

Idaho's Regional Library Networks

A Study of the Trends and Success Factors

*Includes Suggested Activities for
Building, Sustaining, and Expanding Idaho's Networks*

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During the summer of 2003, the Idaho State Library carried out a study of networking activities in Idaho in order to create a work plan for the development of regional library consortia. The work plan would identify the activities, roles, and responsibilities for the Idaho State Library in fostering the development of regional library consortia in the state. The project was based upon 3 assumptions:

- Regional library consortia will play a crucial role in reaching the goal of development of a statewide network,
- Libraries in Idaho will welcome assistance in organizing and developing regional consortia, and
- ISL needs to know what role to take in the development of these consortia.

With these assumptions in mind, ISL staff set out to identify areas of past success and areas of anticipated need in the development of regional library consortia. This report will identify national networking trends, the status of networking within Idaho, the success factors for Idaho's networks, the barriers to their expansion, and suggestions for activities for the continued success and expansion of Idaho's networks.

In order to delve into networking, the first step is to define the activities and organizations supporting networking activities. Networking, consortia, library systems and all the terms associated are often used interchangeably. The following is a list of terms used in this study. Let these act as working definitions within the scope of this study.

DEFINITIONS

According to the FY2004 LSTA Guide for Idaho, the following working definitions are being used:

Consortium - A group of libraries that join together for one or more cooperative purposes. Examples are cooperative purchasing, creating an inter-library courier service, or sharing integrated library systems. A consortium provides the infrastructure through which these services are delivered. A consortium has a mission, goals and objectives that are outlined in a long range or strategic planning document. It also has an organizational structure that includes governance, administration, staffing, and sustainable funding.

Infrastructure of a library network - A consortium provides the infrastructure of a library network. The consortium governance, administration, staffing, and sustainable funding mechanism provide the stable organization necessary to administer a network.

Network - Although often used synonymously with consortium, for LSTA purposes, the State Library defines a network as an electronic means of sharing resources among member libraries of a consortium. At a minimum, a network consists of a shared integrated library system that is web-accessible and has a Z39.50 Version 3 or newer server that allows simultaneous multi-site searching both from within the network and remotely, and interlibrary loan service among all network members.

Integrated Library System - Incorporated catalog of records from all libraries in the system. For LSTA purposes, records must be MARC 21 format, web-accessible and Z39.50 readable.

NATIONAL TRENDS

Library consortia range from informal collaborative efforts aimed at sharing resources and leveraging funding and expertise to sophisticated, automated networks encompassing large regions. Nationally, there is great variety in the composition of cooperative library efforts. Their members may come from various types of libraries, but generally, the basis for establishment is to provide services that benefit the libraries themselves and/or their customers.

Many times, consortia are established through grant funding. Once the initial grant runs out, funding is then picked up in another manner. Some cooperatives are funded through state funds exclusively, while others use a mixture of internal sources, such as members' fees, and external sources such as state funds, E-rate discounts and grants. (Conrad & Lessner, 2002)

Governance of a library consortium is membership driven and adjusts to fit the purpose and membership of the consortium. Governance types range from a decision-making board comprised of a representative from each library to advisory councils to a paid staff which administers the consortium. Generally, representatives from member libraries provide the direction.

The mark of a valuable consortium is that its foremost reason for existence is to better serve the needs of its patrons. How consortia have accomplished this is as varied as their funding and governance processes. For many existing and developing networks, it is still important to share resources. As Potter (1997) states, "...a group of libraries has a combined set of resources that is greater than the resources of any single member." Others form, not to share existing collections, but to access the new electronic resources at the lowest possible cost. (1997) Still, other organizations want to ensure a level playing field for all members. (1997) Bolt (2000) notes the following reasons behind collaboration:

- Response to pressure from funders to use resources efficiently
- Cope with reduced resources
- Make more services more accessible
- Increase positive results of cooperation
- Help communities solve problems and move forward
- Bring attention to the role and contributions of libraries.

