Kelsey Badger, Anna Biszaha, and Stephanie Schulte

We Couldn't Have Done It Alone

Reflections on Getting Started with Cross-Campus Service Coordination

For librarians, working with campus partners to achieve a mutual goal can feel both exciting and daunting. With the research landscape becoming increasingly competitive, this kind of teamwork can produce outcomes that have greater impact, and librarians should consider how they can successfully work with other units on their campuses to better fuel success. Significant changes to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Data Management and Sharing Policy (DMSP) that became effective in January 2023[1] served as a catalyst for us to work with several key research-support departments at our institution. In this column, we describe our experience, lessons learned, and how this partnership is leading to formalized commitments that can potentially sustain change. Though our work is specific to data management and sharing, the lessons we share could be applied to any large collaboration in an institution.

Developing and Working with a Campus-Wide Group

Ohio State is a large R1 institution, with more than 1.4 billion in research expenditures for FY2023[2] and an extensive research enterprise. Within the libraries, the University Libraries and Health Sciences Library (HSL) are administratively separate. Though we are known to collaborate, we provide services through different models and serve different populations. Prior to 2022, both the University Libraries and the HSL had vacancies in key positions related to research data services, which created a void of coordinated library support.

Within the overall research enterprise of the university, the research integrity specialists in the Office of Research Compliance began exploring their own role in supporting researchers with the changes to the NIH DMSP. After identifying data management resources on a library website, they approached University Libraries in late spring 2022. That serendipitous discovery by an office with substantial influence within the university soon blossomed into a working group with representation from multiple offices across the research support enterprise (table 1).

Kelsey Badger is an assistant professor and research data librarian at The Ohio State University Libraries, email: badger.60@osu.edu. Anna Biszaha is an assistant professor and research and education librarian at The Ohio State University Health Sciences Library, email: biszaha.2@osu.edu. Stephanie Schulte is a professor, assistant vice president, health sciences, and director of The Ohio State University Health Sciences Library, email: schulte.109@osu.edu.

Table 1. Overview of Participating Offices

University Office	Scope of Responsibilities	NIH DMSP Impacts
Office of Research Compliance	Supports researchers with research integrity and maintains the university Research Data Policy	Proper policy compliance
Office of Responsible Research Practices	Supports researchers with ethical conduct of human subjects research	Ethical management and sharing for human subjects data
Office of Sponsored Programs	Supports researchers with grant applications and awards management	Application materials and post-award reporting
Office of Innovation and Economic Development	Supports researchers with patents or commercialization of research products and manages Data Use Agreements	Intellectual Property implications of data sharing
Information Technology University IT Medical Center IT College IT	Supports research infrastructure, such as computing and storage facilities	Local data storage and transfer between storage solutions
College Leadership	Oversees research programs within colleges	Supporting researchers to be successful

The process of our group development was very organic, with new members continuously joining as we realized certain voices were missing. We called ourselves a working group although we retained an informal structure and did not have any true parameters or charge to which to adhere. It was more of a space where like-minded individuals could come with information, questions, or ideas on how to address the upcoming policy changes and coordinate our efforts better in a large institutional setting where information can easily become siloed.

In addition to increased communication and collaboration between departments, the group also produced several concrete outputs:

- **LibGuide**, which served as the primary vehicle for information sharing with Ohio State-branded resources and became the university's only researcher-facing webpage on the policy.
- **Informational webinars** co-taught by the University Libraries, HSL, and Sponsored Programs at regular intervals in conjunction with the major R01 deadlines.
- **Open office hours and inter-office referrals** that leverage the distinct expertise across the participating research support units.
- **Institutional responses** to requests for information on the Association of American Medical Colleges' round-up of institutional resources (summer 2022) and the NIH's draft public access plan (spring 2023).

These coordinated activities generated awareness across campus about the impending policy changes and raised the profile of the libraries as a source of data management expertise. As a result, we began fielding multiple requests for individual department presentations, one-on-one consultations with researchers, and a surge in requests to provide feedback on Data Management and Sharing plan drafts.

Lessons Learned and Challenges

Throughout the months since summer 2022, we have learned much about working on a large initiative with multiple campus departments. These lessons are likely transferable to other library–campus unit collaborations.

