

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Grant Report

Many Voices: Building a Consortium of Small, Scholarly Societies in the Humanities

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Executive Summary

Scholarly societies serve a crucial function in the academy, bringing together scholars from across countries and the world to further knowledge and understanding of a particular discipline, in-discipline¹, cross-disciplinary area, author, or subject. Small, scholarly societies in particular serve the latter types of scholarly groups--those working at or across boundaries or in neglected histories, such as the Pauline Hopkins Society, a micro-society with fewer than 100 members, that fosters scholarship and dialogue on Hopkins as an understudied African-American female writer and editor from the early 20th century. The Hopkins society has little administrative infrastructure and no scholarly publishing infrastructure but has tremendous value in maintaining and building the legacy of Hopkins's work on American culture in the early 1900s and beyond. The project team—with expertise in publishing and in administering small, scholarly societies—believed that without more infrastructural support, small societies such as this one would disappear too soon.

Thus, this project began as a conversation among an interdisciplinary working group established for the 2016 Triangle Scholarly Communications Institute (SCI), with the initial aim of helping small, scholarly societies in the humanities and humanistically oriented social

¹ A discipline within a larger disciplinary area (e.g., writing studies as it lies within language/literature)

sciences “flip” their print-based, closed-access journals to open-access models. However, we quickly realized that reimagining the business model for a society’s publishing program was predicated on that society having a certain level of inherent stability and sustainability already in place, and it ignored the small societies that have no publications but that also needed sustainable infrastructures. We recognized that many small societies in this disciplinary area lacked that stability, in large part because both leadership and administration of the organization often falls on (already overtasked) faculty holding (generally) short-term positions. We determined that more work needed to be done to understand what baseline administrative, technical, and financial services support would be needed by these societies to create the solid organizational foundation that would allow them to start thinking strategically and, in the longer-term, moving to open-access publishing.

As a team, we sought a 12-month planning grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in the amount of \$59,500 to explore a specific approach to addressing the organizational needs of small scholarly societies (those with fewer than 1,000 members) in the humanities: establishing a consortium. The purpose of such a consortium would be to consolidate the recurrent and often time-consuming administrative, technical, and financial functions that all scholarly societies face, but that are especially burdensome for small societies with limited or no professional staff. The ultimate aim would be to allow these societies to focus their efforts on core activities and membership benefits—such as publishing a scholarly journal—rather than on the more mundane “business of the business.” Our goal was to determine the interest in and possibility of creating such a consortium.

The planning grant covered 12 months of research and analysis, including an in-person meeting involving the project team, stakeholders from five small scholarly societies, and Steven Wheatley, as respondent, from ACLS, who all met in December 2017 to explore the consortium idea. The meeting was followed by an online survey of society officers (focused on small societies) based on the in-person discussion to further vet the idea. While the planning grant was meant to move us toward consortium-building, the centralization envisioned would be in service of several larger goals: to help small societies achieve financial stability through greater efficiencies; to support small societies’ efforts to develop scholars and academic leaders in their respective disciplines; and to provide a forum in which small societies can collectively consider potential alternative approaches to traditional publication, including open access.

Survey respondents (n = 226) were overwhelmingly in favor of a consortium model for scholarly societies. (We could not filter out societies based on size prior to sending the survey, so larger societies also responded; we were able to filter answers to the survey based on society size, as can be seen below when discussing the survey results.) The largest area of need for small scholarly societies that emerged from the survey is for strategic planning and vision work while assistance with day-to-day operations is also of much interest. The project team also identified an area of further research: determining how and to what extent the organization’s business models are impacted by their journal publications and how those publications might be affected by better strategic planning, including the possibility of “flipping” those journals to open access as an organization’s mission and vision come into more concrete focus.

The report concludes with several recommendations, including the need for building a consortium that offers strategic planning for all aspects of the society (including its publishing program), fosters collaboration across small scholarly societies, as well as facilitates the inclusion of more faculty ranks within the scholarly profession and societies. We define this *consortium* as a member and service organization that brings together small scholarly societies to share ideas and goals and provides help on strategic, administrative, technical, and financial matters. We offer a tentative look at what financial scenarios for such a consortium *might* be, but the work of finding potential partners with staffing resources, alongside a deeper research agenda into the connection between society publications and strategic planning, will be proposed as a follow-up planning grant.

Environmental Scan

As a project team, we understood that there were gaps in our knowledge of small, scholarly societies, particularly small ones. During the summer and fall of 2017, team members collected a significant list of readings (see “Selected Readings” in Appendix A) to deepen our understanding of the critical issues touched upon by the grant project, which informed how we structured our face-to-face meeting with the stakeholders and, later, the survey. The readings covered a large number of topics, but focused in particular on the following:

- **Scholarly societies.** The readings provided many insights into the role of scholarly societies in the academy. A few of the readings focused on membership issues. Why do people join scholarly societies? What benefits do they receive? What more would they hope to get out of their membership? A couple of the readings also explored how scholarly societies (particularly smaller ones) might join together and collaborate in order to become more sustainable. Such articles supported our exploration of a possible consortium for small scholarly societies in the humanities.
- **Academic publishing.** The readings provided a broad introduction to the challenges and opportunities in current academic publishing practices, which was particularly helpful to team members who are not professionals in that industry.
- **Scholarly society publishing.** These readings honed in on the specific challenges and opportunities of publishing by scholarly societies—with particular attention to small scholarly societies in the humanities. Here we grappled more explicitly with the opportunities and threats of open access publishing.

While team members had extensive experience as academics, publishers, consultants, and scholarly society leaders, the additional research that we conducted provided us with both a sweeping overview of and a deeper dive into the critical issues explored in this grant project. In sum, we came to a greater understanding of the integral role that scholarly societies have in the production of knowledge and the health of academic communities. We understood better the challenges facing scholarly societies (again, small ones in particular) and both the opportunities and threats of open access publishing. We came away more convinced than ever that small

scholarly societies in the humanities needed more support and resources to maintain their critical missions in the academy and to sustain those missions in the future.

Stakeholder Meeting Report

To collect initial data on the feasibility of the consortium, the project team decided to conduct a stakeholders meeting in December 2017, which would include executive directors and presidents of small, scholarly societies. To prepare for this meeting, and to ensure we were inviting a diverse array of stakeholders, we researched societies based on the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) membership list, on the brainstorming done at Triangle SCI of societies with which the project team was familiar, on the societies represented by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ) and being published by Penn State University Press (PSUP) and University of North Carolina Press (UNCP), as well as on the society work that was completed to support the 2014 white paper that team member Rebecca Kennison published through K|N Consulting on open access in humanities and social sciences.