Consortia provide and facilitate services to reduce staff work at the local level, extend the reach of individual library budgets, help to enhance services to their constituencies, strategically plan and maintain awareness of innovations that may improve library service. (Pronevitz, 2000)

Some provide centralized services for members like cataloging, automation, Internet access, technical support, group purchasing and subscriptions and staff training. (Conrad & Lessner, 2002) Some consortia have progressively become advocacy and development agencies. They are building consensus among diverse library staffs, providing cost effective programs and taking advantage of opportunities for peer-to-peer sharing. (Simmons, 2000)

According to experts in library cooperation, consortia will continue to be an important feature of libraries in the future. Peters (2003) believes “that collaboration involving libraries is crucial to the continued success of libraries”. He continues that the risk of not cooperating is redundancy, duplication and missed opportunities. (2003)

The future of consortia will be one of rapid change.

“The library cooperative culture is chaotic, results-oriented and calendar aware. It calls for people who are flexible, multi-talented, task-oriented, aware of library setting work pressures, curious, lifelong learners, comfortable working with member library people at all levels and mature and calm in the face of confusion; a sense of humor is a must.

Above all, there must be an understanding and connection to the purpose of the cooperative.” (Simmons, 2000)

Consortia leadership and staff must embrace change, experiment to keep the consortium vital and on the cutting edge, and welcome the possibilities of cooperation. Also, because technology changes faster than policy, consortia need to provide working proof of the new [technological] concept for it to gain quicker acceptance. (Pace, 2001)

Some things should not change, however. Consortia need to stay progressively customer service oriented. “Service – intelligent, responsive and personal must be our competitive edge.” (Hyman, 2000) This means being accountable to users and members. Hamon (2000) indicates that library consortia must assess their communities and their infrastructure to direct future growth. Strategic planning will continue to be essential to consortia development.

All stakeholders must understand why they are part of a cooperative and how they benefit. (Simmons, 2000) More and more, consortia will be advocates for their members, users and libraries in general. Their organizations will also research and develop better methods of operating. “Library consortia will become even more important in the future by assisting libraries in implementing and managing the process of change.” (Bosseau, Martin & Hirshon,

1999) They continue, “the most successful consortia in the next century will help libraries predict their emerging needs and help them work through the process of change to develop strong programs and services in a way that fosters experimentation, risk-taking and creativity.” (Bosseau, Martin & Hirshon, 1999)

There will be fewer consortia but they will be larger. All consortia, to avoid working against each other must look for opportunities for interconsortial cooperation. (Peters, 2001) The future will also be one of growing international cooperation. Consortia need to be aware of the global information environment (Peters, 2003) and its effects locally.

CURRENT STATUS OF NETWORKING IN IDAHO

There are 3 distinct geographic regions in Idaho, and in each region a variety of stages of networking can be witnessed. Pnina Shachaf, in her unpublished article “National libraries consortia life cycle,” identifies the stages of the evolution of national library consortia. Although she addresses national consortia, the progression of local and regional consortia tends to follow a similar cycle. The stages she identifies are:

1. Embryonic
2. Early Development
3. Development
4. Maturation
5. Disbanding or MetaConsortia

In the Embryonic stage, informal efforts toward resource sharing and other cooperative activities take place. Steps are taken to formalize the cooperation and plan for the future. During this cycle, the consortium can be affected by members’ individual circumstances.

Early Development occurs after some time has been spent establishing and strengthening the consortium. At this point the consortium becomes self-sufficient. In this stage a consortium may want to show its members the benefits of cooperating to further strengthen the consortium. Additional cost-saving opportunities may be sought, and enhancement of existing services may take place.

At the Development stage, a consortium has realized its staying power, but may experience insecurity about the future of the effort. Generally, increased funding is sought to enhance services and increase membership. In this stage, efforts may be focused on efficiency and stability.

When a consortium becomes independent of external funding and is operating efficiently, it has moved into Maturation, the fourth stage. At this time a consortium’s identity and scope is clear and stable.

The fifth stage identified by Shachaf is either Disbanding or MetaConsortia. Disbanding is not a usual development at this point, but a consortium may merge with other consortia to become a MetaConsortium, or, a consortium of consortia. With no data to offer insight into the development of MetaConsortia, Shachaf surmises that a MetaConsortium would follow the development cycle of new consortia.

In Idaho, one can see all these stages represented. In Southwest Idaho, there is a great deal of consortia activity--some of it in the earliest of stages. The Valley Mountain Library Consortium (VMLC) is in the embryonic stage. A group of 12 public libraries have moved from an informal regular gathering to a formalize consortium with governance in place. Where VMLC has identified the value of their cooperative efforts, movement to the Early Development stage won't take place until more concrete plans for shared services, including a shared network, and more established financing is in place.

