VALE

This document is in two parts: Part one is the narrative summary of the executive committee meeting. Part two is the recommendations from New Commons.
V2: 11-6-14
New Commons

Summary of Executive Committee Workshop on the Afternoon of 10-30-2014

Agenda
- Reflections on the results of the Member Council workshop
- Who else do we need to engage with what questions?
- NJEDge –what does VALE get and want?
- A new operating structure
- Summary

Based on the conversation with the Member Council in the morning

What are the areas of alignment?
VALE needs a conversation about libraries and librarians and the distinction between them. Not sure Executive Committee is the best group to evaluate member needs. Current structure of supporting the organization of VALE (of using mostly volunteers) isn't sustainable; acknowledgement that special projects like VALID need special, dedicated resources. More transparency and communication is needed within the VALE membership.

What are the areas of concern?
Future of VALID within VALE; meeting the needs of special groups; issues of inclusion by the community colleges, such as money spent on VALID and inability to attend meetings. Collectively address issues of policy; a diversifying membership to include proprietary colleges, and with the proprietaries, not sure I want to share with other organizations if values aren't aligned. Counterpoint: is a member a member?

We don't offer a lot of services. Staffing: if we stay volunteer, we will need to scale back in delivering services. In the other consortiums they're staff-driven and we're not. The services of the other consortiums didn't grab the imagination of the workshop participants. VALID isn't going to define the entire membership.

What are the draft priorities for the next 24 months?
Conduct a survey among members to get at their priority needs. For example, what is common, what isn't? Investigate the best way to tier the membership – using tiers is a way of differentiating membership based on needs. How do we best serve the librarians and serve the organizations? We built something future-important from the conversation today; let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

The communication piece about the 6 goals: 4 of the 6 are VALID based. Look at the 6 priorities again to make public: What have we done? What are we going to do / not going to do going forward? Making more explicit how purchasing occurs: it's also resource sharing. It's more than just purchasing. What are the things that VALE could facilitate members coming together to buy that aren't on the current list? For example, organize an institutional repository hosted by Rutgers with other members buying in at various levels.

Based on today, looking beyond the Executive Committee and Member Council to engage with other constituents…

Who does VALE need to hear from?	What questions do we ask them?
Executive Committee needs to talk among themselves more about the future of and strategic planning for VALE for at least 1 hour at every meeting. Consider dedicating two meetings per year to strategic planning.	How to make collaboration more central to VALE?
College administrators?	Follow the money – more services means more money
Our end users?	Can you find what you're looking for?
Potential partners?	How can we help each other by relying on each other's strengths instead of trying to do it all?
Other consortiums to help us clarify who we are and what we can hand off to them?	Facilitate campus conversations and implementation among academics, technologists and libraries

Collaboration with NJEDge…

What do we get?	What do we want?
Corporate status	Our role stays clear as an equal partner, not a sub-set of IT
Institutional support	Help IT understand librarians are valid variants
Improved communication with a parallel organization with muscle among the CIO's and academic leaders	Help with figuring out how to get members to pay for new VALE services…help with the Presidents
An enhanced understanding of organizational	

development – NJEDge is more complex; something to learn from	

If VALE blank-slated its operating structure and started from scratch and considered what the other consortiums deliver…

What would the go-forward structure look like?
Something that does not operate with mostly volunteer committees; instead of committees they could be interest groups.

Use committees that do work to achieve strategic priorities and report to the Executive Committee?
Yes, committees should be tied to priorities and answerable to the director.

Create interest groups for learning?
Yes, because it doesn't take any management time. A minimal number has to participate in an interest group for it to exist (yet to be determined); review interest groups every 3 years to re-up.

If we stay flat and volunteer how far will that get us?
Not far: burnout.

Add employees or contractors because (fill in the rationale)?
Yes, VALID is the first project; going forward every project has to be operationalized. In the near term stay with contractors or part-timers for discreet deliverables. An Executive Director may be required down the road for advocacy, grants, etc.

Closing…

Conclusions?
- Continue the strategy and organizational development conversation by devoting 2-3 Executive Committee meetings per year only on strategy
- Bring VALID to closure, yes or no, by July 1, 2015
- Be more deliberate with setting deadlines
- By July of 2015, have a plan in place for adding more professional staff

Open questions?
- Is the current Executive Committee structured right?
- Do we create a steering group within the larger group with authority to make some decisions independent of the current executive committee?

Next steps?

Recommendations from New Commons

As individuals, members of the VALE Members Council are people who really care about what they do. They are thoughtful and strategic. Yet, the current operating structure has rendered them less than optimal in effectiveness. New Commons proposes recommendations in three areas: strategy, membership and operating structure.

Strategy
Prioritize and elevate two ideas to shape the pursuit of every initiative and action:
1. Elevate the spirit and practice of collaboration by "working together to accomplish what we can't do alone" (which was the response in the workshop to the question: What will members value the most going forward?)
2. Focus on directly and visibly improving teaching, learning and research. This is aligned with the new strategic goal of NJEDge, mandated by the trustees, to forge an academic technology partnership on each campus.

Currently, there are 6 strategic priorities. Narrow the field for 2015. Pick the two that can be best leveraged and create an impact. Deliver only on the two chosen priorities and let everyone know the other 4 are on hold for 2015.

