

## Research on Organizational Management Models of Foreign Library Consortia - Postprint

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] The organizational management model of library consortia in China remains immature, characterized by a lack of standardized regulations and dedicated management personnel, which results in low operational efficiency and difficulty in achieving objectives. In contrast, foreign library consortia have developed earlier with more mature organizational management, establishing certain scaled and stable patterns; their excellent organizational management experience warrants reference and emulation. [Method/Process] This study selected 100 foreign library consortia distributed across various continents as research subjects, employing literature review, website investigation, inductive analysis, and comparative research methods to conduct an in-depth investigation into the construction of their organizational management models, and to summarize specific elements such as management structure configuration, authority of management institutions, and deliberation mechanisms. [Results/Conclusion] The organizational management models of foreign library consortia demonstrate characteristics including well-developed organizational management policies, high member participation, clear delineation of authority and responsibility among management institutions, and high management and operational efficiency. Four key insights are derived: institutional frameworks serve as the foundation for standardized management of library consortia; high participation is crucial for collaborative management; clear authority and responsibility is essential for refined management; and a stable management team is a prerequisite for efficient management.

### Full Text

## Research on the Organizational Management Models of Library Consortia Abroad

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**Abstract:**

**[Purpose/Significance]** The organizational management models of library consortia in China remain immature, lacking standardized regulations and dedicated administrative staff, which results in low operational efficiency and difficulty achieving objectives. In contrast, foreign library consortia developed earlier with more mature organizational management, having established stable models at scale whose excellent management experience merits reference and learning. **[Method/Process]** This study selected 100 foreign library consortia across continents as investigation subjects, employing literature review, website investigation, inductive analysis, and comparative research to examine their organizational management model construction, summarizing the management structure settings, authority of management bodies, and deliberation mechanisms of each model. **[Result/Conclusion]** Foreign library consortia exhibit four key characteristics: comprehensive organizational management policies, high member participation, clearly defined management authority and responsibilities, and high management/operational efficiency. Four implications are summarized: institutional frameworks guarantee standardized consortium management; high participation is key to collaborative management; clearly defined authority and responsibilities enable refined management; and stable management teams are prerequisites for efficient management.

**Keywords:** library consortium; organizational management model; management structure; council management model

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## 1. Research Status at Home and Abroad

Organizational management models of library consortia fall under the scope of “library consortium governance.” Consortium governance, oriented toward consortium objectives, is a progressive, spiraling process that can be divided into internal governance mechanisms (organization and coordination among member libraries) and external governance mechanisms (patterns formed by external factors) [4]. This study focuses on internal governance mechanisms, particularly organizational management models. Governance models vary by country: the U.S. employs council governance, Australia uses corporate governance, and China adopts multi-center governance [5], with each consortium developing distinctive management models over time. Current research on “foreign library consortium organizational management models” is limited, mostly comprising case studies or country overviews.

### 1.1 Development History of Consortium Organizational Management Models

The basic formation of consortium organizational management mod-

els can be traced to the latter half of the 20th century. From the 1960s to the late 1990s, inter-library cooperation models fell into two categories: loosely structured “buying clubs” and tightly integrated resource-sharing alliances [6]. During this period, cooperation was relatively simple with few joint projects, primarily focused on cooperative purchasing and resource sharing. Management models were nascent, simple, and not particularly robust. By the late 1990s, consortium structures diversified due to the introduction of management documents such as memoranda of understanding, resource-sharing agreements, and strategic plans, which explicitly defined governance and management structures [7]. These documents enabled rule-based management, gradually forming more stable patterns. For example, the Washington Research Library Consortium’s (WRLC) organizational structure evolved alongside its resource-sharing programs, and by 1992, members executed a “perpetuity agreement” that clearly defined services and responsibilities, making WRLC’s structure rule-based [8].

