Factors That Influence the Establishment of a Network of Medical Libraries in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The paper sought to identify the factors affecting the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines. The paper dealt with the following questions: What facilitates or hinders the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a network? Is it feasible to establish such network? Who will manage the network? What are the network's functions and services? What are the requirements to join this network? What are the governing policies and guidelines? The researcher sent survey questionnaires to heads of medical libraries who are members of the Medical and Health Librarians Association of the Philippines (MAHLAP) and/or the Association of Philippine Medical Colleges (APMC). After the initial survey, the researcher conducted focus group discussions (FGD) participated by the MAHLAP 2010 Board of Officers. The researcher also interviewed networking experts and heads of medical institutions to obtain their opinion and suggestions on network establishment. Frequency analysis was used to count preferences of librarians regarding the facilitating and hindering factors affecting the establishment of a network of medical libraries. The study revealed that the key factors affecting the establishment of a network include administrative support and budget to address hindrances such as networking costs and other requirements in joining a network. Attaining these key factors would direct the readiness of medical librarians and libraries in establishing a medical library network. The researcher recommends that potential member libraries sit down and further discuss the establishment of a network of medical libraries. MAHLAP should take the initiative to convene its members and present to them draft policies and guidelines. Once discussed, this can be submitted to APMC for the heads of institutions review and approval. Once the invitation for membership is approved, librarians can meet to finalize the guidelines.

Keywords: medical libraries; network; Philippines; feasibility study; collaboration; information resources sharing

INTRODUCTION

Medical libraries in the Philippines are faced with the challenges of acquiring and maintaining sufficient resources for their users. Common problems among them are budget instability and increasing prices of medical resources. Solutions to these problems are being explored and discussed during conferences/dialogues among medical librarians. Medical librarians are enthusiastic in finding ways to cope up and provide services even with limited resources (information and/or manpower). One of the solutions that was raised during an FGD in one of MAHLAP's congresses was to establish a network for sharing resources and expertise and, therefore, save on costs.

Rouse (1980) cited a definition from the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science that says that a network is *"two or more libraries and/or other organizations engaged in a common pattern of information exchange, through communications, for some functional purpose. A network usually consists of a formal arrangement whereby materials, information, and services provided by a variety of libraries and/or other organizations are made available to all potential users."* [NCLIS, 1975, pp. 82-83]

Benefits That Will Facilitate Network Establishment

Networking has already been known to have significant effects on libraries and information resource sharing. Ernst (1977) said that *"it has been finally recognized that no single library can provide complete and universal service, but it may just be possible, though not probable, that this ideal might be approached through joint and concerted effort."* [Ernst, 1977, pp. 171-181]. An information network can facilitate resource sharing; shared cataloguing; ownership of bibliographic data; access to jointly-owned, centralized databases; control of the technological destiny of the library and the profession; and cooperative preservation (Martin,1988). Todaro (2005) also presented a number of library benefits: maximize resources; economize; solve a

problem; make money; indicate worth for services within an environment; give good/better customer service; create an information literate community; meet a need; change an image; create a need that should be there; do a good deed; provide access to information, resources, buildings, services and experts; serve the un-served, the underserved; and build communities.

Issues That May Hinder Network Establishment

While it is evident that networks have good impact to libraries, Todaro (2005) still identified a number of elements of failure. If there is lack of clarity or misunderstanding with the goals and objectives, a network will not work. Some libraries also have turf concerns and fear of losing their identities; others dislike change. Some are concerned about the time and money that they need to commit. If these apprehensions are present and remained unsolved, benefits of the network will not be enjoyed.

There are other things that might cause negative perceptions about networking. Some may think that networking may just be an added work. Some may feel that they can offer more but might gain less. Some may even feel that they can survive without having to join a network. On the other hand, some librarians, according to Ernst (1977), believed that *"they and their libraries have nothing to contribute because of their smallness, and, perhaps, because of their very specialized nature and, therefore, limited purpose and collection."* [Ernst, 1977, pp. 171-181].

