

COOPERATIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL LIBRARIES

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This paper will present ways in which cooperative services may be of benefit to rural public libraries. Cooperative programs described in it will be between public libraries and a variety of other information sources. These include other libraries, other agencies, and individuals.

There are several reasons for public libraries, especially in rural areas, to seek cooperative activities. One being the population shift toward rural areas, bringing with it greater diversification in the needs of people residing in rural communities.¹ With the influx of people comes a need for a wider variety of materials, a demand rural libraries must strive to meet. Stanley A. Ransom showed this demand on rural libraries in New York.

Rural communities are becoming increasingly dependent on each other as well as on urban centers. Materials requested on interlibrary loan in rural areas can be ²and often are as sophisticated or technical as in any urban areas.

Arthur Meyers, in an article about cooperation in public libraries, stresses other difficulties with trying to find the right book for the right person at the right time. This ideal situation is no easy task in the largest of libraries, much less in one in a rural community with a limited collection. Meyers lists four impediments to this task:

. . . 1) the person may not need or be able to use an entire book because of a reading problem or difficulty in accessing materials; 2) the information needed may not actually be in a book but rather in some other format, such as a pamphlet from the Government, periodical article, audio recording, film medium, microform, or in the memory of a person; 3) the item needed may not be within our build-

ing but at a distant location, and we've come to recognize that barriers can be measured not only in the number of miles the patron is from the holding library or in the arrangement of hours the other facility is open, but also because of inaccessibility of the materials due to lack of indexing or location listing; 4) and, finally, but increasingly important in getting material or information needed to the patron, is the limitations of any one library's financial resources to purchase or store or otherwise make more accessible the particular item in the format needed.³

Cooperation between libraries and other sources of information should result in the alleviation of some of these hindrances to providing the best possible service. Of course it may still be impossible to find the right material for the right person every time but the end goal of cooperation should be to improve resources and services for the patrons.

Before entering into cooperative efforts the library must ascertain in what areas resources or services could be improved. It must then decide which can be provided on an individual basis and which can be gained through some type of cooperation.

But before moving into greater cooperation or embarking on the road to participation, the individual library must have a clear understanding of the needs and interests of its present and potential users, and how it is not meeting their needs.

Once the institution has defined its service mission through a clear understanding of its patrons, it is then faced with the realization that it cannot economically satisfy all user demands made on it. It can then explore the particular⁴ cooperative or network arrangement that will best meet its needs.

An instrument designed for this purpose is Robert N. Case's "Assessment Checklist - A Guide to Strengthen Community Library in Library Cooperation." In it Case has acknowledged the existence of many community information sources with whom cooperation can be of benefit to the library. He has developed a checklist of one hundred items to help the library find areas to be strengthened. The checklist covers the needs of patrons both current and future, community sources to be identified and located holdings of the li-

brary, administrative attitudes, the role of the library and its implication in society as a whole.

Case's "Assessment Checklist" provides a starting place for the library interested in cooperative services. It gives the library a list of places in the public, private, and civic sectors of the community to consider, as well as the type of materials available, and questions for the library to determine which agencies or organizations can be most helpful.⁵

The rest of this paper will describe some cooperative efforts between public libraries and such information sources and services. These also serve only as a beginning in cooperative services. The ideas are presented as a basis for possibilities in cooperation.

The sharing of bibliographic information through computer-based networking systems is an area of rapid growth. The emergence of OCLC was only the beginning of on-line bibliographic networking which can provide libraries with interlibrary loan and cataloging information.

In Rhode Island the Northern Interrelated Library System, headquartered in Pawtucket, Rhode Island has tapped into Boston Public Library's holdings. This provides its forty-three member libraries with around-the-clock access to cataloging information which they hope will get books on the shelf faster and less expensively than with OCLC.⁶

Southwestern Ohio Rural Libraries (SWORL) has also created a network by contracting with the Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County (PLCFC) for interlibrary loan requests and for reference services. PLCFC will also benefit as the cooperation enables it to make more effective use of its materials and facilities and to add personnel.⁷

Access to materials in other libraries need not be limited to computer-based searches, nor to participation in a large system. Libraries can make patrons aware of resources available in other locations by being aware themselves. Forest Grove, Oregon has a cooperative referral system based on the close personal friendship of the public, school and university librarians. Reciprocal borrowing privileges have been established between the three libraries. The university and high school librarians send lists of new acquisitions to each other and to the public librarian. She informs them and the community of her new materials through a weekly newspaper column. In this instance all of the libraries are within walking distance of each other.⁸

Interlibrary loan cooperatives may also be limited to a specific topic. The Southern Adirondack Library System in New York State has cooperated with the North Country Library System and the Clinton-Essex-Franklin Library System in providing a multisystem workshop on genealogy and local history. Their emphasis is on interlibrary loan and on cooperative acquisitions in these subjects.⁹

