

## **Public Libraries and Multitype Cooperatives in Illinois: Implications of Service for Rural Libraries**

by Morgan Tracy

The evolution of the library cooperative is one of the most significant developments in the history of American librarianship. Stimulated by the federal mandate of the Library Services Act (LSA) of 1956, the concept of a library cooperative was introduced with the hope of improving library services and information access primarily for the population of rural areas (Ison, 1995; Kirks, 1989). Before this time, rural public libraries typically existed as isolated units, linked to other neighboring libraries only on an informal basis. Forty years after the passage of the LSA, it is difficult to imagine a rural public library, or any public library for that matter, that does not have some level of interaction with a cooperative system (Sager, 1992).

Since the passage of the LSA, however, transitions in federal policy have affected the role of the library cooperative in relation to rural libraries. For example, the legislation that succeeded the LSA in the 1960s, the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), shifted a large part of the legislative focus away from supporting rural library needs to addressing the problems of urban libraries. At present, the LSCA is undergoing another transition, this time to the Library Services and Technology Act, an Act which will redirect policy emphasis to the role of electronic information in the library. This latest evolution may have serious implications for the cooperative structure, since many historically cooperative based services can now be manipulated from a computer at the local library (Sager, 1992). Whether rural libraries will be able to adapt to this most recent policy shift as readily as their urban counterparts remains to be seen.

Given this historical pattern of federal legislation, it seems worthwhile to ask if the library cooperatives which were born of the original Library Services Act are currently perceived as effective in meeting the wants and needs of their member libraries, especially those libraries in rural areas. One state in particular that finds itself grappling with this question is Illinois, where an elaborately developed intrastate system of library cooperatives has been contending with the vicissitudes of library policy for thirty years. Illinois is a particularly interesting barometer of cooperative effectiveness, for the state contains a wide variety of public libraries, from libraries in the suburbs of Chicago which are plugged

firmly into the information superhighway to libraries in the southern part of the state that still lack a computer, or perhaps even a telephone.

How, then, do public libraries in Illinois view the support they receive from their cooperative systems, and are there any significant differences in perception between those libraries in a metropolitan setting versus those in a more rural environment? It is these two related questions that were the focus of a research project conducted by the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship at Clarion University of Pennsylvania in the fall of 1995, the results of which will be discussed in this paper. The project sought to assess the perceptions of public library directors in Illinois on the effectiveness of their library cooperative with regard to four specific service areas: continuing education, consultants' services, the promotion of automation, and the promotion of partnerships with other community agencies. Before the results of the survey are analyzed, a brief historical overview of library cooperatives in Illinois, their relationship to rural public libraries, previous attempts at evaluation of Illinois cooperative systems, and current standards for evaluating these systems will be considered.

### **LIBRARY COOPERATIVE SYSTEMS IN ILLINOIS**

The era of library cooperatives in Illinois began in 1965 when the Library Systems Act was passed as a state law (not to be confused with the federal Library Services Act). Prior to the Library Systems Act there had been very little statewide initiative to promote interlibrary cooperation (Halcli, 1990a). In fact, in the decades immediately preceding the Act, most attention from policymakers had been concentrated on stimulating the introduction of public library service to unserved rural areas, and not on improving the services of existing public libraries. The previous policy had strived to design large library districts and demonstrate their utility to areas without libraries, thereby convincing the local population to adopt this service through taxation. However, by the 1960s it was apparent that many rural communities were not willing to finance new library service with their tax revenue.

Consequently, the legislative mandate was redirected to addressing the needs of existing public libraries. A study commissioned by the Illinois Library Association in the early 1960s firmly supported this position by recommending that the state become actively involved in public library development through four methods: 1) providing equalization aid grants to supplement local tax support; 2) creating and

financing regional systems; 3) establishing four statewide reference centers; and 4) creating a union catalog and list of serials (Halcli, 1990a).

The second of these four objectives was codified by the Library Systems Act, as the Act's intent was to construct regional cooperative systems (18 at the time) that would be able, on one hand, to assist their member libraries in meeting minimum state standards of public library service, and on the other hand, to address the unique needs of member libraries from the diverse regions of Illinois. The law ensured that while funding for systems' operations would come from state revenues, the administration of systems would be conducted by an elected board of directors which were to represent member libraries. Since the initial passage of the Library Systems Act these library systems have incorporated other types of libraries into their framework, including academic, school, and special libraries, and presently every system in Illinois has a multitype membership.

### *Cooperative Systems and the Needs of Rural Libraries*

The diversity that characterizes the regions of Illinois which have been divided into library systems (now 12; see Appendix A) is particularly evident in terms of contrasts between urban and rural areas. On the one hand, three of the cooperative systems are located in the suburbs of Chicago, and they cover an area of just over 2,000 square miles and serve a population of over 4 million. On the other hand, one cooperative system in southern Illinois, the Shawnee System, covers over 12,000 square miles yet serves only 650,000 people and does not contain a city with a population of over 30,000. Most of the remaining systems fall somewhere in between these two extremes, typically covering a smaller area than the Shawnee System and in all cases containing at least one metropolitan area. The notable exception in terms of size is the Alliance System, which assimilated areas from several of the 17 original systems and now extends its reach over 14,000 square miles.

Outside of geographical area and population, the library systems in Illinois encompass a wide range of demographics as well. Generally, the rural areas which many systems serve have been experiencing higher unemployment, greater population decline, and a lower local tax base than many urban and suburban areas (Walzer & P'ng, 1993). Consequently, these rural areas have different needs for library support services than wealthier urban and suburban communities. One of the most persistent needs of rural areas is to establish library service in areas

that are without this amenity. As the State Library policy of the 1960s tended to push the issue of unserved areas to the background, this problem was not substantially redressed by the advent of regional systems (Ubel, 1990). Despite the efforts of Project Plus, a statewide program designed to enlarge the service area of existing libraries, the percentage of Illinoisans unserved by libraries only fell from 19.5 percent in 1965 to 15 percent in 1986 (Halcli, 1990a). With approximately 1.7 million people unserved in 1989, Illinois registered a greater unserved population than any other state in the country at that time.

