Chapter 1
Don’t Make Us Use the “Get Along Shirt”: Communication and Consensus Building in an RFP Process

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ABSTRACT
A request for proposal (RFP) process is daunting and fraught with the potential for misunderstandings, disagreements, and the pursuit of individual agendas. An RFP process for a new, large, and loosely connected state consortium is all of that and more. This is the story of how the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) embarked upon the journey of contracting for a joint integrated library system and discovery layer. The authors describe in detail how the project began and how a successful conclusion was reached, while offering practical advice gleaned from these experiences for institutions and consortia who may be considering a similar project.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1735-1.ch001

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PHASE 1: GEARING UP

2012 through November 2014

SETTING THE SCENE

Across the country, state supported higher education has undergone major changes over the last 10 years. After decades of steady growth in student enrollment, the trend began to reverse itself, ironically, in 2011, the year a merger of two of the three systems of public higher education in Connecticut took place (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). College enrollment numbers have been falling nationally since 2011. The oft cited reasons for this include a decline in the number of traditional college-aged students and an improving job market (Thomason, 2015). This downward enrollment trend combined with a steady decline in state funding of higher education over the past 25 years led the administrations of public colleges and universities as well as state governments to seek efficiencies and cost savings to address budget shortfalls (Carlson, 2016; Berrett, 2015; 25 years of declining state support for public colleges, 2014). Public systems of higher education that relied too heavily perhaps on enrollment growth and tuition increases as a means to offset declining state support found themselves in a difficult bind.

This was indeed the case in Connecticut. Prior to 2011, there were four distinct entities in the state:

1. **The University of Connecticut (UConn):** The state’s flagship land grant university, consisting of a main campus and several branch campuses, governed by its own Board of Trustees;

2. **The Connecticut State University System (CSUS):** Consisting of four regional independent universities (Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western), governed by a separate Board of Trustees;

3. **The Connecticut Community Colleges system (CCC):** Including 12 independent institutions scattered all over the state, and also governed by a separate Board; and, finally,

4. **Charter Oak State College:** “…the state’s only public, online, degree-granting institution, [that] provides affordable, diverse and alternative opportunities for adults to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificates. The College’s mission is to validate learning acquired through traditional and nontraditional experiences, including its own courses” (Charter Oak State College, 2016).
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