Consortial collaboration
a perspective from the U.S.

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The Challenge

Consortial overlap in membership and mission

"Very problematical, I see no pluses“

"Annoying but not too much of a challenge“

"Working pretty well, at least for electronic resources“

“Getting better but still very confusing and inefficient”

"Entrenched, backward, and myopic“

Positive impact of overlap

Competition is healthy

Specialized consortia are tailored to meet the unique needs of their membership

Negative impact of overlap

- Duplicated effort
- Reduced buying power
- Confused libraries, vendors, & patrons
- Diffused of financial resources
- Diffused of human resources
- Consortia that are too small or weak for some projects

Obstacles to collaboration

- “Culture & context”
- Mission creep
- Empire building
- Lack of planning and clarity
- Loyalty to organizations that have outlived their mission or not progressed
- Consortium staff that look for new ways to justify their positions

Obstacles to collaboration

- Fear that change may imply failure or endanger funding
- Funding streams that are locked in by legislation
- Uncertainty: which organizations are most likely to succeed?
- Lack of political will to attempt more definitive solutions: merger, radical reorganization, shutting down

Approaches to Consortial Collaboration

1. Communication
2. Coordinated programs
3. Merged programs
4. Changing outdated organizations
    - Updating mission and programs
    - Using consortium in name only and directing funds elsewhere
    - Shutting down
5. Creating an umbrella or coordinating organization
6. Merger

A case study in merger

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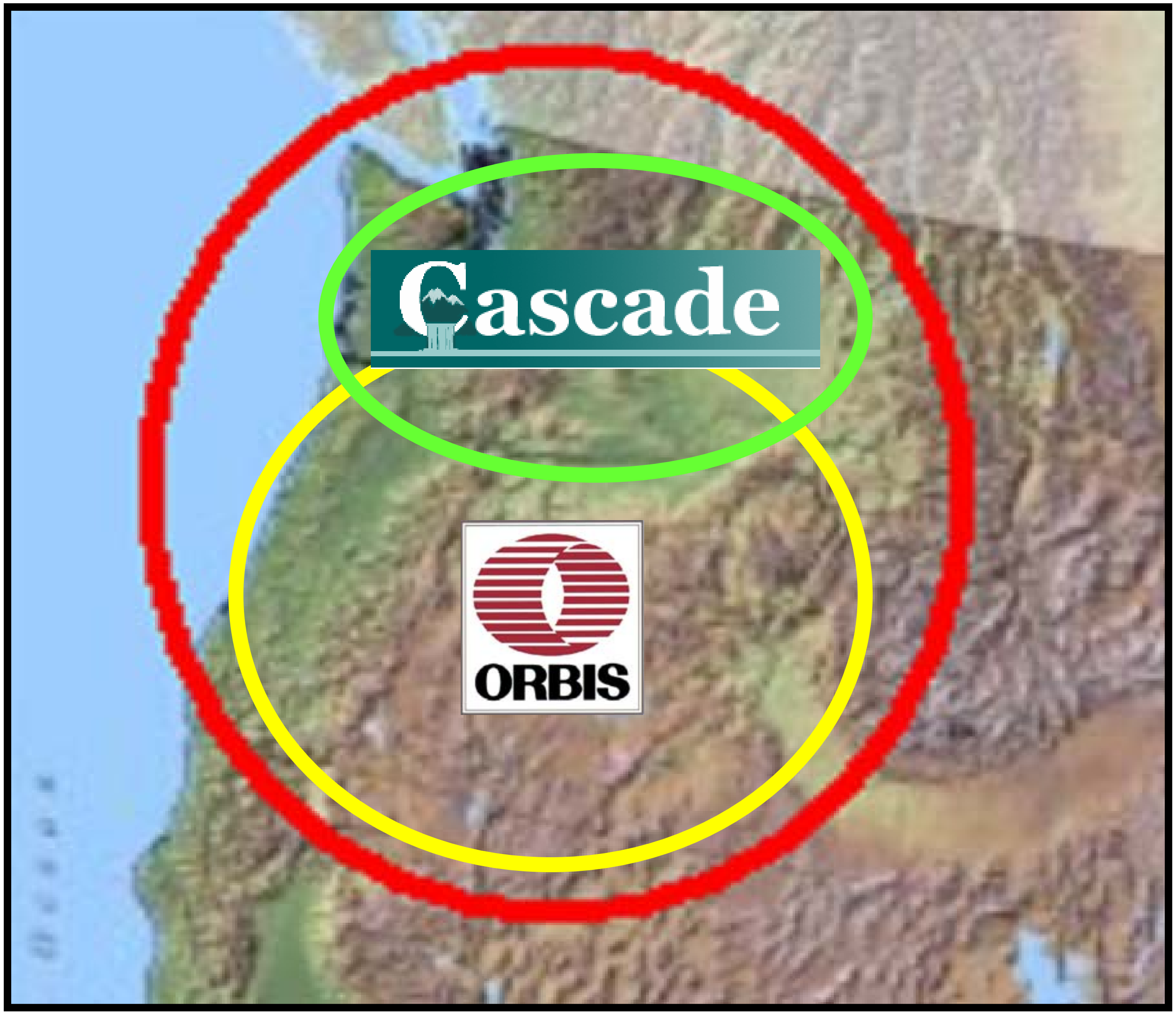
Academic: Oregon & Washington, Private & Public, 2 & 4-year
Small community colleges through large research universities

Orbis and Cascade



Why was merger possible?

