
Rural Public Libraries in Multitype Library Cooperatives

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ABSTRACT

COOPERATION AMONG LIBRARIES is a practice that supports information service to patrons of all libraries. This article will examine the historical overview of cooperative efforts, the roles identified for the cooperative library organizations and members of the organizations, and the services associated with these organizations. It will also examine the contributions that rural libraries make toward cooperation among all types of libraries and identify challenges for rural libraries participating in networks in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The first and most important thing that libraries should keep in mind when dealing with networks is that it is not necessary for outcomes, products, and uses of networks to be the results of an equal system, but rather that the network be valuable to each of the participants. Equity is not the goal—results are. (Atkinson, 1987, p. 432)

This quote from the late Hugh C. Atkinson is the essence of library cooperation which remains today as it did in 1987 and as it did in the early 1900s. Atkinson used the word “networks.” He could just as easily have said “systems,” “cooperatives,” “interlibrary cooperatives,” “multitype library organizations,” “consortia,” or the more trendy “virtual library.” The most important thing is to realize that the spirit of what Atkinson is saying remains the same. What is also essential to understand is that it applies to any library participating in a cooperative whether it be small or

large, rural, metropolitan, or suburban. The fundamental principle is that, in order for cooperation to succeed, results for the patron must be the goal—not equity between libraries or some magical balance between resources lent by one library and resources received from another library.

This article will provide a definition and overview of cooperation in the United States. It will identify the roles of both the cooperative organization and the rural library in the cooperative and outline common services supported by cooperatives and trends in services in the future. Finally, it will outline challenges and examine some commonly held perceptions about cooperation as it relates to rural libraries, provide some data regarding the benefits of cooperation for rural areas, and discuss service programs.

Throughout the article the author will use the words “cooperative,” “system,” “network,” “cooperative organization,” and “consortium” interchangeably as is a commonly held practice in recent years. Overall, which word is used depends primarily on the perception and common practice of use for those creating the cooperative organization.

WHAT IS COOPERATION?

Cooperation, as defined by Webster's (1973), is “to associate with another or others for mutual, often economic benefit” (p. 250). Other Webster definitions include “working with another for a common end; to act together; given to or marked by willingness and ability to work with others in a common effort; not motivated entirely by selfish individual aims” (p. 250). For cooperative efforts among libraries, this means two or more libraries working together to provide better and enhanced service for the library client or to support programs that cannot be supported by a single library.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Library cooperation in the United States does not have an extended formal history. Rather, the overall growth of formal cooperative efforts between and among libraries is a twentieth-century phenomenon. The efforts in cooperation prior to the twentieth century were limited in scope. In the view of Norman D. Stevens (1979), the establishment of cooperation began at approximately the same time that librarians held their first conference, which was in 1853. It was at that time that a proposal was presented to produce a national union catalog. Certainly the goal of a national catalog, a universal access point, one-stop shopping, or the virtual library has not changed from those beginnings.

Robert McClarren (1981) discusses in depth the overview of public library cooperation. He states that cooperation prior to World War II was more informal, and following the war a more structured cooperative service program began. Even if the pre-World War II efforts in cooperation

were primarily unstructured as McClarren indicates, they did include some profound innovations that remain a major contribution to the library community today. Those innovations include the National Union Catalog in 1901, the Union List of Serials in 1927, and the first Interlibrary Loan Code in 1917. In the late 1950s, public libraries began to incorporate into "systems" or cooperatives. There is a consensus in the library literature that the biggest boon for cooperation was the passage of the federal Library Services Act (LSA) in 1956. The original LSA marked the first time that the federal government identified any responsibility for supporting library programs throughout the United States. It further encouraged and required planning at the state level. It was most significant for rural libraries as the emphasis was on library service to communities of populations of 10,000 or less. The emphasis was on rural library development and on larger units of service. This development clearly was a driving force for the establishment of cooperative organizations, particularly public library cooperatives, supporting rural library development.

The federal funding of libraries changed in 1964 when the act was amended to be the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). This amendment ended the sole emphasis on federal funding for rural libraries by adding funding for urban libraries and also added construction to the overall program. The primary impact on multitype cooperation came in 1966 with yet another amendment to LSCA. The section of LSCA known as Title III, Interlibrary Cooperation, established a mechanism to include state, school, college and university, public, and special libraries in networks which could be local, regional, state or interstate in configuration. The intent of LSCA Title III was that there would be a maximum effective use of the limited funds in providing services to citizens. Those formal cooperative efforts that began in the 1950s and 1960s were primarily of four types: (1) A total library program called a "system" was formed by a single political jurisdiction (a city). This agency became a single agency with a multiplicity of branches. These were, and still are, the public library of choice in large cities. (2) A cooperative system established by two or more independent libraries which planned and worked together. In this method of cooperative organization, libraries work together but remain autonomous. (3) A consolidated system formed by two or more independent libraries. The libraries are no longer independent but are one agency. (4) A network established by two or more libraries which planned and worked together, usually with a single purpose, such as OCLC, with its original purpose of shared cataloging.