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Recognizing that a network can improve access to information and sharing of library resources, as articulated in dialogues initiated by associations like APMC and MAHLAP, the paper dealt with the following questions:
1. What facilitates or hinders the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a network?
3. Is it feasible to establish such network?
4. Who will manage the network?
5. What are the network's functions and services?
6. What are the requirements to join this network? What are the governing policies and guidelines?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on previous studies that present positive and negative elements of having a network, this paper asked librarians who are members of MAHLAP and/or APMC. The objectives of the study are:
1. To identify the facilitating and hindering factors affecting the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines;
2. To identify the advantages and disadvantages of having a network of medical libraries;
3. To determine the expected network's management system;
4. To identify the network's functions and services;
5. To recommend policies and guidelines for the establishment and sustainability of a network of medical libraries; and
6. To determine the requirements and responsibilities of a network member.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of this study will provide librarians, specifically, medical librarians a better perspective on how to establish a network. For prospective network members, the result of the study helps them re-assess their libraries' collection, technological infrastructure, and services; and to enable them to gauge their qualifications to join a library network. For medical librarians,

their understanding of the need for a network of medical libraries will be augmented; and hopefully reduce, if not remove, the hindering factors that affect their cooperation.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher sent survey questionnaire to heads of medical libraries who are members of MAHLAP and/or APMC. The researcher sent out 100 questionnaires but only 30 returned. The survey questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first and second parts briefly drew out the positions held, length of service of respondents, and the profile of the libraries. The last part determined the respondent's awareness about the benefits of establishing a network of medical libraries, their willingness to join the network, and their preferred policies and guidelines which they think would be appropriate for the network. Below are some of the questions:
1. What do you think are the benefits/advantages of having a network of medical libraries?
2. What do you think will prevent you from joining a network of medical libraries?
3. Which among the following could be the best network model or system for resource sharing of medical libraries?
    a. Non-directed network
    b. Directed network
    c. Non-directed with a specialized center
    d. Directed with a specialized center
4. What resources should be shared?
5. What do you think should be the requirements to join a network?
6. What should be the network's functions and services
7. Who do you think should manage the network?
8. What should be included in the network management policies?
9. How should activities and programs be implemented?
10. How should the activities and programs be monitored and evaluated?
11. How do you think should the network be funded?
12. How should the network enforce institutional commitment?
13. How should the activities be sustained?

The researcher also conducted two FGDs participated by the MAHLAP 2010 Board of officers. The first group was composed of five officers working in academic libraries; the second group was composed of five officers working in special libraries. The FGD was conducted as a follow up activity to validate the survey results. Below are the guide questions:

a. What is your idea of a networking?
b. Based on the initial study, almost 100% of librarians think that having a network will work for their advantage. Do you think your library will benefit from this? Why or Why not?
c. In a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest, how would you assess your library as technology-ready for networking?
d. In a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest, how would you assess your library as collection-ready for networking?
e. In a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest, how would you assess your library as personnel-ready for networking?
f. What are the barriers or challenges you think may prevent you from joining a network?
g. What do you think will permit you to join a network?
h. What do you think are the advantages of having a network of medical libraries?
i. What do you think are the disadvantages of having a network of medical libraries?

The researcher also interviewed networking experts and heads of medical institutions to obtain their opinion on network establishment. Frequency analysis was used to count preference of librarians regarding the facilitating and hindering factors affecting the establishment of a network of medical libraries.

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This paper looked into the facilitating and hindering factors in establishing a network of medical libraries. The presence or absence of these factors determines the feasibility of creating a network of medical libraries.