Communication across campus units may not be robust. Many of the units that were working as part of our informal campus group have similar interests and concerns related to researcher compliance with NIH policies. We expected that they would be in semi-regular contact with each other around these matters. However, the working group appeared to bring together many of these groups for the first time. In some ways, the working group may have improved collaboration and communication across the units and is a good example of librarians being connectors in complex settings. This was also true within the libraries, as the NIH policy changes created a heightened need for collaboration. For example, University Libraries and the HSL developed a rotation system to manage the increased workload.

Differences in service models may challenge librarian scope. While librarians are accustomed to proactive educational programming, many of our partners in the research support enterprise have different job roles or service models. Differences in our approaches created a sense of imbalance at times. For example, librarians have expertise creating instructional workshops, which were a primary output of the working group. Our leadership in this area spurred additional conversations about librarians taking responsibility for more tasks, but many were outside what we believed to be our scope. Determining the scope of librarian work can be challenging, especially as roles evolve with needs. It can be tempting, and sometimes necessary, to push traditional boundaries to discern whether our scope should shift or expand.

Ad hoc groups may function better with designated leaders and formal charges. The "interested parties" nature of the working group led it to grow organically over several months; thus, catching up new members took some time away from meetings. It also lacked a formal charge that might have included designated leadership and expectations for the group. The group was able to make progress despite this, but the leadership void and lack of understanding of who had the authority to make certain decisions sometimes made for awkward moments in meetings. In retrospect, this is easy to see, but all too often, this is exactly how groups of collaborators (including librarians) come together on important issues. It may be beneficial to have clarity around these issues even in beginning stages of conversation.

Working with multiple campus units is incredibly insightful and positive for librarians. The challenges described above proved to be rich learning experiences for us and provided a window into the decentralized research landscape at our institution. We believe respect for our expertise and ability to deliver materials and services that are helpful to researchers increased. New invitations to present and provide feedback on the policy and other data-centric resources grew out of this work. Libraries can become just as insular as other campus units, but partnerships across campus can increase the level of influence and impact of librarian services.

The Next Chapter for Campus Coordination

The NIH DMSP provided a unique catalyst for campus partnership that may otherwise have been a challenge to initiate. As the immediacy of the policy began to wane, we strategized on how to maintain those relationships. The result is a formalized working group with a charge scoped in response to the Office of Science and Technology Policy's 2022 memorandum ("Nelson Memo") on public access to federally funded research.[3] In many ways, this group is an extension of the previous initiative and builds on those relationships. Its formal charge has many benefits that address the challenges we encountered with the previous group.

Most significantly, the new group has clearly articulated sponsors and chairs, which addresses the leadership vacuum of the earlier group. These responsibilities are shared by the University Libraries and the Office of Research. Our units bring complementary expertise to the complexities of data sharing, with the library contributing experience with the preservation of scholarly outputs and the research enterprise contributing familiarity with research integrity, policy, and compliance. In addition to inviting back the units who contributed to the previous group, the Libraries and the Office of Research also collaborated to create a tailored list of invitees that would broaden representation to other groups, including faculty representatives and the University Senate Research Committee.

In the short term, we will focus on the key areas of our new charge: collective study of the forthcoming updates to federal agencies' public access policies, development of a consistent educational strategy, and alignment of our existing Research Data Policy[4] with the expectations of federal sponsors and the emergent principles of the scientific community.[5] The working group also has a fourth charge, which is to make recommendations for future directions that will support data management and sharing. Greater campus coordination creates the possibility of service models that the library cannot implement on its own. These include university- or college-level policy changes like mandating data management plans for all research groups[6] or requiring groups to designate a research data manager.[7] There are also early examples at peer universities of new types of job roles, with shared positions between libraries and various areas in the research support enterprise. These include librarians taking on new responsibilities in data governance and data policy[8] as well as research administrators formally adopting roles that support data management education and consultation.[9]

As discussions about campus coordination become increasingly common among librarians,[10] the next horizon will be a critical evaluation of which new models are most effective. Strong cross-campus relationships are the foundation that empower libraries to experiment with these new and innovative approaches to meeting researchers' needs. Like the programs and services they enable, these relationships take time, effort, and the right opportunity. We are in the early stages of cross-campus coordination, but the future is bright. ✄

Notes

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