A further problem for rural libraries in Illinois is money. With a shrinking tax base, many rural libraries are increasingly dependent on the equalization aid grants provided by the State Library to offset the decline in local revenues (Ubel, 1993). However, as of 1996 these grants only amounted to \$4.25 per capita, the same amount that had been instituted in 1977, and while in 1977 this aid equaled 58.6 percent of the average per capita funding for public libraries, by 1991 the proportion had dropped to 17.6 percent. At such a low level, this is suspect in its attempt to equalize the services between richer suburban libraries and poorer rural libraries, and therefore seems less effective in improving library services across the state, an important aim of the Library System Act.

In response to the particular needs of rural libraries, a Rural Library Panel appointed by the Secretary of State (who is also the State Librarian) formulated a series of recommended actions in 1991 for the State Library to improve rural library services ("Strengthening...", 1993). Several of these recommendations touch on areas that are already functions of regional cooperative systems, such as support for continuing education, automation, and community development, and are therefore suggestive, sometimes explicitly, that these regional systems can have an important role in helping to strengthen rural library services. At this point, it remains to be seen if the State Library will consistently commit their resources to the Panel's recommendations, and if the regional systems, each of which operates with a large measure of autonomy in terms of planning, will also be eager to embrace these recommendations.

### *Previous Evaluations of Cooperative Systems*

In the mid-1980s the State Library commissioned the consulting firm HBW Associates, Inc., to conduct an evaluation of the regional cooperative systems' effectiveness and to recommend future courses of

action (Avallone, 1987). The study revealed that 86 percent of responding libraries claimed that they had benefited from system membership. Furthermore, a high percentage of member libraries (79 percent) and system officials (88 percent) felt that the importance of the cooperative systems would increase over the next 15 years. Unfortunately, this general enthusiasm was countered by a 44 percent affirmative response among member libraries to the statement that they have adequate input into decision-making at the system level.

The most talked-about components of the HBW study, however, were the consulting firm's recommendations, which sparked intense debate within the Illinois library community, especially on issues that affected rural libraries. Many of the recommendations from the HBW report were disputed by library professionals, and a "Blue Ribbon Task Force," comprised of various Illinois librarians (including system directors), was appointed shortly after the study's release to offer a critique of the recommendations.

One recommendation of the HBW study expressed the necessity for systems to establish library service in unserved areas. The study offered several models for accomplishing this objective, including the creation of countywide libraries, the use of nearby community college libraries as public libraries, and the creation of small "community information centers," which were to consist of outlets of books and computer databases in shopping malls, either staffed or operated on a vending machine principle (HBW Associates, 1988). A further HBW recommendation pursuant to improving service to rural areas was to merge free-standing small libraries when to do so would prove more cost-effective.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force reacted to this vision of centralized library service supplemented by micro-sized branches with an endorsement of the initiative to reach out to unserved populations, but with loud opposition to the idea of phasing out small libraries, citing that the HBW report "shows no appreciation of the positive role that small libraries play in their communities" ("Final Report...", 1988, 437). The Task Force's argument was that a spirit of compromise must balance the positive aspects of new service programs, such as countywide libraries, and the need for local residents to harbor a sense of local pride in their information centers. The spirit of this compromise is captured by James Ubel (1990), Director of the Shawnee Library System, who advocates the development in rural areas of "community service centers," an expansion of HBW's "community information centers" in that they

would provide not only library resources, but would also house the outreach programs of various social service and adult education agencies, thereby fostering community involvement and development.

Another recommendation of the HBW study that was a cause of concern for rural libraries was the admonition that systems should move in their supportive role from a "provider" to a "facilitator." In the definitions of the Blue Ribbon Task Force, the system which provides focuses on furnishing materials to patrons either directly or indirectly via local libraries. In contrast, the system which facilitates focuses on promoting interlibrary resource-sharing. While it has been acknowledged by the Task Force and others that the progression from provider to facilitator should continue, it has also been pointed out that not every system can achieve this transformation on the same time line. As Halcli (1990a) notes, those libraries which have an abundance of resources and therefore belong to systems which are much more disposed to a facilitating role are usually found in suburban areas, while many rural libraries are without these resources and still rely on their system to act as a provider in many instances.

Finally, the recommendation of the HBW report which sparked the most controversy among the Illinois library community called for reducing the number of regional systems from 18, the number at the time, to 6 (Avallone, 1987). Many librarians feared that the large geographical areas which would be covered by the reduced number of systems would inhibit the efficiency of system services and resources (Schmitt, 1990). This recommendation was severely criticized by the Blue Ribbon Task Force, which argued that HBW offered no measurable rationale for such a massive conversion. The Task Force claimed that a set of standards for the objective evaluation of systems should be implemented before any restructuring took place. Since the release of the HBW study, these standards have indeed been implemented (to be described shortly), and the number of systems has been reduced to 12, although the direct causal relationship between these two events is unclear.

An interesting contrast to the HBW study is an earlier survey which sought the impressions of library directors from member public libraries towards the services of their cooperative systems, published in 1985 by the State Library in an issue of *Illinois Libraries Statistical Report* (Schmitt, 1990). This survey is significant to a great degree for documenting several differences in the perception of system services

between small and large libraries. For instance, the directors of libraries which served under 10,000 people felt that system consultants were more responsive in meeting their needs than did the directors of larger libraries. Also, respondents from these smaller libraries tended to give the staff at their system better quality and competency ratings than the ratings that were given to system staff by the heads of the other libraries. On a different note, the survey further revealed that librarians from libraries serving under 5,000 people were generally less likely to have visited the system agency (the system's headquarters) or to have served on a system committee.

### *Current Standards for Cooperative Systems*

As mentioned earlier, the HBW study stimulated the development of a set of statewide standards for measuring the activities of cooperative systems and for elucidating the corresponding responsibilities of member libraries. A new set of standards was in demand, for after the Library Systems Act had passed, State Library standards had focused more on the accumulation of quantifiable resources such as staff and books and less on the quality of services, and most systems had complied with these regulations by the end of the 1960s (Halcli, 1990b). Subsequently, evaluations were conducted only on a system-by-system basis until the HBW report in the mid 1980s recommended a more concrete method of evaluation. The standards which emerged are very important to the administration of library systems because they provide a basis for objectively evaluating system performance, which complements the subjective evaluations of individual systems (Illinois State Library, 1993; Halcli, 1990b).

