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Funding for the future: the Rockingham, Western Australia, joint use library experience

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Abstract

Rockingham Regional Campus Community Library is a joint use library which has been in operation since 1998. It is a tripartite library that supports the information and recreation needs of Murdoch University, Challenger Institute of Technology and the City of Rockingham.

With the construction of the Library, a Heads of Agreement was signed that stipulated the breakdown of the costs associated with the building and then included a clause which stated that “the parties will contribute to the ongoing costs of the library as agreed in the Operational Agreement to be negotiated.” This Operational Agreement has never been developed and yet the library has gone from strength to strength. To date our strategic direction and service model has succeeded without a Budget model.

The Budget is crucial for any library, justifying expenditure and costs to multiple stakeholders can be even more significant. The importance of a strategic and flexible funding formula is a critical success factor for our library.

Introduction

Financial and economic stability are crucial to the success of any venture, however there appears to be very little written about this aspect of planning for the operation of a joint use library. Much of the literature discusses the issues of staffing, outcomes, collection development and building location but very little detail is available about how joint use libraries are to be funded. The models which do seem to describe funding use the models of parallel finance rather than joint finance. I believe if a joint use library is going to be successful it needs to be “joint” in all aspects of its operation including its financial model.

Current Funding Model

Rockingham Regional Campus Community Library opened its doors in February 1998 as a tripartite library looking after the needs of Murdoch University, Challenger Institute of Technology and the City of Rockingham. The Chief Executive Officers of all the organisations had a great working relationship and I’m sure the library was conceived over a number of bottles of good red wine. Given that sort of birth it is no surprise that a funding model was not high on the agenda.

The funding model for the library is organised so that Murdoch University covers all the costs but the other two partners reimburse the university to cover expenses. This includes not only running and administrative costs but also staff costs. The advantage of one partner being responsible means that there is no confusion over invoicing or deciding how different aspects of the operation will be paid for

by different partners. The benefit of funding through one organization is the capacity to strategically plan for the future in a sustainable way.

The library staff are employed by the university and have their employment conditions matching other university employees. There was initial discussion about which award would be most beneficial for the staff and it was agreed that although the salary of the university was not the highest the other conditions including superannuation made up for this.

Over the years funding percentages for the operational budget have changed amongst the partners, initially it was a three way split with each partner paying an equal amount. Because the University has required certain standards to be maintained over time the University has ended up paying a larger part of the costs. This has more recently changed with the realisation that the City of Rockingham patrons are not only the largest stakeholder group but also use the facilities to a much larger extent. We envisage this model will be constantly under review and would anticipate movement in the percentage paid by each partner as their use of the library facilities for their patrons change and also as each organisation undergoes changes within their own funding situation. The importance of library provision varies within the different sectors which is also a factor that can impact on funding. Library services to complement research, teaching and learning is important to universities while TAFE colleges vary in the significance they put on library services. However, the TAFE sector as a whole is increasingly seeing the importance of library services particularly in its moves to raise its educational outcomes. Local government too can see libraries as a drain on the public purse or the catalyst for change and a driver to improve community aspirations.

Each partner also allocates funding for resources. These are negotiated with the stakeholder partners and the value is budgeted for the coming calendar year. They are reported separately. On behalf of the WA Government the State Library administers the current system of 'grant' allocations for centrally purchased materials. 134 local government authorities (LGAs) receive these allocations. The City of Rockingham's 3 libraries share the allocation and then a further amount is provided by the City to purchase additional materials.

Funding the parent organizations

Each partner has a different funding formula for the parent organisation.

"University libraries in Australia are funded by their parent organizations, sometimes through a fixed percentage of overall university income, sometimes through indexation of historically fixed amounts and sometimes through a negotiation process based on various forms of budgeting, which may be program or project related" 1.

