

LiLI Unlimited: Complementing Consortia

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With the emergence of LiLI Unlimited Resource Sharing, library staff may find themselves struggling to reconcile consortium membership and participation in the LiLI Unlimited program. While one might find themselves wanting to choose just one, they should instead consider the whole package. The fact is, these options are not mutually exclusive, but, rather, they complement each other. The result is more expansive access to information for patrons provided in a more efficient manner by the library.

What does a consortium do?

To understand the relationship between the regional consortium and the statewide LiLI Unlimited program, it is important to understand the function of library consortia. A consortium is a group of libraries that join together for one or more cooperative purposes. Examples include cooperative purchasing, integrated library systems (automated catalogs), reciprocal borrowing, cooperative collection development, courier service, and other resource sharing activities. The most common purposes for Idaho's library consortia are shared automated systems and resource sharing.

Expanding reach through resource sharing

Resource sharing typically includes interlibrary loan (ILL), intra-library loan, and reciprocal borrowing. Intra-library loan refers to the borrowing and lending of materials between libraries or branches within one consortium or library system. Interlibrary loan is a function for borrowing and lending materials between libraries outside the local system or consortium. Reciprocal borrowing is a form of access in which a patron of one library system is permitted walk-in borrowing privileges at another participating library.

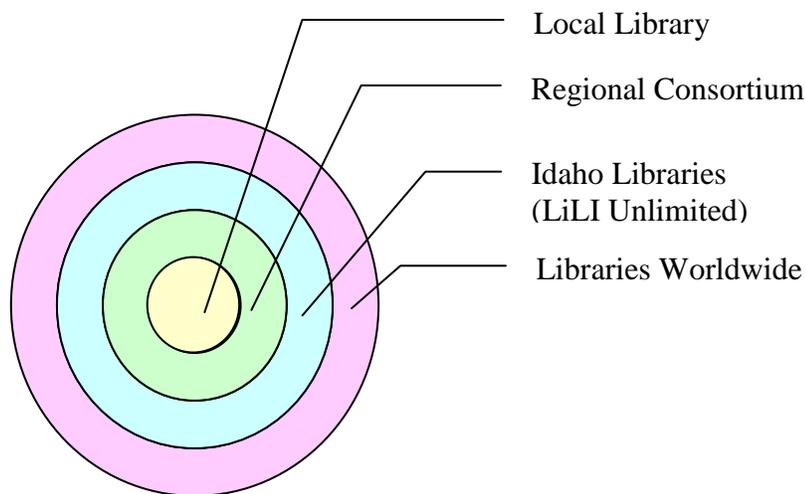
How does it work?

Patrons within a consortium will first seek library materials through traditional circulation, reciprocal borrowing and intra-library loan. These services are becoming even more effective with cooperative collection development. With cooperative collections individual libraries develop specialized collections in certain subject areas. The local collection still reflects the community's unique needs, but the cooperation with other libraries provides expanded access to specialized subjects through intra-library loan or reciprocal borrowing.

Even with reciprocal borrowing and intra-library loan services in place, it is unrealistic to expect one region or group of libraries to have all the resources to meet every patron's needs. To meet the users' vast needs, member libraries rely on interlibrary loan with libraries outside their regional membership. Interlibrary loan allows libraries to expand their reach beyond local resources and out to the world.

By participating in LiLI Unlimited Resource Sharing, consortium members can reach these out-of-area resources using online tools to facilitate the process. The electronic ILL system that participants use allows library staff to locate materials worldwide with just one search. In addition, libraries using the electronic system report that it is easy to learn, easy to use, and saves staff time.

Libraries usually approach resource sharing with a tiered system of borrowing. The first level is, of course, the local library. When an item is not available locally, the next step is the regional consortium. From there, materials may be acquired from other libraries in the state or even from libraries worldwide. The number of tiers depends largely upon the local library's workflow and regional relationships. Refer to the diagram below for one example of how a borrowing tier might look:



Sharing the Cataloging Load

In addition to the sharing of library materials, consortia offer the means to share cataloging data through a shared automated catalog. The shared catalog provides enormous customer service benefits, but also has advantages for library staff. As materials are added to the library collection, processing them utilizes the library's most valuable resource: staff.

With a shared automated system, the first library to catalog a new item creates (or downloads) the information in the shared database. The other members are then able to simply attach their holdings information to the already-available record—a real benefit for member libraries. Since, being the first library to catalog an item takes a bit more staff time than simply attaching holdings, most consortia will try to share the responsibility of being the first to catalog an item. This can be achieved when all members of the consortium have access to similar cataloging tools.

LiLI Unlimited Resource Sharing gives participating libraries discounted access to online cataloging tools that make it easy to be the first to process a new item. The online tools available through LiLI Unlimited allow library staff to process those new materials faster and easier than manual methods. When all members of a consortium utilize this resource, they are better able to share the cataloging load while maintaining consistent quality of cataloging within their shared database.

Complement, not Conflict

Libraries today are faced with many difficult choices among decreasing budgets, increasing costs, and increasing customer needs. With the complementary nature of library consortia and the LiLI Unlimited Resource Sharing program, library managers do not need to choose. By taking advantage of both opportunities, library staff can get their work done more efficiently while providing expanded access to information for customers.