

Pacific Rim Digital Library Alliance (PRDLA) and Pacific Neighborhood Consortium (PNC): Synthesis or Siblings?

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Abstract: The author examines the question of whether the Pacific Neighborhood Consortium (PNC) and the Pacific Rim Digital Library (PRDLA) alliance should merge or simply agree to co-exist. He reviews the goals currently being pursued by PRDLA (PRDLA), the goals of the most recent PRDLA meeting which was held in Tokyo, and its subsequent action agenda of what needs to be developed: an online digital process inventory, information about PRDLA's goals, a determination of how PRDLA should interact with other organizations, a white paper on storage management architecture issues, an inventory of technical experts and types of volunteer advice/training member libraries are willing to offer each other, an internship matching program including whether PRDLA can facilitate accepting interns selected by the Japan Association of Private University Libraries, improved communication between member libraries, a proposal to sponsor an Asian ICOLC-like event, an inventory of the kinds of e-resources needed by faculty members at member institutions, collaborative models that might govern the sharing of e-resources.

The purpose of this presentation is to establish a dialogue between our two groups and to gather information in order to recommend our future relationship: should PRDLA and PNC merge or simply accept that we are siblings. While I am the current PRDLA Steering Committee chair, my words today are my own and my presentation does not represent the collective thinking of the PRDLA membership. In some ways my talk is only a part of the dialogue that needs to take place since I will focus mainly on describing PRDLA's goals and activities. I will make a few comments on how this complements or differs from what I understand to be PNC's goals and activities. But my coming to this meeting has the objective of developing an understanding of PNC.

The goals of the Pacific Rim Digital Library Alliance according to our home page, which badly needs revision, is to

- Facilitate improved user access to scholarly research materials, primarily through digital means; [and to accomplish this by]
- focus[ing] limited human and budgetary resources on cooperative ventures both among all members and also within smaller subsets of Alliance members; and
- support new and traditional library functions through the sharing of electronic and hardcopy data, cooperative collection development, personnel exchange, and other activities

While I believe PRDLA needs to revise the language used to express these goals to reflect its current set of activities, they do reflect its central tenants: Collaboration and or sharing designed to increase the breadth and depth of electronic/digital information we are able to offer our library patrons.

I am purposely not going to discuss PRDLA's history and origins. While these origins are important, I will use the time available to describe its current activities and to draw some comparisons with what I believe are PNC's goals.

At the Beijing 2000 PRDLA meeting two organizational decisions were made which produced some significant changes. First, it was decided that a more formal Steering Committee was needed if PRDLA was to pursue a more dynamic action agenda. Second, it was decided to go ahead with the idea of opening up the membership to other libraries/institutions on the Pacific Rim in order to increase the muscle power needed to carry out these actions. These two changes have proven successful.

Using email and conference calls, the Steering Committee was able to develop a set of questions/issues that needed to be answered/addressed before PRDLA could become more action oriented:

- Steering Committee goals, membership, frequency of meetings.
- The types and leadership of working groups needed.
- The amount of dues needed to support a Secretariat.
- When and where should general membership meetings be held?
- What sorts of things should happen at these general meetings?
- What do we want PRDLA to accomplish.
- What should PRDLA's relationship be with other groups like PNC, etc.?
- Who should be invited to join PRDLA?
- Should there be multiple membership types?

Some questions were answered, others served as topics for the general membership meeting that was held in Tokyo this past July. Basically the Tokyo meeting accomplished 5 main purposes:

- It enabled the Steering Committee to meet face to face before and after the meeting. This meant that we were able to start with a review of our goals and end with the development of a concrete action agenda with time tables and the delegation of responsibilities.
- It enabled us to try out our organizational technique of dividing the attendees into consortial licensing, resource sharing, technology, and metadata standards discussion groups. These groups had the two-fold goal of sharing with each other what was happening in their part of the world for the assigned topic, and to brainstorm some meaningful collaborative activities that might be pursued by PRDLA.

- It gave each institution the opportunity to share and listen to descriptions of the kinds of digital projects being initiated back home. This was facilitated by asking members to answer a digital projects questionnaire developed along the lines of the activities reported on by Digital Library Federation members.
- It enabled the group to take care of a number of house keeping tasks like where it will meet in subsequent years. We decided to try and piggy back on other meetings wherever possible. For example, we will hold our next meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia the week prior to the American Library Association meeting in Toronto; we will hold the 2004 meeting in Taipei in conjunction with PNC, we'll go back to North America for 2005 and hold that meeting wherever the Coalition for Networked Information meeting will be held (this presumes that our non North American members will be able to attend that meeting as foreign guests); and in 2006 we want to go to Seoul and hold our meeting in conjunction with the IFLA meeting that will be convened there.
- Perhaps most important, it gave us many opportunities to meet in informal settings to speak and share information with each other. We did this while eating and visiting tourist sites. We shared a wonderful meal atop the Shinagawa Prince hotel, another dinner on a boat in Tokyo bay, a wonderful lunch at a centuries old Inn transplanted to the Wasaeda campus. Indeed we spent a lot of time bonding and discovering that libraries were much the same whether they were located in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, or the USA.