The standards are entitled *Standards for the Services of Illinois Multitype Library Systems*, and they were designed by a subcommittee composed of two system directors, a public library director, a college library director, and a public library trustee. They are relatively comprehensive, covering the following "core" service areas in addition to general administrative standards: automation/technology, bibliographic access, consulting, continuing education, delivery, interlibrary loan, reciprocal access, and reference. The section of standards for each service is prefaced by a definition and an introduction, and the main body of specific rules is subdivided into three components: administration and service, staff and resources, and member responsibilities. At their heart, the objective of the standards is to ensure the attainment of a minimum level of system services while allowing for flexible planning by systems

based on local needs, an objective which fully supports the intent of the original Library Systems Act of 1965.

## **SURVEY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY DIRECTORS**

In light of the recent effort within the Illinois State Library to establish statewide minimum standards of services for library cooperative systems, it seemed highly appropriate to investigate the current sentiment of public library directors towards the effectiveness of these services. Furthermore, in light of the 1991 Rural Library Panel recommendations and the observations of the Blue Ribbon Task Force, it also seemed to be appropriate to consider the distinct impressions of rural public library directors to the services offered by their cooperative systems, as opposed to the impressions of directors of urban and suburban public libraries. A research study conducted by the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship at Clarion University of Pennsylvania investigated both of these concerns through a survey instrument in the fall of 1995.

### *Objectives*

The purpose of the survey was to question public library directors in Illinois on their perceptions of administrative support from their regional multitype cooperative library system in the areas of continuing education, consulting services, automation, and community partnerships. The first three of these service areas were drawn directly from the list of "core" services identified in the *Standards for the Services of Illinois Multitype Library Systems*, while the fourth service was chosen in light of the increasing prevalence of the concept in the library literature. The survey assumed, therefore, that all library systems were actively striving to advance the first three areas of service, since system support of these functions is mandated by the State Library. However, this was not assumed for the fourth area of service, the support of which is not specifically required by the State Library. In addition to identifying the overall reaction from public library directors throughout Illinois, a further purpose of the survey was to compare and contrast the perceptions of rural and urban public library directors as distinct groups.

### *Methodology*

Surveys were mailed to a sample of 150 public library directors from throughout the state of Illinois, each of whom was identified using the 1995-1996 edition of the *American Library Directory*. Seventy-five



of the selected libraries were considered to be rural based on a definition established by the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship. This definition encompasses all libraries which serve under 25,000 people and are not located within a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The remaining seventy-five libraries were considered to be urban, implying that they *either* served a population over 25,000 or were located in a MSA. Surveys were sent, along with a personally addressed cover letter, to libraries from every regional system in Illinois with the exception of the Chicago Library System, which was purposefully excluded from the survey because it contains one public library with branches rather than a group of autonomous public libraries.

### *Results*

Six weeks after the surveys were mailed a total of 105 responses had been received, yielding a highly favorable return rate of 70 percent. From this general group two smaller groups were selected to reflect an urban sample and a rural sample. Using the zip codes on the postmarks of returned surveys, a group of 31 responses were identified from suburban libraries located in the Chicagoland area, and 24 responses were identified from rural libraries located primarily in the southern and eastern areas of the state. The following description of the survey results (see Appendix B for full results) will accordingly examine the overall responses and highlight those differences between the identified responses from rural and urban libraries.

### *Observations*

The first half of the survey (Questions # 1-10) asked respondents about their experiences with the continuing education workshops and consulting services offered by their cooperative system. The vast majority of overall respondents had participated in at least one continuing education workshop (94%) and had sought consulting services (90%) at least once within the last year, certainly an encouraging sign to system administrators (see Questions 1 & 6). Moreover, over 87% of both the urban and rural sample groups had also engaged in these activities.

With regard to how often they actually took advantage of these services, the mean number of workshops attended by the overall respondents was greater than four, and the mean number of consultations was almost six (see Questions 2 & 7). A wide range in participation was evident, as several respondents had used these services more than ten times over the past year. Interestingly, while more urban library directors

(22% of the urban group) reported attending over ten continuing education workshops than did rural library directors (5% of the rural group), the reverse held true for the use of consulting services, where seeking consultation more than ten times was reported by 37% of the rural respondents and only 12% of the urban respondents. This reversal in proportions could signal a difficulty faced by rural librarians in obtaining transportation to centrally located workshops, and may indicate the need of rural librarians to have system experts come to them physically or by phone rather than paying a visit to their system's headquarters for expertise.

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that within the rural sample group more respondents ascribed the phrase "very helpful" to their experiences with system consultants (75%) than they did to attending continuing education workshops (33%) (see Questions 3 and 8). Meanwhile, the percentages of urban respondents who felt that their experiences with these two system services had been "very helpful" were at the same level (57% for workshops, 59% for consulting). Overall, 45 of 96 respondents (47%) considered their system's continuing education workshops "very helpful," and 67 of 96 respondents (70%) felt their system's consulting services met this description. As proof of the enthusiasm for these services, only 8 of 96 respondents (8%) evaluated these experiences to be "minimally helpful," and not one respondent felt their experience was "not helpful at all."

In relation to the perceived need for their library system to offer more, less, or the same number of continuing education workshops, the majority of those who answered the question felt that no change in number was necessary (see Questions 4 & 9). This held true for the overall group (59%), the rural group (64%), and the urban group (68%). The same percentage of overall respondents were also satisfied with the present level of consulting services, while 58% of rural respondents and 52% of urban respondents were satisfied. The balance of respondents supported extending workshops and consulting services, with the exception of 4 respondents in the overall group who wished to see fewer workshops offered by their system. These percentages seem to indicate that systems are meeting member libraries' demand for professional development and advice, but that some extension of services would not be unwelcome.

The final question on continuing education and consultants' services asked survey recipients to identify two areas of need from a choice of

six (see Questions 5 & 10) which they would most like to see addressed by their library system. The two most prominent choices by far and away were "library automation" and "management/personnel issues," each of which garnered the votes of over 50% of all respondents. Curiously, however, while the votes of the urban sample group were weighted heavily towards these two areas, the rural group was more ambivalent, dividing choices more equally, particularly in terms of possible topics for continuing education workshops, as no one choice received more than a 42% level of support.

