

Pros:

We embrace the concept that Partners is, in essence, one single library in Montana, with shared materials, shared patrons and shared goals. The concept of “commitment to sharing” needs to be expounded upon and explained in a clear, transparent manner to both new and ongoing members. What does “sharing” mean and what does it look like? At times, members, whether new to the partnership or currently enrolled, differ in how to define sharing and what a “borderless approach” means in terms of collection circulation across the collective and the sharing of patron activity and access to materials.

Access to a huge collection

Save money on books we can't afford / extra copies of high demand books

allows us to provide access to such a breadth of materials to our Patrons and allows a relatively small community like ours to have reasonable access to the resources of much larger libraries.

Partners permits us to develop and/or retain specialized collections at a local level that would be weeded due to space constraints or low usage.

At a conceptual level, Partners is a model for innovative library networking and collaboration. Membership imbues participating libraries with an authority at the State level, meaning that the collective has enhanced decision making opportunity with regards to systems directions and cataloging policy.

Partners unique role means it can function as a pilot group for innovation; for instance, it has assisted with the state-wide courier project, tested the OCLC WorldShare OPAC interface, developed a model for single-use library cards, and, currently, select members are testing a centralized acquisitions project.

The collective also demonstrates how united organizations can be stronger as a whole and can build powerful relationships beyond the system. When the Rosebud library experienced a mass flood several years ago, Partner members joined together to help out, providing shared materials for Rosebud patrons to access, donating materials for the rebuilt collection and, in some cases, showing up in Forsyth to help with disaster recovery.

Saves space and time

It keeps our circulation numbers up, items that don't circulate with our local patrons often do through Partners

Drastic reduction in ILL workload and fees to users; we would have charged our users \$27,053 for the items they have received during our tenure in Partners and we still would've lost money on the postage.

Alleviating the going-without

For the most part (except for the most popular items) the time from when a hold is placed to when the item is received is short.

The consistency across different libraries in the catalog and being able to use cards at other libraries is great, since there are so many Partners libraries so close to us

Learning from other librarians is also a great value of Partners and being able to find out what worked and what didn't for them is very helpful. Just being part of the shared goals and momentum of Partners is rewarding.

We pay \$5 a crate, but if we would do a traditional ILL it's \$2.61 and up per item.

Monetarily speaking average cost of a fiction book is \$17.00, can fit about 40 in a crate for a total book value of \$680.00 and a round trip crate costs \$10.00 plus librarian time, great savings and use of library materials.

Member libraries of the Partner Sharing Group also radically reduce their shipment costs for interlibrary materials from a minimum cost of \$6.00 via USPS per item to an average cost of .70 per item using the State courier service.

Many times people will discover a "new to them" author, and will request the previous books our collections house, the availability of old, odd, or obscure books is a great resource.

Sharing allows us to purchase more books and increase/improve our collections, it also lets us keep in the loop about what patrons are reading.

- 1) Offering and sharing donations of value that are received from the Missoula community to other Partner libraries.
- 2) Extending use of our AV polishing and repair service to Partner libraries that have damaged AV materials.
- 3) Actively sharing and transiting float materials to Partners that are concerned about lack of on-shelf materials in their individual libraries.
- 4) Providing on-site assistance when Partner libraries experience operational difficulties due to lack of staffing or any other exigent circumstance that might affect their ability to meet Partner obligations.
- 5) Continuing to offer on-demand cataloguing assistance to all members.

Challenges:

Partner members need to be more forthright about how select internal practices may affect Partner policies and procedures and Partner patron access to materials in demand. Concerns about how these practices impact definitions of sharing and borderless access should be raised in a professional, solutions-based manner that abides by ethos and standards that embrace sharing and collaboration.

Buying books and sending them to another library immediately

Partners could do a better job of educating new members on what participation is going to mean with regards to materials circulation. First day launch can be a traumatic experience as library materials begin shared circulation and more might be done to mitigate issues beforehand.

All members should have a better understanding of scheduled reports and their importance to maintaining system processes. Training in float-return, trace and in-transit management, for example, should be continuously offered. Training of library staff at all sites should be guaranteed by Partner representatives. Timely crate processing is also essential to ensure that system processes run smoothly and capacity is met.