Hypothesis

This study holds the hypothesis: that there are factors that facilitate and/or hinder the establishment of a network of medical libraries. Figure 1 represents the feasibility of creating a network. Figure 1 illustrates that member libraries are faced with facilitating and hindering factors that affect their support in the establishment of a network of medical libraries in the Philippines organized according to the enclosed components.
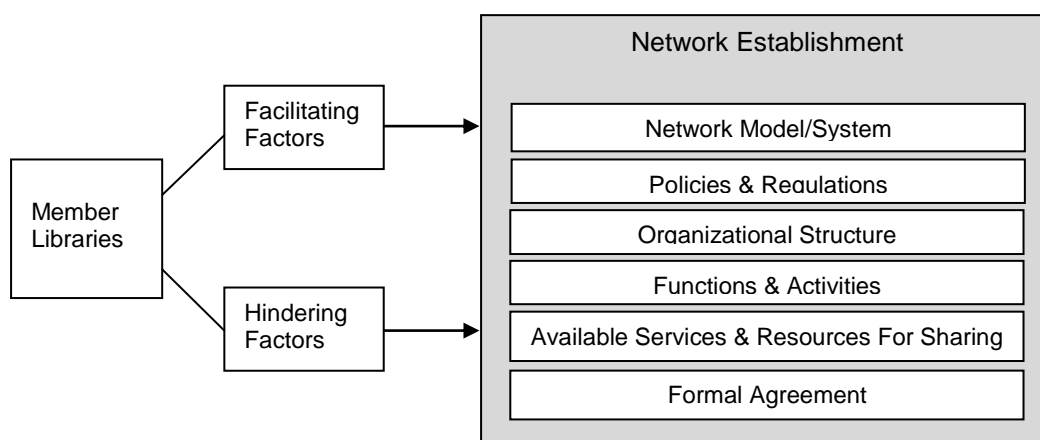

Figure1: Feasibility of Network Establishment

FINDINGS

Facilitating Factors

As shown in Table 1, one respondent noted that, if implemented well, all of the given factors are possible. Most of the respondents identified (a) resource sharing, (b) access to information, resources, buildings, service and experts, (c) good/better customer service and (d) provision of training programs, as the major benefits or advantages of having a network of medical libraries. Two respondents added that having a network will have a cost-saving advantage for their institutions. These possible benefits will attract libraries to join a network. Changing an image has the least number of responses (13).

During the FGD, most of the participants agreed that joining a network means additional resources for their respective libraries. Participants expected a network to improve library services and help library clientele. Aside from the evident benefits of networking, participants also agreed that management support is one of the major factors that will permit them to join a network. With management support, libraries can have more budget, and with more budget, libraries will be able to comply with the requirements of joining a network.

While the MAHLAP Board saw administration support as one factor that may permit them to join a network, they also saw it as a factor that may hinder them from joining; that is, when administrators refuse to participate in any collaborative activities with other institutions.

Table 1: Benefits/Advantages of a Network (N=30)

Benefits/Advantages	Frequency	%
Change an Image	13	43.3
Cooperative Preservation	16	53.3
Good/better Customer Service	25	83.3
Provide Access to Information, Resources, Buildings, Services and Experts	28	93.3
Provide Training Programs	23	76.7
Resource Sharing	30	100
Shared Cataloguing	21	70
Others: Cost-saving	2	6.7

Note: Multiple responses

Hindering Factors

As shown in Table 2, one respondent said that none of the given factors would prevent them from joining a network. Ten of the respondents, however, identified lack of clarity or misunderstanding of the goals and objectives of the network to be one of the major factors that will prevent them from joining a network. Three other hindering factors are: (a) abuse of the libraries' resources, (b) joining a network is costly and (c) they may not be qualified to join. One respondent was also pessimistic and noted that the Department of Health (DOH) had a similar initiative but it did not materialize due to lack of funds.

Table 2: Hindering Factors (N=30)

Hindering Factors	Frequency	%
Abuse of Resources	7	23.3
Can Survive w/o Joining a Network	2	6.7
Costly	8	26.7
Give More Gain Less	2	6.7
Lack of Clarity	10	33.3
Loss of Individual Identity	1	3.3
Not Qualified to Join	8	26.7
Nothing to Contribute	4	13.3
Time Consuming	6	20
Others: None of the above	1	3
No Response	1	3

Note: Multiple responses

On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Establishing a Network of Medical Libraries

The respondents saw the benefits of having a network of medical libraries but at the same time, also noted its disadvantages. Having only 10 as the most number of responses to network's disadvantages, as compared to the 30 responses on network benefits, showed that most of the respondents saw very few hindering factors and that more were optimistic to join a network.

Network Model

Table 3 shows that 14 respondents prefer a non-directed model of networking. In this model, member institutions can communicate with each other without having to go through a coordinator. A library can request resources directly from another library; there is no need to course through the network's coordinating office. Ten respondents prefer a directed model where a coordinator acts as the central node intermediating among the members. Four respondents prefer a non-directed model with a specialized center where communication is still open for all members, but this time, a coordinator is included in the loop (Atherton, 1977).