Multitype cooperatives may exist for purposes other than sharing of materials. East Bay Librarians Council (San Francisco) organized a regional warehouse for storage of little-used materials.¹⁰

Libraries in rural southeastern North Carolina formed an informal association called The Loose Region in an effort to overcome staff apathy and to exchange programming ideas. They communicate with each other by holding quarterly meetings, by publishing a regular newsletter highlighting library programs, and by distributing a series of papers with details of unusual library services.¹¹

Academic institutions can be of value to the public libraries in other cooperative ventures. In a program funded by the Higher Education Act Title II-B the Appalachian Adult Education Center (AAEC) of Morehead State University, Kentucky worked with public libraries to increase the availability of materials to adults enrolled in the Center's program to fight illiteracy among adults. AAEC organized the program and developed bibliographies of materials for those enrolled. The public library provided these materials to patrons in rural areas through bookmobile and mail services.¹²

In Mississippi the University of Mississippi's extension department aided public libraries through three programs. The Drama Loan Library lended plays for reading purposes on a three-week loan basis in exchange for payment of postal costs. A Program Package Service distributed materials on cultural or educational subjects for the use of program planners. Public library patrons participating in Home Reading Courses of Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs were also supplied with materials through the extension department,¹³

Schools and public libraries have explored many areas of cooperation. In a report from the National Commission on Library and Information Science entitled "The Role of the School Library Media Program in Networking," the importance of this cooperation is stressed in that school library resources

. . . constitute a major component in this country's total information resource. The unique nature of many of the resources the school acquires and makes available to its students makes them valuable as potential contribution in library networks.

Among the strengths identified are audio-visual collections, professional collections (such as selection tools for instructional materials and indexes of community resources), specialized ethnic collections, career education collections, high interest/low vocabulary collections, foreign language materials, and children's and young adult literature collections.¹⁴

A basic cooperative effort between schools and public libraries is the use of forms to make the public librarian aware of assigned topics so that the library may have the materials and perhaps bibliographies prepared for the onslaught of students. Another is for the public and school librarians to switch places for a week enabling each to see some of the materials and services available from the other.

On a much grander scale is the Olney, Texas, Community Library. The resources of the former elementary, junior high and senior high school libraries and of the public library were combined and moved into a new building in June 1979. The building is set on the school campus between the elementary and high schools. School students use passes during the day as in other school library media centers. The adults of the community may also patronize the library while school is in session.¹⁵

Young adult services is the target of a project between the Shenendehowa Free Library in Clifton Park New York and two local junior high schools. Together they work to design and implement programs to attract poor or reluctant readers. Activities include applying the Fry Readability Formula to the young adult collection, surveying students for their interests, and conducting programs such as a science fiction film/discussion, a session on earning money during summer vacations, and a play reading workshop.¹⁶

Libraries may find it beneficial to cooperate with agencies other than libraries.

Many rural systems work with cooperative extension offices in supplying books, films, and other materials in such fields as wood heat, energy, and food preparation. . . The rural systems should become material resources for rural agencies where practicable. CEF (Clinton-Essex-Franklin) library system, for instance, inspects and repairs, and in some cases houses, books and films for Planned Parenthood, alcohol abuse offices, and fire and police departments.¹⁷

An article by Sally Sims for Rural Libraries specifies types of historical studies being conducted in rural communities, and the need for rural public librarians to be aware of the resources of local historical museums, court houses, newspapers, and even school boards.¹⁸

Another possibility is working with employment offices in sharing job training and opportunity information. The library and employment office could swap fliers, the library's dealing with materials on training, interviewing, or writing resumes, and the employment office's dealing with openings or training programs in the job market.

Many businesses provide speakers who could help the library with information programs or with expert advice when selecting materials.

William T. DeJohn feels cooperative services with the local community have great potential for improving rural libraries and states, "One possibility is actually to employ a trained staff member to be the main contact for the community rather than trying to develop a building with books."¹⁹

In searching for community resources, the library must remember that one of the greatest resources may be individuals who are not contacted through an agency. Skamokawa, Washington has a population of approximately 850 who were desirous of a library. The library runs on a cooperative system of individuals. It was established through the volunteer efforts of a librarian and people in the community. The building was donated from the federal government, moved to church property by a local logging contractor, and cleaned and painted by volunteers. Funds are made available from donations and money-raising benefits. Irene Martin, the librarian, feels the willingness of rural dwellers is an important source in developing libraries in rural areas.²⁰

The end result of cooperation should be better service for and to the community and the library's patrons. Hopefully it will financially help the rural library as well. Some cooperatives may have the objective to coordinate efforts to gain financial support,

If metropolitan and rural libraries are eventually to create an efficient state network, they must pool their resources and efforts when seeking financial support, whether from private foundations, the state legislature, or the state agency responsible for federal funds distributions.²¹

In no way should cooperation be considered simply to cut expenses; starting new programs, training staff to work with the community, and taking the time to develop cooperative services away from other demands on the librarian's time must be considered. As David R. Hoffman states in his look at inter-library cooperation, "Cooperation is not free. It costs, but it should help us to slow the rate of rise in costs."²²

There may be legal barriers to cooperation. Some of these have been identified by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science in its report on school library involvement in networking.

