THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE PURCHASING

BY ANNA LAWLESS-COLLINS & KATY WIGHT

How the Boston Academic Law Library Collaborative and Edward Elgar Publishing formed a unique partnership to broaden access to legal resources across their institutions.
ALLCO members include the libraries of Boston College Law School, Boston University School of Law, Harvard Law School, New England Law Boston, Northeastern University School of Law, and Suffolk University Law School. The stated mission is to “coordinate access, maintenance, and housing of law-related print and microform titles among the members of the group and to provide for expedited access to those sources as requested by the other members.” While this mission is still a large part of BALLCO’s focus, the group has recently begun to look at other opportunities for collaboration.

BALLCO, The Mini-Consortium
BALLCO meets twice a year and the meetings provide an opportunity for members to discuss common issues, solve problems together, and collaborate on issues facing the group. In 2016, BALLCO began to discuss possible new ways to use the mini-consortium, including a joint purchase of material, a joint demand-driven acquisition program, and a joint purchase of a large data set. Ultimately, a joint purchase of material appeared to be the best option for the schools, and the group began to consider possible vendors and subject area collections. Boston University and Harvard were both interested in Edward Elgar Publishing’s annual law ebook collection.

Edward Elgar Publishing
Elgar’s law collection has simple licensing terms and high-quality titles. When he founded the company 32 years ago, Edward Elgar’s vision was to create a publishing house that attracted high-quality books by offering a superior service to authors. The company remains focused on treating its authors (and potential authors) and their books with care and attention to detail, as well as providing its customers and readers with high-quality products and service, and greater access to its publications. Elgar’s law list has grown steadily over the past 15 years, with about 140 titles released in 2018. While the majority of the list comprises scholarly books, titles aimed at law practitioners are a growing segment. A collaboration with BALLCO offered Elgar an opportunity to better serve its authors by expanding access to their works to law scholars and students across the Boston area.
BALLCO’s challenge was finding an arrangement that worked for the wide variety of schools and budgets encompassed in BALLCO’s membership. As the group discussed the proposals, Elgar demonstrated flexibility and a willingness to work with the group to make an arrangement that benefited everyone.

Creating a Partnership
Before launching their online ebook platform, Elgaronline, in 2012, Elgar worked with a panel of academic librarians to prepare a license agreement that would be “library friendly.” Ebooks on Elgaronline are DRM-free and chapters can be downloaded as PDFs that can be printed or read offline on any device. Many Elgar titles are used as assigned or supplemental reading in courses, so it was important to allow for unlimited simultaneous users without any extra cost to the library. The collections are sold on a perpetual access basis and archived with Portico, so libraries own the resources outright and can never lose access. Thanks to feedback from the librarian panel, the license also allows for interlibrary loan at the chapter level. The collections also include downloadable MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloging) records for each collection and COUNTER-compliant usage on an administrative site.

Based on the recommendations of Boston University and Harvard, BALLCO reached out to Edward Elgar Publishing and the two organizations began discussing purchase options in the fall of 2016. Elgar proposed two options: the first was a combined purchase and Evidence-Based Acquisition (EBA) model where Harvard and Boston University would continue to purchase the full 2017 frontlist collection and the other four institutions would participate in an EBA program where they would each commit to an annual spend. Several years’ worth of titles would be accessible and, at the end of the agreed time period, available for purchase at a premium price. The challenge of this proposal for Elgar was covering the costs of extra administrative and coding work. In addition, since only a limited number of titles would be purchased for perpetual access, implementing this proposal would not fulfill the company’s mission of increasing access to all of their authors’ works.

The second proposal was designed to allow for a greater number of Elgar law titles to be exposed and discoverable in the future. Each institution would purchase the full 2017 frontlist collection at a price based on its own budget. Pricing was calculated based on the number of Elgar titles already owned by each library, each law school’s FTE (full-time equivalent) population, budget, and research and usage levels. Because this model was simpler for the publisher to administer and would help fulfill the company’s mission, Elgar offered to provide access for one year to their 2016 Law Collection to the four institutions that didn’t already own it. Those institutions could then purchase perpetual access to titles from that collection at the end of the 12-month period at a discount and with no minimum commitment.

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Harvard and Boston University had bought Elgar’s law collections for the past few years and were able to share usage statistics with the group. Elgar provided title lists from the past and for the upcoming year, and the combination of usage statistics and title lists helped convince BALLCO to move forward with the partnership.

The Result
Ultimately, BALLCO decided on the second proposal, with purchase of the law collection for each school at a discounted price. Each school would own the titles and load the titles into their library systems individually. BALLCO was able to come to a cost-sharing agreement.
arrangement that allowed the schools with smaller budgets to pay a reduced portion of the overall cost, split unevenly among the schools based on budget, size, and projected usage. The result was that Harvard and Boston University paid what they would have paid for individual collection purchases regardless of a BALLCO purchase, while other schools were able to get the collection at various discounts. Additionally, Elgar opened up previous years’ collections to the schools for optional evidence-based acquisitions programs.

This approach provided benefits to BALLCO and Elgar. For BALLCO, it allowed each school to provide access to the collection. The schools that ended up paying more under this model would have purchased the collections regardless of this arrangement, and with the arrangement were able to give colleagues across the city the opportunity to access materials they otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford. Because each school purchased the titles, each school was able to separately report these as monograph purchases and volumes added electronically when responding to national surveys. Schools that paid less were able to provide patrons with access to more materials than they would have otherwise been able to obtain. Elgar was able to work with new customers and expose their publications to more patrons, make their materials more accessible to customers, and explore new models.

The model has been working well and BALLCO renewed the arrangement for the 2018 collection. The ebooks are seeing good usage at all of the institutions, with very high usage at Harvard. Elgar’s Handbooks, which contain original specially commissioned content, have seen the highest use across the six BALLCO institutions, with nearly 1,000 chapters accessed between April 2017 and September 2018. Monograph chapters were accessed 726 times in that time period. Practitioner books and research literature reviews, which make up a smaller percentage of Elgar’s list, were also accessed a number of times. Titles on public international law, environmental law, comparative law, European law, and intellectual property were the most popular. After the initial year, two schools took advantage of the EBA option, while two schools chose not to go that route.

Elgar and BALLCO continue to discuss the collections and Elgar has been transparent, flexible, and open to feedback throughout the process. The two groups are currently exploring further options for collaboration, including other subject areas and collections, and expanding the relationship to University libraries. As Tim Williams, the managing director for Edward Elgar Publishing noted, “this creative acquisition model was a nice way for both organizations to deepen existing relationships and to form new relationships, while simultaneously allowing Elgar to support BALLCO in its wider objective of broadening access to legal resources.”

Usage has been high at each library, with the highest usage at Harvard.

**EBOOKS USAGE (APRIL 2017 - SEPTEMBER 2018)**

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