This article will discuss cooperation among autonomous libraries rather than cooperation among libraries that are in a single consolidated system or single political jurisdiction. However, many of the services are similar in consolidated systems as in cooperative systems, and many of the same reasons for creating consolidated systems are the same for creating cooperative systems.

During this era, several states established statewide efforts in cooperative services. Among the earlier activities were the Illinois Library Systems Act of 1965 in Illinois, the Regional System of Cooperating Libraries of 1965 in Kansas, the Public Library Systems law in New York, and the regional public library networks in Nebraska in 1971 and in California in 1963. Some states, such as Oklahoma, established a consolidated system structure. In most states, the structure has been modified from the original act, but the basic concepts remain, with the states updating the laws based on changes and evolution of cooperation and library service within the states.

GROWTH OF MULTITYPE LIBRARY COOPERATIVES

The library cooperation movement began to move toward cooperation among all types of libraries with the advent of the Interlibrary Cooperation section of LSCA known as Title III. This was the beginning of federal involvement in funding of cooperation among more than one type of library. The federal support of individual libraries began with the passage of Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for schools and Title II B of the Higher Education Act for academic libraries.

The paths of multitype cooperation took two major directions in the United States. The first was the evolution of public library cooperatives to multitype systems or, in the case of some states, development of cooperatives from the beginning as multitype rather than single type. The second path was the development of another layer of cooperation which included existing single type systems. The development of the networks depended on the political and economic climate in the individual states as well as the philosophies and personalities of the individual leaders who made key contributions to the network development within the states.

Indiana chose the first option and was the first state to establish multitype cooperatives in 1967. Colorado also established their cooperatives as multitype from their inception in 1968. New Jersey cooperatives were established in 1989. Illinois took the successful cooperation model that was created in 1965 and moved it in an evolutionary process to multitype in governance in 1983. New York, however, established another cooperative structure called the Reference and Research Library Systems in 1978 rather than changing or evolving the existing public library system structure. Minnesota also established multicounty multitype library systems in 1979 as an enhancement to the cooperative public library systems that were in existence.

The governance structure of the previously described cooperative arrangements has been primarily through state authorization and, in some cases, funded with state dollars or, in others, authorized by state statutes with funding coming primarily from the federal LSCA programs. There is another type of governing structure that is often found in multitype

cooperatives as they are established as not-for-profit corporations—as 501 C3 organizations. Certainly OCLC is the largest of the cooperative organizations of this type. Major regional networks such as SOLINET, PALINET, and AMIGOS are all part of this multitype cooperative activity that took place in the United States.

Within the last eight years, several statewide developments have occurred. California has invested time and money in a multiyear planning process in order to implement a statewide multitype library network. Illinois in 1985 commissioned a study to look at the library systems in Illinois. One of the key recommendations of *Vision, 1996, A Plan for the Illinois Library Systems in the Next Decade* (HBW Associates, 1986) was to reduce the number of systems in Illinois from the eighteen existing at that time (p. 155). In yet another evolutionary process involving local decision making, the number of Illinois systems has been reduced to twelve. New York also commissioned a study of systems which recommended eliminating the research and reference library systems structure. In Indiana, the area library service authorities are in the process of becoming a single statewide program rather than a regionally based network.

These changes have meant a different means of supporting and providing cooperative service to members. This is especially true in the case of rural libraries where dependence on the cooperative has been greatest. These evolutionary, and in some instances revolutionary, changes are making way for the facilitation and management of access to broader network services such as the Internet. This development is moving straightaway into the “virtual library” movement which involves not only libraries but also all types of information providers.

In retrospect, it is interesting to reflect on John Cory's (1969) portrayal of the development of library cooperation. He described the single library of any type as the first generation of development, the single type library cooperative as the second generation, the multitype library cooperative as the third generation, and the combination of all types of libraries with nonlibrary agencies as the fourth generation (pp. 264-66). While cooperation has not been that focused in all parts of the United States, it is clear that libraries participate in a different type of cooperation now than they did less than twenty-five years ago. The computer and telecommunication networks are changing the way the world does business, and this affects libraries from rural areas just as much as those in more metropolitan areas.

One constant in the development of multitype cooperation is the goal of broadening access to resources and information so that the result for the client is an easier, more user-friendly, library environment. The overall goal rarely has anything to do with rural or urban, small or large. It is most often the same for all.

ROLES OF MULTITYPE LIBRARY COOPERATIVES

Cooperatives have developed largely as membership organizations. Individual libraries made decisions to join or participate in systems for the opportunities that the cooperative offered to enhance local library service. Even in instances where there is strong encouragement by the state agency to be a member of a cooperative organization, a library can choose not to participate. In some instances, states offer a "carrot" for participating. An example is found in Illinois where local public and school libraries must be members of systems in order to receive per capita grant funding from the state of Illinois. However, the local board has the authority to make the decision on whether or not to participate and receive the services and funding offered by the state.