The next four questions on the survey (# 11-14) concerned library automation. The survey sought to discover both the present extent of automation enjoyed by these libraries and the perceptions of the library directors towards any automation support they received from their cooperative system. In terms of currently functioning automation services, only two respondents claimed they had none in their library, while at least 63% of all respondents had six of the seven types of automated services listed in Question 11. The notable exception was access to a community network, which only 34 respondents (32%) confirmed as operational in their library. Perhaps not surprisingly, the greatest discrepancies between rural and urban libraries documented on the survey were those in relation to the level of automation. On one hand, at least 84% of urban respondents enjoyed every automated resource listed in Question 11, with the exception of access to a community network (39%). On the other hand, only one automated resource (software for staff use) was owned by a great majority of rural respondents (79%), and no other automation resource was held by more than 58% of rural respondents. Most striking was the gap between the two types of libraries with regard to "online/CD-ROM reference resources" (held by 90% of the urban group and 33% of the rural group) and access to the Internet (held by 94% of the urban group and 42% of the rural group).

Curiously, the higher levels of automation in urban libraries did not seem to cause the directors of these libraries to be more satisfied than rural library directors in their ability to adequately serve patrons' needs (see Question 12). In fact, while 11 of the 23 rural respondents (48%) answering the question expressed satisfaction, only 8 of 31 urban respondents (26%) felt the same way. Overall, 37% of respondents thought that the current level of automation was satisfactory in meeting the demands of patrons. Importantly, however, all respondents overwhelmingly indicated that their library system provided support for enhancing their automation levels, including an affirmative response

from 26 urban libraries (84%) and all 24 rural libraries (100%) (see Question 13).

The last question on automation queried respondents as to the top two automation issues that they would most like to see their system address (see Question 14). Overall, the most frequent choice was "lowering telecommunications charges" (62%), followed by "how to connect to the Internet" (35%), and "how to establish and use a community network" (30%). There was a marked difference in the choices of the rural and urban sample groups, especially with regard to "lowering telecommunications charges," which was selected by 75% of rural respondents but only 39% of urban respondents, and "how to establish and use a community network," which was chosen by 48% of the urban group but only 17% of the rural group. These differences suggest different stages of development among rural and urban libraries with respect to electronically networked information, for urban library directors are focused on a specific feature of the information superhighway, community networks, while rural library directors are simply trying to pay the basic toll to get on the on-ramp.

Questions 15 through 18 on the survey inquired into the current level of cooperation between libraries and other community agencies and the impressions of library directors on system support for this resource-sharing. Responses revealed that 84% of the overall group of library directors do indeed cooperate with agencies from the greater community, and that this cooperative activity is present within the rural and urban sample groups at similar levels (88% and 87% respectively). Within the overall group, 70% of libraries shared information resources on local social services and 53% shared information on economic opportunities and development (Question 16). In the sample groups, sharing information resources on social services was more common among urban libraries (81%) than rural libraries (63%), but the reverse held true for economic development information, which was cooperatively provided by 67% of the rural group but only 35% of the urban group. A cause of the latter difference might be the hard economic times rural Illinois has experienced lately and the great need to rejuvenate rural economies. The higher incidence of cooperatively shared social services information among urban libraries is more perplexing.

Systems are active in encouraging resource-sharing activities, as

testified by 73% of those library directors who responded to Question 17. Notably, however, while a high percentage of rural library directors (83%) felt such encouragement, the feeling was shared by only 58% of their peers in urban libraries. With regard to more system encouragement, 68% or better of the urban and rural groups were satisfied with the present level of system effort (see Question 18).

Finally, Questions 19-20 asked respondents if they perceived their own library's interests to be well represented in the administration of their regional system and in the Illinois State Library. In a striking contrast, 71% of those respondents who answered the first question voiced their belief that they were represented in their system, but only 47% of responding directors felt the same way about their representation with the State Library. Similarly, the responses of both urban and rural library directors revealed that confidence is much greater with respect to system representation than it is for state representation, but also revealed that the confidence of the group of rural library directors in representation at the state level is much higher than it is for the group of urban library directors (63% to 39%). Many rural librarians apparently do not feel grossly neglected by those in the state capitol, a sentiment that does not seem to be shared by urban librarians.

### *Personal Comments*

Numbers, of course, do not always tell the full story, and this survey is no exception. Therefore, in an effort to flesh out the statistics described above, the following comments have been taken from the responses of individual library directors.

“Our library system has always been most cooperative in all issues brought to their attention. The consultants are great in getting answers to my questions.”

“Our library system ... has been very very helpful to us. The consultants are really willing to help every time I have asked. I truly appreciate all the help they have given us.”

“[Our] library system is most helpful—at present the system is going to computer ordering of loan material and there is much to learn. They offer many workshops and I hope they repeat [them] later when we are ready to do it. I believe they will.”

“We have a State Librarian...who once headed a rural task force, so he is aware of problems of small libraries. He and the State Library have addressed issues, such as automation, and are initiating action to keep small rural libraries as up-to-date as possible.”

“The library system is working diligently to see that as many libraries go online as possible. They also encourage seeking ways to provide service to the unserved. Unfortunately I am not sure that the level of support is matched by the State Library.”

“I think that a lot of State Library people don’t know what a small rural library is really like.”

“We feel that it has probably been a long time since governing authorities have really been in small libraries. So many regulations are beyond our capabilities—or needs.”

“Both State Library and library system do not live in `real world.’ In spite of automation and Internet, our patrons still want books and magazines. We get no support in this very basic function that we do and try to do well... Our system and State Library should be subsidizing the automation costs at the local level since they are the ones pushing it!”

“...we have not sought the assistance from our system consultants in over a year because they have become less and less helpful with questions generated from the library. They are more willing to help with questions in regard to projects, etc. sponsored by the system... Most of the services previously provided to member libraries have been eliminated, curtailed, or turned back to the individual libraries. The system refers to these actions as `empowering’ the member libraries. And so our library struggles on, trying to serve the community with no additional funds or staff, but with an ever-increasing workload.”