**1.2 Organizational Management Models by Country** U.S. library consortium management models can be summarized into three types: council management, hierarchical delegated management, and loose agreement-based management [9], with council management being most common. For instance, WRLC employs a council governance structure with a WRLC Steering Committee overseeing four standing advisory committees, supplemented by subcommittees and working groups [10]. OhioLINK uses a Management Board that delegates an Executive Director, assisted by Technical and Library Advisory Councils, to manage operations. These councils oversee four standing committees, which establish special working groups and interest groups as needed [11]. Committee management models also exist, such as the Alabama Digital Preservation Network (ADPNet), where daily management is handled by ADPNet’s Steering and Technical Policy Committees [12].

Canadian models include loose and tight types. Loose consortia lack dedicated management bodies and strict agreements, while tight consortia have specific organizational structures and management methods, employing “Executive Committee leadership + working group execution” or “Board leadership + committee execution” models [13]. The Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) uses an Executive Committee to lead resource development, with standing committees and working groups implementing specific tasks [14].

UK consortia register with commercial authorities and implement centralized council management with executive committee operations [15]. Most German regional consortia are managed by central institutions located in larger member libraries, some with advisory committees and business committees [16]. Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, and Belgium have civil and government-run models [17]. Most Spanish consortia are regional legal entities under administrative divisions, though some “buying clubs” for e-resources operate as projects without independent structures [18]. Nordic consortia (Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden) are either state-coordinated or facilitated by library associations [19].

Turkey's Anatolian University Libraries Consortium (ANKOS) comprises university libraries pursuing common interests, with overall authority vested in a Steering Committee [20]. Australia's Australian Academic and Research Library Network (AARLIN) uses a three-tier structure: a Planning Steering Committee, expert advisory groups, and special committees/task forces, with regular meetings as the primary deliberation method [21]. Japan's JUSTICE consortium, jointly established by the National Institute of Informatics and university library committees, operates with a Management Committee and special offices, with members joining equally through signed agreements [22]. Jordan's public university library consortium is supervised by a "Center of Excellence" managed by a council headquartered at Al-Yarmouk University Library [23].

Indian consortia and resource-sharing networks follow government-led or civil society models, with government-funded departments establishing dedicated bodies for management, coordination, and oversight [24]. South Africa's GAELIC established its administrative structure at the inaugural meeting, with committees and task groups managing operations [25]. Finland's FinELib is managed by a high-level steering group, consortium group, and expert group [26]. Greece's HEAL-Link is managed by a 34-member body from 34 academic institutions, with the managing chair authorized to sign licensing agreements and a five-member steering committee handling negotiations [26]. Russia's NEICON uses a Coordination Committee that approves strategic plans and assembles expert groups for resource-sharing advice [26].

In summary, foreign models fall into three categories: (1) Council management, where councils (comprising experts and member representatives) lead decision-making on regulations and strategy, with committees handling implementation; (2) Entrusted management, where consortia without independent management bodies delegate authority to strong member libraries or research institutions; and (3) Agreement-based management, where consortia are formed through member-signed agreements without fixed management bodies, with all members jointly responsible [27-28]. Other models also exist [27-28]. However, existing research focuses on limited cases, and no comprehensive studies specifically address organizational management models. Moreover, governance mechanisms evolve dynamically with internal resources and cooperation relationships [29], meaning studied consortia may have modified their models, rendering current findings potentially outdated. Therefore, this study investigates 100 consortia across continents and types to systematically summarize their organizational management models and characteristics, providing references for Chinese consortia.

## **2. Current Status of Foreign Library Consortium Organizational Management Models**

The investigation of 100 foreign library consortia reveals that management models primarily include council, committee, general membership meeting, and entrusted management models, with some individual variations. Council manage-

ment is the most widely adopted model. Application statistics are shown in Table 1 .

**2.1 Council Management Model** Sixty consortia employ council management, where the council is the supreme governing body, commonly named “Board of Directors,” “Board of Trustees,” “Council,” or “Board.”

**2.1.1 Management Structure** Management structure refers to the hierarchical framework established for effective consortium governance. Council models typically include councils, executive committees, standing committees, ad hoc committees, and working/task groups. Structural combinations are shown in Table 2 . The most common structure is “Council + Committees,” followed by “Council + Committees + Leadership Team/Working Groups/Task Groups.” While committee types vary by consortium mission and projects, council composition and some standing committees show similarities.