Since cooperatives exist primarily in a membership environment, the laws that describe multitype cooperatives do not prescribe the service roles of the organization except in broad and general terms. While the term "role" means an expected behavior or a function, the very word "cooperate" sets the framework for these organizations, and the way the organization operates depends on the needs and desires of its members. The Standards for Cooperative Multitype Library Organizations (Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1990) support the concept that the roles depend on the individual organization. The standards prescribe in section 4.5.1 that "all parties involved in the Multitype Library Organization are mutually responsible for the development and implementation of the organization's overall Service Program and success of the organization" (p. 11). They further clarify that the governing board is responsible for policy development, and that the chief executive officer is responsible for implementing the policies and the program of service once it is developed.

Regarding the service program, systems are frequently charged with the role of improving access to the resources of the geographic area of the state for the citizens of the state, while other states have a goal of equality of access to resources no matter where the citizen is located geographically. The approaches to fulfilling this role often vary. In some states there is specific mention of interlibrary cooperation and working together to provide access to resources while other states encourage strengthening local libraries and thus improving library service. Finally, most people seem to agree that cooperative library service should improve the quality of library service provided to the clientele, including timeliness of service provision and economies of scale, so that the shared service provided is cost effective for all members.

Since there is not a set of uniform roles for systems, methods for fulfilling various roles differ from state to state. Occasionally a state may make an abrupt change of course as illustrated by recent developments in Illinois where a debate has existed for several years on the provider

and/or the facilitator role for library systems. The HBW Report (HBW Associates, 1986) describes the role that Illinois systems should support for the future:

[The] systems should withdraw from the role of service "provider," and move into a "facilitator" role. The housing of large collections of library materials—collections averaging more than 76,000 books—represent systems providing service. These same materials, disbursed throughout the state, housed with member libraries, and accessible via database, exemplify systems facilitating service. (p. 133)

This trend is not unusual in Illinois and is one that cooperatives are facing in other areas of the United States.

There seems to be a consensus that one role that the cooperative should not fulfill is that of replacing local services and local decision making. Public library service has always been a primary responsibility of the local government in which it is created. That fact has not changed over the decades of public library service and, cooperative service programs, whether they are single or multitype, should not interfere with that tradition. The tradition of local control and local decision making, however, is a key element that challenges cooperative organizations and cooperative decision making. The tension that is created in supporting local needs and expanding and offering wider service will remain a challenge and generate more philosophical, practical, and pragmatic challenges as libraries embark on the virtual library. Another element of the tension is that of agreeing to what local responsibility is vis-à-vis the cooperative's responsibility. As the world of information and information access continues to explode, the roles become more blurred among independent agencies.

ROLES OF MULTITYPE COOPERATIVES IN RURAL LIBRARIES

The following roles seem to encompass the generally accepted roles that cooperatives assume: supporting access to information and resource sharing, library development, innovation, promotion and advocacy, facilitating and coordinating cooperative programs, and equalizing services.

Access to Information

Access to information is critical to all libraries in cooperative organizations; however, it is especially necessary for rural libraries. The many tools to access information are difficult for larger libraries to provide and impossible to harness in libraries that have fewer than five employees. The cooperative can assist libraries in identifying the information that they need to have access to in order to support local clients and, at the same time, negotiate to get the information for the local libraries. In some instances, this is simply providing pointers to the information while in others this may be negotiating contracts to get information in a more cost-effective means than a single library can due to economies of scale.

Resource Sharing

Another role that cooperatives support is resource sharing. This takes many forms throughout the many cooperatives. What it means is that the support for sharing resources is often provided at the level of the cooperative organization. The organization monitors and develops protocols and, in some instances, initiates resource sharing requests. This is changing dramatically as the technological abilities for libraries to do this locally change and expand.

A key segment of the resource sharing picture is for cooperatives to offer opportunities for rural libraries to share their resources with larger libraries. While rural libraries may not have as many total volumes as larger libraries and they may not loan as much, they are, in fact, resource rich for the local community and often for the partners in the cooperative. Traditionally, however, there is a lack of understanding that the resources available in the rural library are needed or desired by other agencies. Often they are not available on shared databases, and rural or small libraries are often the last to get the technology to allow them to be active participants in the larger network. Cooperatives have spent so much of their energy in gaining access to resources of larger organizations for the rural partners that they missed opportunities to make the resources of the small libraries available.

Library Development

Probably one of the most important roles that cooperative organizations support for rural libraries is that of library development. Rural libraries often do not have trained librarians managing the library, and they often have solo librarians or, at the most, fewer than five staff members. They lack opportunity and options for keeping abreast of the changing library services and environment, especially with smaller budgets for purchasing a breadth and depth of library professional tools. To support the development of local library service, cooperatives have engaged extensively in assisting local libraries through professional consulting services. Further, cooperatives often manage and offer extensive continuing education and training programs to provide education for rural library personnel.

Innovation

Since their inception, cooperatives have provided, and continue to provide, the role of "innovator" or "risk taker." For rural libraries especially, this role is essential and needs to be strengthened more and more. Since the majority of public libraries in the United States have budgets under \$50,000 and serve populations below 20,000, this role enables rural libraries to test and try different options in order to make decisions about their future service provision. The challenge for the cooperative and the rural library in this role is that, with innovation and testing, come

changes in service and service provision. This means that the program of the cooperative may be ever-changing and difficult for librarians and trustees to understand.