In 2009 Murdoch University changed the way the University Libraries obtain their funds, instead of the money coming directly "off the top" from the University budget the costs were devolved to the schools who were required to pay for University costs such as the Library. This University Support Services (USS) charge has repercussions for the Library in that the schools may decide they want to have a greater say in how the Library spends its funds, the library has to be seen to provide value for money.

TAFE Colleges in Western Australia are all owned, funded and operated by the Government of Western Australia. The funding is based on total contact hours and so can change quite dramatically from one year to the next. TAFE's allocation of funds has been reasonably static over the 13 years of the library's operation, although in 2003/4 the allocation was reduced. This has been the case even though costs for running the library have increased over this time. TAFE has had many internal changes over the years including several name changes, from South Metropolitan College of TAFE, Challenger TAFE and recently all the West Australian TAFEs have decided to remove TAFE from their names and our college is now called Challenger Institute of Technology.

The City of Rockingham fund the libraries from its rates revenue. The City of Rockingham has increased its funding over the years by mutual agreement with the University. The library population has changed with university numbers decreasing and public members increasing since the establishment of the library. The City has a current population of 105,000 and a large percentage (nearly 50% or 49,769) of residents are members of the 3 libraries that make up the Rockingham Library system.

Usage

Usage by patrons is a handy indicator for funding but with changes in demographics and strategic direction for different organizations it needs to be taken into consideration with a number of other factors. Over the past 13 years the university campus has lost significant courses to the main campus which has impacted on university numbers using the library. We no longer offer Engineering, Tourism or Commerce degrees and have focused on Primary Education. In 2000 the University campus had 542 students, in 2005 1,274 students were enrolled and by 2010 it has dropped to 686 students. TAFE student numbers have followed similar trends though far greater in number. Challenger students numbered 2,352 in 2000 and 1,820 in 2010. City of Rockingham residents now expect high level information access and these demands have seen a growth in usage. We provide 40 public access PCs and in the past 10 years computer usage has increased dramatically with the increased use of email, on line employment/recruitment and the shift of government and businesses to online information.

A snapshot of funding

Year	University	TAFE	City	Total
1998	294,311	183,300	183,300	660,911
1999	230,100	210,000	220,050	660,150
2000	231,374	210,000	230,000	671,374
2001	238,874	215,500	237,500	691,874
2002	269,192	215,500	245,320	730,012
2003	269,280	204,725	252,552	726,557
2004	337,958	199,500	265,000	802,458
2005	337,958	199,500	265,000	802,458
2006	357,500	199,500	275,000	832,000

2007	387,101	199,500	289,500	876,101
2008	376,523	199,500	307,000	883,023
2009	316,721	199,500	384,700	900,921
2010	276,596	199,500	394,300	870,396

Additional funding

As with all libraries we are continuously looking at new ways to produce extra funding and become more sustainable. We invigilate exams for external students, provide services such as photocopying, printing, scanning, colour copying, faxing, binding and laminating. We sell stationery supplies such as library bags, usb's, cd's and headphones. We also sell donated and discarded books. We charge for the use of our meeting rooms for commercial purposes. The benefits of a joint use library is the capacity to be seen as a leader in the community and the City patrons in particular see us as a library of first choice where we can provide value added services .

Other Funding models

Many joint use libraries sign service level agreements or memorandums of understanding. Some work on flat percentages plus student numbers others pay for their staff and resources separately. The complexity of these formulas can hinder the relationships between the partners. Some use an Operational Shared Services Costing Model which incorporates: Each party pay equal shares of the first say 30% of all costs and each party be responsible for their share of the remaining 70% based on student numbers for that year.

Other models fund separately for staffing and book allocations and then decide who will pay for big ticket items when they are needed. This does not assist the Library to strategically plan for the future and new initiatives are difficult to promote when you have no control over funding allocations. The model that uses straight student /borrower numbers does not take into consideration the different ways that different user groups use libraries or the amount of staff time needed to service each individual groups needs.

In many cases the partners work on different budget cycles ie calendar and financial year. In our case the University invoices quarterly for each partners funding contribution alleviating any problems with different financial cycles.