Councils typically comprise 10-15 members with roles including chair, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer. Some positions are combined; for example, the Alberta Library’s secretary also serves as office manager [30]. Council members primarily represent member libraries, with diverse consortia specifying proportional representation to ensure fairness. For instance, the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) has 15 council members: three ex officio (Illinois State Library representative, CARLI Executive Director, Chicago State University representative) and 12 elected/appointed members serving three-year terms, with three each from public universities, private/research institutions, and community colleges, plus three one-year appointed members from each category [31].

Committees established by councils include: (1) Executive Committees as council implementing bodies; (2) Standing Committees; (3) Ad Hoc Committees; and (4) Advisory Committees. Common committees include Executive, Nominations, Personnel/Compensation, Finance, Audit, Budget, Membership, and Collection Development committees.

**2.1.2 Authority and Responsibilities** As the supreme governing body, councils provide strategic oversight, macro-level planning, guidance, and layout. Other committees have distinct responsibilities under council coordination. Council duties include: drafting and amending bylaws; approving operational policies; developing long-term plans/strategies; setting membership fees; establishing committees/working groups; voting on recommendations; reporting to sponsoring institutions; and managing consortium assets. For example, LYRASIS bylaws grant councils authority to: ensure mission fulfillment; hire, evaluate, or dismiss CEOs; authorize CEOs to negotiate and sign agreements; approve strategic goals, policies, and annual budgets; and develop operational guidelines [32].

Executive Committees act as standing bodies exercising council powers between meetings, implementing approved projects, supervising bylaw enforcement, recommending projects, and managing executive appointments. Nominations Committees handle council transitions, developing transition plans and candidate lists. Budget/Finance/Audit Committees oversee financial operations, develop annual budgets, recommend external auditors, review financial reports, and assess financial status. Personnel Committees manage human resources, job descriptions, staffing, compensation, and performance evaluation. Collection Development Committees manage consortium resources, advise councils on collection building, negotiate with publishers/vendors, and handle joint procurement.

**2.1.3 Council Mechanisms** Council mechanisms operate through meetings: regular and ad hoc. Among 60 council-managed consortia, 44 have identifiable meeting cycles. Regular meetings typically occur 1-4 times annually, with bi-annual meetings often scheduled in spring and fall, and quarterly meetings held each season. Ad hoc meetings are convened as needed for specific issues, typically called by the chair, vice-chair, executive director, or secretary, or initiated by a specified number of council members.

Meeting notices are sent via mail, email, fax, or website announcements by designated bodies (e.g., Executive Committees) within prescribed timeframes. Council members should attend punctually or designate proxies.

**2.2 Committee Management Model** Eighteen consortia use committee management, where “Steering Committees” or “Executive Committees” serve as the lead body alongside other committees, or multiple committees coordinate without a distinct lead body (e.g., Minitex uses policy, gateway operations, interlibrary loan, e-resources, and database advisory committees without a separate lead body). The typical structure is “Lead Committee + Other Committees/Working Groups.”

**2.2.1 Management Structure** Structures are simpler than council models, with some consortia using only a steering or executive committee, while others add supporting committees. Most employ “Lead Committee + Other Committees/Working Groups.” For example, the Consortium of Uganda University Libraries (CUUL) has an Executive Committee overseeing seven functional committees: ICT, Programs, Finance and Management, E-resources, Public Relations, Research and Publications, and eIFL Program Coordination [33].

**2.2.2 Authority and Responsibilities** While specific duties vary, lead committees share common responsibilities: developing vision, goals, and strategy; promoting cooperation and resource sharing; overseeing finances, budgets, and performance evaluation; enhancing services; and monitoring the environment to ensure sustainability. For example, the Lithuanian Research Library Consortium (LMBA) General Meeting of Stakeholders approves budgets, annual

financial reports, elects chairs, establishes/dissolves audit committees, and reviews membership qualifications [35].