Promotion and Advocacy

While promotion and advocacy is not a role that is identified specifically in most state laws or rules and regulations, it is a major role that cooperatives have supported for years. This role is often based on the communication network that exists within the organization of member libraries. Since the network already has a means of communicating with member libraries, it is able to share library information updates with members in a more timely manner than other agencies. This will also change as technology provides a more efficient means of communication than the traditional paper communications tools of newsletters, updates, memos, or fax transmissions.

Promoting libraries in general and advocating for library service is something that cooperatives can also do efficiently. While citizens in local rural areas want to know what information the local library has and the local library is in the best position to provide that information, the cooperative is in a good position to support and provide information to funding agencies on a variety of libraries and a variety of library services and information.

Facilitating and Coordinating Cooperative Programs

A major role for cooperatives is to encourage and promote local cooperation. There is very little in the literature about cooperation in rural areas among local library institutions and other local agencies. While it would seem logical that the school and public libraries would have very extensive sharing models in rural areas, the cooperation often is more informal rather than a planned and constantly reviewed process. Although the majority of rural libraries are not partners with local agencies, such as the Cooperative Extension Service, such a partnership would greatly enhance information delivery.

One frequently associates cooperation at the local level with combined school and public libraries. While that is a way to more efficiently utilize a community's library resources in rural areas, it opens the issue of why there are not more formal cooperative efforts between libraries and other information providers within the same community.

The role of the cooperative in this instance is to encourage, to consult, and to provide opportunities for local libraries to work together in addition to offering a means for enhanced local sharing of resources.

Equalization of Service

Another reason for early cooperative efforts was to encourage the equalization of service. The HBW Report (HBW Associates, 1986) on Illinois library systems addresses the issue of equalizing service and concludes

that service could not be equalized as the needs of each individual library were quite different even among similar rural libraries. The citizens want and demand different services from their local library. Equalization of service should not be a goal. What systems could and should do is to equalize the access to resources as the California planning model discussed. It was the equalization of access to the resources, not the equalization of service, that was identified as the goal (pp. 26-34).

WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF THE RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARY IN COOPERATIVE LIBRARY ORGANIZATIONS?

Since overall services roles are developed at the local level and implemented in cooperation among members of the organization, there have been few roles for rural libraries accepted on a widespread basis. The most important role and responsibility that is identified by the *Standards for Cooperative Multitype Library Organizations* (Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1990) is for the libraries to honor membership and service program commitments (p. 13).

As a whole, in examining rural public libraries and cooperative organizations, there seems to be little difference in the responsibilities and services that are developed in rural areas and metropolitan cooperatives. The difference, perhaps, is in the implementation; however, the goals and the results that are desired continue to be the same no matter what the size and what type of library is involved in the cooperative organization.

Participate In Decision Making

Because the role, as identified by the standards, is to help the cooperative succeed, the rural library has a responsibility to participate in decision making. The governance structure of state-based multitype cooperatives is often outlined by law. The structure is usually described in broad general terms as to who is eligible for membership on the governing board; most notably it describes that all types of libraries should be represented. It also describes the position of individuals who can represent the member libraries. The law leaves local decisions on representation to the local cooperative. There are often opportunities in the bylaws of cooperatives for geographical representation by region, size of library, or other elements. Rural public libraries need to be represented on governing boards and to be active participants.

There are also opportunities for service on other committees within the cooperative organizations. This is often in the development or evaluation of system services or service programs. Again the rural library needs to be represented. Personnel in those libraries have a great deal to offer the entire constituency of the cooperative regarding the perspective of local service needs and desires.

Meeting Local Needs

Because personnel in rural libraries are often closer to the customer than those in larger libraries due to the numbers of staff members and the limited population in the service area, they often are more aware of the overall needs. Rural libraries, just as other libraries, should support local needs. The rural library must be sure that it has adequate hours to support the needs of the community so that patrons will have opportunities to use the library at convenient times. It is essential that the rural library make every effort to entice local patrons into the library. The library also has to be willing to purchase materials of all types and not just those materials that are safe and without controversy. There are some views by personnel in larger libraries that smaller libraries do not buy controversial materials but simply borrow them on interlibrary loan so that they do not have to face discussions at the local level.

Make Collections Accessible to Other Participating Members

Another role that the rural library needs to play is to offer to share the resources that it has. While most rural libraries are more than willing to share, they often have not had that opportunity. A library cannot easily share if what it owns is not available on an electronic database. This means that the library will need to participate and probably spend some precious local funds to have collections made available in shared databases at the regional, state, and national level. This will further mean that the library will have to follow national standards in order to be able to effectively share resources.

