

INTERLIBRARY COOPERATION --  
A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE STATE LIBRARY  
OF PENNSYLVANIA

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I've used a variety of definitions of "cooperation" in the course of fulfilling my tasks, some half in jest like the one in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary of 1974: "a dynamic social process in ecological aggregations in which mutual benefits outweigh the disadvantages of crowding." The same source defined "consortium" as "the legal right of one spouse to the company, affection, and service of the other," and "cooperative" as "an enterprise of organization owned by and operated for the benefit of those using its services." Perhaps the most down-to-earth definition is that for the verb "to cooperate": "to associate with another or others for mutual benefits."

The first definition is not altogether inappropriate, because cooperation is likely to mean that from time to time you may have more persons in your library. You'll want to know that the benefits of cooperation offset the crowding. The second definition indicates to me that you'd best be serious in your endeavor, remembering that cooperation is by its nature a voluntary act but the rights and privileges of the partners need to be understood

by all. The third and fourth definitions ought to need no introduction or explanation.

Note that nothing in these definitions limits their applicability to size or location of the participating institutions. Libraries participating in cooperative programs may be large or small, rural or urban. What is important is the need or desire to provide service and the willingness to work with others toward that goal.

Mutual benefit, it seems to me, is what working together is all about. Like everything else we do in our libraries, cooperation requires effort, and effort is measured generally by the staff time it takes, the money it costs, and the results it delivers. If it does not pay off in benefits for all parties, someone, some library (sometimes, even all libraries participating) gets stuck with non-productive effort.

What should be the result of cooperation between libraries? My hands-down, no-competition answer is better service to library users. That service may be access to a broader range of materials, more comprehensive reference assistance, less time elapsed between patron request and satisfaction, but it is the user for whom library cooperation should be designed, just as it is the user who provides most of our libraries with their major reason for existence.

Very few of us are in the business of preserving, museum-style, the records of history for future generations to use.

The benefits to the user should be evident in more resources, a broader range of service, perhaps more hours of service, maybe more sites for service. Cooperation should enable us to achieve these benefits at a cost less than that necessary to do it alone, in isolation from other libraries.

Cooperation is not free. It costs, but it should help us to slow the rate of rise in costs.

The State Library of Pennsylvania has published two editions of an Inventory of Pennsylvania Library Cooperative Organizations. The most recent, issued early in 1979, contains data current in November 1978 for twenty-seven district library center programs and forty-four other library cooperative programs. We attempted to include all organizations which had three or more libraries participating, and if the organization were interstate in scope, a majority of members were Pennsylvania libraries. Some copies of the Inventory are still available, upon request, from the Bureau of Library Development at the State Library.

We found that these organizations provided such services as access to the OCLC network; access to other machine-readable data bases; bibliographic verification; continuing education programs, workshops, seminars; cooperative acquisition; cooperative cataloging; cooperative processing; cooperative purchasing; inter-library loan of films, monographs, periodicals, sound recordings, and materials in other formats; interlibrary loan location service; joint ownership of a film collection; literature

searches; photocopy service; professional assistance to staffs of member libraries; reference service for member libraries; reciprocal borrowing privileges; undergraduate borrowing privileges; union catalogs of member libraries' holdings; union lists of serials and of materials in other formats; shared use of audio-visual hardware; group fringe benefit programs; delivery services; graphic arts services; rotating deposit collections; and more.

These services have all been developed because librarians have recognized the need to improve services and have found a way to do so through cooperation in programs which have mutual benefit for all the participants. They have studied choices, made plans, sometimes changed course if what seemed appropriate turned out not to be appropriate in practice, and evaluated progress.

Many of these activities are strongly represented in the programs of urban libraries, but they are applicable to libraries in all sorts of communities, in all sorts of circumstances. Public libraries in smaller communities, school libraries, college libraries, hospital libraries, wherever they are, exist to provide reference service, information, facts, good reading, listening, viewing. Their materials may be used in the library or outside the library, and they may be used by individuals or by groups. Their materials may satisfy educational needs, or recreational needs, or personal needs of any sort.

It is precisely because in rural areas there are likely to be fewer libraries in a given area than in urban areas that the challenge for cooperation is both greater and more attractive.

As librarians, we can--we should--make it a point to know the resources, the strengths of other libraries in the area as well as our own. A community library council, which has representatives from all of the libraries, is a good way to begin. A community library council need not be a highly-structured group, but it should bring together the public librarians and school librarians (these two are in almost every community), college librarians, hospital librarians, law librarians, church librarians, and others. The council could provide a means for all the librarians to get to know what resources are available, what services are provided, what unmet needs the librarians perceive. It is a safe bet that in some communities, at least, having the council hold its meetings in different libraries in turn would give some librarians their first visit to some of the other libraries.