**2.2.3 Committee Mechanisms** Committee models operate through lead body meetings. For instance, Georgia’s GALILEO Steering Committee meets at least quarterly; British Columbia’s BC ELN meets three times annually; Australia’s CAUL Executive Committee meets six times yearly; and Queensland’s QULOC meets three times annually. Meetings include regular and irregular sessions based on operational needs. Other committees also conduct meetings to handle affairs.

**2.3 General Membership Meeting Model** In this model, the general membership meeting is the supreme authority, responsible for: determining goals and purposes; drafting/amending bylaws; overseeing finances; approving decisions and annual reports; and establishing other management bodies as needed. For example, the Lithuanian Research Library Consortium (LMBA) holds stakeholder meetings to adopt/amend bylaws, set goals, determine council composition, establish fee structures, and handle reorganization [35].

**2.4 Entrusted Management Model** This model has two forms: entrusting to an institution or to a senior executive. Most foreign consortia use institutional entrustment. For example, Texas’s TexShare is managed by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, collaborating with the Texas Historical Records Advisory Board, Records Management Interagency Coordinating Council, Library Systems Act Advisory Board, and TexShare Advisory Board [36].

Few consortia use executive supervision. Iceland’s IC is supervised by the National Librarian with an advisory committee assisting in negotiating licenses, approving budgets, and setting annual fees [37]. Australia’s NSLA E-Resources Consortium is guided, evaluated, and reviewed by the National Library of Australia (NLA) CEO, who serves as chief negotiator [38].

**2.5 Other Management Models** Beyond the four common models, other simpler models exist.

**“Management Team” Model:** The lead body comprises senior managers from member libraries. The Big Ten Academic Alliance is managed by an executive leadership team of senior administrators from member universities who oversee operations, guide development, and secure funding [39].

**Agreement-Based Model:** Norway’s CRISTin is an open consortium where institutions join individual projects by signing relevant agreements [40]. Sweden’s BIBSAM lacks a legal governance structure; member institutions remain independent, with six NLA librarians negotiating and signing agreements [41].

**“Corporate” Model:** Ireland’s IReL is managed by IRIS Electronic Information Services Ltd., assisted by an IReL Steering Group, with the Irish Universities Association Librarians Group handling projects and an IReL Monitoring Group overseeing performance [42].

### 3. Characteristics of Foreign Library Consortium Organizational Management Models

Foreign models show both convergence and diversity, exhibiting four main characteristics:

**3.1 Comprehensive Organizational Management Policies** Among 100 investigated consortia, 45 published bylaws or regulations online, typically titled “Bylaws,” “Articles of Association,” or “Memorandum and Articles of Association.” These documents specify consortium names, locations, membership, organizational structure, authority, positions, and responsibilities, often dedicating sections to management models, institutional settings, authority, composition, selection methods, and meeting procedures. Even consortia without formal bylaws publish organizational information on their websites. For example, PALNI lacks bylaws but categorizes and describes its teams and committees online [43]. Some consortia include provisions in membership agreements. These explicit regulations enable rule-based, orderly management.

**3.2 High Member Participation** High participation manifests in two ways: (1) strong involvement in deliberations and decision-making, and (2) numerous opportunities for staff participation. Council and committee model members come from member libraries, with smaller consortia ensuring each member has representation, and larger ones maintaining strict proportional representation by type and region. Most grant each member one vote, ensuring decisions reflect member will. Beyond formal committees, some consortia establish working or interest groups allowing staff to discuss issues or complete tasks. Some councils also include interested individuals beyond library staff. For example, Rochester Regional Library Council bylaws allow council members from member libraries and individuals interested in improving regional library services [44]. This flexible, inclusive approach respects diverse perspectives.

**3.3 Clearly Defined Authority and Responsibilities** Foreign consortia have clear divisions of labor, with some establishing over 20 committees, working groups, and advisory teams, creating complex yet finely divided management systems. As noted in Section 3.1, consortia explicitly define authority and responsibilities in bylaws, websites, and agreements, detailing not only institutional missions but also individual position duties. This clarity enables orderly management and layered, well-defined responsibility structures.