. . . the lack of conformity in state laws pertaining to inter-library cooperation and networks; bureaucracy in individual schools as well as in school districts; state and federal aid programs that put restrictions on who can use materials purchased with such aid; and the new copyright restrictions.²³

Arthur Meyers believes the financial, legal, and other barriers can be overcome through the planning he stresses as vital to any cooperative service. He includes the library's concern about losing materials or not having an item readily available for one's own patrons among psychological barriers.

The barriers will fall as we intelligently examine our individual goals and see where we are strong and where we fall short, and recognize how we can each contribute and profit from cooperation and coordination.²⁴

As rural libraries explore and develop cooperative services at all levels, they should find the positive aspects outnumbering the negative. The most positive response should be from the community as improved services hopefully result in increased backing. Access to a wider variety of materials and expanded programming is good public relations. As the community develops an extended awareness of the need and value of a good public library, patronage and hopefully funding will increase.

FOOTNOTES

¹Ann Drennan and Henry Drennan, "Rural Populations in the 1970s," Library Trends, Spring 1980, pp. 493-512.

²Stanley A. Ransom, "The Rural Imperative: New York's Public Library Systems Face the Challenge," The Bookmark, Spring 1980, p. 358.

³Arthur Meyers, "Communication and Cooperation in Public Libraries," Catholic Library World, July/August 1978, p. 17.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

⁵Robert N. Case, "Assessment Checklist - A Guide to Strengthen Community Libraries in Library Cooperation," Rural Libraries, Fall 1980, pp. 1-44.

⁶"Library Cooperation: Rhode Island Co-op and Boston Public Eye Resource Sharing," Library Journal, July 1980, p. 1460.

⁷"PLCFC Reference and Loan: Ohio Co-op Agrees to Pay," Library Journal, 15 March 1988, p. 605.

⁸S. J. Christopher, "Suggestions for Increasing Coordination of Library Services Within the Community," Pacific Northwest Library Association Quarterly, Spring 1972, p. 23.

⁹Ransom, "The Rural Imperative," p. 362.

¹⁰Ralph H. Stenstrom, Cooperation Between Types of Libraries, 1940-1968 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1970), p. 32.

¹¹"Cooperation in North Carolina: Rural Library 'Info Exchange,'" Library Journal, 15 June 1978, p. 1218.

¹²Ruth J. Patrick, Joseph Casey, and Carol Novalis, A Study of Library Cooperatives, Networks, and Demonstration Projects, 2 vols. (New York: K. G. Saur, 1980), 2:19-25.

¹³Christine Drake, "Public Libraries Find Needed Information Through University Extension Services," Mississippi Library News, March 1966, pp. 28, 30.

¹⁴"Role of School Libraries in National Network Sketched," Library Journal, 15 March 1979, p. 664.

¹⁵James A. Kitchens and Joni Bodart, "Some Libraries Do Everything Well: An Example of School/Public Library Cooperation," Top of the News, Summer 1980, pp. 357-362.

¹⁶Elaine Baker, "The State of Young Adult Services in a Rural Library System and Implications for the 1980's," The Bookmark, Summer 1980, p. 420.

- 17 Ransom, "The Rural Imperative," p. 362.
- 18 Sally Sims, "New History' in the Countryside: Material Culture, Local History, and the Role of the Rural Library," Rural Libraries, Summer 1980, pp. 1-9.
- 19 William T. DeJohn, "The Impact of Technology on the Future of Rural Public Library Service," Library Trends, Spring 1980, p. 638.
- 20 Irene Martin, "Skamokowa Story: Rural Library Service in Washington State," Wilson Library Bulletin, February 1981, pp. 240-242.
- 21 Mary Jordan Case, "Indiana Case Study 2: The Stone Hills Area, A Rural Experience," in Multitype Library Cooperation, ed. Beth A. Hamilton and William B. Ernst (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1977), p. 80.
- 22 David R. Hoffman, "Interlibrary Cooperation -- A Perspective from the State Library of Pennsylvania," Rural Libraries, Summer 1980, p. 13.
- 23 "Role of School Libraries Sketched," p. 665.
- 24 Meyers, "Communication and Cooperation," p. 19.

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