Table 3: Network Model

Model	Frequency	%
Directed	10	33.3
Non-Directed	14	46.7
Directed with a specialized center	2	6.7
Non-Directed with a specialized center	4	13.3
Total	30	100

Resources for Sharing

Table 4 shows that the resources for sharing with the most number of responses are in electronic form. Most of the respondents wanted to share e-journals, online databases, and e-books. This is because resources in electronic form are easier to transmit or share. Only three respondents wanted to share models and two wanted to share print journals.

Table 4: Resources for Sharing (N=30)

Resources	Frequency	%
AV materials	11	36.7
E-Books	22	73.3
E-Journals	25	83.3
Models	3	10
Online Database	24	80
Textbooks	13	43.3
Theses and other unpublished materials	15	50
Others: Print Journals	2	6.7

Note: Multiple responses

Requirements to Join a Network

Table 5 shows the preference of the respondents as to the requirements to join a network. The requirements with the most number of responses are: (a) Journal subscription with at least 20 titles; (b) Collection of books with at least 3,000 volumes; (c) Library automation; (d) Access to the internet; and (e) WebOPAC. Budget as a requirement had the least number of response. One respondent noted that willingness to share should be added as requirement to join a network.

Table 5: Requirements to Join a Network (N=30)

Requirements	Frequency	%
Access to the Internet	22	73.3
Annual Budget	9	30
Collection	25	83.3
Expertise	16	53.3
Journal Subscription	27	90
Library Automation	23	76.7
Licensed Librarian/s	17	56.7
Online Database Subscription	16	53.3
WebOPAC	21	70
Others: Willingness to share	1	3.3

Note: Multiple responses

Table 6 shows that among the 25 who chose collection as a requirement, 12 or 48% preferred at least 3,000 volumes. Only two or 2% wanted to require at least 50,000 volumes. Five respondents did not find the number of collection as a requirement to join a network.

Table 6: Number of Collection (n=25)

Volumes	Frequency	%
at least 3,000	12	48
at least 5,000	6	24
at least 10,000	5	20
at least 50,000	2	2
Total	25	100

Table 7 shows that among the 27 who chose journal subscription as a requirement, 12 or 44% required a minimum of 20 titles. Three respondents did not specify journal subscription as a requirement to join a network.

Table 7: Journal Subscription (n=27)

Volumes	Frequency	%
At least 5 titles	7	25.9
At least 10 titles	8	30.6
At least 20 titles	12	44.4
Total	27	100

The network's criteria or requirements to join a network could be met by individual libraries, big or small, only if they have administrative support.

Network Functions and Services

Most of the respondents perceived a network to have the following functions and services (see Table 8): (a) To facilitate document delivery service; (b) To organize and facilitate meetings, for a, symposium, etc.; (c) To establish referral systems; (d) To provide reference service, and; (e) To set up and maintain a union list of serials. Original subject cataloguing had the least number of responses (3).

Table 8: Network Functions and Services (N=30)

Functions and Services	Frequency	%
Access to machine-readable database for reference/cataloguing purposes	16	53.3
Centralized/decentralized cataloguing	9	30
Cooperative acquisition of materials	15	50
Document Delivery Service	24	80
Interlibrary loan service for non-print materials	15	50
Mutual notification of purchase	6	20
Negotiating agent and/or purchasing entity	11	36.7
Organize and facilitate meetings, fora, symposium, etc.	23	76.7
Original subject cataloguing	3	10
Photocopying service	11	36.7
Reciprocal borrowing privileges	9	30
Reference service	19	63.3
Referral system	24	80
Serve as the "thinking body" with regards to resource acquisition and maintenance	15	50
Union catalo of materials	12	40
Union list of serials	17	56.7
Union shelf list	8	26.7
Use of subject heading	6	20

Note: Multiple responses

Network Management

Table 9 shows that the respondents had varying responses as to who will govern the network. Fifteen of the respondents wanted MAHLAP to govern a network of medical libraries; thirteen respondents preferred a governing body elected by the network member libraries. Only one respondent wanted APMC to govern the network. One did not respond.