**3.4 Efficient Management and Operations** Eighty-eight of 100 consortia have established offices (or administrative offices/secretariats), with statistics shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]. Most register independent locations, though some situate offices within member libraries or sponsoring institutions. Some national consortia, like UK's JISC, maintain six offices across cities. Physical offices concentrate staff efforts, enable full-time personnel, provide fixed meeting venues, facilitate ad hoc meetings, and improve deliberation efficiency.

#### **4. Implications for Chinese Library Consortium Organizational Management Models**

Chinese consortia should adapt foreign advantages to domestic conditions, optimizing and innovating to develop suitable models. Four key implications emerge:

##### **4.1 Institutional Frameworks Guarantee Standardized Management**

Foreign consortia are guided and constrained by bylaws and strategic plans, with some leadership positions following national regulations, demonstrating institutionalized, standardized management. China lacks unified standards and authoritative national library laws, and few consortia develop strategic plans. Simple bylaws result in goal-deficient management, weak member constraints, slow development, and even premature dissolution. Regulations not only constrain behavior but also promote resource sharing and protect member interests [45]. Therefore, Chinese consortia should prioritize developing comprehensive regulations to ensure goal-oriented management.

##### **4.2 High Participation Is Key to Collaborative Management**

Chinese consortia face a challenge: sponsoring and core members dominate construction and management, while small and medium libraries have weak participation and limited voice in decisions, hindering healthy development. Chinese consortia should establish management structures with proportional representation from different member levels, adding staff from smaller libraries and creating committees, task forces, and working groups to provide participation opportunities. Successful foreign models demonstrate that effective consortia require reasonable, complete management structures like “Council—Executive Committee—Standing Committees—Ad Hoc Committees—Working Groups/Advisory Teams” that reflect all stakeholders’ interests, facilitate resource sharing, and enable most staff to contribute and supervise. Chinese consortia should use diverse meeting forms (general assemblies or partial meetings) based on topics to fully hear all members’ opinions, and divide projects into sub-projects allowing all members to join areas of expertise. Only by improving management structures can Chinese consortia balance interests and mobilize all components.

##### **4.3 Clearly Defined Authority and Responsibilities Enable Refined Management**

Chinese consortia need standardized management systems en-

sureing executability and continuity, with annual plans, operational rules, assessment, and incentive systems, plus mid-year supervision and year-end reviews [2]. While foreign consortia's lead officials often come from member libraries, their well-developed structures with executive, supervisory, and advisory bodies prevent dictatorship and blind development. Chinese consortia could adopt rotating leadership, like Utah Academic Library Consortium's annual council chair rotation [49], ensuring efficient operation. Clear authority and responsibility definitions are essential for complete management systems, enabling orderly project implementation and mobilizing members to contribute their strengths.

**4.4 Stable Management Teams Are Prerequisites for Efficient Management** Chinese consortia rarely have physical management bodies. Most convene meetings at scheduled times while daily work is carried out part-time by responsible institutions or personnel according to regulations and meeting documents. Few have offices, usually within member libraries. This reliance on bylaws without dedicated teams creates weak constraints, making it difficult to convene meetings for urgent issues. Foreign consortia's fixed offices and full-time staff enable stronger problem-solving capacity. Establishing complete management bodies and dedicated staff facilitates focused consortium building, holistic coordination, and direction-setting [46-47]. Chinese consortia could hire non-member staff or second appropriate candidates from member libraries to handle consortium affairs full-time [48].

## Conclusion

Foreign library consortia, with earlier development and mature management, have established fixed models including council, committee, general membership meeting, and entrusted management, plus individual variations like management team, agreement-based, and corporate models. Council management is most prevalent. These models demonstrate comprehensive policies, high participation, clear authority, and efficient operations, offering valuable lessons for Chinese library consortium development.

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