Striving to move from Embryonic to Early Development is the West End Library Consortium (WELCOM). WELCOM is made up of 2 public libraries, and the libraries of 3 school districts. Governance is in place, but the consortium has not yet reached a state of self-sufficiency. The consortium's activities are still strongly affected by the circumstances of the individual libraries involved. In order for the consortium to fully reach the Early Development stage, more stable funding will have to be in place to support services, and resource sharing services will need to expand to strengthen the cooperative effort.

Also in the Southwest region of Idaho is the Lynx! Consortium. Lynx! was established in the 1970s and has grown to include a fully integrated library automation system, reciprocal borrowing, a courier, and other resource sharing services. In Shachaf's definitions, Lynx!, with membership consisting of 8 public libraries, would be identified as having reached Maturation.

Still in the earliest of stages the Southwest Library Consortium (SLC), is being formed in the Boise area. The new consortium includes 3 school libraries, 1 public library, and a large university library. With governance newly in place and an integrated library system still in development, SLC is clearly in an Embryonic stage. Their future development looks strong as they model their services upon the successes of consortia in other areas of the state.

Eastern Idaho has recently realized the creation of one large, new consortium. The Library Consortium of Eastern Idaho (LCEI) is the result of the merger of 2 previously-separate systems. In its new form, LCEI finds itself in transition from Embryonic to Early Development stage; though quickly moving from one to the other. Governance and resource sharing agreements are being reestablished. Meanwhile, an integrated library automation system is in place, and, financially, the consortium is self-sufficient. With years of cooperative experience among the membership, LCEI will soon find itself moving to Early Development and, then, to the Development stage.

North Idaho hosts consortia in the more advanced stages of development. In fact, when multiple consortia, including CIN, VALNet, and INLAN, merged to form WIN, the Washington Idaho Network; a type of MetaConsortium was created. Using the theory that MetaConsortia follow the same stages of development as other consortia, one could say that WIN is in the Development stage. Established in 2000, WIN is now self-sufficient and has fulfilled the earlier-stage activities of establishing governance and basic services. Still, WIN is in the process of strengthening themselves by enhancing resource sharing services among all members, and is not quite completely free of outside funding as they have relied on LSTA funds for some expansion activities. Their experience and history show, however, that it won't be long until the members of WIN revisit the Maturation stage, although, this time, as a MetaConsortium.

SUCCESS FACTORS OF IDAHO NETWORKS

To determine the success factors of Idaho's networks, ISL staff looked to the networking projects it helped to establish. Through LSCA and LSTA funding, the Idaho State Library has funded a number projects for the planning and establishment of library networks in the state. Since 1997, ISL has used a Peer Evaluation technique to evaluate the effectiveness of these and other LSCA/LSTA projects. With the Peer Evaluations available, staff reviewed each networking project's evaluation to identify answers to the following questions:

- What worked well in the project?
- What could have worked better?
- What was ISL's role in the project, if any?
- Is the network still in place today?

As a follow up, staff arranged telephone interviews with the project leaders. Interviewees were provided the results of the first-level review and the list of questions for the interview. ISL staff asked the following questions during the follow-up interviews:

- Would you include further comments as to what worked well (+) and/or what needed improvement (Δ)?
- In retrospect, would you change any comments?
- What role, if any, did ISL play in your project?
- If ISL played a role, how did the role affect the project?
- What characteristics contribute to your network's longevity?
- How have you been getting new members?

The responses to the follow-up interviews were studied along with the first-level review of the Peer Evaluations. As a result, the staff identified 4 success factors significant in the building, maintenance, and sustainability of library networks in Idaho.

1. Commitment to Networking. Overall comments during interviews indicated that membership commitment was a strength in the successful creation of a network. For those networks that saw struggle in development, project leaders point to wavering commitment levels among members. Commitment, it seems, comes in multiple forms. Foremost is a commitment to the philosophy of resource sharing and networking in general. That is to say that networking is far more than a shared automated system. Beyond that, a commitment may occur in the form of buy-in to the project at hand. Suzy Ricks, from the EILNet consortium (currently LCEI) indicated that they struggled when there "wasn't a buy-in from all participants; they didn't have to work on it or for it."