I believe that joint use and our funding mechanism has moved all the partners forward in some way or another. Our TAFE and City partners have taken on new initiatives and new technologies not just at our library but at other branches because they have been exposed to different aspects of services provided by libraries. The services and facilities which we have been able to be provide through joint use would not have been possible to achieve by any one of the partners working on their own, it is only through the encouragement of and demands of our joint needs that we have been able to raise the bar for all partners. All of the partners appear to be very satisfied with the service they receive and the funding

currently allocated to the joint use library could be seen as funding for the future as all parties enjoy high end technologies and services.

The City of Rockingham continues to be extremely satisfied with the joint use arrangement.

" Local Governments throughout Australia are constantly looking for ways to deliver and expand a vast range of community services and maintain their assets, in a financial environment that offers little or no opportunity for increased revenue streams.

The biggest drivers of our costs are labour and infrastructure provision, so the opportunity to share the burden of these costs with organisations with similar client bases carries significant benefits. The City of Rockingham and Challenger Institute of Technology have combined with Murdoch University to deliver a contemporary best practice library facility at a fraction of the cost that would be involved in establishing and operating three separate facilities. In essence the City outsources its library services to Murdoch on a fee for service basis and receives outstanding value for money and a very satisfied community client base. The business model enjoys a structured framework of roles and responsibilities, high level stakeholder engagement, and a spirit of cooperation.

The Rockingham Regional Campus Community Library is a true success story in resource sharing and cooperation between agencies and provides a wonderful cost effective service outcome for our community." 2

The University Libraries have been reviewed by external review panels in 2004 and 2011. In both of these reviews the panel has recommended a service level agreement be developed for the Rockingham Library. The response from the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) to the 2004 request was that they felt it was up to the organizations themselves to come up with a service level agreement as the PAC did not have authority to set budgets etc. There has not been a pressing desire from the partners to arrange an MOU or Service Agreement in fact there has been some resistance from members of the Policy Advisory Committee. The current Policy Advisory Committee has not yet seen the recommendations from the last review so it will be interesting to see the response to that advice.

Governance

With the relationships that existed between the founding Chief Executive Officers it was important that we provided the best possible service, resources and facilities for our patrons. "Seamless Service" was our catch cry and so we agreed all the items would be available for anyone to borrow (with a few high use exceptions) and all the staff would service all our patrons regardless of which partner they represented. This has resulted in our patrons accessing services and materials without realising which organisation provided them. We don't worry about who uses the resources just that they are used to their fullest potential. If we can provide resources which cater for more than one partner group that is a

bonus. Over the past decade many of our patrons have merged or changed patron type so to try and offer particular services to one patron type would be impossible.

