Spanning Our Field Boundaries: Mindfully Managing LAM Collaborations
https://educopia.org/sites/educopia.org/files/publications/Spanning_Our_Field_Boundaries.pdf
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Spanning Our Field Boundaries: Mindfully Managing LAM Collaborations is one deliverable of the IMLS-funded "Mapping the Landscapes" project, overseen by the Educopia Institute on behalf of the Coalition to Advance Learning in Archives, Libraries and Museums, a nonprofit including representatives from a wide range of cultural heritage organizations. Educopia, also a nonprofit, provides training, facilitation, and administrative support for collaborative communities, and develops and manages research projects focused on libraries, archives, and museums; particular areas of focus are scholarly publishing and digital preservation.[1] The Coalition is an outgrowth of a June 2013 OCLC and IMLS-hosted summit on the future of continuing education and professional development for cultural heritage staff. At this summit, IMLS shared that it had "been considering their investments in continuing education" and that "some sources of funding for continuing education had been reduced in recent years, and that made it even more critical that we work together" across organizations.[2] Understanding the purpose for the Coalition is important to understanding some of the statements included in *Spanning Our Field Boundaries.*

The purpose of the *Spanning Our Field Boundaries* brief is "to examine the perceptions and perspectives that make cross-field collaboration difficult" and to "shed light on some of the issues that currently hinder our boundary-spanning potential, so that together we can mindfully observe and manage these issues as we develop collaborations."[3] The authors—including fifty contributors representing an array of archives, libraries, museums, and professional organizations—note that "the early 21st century marks a moment in which many 'public good' institutions, including libraries, archives, and museums, face rapid change and constrained resources" but that many of these institutions are "interested and willing" to collaborate, with "many [joint activities] enabled or encouraged through foundation

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[1] "Mission," Educopia Institute, accessed July 14, 2017, https://educopia.org/about-us/mission.
[2] *Coordinating Continuing Education for Libraries and Cultural Institutions*, Coalition to Advance Learning in Archives, Libraries, and Museums, accessed July 14, 2017, http://www.coalitiontoadvancelearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CE-Summit-report.pdf.
[3] Educopia Institute, *Spanning Our Field Boundaries: Mindfully Managing LAM Collaborations*, November 2015, 3, accessed July 14, 2017, https://educopia.org/sites/educopia.org/files/publications/Spanning_Our_Field_Boundaries.pdf.

and federal funding opportunities."[4] However, the authors also observe that "creating nexus points between libraries, archives, and museums requires more than funding sources and good intention: it requires careful cultivation," including intentional "boundary-spanning."[5] The authors helpfully provide two sources for readers who wish to learn more about LAM collaborations and "boundary-spanning."[6]

The brief includes three areas of both tension and collaboration: "Field Diversity," "Resources," and "Vocabulary and Acronyms." In "Field Diversity," the authors describe structural differences among LAMs, including the types of "objects" managed by various institution types and the myriad subfields encompassed by each field, as well as embedding cultural heritage entities within each other, such as a museum with a library or a museum with an archives. The authors note that the type of organization influences the focus of the institution and its staff, whether government, private, or nonprofit. They give considerable space to descriptions of how staff enter each field, including graduate education, a variety of undergraduate degrees, and on-the-job training, with the authors noting that LAMs do not require their employees to maintain certification. This speaks to the purpose of the "Mapping" project: to review the opportunities for continuing education and professional development for LAM staff; however, it is confusing to readers who expect to learn about collaborative strategies, not about how staff are educated. In the "Resources" section, the authors ask, "How do resourcing perceptions influence these fields' ability to partner?"[7] Areas covered in this section include the different funding models for various organizations (government, private, etc.), and the authors note that advocacy is an area where institutions could benefit from continuing education or training, as well as cross-disciplinary learning. This section also covers variations in staffing levels, as well as perceptions of grant funding opportunities.

"Vocabulary and Acronyms" encompasses both the overabundance of acronyms within each LAM field and the confusion that arises because these fields use many of the same words, but with slightly different meanings. The authors note that "when crossing over fields, especially in the early stages of collaboration, we must maintain an awareness of the vocabulary we use, both as a project member and as a project team . . . [I]t is vital that we build an environment where people can stop and ask for clarification, or actively define or avoid cumbersome terms . . ."[8]

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[4] Ibid., 5.
[5] Ibid.
[6] The two sources include Diane M. Zorich, Günter Waibel, and Ricky Erway, *Beyond the Silos of the LAMS: Collaborations Among Libraries, Archives, and Museums*, OCLC, September 2008, http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2008/2008-05.pdf; and Chris Ernst and Donna Chrobot-Mason, *Boundary Spanning Leadership: Six Practices for Solving Problems, Driving Innovation, and Transforming Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008).
[7] Educopia, *Spanning Our Field Boundaries*, 8.
[8] Ibid., 10.