This research produced a list of over 800 possible societies. We created a spreadsheet based on the relative size, discipline, and publication status (i.e., no publication to newsletters to journals) of each organization.

Aiming to emphasize disciplinary, professional, and embodied diversity in our stakeholders, we created an additional set of malleable criteria through which to review each possible society. These criteria included the following diversity perspective for each society:

- Race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality focus
- Location of organization or subject (e.g., North America/Europe or Central/South American, African, and Asian)
- Discipline (e.g., language/literature, history/philosophy/religion, or other discipline, including a strong focus on music/art/performance or social scientific)

We wanted to ensure that our in-person stakeholders would represent the broadest range of scholarly societies across these criteria.

For our in-person meeting, we intentionally selected a range of societies with under 1,000 members (including at least one micro-society of under 100 members) as well as a diversity of disciplines (music, history, single-author/literary societies, and area studies), those with and without publications, and those whose leadership also represented a diversity of race and gender. The five stakeholders are listed below. (Our sixth invited stakeholder was unable to attend.)

- Adélékè Adéèkò, President of African Literature Association (Ohio State University)

The African Literature Association (ALA) is an independent, non-profit professional society. The organization affirms the primacy of the African peoples in shaping the future of African literature and actively supports the African peoples in their struggle for

liberation. The society publishes an annual journal, *Journal of The African Literature Association*, which was founded in 2006, and is published by Taylor & Francis.

- April Logan, President of Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins Society (Salisbury University)

The Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins Society (PEHS) was officially established at the Spring 2009 American Literature Association Conference. The society works to encourage interest in Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins' life, writings, and the issues she explored. The PEHS aims to foster scholarship and dialogue on Hopkins and her era through conference meetings, publications, and pedagogical resources useful to scholars, teachers, and community members at large. Currently, the society publishes an annual newsletter to document society activity. The society has roughly 30 members.

- Kristine Navarro-McElhaney, Interim Executive Director of Oral History Association (Arizona State University)

The Oral History Association (OHA) has served as the principal membership organization for people committed to the value of oral history since 1966. OHA engages with policy makers, educators, and others to help foster best practices and encourage support for oral history and oral historians. With an international membership, the OHA serves a broad and diverse audience including teachers, students, community historians, archivists, librarians, and filmmakers. *The Oral History Review*, published biannually by Oxford University Press, is the U.S. journal of record for the theory and practice of oral history and related fields.

- Kim Park Nelson, Executive Committee Member of Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture (Minnesota State University, Mankato)

The Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture (ASAC) officially formed, through a constitution established in 1998, under the name The Alliance for the Study of Adoption, Identity, and Kinship. The ASAC promotes understanding of the experience, institution, and cultural representation of domestic and transnational adoption and related practices such as fostering, assisted reproduction, LGBTQ+ families, and innovative kinship formations. The society's journal, *Adoption & Culture*, published by Ohio State University Press, publishes essays on the many aspects of adoption's intersection with culture. The society is made up of approximately 200 members.

- Mariana Sonntag Whitmer, Executive Director of Society for American Music (University of Pittsburgh)

The Society for American Music is a non-profit scholarly and educational organization incorporated in the District of Columbia as a 501(c)(3) and is a constituent member of the American Council of Learned Societies. Dedicated to the study, teaching, creation and dissemination of all musics in the Americas, the society aims to serve a wide and

diverse array of academics, librarians, composers, performers and members of the general public. The society's journal, *Journal of the Society for American Music*, was created in 2007 and is published by Cambridge University Press.

Our PIs also represented a diverse array in terms of disciplinarity (interdisciplinary, single-author/literary, publishing), size (under 100 members to 500–1,000 members), and their society's publishing component:

- Council of Editors of Learned Journals: very small society, interdisciplinary, no publishing venue
- Society for Values in Higher Education: small society, interdisciplinary, journal venue
- Edith Wharton Society: micro-society, single-author, journal venue

In addition to the stakeholders, we invited Steven Wheatley, vice president of ACLS, to join our in-person meeting to provide key points of information on the function of executive directors and feedback on the uses of consortial models for scholarly societies.

Prior to the meeting, we asked stakeholders to provide us with additional information we could not otherwise get from their society's website, such as annual reports, organizational charts, bylaws and/or constitutions, their last or latest journal issues, and membership counts/rates along with available demographic information (including graduate students, international members, and those employed outside the academy). This information was intended to supplement our understanding of these specific groups, as examples of the larger collection of small scholarly societies.

While the overarching goal of the in-person meeting was to get initial feedback on the idea of a consortium from small society stakeholders, to do that, it was necessary to learn quite a bit about the current and future operational status of each organization and the importance of society leadership as part of each stakeholder's work in the profession. We formulated a set of themed questions, taken from our initial research questions proposed in the grant narrative, that we thought might help us answer the question of "Does One Size Fit All?" when it comes to supporting small scholarly societies:

- **History:** Why does your organization exist? How did it come into being? What are the circumstances? Is that start-up rationale relevant in the daily operations of your current organization?
- **Mission:** Has the mission of your organization changed over the years? If so, how and under what circumstances did it change? If not, do you think a reevaluation of your mission is needed? What do you see as the most significant risks to meeting your mission in both the short- and long-term?
- **Values:** How would you describe the values of your society? How do you balance the intellectual work of the society within real or perceived changes in your discipline? How do you balance or strive for growth alongside the need for stability and longevity? What values does your organization place on interdisciplinarity?

