



## The Need for Cooperation Among Libraries in the United States

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THE TITLE OF this article is deceptive. It assumes that traditional library cooperation is valid. About a decade ago, one state library had as its slogan "cooperation is the key." Similar terms such as library cooperation, regional library, library system, and networking—all of which imply cooperative action—have become sacred in the profession. From time to time, someone needs to ask: Cooperation—the key to what and for whom?

In addition, the title does not indicate whose needs are fulfilled by traditional library cooperation, i.e., shared resources and shared jurisdiction. There is no doubt that it has been of benefit to those citizens who now have some type of regional library, or to researchers who receive library materials on interlibrary loan. There is no doubt that it has been beneficial in providing jobs for hundreds of library employees. But how valid is library cooperation based on an analysis of contemporary user needs for library and information services?

The title also implies that cooperation among libraries is the only valid and important type of cooperation. There is certain historical justification that interlibrary cooperation has been very beneficial; yet, how important is it today in relation to all other types of cooperative ventures with the various agencies and groups to which a library now has access?

It is the purpose of this article to take a critical look at the validity of library cooperation based on the recent increase of user need and demand studies and to determine whether cooperation really has been and will continue to be the key to meeting those needs and demands, based on the information and library needs of users and potential users.

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Shared library resources and jurisdictions have prospered in the United States based on the assumption that *more* is good, and that a well-coordinated and well-financed *more* is even better. Regional public library development grew out of projections made by Carleton Joeckel in 1935 that the answer to the poor distribution of library resources in the United States was a series of regional libraries which would provide nationwide library service, including service to rural and suburban areas.<sup>1</sup> Joeckel argued that by forming regional units of communities and counties too poor to provide library service, adequate levels of library service would span the country. Aided by federal legislation such as the Library Services Act of 1956, regional libraries did begin to provide a pattern of library service to the country.

Cooperation among college and university libraries was based on the assumption that the problems of too much growth within any one library could be offset by well-coordinated and cooperatively financed efforts. Spurred by threatening projections, college and university librarians began to develop joint acquisition programs such as the Farmington Plan, cooperative storage centers such as the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago, and the development of a nationwide system of interlibrary loans.

Networking continues to stress the better coordination of existing resources in all types of libraries. Bibliographic networks are allowing for the decrease in repetitious processing of library materials, while telecommunication networks are connecting a variety of library materials in all types of libraries, and administrative networks are working toward better coordination of library and information services. The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, in developing its program for a national network, calls for this coordination factor to protect and sustain the United States' national resources of information.

These threads show that library cooperation has become an economically feasible way to improve traditional library service, a pattern which emphasizes the importance of improved access to a growing number of library materials. Regional library service is better than no library service, access to several university libraries via interlibrary loan is better than the availability of just one university collection, and the coordinated access of library materials in the United States through a national network would be even more advantageous.

The argument has been that the more library materials available locally, or at a reasonable distance, the better the library service will be.

### *Need for Cooperation*

If the financing of this service is shared by several jurisdictions, the service will be better and the costs more equally distributed.

From the point of view of library management, cooperation is certainly reasonable. But how does it rank in view of recent studies in user information need and demand?

### USER STUDIES OF THE INFORMATION RICH AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

User studies traditionally have been examinations of how libraries were used and by whom. They have been analyses of circulation statistics, of the use of particular library areas such as the reference department, or of the socio-economic backgrounds of library patrons. Tobin points out that this type of user study grew in popularity after World War II and was used as a management tool to "improve [the] existing condition." However, over the years little attention was given to the potential user or to citizen information demands or needs.<sup>2</sup>

This review looks at users and potential users of information rather than only at those who currently use libraries. In viewing their demands and needs, groups of information users should be distinguished. Edwin Parker uses the terms *information rich* and *information poor*.<sup>3</sup> The former includes leaders from scholarly, governmental and business communities who have an overabundance of information, who use libraries and other formal information sources, and who are familiar with techniques for securing information. The information poor are those who have little acquaintance with traditional information sources such as libraries, and whose information needs in many cases would not be met by these sources. For purposes of this discussion, Parker's distinction will suffice.

Next, one should distinguish between an information demand, or articulated information need, placed on the formal information community, and an information need which the individual has not articulated, perhaps even to himself. Demands on formal information sources have been a growing concern for a number of years, while the study of information needs is still in its infancy—there is little standardization at this point and the methodology is still in a formative stage of development. The major tool of measurement is the written questionnaire combined with an interview. From time to time there is serious doubt as to whether it is possible to discover information needs by querying an individual or group of individuals.<sup>4</sup>

Information demand research meanwhile has evolved into two separate strands: one which focuses on the literature patterns of use, and one which concentrates on the individual and his information gathering habits.

