, lblanchard@pacscl.org/

JOIN OR DIE? Expanding Collaboration Among Philadelphia Institutions

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Presentation Highlights

Laura Koloski, Heritage Philadelphia Program, “The Many Faces of Collaboration”. A look at the number of history organizations in the Philadelphia area – more than 400 at last count – suggests that competition for resources will be strong and some will be let out. Those resources include board members, managers, donors, volunteers, and visitors. Collaboration offers ways to conserve resources, but also offers ways to create more for audiences than the individual institutions could do alone. She cited several examples, including a PACSCCL exhibition of medieval manuscripts, the work of the Civil War History Consortium, the rebirth of the National History Day program for middle- and high-school students, and the Hidden City and History Hunters projects funded by the Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative and the Heritage Philadelphia Program.

Kenneth Finkel, WHYY, “Recognizing the Future: Perceiving Patterns for collaboration 2.0 and Beyond.” As WHYY moves into digital programming, it is creating new channels, including two devoted to Arts and Culture. Now, for the first time since the days of early television, there are new opportunities for collaboration between public service media and Content partners. In addition, with the reduced cost of equipment, software and the use of robotics, the cost per program hour is at an all time low. Finkel observed from his recent experiences on a grant review panel that the strongest collaborative projects had collaboration “knit into the bones” of the project rather than incorporated as an afterthought. In a landscape of many separate collecting institutions, this community of institutions needs to develop something more than a set of projects, it needs a deeper approach that would constitute a “new operating system” that takes into account the organizations and the opportunities between them. Finkel called for an enlightened, vision-based collaborative culture, one that plans and proactively for the short term and projects into the long term – 20 years or more.

Glen Ruzicka, The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA), “Philadelphia Collections Central: An Idea Whose Time is Yet to Come.” Although the issue of collaborative collection storage has been discussed in Philadelphia for more than twenty years, the “Collections Central” arose from a 1998 meeting convened by representatives of the Philadelphia Historical and Museum Commission and Atwater Kent. A seven-member team began to develop a project that would have been supported by a \$6 million dollar line item in Pennsylvania’s capital budget. With planning grant funding from the William Penn Foundation, the group, with CCAHA in the lead, conducted a needs assessment and developed a model that included a limited liability corporation under the CCAHA umbrella. The project carried a \$2.5 million price tag for building acquisition, \$16 million for outfitting the building, and \$1.2 million for endowment and technology. Roadblocks to its completion included adverse market conditions in 2001, foundations’ stringent requirements for this project, including the stipulation that participating institutions name this as their overarching institutional priority, and the difficulty of balancing individual vs consortial needs. Ruzicka concluded that although the project did not come to fruition at that time it remains a viable concept that should be re-examined when the time is ripe.

David Moltke-Hansen, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, “Doing the Math: Making the Whole More than the Sum of the Parts,” traced the development of the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCCL) from a collaborative to do an exhibition to one that worked on projects to one that developed an integrated vision of a Greater Philadelphia Research Collections Network, with many collections joined electronic through shared searching and other methods. At the same time, it is reaching out to other professional organizations to find ways in which collaboration can enrich their various constituencies. Other regional collaborations include the Civil War History Consortium, assessing Civil War and other nineteenth-century assets, and a potential collaboration in a Cultural Olympiad if Philadelphia gets the nod for the 2016 Olympics. Finally, Moltke-Hansen announced an upcoming meeting, scheduled for September 8, at which Philadelphia institutions will consider how to join all of its heritage organizations, themes, and stories to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Page Talbott, Associate Director, The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, “The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary: At its Core a Collaborative Endeavor,” takes a look at the midpoint of the Tercentenary project. The central exhibition brought 200,000 visitors to the National Constitution Center, with an estimated total audience of 1,000,000 by the time it has finished traveling in March 2008. Additional hundreds of thousands will view the website or participate in activities ranging from complementary exhibitions to the Starbucks Coffeehouse Challenge and the Autobiography Project. The five-member founding group secured funding from a range of donors, beginning with a \$4 million gift from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The group incorporated and has a modest staff. Talbott described the organization and identified four areas of collaboration that distinguish the project and spoke on each.

