Library Cooperative Relationships in Connection with Emerging Service Patterns

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A recent Library of Congress task force was nicely succinct in reporting to Daniel Boorstin, the Librarian of Congress: "The whole point of library work is to put the needed object—book, periodical, map, recording—or its intellectual substance into the hands of the user." Accurate, timely information is essential to the educational process, supports the research necessary for a healthy economy, enhances the quality of life, and is critical to the political functioning of a free society. More than ever, society needs information and is placing ever-greater demands on libraries as the repositories of man's recorded knowledge. At the same time, libraries are constrained in their ability to perform adequately, and the public is increasingly concerned about library costs and efficiency. In all areas, including libraries, society is becoming painfully aware of finite resources. Every library has limited human and material resources. Resource-sharing through cooperative arrangements is increasingly the means by which libraries attempt to meet efficiently the information needs of their constituencies.

In this information-rich society, individuals know that, somewhere, the information they need exists. Depending upon his or her level of sophistication as an information retriever, the user may have the skills to identify and locate the documents containing the information needed. However, the patron is increasingly viewing information as a commodity. The user, as a consumer, simply wants to state a need ("order" the in-

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formation) and have it fulfilled. When the patron feels intimidated and/or uncomfortable in the process (frequently as a result of the librarian’s attitude), he or she tends either to take the shopping center approach and browse through the inventory until finding the needed item, or to query the most convenient friend, colleague or man-on-the-street.

As information plays a more important role in society, many public agencies and entrepreneurs are offering information services. This has forced libraries to evaluate their own services, to become more responsive to their users’ needs, and to be more aggressive in the delivery of their services.

SERVICE PATTERNS OF COOPERATION
AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Library cooperation is not new. It has a long and noble tradition. Especially noteworthy are the century-old American Library Association interlibrary loan practice, the cooperative cataloging through the Library of Congress card catalog services, and the time-honored courtesy privileges given to visiting scholars and other nonconstituents of individual libraries. When professional librarians knew their colleagues and the collections in neighboring institutions, they tended to make use of these personal relationships and knowledge to receive special assistance and privileges for their patrons.

At midcentury, library cooperation began to change. The post-World War II period marked a dramatic shift in the lifestyle of most Americans, witnessed by the great mobility of the population, the movement to the suburbs, the commuting of workers and students, and the development of the shopping center. People began to live in one area, work in another, go to school in a third, and shop in yet another place. It became convenient for students to use the library where they attend school, and for workers and shoppers to use libraries where they work and shop. Jurisdictional and single-constituency library policies were questioned by users.

Several major developments resulted; probably the most significant was that of county systems. Early public library development had closely followed municipal lines. As counties are generally the larger units, these library systems became larger and included multimunicipal jurisdictions. These larger units frequently established centralized processing units to handle acquisitions and cataloging. Soon they developed union catalogs,
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with many producing book or microform catalogs, and the formerly independent libraries became branches. These systems began to compete with the urban libraries.

Another development was the reciprocal borrowing card. Libraries in contiguous areas worked out agreements to honor library cards from neighboring libraries. In many cases, books could be returned at any convenient library in the system.

The third major development was the publishing of area collection guides. Inevitably, numerous libraries were discovered, and those left out quickly identified themselves. As a consequence, a new appreciation of the breadth and depth of community library resources developed. Sharing resources was expedited by moving patrons to resources.

Out of expediency, the user had questioned "why not?" — and librarians learned to think about materials as community resources rather than with a simple institutional orientation. The old concepts of self-sufficiency and of serving only one's own patrons were giving way. Directors of individual libraries found it easier to specialize both collection policies and services if a nearby library had a superior collection and requisite expertise in other specific areas. Much of the change was attitudinal.

In all these cases, the library was responding to the user. Libraries worked out the fiscal responsibilities and allowed the user to go to the most convenient location.

LIBRARY NETWORKS AS ENABLERS AND INITIATORS OF NEW SERVICE PATTERNS

During the past fifteen years, library cooperation has accelerated and significant changes have occurred. Library cooperation came of age with the emergence of networks, systems and consortia. These tend to be legally based, formal organizations. Whether on the national, regional or state level, the genesis is similar. One factor in their emergence is the growing consciousness of citizen's rights to access in all fields, including libraries. Another is the fact that the sheer quantity of published materials has increased exponentially. Also, the costs of providing library services are extremely sensitive to inflation because libraries are very labor-intensive. New technologies, especially computers and telecommunications, offered solutions, but frequently were feasible only in joint endeavors.

With Library of Congress's development of machine-readable cataloging (MARC), it was only natural that libraries attempt to utilize the computer for on-line cataloging. Single institutions, however, could not
support the necessary computer facilities alone. The most successful venture was the network formed by a group of Ohio college libraries, OCLC. As of early 1979, over 1600 libraries are cataloging on-line through OCLC, building their own machine-readable records. They have instantaneous access to the 4.5 million titles in the data base, which has over 40 million holding locations.

