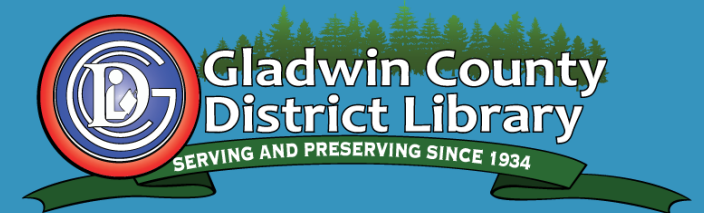
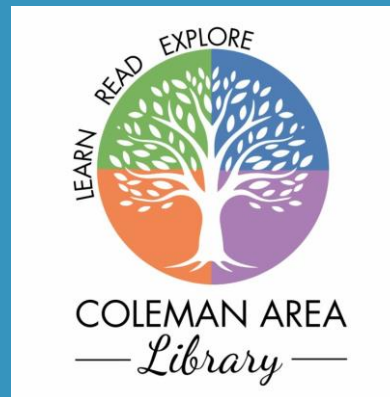
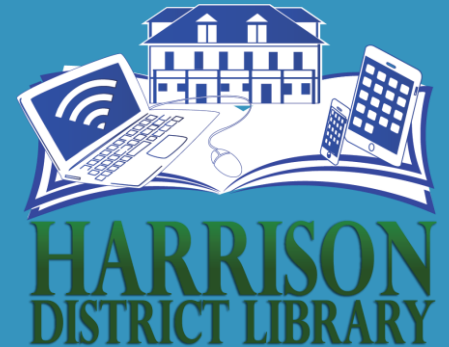
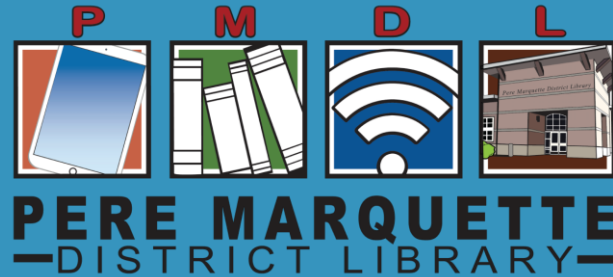


Great Things Together

Libraries Advancing through Partnerships, Innovation, and Shared Services

SMALL LIBRARIES • BIGGER POSSIBILITIES

2026 Conference Session



How it all began

**Garfield Memorial Library & Literacy Council
of Clare and Gladwin Counties**

Clare and Harrison Partnership Develops

First Shared Local ILS (TLC)

First shared ILS system was developed with Chippewa River District Library, Coleman, Surrey Township and Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Library.

Clare, Harrison, and Coleman

The formula for success

Successful partnerships are built on equality. They work best when all partners are valued equally, with no one partner viewing themselves as better than or in control of the others.

Challenges

Successful partnerships are built by people, not simply by organizations. Organizations may remain the same, but when the people who sustain the relationship change, so can the partnership.

Where We Are Now

Clare • Coleman • Harrison • Gladwin

SHARED ILS

A common system creates a shared operational foundation across all parties.

SHARED IT INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure, technology expertise, and resources shared across institutions.

COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMMING

Ideas, funding, marketing, and staff combined to create bigger opportunities.

SHARED STAFFING & RESOURCES

Staff expertise and organizational resources move beyond individual library boundaries.



What started as cooperation has grown into an interconnected network of libraries, staff, technology, and services.

Why collaboration matters

Growing expectations

Patrons expect strong technology, programming, digital access, collections, and responsive service—regardless of library size.

Limited capacity

Small and rural libraries often have fewer staff, smaller budgets, and less specialized expertise to draw from.

A different answer

Instead of duplicating every skill and service locally, libraries can intentionally build capacity together.



Collaboration can expand what is possible without erasing what makes each library local.

From “my library” to “our capacity”

The goal is not consolidation.

It is finding the places where working together makes each library stronger.

Local identity stays local

Boards, budgets, priorities, and community relationships remain distinct.

Expertise can travel

A skill held by one staff member can benefit several organizations.

Scale becomes possible

Shared resources can make larger projects practical for small libraries.



What does partnership look like?