Rural public libraries often have an image problem within the local community, within the library and the board of the library, within the cooperative, and throughout the library community. That image problem is the commonly held belief that small libraries, and especially rural libraries, have little if anything of value to share with other libraries. Some believe large libraries have the unique items to share and that small or rural libraries have only duplicates. According to Atkinson (1987), there are unique items in almost every type and size of library; there just are fewer unique items in small libraries (p. 437). However, that does not make the resources of any less value. It is clear that, when the small and rural library is a member of a cooperative organization with a means to offer resources to the other partners, it has provided, and does provide, a major contribution to resource sharing in the network.

The image problem further seems to be that residents in rural communities do not realize the wealth of resources and access to resources that are available in the community. The rural residents often think that they will find everything that they want in larger, more metropolitan, libraries. The fact is that resources are often easier to obtain in a rural library. Customer service is more personalized and the local demand for newer material is usually lower.

Honor Membership Responsibilities and Commitments

The most important thing that any member of a cooperative can do is honor responsibilities and commitments. This means to support all the roles previously described and to meet any agreed upon policies of the cooperative organization. For example, if the policy of the cooperative is to offer reciprocal borrowing among libraries in the network, and policy requires that library cards be validated every year, then the rural library must comply with that agreement. While it may seem like an undesirable step in a rural area where one knows all the borrowers, it is essential in a larger library where the staff simply does not know everyone. Compliance to agreed upon responsibilities make the entire process of interlibrary cooperation work effectively for everyone.

It is also important for the rural library to expect that other libraries in the network will honor their membership responsibilities. Frequently, personnel in rural libraries overlook noncompliance with policies by larger libraries. The reason sometimes relates to fear that the larger library simply will not participate in the network at all if they have to follow the policies, and the rural library may believe that the larger library does not need the network as much as they need it.

WHAT ARE THE SERVICES THAT A COOPERATIVE LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDES TO ITS MEMBERS?

As described previously, the *Standards for Cooperative Multitype Library Organizations* (Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1990) states that: "All parties involved in the Multitype Library Organization are mutually responsible for the development and implementation of the organization's overall Service Program and success of the organization" (p. 11). Just as there is no universal agreement on the roles of the member library and the cooperative, there is no agreement on what services should be part of a cooperative. In addition, there is no universal means of "grouping" the services.

The appendix in the *Standards for Cooperative Multitype Library Organizations* (1990) offers a list of fifty-six sample services undertaken by multitype organizations (p. 17). The list was not designed to be comprehensive but that of commonly supported services. In 1991, Illinois adopted standards for services for Illinois Multitype Library Systems. The document describes eight core services for Illinois Library Systems including: automation, bibliographic access, delivery, consulting, continuing education, reference, interlibrary loan, and reciprocal access (Fiels et al., 1991). The New York study identified basic reference and research library system services including interlibrary loan request processing; verifying and locating materials; reference, referral and research; retrospective conversion; union list/catalog production; delivery; consultant services; continuing education; communications services; and direct access

to member collections (Griffiths & King, 1989, p. 12). In each of these documents, there is a clear indication that these are not necessarily the only services that a cooperative provides. In the case of Illinois and New York, it is clear that these should be the basic or core services.

Others have described the services of cooperatives by functional means such as access to information, communication and public information, consulting and continuing education, resource sharing, development and expansion of library service, support services, and governance and management. All of these groupings are the primary means of describing to members, governing officials, funding agencies, and the general public the programs of the cooperative organization.

This list of service programs provided by the author in the following section also includes service names and brief descriptions. The programs described are not an exhaustive list, nor are these meant to imply that programs not described are not appropriate for multitype library organizations. Further, the grouping by function is the view of the author on how the service would be categorized.

Access to Information

The purpose of this function in a cooperative organization is to support access to bibliographic information and on-site resources for maximum access to the collections of individual member libraries. In a shared automation environment, it is also sharing access to all types of databases. Access to information should not be limited to sharing bibliographic resources but should provide a means to share the human resources of personnel in member libraries. Programs that may be associated with this function include:

- *Blind and physically handicapped services*—supporting the Library of Congress Talking Book Service Program
- *Access to a variety of catalog*—shared access to databases of a variety of libraries
- *Access to a variety of other bibliographic databases*—shared access to periodical indexes, CD ROM resources, OCLC First Search, and a wealth of other databases
- *Internet access*—management of access to Internet services for member libraries
- *Directory of personnel resources*—compilation and development of a resource list of personnel available to share expertise with other members
- *Reciprocal on-site access*—negotiating on-site access to collections that are traditionally not accessible, such as in special libraries and special collections
- *Union catalog of resources*—management of an electronic shared bibliographic catalog either through online and shared telecommunications or via CD-ROM catalogs

- *Union list of periodicals*—management and publication of listing of periodical holdings within the geographic area of the cooperative or access to broader periodical holdings

Resource Sharing Function

The resource sharing function is the major focus of many cooperative service organizations. Cooperatives often coordinate and facilitate the sharing of local library resources in all formats. This function is normally designed to optimize the use of all resources within a geographic area. Specific programs that are commonly identified with this function are:

