

GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING SUBSCRIPTION FEES FOR CROSS-SECTORAL CONSORTIA

Background

There are several consortia which exist to streamline membership of Libraries Australia. For example, each Australian state and the Northern Territory support a consortial arrangement for their public library sectors.

Over the last 12 months, Libraries Australia has devised new models for subscription fees which have been developed on a sectoral basis for libraries. The sectors are: university, state/territory, public, and special. However, additional guidelines are required which allow the new subscription models to be applied fairly to a cross-sectoral consortium.

In this context, a consortium is defined as: “a group of member representatives from companies, libraries, agencies or cooperatives which work together and is itself empowered to represent its members as a legal entity.”

Conduct of the User Agreements

For technical and administrative reasons, any Libraries Australia subscribers which join the service via a consortium are required to sign an individual agency User Agreement. Such reasons include:

- assignment of a unique National Union Catalogue symbol;
- assignment of unique sign-ons, to ensure the right levels of access to Libraries Australia subscription services;
- legal requirements for invoicing of LADD transactions; and
- the ability to satisfy individual agency requests for usage statistics.

Effect of the new subscription models

The process of deriving new subscription models also revealed that:

- any new parameter chosen as the basis for a model is not automatically going to result in a reduction in subscriptions to the Libraries Australia service. The new subscription models are designed to be revenue neutral for each sector;
- while Libraries Australia welcomes new libraries into the service via a consortium arrangement, there is often little benefit in terms of savings in administration. This may be offset by the benefit of streamlined record contribution, but this is not a universal result;
- the establishment of a consortium does not mean that a consortial subscription fee is set in perpetuity, no matter how many libraries join it. Every library which joins Libraries Australia, whether directly or via a third party, should pay fees which are comparable to others in the same sector.

Efficiencies brought by consortia

Some of the efficiencies originally proposed for the establishment of consortia are provided here for discussion, with responses which reflect how Libraries Australia currently operates.

Q1. Does the use of a shared system platform save effort for Libraries Australia Database Services ?

Response: there is an initial saving when data arrives from a single source, because it reduces the testing and configuration of the Record Import Service.

Q2. Does an ongoing single file transfer, rather than multiple transfers, result in major savings for Libraries Australia operations ?

Response: a single file transfer does result in some savings for the network, for example, by reducing network traffic. However, this is also potentially a single point of failure – many agencies would be affected simultaneously instead of one if the transfer failed. Once the routine is established, there are no further savings.

Q3. Do consortia bring agencies to the Libraries Australia service which might not have otherwise joined ?

Response: Libraries Australia always welcomes *new* agencies to the service, and recognises that consortia may provide additional support to agencies to facilitate the process which Libraries Australia may not be able to replicate. However, agencies which are already members of Libraries Australia and switch to a consortium cannot expect their membership fees to be discounted as a result.

Such agencies are also likely to continue to require separate statistics of Libraries Australia usage to justify any membership fee.

Q4. Are there cost-benefits in encouraging members of a consortium to use the Libraries Australia value-added services, such as Libraries Australia Document Delivery ?

Response: while Libraries Australia greatly values the advocacy in such an action, there are no savings to the operation of the service. This will remain true for any new piece of software or service which is introduced.

Q5. Does a single consortial invoice result in significant savings for Libraries Australia ?

Response: unique arrangements tend to cost Libraries Australia more, as all invoicing processes are now automated. While the service does tailor invoices to consortia, and likes to assist agencies in this way, it would cost Libraries Australia less if all agencies were issued with a standard invoice.

Q6. Does the single point of contact a consortium provides alleviate effort for Libraries Australia staff ?

Response: this has not been the experience of the Libraries Australia support team, particularly when significant changes in the operation of the service take place. The

new subscription models are a case in point. In fact, the need to deal with a third party can increase the complexity or the cost of the relationship with the consortium members.

Q7. What does Libraries Australia value from a consortium ?

Response: Libraries Australia values the advocacy provided by consortia for services provided in the national interest.

In summary, the efficiencies gained by the Record Import Service are offset by the increased administrative arrangements imposed by a consortium, so there are very modest savings for Libraries Australia. However, in recognition of the advocacy role played by consortia, the following new guidelines are proposed.

Proposed new guidelines

1. Where a consortium signs a Libraries Australia User Agreement on behalf of its members, the consortium will be required to provide a list of members current at the time of signing. When any new agency chooses to become a member of the consortium, the latter will be required to negotiate the agency's membership fee with Libraries Australia in accordance with the subscription model devised for the relevant sector.
2. For any agency which is new to Libraries Australia and has chosen to become a subscriber via a consortium, a 50% reduction in the Libraries Australia fee will be offered in the first year of membership.
3. For any agency which is already a Libraries Australia member (or has been in the preceding 24 months) and chooses to rejoin Libraries Australia through the auspices of a consortium, their subscription will be calculated according to the model devised for the relevant sector.

The guidelines will be incorporated into Libraries Australia User Agreement clauses, and issued to relevant consortia for commencement in July 2008.

Recommendation

The Libraries Australia Advisory Committee to note the report.

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