- History of informal collaboration
- Geographic affinity
- Similar membership and mission
- Same union catalog technology
- Clear economies of scale: more resources & lower membership fees
- Both recognized that they were too small to achieve some of their goals

Why was merger possible?

- One needed more structure, the other had a successful model
- One had permanent staff, the other had only temporary staff
- Both wanted to fund more central staff
- Change in administrators
- Willingness to take a risk

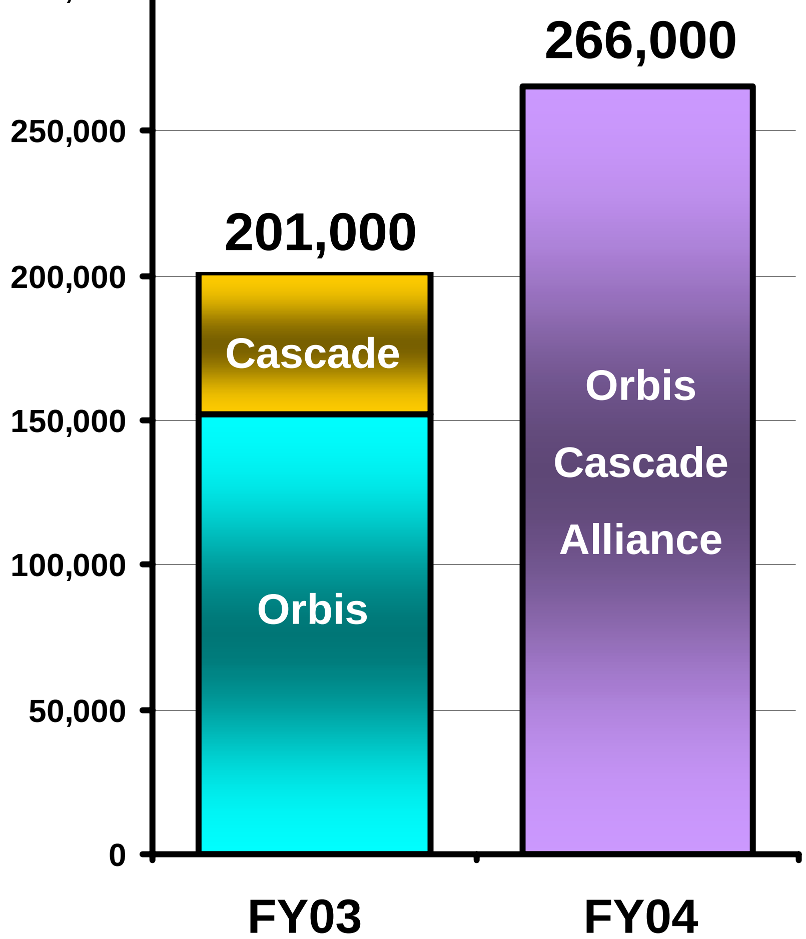
What obstacles had to be overcome?

- “Merging” vs. “Joining”
- Organization name
- Preserving funding & reputation
- Perception of one state "following" another
- Sense of "loss"
- Staff positions
- Adding participants to existing projects
- Interim mission, governance, etc. etc.

Impact of merger

Membership fees:	Decreased by 13%
Staff resources:	Added 2 positions
Electronic resources:	More participants & better pricing
New initiatives:	Improved support

Impact of merging union catalogs



34% increase in lending

94% fill rate (up from 89%)

Best Practices

Communication

Shared responsibility

Commitment

Organization

Finances

Best Practices

Communication

- Stay in touch with other consortia
- Build formal communication mechanisms

Shared responsibility

- Seek out mutually beneficial projects
- Seek out economies of scale
- Market each others' products and services

Commitment

- Build a collaborative spirit and spread responsibility for making it work
- "Commitment from above is big time. Where support comes from is very important."

Best Practices

Organization

- Clarity concerning who does what, e.g., MOU
- Consider umbrella or coordinating structures, e.g., regional "COC"
- Keep vendor negotiation focused on the coordinating consortium or get everyone at the table at the same time
- Maintain a narrow focus on what your organization does well
- Work with consortia, not individual libraries
- Start small and build quickly

Best Practices

Finances

- Attract new sources of funding rather than attempting to refocus existing funding
- Allow funds to flow through old organizations so that they continue to play a role
- Charge appropriate administrative fees for those that do the work
- Determine who has the funding and who is most able to do the work – these are not necessarily the same organizations

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