Table 9: Network Manager

Association	Frequency	%
APMC	1	3.3
MAHLAP	15	50
Elected Officers by Member Libraries	13	43.3
No Response	1	3.3
Total	30	100

Network Management Policies

Table 10 shows that most of the respondents wanted the project to be sustainable, and to do this, the governing body will have to stay in office for two years (see Table 11). Twenty-three of the respondents wanted to make it a policy for the governing body to be elected into office by the member libraries. Fifteen respondents wanted the governing body to have the power to decide on behalf of the member libraries. One respondent did not answer.

Table 10: Management Policies (N=30)

Policies	Frequency	%
The governing body will have the power to decide on behalf of the member libraries	15	50
The governing body will be elected into office by the member libraries	23	76.7
For project sustainability, the governing body will stay in the office in a specified number of years per term	29	96.7
Once the MOA is signed, it cannot be revoked	13	43.3
Members who fail to adhere to the moa will be sanctioned	11	36.7
No Response	1	3.3

Note: Multiple responses

Table 11: Number of Years Per Term (n=29)

Number of Years per Term	Frequency	%
1 year	3	10.3
2 years	15	51.7
3 years	11	37.9
Total	29	100

Activities and Program Implementation

To implement the activities and programs of the network, most of the respondents preferred that the governing body receive suggestions from the members and to disseminate information once suggestions are approved (see Table 12). Only four respondents preferred that the governing body plans and sets activities for the members. One respondent suggested to consider both; one respondent did not answer.

Table 12: Activities and Program Implementation

Implementation	Frequency	%
The governing body receives suggestion/s from the members and disseminate information once suggestion/s is/are approved	24	80
The governing body plans and sets activities for the members	4	13.3
Others: Both	1	3.3
No Response	1	3.3
Total	30	100

Activities and Program Monitoring and Evaluation

Table 13 shows that most of the respondents preferred that the governing body receives and summarizes comments from the members after each programs and activities. Only three respondents preferred that the elected officers meet and evaluate programs based on their own observations. One respondent did not answer.

Table 13: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation	Frequency	%
The governing body receives and summarizes comments from the members after each programs and activities	25	83.3
Elected officers meet and evaluate the program based on their own observations	3	10
Others: Consider suggestions from members	1	3.3
No Response	1	3.3
Total	30	100

Network Institutionalization

Almost all of the respondents selected all given choices as source of funds (see Table 14). Twenty-six or 86.2% of the respondents identified sponsorships/donors as the major source of fund. Twenty-two respondents identified membership fees and 21 identified fund generating activities. Only one respondent did not respond.

Table 14: Source of Funds (N=30)

Source of Funds	Frequency	%
Membership Fees	23	76.7
Fund Generating Activities	22	73.3
Sponsorships/Donors	26	86.7
No Response	1	3.3

Note: Multiple responses

Enforcing Institutional Commitment

Table 15 shows that 26 of the respondents (86.7%) said that to enforce institutional commitment, a memorandum of agreement should be signed by the heads of institutions. Six librarians wanted to impose fine for each violation and two librarians suggested that there should also be a memorandum of agreement (MOA) signed by the head librarians. Two librarians did not respond.

Table 15: Enforcing Institutional Commitment (N=30)

Activities	Frequency	%
MOA signed by institution heads	26	86.7
Impose fine for each violation	6	20
Others: MOA signed by library heads	2	6.7
No Response	2	6.7

Note: Multiple responses

Sustainability

For the network's sustainability, 29 of the respondents preferred to conduct regular meetings (see Table 16). One respondent noted that elected officers should meet once a month.

Table 16: Sustainability (N=30)

Activities	Frequency	%
Strict observance of the agreement	19	63.3
Conduct regular meetings	29	96.7
Others: Elected officers should meet monthly	1	3.3
No Response	1	3.3

Note: Multiple responses

Eighteen out of the 29 respondents preferred to meet twice a year (see Table 17). Five librarians preferred to meet quarterly.