2. An anchor library or organization. Almost all project leaders indicated the value of having an anchor during the building of their network. An anchor might be a library or institution that has the financial or personnel resources to support the network in its earliest of stages. Or, the anchor may be the well-organized consortium leadership, made up of individuals with expertise, experience, and resources available to them to support the activities necessary to build the network.

3. Infrastructure. The infrastructure of a library network may include the consortium governance, administration, staffing, and sustainable funding necessary to administer a network. Peer evaluations, phone interviews, and the observations and experience of ISL staff all point to the value of infrastructure. Where the majority of Idaho's networking projects include the implementation of an integrated library system, many networks find themselves torn between the needs of creating an organizational structure and the need to respond to the technical issues the automated system presents. What has been found is that achieving both goals requires more than the traditional one-year grant period provided through LSTA. And, more importantly, that having an infrastructure in place first allows for a more smooth process of implementing the automation since all the details of membership criteria, fee formulas, decision-making processes, contractual authority, and other administrative issues that come up in the purchase and implementation of an automated system are already accounted for.

4. Technical Support or Expertise. Understanding that the integrated library automation system is key in the development of Idaho's networks, technology is at the forefront of many networking projects. The Peer Evaluations reviewed by ISL staff pointed to the value of available technical support. In some cases, technical support comes in the form of staff of the anchor library or staff of the consortium. In others, technical support was available on contract from an outside vendor. One Peer Evaluation described the challenges faced by a project in which little technical expertise was available among project participants. The Evaluation stated that "the level of technical knowledge of the group as the project began was insufficient to make the technology decisions which almost immediately faced them." With flexibility, persistence, and a commitment to the project, the participants found a solution by contracting the technical administration of their system to an off-site vendor. Still at issue, however, is the need for the local technical support and expertise to make the decisions and implement the technology that makes up the core services of Idaho's networks.

NETWORK EXPANSION BARRIERS

Where review of the Peer Evaluations examined Idaho’s networks as organizations, ISL staff also addressed the barriers to network expansion. The question being: What are the barriers that keep individual libraries from participating in Idaho’s regional networks?

To answer the question, staff used the results of a survey to identify the libraries that are not presently members of a network with shared automated systems. The resulting list of libraries was split into three, with each ISL Field Consultant receiving a list of non-networked libraries in their service region. Through discussions and e-mail, the Field Consultants identified their perceptions as to why an individual library had not yet chosen to participate in a shared network. ISL staff then reviewed the Field Consultants’ comments and classified the “reasons” into categories. The following table displays the categories and the number of libraries for which that category is an issue.

Funding not available	24
Staff indicate a desire for independent services	15
No buy in to benefits of networking	12
Staff not active in library community	10
Lack of strong local network example	7
Need courier services in place first	4
Networking not identified in planning needs	2
Technical staff resistant to shared system	2
Local library community relationships not strong	2
Connectivity	1
Just implemented new stand-alone system	1
Lack of local expertise	1

ISL staff considered the categories with the highest numbers: funding, desire for independence, and lack of buy in to networking benefits. It was surmised that a desire for independent services indicated, or was at least closely related, to a lack of buy-in to the benefits of networking. With this in mind, and considering the other issues represented, it was determined that the two primary barriers keeping libraries from participating in networked services are (1) money and (2) a lack of commitment to or knowledge of the benefits of networking.

SUGGESTIONS TO PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL NETWORKS

The purpose of identifying the success factors and the barriers affecting Idaho’s regional library networks was to develop a work plan. While the networks in each region of the state vary in regard to their development status and experience, the suggestions outlined in the following pages take a statewide approach.

Success Factor	Need	Suggested Activities
Commitment to networking	Education	Include a networking component in the Statewide Continuing Education Plan to address networking related topics including project planning, resource sharing, and collaboration. Include methods to reach those who are not active in the library community.
Anchor library or organization	Consulting	ISL consulting staff can encourage this through regular consulting activities and during the LSTA grant application process. Consultants can encourage the development of these partnerships through facilitation activities.
Infrastructure	Grant Eligibility Requirements	Create or update the eligibility checklist for networking projects seeking LSTA funding. Appendices C and D of the LSTA Guide refer to “consortium planning projects” and “projects leading to networking and resource sharing.” Consider requiring a planning year to achieve the eligibility requirements if they are not yet met.
Technical Support	Information & Referral	Since ISL is not in a position to provide technical support to Idaho’s libraries, two other methods are proposed to meet the need. First, ISL staff could create pathfinders or bibliographies to direct library staff to information resources that could assist in decision making on technical issues.
		Expand the Consortia page of the LiLI Sub-Web, adding descriptions of the activities and services of the networks along with contact information for reaching technical staff and other staff of the network. It is believed that the added information on the Consortia Web page will foster mentoring among Idaho’s networks.