- **Governance:** Is the society a legal entity? How is governance structured, and which persons/bodies hold what roles and responsibilities? How is the Board structured, and what is its current makeup? How are new Board members identified, solicited, and compensated? Do you have bylaws and, if so, how and when are they updated? Is there anything about the governance structure that would prevent your organization from joining a consortium? Is there anything about the governance structure, responsibilities, or roles that you feel needs to change in order to better serve your organization both now and into the future? How does your society plan for the future? Does it have a formal or informal strategic plan?
- **Finance:** Who manages your finances? What are your organization's revenue streams? How are revenues allocated in support of the organization's activities? Who is paid and who is volunteer? From whom are you receiving in-kind services/resources (e.g., administrative support at your university, research assistants paid for by the college, free mailing, IT support for a listserv, etc.)? Is there anything about your financial structure, processes, or activities that you feel needs to change in order to secure a sustainable future for your organization?
- **Membership:** Why do people join your organization? If they continue to be members over the long term, why? How do you engage members now through scholarly, social, and technical means? How do you want to continue/change that in the future? How do you recruit new members and create pipelines for potential new members? How do you secure membership renewals? How are your membership demographics changing? How are those changes affecting your mission/values/goals?
- **Communication Practices:** What forms of communication do you use with your members? What feedback do you get from members about communicating with them? What are you planning, if anything, for changing/bettering your communication with members? How do you view your communications as strategies for recruitment, bringing in new members into the group?
- **Publishing:** What are the objectives of the journal? Who owns the journal and are there other entities who help fund it? What is the relationship of the publishing arm to the rest of the organization? Does your society have a relationship to a press/publisher? If so:
 - What services does your publisher offer to the society beyond journal management?
 - Does your publisher provide learning and professional development opportunities to societies and its members, and if so, how?

How does interdisciplinarity impact your publications? If the journal is not open access, is the journal included as a member benefit (provided at no cost) or offered at a reduced rate for members? If you don't publish a journal (or other publication) from the society, have you ever considered a journal or other publication in the past or think you will do so in the future?

- **Other Intellectual Work:** What types of work/projects does your society work on? Is there an annual conference? How does your society create or bring on new projects? Do you give awards/prizes? Are there other initiatives that your society is involved with?
- **SWOT Analysis:** In a few lines or bullets, please describe your organization in terms of its:
 - Strengths
 - Weaknesses

- Opportunities, and
- Threats

and include any additional information you would like us to know about your small, scholarly society.

We sent the above set of research questions to the participants in advance, asking them to *consider* how they might answer them. We specifically asked them not to write answers to these questions—primarily for fear of it seeming a daunting amount of work, but also because we wanted to use these questions as a framework for the hands-on work of the in-person meeting.

The meeting was structured to allow for in-depth discussion among the stakeholders and the facilitators, with the aim of developing a nuanced understanding of society leadership, operations, and practices. As all three co-PIs have been society executives, we began by introducing ourselves and describing both the current state—membership, finances, publications, and so on—of our own societies. That first evening allowed for an informal discussion of society leadership and its benefits and challenges. The second full day was structured to allow the morning discussion to focus on the status and growth of the scholarly societies under discussion in the next 5-10 years. We followed up on four themes from the pre-meeting questions: Mission, Values, Publishing, Other Intellectual Work, and then moved on to Opportunities and Threats (see images below).

We recorded the stakeholders' commentary using flipcharts and our Project Manager, Emma DiPasquale, took detailed notes throughout. Rebecca Kennison of our research team served as facilitator, Steven Wheatley asked key questions and helped frame the discussion, and all stakeholders and researchers participated actively. The result was, as we had hoped, a nuanced account of the work of society leadership that helped us, in turn, develop our questions for the survey, which is discussed in the next section.

On the flipcharts we captured the ideas generated by each of the questions we posed. This approach facilitated conversation as all stakeholders could see each other's responses, and unexpected similarities in the concerns expressed by a range of society leaders emerged.

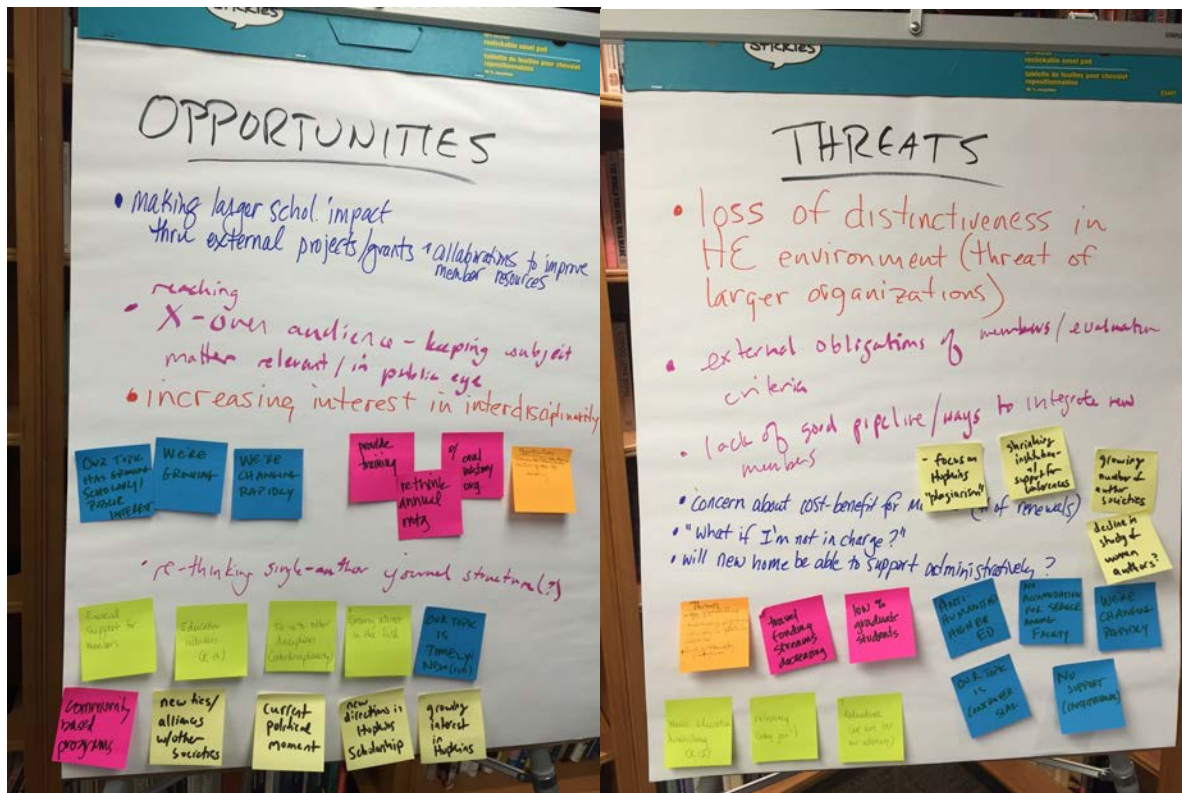


Figure 1. Small society executives noted opportunities and threats to their organizations in a SWOT analysis exercise during our in-person project meeting in December 2017.