Table 17: Frequency of Meetings (n=29)

	Frequency	%
Annual	2	6.9
Semi-Annual	18	62.1
Quarterly	5	17.2
Monthly	4	13.8
Total	29	100

CONCLUSION

The results of this survey with medical librarians, heads of selected institutions, and network experts verified that there are factors that will facilitate and/or hinder the establishment of a network of medical libraries. The results of the study signified that criteria and requirements aside, all of the respondents were willing to sit down and further discuss the network's establishment. With this willingness and enthusiasm, the identified hindering factors can be easily addressed thus facilitating factors can give rise to the network's establishment. On the other hand, for the network to materialize, administrative support is imperative. The researcher concludes, therefore, that the establishment of a network of medical libraries is feasible if the potential member libraries are supported by their respective heads of institutions. Aside from administrative support, another key factor is budget. Budget allocation determines whether a library is qualified to join the network.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends that potential member libraries sit down and further discuss the establishment of a network of medical libraries. MAHLAP should take the initiative to convene its members and present to them draft policies and guidelines. Once discussed, this can be submitted to APMC for the heads of institutions review and approval. Once the invitation for

membership is approved, librarians can meet to finalize the guidelines. Below is a draft of the proposed policies and guidelines.

1. The network will follow a non-directed model of networking (see Fig. 2). In this model, member institutions can communicate with each other without having to go through a coordinator (Atherton, 1977). This way, time and effort can be saved.
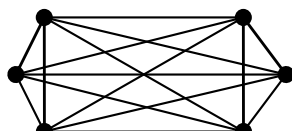

Figure 2: Non-Directed Model

2. The network will have the following functions and services: (a) To facilitate document delivery service; (b) To organize and facilitate meetings, fora, symposium, etc.; (c) To establish referral systems; (d) To provide reference service; (e) To set up and maintain a union list of serials; (f) To provide access to machine-readable database for reference/cataloguing purposes; (g) To facilitate interlibrary loan service; and (h) To act as negotiating agent and/or purchasing entity.

   Document delivery service can be availed for free or for a fee depending on the policies of the institution.

   If the network has enough budget, it can procure a data federator/aggregator that will search through the OPAC of member libraries. In the mean time, the member libraries must submit a list of their catalogue in excel format with the following fields:

Author (surname, first name)	Title	Publication Date	Subject/s	Call Number	Location

Figure 3: Bibliographic Fields

   Initially, this can be uploaded in the MAHLAP's website. The network will also act as negotiating agent especially in getting consortium price for subscriptions.

3. The following resources will be made available for network members: (a) electronic journals; (b) online databases; (c) electronic books; and (d) theses and other unpublished materials. However, before sharing these resources, librarians should be aware and should observe copyright and vendor licenses. It may be best to discuss these with the vendors and/or distributor first.

4. To enforce institutional commitment, a MOA should be signed by heads of institutions (the one who has the authority to commit the institution's resources). The MOA may contain the following guidelines:

   a. Network members will observe and strictly comply with other institution's policies and guidelines.
   b. Network members will set the schedule [day and/or time] to entertain requests and/or visitors depending on their preference

Management

1. Based on the number of responses in the survey, the network will be managed initially by MAHLAP. But since the network will follow a non-directed model, MAHLAP will eventually just be a facilitator. MAHLAP may be the one to call the initial meetings and organize a forum for network brainstorming.

2. For project sustainability, the governing body will stay in office for two years.

3. The governing body will later be elected into office by the member libraries. Election will be after two initial years of operation. Election will be facilitated by the current network administrator (MAHLAP) by requesting nominations from the body.
4. To implement the activities and programs of the network, the governing body will receive suggestions from the members and then disseminate information once suggestions are approved.
5. For monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities, the governing body will receive and summarize comments from the members after each program and activity.
6. For the network's sustainability, network member should meet twice a year. MAHLAP or elected officers should meet once a month.

Requirements

1. These are the minimum requirements in joining the network: (a) Journal subscription with at least 20 titles, (b) Collection of books with at least 3,000 volumes, (c) Library automation, (d) Access to the internet, (e) webOPAC, (f) Licensed librarian (g) Online database subscription.
2. The initial sources of funds are: (a) sponsorships/donors as the major source of fund, (b) membership fees, (c) fund generating activities.

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