Small libraries do not have access to new books for a long time

Larger libraries feel that they have to “carry” small libraries by purchasing more titles

It is sometimes frustrating that our library gets "used" by Partners much more than our patrons place holds on Partner items (this seems to be what is happening in smaller libraries)

Sending items via courier can take a long time

Perception that big libraries dictate how Partners should run

Small libraries are net lenders which is frustrating

Disagreement about replacing items

Large libraries holds sheltering via Grab n Go when small libraries cannot afford to purchase additional copies

libraries regularly send items back damaged, claiming they were received that way. What they don't understand, is that the directors of the smaller libraries are often the ones pulling the holds and packing the crates, so we know firsthand what condition items are being sent out in.

sometimes materials take a little longer to get to our libraries than some patrons would like.

we have had users wait a year for a hold of an unpopular item.

It does seem as if it has helped the larger libraries transition more to community centers (which is a good thing) but that appears to leave smaller libraries stuck with sending them obscure items

I think where some of tension is coming from that is keeping all of Partners participants from feeling successful is based on misperceptions about the overall “value” of partners to a library due to some of the loss/damage that inevitably occurs and libraries with smaller budgets perhaps “feeling” that more than other libraries.

I have noticed on several occasions books being checked out for an overly long time period, and/or returned damaged, or not returned at all. I fully understand that ... it is unrealistic to expect books to remain in perfect condition for any length of time. However, it is very disheartening when our books do not return in the same condition they left in.

Some libraries just pass the buck and take no ownership or responsibility for items they request and check out to their patrons.

The lack of responsibility and pride some branches take in their handling of Partners items is worth mentioning.

Our only challenge is finding staff time and physical space to accommodate the shipping and receiving of materials as Partners is increasingly more successful as a consortium.

It is evident that not all members conceive of how shared, open access enhances and improves statistical and service levels across the entire consortium.

Definition of success:

These elements are essential for every Partner member's success:

- a. Membership requires a commitment to sharing resources, and a "borderless" approach to item ownership, clientele and customer service.
- b. Each Partner library must have the capacity and resources to fulfill its obligations to the consortium and meet increased local demand for materials.
- c. Libraries must have access to viable transportation options for shipping Partner materials and understand their strategic place in the Partner network.
- d. The process of sharing materials with other libraries can illuminate differences in cataloging methods, technical services, and collection management. Partner Libraries must follow the standards and guidelines of the Montana Shared Catalog.

Member libraries understand the purpose and spirit of the Partners network and can elucidate its value and success to their communities, governing bodies and other stakeholders.

Partners is an evolving, growing organization that both recruits and retains member libraries from across Montana.

Library staff positively collaborate and keep the partnership equitable

Local communities can offer a large variety of items in a timely manner

Every library has consistent, fair access to materials owned by all partners

I think that all libraries in Partners should feel like they are benefiting equally, and that no one library (even if it's a founding member) should have a more weighted vote or be able to bully other libraries to get their way.

For my community, Partners is successful each time a user receives, in a reasonably timely fashion, an item they wanted from another library.

It's successful locally because it saves money.

For the group, success means items move around efficiently—chronologically, economically, and logistically.

I think “success” for Partners looks like multiple libraries working together to share materials as seamlessly as possible – basically, like we are all just branches in one large system.

In a broader sense, I think “success” also looks like discussions occurring respectfully and recognizing that we all want the same thing – to provide our communities with the best library services and the most resources possible in the most economical manner.

Not becoming divided along “large” versus “small” library types, but addressing the fundamental issues that are causing certain members to feel frustrated with the system is crucial

The only way I see it being better is that smaller libraries be able to hold the new items for a period of time so the tax payers buying the items can come in and see it on the shelf.

In my opinion, for the group to achieve success in this program each library and every librarian needs to take ownership of the items being exchanged. For example, if one of our patrons damages or loses an item from another library, it should be our responsibility to repair or replace the item.