The intensity of our discussions was an unexpected benefit, and one that, in some ways, further validated the need for this project and our plans toward consortium formation. It was clear that the society executives cared deeply about this work, for its intellectual, social, and community-building components. The key observations that emerged during the stakeholder discussion are summarized below.

Key Takeaways from the Stakeholder Meeting

In most cases, the work of a small scholarly society is being carried out **without support**—either financial, institutional (e.g., through course releases), or professional (e.g., recognition in the tenure and promotion process). For many of the faculty involved in running a society, it is a genuine labor of love. Society stakeholders acknowledged the double-edged nature of this task—work that brings them personal satisfaction and, in fact, helps perpetuate small scholarly societies is often just the kind of labor that fails to bring them the support they need on their own campuses.

Society executives were also keenly aware of the **professional development challenges** they faced in their administrative roles, which can often lead to societies teetering on failure. Few faculty have training in conference planning and organization, membership management, or the legal and financial issues involved in running a society. Almost all the stakeholders identified these issues as significant challenges. On more than one occasion, these professional

development challenges were connected to genuine **financial threats** their societies faced, as in instances when conferences were at risk of cancellation due to lack of organization and related issues. Several identified challenges around **staffing**: some society members take up executive roles and responsibilities simply because no one else will, leaving the fate of the society in a tenuous position.

Almost all stakeholders identified a **tension between short-term operational duties and long-range planning**. Society executives—especially those with less than 500 members—are doing the best they can to manage the nearest events on the horizon. With insufficient staff support, inaccurate or insufficient record-keeping, and frequent staff transitions, it is difficult to develop new publication venues or opportunities; recruit new members; conference plan multiple years ahead or to consider alternatives to traditional conferences; and especially, to fundraise and think proactively about the organization’s finances. Our stakeholders noted a wish for support in these longer-term strategic areas, which, in turn, informed the questions we developed for our survey; we kept a separate large “Post-It” list of questions based on the stakeholders’ convergent points of challenge.

These rich discussions occurred during the full day of the event, and stakeholder participants were then free to leave that evening. The project team stayed another day to conduct a post-mortem and hear feedback from Wheatley, who provided encouragement that the areas of need stakeholders expressed were indeed of relevance and worthy of pursuing further research through the survey. During that second day, the project team developed survey questions focusing on the following topics:

- professional rank (e.g., associate professor) and status (e.g., tenured) of the society leader,
- governance and legal status of the society,
- revenue streams and budget,
- and the following areas of growth and challenge for societies: administration, development, events, membership, publication, and promotion.

Each was broken down into survey components, as discussed in the next section.

Survey Methodology

Starting with the basic questions we derived from the workshop conversation, the project team fleshed out information transcribed from the Post-It flip charts so we could further refine and elaborate questions for the survey. We included questions about the respondent’s demographics, the society’s demographics, as well as the consortial issues relating to administration, development, events, membership, publication, and promotion (outlined below). See Appendix B for the full set of survey questions.

The **demographic** questions included

- Respondent’s geographic location of work
- Institution type
- Size of scholarly society

- Leadership position in society and academic status
- Society discipline
- Legal status
- Governance structure
- Sources of revenue and support
- Total operating budget

We decided **not** to ask more revealing demographic questions, such as asking users to input the name of the society they were responding for. After some team discussion, we believed that allowing respondents to remain anonymous would allow for more directness in their responses, and that such forthrightness outweighed the potential problem of possible duplication of answers (e.g., if a society president *and* its executive director both answered the survey independently).

We could not account for being able to *only* target small, scholarly societies with the survey link, which is why we asked respondents to provide the size of their organization. That way, we could separate out and compare the respondent organizations ourselves, using the following designations:

- Micro (<100 members)
- Very small (100-499 members)
- Small (500-999 members)
- Medium (1,000-4,999 members)
- Large (5,000-9,999 members)
- Very large (10,000+ members)

We also skirted any in-depth questions on financial information for the organization, asking instead about funding sources. One of the key financial questions posed during the in-person meeting was what such a consortium might cost, whether that cost might be on a sliding scale depending on society size, and whether the smallest organizations -- those often most in need of support -- would be able to afford membership/services. So understanding the finances of a range of organizations is important to planning a successful business model for a consortium, but asking potentially hundreds of stakeholders with whom we had not yet built a rapport for this information seemed like it would provide unreliable information, if some of the respondents knew their own organization's finances at all (some would not, as represented by the select cases we had been working with so far). We wanted to ensure all the questions in the survey could be answered easily and quickly, and we did not want detailed questions about finances to stop respondents mid-survey. We also knew that questions about society financials would be better left for more follow-up, in-depth research on business modeling.

The **consortial** questions focused on six areas under which the stakeholders indicated they saw challenges in running their own societies. These six areas were listed and defined this way:

- Administration (e.g., accounting, bylaws/constitutional documents, strategic planning, etc.)
- Development (fundraising, grant writing, etc.)

- Events (e.g., conference planning and management, affiliated conferences/sessions, other events, etc.)
- Membership (e.g., recruitment and renewals, member lists, member communication, networking, mentoring, etc.)
- Publications (e.g., editorial and production support, subscription management)
- Promotion (e.g., marketing and promotion of society and its publications, society website, etc.)

We asked participants the following types of questions about the above six categories:

- The importance of each of these areas to running the society
- How they would describe the time spent on each of these activities
- Whether they were spending too much or too little time on any of these areas
- With which areas they could use more help (if such were available)

Because we wanted to get gut-reaction feedback from leaders as to how they felt about doing the work of their society, we asked in a description question—“In each of these areas, how do you feel about how you’re spending your time?”—and provided the following Likert scale of responses:

1. Under water
2. Some days are better than others
3. Just making it, but could use some help
4. Doing well, going strong
5. Not applicable

We followed these initial consortial questions with more detailed questions about each of the six categories, specifically asking survey participants “If there were an organization that offered some or all of these tasks to assist societies, which would you be interested in getting help with?” Each of the six categories included several subcategories that respondents could check, indicating none, some, or all, depending on their society’s current needs. For instance, under Administration, we offered the following, more specific options that leaders could choose as tasks with which they needed help (see Appendix B for the full survey questions):

- Accounting/bookkeeping
- Investments
- Taxes
- Salaries/payroll
- 501(c)(3) status
- Legal resources (e.g., contract negotiations)
- Bylaws
- Merchant services (e.g., eCommerce, PayPal, etc.)
- Strategic planning
- Leadership transition guidance
- Collaboration facilitation with other societies

We also asked whether participants could imagine other one-time services that their scholarly society might be interested in, such as webinars on editorial practice, consulting on governance and legal issues, and workshops on “flipping” scholarly journals. The survey concluded with a query asking for contact information if they would be interested in a follow-up conversation/interview.