“Four systems have merged into an impossibly large geographic area, leaving us on the very fringe of the system, and in a different area code than most. We do not feel a part of the system any longer.”

“Larger and more affluent public libraries tend to need system support less than the smaller, rural libraries where there may be less professional expertise and training on staff.”

## Conclusions

As these selected personal comments illustrate, the multitype library cooperative systems in Illinois have, on one hand, much to be proud of, and on the other hand, a great need for improvement. This seems particularly true in relation to rural public libraries, the directors of which in many instances are very grateful for the support from their system but at other times are critical of their system's oversight of local needs. The undeniable quotient of all the responses, however, is that the cooperative system behavior has a definite impact on local library activity, whether that impact is perceived as a positive presence or a neglectful absence.

Statistics from the survey, in contrast, generally tend to confirm the more positive effects of system activity upon rural libraries. In fact, rural respondents were more inclined than urban respondents to perceive their systems as supportive in many areas of library activity, such as consultants' services, the development of automation, and the promotion of community partnerships. This dispensation of rural library directors to primarily affirm the role of their cooperative systems may be directly related to the position of rural libraries. Since rural libraries experience disadvantages in terms of geographical isolation, a lack of technology, and a lower economic base, a cooperative system may be much more important in strengthening library services through resource sharing and education in rural areas than it is in an exclusively urban setting.

Of course, the irony of this conclusion is that the whole idea of cooperative systems, which grew from the federal Library Services Act of 1956, was originally designed to benefit rural libraries. In Illinois in the mid-1960s this idea was not necessarily forgotten, but just superseded by a plan which broadened the scope of library systems to all areas of the state, both urban and rural. Thirty years later, then, it certainly may come as a pleasant, if not unexpected, revelation that both urban and rural library directors are generally happy with the level of support extended to them by their cooperative systems.

However, while not wishing to detract from the benefits that cooperative systems provide to both urban and rural libraries, the shift in perception which fueled the Illinois Library Systems Act of 1965 has perhaps served to impair the development of rural libraries in Illinois in two important ways. First, there has been limited attention given to reducing the number of rural Illinois residents unserved by a library, as noted earlier. Secondly, the creation of systems which comprise both

urban and rural libraries, and more recently, the creation of the state-wide *Standards* for all systems, are both factors which pose the risk of neglecting rural libraries.

For example, part of the risk in implementing system-based objectives for a service such as automation, a service broadly mandated by the State Library, is that it may be difficult to balance the different needs of rural and urban libraries. These differences were evident within the survey results, which found that many rural library directors possess less automated resources than their urban counterparts but are often more satisfied with these limited resources. In this case, the ability of the system to reconcile the universal goal of automation with divergences in local library behavior will depend heavily on the ability of the system to respect the needs of all member libraries and incorporate these needs from the grassroots level into any service plan. If this respect is not administered, those libraries with fewer resources, the rural libraries, may develop the sense that they carry little influence, and may increasingly feel alienated from their cooperative system's plans, which of all things should be placing a high priority on these rural interests.

In weighing all of these positives and negatives, it can be said that the multitype library cooperative systems in Illinois at the current time are undoubtedly providing an indispensable service to rural libraries, and indeed to all libraries, particularly in the areas of continuing education, consultants' services, and automation development. This service is now supported and ensured by a codified set of statewide standards. In addition, there seems to be a relatively strong initiative at the system level to promote interaction between local libraries and other community agencies in sharing information. However, this is no time for the cooperative systems in Illinois to rest on their laurels, especially in light of the unique needs that are being voiced in rural areas. The challenge facing these systems is to continually conduct evaluations not only to ensure that they are fulfilling their obligations designed at the state or system level, but also to ensure that they are actively listening to the specific problems and criticisms that emanate from their member libraries, from the largest and most urbane to the smallest and most remote. Only then will these systems fulfill their part as the agency of a *cooperative* system, one that is responsive to all with a sense of equity and fairness.



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## Appendix B

### SURVEY RESULTS - TOTAL (105 RESPONSES)

**Questions 1 - 5 concern your experience with continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system.**

**Q1:** Over the previous twelve months, have you participated in any continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system?

a. yes: 99 (94%)      b. no: 6 (6%)

**Q2:** In how many continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system did you participate over the last twelve months?

1: 12 (11%)	5: 7 (7%)	9: 0
2: 15 (14%)	6: 12 (11%)	10: 1 (1%)
3: 15 (14%)	7: 1 (1%)	11: 0
4: 11 (10%)	8: 1 (1%)	12: 4 (4%)
		16: 1 (1%)

2-3: 3 (3%)	4-6: 1 (1%)	
2-4: 1 (1%)	6-10: 1 (1%)	
3-4: 3 (3%)	8-10: 1 (1%)	
3-5: 1 (1%)	10+: 1 (1%)	
35 (various staff): 1 (1%)	24: 1 (1%)	
85+ (for 64 staff): 1 (1%)		
unknown: 1 (1%)	no answer: 9 (9%)	

**Q3:** Did you consider these continuing education workshops to have been, on average:

a. very helpful:	45	(43%)
b. somewhat helpful:	43	(41%)
c. minimally helpful:	8	(8%)
d. not helpful at all:	0	
a-b: 2 (2%)	b-c: 1 (1%)	
no answer:	6 (6%)	

**Q4:** In the future, would you like to see more, less, or the same amount of continuing education workshops offered by your system every year?

a. more continuing education workshops:	37	(35%)
b. less continuing education workshops:	4	(4%)
c. no change in the number of workshops:	59	(56%)
no answer:	5	(5%)

Q5: Which of the following topics would you *most* like to see addressed in future continuing education workshops: (please check your top two choices)

library automation:	53	(50%)
management/personnel issues:	64	(61%)
budgeting/fund-raising:	26	(25%)
technical services (cataloging, acquisitions):	16	(15%)
interlibrary cooperation (including interlibrary loan):	12	(11%)
cooperation between libraries and other community agencies:	24	(23%)
other:		
online searching, electronic/online reference, building specifications, collection development, internet, state law	1 each	(1%)

**Questions 6 - 10 concern your experience with the services of consultants from your library system.**

Q6: Over the previous twelve months, have you personally sought assistance on a specific issue from the consultants at your library system?

a. yes:	94	(90%)	b. no:	10	(10%)
no answer:	1	(1%)			

Q7: How many times over the previous twelve months have you sought assistance from the consultants at your library system?

