



A Story of Collaboration: Crafting a Resource from Concept to Completion



Kelli Ham, MLIS, National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Pacific Southwest Region
Candace Ford, MLIS, PlaneTree Health Library

This poster describes a multi-year collaboration between the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Pacific Southwest Region and the California State Library which resulted in a professional development toolkit for library staff. The principle players were Suzanne Flint of the California State Library and Kelli Ham of NN/LM PSR. A project of this magnitude requires input by many and cooperation among everyone. What follows is the story of the collaborations that made the Consumer Health Toolkit possible.



The wise people at the California State Library had a vision to improve the health of California communities by building the capacity of public libraries to provide access to quality health information and services.

Health Promotion @ Your Library

A needs assessment was developed by the California State Library and NN/LM PSR. The survey was deployed in 2007 to library staff, library users, and health professionals.

The findings provided the basis for a funding proposal to create a professional development resource for library staff, resulting in a grant. The ideas put forth in the proposal were the result of several phone conversations and in-person meetings to determine the components of the project. The proposal was to create a professional development toolkit for public library staff that encompassed all aspects of consumer health information services and improved the health and well-being of California populations. The project was funded, and work began in the fall of 2009.

Technology for Collaboration

Experience with technology tools for collaboration varied widely among all participants. Some tools we tried were abandoned early on for various reasons while others worked well.

We explored SharePoint, Google Docs, Moodle, and PBWorks as potential collaborative tools. Each one had barriers and benefits. We settled on Moodle, using it for the wiki, as a document repository, and for the discussion forums for communications among the advisory group members. Using the wiki for collecting resource suggestions in Moodle was a failure; people did not feel comfortable making modifications. We used Adobe Connect for web conferencing and real time work on design decisions. Ultimately, email was the preferred method for communication and document sharing by all groups. The working document was created in Word. A number of people worked on the document, and a strict version control and backup system was implemented to insure document integrity.

Consumer Health Advisory Group

Background: A group of advisors was formed to help guide the planning process and content. Members of the group included:

- Public and hospital librarians
- Health educators and health professionals

The advisory team convened for an in-person, full day meeting to learn the objectives, to brainstorm ideas, and to set expectations. The group then met numerous times via web and telephone conferencing. Individual members identified areas of interest and participated in smaller, targeted workgroups. The advisory team assisted with decisions about core competencies, content, and toolkit design elements and issues.

This group was very engaged; the common objective of creating an exceptional tool for improving professional skills contributed to the success of the collaboration.

Design Work

Background: Attractive and functional design was imperative for the usefulness and adoption of the Toolkit. The design team was tasked with creating an interactive PDF document. The table of contents would be hot links to the content section, all web addresses would be working hyperlinks, and the document needed to be accessible by people with disabilities by adhering to Section 508 compliance requirements.

The design team brought an exceptional level of experience, skill, and creativity for this part of the project. The designers understood the aesthetics and how to integrate navigational tools into the design. The biggest challenge was the sheer volume of necessary communications – hundreds of questions, decisions, and answers, in order for work to progress.

This collaboration worked extremely well because of the professional ethics and desire for excellence on both sides. Paying attention to requirements and details, being flexible, maintaining reasonable expectations, and working through issues – all of these contributed to a productive working relationship which successfully pulled together contributions of all the other concurrent collaborative efforts.

Content Creation, Gathering, and Editing

Background: The Toolkit was comprised of six sections. Each one required introductory material, vetting all contributed content, and deciding what would “make the cut.”

The process required input from many individuals: content experts, advisors, editors, and the project manager. We were fortunate to have an outstanding UCLA library school student and two student support staff who assisted with the project. There were many challenges, including managing the sheer volume of content. Topics were assigned and pages upon pages of content returned. Communications happened by email, phone and in person, depending on the situation. A project of this magnitude brings with it dozens (if not hundreds) of formatting and style issues. A style manual was created on the fly to manage the myriad situations that arose. Ultimately, the work done was a colossal collaboration of many dedicated contributors.

PlaneTree Health Library

Background: Two critical components of the Toolkit would include a section of representative health resources for wellness, prevention, and coping as well as a core list of materials to build the foundation of a consumer health collection. The PlaneTree librarians in San Jose called on many years of experience in serving the public and provided their expertise.

While the PlaneTree librarians were part of the larger cooperative effort, the team had their own collaboration issues. In making collection development suggestions, challenges included “relevancy vs. currency,” making the case for unduplicated classics that continue to have impact for consumers, e.g., “I am not sick: I don't need help,” a 2007 book about mental health issues for families, also available in Spanish, and “Living Well with a Chronic Condition” published in 2006 in both English and Spanish.