- *Cooperative collection management*—assisting libraries in making arrangements in cooperatively planning and purchasing collections
- *Delivery/courier system*—management of document delivery service of resources that are shared and not able to be provided to the library in an electronic format
- *Document delivery*—management of document delivery service of materials through electronic means such as telefacsimile, using the Internet, providing full-text documents electronically
- *Interlibrary loan*—assisting or facilitating for library-to-library borrowing of materials, through joint arrangements, shared database, or provision of the service
- *Reciprocal borrowing*—supporting a means for clients of one library to obtain borrowing privileges on-site at other member libraries
- *Reference*—management, support, and often answering questions that local libraries cannot answer
- *Reference referral*—supporting a means to assist libraries in locating resources and getting answers to questions by supporting cooperative arrangements between libraries and other information providers
- *Rotating collections*—supporting a means to move selected collections between libraries; collections would be limited in scope and have a limited number of local clientele interested so that resources could be available at the local library

Communications and Public Information Function

The communication and public information function of cooperatives is basic to all the other functions. This assists libraries in making informed decisions on topics of critical importance to member libraries. This function also promotes the services available through the cooperative or through member libraries. Programs associated with this function include:

- *Area-wide news releases*—general announcement of library services available to a broad group of residents in the cooperative service area
- *Bulletin board, printed and/or electronic*—dissemination of information about services, general library information, or shared communication

- *Directory of libraries*—listing of member libraries, including hours of service, personnel, locations, collection specialties, history, etc.
- *Electronic mail*—supporting communication for personnel in member libraries using electronic mail; currently popular using Internet e-mail
- *Newsletters*—regular publication of news information about member libraries, about library news, or general information
- *Public relations materials*—development and distribution of promotional materials to be utilized by member libraries
- *Publications*—publications of manuals, reports from grants, bibliographies, or research
- *Toll free telephone access*—provision of WATS lines for communicating with personnel in the cooperative as well as for data and fax communication

Library Development Function

The services of the development function are designed primarily to assist libraries by providing necessary information to the professional and support staff of member libraries as well as to the governing authorities. The cooperative assists in providing members with an opportunity to gain specialized knowledge needed to make informed decisions. Traditional programs in this function are:

- *Consulting*—assistance and professional advice to librarians and governing authorities on a wide range of library topics and issues
- *Continuing education*—workshops and seminars to expand the knowledge and expertise of the governing authorities and staff of participating libraries
- *Continuing education calendar*—compilation and publication of a listing of continuing education programs
- *Cooperative programming*—assisting libraries to develop joint programs that would meet the needs of several communities
- *Grants management*—management and development of cooperative grant projects to assist in developing local library and shared programs
- *Research and development*—identifying and testing new and different services
- *Special populations programs*—developing and sponsoring programs for special groups of library users. Examples would be service to the physically challenged, literacy programs, service to ethnic populations, etc.
- *Training*—support in assisting librarians to utilize all the information access tools available at the local level

Support Services Function

The support services function assists member libraries or groups of member libraries in providing certain services cooperatively. This function generally provides those services which are considered a local library responsibility and which may be delivered more cost-effectively and more efficiently on a cooperative basis. This function can vary greatly from cooperative to cooperative and from state to state. Services that can be associated with this function include:

- *Contract negotiation*—negotiating with vendors for shared services on behalf of all members
- *Cooperative acquisitions*—supporting a shared acquisitions program including shared database and shared discounts and cooperative collection building
- *Cooperative equipment repair*—supporting a program to provide access or offer a means for libraries to get local equipment repaired
- *Database management*—management of a shared database including protocols and operations
- *Free net support*—management and support of a free net for residents of a geographical region
- *Negotiated group discounts*—negotiating discounts for member libraries with vendors
- *Preservation facilities*—supporting and offering facilities to preserve library materials
- *Printing services*—supporting opportunities to share printing and duplication services for member libraries
- *Shared automation program*—management and support of a computerized library system which provides automated circulation, cataloging, online catalog, media booking, and gateway access to other databases
- *Technical processing function*—management and provision of technical services for libraries, including cataloging, processing, authority control
- *Telecommunications network management*—management of the telecommunications hook ups between the local library and shared network resources

Governance and Management Function

The governance and management function is essential to any network. Networks or cooperatives can choose to implement all or parts of the other functions; however, connecting them in an organized program requires a progressive and responsive administration which exercises sound fiscal planning and provides personnel support to carry out the functions and programs. Services of this function are essential to a strong organization and would include:

- *Evaluation of the cooperative program*—regular evaluation and input on the entire service program
- *Financial reporting*—regular information regarding the financial condition of the organization
- *Governing board and policy generation*—development of policies and protocols to operate the cooperative organization
- *Legislative networking*—assistance with the development and passage of legislation affecting library services
- *Networking with nonlibrary agencies*—assisting libraries and developing a means to access information from nonlibrary agencies as information providers

Benefits for Rural Libraries

Benefits for rural libraries in a cooperative service organization mirror the reason that the organization was originally created. The service programs are designed to meet the needs of all libraries, small and large, and participation in the network provides much broader access to, and delivery of, resources and information to the user. This goes back to the original discussion and basis for networks as described by Hugh C. Atkinson: Results for the users. The users of the rural libraries get results from the sharing and cooperative arrangements in which the library participates. In addition to broader access, the economies of scale or cost efficiency help the rural library better utilize its limited funding resources. Training and continuing education offer opportunities for personnel in rural libraries to have broad access to quality education at a cost that is minimal compared to commercially provided education. The results for the patron are that the library staff is better able to provide library services to meet their changing needs and demands. In every instance, whether rural or metropolitan, it is the resulting benefit for the patron that should be the final test of the success or failure of cooperative library programs.