SUGGESTIONS TO PROMOTE THE EXPANSION OF REGIONAL NETWORKS

As indicated earlier, the two primary barriers keeping libraries from participating in networked services are money and a lack of commitment to or knowledge of the benefits of networking. To answer the funding need, the Idaho State Library makes available competitive grant funds through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). In fact, one of the priorities outlined in the State Library’s LSTA Allocation Plan is the “establishment, enhancement, or expansion of the services or infrastructure of a library network.”

The other barrier to expanding network membership can be addressed through marketing, internal (ISL) education, and the statewide Continuing Education Plan. The table below outlines the suggested activities in those three areas.

Marketing Networking	Use LibIdaho to promote networking	Periodic sharing of links to networking-related Websites or online articles. The Networking Consultant could share responses to typical questions received relating to network development activities.
	Brochure outlining benefits of networking	Building on the “Myths of Resource Sharing” brochure, a new informational piece could identify the advantages of networking, possibly including quotes and examples of how networking has benefited other libraries.
	LiLI Display panel	Expanding the LiLI Display to include benefits of networking and building upon the brochure content.
	Newsletter articles	Continue to produce informational articles and articles that boast the successes of networks to publish in the ISL newsletter and Trustee newsletter.
Internal Education	Updates for LD staff	Provide a regular update to LD staff on networking activity statewide. This allows for Field Consultants and the Networking Consultant to check their perceptions of statewide and local activities. Consultants could use information during site visits to share information about networking activities around the state.
	Talking points	Create talking points about the benefits of networking. Consultants could use the talking points when providing updates at regional meetings and during site visits. It would allow all LD staff to deliver a consistent message, using consistent terminology, in regard to networking.
Continuing Education	CE Plan Component	Work with the CE Consultant to include networking as a component of the CE Plan. This may include related issues including collaboration, project management, and planning.

NEXT STEPS

- Gina and Erin will present findings to LiLI Advisory Board on September 18th
 - Brainstorming activity with LiLI Board to determine how LiLI representatives can assist in promoting networking in the state.
- Gina will work with other LD staff to identify the estimated work load involved with each of the proposed activities. (Target: November 1, 2003)
 - Work with Continuing Education Consultant to determine how to include a networking component in the Statewide CE Plan.
 - Work with Advocacy Consultant and PIO to determine details involved in marketing activities.
 - Work with Grants Officer and other LD staff to consider activities and eligibility requirements for LSTA funding.
- Gina will estimate any funding that may be required to implement proposed activities. (Target: November 1, 2003)
- With Ann Joslin, Gina will determine feasibility of incorporating activities into LD Work Plan. (Target: December 31, 2003)
 - Identify proposed activities that could be implemented before February 1, 2004.
 - Identify potential implementation dates for other proposed activities.

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Websites:

Berkeley Digital Library SunSITE – <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Libweb/usa-consortia.html>

CMLE – Central Minnesota Libraries Exchange – <http://www.cmle.org/>

NCLC – North Country Library Cooperative -
<http://www.mnlibs.org/dir/multi2.cfm?multitypeid=3>

NEFLIN – Northeast Florida Library Information Network –
<http://www.neflin.org/about/facts.htm>

SMILE – Southcentral Minnesota Inter-Library Exchange –
<http://libraries.tds.lib.mn.us/SMILE/Services.html>

TBLC – Tampa Bay Library Consortium – <http://tblc.org/about/about.shtml>

Interviews:

Suzy Ricks	EILNet	July 16, 2003
Paul Krause	WIN	July 16, 2003
Laurel White	LYNX!	July 17, 2003
Cynthia Toppen	WELCOM	July 17, 2003
Erin McCusker	Boise County	August 11, 2003