- **Organization:** the five founding partners each had a specific area of expertise and range of resources available.
- **Exhibition Planning:** Tercentenary members or their partners shared their expertise in the areas of locating objects; conservation; appraisals; scholarly context; and the establishment of a Franklineana database, a “museum without walls.”
- **Marketing:** Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia. Partners include the Greater Philadelphia Tourism & Marketing Corporation; Philadelphia Convention & Visitors bureau; Alta Communications, Inc.; and the many cultural organizations and heritage institutions that mounted collaborative programming.
- **Collaborative Programming for All Ages:** This includes the Starbucks Coffeehouse Challenge (volunteer-led community conversations about betterment of their neighborhoods) and the Autobiography Project that complemented Philadelphia’s *One Book, One Philadelphia* program, among others.
- **Educational Programming:** Five organizations joined forces to design an inventive educational program using two Franklin-based exhibition.

Taken together, this organizational structure and these activities offer a model for collaborations going forward.

Small Group Discussion Reports: Three Big Ideas

Each discussion table was challenged to distill its conversations into three “big ideas” to share with the larger group. Conversations were arranged around potential areas of collaboration.

Media and Communications

1. More discussions across different kinds of organizations, including representatives from media and communications outlets
2. Consider communication outcomes in terms of 3-5 years and beyond: look at the big picture
3. Think about messages and audiences in three ways: geographic; topically; whether the audience is general or scholarly

Technology

1. Build and support for different levels of expertise
2. Plan for funding and technological stability
3. Conduct a needs assessment to determine what the technology needs are among collecting institutions

Collections I

1. Develop ways to make collections accessible to a wider audience
2. Develop a regional history center
3. Work on collaborative exhibitions – these can be at an individual institution but perhaps with a central person working on the collaboration

Collections II

1. Find ways to make PACSCL's programs more accessible to more institutions, especially those with smaller budgets
2. Share staffing expertise across institutions via an online directory, networking, etc.
3. Find ways to link collections that have similarities but no obvious connections (e.g., the Fabric Center with the textile-related collections at the Chemical Heritage Foundation)

Public Programs/Education

1. Find ways to connect programs at planning stage via networking, creation of a privately-accessible planning calendar, etc.
2. Develop a resource survey of public programming
3. Identify interpretive clusters that could benefit from reciprocity in programs and marketing

Administration

1. Acknowledge the tension between the needs of individual institutions and the collaborative project and move beyond them
2. Think for the longer term and not simply in 3- to 5-year bursts
3. Develop a Greater Philadelphia heritage organization

General Discussion

1. Identify ways in which collaboration meets individual needs so that there is a quid pro quo
2. Develop educational and public programming
3. Consider collaborative digitization of collections

Summary discussion—some points:

- Move beyond the celebrations – sustainability after the anniversary
- Do we really need another umbrella organization, or can we parse these things out among existing entities (e.g., PACSCL, Museum Council, DVAG, GPTMC, GPCA, Palinet, etc., etc., etc.)
- While we can parse them out, the process of collaboration may need an owner. We may want to define the vision and then build the capability either by using existing organizations or creating a new one or a combination of both
- We need a planning calendar so institutions can identify possibilities for collaboration early on
- We need to reach out to other groups
- We need to embrace diversity (reach out to African American cultural institutions, e.g.)

Next steps include:

- Considering clusters based on geography and based on themes
- Revisit the “Museums in the Life of the City” program
(see <http://www.aam-us.org/sp/city-life.cfm> for a brief description)
- Reach out to other institutions and associations
- Develop a mechanism for ongoing and proactive conversation and information sharing

The Audience at a Glance:

Number registered (including speakers): 99

Number of actual attendees: 84

Number participating in breakout sessions: 73

Number of attendees who filled out evaluation forms: 43

Number of evaluation forms indicating interest in a listserv: 39

Number of evaluation forms indicating interest ("yes" or "would consider") in planning or organizing another event or project: 32

Evaluation summary

Level of Interest in Collaboration on this Topic...	Strong	Moderate	Little	Notify of future events
<i>Media/communications</i>	18	18	3	7
<i>Technology</i>	16	16	4	8
<i>Collections</i>	27	8	2	10
<i>Public programming/education</i>	22	17	0	9
<i>Administrative</i>	12	11	13	5
<i>How useful was the meeting</i>	Very-21	Somewhat-16	Not very - 0	Not - 0