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES

PROGRAMMING

Pool resources to bring larger author events to the region.

STAFF

Share trained staff across locations that use familiar systems.

LEADERSHIP

HDL & PMDL
One director can serve two distinct library institutions.

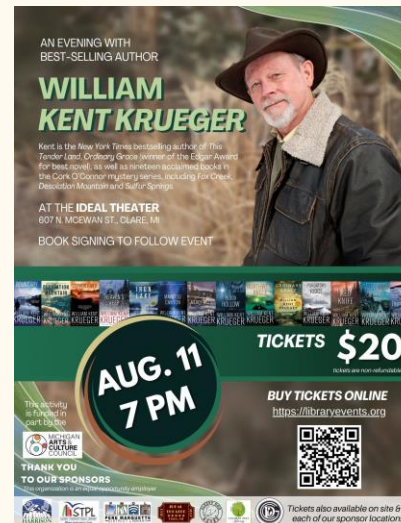
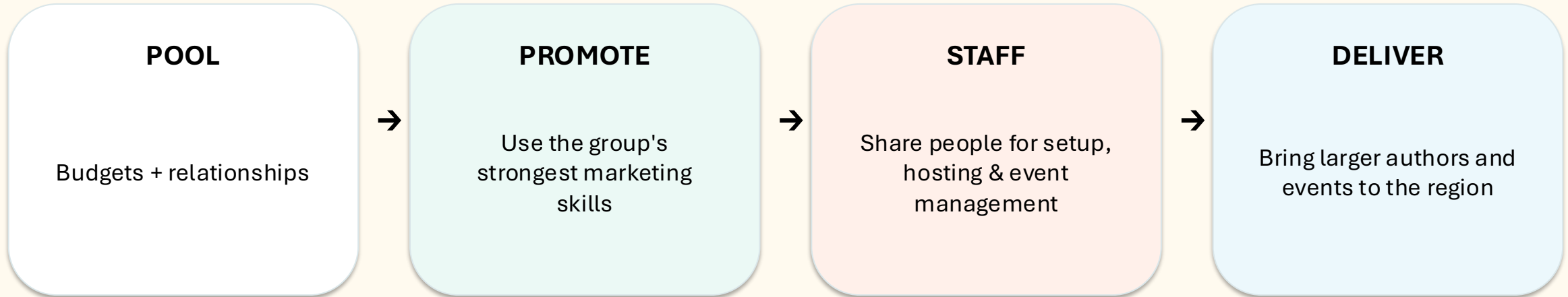
TECHNOLOGY

One library can serve as the infrastructure hub for several.



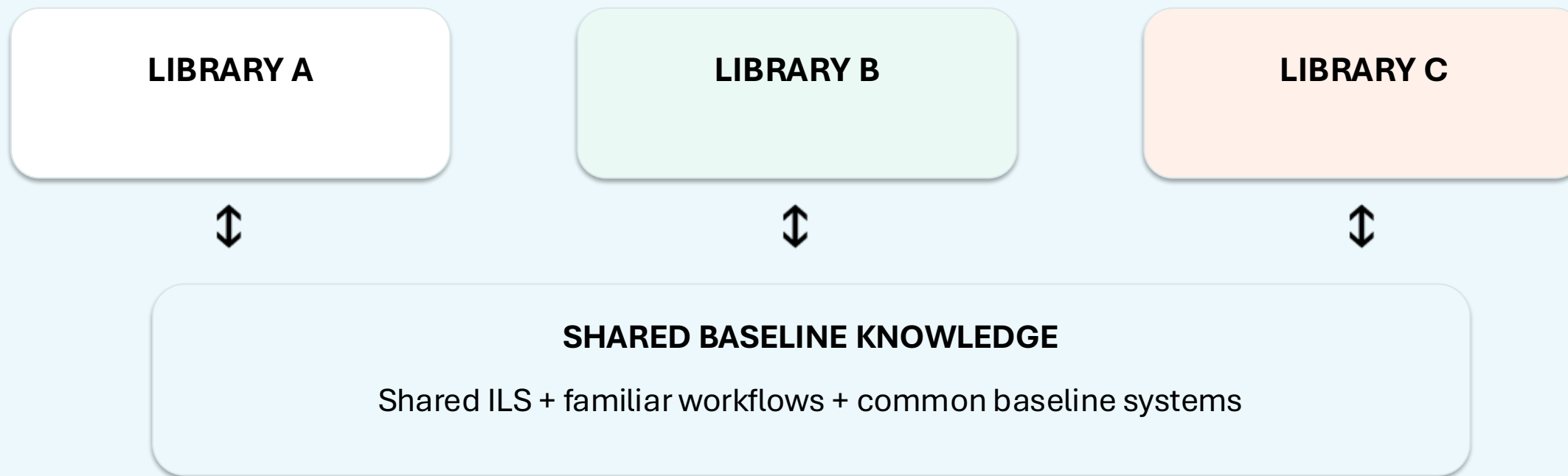
The common thread: use the strongest available resource across the partnership instead of recreating it everywhere.