Other intensive discussions revealed the need for a range of literacy levels and age interests in the recommendations for print, media, and websites. “Less is indeed more” in this era of information overload, but when there is plenty of “more” and various opinions about the “best,” many thoughtful discussions ensued, both internally and with the project manager.

The PlaneTree team also developed internal processes as to assignments, deadlines, final decisions, etc. Towards the end of the project, the team recommended a reorganization of the health resources section with its unwieldy A-Z listing by topic. A project timeline extension allowed PlaneTree to reorganize the resources logically so that librarians and staff less familiar with the consumer health field could efficiently find what they needed on a busy reference desk. This final contribution increased the utility and usability of the resource immensely.

Evaluation Planning

Background: The initial proposal included a plan for determining if the objectives were met and for evaluating the usefulness of the Toolkit for library staff.

An evaluation expert was chosen, and multiple teleconferences were held with representatives from the California State Library and NN/LM PSR. The plan was to launch the Toolkit in September with a webinar. Library staff would be given five months to use the Toolkit in the field, and then an evaluation survey would be deployed. The survey launched on February 1, 2011 and concluded on February 23, 2011. The collaborations in this area were smooth and productive; choosing an expert with essential qualifications and experience ensured a well-designed survey instrument that will provide valuable feedback about the Toolkit.

Final Production and Printing

The final push involved pulling together all content, editing, checking all links, and iterative revisions and proofing with the design team. The Toolkit was published in September 2010 as a downloadable PDF file. Remaining funds were used for a limited print run, and free copies of the Toolkit were provided on request to California libraries.

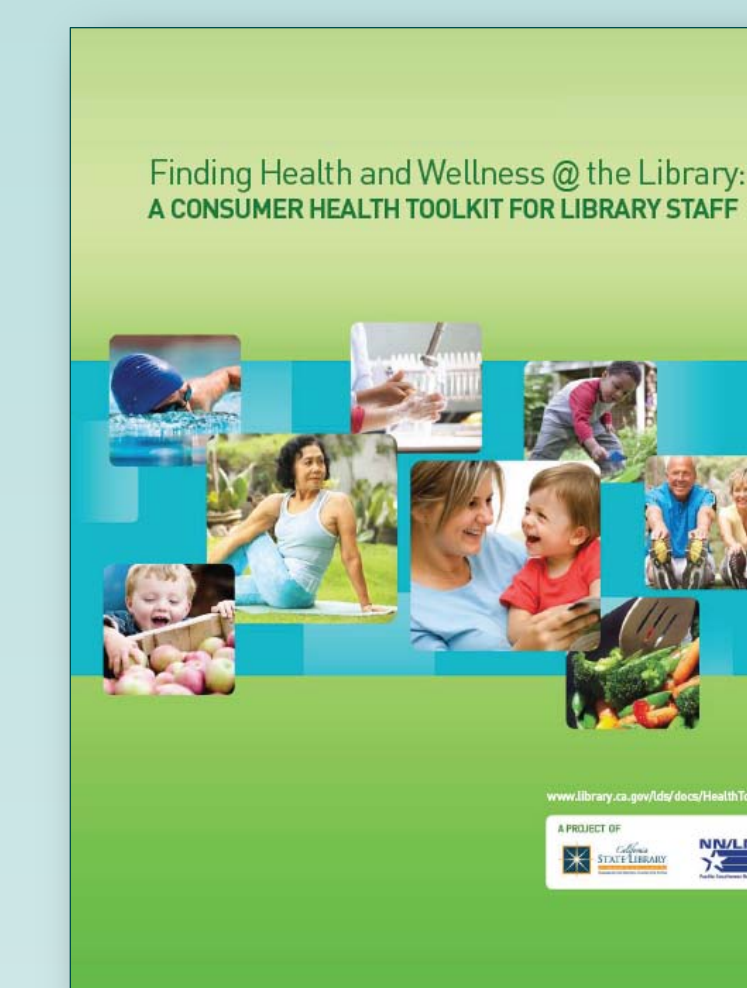
Elements of Successful Collaborations

- Clear communication
- Trust and belief in partners
- Shared desire for excellence
- High level of professional ethics
- A genuine sense of humor freely shared
- Flexibility and willingness to work through issues

Finding Health and Wellness @ the Library: A Consumer Health Toolkit for Library Staff
<http://www.library.ca.gov/lrs/docs/HealthToolkit.pdf>

Latitudes Blog article about the Toolkit:
<http://nnlm.gov/psr/newsletter/2010/09/30/consumer-health-toolkit/>

More resources for providing consumer health services to the public:
<http://nnlm.gov/psr/public/>



So the Consumer Health Toolkit came to be, and people in communities everywhere lived healthier happier lives ever after.

The End