VALID: it is clear that all current members will not use VALID. Rather than trying to achieve the goal of getting all members in the VALID game, identify only those who are ready to use and pay for VALID. Start with the ready-to-go. Leave the door open for others to join once it gets going. (Participating in VALID could serve as the first differentiating tier in the membership structure – see next section.)

If VALE decides to spin off VALID, do it as a separate entity that VALE owns equity in and receives income from.

In the future conduct a more formal strategic planning process. New Commons recommends waiting, at least, until the end of 2015, when VALE will have a better sense of two things: VALID's future and VALE's relationship inside NJEDge. Trying to do a plan now would be an unnecessary diversion and lead to frustration because the group would be re-hashing all the stuff discussed at the 10-30-14 workshop.

In the meantime there are more than enough of the right strategic things to do on the VALE agenda. Please declare them in writing, make them public and pursue them.

Membership
Assuming VALE develops services, I recommend that VALE use a tiered membership structure to offer them. The use of tiers is not meant to isolate people into separate groups that don't interact with each other. Rather it would be used to provide some coherence around fees and levels of service received in exchange for the fees. As noted earlier, a logical tier would be defined for VALID users if VALE decides to pursue it only for those that want it. In living the spirit and practice of collaboration as the essence of VALE (as articulated in the workshop) the tiers would not be used as the primary means for engaging in community. This has to be done by the whole community.

Do a member survey to identify priority needs. Do a survey that reaches each of the primary institutional stakeholders: end user, CFO, Provost and so forth. It may be necessary to conduct multiple surveys for the various stakeholders. Getting a deeper handle on member needs is important and must be done. That said, don't wait to take action until the survey is done: pursue the important stuff that surfaced at the workshop. Conducting the survey and pursuing priorities can be done in tandem.

The current user conference should stay devoted to librarians, but run as a self-organized event by them. Mount a second conference for library organizations focused on the library organization of tomorrow and doing organizational peer reviews. The Quilt (the network of the regional technology networks that includes NJEDge) has an excellent peer review assessment tool and process for its member organizations VALE to consider adapting. New Commons designed the process and the tool with Quilt members.

Reach out further, and more deliberately, to the public school libraries and invite them to become members. There is something potent emerging in the alignment between what happens in the K-to-12 library and the post-secondary library.

There were not a lot of young, emerging professionals participating in the workshop. It would be vital for succession planning in the Member Council and Executive Committee to consciously cultivate young people. Put two young leaders on the Executive Committee ASAP. Form a self-organizing learning/interest group among emerging professionals. Consider asking Marianne (who is retiring from Rutgers) to serve as the first facilitator of the group until she moves to North Carolina.

Operating Structure
The VALE operating structure defines how work is organized to achieve results. It includes the Member Council, Executive Committee, committees (newly re-purposed) and part-time staff.

With its current operating structure trying to do everything it currently aims to do, VALE can't stay voluntary. If it stays voluntary, then significantly scale back what you are doing. And if you stay voluntary, even with organizational support from NJEDge, VALE will lose ground and become less relevant to members.

The "tempting move", as noted during the workshop, is to hire an executive director. New Commons recommends VALE not make this move. Three reasons:
- Too expensive
- It is premature until VALE knows, in depth, what NJEDge will provide and can leverage with the Presidents Council
- An executive director provides leadership…right now VALE has significant leadership. What it needs are paid doers

As noted during the workshop, VALE will be better served to make a short list of the discreet skills/know-how required to move its agenda forward for the next 12 to 18 months. To justify the added investment, develop a mini-business plan that demonstrates how the expense will be covered with what added revenue. Hiring contractors may require a loan from reserves or other sources. Then engage paid contractors to provide the deliverable. If VALE decides to pursue the implementation of VALID among the people who are ready to do so (as recommended by

New Commons), then hiring a part-time contractor to take the lead on VALID implementation would be the first hire.

As currently structured, the Executive Committee is the size of a typical board of directors. The size is too big for ongoing effective, day-to-day decision making. From the group of 17, consider forming a Steering Committee of 5 to 7 people to focus only on the future organization and strategy. Give the Steering Committee defined authority to make decisions independently of the Executive Committee. Consider having the remaining members of the Executive Committee focus on technical and other issues that historically occupy its meetings. The entire Executive Committee would engage in strategic thinking at two meetings per year. The recommended Steering Committee would provide the ongoing strategic thinking and organizational development in all its meetings and prepare the agenda for the two strategically-focused Executive Committee meetings.

The current committees should become self-organizing learning/interest groups to pursue non-organizationally strategic discussions. Re-constitute the committee structure so it is strategically focused on building VALE as an organization. I think there are two committees, one each for the two (of the six) priorities VALE chooses to pursue in 2015. Consider forming a third committee to focus on shared e-content, which was the proposed service that got the most dots.

New Commons recommends the use of BASECAMP to supplement the many face-to-face meetings. It is an online, collaborative workroom for use by the Executive Committee, the Steering Committee and the re-purposed committees. A lot of prep work can be done in BASECAMP to make actual face-to-face meetings snappier and shorter.