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Fostering collaboration in the 21st century research library

The 21st century research library can no longer exist in isolation. In today's world, the challenges of providing access to and preserving research content, as well as supporting new educational models, requires entering into deep relationships and collaborations with other libraries and stakeholder communities. Research data management, scholarly communications, digital preservation, content licensing, MOOCs, digitization – the success of all of these services will be determined based on our ability to work successfully with others.

In 2014, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), an association with 124 members from research libraries in the US and Canada, began a profound transformation in order to foster greater collaboration and innovation amongst its members. A key component of the new approach involves catalyzing action within the broader ecosystem of higher education, through a 'system of action'. A system of action is made up of interrelated components that affect the way people do things. These components are also interdependent. A change to one component affects the response of all the other components. Through collaboration within this system of action, ARL aims to catalyze collective action.

The new ARL framework proposes five initiatives as a focus for ARL:

1. Collective Collections: deep and wide platforms for ensuring resources are available;
2. Scholarly Dissemination Engine: promoting wide reaching and sustainable publication of research and scholarship;
3. Libraries that Learn: integrated analytical environments to mine data for transformation;
4. Association of Research Library Academy: fostering and nurturing creative, effective, and diverse research library leaders and leadership;
5. Innovation Lab: an incubator for new ideas and the seeds of change.

System of action initiatives are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the overlaps are important as they encourage collaboration across silos of interest and activity. This paper will present the conceptual framework underlying this new approach and provide some examples of the kind of collaborations made possible for research libraries by this approach.