Once we had defined the survey instrument, we submitted an Exempt IRB protocol for the data collection through West Virginia University (protocol #1802969987), which allowed us to anonymously collect the data using SurveyMonkey, store it for three years, share it among the project team, and discuss the raw data in this report to Mellon. (The IRB does not allow us to further publish on this data.)

Once the survey questions were completed and entered into SurveyMonkey, the project team members tested the survey, which resulted in a few minor revisions in terms of wording, question order, and interface design. After the revisions, we tested it again among ourselves, and then sent a final test to the five stakeholders who had attended the December 2017 meeting. We received no additional suggestions from them, so we released the survey to our participant list.

In creating the participant list, we used the initial society list from which we had pulled the five in-person stakeholders, which included allied organizations from the ACLS and CELJ, as previously mentioned, along with those from the Modern Language Association, the American Political Science Association, the American Historical Association, the American Academy of Religion, and the American Anthropological Association.

On February 25, 2018, we sent the survey to 827 people, of which 43 opted out. (A feature of SurveyMonkey allows potential participants to opt out of all SurveyMonkey surveys, not just the one we sent.) Of the remainder, 520 (62.9%) opened the email, and 226 took the survey. We sent weekly reminders to all on the original list, urging them to either take or complete the survey. Of those who took the survey, 189 (90%) completed it in its entirety by the time we closed the survey after one-month’s time, on March 23, 2018.

The project team reviewed the full set of responses that had been downloaded into a spreadsheet. We had a surprisingly large response from societies with over 1,000 members, so we wanted to separate them from the rest while also being able to compare the small societies (all under 1,000) to the large ones, in case that showed anything interesting. Therefore, in order to better interpret the data, we sorted the data into these five size-based categories:

- under 100
- 100–499
- 500–999
- all societies under 1,000
- all over 1,000

Additionally, we created two sets of graphics:

1. Ones that compared those under 1,000 members to those over 1,000
2. Ones that compared across four categories: those under 100 members, 100–499 members, 500–999 members, and those over 1,000 members.

We also reviewed all the qualitative answers, which comprised mostly responses to any “Other” categories we included. An analysis of the key data points and visualizations are presented in the next section.

Survey Data

The excellent response rate (n = 226; 28.8%) to the survey seems to indicate that scholarly society executives are eager to share information about their societies. Following the structure of the survey, which was split into two sections, the results that follow will be presented first based on answers to the demographic questions and then on the consortial questions. For visualizations on all results, please see Appendix C.)

Demographic Data

Ninety-five percent (95%) of respondents were from doctoral-granting universities in the United States or Canada (we did not distinguish between these two countries in the survey). As one might expect from the groups that made up the participants’ list, societies in history (40% of small societies), literature or composition/rhetoric (27% of small societies), and interdisciplinary studies (20% for small societies) were the largest groups of respondents, with smaller representation from area studies spread across the disciplinary spectrum.

The largest number of respondents by society role were presidents (45% for small societies; 35% for larger societies) followed by executive directors (14% for small societies; 25% for large societies). Almost 30% of small society leaders are full professors (or the equivalent) and that number is closer to 36% for larger societies, making up the largest academic rank of respondents; associate professors were at 12% for small societies and 5% for large societies. Other ranks were reported with negligible numbers.

Over 70% of all respondents say their organizations are governed by elected officers. Over 50% of small societies and nearly 80% of large societies also noted that they are also governed by an elected board. (Respondents could pick more than one answer to the governance question.) Twice as many large societies (20%) had executive directors compared to small societies (10%), but the majority governance structure seems to be through boards and officers, which for some may be the same entity.

Over 70% of small scholarly societies are listed as 501(c)3 organizations (this number jumps to nearly 90% for larger societies), but about 10% of small organizations are unincorporated. Small societies’ primary form of support is membership dues (over 90% rely on this strategy), followed by conference fees (~60% rely on this). Approximately 50% of the small societies rely equally

on personal donations, volunteer labor, and publications (subscription fees) to supplement their income. Only 30% of the small societies rely on institutional support, in the form of in-kind support, office space, student workers, etc., despite the overwhelming majority of respondents who conduct their society work out of a university department. Small scholarly societies rely the least (17%) on external funding from endowments and grants, with most of that number found in societies in the 500- to 999-member range. When asked about their annual operating budget, small scholarly societies populate the financial spectrum from “Under \$1,000” up to \$100,000, while the majority of larger societies populate the ranks from \$100,000 to more than \$500,000.

Consortium Data

Ranked in terms of importance, small scholarly societies indicated the following areas of focus were important, from most to least:

1. Events
2. Membership
3. Publications
4. Administration
5. Promotions
6. Development

Almost 20% of the small scholarly societies indicated they were “under water” when it came to working on development, while they felt twice as confident but still “could use some help” on promotion and membership (ranking at 40% of respondents for each). For a complete table of responses, see Question 12 in Appendix C.

However, when asked specifically whether they felt they were spending too much time on any one of these areas (see Fig. 2), both the small and large societies overwhelmingly responded (near 50% for both size categories) that they spent too much time on administration. Events came in second for the small societies as especially burdensome, at just under 30%.