1:	4	(4%)	6:	4	(4%)	11:	1	(1%)
2:	10	(10%)	7:	0		12:	2	(2%)
3:	11	(10%)	8:	4	(4%)	15:	1	(1%)
4:	10	(4%)	9:	0		20:	2	(2%)
5:	4	(4%)	10:	7	(7%)	24:	1	(1%)
2-3:	2	(2%)	1-5:	1	(1%)			
3-4:	2	(2%)	5-6:	1	(1%)			
3-5:	3	(3%)	5-10:	1	(1%)			
several times/week:	2	(2%)						
more than 10:	3	(3%)	several:	2	(2%)			
unknown:	14	(13%)	no answer:	11	(10%)			

Q8: How would you rate your experience with your library system's consultants:

a. very helpful:	67	(64%)
b. somewhat helpful:	21	(20%)
c. minimally helpful:	8	(8%)
d. not helpful at all:	0	
no answer:	9	(9%)

Q9: Would you like to see the level of assistance from the consultants in your library system expanded, or are you satisfied with the present level?

a. expand level of consultants' assistance:	43	(41%)
b. satisfied with level of consultants' assistance:	61	(58%)
no answer:	1	(1%)

Q10: For which of the following needs at your library would you *most* likely be willing to seek assistance from a consultant at your library system:

(please check your top two choices)

library automation:	75	(71%)
management/personnel issues:	39	(37%)
budgeting/fund-raising:	21	(20%)
technical services (cataloging, acquisitions):	21	(20%)
interlibrary cooperation (including interlibrary loan):	20	(19%)
cooperation between libraries and other community agencies:	14	(13%)
other:		
legal	7	(7%)
state library rules	4	(4%)
grants	3	(3%)
board/trustees	2	(2%)
building specifications, internet, paperwork		
multi-library automation, unusual problems		
	1 each	(1%)

**Questions 11 - 14 concern your experience with support from your library system for the level of automation in your library.**

Q11: Which of the following types of automation are available at your library:  
(please check all that apply)

software applications (word processing, database):		
for staff use:	95	(90%)
for public use:	66	(63%)
online/cd-rom reference resources:	70	(67%)
online public access catalog:	73	(70%)
circulation control:	77	(73%)
access to a community network:	34	(32%)
access to the Internet:	75	(71%)
none:	2	(2%)
no answer:	1	(1%)

Q12: Are you satisfied that the current level of automation in your library (even if there is none) adequately addresses the needs of your patrons?  
 a. yes: 38 (36%)                      b. no: 66 (63%)  
 no answer: 1 (1%)

Q13: Do you feel that your library system provides encouragement and assistance for enhancing the current level of automation at your library?  
 a. yes: 89 (85%)                      b. no: 14 (13%)  
 split answer: 1 (1%)  
 no answer: 1 (1%)

Q14: Which of the following concerns about the future of library automation in your library would you *most* like to see your library system address: (please check your top two choices)

how to purchase new automation systems:	19	(18%)
how to maintain and repair automation systems:	27	(26%)
how to establish and use a community network:	32	(30%)
how to connect to and use the Internet:	37	(35%)
lowering telecommunications charges:	65	(62%)
other: funding, database maintenance, subsidies, responsive management, more databases, security, purchase upgrades, use of cd-rom/online, general intro, work with macs, network school/public libraries, shared databases	1 each	(1%)

**Questions 15 - 18 concern your experience with support from your library system for cooperation with other community agencies.**

Q15: Does your library cooperate with other community agencies in providing information resources to people in the community?

a. yes: 88 (84%)      b. no: 17 (16%)

Q16: What types of information resources are shared between community agencies and your library and made available to people in the community:

(please check all that apply)

information on economic

opportunities/development: 56 (53%)

information on local social services: 74 (70%)

other:

city documents 3 (3%)

government information 3 (3%)

small business information 2 (2%)

literacy 2 (2%)

employment information, genealogy, grants, government documents, local statistics, local documents & archives, flood prevention, homebound delivery, clubs & organizations, local business, education, health, school, art, cultural affairs, large print books, recreation

1 each (1%)

no answer: 18 (17%)

Q17: Have you received any encouragement from your library system to pursue cooperation with other community agencies?

a. yes: 72 (69%)      b. no: 26 (25%)

don't ask system: 1 (1%)

no answer: 6 (6%)

Q18: Do you wish there was more encouragement from your library system to pursue cooperation with other community agencies, or are you satisfied with the present level of encouragement:

a. more encouragement: 26 (25%)

b. satisfied with present level of encouragement: 75 (71%)

both: 1 (1%)

no answer: 3 (3%)

**Questions 19 & 20 concern your perceptions on how well your library is represented in your library system and in the state library.**

Q19: Do you feel that the interests of your library are well represented in the governance of your library system?

a. yes:	74	(70%)
b. no:	19	(18%)
c. unsure:	11	(10%)
no answer:	1	(1%)

Q20: Do you feel that the interests of your library are well represented in the governance of your state library?

a. yes:	48	(46%)
b. no:	28	(27%)
c. unsure:	27	(26%)
no answer:	2	(2%)

## SURVEY RESULTS - URBAN (31 RESPONSES)

### Questions 1 - 5 concern your experience with continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system.

Q1: Over the previous twelve months, have you participated in any continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system?

a. yes: 30 (97%)      b. no: 1 (3%)

Q2: In how many continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system did you participate over the last twelve months?