Can you direct a layman to a hospital library if he wants to borrow a medical book which you at the public library do not have? Have you talked about this with the librarian at the hospital?

What about law libraries? Do you know what a patron of the public library can get from the County Law Library?

What resources does the high school library have which can be made accessible to persons not connected with the school?

Participation in meetings of a community library council can help each librarian know better how to refer patrons as well as how to locate materials or special services for patrons. A council can help in promotion of library services because it represents all libraries in the community and not just a segment. Through a council, librarians might also explore ways to establish group purchase contracts for supplies or books or other items to stretch library budget dollars.

A public library participating in a system is involved in a cooperative program, since systems do allow residents to use any participating library. Among libraries not in the same system, "reciprocal borrowing" programs can be established when libraries and their boards agree to honor the cards of borrowers validly registered at another library.

Many systems have delivery services linking their members; libraries not in systems may want to explore a variety of options for delivery of materials between libraries, among them delivery service offered by the district library center, the intermediate unit, or the school district. District centers, intermediate units, and school districts all have the legal authority to enter into contracts with other organizations to provide or receive service.

Frequently, programs which cost relatively little can pay off in a big way with improved service. Most libraries have typed lists of periodicals currently received or held in back

file; depositing copies of those lists in other libraries in the area can help all libraries to expand their services. Some library systems are making plans to produce microfiche copies of their catalogs so that any system user can check the entire holdings of the system at any system library; making duplicate copies of the microfiche catalogs at little expense for deposit in school or college or special libraries can help both to increase appreciation for the services of the public library system and to expand services through any library in the area.

Most Pennsylvania libraries are familiar with the Pennsylvania Interlibrary Loan Code, published in 1979 and by mid-1980 endorsed by formal action of nearly 800 libraries of all sorts throughout the state. This Code includes suggested patterns for placing and routing requests and sets forth procedures for all types of libraries to make use of interlibrary loan services. Grant funds from the State Library supported the preparation of the Code; copies are available on request from the Bureau of Library Development. Workshops to assist librarians in the practice of interlibrary loan were held in April 1980 in six locations; nearly 400 persons from all types of libraries participated.

State Library grant funds have assisted in the establishment and continuing support of the statewide delivery system provided by the Interlibrary Delivery Service of Pennsylvania (IDS). IDS services reach twenty-three of the district library centers, some special libraries, and nearly eighty college and university lib-

raries across the state. Libraries of all type are eligible to join. For the smaller public library whose interlibrary loan requests are forwarded outside its area by the district library center, IDS can bring materials promptly from any part of the state.

State Library grant funds have been used to support participation by the District Library Centers in the OCLC, Inc., network services, through two Pennsylvania-based networks, PALINET and the Pittsburgh Regional Library Center (PRLC). District Centers have the capability, with OCLC, of providing cataloging for local libraries in their districts and are able to use the network's computer capability to locate materials for interlibrary loan and to transmit requests for such loans and maintain relevant records of the transactions.

The State Library is committed to helping improve library service throughout Pennsylvania. A major means of accomplishing that intent is support of public library improvement through consultant services of the Bureau of Library Development and through administration of a program of state aid to public libraries. The aid program, now in excess of \$9,000,000, is based on legislation enacted in 1961. Legislation is being sought this year (1980) to improve the aid formula and permit the distribution of additional money for the support of public libraries, public library systems, and district library centers.



The State Library is also seeking the passage of legislation (S.1204, P.N.1488) which would place in the State Library a responsibility to encourage, promote, and support interlibrary cooperative activity and which would authorize the appropriation of state funds to support cooperative programs.

In addition, the State Library administers funds under Titles I (public and institutional library service) and III (interlibrary cooperation) of the federal Library Services and Construction Act. LSCA funds have been used in every county of the Commonwealth to strengthen library programs, improve library collections, and make possible improved library services to the people of Pennsylvania. Announcements of the priorities for application for grants under LSCA Title I are mailed to public and institutional libraries in late winter each year; announcements about the availability and use of LSCA Title III funds are mailed to all public, academic, and special libraries, and to school district administrators in late winter.

I said that the challenge for cooperation among libraries in rural areas is greater and more attractive. The challenge is great because rural areas tend to have fewer and smaller libraries than urban areas, while the range of interest and information needs of the people are as broad as in more populous areas. At the same time, it is attractive because there is a greater opportunity to involve the total library resources of the area. A community library council, working to share personnel and services

and resources to meet total community needs for information, recreational reading, self-education, and support for formal education, can make itself an asset to the rural community which is seeking stability and a good life for its residents.