The study of literature use emphasizes the frequency and the depth to which particular segments of the library collection are utilized. The Fussler and Simon book on *Patterns in the Use of Books in Large Research Libraries*, which examines use patterns of various collections at the University of Chicago, is an example of this type of study.<sup>5</sup> The field of bibliometrics, in which fields of literature are analyzed for frequency and duration of use, has added much to the knowledge of user demands on library collections.

The other trend in user demand studies has been toward the investigation of information gathering techniques, i.e., the way scientists and other professional people search for information, what service they use, and how they evaluate and rank the various sources they use. Patterns and networks of the information flow are the central concerns of this research.

In examining the literature of user demand by the information rich, one notices two factors. First, there seems to be little relation between the groups concerned with information demand and need studies, and the groups involved with the development and design of library and information services.<sup>6</sup> In other words, library administrators and information technologists seem to draw little from the research in information need and demand. One notable example which has been documented is the development of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC); no user studies of demand and need, user behavior, or user requirements were included in the development of the ERIC system. As a result, Paisley found that after five years of operation the system was still not being brought to the attention of the educational practitioner.<sup>7</sup>

The second startling factor is that much of the work in information demand and need is being done abroad. There is, of course, the work being done at the Institute for Communication Research at Stanford University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Johns Hopkins University, and the studies of the American Psychological Association. However, much progress is being made abroad. England is a prime example; in preparing the background work for cooperative plans such as the National Lending Library, numerous studies were made of user demands for information and on library collections.

There are several major themes which run through the information

### *Need for Cooperation*

studies of the information rich. Perhaps the most recurring is the choice by scientists, researchers and other professional people of an informal information network over, or in equal importance to, any formal network of libraries and information centers. Watson's discussion of the informal communication of scientists in his book, *The Double Helix*, has been corroborated by numerous user studies. Studies of astronomers, anthropologists and agricultural experts show that informal discussion among colleagues is a major source of information.<sup>8</sup>

The use of informal discussion has led to a series of studies on information flow in professions, associations and organizations. It has allowed investigators to project the concept of an invisible college where scholars of a particular discipline are interconnected in an informal network akin to the organizational grapevine.<sup>9</sup>

In formal information channels, the right amount of information is more important than access to a quantity of information. For example, studies among physicians and physicists show that use is limited to a restricted number of primary journals in the field. One writer claims that in reader studies based on journals in the field of physics, even these basic journals are not well read. Another author claims that the "quick fix" was more often the norm than an exhaustive use of available collections.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the question of accessibility—both in terms of time and geography—proved to be a more important factor than the quality of the source. One study asked individuals in a research sample to rank sources of information for several hypothetical problems. In each case, the sources of a personal library, a knowledgeable person close by, or the telephone were given priority over the services of a more distant library.

When such individuals are drawn into a formal information channel such as a library, numerous studies have shown that they are not sophisticated in their use of the tools of library and information science. Studies of citations from abstracting and indexing tools, for example, show a small number of references drawn from these sources.

One researcher speculated that the twin features of accessibility and the right amount of information were the reasons many researchers went to informal sources. There the individual gets "the right information in the right amount and within the time required."<sup>11</sup>

Finally, librarians are not seen as active participants in the procurement of information. They are seen as housekeepers,

organizers, or managers perhaps, but not people who aid in the complexity of securing information and data.<sup>12</sup>

### USER STUDIES OF THE INFORMATION POOR AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

User studies of the information poor are even more limited than are studies of the information rich. Tobin, studying the 477 user studies of all types listed in *Library Literature* for 1960-73, could find only five studies of nonusers and three studies of the disadvantaged. She hypothesized that there may have been more, but the results in terms of library use were minimal and not disclosed.<sup>13</sup>

Studies of the information demands of this group have shown that the logical, formal, information source—the public library—contributes little toward fulfilling their needs. A study conducted by the System Development Corporation (SDC) called for a “new outlook” by the public library if it is to be responsive to the information needs and demands of the disadvantaged.<sup>14</sup> An earlier study of the information needs of the information poor by Mary Lee Bundy showed the public library in a position of nonimportance.<sup>15</sup> A study of adult information needs in Indiana indicated that even for business, industry, agriculture and labor, the public library had little relevance.<sup>16</sup>