1: 1 (3%)	5: 1 (3%)	9: 0
2: 5 (16%)	6: 3 (10%)	10: 1 (3%)
3: 3 (10%)	7: 0	11: 0
4: 5 (16%)	8: 0	12: 3 (10%)
		16: 0
2-3: 2 (6%)	4-6: 0	
2-4: 1 (3%)	6-10: 1 (3%)	
3-4 : 0	8-10: 1 (3%)	
3-5: 0		
35 (various staff): 1 (3%)		
85+ (for 64 staff): 1 (3%)		
unknown: 0	no answer: 2 (6%)	

Q3: Did you consider these continuing education workshops to have been, on average:

a. very helpful:	17	(55%)
b. somewhat helpful:	12	(39%)
c. minimally helpful:	1	(3%)
d. not helpful at all:	0	
no answer:	1	(3%)

Q4: In the future, would you like to see more, less, or the same amount of continuing education workshops offered by your system every year?

a. more continuing education workshops:	9	(29%)
b. less continuing education workshops:	0	
c. no change in the number of workshops:	21	(68%)
no answer:	1	(3%)

Q5: Which of the following topics would you *most* like to see addressed in future continuing education workshops: (please check your top two choices)

library automation:	23	(74%)
management/personnel issues:	23	(74%)
budgeting/fund-raising:	4	(13%)



Q5 *cont'd*

technical services		
(cataloging, acquisitions):	2	( 6%)
interlibrary cooperation		
(including interlibrary loan):	0	
cooperation between libraries		
and other community agencies:	4	(13%)
other:		
building specifications	1	( 3%)
online searching	1	( 3%)
electronic/onlince reference	1	( 3%)

**Questions 6 - 10 concern your experience with the services of consultants from your library system.**

Q6: Over the previous twelve months, have you personally sought assistance on a specific issue from the consultants at your library system?

a. yes: 27 (27%) b. no: 3 (10%)  
no answer: 1 ( 3%)

Q7: How many times over the previous twelve months have you sought assistance from the consultants at your library system?

1: 3 (10%)	6: 0	11: 0
2: 4 (13%)	7: 1 ( 3%)	12: 1 ( 3%)
3: 3 (10%)	8: 1 ( 3%)	15: 0
4: 5 (16%)	9: 0	20: 0
5: 2 ( 6%)	10: 2 ( 6%)	24: 0
2-3: 1 ( 3%)	5-6: 0	
3-4: 0	5-10: 0	
3-5: 2 ( 6%)	10-12: 0	
1-5: 1 ( 3%)		

several times/week: 1 ( 3%)  
more than 10: 0 several: 1 ( 3%)  
unknown: 1 ( 3%) no answer: 3 (10%)

Q8: How would you rate your experience with your library system's consultants:

a. very helpful: 17 (55%)  
b. somewhat helpful: 7 (23%)  
c. minimally helpful: 5 (16%)  
d. not helpful at all: 0  
no answer: 2 ( 6%)

Q9: Would you like to see the level of assistance from the consultants in your library system expanded, or are you satisfied with the present level?

a. expand level of consultants' assistance: 14 (45%)

b. satisfied with level of consultants' assistance: 16 (52%)  
 no answer: 1 (3%)

Q10: For which of the following needs at your library would you *most* likely be willing to seek assistance from a consultant at your library system:  
 (please check your top two choices)

library automation:	22	(71%)
management/personnel issues:	16	(25%)
budgeting/fund-raising:	2	(6%)
technical services		
(cataloging, acquisitions):	1	(3%)
interlibrary cooperation		
(including interlibrary loan):	3	(10%)
cooperation between libraries		
and other community agencies:	3	(10%)
other:		
legal	4	(13%)
state library rules	2	(6%)
grants	2	(6%)
board/trustees	1	(3%)
building specifications	1	(3%)

**Questions 11 - 14 concern your experience with support from your library system for the level of automation in your library.**

Q11: Which of the following types of automation are available at your library:  
 (please check all that apply)

software applications (word processing, database):		
for staff use:	30	(97%)
for public use:	36	(84%)
online/cd-rom reference resources:	28	(90%)
online public access catalog:	26	(84%)
circulation control:	30	(97%)
access to a community network:	12	(39%)
access to the Internet:	29	(94%)
none:	0	

Q12: Are you satisfied that the current level of automation in your library (even if there is none) adequately addresses the needs of your patrons?

a. yes: 8 (26%)    b. no: 23 (74%)

Q13: Do you feel that your library system provides encouragement and assistance for enhancing the current level of automation at your library?

a. yes: 26 (84%)    b. no: 5 (16%)

Q14: Which of the following concerns about the future of library automation in your library would you *most* like to see your library system address: (please check your top two choices)

how to purchase new automation systems:	7	(23%)
how to maintain and repair automation systems:	7	(23%)
how to establish and use a community network:	15	(48%)
how to connect to and use the Internet:	13	(42%)
lowering telecommunications charges:	12	(39%)
other:		
use of cd-rom/online, security, work with macs general intro,		
shared databases	1 each	(3%)

**Questions 15 - 18 concern your experience with support from your library system for cooperation with other community agencies.**

Q15: Does your library cooperate with other community agencies in providing information resources to people in the community?

a. yes: 27 (87%)      b. no: 4 (13%)

Q16: What types of information resources are shared between community agencies and your library and made available to people in the community: (please check all that apply)

information on economic		
opportunities/development:	11	(35%)
information on local social services:	25	(81%)
other:		
government information	3	(10%)
homebound delivery, clubs & organizations,		
local business, education, recreation	1 each	(3%)
no answer:	4	(13%)

Q17: Have you received any encouragement from your library system to pursue cooperation with other community agencies?

a. yes: 18 (58%)      b. no: 12 (39%)

no answer: 1 (3%)

Q18: Do you wish there was more encouragement from your library system to pursue cooperation with other community agencies, or are you satisfied with the present level of encouragement:

a. more encouragement:	8	(26%)
b. satisfied with present level of encouragement:	21	(68%)
both:	1	(3%)
no answer:	1	(3%)

**Questions 19 & 20 concern your perceptions on how well your library is represented in your library system and in the state library.**

Q19: Do you feel that the interests of your library are well represented in the governance of your library system?

- a. yes: 24 (77%)
- b. no: 6 (19%)
- c. unsure: 1 (3%)

Q20: Do you feel that the interests of your library are well represented in the governance of your state library?

- a. yes: 12 (39%)
- b. no: 12 (39%)
- c. unsure: 7 (23%)

**SURVEY RESULTS - RURAL (24 RESPONSES)**

**Questions 1 - 5 concern your experience with continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system.**

**Q1:** Over the previous twelve months, have you participated in any continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system?

a. yes: 21 (88%)      b. no: 3 (13%)

**Q2:** In how many continuing education workshops sponsored by your library system did you participate over the last twelve months?

