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# Program for Cooperative Cataloging

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## Top Five Reasons Why Library Administrators Should Support Participation in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging<sup>1</sup>

by

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For the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) to be a healthy, actively growing organization, it needs the support of library administrators who understand and are familiar with the benefits of involvement in cooperative cataloging programs. Library administrators need to be lobbied and educated in order to obtain their blessing on PCC participation. To that end, I'd like to present the top five reasons why library administrators should support participation in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging.

▣ [Reason #5: Because it slows catalogers down!](#)

▣ [Reason #4: Because it takes time away from production](#)

▣ [Reason #3: Because it involves costly overhead!](#)

▣ [Reason #2: Because it's labor-intensive!](#)

▣ [Reason #1: Because it's expensive!](#)

### Reason #5: Because it slows catalogers down!

Perhaps one of the foremost benefits of PCC involvement is the fact that the process begins in an act of serious soul-searching.

- ❏ Is cooperative cataloging important? If so, what role does it play in serving the mission of the library?
- ❏ Will participation mean that we have to change the way that we work?
- ❏ Are there things we need to learn that we don't already know?
- ❏ What will be the impact on original cataloging? On copy cataloging?
- ❏ What benefits, if any, are there to be gained from joining one of the PCC programs? Will it help us catalog new kinds of materials such as e-books or Web sites?
- ❏ And, of utmost importance, will the backlogs get any bigger?

Even library administrators who have already made up their minds that they were not going to sanction PCC involvement would benefit by asking their catalogers to look into the PCC and confront the issues that would be raised by joining. Why?

Because to investigate the aims of the PCC is to encounter all the major themes that run through modern-day cataloging. The stated goals for the PCC address productivity, quality, timeliness, standards, record sharing, and cost-effectiveness. The work of the Standing Committees on Automation, Standards, and Training and their Task Groups brings important issues into focus. Among the questions that the committees and task groups address are:

- ❏ How can automation aid the work of catalogers? What can be effectively handled by automation and what needs human intervention?
- ❏ What standards represent an agreed-upon minimum threshold for acceptable cataloging? Should there be different standards for different kinds of materials?
- ❏ What data elements are essential to provide effective bibliographic access to our library's resources?
- ❏ How can cataloging skills be improved on an ongoing basis?
- ❏ What partnerships can be developed with vendors or other organizations to develop new tools, reduce duplication of effort, and increase the timely availability of cataloging records?
- ❏ How can we share our resources worldwide more effectively?
- ❏ What changes should be made to address inadequacies in our cataloging codes?
- ❏ Can descriptive cataloging and subject analysis be simplified?

**So, the number 5 reason why library administrators should support involvement in the PCC is that the very act of considering membership is an excellent opportunity for catalogers, their public services colleagues, and library administrators to slow down and set aside some time to consider the big picture, to think about why cataloging is performed, what makes it valuable, what is essential and what is not, and whether it makes sense to approach it in a cooperative environment like the PCC.**

My own opinion is that even the most skeptical of library administrators will appreciate the depth and breadth of the PCC vision. I would also guess that most, if not all, catalogers will be excited and enthusiastic about the prospect of PCC participation.

#### **Reason #4: Because it takes time away from production cataloging!**

Precisely!

My goal at the University of Oregon has long been to facilitate the day when professional catalog librarians and high-level paraprofessional catalogers are no longer engaged in routine production or copy cataloging. Instead, they will focus exclusively on the creation of original records, or the upgrading of seriously-deficient member or vendor records, that conform, at a minimum, to PCC core standards.

Why?

Catalog librarians increasingly find themselves involved in activities -- such as the evaluation and implementation of new technologies, the formation of cataloging policy, the provision of bibliographic control for digital resources, training and supervision of staff, teaching in the Library's public services curriculum, participating in collection development -- which reduce the amount of time that they can devote to cataloging. Given that, I want the time that they do have for cataloging to be spent working at the highest level for which their training has prepared them. Our involvement in the PCC dovetails beautifully with this effort.

Participation in NACO, SACO, BIBCO, and CONSER calls upon catalog librarians and high-level paraprofessional catalogers to master new challenges and take their cataloging to a higher level by truly coming to grips with and internalizing the cataloging rules and principles. This provides additional intellectual stimulation and adds an element of variety to their work.

In an era when people speak of the de-professionalization of library cataloging and outsourcing seems to be on everyone's mind, PCC involvement is a path that leads to professional growth for catalogers who want to remain catalogers. They have a sense of being involved in an international mission and know that they are producing cataloging records whose quality can be depended upon and used effectively by their own and other libraries.

**So, the number 4 reason why library administrators should support involvement in the PCC is that the act of participation imposes a greater discipline upon the professional cataloger that can pave the way for better original and upgraded copy cataloging, higher morale, and potentially higher**

## **production and productivity for us all.**

### **Reason #3: Because it involves costly overhead!**

When you prepare to join one of the PCC programs, you will discover the need to designate someone as a principal point of contact for staff on-site who have questions, as well as for communicating with other participating libraries and with program coordinators at the Library of Congress. This person will probably be one of your more experienced catalogers and, perhaps, one of your library's more highly paid employees. To be sure, paying this person to devote part of her time to coordinate PCC activities will increase the overhead costs associated with PCC participation. There is no way to redirect the time of a productive professional away from front-line production activities and dismiss the impact as insignificant.