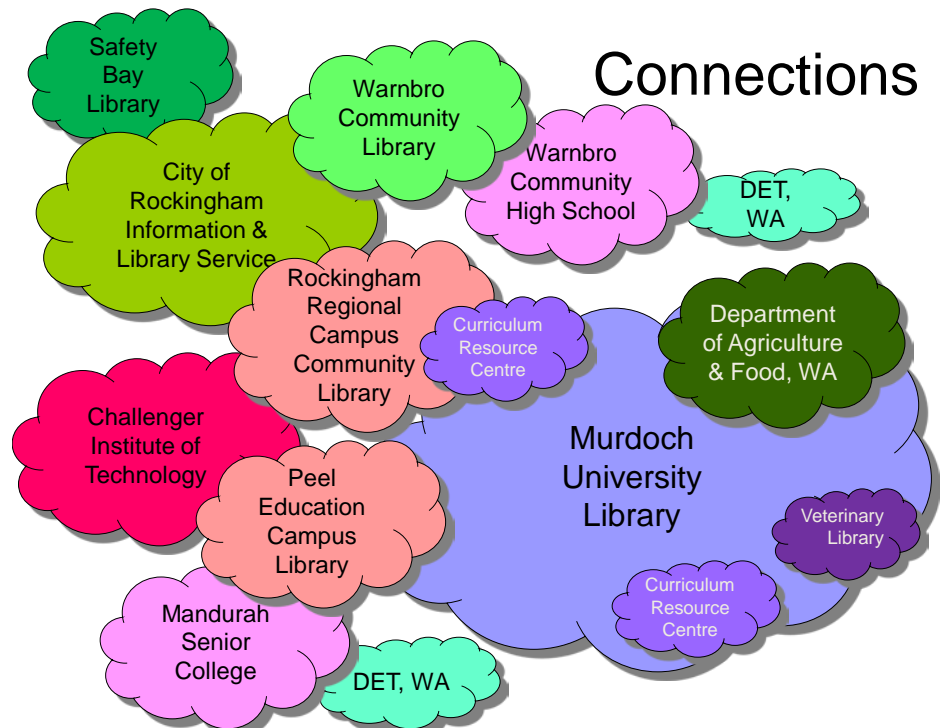
From the very start we developed a library service charter to ensure that all our patrons received this seamless service. When we arrived at what was a joint use library between the City and TAFE we had quite a problematic management issue where staff who, because of differing awards etc, were at the point where they would only look after the interests of the organisation paying their wages. This was one of the main reasons we encouraged the partners to have staff under one award, paid by one organisation. This removed inequities around different public holidays and pay rates for staff doing the same jobs which had caused a huge amount of disharmony.

To support the manager of the library and also make sure that communication is continuous between the stakeholder groups, a Policy Advisory Group meets at least 3 times a year. Membership includes a senior administrator and Librarian from each group. The Rockingham Regional Library Manager also attends together with the Financial Manager from the Library at Murdoch University. A budget report is provided quarterly and the finance manager is available to answer any budget queries. This group was mandated in the Heads of Agreement to review and improve policy and support the manager in resolving budgetary issues.

Initially the library had three different systems to manage the collections in 1998, Challenger was using Dynix, Murdoch used Innopac and the City used the manual Brown's system. The complexity for staff endeavouring to use three systems simultaneously could have been disastrous for the fledgling joint use library. Lending was time consuming and some administrators were suggesting having separate library management systems on each floor of the library. The decision to move to a single system, Millennium, had a number of benefits but the major one was to have the whole collection on one computer system.

Millennium is not the obvious first choice for public, school or TAFE libraries whose needs might be served by a simpler system with less functionality. However, having decided to go ahead with a joint system the advantages have been to provide a sophisticated library system which is intuitive and rational and which raises the bar in functionality. Patrons have access to a system with add ons such as Syndetics, and the capability to manage their own borrowing and have easy access to multiple searches because the system is used by the Western Australian State Library Service as well as other Western Australian universities.

Since the City of Rockingham has adopted the Millennium system a number of other users have joined the consortia including the Western Australian Department of Agriculture. These connections continue to flourish.



Benefits

There have been numerous benefits for all parties since the establishment of the library, a major one has been the development of a major library for significantly reduced capital outlay. Individually no one organization could afford such an extensive library or have the resources to staff and stock it.

TAFE has a better facility than it used to have in the old library building, and more students use the resource on a regular basis. The students are able to not only access a larger number of resources but have access to more computers, study spaces, expert staff help and modern services like scanning, faxing, binding, laminating, high quality colour printing and disability support with zoom text, and other equipment.

By moving the location of the Library, TAFE was able to free up space for their Administration and Student Services on their section of the campus; this has allowed TAFE to better utilize their space without the cost of new construction. The City was able to close a small branch library which reduced operating and maintenance costs.

All groups have greatly improved their book stock, duplication has been minimised, synergies have evolved across many subject areas, and many subjects are useful for a range of patrons. This means when we purchase material we can meet the needs of more than one group which results in savings for each partner.