Data on information needs of the information poor are even more restricted. The most recent efforts appear to have been conducted by the SDC and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS). SDC, in a study of Library Services and Construction Act projects to special target groups, looked at the information needs of the various groups of the information poor. The study focused on users and nonusers of federally financed library projects, finding a high interest in audiovisual formats. This was especially true of nonusers of the projects. Subject interests favored were employment information, health care, ethnic materials, and hobbies.<sup>17</sup> Similar trends were noted by the NCLIS in evaluating total information needs and relating this evaluation to planning for nationwide library cooperation and networking. After an early study by Patrick and Cooper indicated that the previous user studies did not provide enough data for national information planning,<sup>18</sup> the NCLIS made various attempts to identify user needs as a basis for national planning. An NCLIS study conducted by Bourne and others for the Institute of Library Research, University of California, Berkeley, identified nineteen subgroups whose information needs would vary from the

### *Need for Cooperation*

norm. Among the nineteen groups with special information needs, the following information-poor groups were identified: the economically and socially disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, the mentally and physically handicapped, the geographically remote, the aged, and the institutionalized.<sup>19</sup>

Another NCLIS study, written and researched by Edwin Parker of the Stanford University Institute for Communication Research, projected the impact of socio-economic change on information needs.<sup>20</sup> Again, emphasis was placed on information needs of the information poor, with a special stress on life information, and on information in an audiovisual format.

A third, less scientific attempt to evaluate potential user needs was a series of regional hearings scheduled in various parts of the country. Invitations to testify were sent not only to library and information specialists, but also to users and potential users of library service. The major impact of these hearings was on the growing awareness by the NCLIS of a greater variety of information needs being expressed by a wider potential clientele.<sup>21</sup> The commission found itself face to face with representatives of the information poor and heard them describe their information needs. While many of these needs were only partially or incompletely explained, the commission did begin to gain a broader understanding of the information needs of the information poor.

Still another effort to analyze user needs was the NCLIS's conference on user needs, held in Denver in May 1973. Building on the work of the Institute of Library Research, the commission invited sixteen specialists in user information needs to present papers on the information requirements of a particular subgroup. Each participant found that the description of information needs was a difficult task, even when one is extremely knowledgeable of the subgroup and its information interests.

In all sixteen subgroups, two factors which remained consistent were the importance of time and the usability of format. Unless information arrived on a prescribed time schedule and was in a format which could be used, the information itself was useless.

Nine of the papers looked at information needs of social and demographic subgroups which varied from the norm, the norm being defined as a "white male, middle class, healthy 'normal' adult, aged 21-65 years." These groups included women, homemakers, parents, children, young adults, the aged, the geographically remote, the economically and socially deprived, the institutionalized, the mentally and physically handicapped, and Mexican-Americans. The major

information needs of these groups were for life information, included survival, general life maintenance, and self-enrichment and growth.<sup>22</sup>

While the commission made these efforts to comprehend user needs, it is evident that there is still a great deal of basic research to be done on user information needs. It is encouraging, however, that the commission's study is one of the first times that library/information system planning and research on user needs are being conducted by the same group.

As many writers have pointed out, research in user information needs and demands is a fairly new field. More is known about information demands than about information needs. Work has concentrated on the information rich, with special attention to the requirements of scientists and technologists. As late as 1970 Britain could identify only eighteen useful studies on the users of social science material.<sup>23</sup> Even less is known about the information needs of the information poor. While it is premature to draw too many conclusions from this total body of work, it is perhaps possible to make several observations about user information needs and demands, and library cooperation. There seem to be definite implications at the local, regional and national levels.

Despite limited knowledge of information needs, it is obvious that well-coordinated and well-financed library cooperation is not enough. More and better traditional library service is not the complete answer, which may suggest an entire new approach to the local delivery of information, especially to the information poor.

In his book entitled *Management*, Peter Drucker takes public service institutions to task for simply asking for more money to do the same old things. It is "effectiveness, not efficiency which the service institution lacks . . . they tend not to do the right things. . . . All service institutions are threatened by tendencies to cling to yesterday rather than slough it off."<sup>24</sup>

From the viewpoint of the information poor, and to a certain extent that of the information rich, it is necessary to reevaluate information and library services to determine which are important, and to ascertain the types and extents of information needs.

The first step in this process of moving from efficiency to efficient effectiveness is a better understanding of the potential user and his or her information needs. The use of marketing research techniques has proved helpful in some developments. This does not imply the creation of false needs, but rather a true analysis of a segment of the potential clientele, an assessment of their information needs, and then

### *Need for Cooperation*

development or alteration of services to meet these needs. The needs of potential patrons are studied to project the types and varieties of demands they could place on an institution. One marketing expert examined the marketing approaches for an information system such as ERIC and found that marketing techniques could be applied,<sup>25</sup> and a public library in Manchester, England, has experimented with market research training for its staff.<sup>26</sup> The work done at Hamline University in Minnesota in studying the information needs of the campus, and then using the data to make the library responsive to these needs, is another illustration.<sup>27</sup>