By the end of the meeting we had developed a good action agenda:

- Develop online digital process inventory to secure information for all digital projects including descriptive,

technical, preservation, and administrative metadata standards employed; Benchmark information for member projects including cost, time; Software/database management system; hardware employed.

- Pull together for review all information about the mission, roles, purposes of PRDLA. Share this with members to get confirmation and broad understanding. Discuss the degree to which PRDLA is open/closed to participation by non PRDLA members in PRDLA initiatives
- Develop white papers on the mission/goal similarities/differences between PRDLA and Pacific Neighborhood, APRU, etc. Discuss the pros and cons of developing a formal relationship (aligning to merging) with these groups.
- Develop a white paper to clarify the storage management architecture issues governing our relationship to San Diego Super Computing Center (SDSC); decide what issues /developments would dictate a continued relationship, an end to the relationship.
- Develop an online inventory of technical experts and types of volunteer advice/training they are willing to give to other PRDLA member library staff.
- Develop an intern matching service (match staff training/internship needs with internships opportunities. Seek membership consideration.
- Explore the willingness of PRDLA member libraries to accept a self funded librarian selected by the Japan Association of Private University Libraries for 3 months internships.
- Revise list serve to facilitate improved communication between/among PRDLA membership related to consortial activities.
- Flesh out a proposal to sponsor an Asia/Pacific ICOLC like event.
- Explore database management system that could be used to facilitate access to information gathered above.
- Develop an inventory of information needed by scholars at member library institutions.
- Develop collaborative models (central and distributive) which would facilitate members contributing content to shared databases, e.g. cultural revolution materials, oceanic materials, etc.

We hope that most of these activities will take place this year but the last four will probably not become a reality until the year following.

Let me conclude by returning to the question of how does PRDLA relate to PNC. Should these organizations be merged or simply aligned as complimentary siblings?

I am sure that I don't know enough about PNC to answer this question as yet. Since I didn't think ahead enough to take the time to request PNC leadership to send me some formal documentation to look at, I have relied upon the agenda for this meeting, and some information I could easily retrieve from the web about PNC, to give me some preliminary feeling for what might be the answer.

Perhaps I can use the who, what, when, why, and where questions that journalists employ when trying to understand something. I believe the answers to these questions suggest that while we share much in common, we are not identical:

Question	PRDLA	PNC
Who	Librarians (largely administrators) from both sides of the Pacific.	All sorts of scholars, computer scientists, museum curators, and librarians from both sides of the Pacific.
What	Collaboration dealing with digital as well as other sorts of issues including staff exchange, consortial buying, etc. Emphasis on macro library specific issues	Sharing research finding (content and technique issues) dealing with a wide range of digital projects. Macro issues as well as micro issues given attention.
When and Where	Annual meetings on both sides of the pacific. Short meetings, usually a day and one half.	Annual meetings on both sides of the Pacific. Longer meetings involving 3 days.
Why	Gain more content for library patrons.	Share content and techniques with other interested scholars, computer scientists, museum curators, etc.

So where does that leave us. I think PRDLA and PNC are different.

PRDLA could possibly be seen as a subset of PNC. Or, alternatively, it could be seen as complimentary to PNC. The more macro organizational aspects that

are emphasized in PRDLA could continue to take place there, but the more micro project-specific sorts of activities that have occurred in PRDLA could be more meaningfully be deferred to PNC.

I realize this conclusion will not be greeted with approval by some of my Library Director colleagues who have a very practical problem to solve: the lack of international travel funds. If the groups were to merge or somehow loosely coalesce – there would be one meeting and one expensive air ticket. As someone who is personally interested in taking part in both meetings and having my staff involved in both groups, I can identify with this concern. Spending the better part of two weeks in different parts of Japan is not easy. Next year I could perhaps find myself in two parts of North America. Luckily in 2004 I can attend both meetings in Taiwan where I have spent nearly four years of my life. Yet, unless our two organizations can correlate our meeting schedules more effectively I don't see this problem disappearing.

My overall conclusion is we need to continue to talk, and I am confident this can and will happen.