Increased patronage has occurred across all groups, because we are able to provide more services and facilities we can meet more of our patron needs. Also because we have the space we can service many groups at the same time undertaking different activities. At any one time we can have a TAFE childcare class using the resources in the Curriculum Resource Centre, a storytime activity in the children's library for pre-schoolers, a University tutorial group might be in one of the larger meeting rooms and a group of public patrons learning how to use computers with a local class of school children in the e-library.

Because of the use of the joint library management system our patrons have access to a wide range of resources, paging allows patrons to request material from all locations, we have couriers between each library in our group on a daily basis and this allows a greater use of all the collections to the benefit of all patrons across the network. The system allows patrons to page items for themselves, they can do this from home, class room or anywhere they have access to the internet, usually items arrive the next day (if they are not on loan).

Patrons don't necessarily fit into any one group many cross boundaries between our partners – they are not restricted to one patron group. For example a public member might come to us when looking for homework help when at school, they could go on to study at TAFE and perhaps move through to the University and then use us as a public library for recreation or further study. Library staff need to not compartmentalize patrons and it is important that our library system is flexible enough to allow one person to be registered as more than one type of member.

Challenges

As with any organisation joint use libraries have their fair share of challenges. We need to times this by three!! Each organisation needs to relinquish a certain amount of autonomy and agree to the greater good. It was decided at the start that we would make it clear who owned which resources and so included in the library management system is a table of locations which designate which body owns which items. In the event of a dissolution of the partnership it would be possible to give back the items to each partner.

The library is still an imposing building that offers our clients great spaces. Our lecturers from both organisations now recognise the level of service and physical environment that we offer and now try to book whole semesters of e-library or classroom space. Of course we need to have the capacity to offer all three stakeholders space and this can lead to some friction especially at the start of semester when traditionally all the TAFE and University classes want information literacy classes. The University is offering a number of courses to encourage tertiary participation and these classes need information literacy and support from library staff. Again the Library is seen as a neutral space where all groups feel comfortable.

Of the three user groups TAFE has been the hardest group to convert to the joys of libraries but now with the use of technology and the requirements of TAFE courses things have improved. Many lecturers were not happy with the change ...we were too far away and many did not see library services as a requirement. Lecturers now see us as critical and many have included our information literacy worksheets in their courses. Library staff stay in touch with lecturers and ensure that their needs are met where possible, including purchasing materials for classes. The University sees the availability of the

library service as essential and to be able to have an excellent library service shared by the three partners has been a very cost effective way to provide library services as the campus has developed. The City has access to a powerful library system that it would not necessarily have been able to fund alone and the presence of a tertiary library with all its requirements has meant that City patron expectations have increased.

Opportunities

Joint use means that we need to be really good at developing relationships with not just our stakeholder organisations but also with other TAFE's, Universities and other public libraries. We need to ensure we keep up to date with innovations in all sectors so that our patrons don't miss out. Staff try and attend conferences for all sectors and present at all sector events too. We need to be able to access collections and have the capacity to share knowledge.

Both the university and TAFE sector have gained from our joint use joint location scenario. In the current political scene with universities directed to increase low socio-economic student enrolment the relationship with TAFE has seen an increase in combination degrees and Applied degrees where students commence study in the VET sector and move to the university sector. The boundaries between both are blurring and we need to provide services and skills that will cover the requirements of both sectors. This has meant that the sort of information literacy training we now do for TAFE has increased and that level is now expected. Gone are the days where we only did catalogue training for the VET sector...now there is a requirement for database training.

Resources developed for University can be seamlessly transferred to TAFE, the University Library use Libguides (hosted on Shareware) to provide subject information for their students, our library has taken advantage of this and created Subject guides for TAFE students using the same software. Technologies are able to be shared. The University has recently moved to putting smart boards in all its tutorial rooms, the library has been included in this upgrade with one being put in the e-library, this has meant that all classes run in this room are able to take advantage of this new technology, it has been very popular. We have self checkout PC, automated printing stations with card access and are working towards an online self service computer booking system.