CONTRIBUTION OF RURAL LIBRARIES

Rural and small libraries are often undervalued in cooperative networks. While the resources that they have do not number the total volumes that are available in larger institutions, the small library may have the one book or the one video that will satisfy the user's demands. The contribution in resources as well as human networking is as William B. Ernst, Jr. stated in 1977: "reciprocal and mutual." The rural library often delivers and supports the network faster than in larger more complex library institutions. The library is not burdened with complex organizational structure and is able to move resources faster. At the same time, rural libraries support customer service as its most important feature. They are often just as concerned about patrons of other libraries as about their own and thus have a dedication to getting the information quickly in order to satisfy user demand.

While the rural library has much to gain from participation in a network, it also has a lot to offer participants. The author has described the patron-initiated interlibrary loan that is being utilized in the Lincoln Trail Libraries System (Ison, 1994). Recently, the System, a primarily geographically rural cooperative headquartered in Champaign, Illinois, added the feature of patron-initiated holds on the public catalogs in the shared automation service program that includes rural libraries from communities of under 5,000 and 10,000 citizens along with population areas of over 50,000. The system manages the shared database of over 1.3 million items for twenty-two libraries. It includes the partial holdings of over eighty different agencies. Through patron-initiated holds, citizens from all participating libraries are able to request materials from other libraries via the shared automation system. The opportunity to do this has been described as virtual borrowing, which is borrowing of materials from a remote library where the transactions are initiated directly by the library patron without mediation from library staff. The materials are then delivered to the patron's home library for pick up by the patron.

A somewhat surprising outgrowth of patron-initiated interlibrary loan is the shifting of the lending away from the larger libraries to a reliance on smaller, more rural, libraries. According to statistics, rural libraries were better able to rely on each other and, in several instances, smaller libraries loaned more than they borrowed from the largest libraries in the consortium. In the same four months that the study was conducted, in every instance, libraries serving a population of 20,000 or fewer increased their percentage of lending to other libraries within the consortium. In every instance, libraries serving a population of over 20,000 decreased their percentage of lending to other libraries and increased borrowing from smaller libraries. Overall, borrowing and lending was up dramatically from the same four months of prior periods with a five-fold increase in activity. This supports a theory that Melvin R. George introduced in 1977 that, with technology, access libraries in a region, similar in size and function, can support a large percentage of interlibrary loan. George predicted that there would be a shift from relying only on the largest of libraries to a more even distribution among different sizes of libraries.

Simple observation by the author has shown that newer materials that have long reserve lists in larger libraries are available on the shelf in smaller libraries. They are available long before larger libraries are able to share with smaller libraries. The key is that citizens in rural and smaller libraries have many of the same interests as those in cities, and rural libraries purchase the resources to meet the demand. However, the volume of the demand and the number of citizens desiring the materials is lower in rural libraries, making the materials available to share more quickly.

While we should not base interlibrary borrowing only on new materials in small or rural libraries, we should definitely take advantage of those resources, especially if a mechanism is in place to easily transport the materials from one library to another. Rural libraries are also rich in unique materials and are continually making these resources available in shared databases. For example, Lincoln Trail Libraries System offers and supports retrospective conversion of holdings. In the more than twenty libraries that have been converted, the overall average of unique materials is 33 percent compared with other information in the shared database. In every instance, there are new and unique items added to this shared resource tool by rural libraries.

Rural libraries are often the only source of local history and local resources for that community or area, and there are often older unique titles in rural libraries that need to be made available to the network. In order to fulfill a role of information provider, the rural library must conform to standards for shared resources. Frequently, however, the governing boards of rural libraries are reluctant to commit financial resources to participate in shared cataloging programs that will permit those libraries to open their resources outside the community. The reason is not necessarily that they do not want to share, it is that the value to them has not been adequately explained.

Another important contribution that the rural library makes is the ability to support the resource sharing activities more quickly than larger libraries. Lincoln Trail Libraries System supports a vehicular delivery service in order to quickly and efficiently get the resources from the lending to the borrowing library. The procedure for the small libraries is to review and sort their holds list prior to the scheduled arrival of the delivery personnel. This enables a patron to request an item on the shared system and often within twenty-four hours have that material delivered to the requesting library. Overall, this shared system and the virtual borrowing that it allows must be coupled with committed staff in all libraries to be sure that the needs of patrons of all libraries are treated as important. The rural library is able to make a great contribution, in speed and dedication, to getting the resources to the libraries, and patrons comment on the quick service under virtual borrowing.