At the same time, however, a number of tangible benefits will result, which, in my mind, offset any temporary loss in productivity. First, the coordinator will step up to function as a leader/expert who can assume the burden of knowing all the ins and outs of the program that would be difficult for everyone to retain. When questions and problems or unique and difficult situations arise, the coordinator is there to provide direction, get answers, and offer encouragement.

Secondly, the coordinator will emerge as a national point person for ongoing training. Our PCC coordinators have been instrumental in organizing, arranging and presenting skill-sharpening sessions using real-life examples that have come up in daily work. Finally, the position of coordinator allows someone to assume a non-managerial role with enhanced responsibility. This is a perfect position for the "cataloger's cataloger," someone who doesn't aspire to management but who, nevertheless, wants an avenue in which to excel and grow beyond the original job description.

**So, the number 3 reason why library administrators should support involvement in the PCC is that an investment in the overhead necessary for participation pays dividends that, in a short period of time, more than exceed the costs.**

### **Reason #2: Because it's labor-intensive!**

The prospect of taking all the catalog librarians and high-level paraprofessional catalogers away from their regular duties and providing intensive training so that they can then spend more time per record adhering to higher standards is enough to make any administrator cringe. However, it never hurts to question assumptions. For example, is it true that for your library to join NACO your librarians would have to acquire an entirely new knowledge base? I doubt it.

If cataloging staff at an institution are savvy enough to be utilizing authority records in their local system, and are creating local authority records to support collocation and cross referencing, they are probably already applying the principles and standards that feed into the NACO program. After years of contributing to cooperative databases which utilize the same standards as the PCC program, your catalogers are probably already well versed in the standards that they would need to apply. If so, NACO (or SACO, BIBCO, or CONSER) training is more like frosting the cake instead of having to bake it from scratch.

In fact, one of the foremost reasons for PCC participation is that it provides a mechanism for capturing and sharing more widely the high quality work that cataloging staff are already doing. Rather than assuming the burden for performing authority work that will only be repeated by the next cataloging institution, PCC participants are able to do the work once and make it available for everyone who needs it. Furthermore, cataloger time spent preparing the NACO record can be reduced by using shortcuts like the NACO macro which can generate for cataloger review a draft authority record based on information in a bibliographic record in a matter of seconds.

**So, the number 2 reason why library administrators should support involvement in the PCC is that cataloging in general is labor-intensive to begin with and, when the effort is shared according to mutually agreed-upon standards, becomes less so for everyone.**

## Reason #1: Because it's expensive!

As the PCC brochure states, "In today's developing global bibliographic network, shared authority work is an absolute requirement. Since libraries began implementing AACR2 on a worldwide scale, the creation, updating, and maintenance of standardized and consistent authority files has provided major challenges to catalogers. In addition, the ever-increasing number of publications in a wide variety of languages, scripts, and formats has renewed the need for and interest in cooperative bibliographic initiatives." [2](#)

The beauty and genius of the PCC is that it has renewed our vision for what real cooperative cataloging can accomplish.

Although we can probably credit the bibliographic utilities for the inspiration, somehow, over the years, the vision of cooperative cataloging started to dim and lose the vibrancy of its original intent. At my own institution, we stopped trusting member copy. We had created a list of "favorite" libraries whose records we would trust and had lost some of the drive to make original or enhanced contributions to the shared database. Someone else would do it, we assumed, and we could simply wait and age our backlogs until the copy appeared -- which we would then pick apart.

The PCC program has shown that libraries of all sizes and types can make valuable, upfront contributions. This is the message that library administrators need to hear over and over again. It's less expensive in the long run if libraries band together and catalog to mutually agreed-upon standards. By joining the PCC, libraries create and then share an abundance of wealth of expertise and knowledge that would be impossible for each library to obtain on its own. Yes, there will be some expense in providing the initial training (although the overhead of the training is underwritten to some degree by the PCC itself).

Yes, there will be expense as catalogers take the time to acquire some new knowledge and skills. But the end result is an overall reduction in cataloging costs, as the pool of bibliographic and authority records created to common standards increases and more of these records can be utilized in fast or quick cataloging processing streams. The time and effort spent on record creation pays for itself many times over whenever a library uses the bibliographic or authority records created by others. Of course, this only works well if a sizeable number of libraries commit to participation. Let me quote from an excellent report produced by the Catalog Division of the Princeton University Libraries:

We have to recognize that there is a genuine community of interest among research libraries, and that sharing is not merely altruistic. Everybody wants LC to catalog more books; the more LC catalogs, the better off we all are. Similarly, if everyone wants more headings in the NAF, for use in the cataloging process or in post-cataloging authority control in local OPACs. NACO is one of the few concrete ways to contribute to that process. To the degree that cataloging is shared, those that help others help themselves.<sup>3</sup>

**So, the number 1 reason why library administrators should support involvement in the PCC is that it's too expensive NOT to participate -- the more participants, the lower the overall cost for everyone. That's a bottom line that any library administrator can support!**

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## References

1. First presented as a paper at the joint Oregon-Washington Library Associations meeting in April 1997. Edited for posting by Carol Hixson in June 2001.
2. Program for Cooperative Cataloging," Regional & Cooperative Cataloging Division, Library of Congress, 2001, p.8.
- 3."NACO at Princeton," typescript, ca. 1993.



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July 18, 2005

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