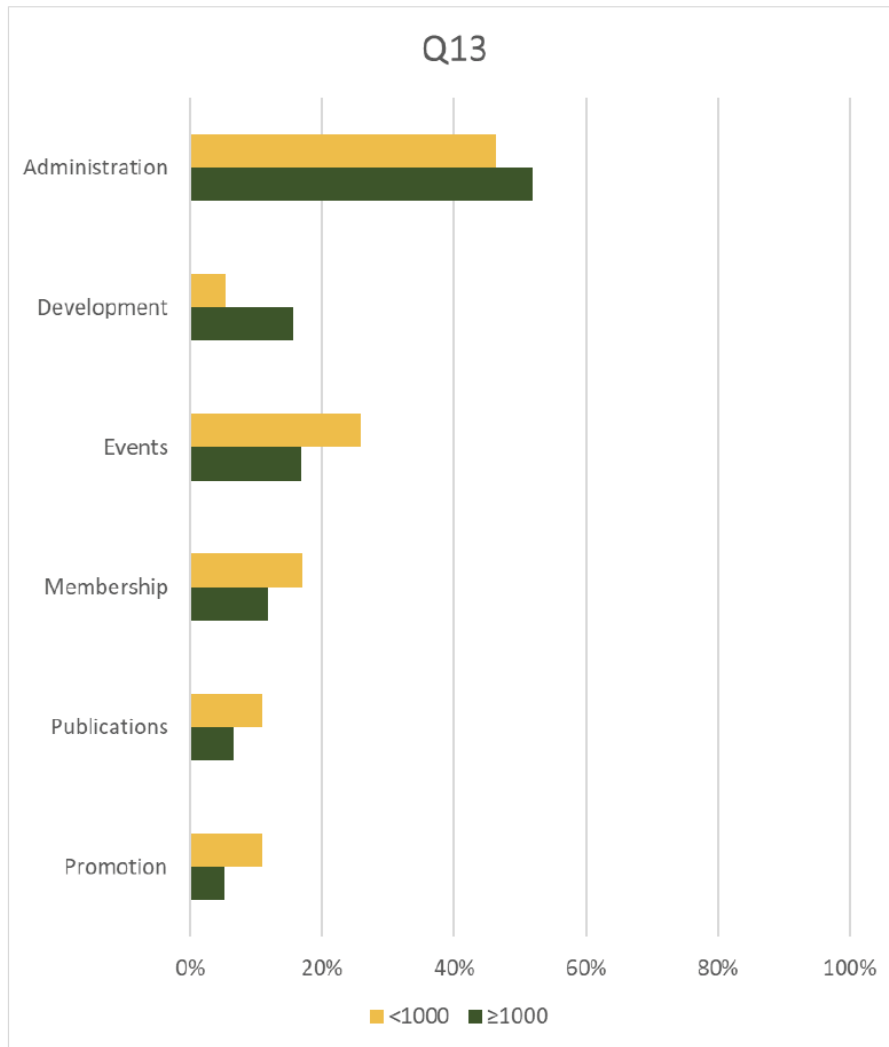


Figure 2: Question 13 asked, “On which of these areas are you spending more time than you’d like?” Administration was the leading response by small and large societies alike.

When asked where they would most like help, if it were available, the small scholarly societies responded in this order (see Fig.3):

1. Development
2. Promotion
3. Membership
4. Administration
5. Events
6. Publications

Micro-societies (societies with fewer than 100 members), in particular, desired more help on running or managing publications and events than those societies with more than 100 members. (See Q15 in Appendix C for a full breakdown of responses according to each membership level of small society.)

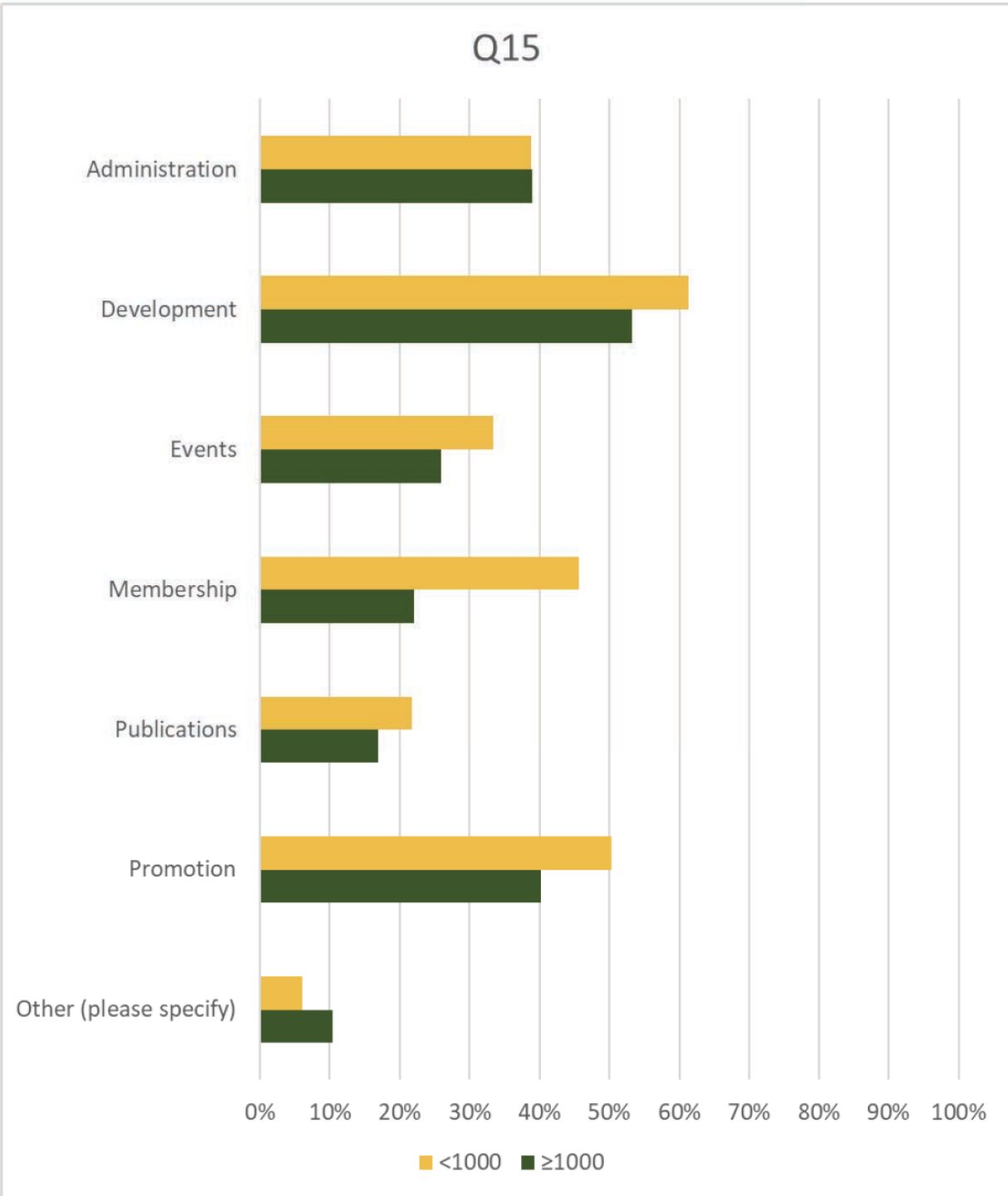


Figure 3: In Question 15, we asked, “Where would you like or need more help through additional human resources/support, if it were available?” Small scholarly societies in every demographic (>100, 100-499, 500-999) are in need of more help across the range of society tasks.