The brief ends with two summary sections, "Collaborative Starting Points" and "Call to Action." The former lists five "growth areas" that "may be ripe for collaboration" including digital transitions, funding challenges, policy changes, leadership challenges, and succession planning.[9] The latter, however, encourages readers to "actively seek out" collaboration with other LAM organizations.

The brief's strengths are its broad observations about LAM organizational structures and resources, and the "perceptions and perspectives" that can make collaboration difficult for cultural heritage institutions. Although the brief doesn't surface much new information for those already working in LAMs, it is useful to have such information clearly articulated. Archivists may find that the report validates what they already know and have experienced if they have been involved in "boundary-spanning" projects with other cultural heritage institutions. The brief is useful in describing areas of tension among LAMs, which could assist archivists participating in or considering collaborations to draw their awareness to potential or current issues in working with other types of cultural heritage organizations.

Spanning Our Field Boundaries has two major limitations: first, it provides neither solutions to nor pathways for "mindfully managing" successful collaborations; second, the brief lacks clarity regarding its actual purpose. The lack of solutions is most apparent in the "Call to Action," in which the authors resoundingly assert that LAM staff should "actively and strategically seek out and leverage partnerships with organizations unlike your own" which could achieve efficiencies and bring about transformational change.[10] However, specific suggestions as to how to successfully collaborate or "mindfully manage" are missing. Even the "Collaborative Starting Points" are not a list of actual collaborative initiatives that could be undertaken by LAMs in order to further their missions; the list is instead composed of areas in which continuing education and professional development offerings could be focused (which is the purpose of the "Mapping" project). Its stated purpose noted above fails to indicate the wider purpose of the brief's umbrella project. The "Mapping" project's purpose is to "map out individual learner needs within and across the museum, archives, and library fields"; these "learners" are not visitors, users, or patrons of LAMs, but LAM staff.[11] The audience for the brief is not LAM staff, but hosts and trainers who seek to "respond to gaps, common issues, and innovations within the field at large."[12] Making more explicit the major purpose of the "Mapping" project, as well as the intended audience for the report would help clarify in particular the "Collaborative Starting Points" which are otherwise jarringly disconnected from the preceding observations about organizational structure, resources, and language.

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[9] Ibid., 11.
[10] Ibid., 12.
[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] See "Mapping the Landscapes," Educopia Institute, accessed July 14, 2017, https://educopia.org/research/mapping-the-landscapes.

Finally, the authors strongly recommend several times "collective impact methodologies" in the "Resources" section, but neglect to point to further resources. This is odd as the authors explicitly direct the reader to further resources on "boundary-spanning" as a concept. It is even more curious an omission because Educopia has authored a white paper "Chrysalis: Moving Forward Collectively" (2014) which heavily cites the work of Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer on the topic of "collective impact methodologies."[13] Lastly, the authors seem to validate the services of Educopia as a nonprofit which provides support and administration for collaborative communities and grant projects. In the "Resources" section they note that, "individual institutions rarely have the staff or resources necessary to organize and lead such [collaborative] initiatives. Having neutral groups that can organize and facilitate efforts, providing a sort of 'glue' between the players, may be a missing key for engaging in joint work across sectors."[14] It is unclear whether the authors are suggesting that outside groups are needed to organize and facilitate collaborative initiatives undertaken by LAMs or if they mean outside groups are needed to organize and facilitate professional development and continuing education offerings for LAM staff. These ambiguities further reinforce the lack of clarity regarding the purpose of the brief: is it meant for LAM staff or for hosts and trainers of LAM staff? Clarifying the brief's function as a deliverable on professional development needs of LAMs would strengthen its relevance for cultural heritage professionals, as well as for hosts and trainers seeking to develop pertinent programming opportunities. While the brief leaves archivists with few strategies for establishing successful collaborations across LAMs, it does inspire its readers in the potential for successfully working with cultural heritage allies to meet new and emerging challenges across the professions.

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[13] Katherine Skinner, Christina Drummond, and Martin Halbert, "Chrysalis: Moving Forward Collectively," Educopia Institute, December 18, 2014, https://educopia.org/sites/educopia.org/files/deliverables/Draft_Chrysalis_Moving_Forward_Collectively.pdf; Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer, "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, January 26, 2012, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work.
[14] Educopia, *Spanning Our Field Boundaries*, 9.