After the Library of Congress terminated publication of the nation-wide *Union List of Serials*, some networks developed such lists for their own constituencies. These data bases, on-line catalogs and union lists of serials provide resource-sharing options when the local library does not have the needed materials. The local library may serve as the surrogate and obtain the item on behalf of a patron, or, if convenient, the patron can go directly to the holding library. As of this writing, the OCLC on-line interlibrary loan system is undergoing testing. This system could greatly enhance resource-sharing among libraries.

Networks provide one or more of the following services:

1. support telecommunications so that libraries can easily transmit messages,
2. develop bibliographic data bases which show where items are held,
3. support delivery systems so that materials may move freely between libraries,
4. contract with utilities or vendors to provide cheaper on-line group rates for their members,
5. train librarians to use automated services such as on-line cataloging and on-line subject retrieval,
6. convene user groups to assist library personnel in the utilization of available cooperative resources and services,
7. develop cooperative collection plans in order to build on strengths and eliminate unnecessary duplication,
8. operate processing centers for the purchase and cataloging of materials, and
9. provide integrated circulation systems in order to ascertain availability as well as holdings information.

The regional networks have trained literally thousands of librarians in ISBD (International Standard Bibliographic Description) and MARC cataloging formats for books, serials and nonprint materials. This massive short-term training program is unprecedented in library history and is leading to uniform adoption of standard cataloging practice. It will be of incalculable benefit to the user when there is one unique, authoritative
record for each item. This will allow either the merging of large bibliographic files or access to multiple files through one system.

It should be noted that there is no substitute for collections and service provided at the local library. Libraries should do cooperatively only what they cannot do individually in a cost-effective manner. E.F. Schumacher poignantly reminds one of this:

From the point of view of Buddhist economics, therefore, production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life, while dependence on imports from afar and the consequent need to produce for export to unknown and distant peoples is highly uneconomic and justifiable only in exceptional cases and on a small scale. Just as the modern economist would admit that a high rate of consumption of transport services between a man’s home and his place of work signifies a misfortune and not a high standard of life, so the Buddhist economist would hold that to satisfy human wants from faraway sources rather than from sources nearby signifies failure rather than success.

PUBLIC LIBRARY/COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

There are two indicators of emerging patterns of service: new names and new locations of libraries. It is interesting to note how many libraries have changed their designation to “information center” or “learning center” or added the phrase to their name. An increasing number of public libraries are being built as part of or adjacent to either shopping centers or government buildings which provide license, social, medical and municipal services.

These changes reflect the desire to be located in a busy area so that patrons can stop at the library as part of normal business or shopping activity. They suggest that libraries are less concerned with their custodial book depository role and more interested in providing citizens with useful information and programs to support their daily activities. Some libraries, in cooperation with local medical and bar associations, are offering lay medical, legal or consumer information through a telephone tape-recorded service. Many are actively involved in independent adult learning programs and in publicly espousing their educational role. The lending collections libraries provide of recorded music and art objects align them with cultural institutions. Audiovisual materials and equipment, as well as calculators and computers, for in-building use or loan, reflect signifi-
cant collection policy changes. Libraries are being much less prescriptive in setting standards of what ought to be read, and more responsive to users' information needs.

THE ROLE AND STRUCTURE OF LIBRARY POLICY IN ENCOURAGING EMERGENT FORMS OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Federal, state and foundation monies have all encouraged library cooperation with the intent of providing improved or expanded services to patrons. There is hardly a library in the United States that is not a member of at least one network, system or consortium. As a result, libraries are becoming interdependent institutions; and increasingly, decision-making is cooperative instead of institutional. Governance and constituencies tend to be extrajurisdictional rather than only local.

Networking is not without its problems. The major ones are governance, standards, local autonomy and costs (who pays and how much). These problems demand serious attention lest they usurp time and energy that needs to be spent on services. The new public services, i.e., access to external collections and the ability to provide automated and other new services, will not survive if the profession is unwilling to yield some local authority, if the structure cannot survive changes in personnel, and if there are no provisions for growth and change.

There is a critical need to reexamine acquisitions policies. It is mandatory that the profession learn to make better utilization of personnel. A few libraries need to be designated as research libraries, provided with appropriate funds, and given the responsibility to make their collections available for potential future users. This would allow the majority of libraries to concentrate on serving current patrons. It is essential that the appropriate funding and governance roles at the local level be found while allowing libraries the necessary flexibility to interact with other libraries. Adoption of bibliographic and telecommunication standards is overdue.

Those in public libraries must understand and acknowledge their role of providing free information to a free society. It is reasonable for the user to expect that upon going to the library, he or she should either receive the necessary document or information, be referred to a library where it is available, or have the library secure it.
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References