Because we have designed and delivered these services other campus libraries in our college and other public libraries in our system have needed to develop these to service client demand.

Politics

Relationship building is critical to the success of any organisation but even more so to joint use facilities. It is easy for any partner to feel like they are being left out or the needs of their users neglected. Seamless service has always been a catch cry of our library and we make sure that all staff are aware of it when they start. As the manager I attend functions for all the stakeholder groups and make sure that

all are invited to anything we organise at the library. As a university sector library we are reviewed every 4 or 5 years and the partners are always invited to have input into the review. The latest was held in June 2011 and users from all sectors were interviewed and managers from the other partners were also interviewed to make sure that any issues were addressed.

Awareness of each stakeholder's vision and mission is essential and the capacity to link into internal communications is an added advantage. The Manager and Deputy both have access to Challenger Email and access to local government minutes and agendas mean that library staff are up to date with progress at the City.

We wanted to create a web page which was not aligned with any one partner but was unique to our Library. The page uses images of the local environment and we have also created a logo which reflects the ocean. Each partner has information within the pages but it means that all partners are given equal prominence.

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ROCKINGHAM REGIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNITY LIBRARY

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Welcome to your joint use library

Latest from our blog!

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Rockingham Regional Campus Community Library is a joint venture between [City of Rockingham](#), [Challenger Institute of Technology](#) and [Murdoch University](#).

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Key Data comparison

Each year since we commenced the joint use operation we have published key data information. It has been interesting to compare the data from 2000 to 2010. The main changes have been to our collection size with very little change in our loans, staffing or client base numbers. Of course in the 10 years between many changes occurred with increases and decreases in student numbers as well as governance decisions on how long to keep public borrowers in the system. The client base is only those

numbers who have enrolled in our library and doesn't take into consideration City borrowers from the other 2 libraries who have their home library registered as either Safety Bay or Warnbro.

	2000	2010
Collection size	54,746 items	92,788 items
Loans	215,096	222,787
Client Base	25,367	23,858
Staff	9.5 EFT	10.3 EFT

The availability of this key data has made funding easier to justify. Reporting to the Policy Advisory Committee not only includes this data but also computer usage, room bookings, information literacy classes as well as loans data. Transparent information about usage and costs instils confidence in the partners so that the flexible funding formula can work to benefit all partners.

Funding for the future

Whether one considers joint-library undertakings as a defense against *“being marginalized in the digital age”* or as a wonderful opportunity to enhance the leadership role of libraries in their communities and campuses, *joint-use libraries are here to stay; librarians need to develop the administrative dexterity to make sure they work well.* “ 3.

This sums up the future for joint use libraries. Librarians need to ensure that they have the skills to develop relationships that create win-win scenarios for the various members of their communities. Joint use can benefit communities that may never have the opportunity to experience first class library services if they were to go it alone. Funding is always a contentious issue for any organization and libraries are rarely seen as profitable because of their service orientation. Parallel funding enables a service to be offered but does not allow a truly strategic approach to library services. Managers need to be able to visualize the future needs of their communities and have the capacity to provide strategic services without needing to approach the most appropriate partner cap in hand. Libraries that use funding models with limited flexibility cannot budget for innovation and in some cases find it difficult to ensure the replacement of essential operational equipment.

Confidence in your partners and confidence in management to do the very best for each stakeholder is essential if funding is not to be so stringently scrutinised that there is no room to maneuver. Librarians need to develop the leadership skills and communication skills to make sure that trust and transparency is apparent across the organization itself and across the partnerships. Service Level Agreements and Memorandums of Understanding need to be flexible enough to allow for libraries to thrive and provide the very best for their patrons. Agreeing on a funding formula that allows for flexibility and not losing sight of the many benefits of joint use, especially the fact that each partner would never be able to provide the same level of service on their own is the critical success factor for joint use funding into the future.

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Additional Reading

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