When we asked which tasks within each of those larger areas societies might desire external help with, they reported the following:

- **Administration:** At least 40% of small societies desired support for accounting and bookkeeping, strategic planning, and facilitating collaboration with other societies.
- **Development:** An average of 50% of small societies desired support for grant writing and fundraising.
- **Membership:** An average of 40% desired help with membership payments, management, recruitment, and engagement, with recruitment being the strongest need.
- **Events:** Thirty percent (30%) of small scholarly societies wanted help with conference management and payments and events marketing and promotion, while over 40% desired help with conference planning and negotiations.
- **Publications:** Small scholarly societies desired the most help with copyediting (20%) and editorial/submission management (18%), although they all indicated they could use some help (15%) with other areas of publishing including subscription management, production/design, distribute and dissemination (including indexing and open access), and scholarly newsletters.
- **Promotion:** Nearly 50% of small scholarly societies wanted help with social media marketing of their organizations, as well as help with their society websites (40%) and graphic design (over 30%).

We also asked societies if there were other areas they would like specific consultation with (such as one-time services). They were most interested (~30%) in support for governance issues, such as mediation, leadership transition training, and strategic planning, as well as legal issues, such as nonprofit status and contract negotiations.

Survey Analysis

The project team believes that the survey reached the appropriate leadership levels for small scholarly societies, given the majority of respondents' roles in their societies as society presidents. The overwhelming majority of these organizations have homes on university campuses. As more colleges and universities struggle through difficult fiscal issues, there is the increasing danger that they will no longer be able to provide financial or even in-kind assistance to these organizations. Indeed, it is unclear from the survey whether respondents even know what type of in-kind support they are currently receiving from their universities in order to request a maintenance or increase of this type of support. It is also possible that the low response rate (30%) of small scholarly society leaders to this question does truly indicate that they receive no in-kind support such as course reassignments for their efforts in these organizations. In either case, there is an increasing need to provide a sustainable model for the operations of these organizations.

A significant number of the society leaders are full professors, suggesting that society executives take on these positions relatively late in their careers and may stay in them for a number of years. This has implications for leadership transitions and succession pipelines; faculty may only feel they can step into these positions only after promotion to full professorship.

Such a culture makes it difficult for pre-tenure or even mid-career faculty to step into executive positions, and in turn, when people step down, organizations may struggle with a lack of qualified applicants for leadership roles. In addition, with the shrinkage of tenure positions in the academy and the concomitant growth in non-tenure-track positions, the project team wonders what the long-term impact of this status shift will mean for the future of small scholarly societies. Furthermore, the majority of these tenured leaders are at research-intensive (i.e., doctoral granting) schools, which reinforces the idea that only the most networked, well-established colleagues can afford to serve in these service roles, perhaps to the detriment of future leadership possibilities--particularly in terms of diversity, inclusion, and equity within the academy--as well as the future stability of small societies.

A very small percentage of the small societies surveyed have executive directors, indicating a dependence on volunteer staffing alone. This dependency makes it difficult for organizations to function well during transitions of Board members (if they even have a Board) and officers. The survey respondents in the small societies' categories often indicated that they have both elected boards and elected officers, which may indicate that the officers comprise the board. This conflation between roles means that small scholarly societies may be foregoing the board's intended work of vision and strategic planning in favor of the officers' day-to-day work of managing and maintaining the society. We see these societies, who indicated they needed help with the strategic work, as requesting assistance because their volunteer officers are often struggling to complete the day-to-day work. This dependency on volunteers becomes even more precarious for small societies as universities eliminate course releases for faculty who engage in this kind of professional service.

Nearly half of the organizations surveyed are small in terms of both membership (fewer than 500) and annual budget (less than \$25,000), making them particularly vulnerable to financial crises and industry disruptions, such as the rapid changes in the publishing world. These small organizations have a relatively small number of primary revenue streams (i.e., membership dues, conference fees). This small number makes these organization more vulnerable to financial crises and downturns in either membership or conference registration.

One area the project team had not anticipated was discovering that more than half of the organizations either self-identify as interdisciplinary or focus on subject matter that is inherently interdisciplinary (e.g., area studies). As the academy continues to move toward greater interdisciplinarity, these organizations are more important now than ever. By helping them to sustain themselves, a consortium could be a significant contribution to the academy, perhaps by facilitating conversation among organizations through making available lists of peer societies and their executives. In addition, the consortium itself could offer another level of interdisciplinarity—providing a mechanism for these organization to work with one another.

Generally, respondents leading small societies (under 1,000 members) felt that their organizations were managing activities around their events and publications well, with **development and promotion** being the main areas in which they would welcome support. These societies have a strong preference for focusing their internal efforts on any of the other

areas *besides* administration, but administration is where faculty leaders note they are spending too much time for not enough intellectual or financial pay-off. So there seems to be a contradiction in their answers between how they spend their time and what they think they need (or want) help with. The organizations identified a number of areas where the staff do need more help. Again, these tend to be areas that are not the immediate day-to-day operations, but are more forward-looking (e.g., building membership, grants, fundraising, etc.). Cash-strapped and understaffed, these organization have a difficult time **planning strategically** and implementing such plans. A consortium that provided assistance in some areas might free up the staff in its efforts to generate revenue and plan for the future.

The majority of small scholarly societies that had publications were comfortable with their work in those areas, although they were still interested in getting additional help in terms of copy-editing, editorial/submission management systems, and distribution/dissemination (including open-access) work. In addition, only two or three of the small scholarly societies who did not already have a publication said they were interested in starting one. Publications could be one of the most effective ways for small societies to gain notice and grow membership; they might provide collaborative opportunities for similar micro-societies (e.g., single-author societies) to publish together. That said, the project team recognizes that it is important for smaller groups to gain traction and stability before beginning to have publications. Many on the project team have publishing and production experience that extends beyond what faculty in these leadership roles have experienced working with commercial or large university press editorial partnerships, and so we wonder whether the confidence that respondents felt about their publications was more indicative of their narrower perspective of publishing, as editors, than publishers in the group have. We wondered, for instance, how many small societies are publishing in partnership with a university press versus a commercial press versus independently. (For the initial stakeholder meeting, we researched these answers before making invitations so as to get a breadth of publisher–society relations, but we did not ask this question during the survey.) Also, what do societies mean when they indicate that their journal is “doing well”? Does it indicate a financial or administrative strength or some other qualitative outcome, such as a focus on the finished publication instead of the stress points of invisible work that may be glossed over once an issue is done? While there may be possible improvements that have been made to their scholarly communication workflows (e.g., moving to a publishers’ electronic platform), we wonder whether these leaders are aware of other publishing platforms, such as those that are open-source, which could help with the overall long-term stability of the society. While we did not ask for a business model for their journals or what percentage of their income comes from publications, this is a point worth pursuing in future research.