CHALLENGES

Cooperation in a multitype library organization is not without its challenges for the future. Rural and small libraries, as are all libraries, are faced with tremendous upheaval in the means for information and resource delivery. The challenges for rural libraries include dealing with change, obtaining telecommunications, participating in the virtual library, securing adequate funding and staff, and increasing collaboration with other information providers.

Change

The biggest challenge for the future of libraries is found in the rapid pace of change. This is especially overwhelming for libraries with few personnel resources and in areas where tradition is very important. Citizens in rural areas want and need the same opportunities as those in more urban areas, but the need to maintain traditional library service is also important. People want stability in their lives, and the traditional library helps to provide that stability. The challenge of change is to be able to balance the traditional services while providing the information access tools to meet the information needs of today's clientele. More and more services that were traditionally provided by the cooperative, such as verification and searching for interlibrary loan items, are now being shifted to the local library. This workload shift allows the librarian the opportunity to work more closely with the patron in determining exact needs and providing better service. On the other hand, the library will have to provide staff with more training and educational opportunities. At the same time, the ability of citizens to use their own technological resources to gain access to more collections is also growing, and the impact this unknown potential has on library service is unsettling.

The rural librarian must be flexible, willing to take more risks, and understand that change is inevitable and will provide patrons with positive service results.

Telecommunications

With electronic information access comes an immediate challenge for rural libraries—telecommunications costs. While rural libraries and urban libraries for years have been able to mail a letter for the same cost, they have never been able to gain the benefits of telecommunications at the same rate. The proliferation of telephone companies and telecommunications providers has exploded since the deregulation of AT&T in 1984, ten short years ago. In 1994, Congress introduced Senate Bill 1822 to overhaul the sixty-year-old communications law. The reform bill did not pass, but it is anticipated that there must be an overhaul passed soon. Among the elements in any new legislation will be how rural areas can gain equal access to telecommunications services. In many rural areas, there are local and private phone companies that control the local telephone service. Many rural areas cannot get the telephone service to support the needed connections for rural libraries to participate. In addition to the access issue, Congress also needs to address the issue of affordability of access so local libraries can get connected. Because the telecommunications issues are very complex, librarians and trustees in rural libraries must be able to articulate their needs to their Congressmen to assure equal access and cost-efficient access for the local community. This is an area in which the cooperative organization can provide guidance and expertise so that rural libraries and rural communities are not information poor due to lack of telecommunications access.

Ability to Participate in the Virtual Library

As rural libraries acquire appropriate telecommunications, they must be willing contributors to the network by providing access to their resources in an electronic format. This will require changes in attitudes and changes in funding for supporting resource access. As rural libraries participate in shared online catalogs and databases, their resources will be in more demand than they have been in the past. It will take commitment on the part of librarians and trustees in rural areas to be sure that they are able to actively participate and contribute to the library community.

Funding and Staffing

Another challenge that continues for small libraries is the means to fund services to meet the increased demands as well as how to attract, hire, and train staff to meet the needs of the community in the future. The concern of funding is evident especially in the area of telecommunications costs. An Illinois Secretary of State Rural Library Panel report regarding rural library services in Illinois discussed the issue of funding and telecommunications. Rural librarians considered the cost of telecommunications as one of the biggest problems that they faced in the electronic age. The task force also recommended developing new means of delivering formal training to rural librarians since the distance from training sites posed a major problem for the participants who needed to have the training localized. The report recommendations resulted in additional toll free access to shared online catalogs and increased usage of teleconferences to deliver education on a statewide basis (Ryan, 1992, pp. 1-14).

Collaboration with Agencies Other than Libraries

The information explosion is facing other agencies besides libraries. It is essential that the rural library be a leader in collaborative community planning for development of information access to the community. The Information Superhighway, the Internet, the Infobahn, are all realities of 1995 and the future, and local citizens want access to this vast resource. The rural library has an opportunity to be the lead information agency in the community and maintain the community network. Through cooperation with other libraries and other information agencies, the library can be the leader. This will offer new opportunities for multitype cooperation at the regional level as well as at the local level. The Southeast Florida Library and Information Network (SEFLIN) has created a model of regional access to the Internet by managing the local free net for the libraries that are members of the cooperative. The SEFLIN model is one that cooperatives and local libraries should examine so that libraries can provide the network access in the future. Metropolitan models are frequently appropriate to emulate in rural areas. There may be different challenges; however, the desired results are the same, and librarians should learn from the pioneering efforts of others.

CONCLUSION

Multitype library cooperatives and rural libraries are natural partners. The commitment by rural libraries to their customers and the desire to provide increased access to resources at a reasonable cost will continue to be essential in the future. The needs of the patron for more information beyond what is offered locally will continue to grow, and the multitype organization will continue to be a leader and a supporter for shared information resource access. The growing need to share information will encourage a much broader commitment to working with nonlibrary information providers in order to satisfy patron demand, as libraries will not be able to satisfy all users' demands. More networking, more training, and more and different opportunities for information access will produce results for the citizens of all libraries.

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