1: 1 (4%)	5: 1 (4%)	9: 0
2: 6 (25%)	6: 2 (8%)	10: 0
3: 4 (17%)	7: 0	11: 0
4: 5 (21%)	8: 0	12: 1 (4%)
		16: 0
2-3: 0	4-6: 0	
2-4: 0	6-10: 0	
3-4: 0	8-10: 0	
3-5: 1 (4%)		
85+ (for 64 staff): 0		
unknown: 0		
no answer: 3 (13%)		

**Q3:** Did you consider these continuing education workshops to have been, on average:

a. very helpful: 7 (29%)  
 b. somewhat helpful: 12 (50%)  
 c. minimally helpful: 2 (8%)  
 d. not helpful at all: 0  
 no answer: 3 (13%)

**Q4:** In the future, would you like to see more, less, or the same amount of continuing education workshops offered by your system every year?

a. more continuing education workshops: 8 (33%)  
 b. less continuing education workshops: 0  
 c. no change in the number of workshops: 14 (58%)  
 no answer: 2 (8%)

Q5: Which of the following topics would you most like to see addressed in future continuing education workshops: (please check your top two choices)

library automation:	10	(42%)
management/personnel issues:	9	(38%)
budgeting/fund-raising:	8	(33%)
technical services		
(cataloging, acquisitions):	6	(25%)
interlibrary cooperation		
(including interlibrary loan):	5	(21%)
cooperation between libraries		
and other community agencies:	6	(25%)
other:		
collection development	1	(4%)
state law	1	(4%)

**Questions 6 - 10 concern your experience with the services of consultants from your library system.**

Q6: Over the previous twelve months, have you personally sought assistance on a specific issue from the consultants at your library system?

a. yes: 23 (96%)      b. no: 1 (4%)

Q7: How many times over the previous twelve months have you sought assistance from the consultants at your library system?

1: 0	6: 2 (8%)	11: 0
2: 1 (4%)	7: 0	12: 0
3: 4 (17%)	8: 1 (4%)	15: 1 (4%)
4: 1 (4%)	9: 0	20: 1 (4%)
5: 0	10: 3 (13%)	24: 1 (4%)
2-3: 0	5-6: 0	
3-4: 1 (4%)	5-10: 1 (4%)	
3-5: 0 (4%)	10-12: 0	
more than 10: 1 (4%)	several: 2 (8%)	
unknown: 2 (8%)	no answer: 1 (4%)	

Q8: How would you rate your experience with your library system's consultants:

a. very helpful:	18	(75%)
b. somewhat helpful:	6	(25%)
c. minimally helpful:	0	
d. not helpful at all:	0	

Q9: Would you like to see the level of assistance from the consultants in your library system expanded, or are you satisfied with the present level?

a. expand level of consultants' assistance:	10	(42%)
b. satisfied with level of consultants' assistance:	14	(58%)

Q10: For which of the following needs at your library would you most likely be willing to seek assistance from a consultant at your library system: (please check your top two choices)

library automation:	17	(71%)
management/personnel issues:	4	(17%)
budgeting/fund-raising:	4	(17%)
technical services		
(cataloging, acquisitions):	8	(33%)
interlibrary cooperation		
(including interlibrary loan):	5	(21%)
cooperation between libraries		
and other community agencies:	4	(17%)
other:		
legal	2	( 8%)
board/trustees	1	( 4%)

**Questions 11 - 14 concern your experience with support from your library system for the level of automation in your library.**

Q11: Which of the following types of automation are available at your library: (please check all that apply)

software applications (word processing, database):		
for staff use:	19	(79%)
for public use:	10	(42%)
online/cd-rom reference resources:	8	(33%)
online public access catalog:	14	(58%)
circulation control:	12	(50%)
access to a community network:	4	(17%)
access to the Internet::	10	(42%)
none:	2	( 8%)
no answer:	1	( 4%)

Q12: Are you satisfied that the current level of automation in your library (even if there is none) adequately addresses the needs of your patrons?

a. yes:	11	(46%)	b. no:	12	(50%)
no answer:	1	( 5%)			

Q13: Do you feel that your library system provides encouragement and assistance for enhancing the current level of automation at your library?

a. yes: 24 (100%)    b. no: 0

Q14: Which of the following concerns about the future of library automation in your library would you most like to see your library system address: (please check your top two choices)

how to purchase new automation systems:	4	(17%)
how to maintain and repair automation systems:	2	(8%)
how to establish and use a community network:	4	(17%)
how to connect to and use the Internet:	9	(38%)
lowering telecommunications charges:	18	(75%)

**Questions 15 - 18 concern your experience with support from your library system for cooperation with other community agencies.**

Q15: Does your library cooperate with other community agencies in providing information resources to people in the community?

a. yes: 21 (88%)    b. no: 3 (13%)

Q16: What types of information resources are shared between community agencies and your library and made available to people in the community: (please check all that apply)

information on economic opportunities/development:	16	(67%)
information on local social services:	15	(63%)
other:		
health, school, art, cultural affairs,		
local statistics, large print books	1 each	(4%)
no answer:	4	(17%)

Q17: Have you received any encouragement from your library system to pursue cooperation with other community agencies?

a. yes: 20 (83%)    b. no: 2 (8%)  
no answer: 2 (8%)



Q18: Do you wish there was more encouragement from your library system to pursue cooperation with other community agencies, or are you satisfied with the present level of encouragement:

- |   |    |       |
|---|----|-------|
| a. more encouragement:                            | 6  | (25%) |
| b. satisfied with present level of encouragement: | 17 | (71%) |
| no answer:  | 1  | (4%)  |

**Questions 19 & 20 concern your perceptions on how well your library is represented in your library system and in the state library.**

Q19: Do you feel that the interests of your library are well represented in the governance of your library system?

- |            |    |       |
|------------|----|-------|
| a. yes:    | 17 | (71%) |
| b. no:     | 3  | (13%) |
| c. unsure: | 4  | (17%) |

Q20: Do you feel that the interests of your library are well represented in the governance of your state library?

- |            |    |       |
|------------|----|-------|
| a. yes:    | 15 | (36%) |
| b. no:     | 3  | (13%) |
| c. unsure: | 6  | (25%) |