Recommendations

Our research affirmed both the promise and the long-term value of this project. The vast majority of our respondents sent a clear message about the importance of their societies and of their scholarship. These societies would benefit greatly from stabilization and the opportunity to thrive and mature. In addition, our interviews and survey data emphasized the relevance of this project to creating a more inclusive scholarly landscape. Although we were careful to select

stakeholders who represented the perspectives of women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ scholars, our research emphasized even more fully the importance of scholarly communications from the margins--national, cultural, global, and disciplinary. Yet these are precisely the communications and societies whose organizations are often the smallest and most fragile, benefitting from the least financial and institutional support, and hence the most in jeopardy.

This planning grant helped us answer the question of whether small, scholarly societies would be interested in a consortium that might offer both member services and consulting services: The answer is yes. And while this phase of the project helped us determine that there is viability in moving forward with the idea, there is still more research needed to discover what the business model for such a consortium might need to be, as well as what the strategy for implementing such an organization would be. That work remains to be done as part of future grants. However, we can offer some preliminary recommendations based on the survey results:

- **A consortium is desirable** by these small scholarly societies, especially if society leadership is then freed up **to focus on big-picture issues such as strategy and planning**, perhaps in conversation with others facing the same challenges. The day-to-day needs could be supported by such a consortium or ameliorated through stronger focus on strategic issues that maintain the lifespan of these societies.
- This organization would have a significant role working with societies on their **publications**, focusing in particular on the strategic level, not in the context of the practical aspects of journal editing and delivery. For small societies, this is exactly where the issues of scholarly communication and open access need to be addressed. Respondents discussed the day-to-day existing processes and business models of their publications, not what those processes or business models could or should be with respect to their society missions.
- Such a consortium should provide a **centralized hub of network opportunities** to capitalize on the interdisciplinarity of these societies. Offering an “infomap” so organizations can self-connect as well as fostering collaboration—possibly through shared publications, conferences, or other events—may help to strengthen the membership models of these organizations.
- By offering both strategic and operational support, a consortium should help create a space for **more contingent scholars to engage** in leadership roles, nurturing both the breadth of researchers in today’s academy and sustaining the life of small scholarly societies.

In brief, we propose that a consortium of small societies would have as its primary mission to provide strategic guidance on the future of scholarly communication in the context of small societies’ long-term mission, vision, and goals. Scholarly communication includes all scholarly output from the society, not only the journal. This consortium could work with executive directors and board members to think about the intellectual output of the society at a high, deep, and broad level so that they can put into place both short-term and long-term initiatives to reach their overall goals. This consortial work could be done within a suite of strategic planning services that also cover more traditional issues (e.g., governance); and we know that small societies also

need day-to-day services (e.g., administration, promotion, publication management, membership), which can serve as a more predictable source of revenue for the consortium than the one-off strategic services.

While we cannot offer a complete financial scenario now, based on the need for further financial research, we did attempt to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of running a consortium and include a sample budget based on a scenario in which there are dues from societies, donations, project charges, and funding (income) versus expenses related to an office with a staff of 2 to 2.5 people. It assumes no location on a university campus (so there's rent) and external funding to keep it afloat (see Appendix D for this interactive budget). Without some of the practicalities answered (in terms of sustaining partners, scale, in-kind rent, etc.), we could only create a speculative financial scenario that will be used to create a more stable business model in a proposed Phase Two of this project.

Conclusion

Phase One of this project has presented us with the confirmation that small, scholarly societies are active intellectual places with committed (and highly overworked) individuals who see the benefit of external support, particularly through human resources offering them more stable governance and strategic planning. We also know that scholarly publishing is growing in complexity and is ever-changing. Even full-time publishing professionals who pay attention to this world on a daily basis struggle to stay on top of these changes, so it would not be surprising that (often volunteer) faculty editors and officers at small, scholarly societies would not be able to do so. Editors and officers at small scholarly societies may define success only in a financial sense (either breaking even or turning a small profit) rather than by other criteria (such as breadth of distribution, degree of access, etc.). They may not know what is on the horizon vis-a-vis publishing, and thus may not know the challenges that await them. We submit that scholarly societies do not know what they do not know, which is why we believe these societies do not think they need help with their publications (as a major example).

We believe strongly that moving towards a consortium model for these small societies will help us open the conversation towards open access with their publications, and this initial research has laid the foundation to further explore how small, scholarly societies can be engaged and sustained in multiple ways that will allow them to consider flipping their publications in the (hopefully near) future.

To continue working towards that goal, we are planning a three-phase strategy, with this current report concluding the first research phase. The second phase, similar in scope and duration to the first but focused exclusively on researching potential business models, is currently in the proposal-writing stage. The third phase would be implementation of this model.

Specifically, we will partner with a scholarly organization with a vested interest in such consortial work to pursue a second round of research activity with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that includes:

- More in-depth information-gathering from our survey respondents, particularly around finances and publications. We will return in particular to the 40+ respondents from the small scholarly society category who provided their contact information for follow-ups to gather this data.
- In-depth discussions with selected survey respondents on open access and the future of communication in their discipline.
- Additional research on similar freelance administrative organizations, such as NomadIT (<https://www.nomadit.co.uk/>), to see how or whether these groups are supporting small, scholarly societies yet.
- Discussing with the affiliated societies of our partner organizations (e.g., MLA, etc.) and what their contribution to such an entity could be.
- Development of a scaled business model for a consortium, which would include holding discussions with like-minded organizations that may be willing to partner with us or donate their time toward these strategic services.

Our goal with this second round of research and planning would be to present an actionable plan, particularly a business model that could be undertaken initially through grant funding or that a partner institution might support. Some key questions that Steven Wheatley helped us articulate from this research includes: What can their membership pay? Is it better to raise dues? Scale dues? What are the benefits of being members vs. customers? Are people interested in events or products? The face-to-face meeting and survey provide a great overview of finding what small, scholarly societies think they want, but what they need may not be exactly what they want. And finding out how to make what they need affordable is the primary goal of our next research phase.

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