Bigger programming through pooled resources



Result: events with a reach, profile, and staffing footprint that may be difficult for one small library to produce alone.

Staff can move; knowledge moves with them



The operational wrinkle

A staff member may have separate payroll relationships with multiple institutions, while arriving already trained on the core systems needed to work effectively.

One Director. Two Institutions.

Example 3 • Shared leadership while maintaining separate organizations

INSTITUTION A

- Separate board
- Separate budget
- Separate identity
- Separate Policies

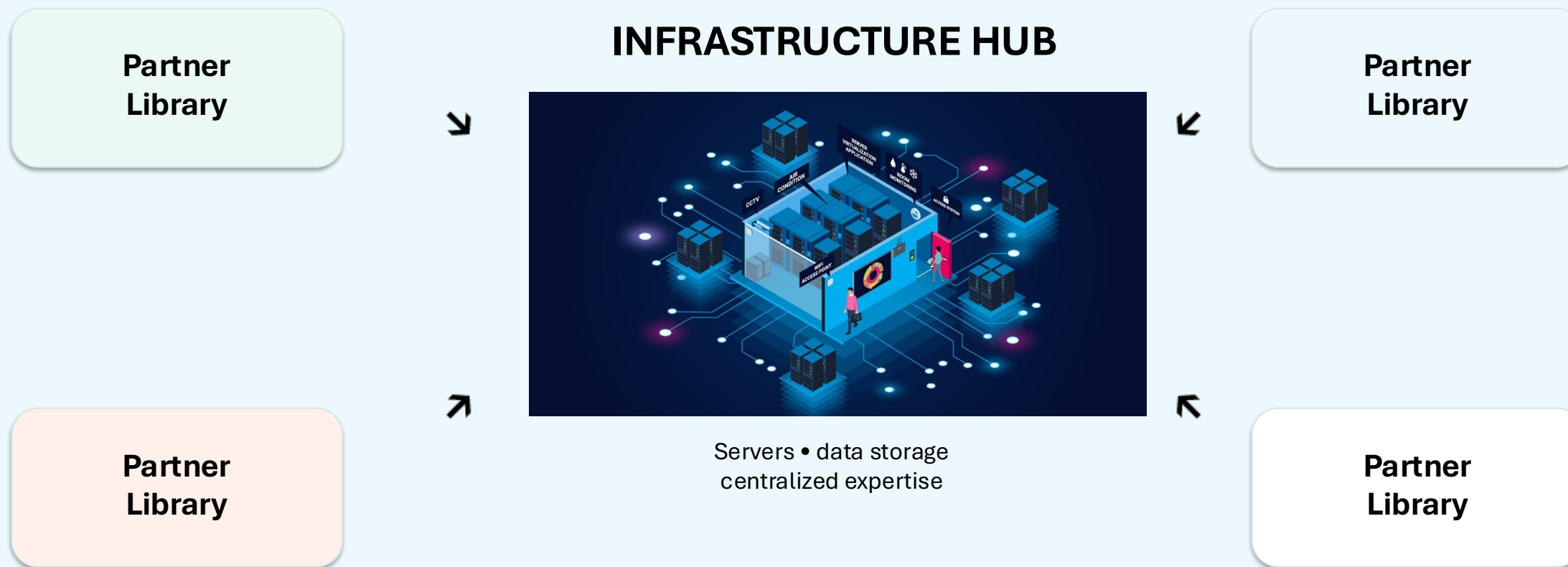
SHARED DIRECTOR



INSTITUTION B

- Separate board
- Separate budget
- Separate identity
- Separate Policies

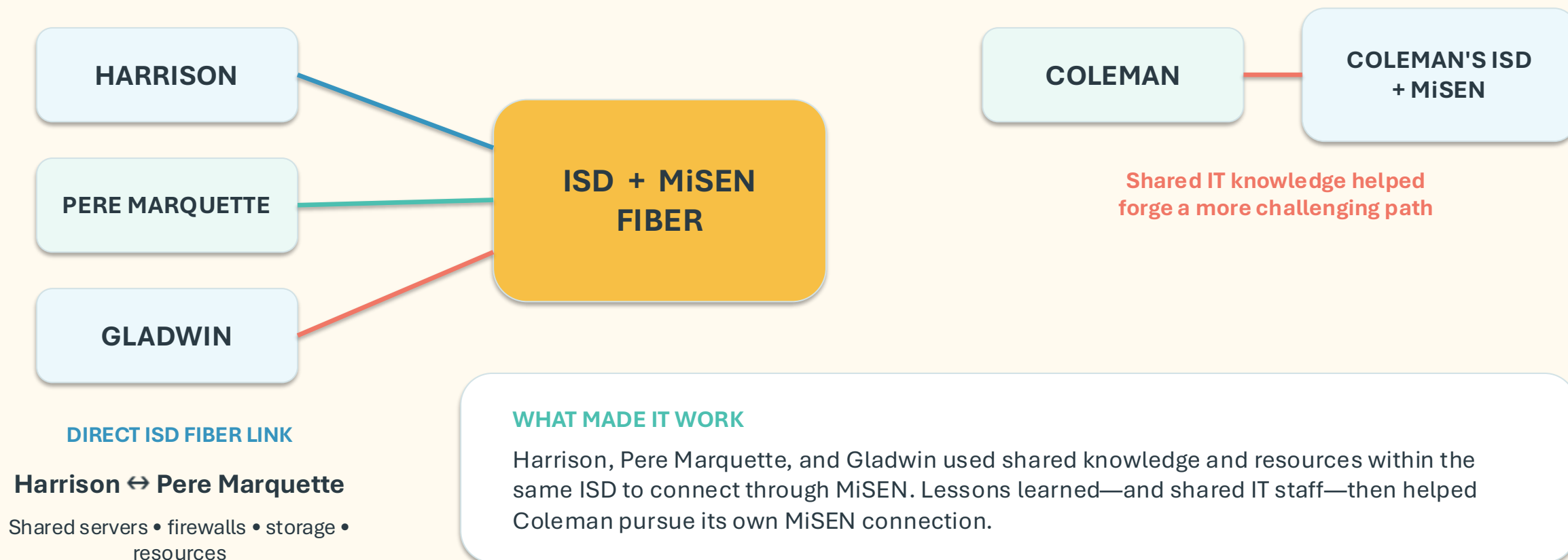
One technology hub, multiple libraries



Centralizing selected infrastructure can reduce duplicated hardware and concentrate technical expertise while each library remains operationally distinct.

Fiber Internet Through Collaboration

Shared knowledge helped four libraries build stronger connections.



One library figures it out. The next library doesn't have to start from scratch.

How a partnership grows



Important

The strongest partnerships often begin informally—with a phone call, a shared problem, or one project that proves the relationship has value.



What does success look like?

Less duplication

Fewer repeated purchases, processes, vendor relationships, or separate learning curves.

More capacity

Access to staff skills, infrastructure, and programming scale that may not exist locally.

Better reach

More patrons and communities can benefit from investments made across the partnership.



Useful measures: dollars avoided • staff hours saved • attendance • project completion • service reliability • new capabilities

Partnerships need clarity

Who owns the work?

Define responsibilities and who communicates with staff, vendors, boards, and partners.

How are costs handled?

Be clear about money, staff time, equipment, and what each organization contributes.

What remains local?

Identify decisions that stay with each board, director, or institution.

What if people change?

Document enough of the arrangement that it can survive turnover.

The formula

Trust makes collaboration possible. Clear expectations make it sustainable.



Q & A