The Partner Sharing Group should not authorize, legitimize or tolerate any activity that limits Partner patrons’ system-wide access to materials, unless those materials are physically exempt from circulation, subject to licensing restrictions, or matched by circulating items. Our library supports elimination of non-holdable, non-circulating designations or parameters for books and AV materials that are in demand. This includes books or AV materials with a GRABNGO designation.

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Member libraries understand the purpose and spirit of the Partners network and can elucidate its value and success to their communities, governing bodies and other stakeholders.

MSL role:

Penalize libraries that are not following the rules

Make cataloging simpler

shouldn't be more than a resource with your tremendous wealth of knowledge and assistance with the catalog

Assistance in implementing decisions made by Partners, not responsible for resolving or acting as arbitrator

MSL could act as a moderator for Partners discussions.

Continue to provide meaningful statistics to the group.

Take note of and make known to the group inconsistencies in a member’s practices that could indicate unfamiliarity with the group’s accepted procedures.

MSL can work with us in combining BIB records so that there are fewer records to sort through and items are consistently accessible.

simply continuing facilitating the discussions and making suggestions when appropriate about how to ensure equitability amongst the various libraries would be great.

MSL should hold libraries accountable for misuse of the program.

Libraries who repeatedly cause problems should be removed from the program.

Libraries must have access to viable transportation options for shipping Partner materials and understand their strategic place in the Partner network.

Present analyses and evaluations of Partner processes and activities in simple, concise language, ideally as bulleted points with clear, understandable takeaways. This will reduce confusion and provide members with materials easy to share with Boards, staff or other interested stakeholders.

Assist with vetting new members more carefully and connecting them with current members who can explain, mentor and educate them about Partner goals, values, policies and procedures.

Reach out to new directors to introduce them to Partners goals, values, policies and procedures. Explain how Partner membership affects circulation and requires a collaborative mindset for continued success.

Organize and offer more interlibrary training on procedures and collaborative methods.

Promote site visits between members.

Create a training manual for new members or new directors that is an interim document between the Membership Preparation Plan and the Policies and Procedures Manual.

Create a brochure for promoting Partners to Boards and other stakeholders that may not understand how innovative and valuable the Partners Sharing Group is for communities, patrons and state-wide goodwill.

Assume a bigger operational and directional role to benefit the consortium. Follow through with members about responsibilities, reminding them, where warranted, about obligations to conduct timely transit and item management. Use arising issues as an opportunity to explain how Partners enhances circulation statistics and gives value to an individual library. Encourage the sharing mentality by explaining the return on investment that holds fulfillment and floating collections offer.

Review the current membership contract to see if it needs updating or amending.

Continue to improve Enterprise and WorkFlows for the benefit of sharing groups.

Provide an easy way for members to leave Partners if they so desire.

Be the champions for Partners. Understand why Partners exists and be ready to expound on its conceptual and practical value. Partners needs a cheerleader at meetings and in Montana and the MSL staff are good candidates for this role.

Help facilitate discussion and establish expectations for the group. I understand that Partners should be a self-governing group, and that's historically pretty successful. At the

same time, we also need a guiding force to help us all internalize and be able to articulate the value and impact of Partners. We need to balance our individuality with a measure of leadership and accountability that is best provided by the State Library.

I also can see benefits to MSL acting as a Secretary of sorts – documenting decisions made and being able to explain those decisions, directing questions to appropriate Partner contacts, and acting as the arbiter of policy discussion. MSL could also facilitate discussions that become contentious, and coach us on how to resolve conflict as a group. I'm also curious about what it would look like to have more formalized roles for members of the group – a Secretary? Vice Chair? Development/Training chair?

Finally, if Partners is intended to be self-governing, MSL could help the group to define individual expectations and provide continuity as Partner libraries and contacts come and go. Specifically, some documentation of expectations and training for the Partners chair. Some established ground rules for communication within the Partner group would help ensure meetings are productive and respectful.

Other ideas:

New members or new Partner representatives should receive extensive one-on-one training and the group should institute mentoring or buddy programs for all members to assist with troubleshooting, questions and training. A Partners Sharing Group representative should be available to appear before any governing bodies (boards) or local communities to present on Partners and answer questions or concerns, both before new memberships are approved or whenever local problems arise for current members.