This marketing approach emphasizes a different type of library cooperation, a closer user-professional working relationship. It implies a closer working relationship with all potential users in the community and community involvement in the planning of new and revitalized programs and services. It requires the library administration to work with the leadership and staff members of other groups serving the same community. In the SDC study of special target groups, people from other agencies ranked community involvement important to the success of the projects studied, whereas community involvement was not a significant point cited by the librarians questioned.<sup>28</sup>

User studies imply that the user-professional relationship needs to be strengthened within the walls of the library. The librarian needs to be more adept at isolating an information demand when it is articulated. Studies by Crowley and Childers show that the librarian is deficient in responding to even elementary information demands.<sup>29</sup> Merely to call on the vast resources of library cooperation and interlibrary loan is not enough. The importance of the professional's role in interpreting the demand and delivering the right amount of information is reflected in user studies. Studies show that the information rich are satisfied with less information than was supposed and that the information poor often require smaller amounts of information than most libraries will supply. This would indicate that it is crucial for a professional directly serving the public to identify correctly an information demand and then to produce the right amount of information to appropriately satisfy that demand.

Improved information demand analysis implies a greater concern with the interview process. The professional needs to know not only the literature and the channels for securing it, but also how to query the client to be sure the correct demand has been ascertained. It also indicates a greater responsibility for the librarian as an information transfer facilitator. Special librarians have long espoused this role in

meeting the information demands of their companies, but librarians from other types of libraries have been slower to accept this responsibility. If even the information rich are partial to informal and personal channels of information, and are unskilled in the use of library and information science tools, the growing importance of the trained librarian or information transfer specialist is obvious.

At the same time, there is a strong need for the library to explain its function to the user. Studies show that even if the user can overcome the difficulty of translating a generalized need into an information need and then into an information demand, it is very unlikely that the library is credited with satisfying that demand. This requires a total public relations program by the library (which starts with marketing or needs assessment), the development of new or revamped programs, and then the explanation to the public of the function and availability of these programs. This goes beyond elementary publicity to the very image that the library has in its community, whether it is town, campus, or school building.

User studies indicate that this need for closer user-professional cooperation is balanced by a need for closer cooperation with technological improvements. Users are making information demands which can no longer be filled by traditional formats or traditional sources. The growing importance of audiovisual formats for the information poor has been stressed by several authors. The value of technology—especially telecommunications and computers—in aiding the receipt of information at the right time is becoming increasingly important to users of all types. Participants at the NCLIS Denver conference on user needs stressed that information not received in time was not useful information.<sup>30</sup> The ability to relay data about information, as well as information itself, via faster processes will be of growing importance to the information user.

At the regional and national levels, the improvement of the traditional form of library cooperation, i.e., the coordination and interchange of library materials, is rivaled by the importance of new and different types of library cooperation. Illustrative is the need for a coordinated program for continuing education, which updates and revitalizes the librarian's view of user needs, service patterns, and library cooperation. Better coordination of newer formats—such as audiovisual materials, microforms, and computerized data bases—is needed. The applicability of the technologies of computers and telecommunications to user information requirements demands better understanding.

### *Need for Cooperation*

One effort, hopefully cooperative, is the developing study of user needs and the demands for information. Work with the information poor lags far behind the work conducted with the information rich. Even more important, there must be closer cooperation between researchers in information needs and administrators who are designing and providing library and information services. The developers of new or revitalized library and information services and products should be aware of and benefit from research in user needs studies. Finally, there is the effort to increase the effectiveness of traditional library cooperation by the infusion of technology and the planning of standardized networks.

From the user's viewpoint, the four important cooperative trends appear to be: (1) the effort to increase the effectiveness of traditional library cooperation by the infusion of technology and the development of a system of networks; (2) the development of other regional and national cooperative endeavors, such as the coordination of continuing education for library and information personnel; (3) a growing cooperation between the user of information services and the professional librarian or information specialist in order to reassess the way in which information is dispensed at the local level; and (4) the initial, although limited, cooperation between researchers on user information needs and demands, and the developers and administrators of library and information services. Just what the highest priority should be among these four trends depends to some extent on the group of users with which one is identified. For example, developments in the first trend have been criticized as being of more benefit to the information rich than to the information poor. The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, although sharply criticized for it, has provided leadership for the first and second trends. However, clear leadership patterns are not as obvious for the third and fourth trends.

Traditional library cooperation, improved by technology, may still be a key to the fulfilling of user information needs and demands. Nevertheless, to ensure improved service to all user groups, it is essential that all aspects of these cooperative trends be utilized.

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### *Need for Cooperation*

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