



LINN COUNTY LIBRARY CONSORTIUM: Twenty Years of Cooperation

edited by Judith A. Leavitt



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The Linn County Library Consortium celebrates twenty years of multitype cooperation with a review of its history, organization, and programs, which currently include an annual union list of periodicals and an electronic mail system. The article, itself cooperatively written by Consortium participants, concludes with a discussion of future trends in library cooperation.

History

The Linn County Library Consortium traces its origins to the summer of 1969 when librarians from the Cedar Rapids Public Library and Coe College proposed a policy for cooperative library use in the metropolitan area. The policy stated that an approved borrower from any participating library could obtain library materials from any other participating library. The materials could be acquired either directly by the patron with a librarian's referral or through traditional interlibrary loan.

Libraries initially participating in the experimental agreement included the Cedar Rapids Public Library, the Cedar Rapids Community Schools, Coe College, Collins Radio, Cornell College, the Iowa Masonic Library, Kirkwood Community College, Mercy Hospital, Mount Mercy College, and St. Luke's Hospital. Librarians evaluating the project at the end of the trial period voted to renew the cooperative use policy, and the referral system today remains a vital part of the Linn County Library Consortium's activities.

The libraries participating in the referral project became known as the Cedar Rapids Area Cooperating Libraries. Regis and LaSalle High Schools joined the group in 1972. That year the Cooperating Libraries voted to expand their cooperative efforts to include the publication of a Cedar Rapids Union List of Serials. The first edition of the annual union list, which

was published later that year, included approximately one thousand titles. The seventeenth edition of the union list will include almost 4,000 titles and is now in preparation.

The union list of serials and the referral project were the major activities of the Cedar Rapids Area Cooperating Libraries in the 1970s. By 1979 the group had expanded to include the Cedar Rapids Art Center Library, Grant Wood Area Education Agency, and the College Community Schools. By the end of the decade the cooperating libraries were discussing legal incorporation, and the Linn County Library Consortium was incorporated in late 1980. The seven charter members were Cedar Rapids Public Library, Coe College, Cornell College, Kirkwood Community College, Mercy Hospital, Mount Mercy College, and St. Luke's Hospital.

In 1982 the Consortium was awarded a Medical Library Resource Grant from the National Library of Medicine. The four libraries that participated in the grant (Kirkwood, Mercy Hospital, Mount Mercy College, and St. Luke's Hospital) identified medical areas requiring additional library resources in the community and developed plans for sharing those new resources. Other projects from the early years of the Consortium included an unfunded grant proposal to share library resources via an OCLC network and a group contract for BRS data base services. In 1984 the Linn County Library Consortium cosponsored the annual convention of the Midwest Chapter of the Medical Library Association.

Cedar Rapids Public Library's acquisition of a DEC VAX computer prompted two new Consortium projects in 1985. Consortium members developed procedures to utilize the VAX's electronic mail capability. Consortium members with access to computers and modems use the electronic mail system to transmit inter-library loan requests and other messages to one another. The Consortium also

transferred the Cedar Rapids Union List of Serials to the VAX. Approximately 3,600 full MARC serial records are maintained online on the VAX.

Since 1980 the membership of the Consortium has increased from seven libraries to nineteen.

Organization

The primary purpose of the Consortium is to promote cooperation among its members that will prove beneficial to all. Its objectives include:

1. Encouraging cooperation among members on matters relating to library service, access, and information system.
2. Supporting the development and use of special collections.
3. Serving as a coordinating body between members and other organizations, institutions, and funding sources on matters relating to the use and development of libraries.
4. To assist in acquiring funds to implement or continue the objectives above.

The members of the Consortium maintain a sense of autonomy while striving to meet these objectives.

Full membership is open to any non-profit, private, public or parochial elementary or secondary school system; to any nonprofit institute of higher education; to any nonprofit tax-supported public agency whose primary function is education or library services; and to any public or private medical, legal, or specialized library or organization which shows a commitment to library services by ongoing budgetary and administrative support and which makes its collection available in some form to the entire community. Associate membership is open to any organization that demonstrates an active interest in library services, and to any library which does not meet the qualifications for full membership.

Regular meetings are held every six weeks throughout the year with an annual business meeting and election of officers held in September. Meeting sites alternate among member libraries. There is a \$75 initial fee for membership and annual dues of \$20.

Through its varied membership, the Consortium serves the public, school, medical, academic, and special library needs of patrons in the Cedar Rapids area.

Current members include:

Name	Type of Library
Cedar Rapids Community School District	School
Cedar Rapids Gazette	Special
Cedar Rapids Public Library	Public
Coe College, Stewart Memorial Library	Academic
College Community School District	School
Cornell College, Russell D. Cole Library	Academic
Creswell, Munsell, Fultz & Zirbel	Special
East Central Regional Library	Public
Grant Wood Area Education Agency	School
Hamilton Business College	Academic
Kirkwood Community College	Academic
Linn Mar Community School District	School
Marion Carnegie Library	Public
Mercy Hospital	Medical
Mount Mercy College, J. Edward Lundy Library	Academic
Norand Corporation	Special
Rockwell International Collins Divisions	Special
St. Luke's Hospital	Medical

The Consortium is governed by a Board of Directors composed of one person from each organization with the status of full membership. Officers serve a oneyear term and include a president, vicepresident, secretary, and treasurer.

Programs and Services

One of the most important services offered by the Consortium is its annual Union List of Periodicals. Currently in its 16th edition, the Union List contains periodical holdings of participating libraries, which greatly facilitates referrals and interlibrary loans within the region. Additionally, the Union List includes a summary page of services available from each member library, associated service charges, facility hours, contact persons, addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers, and other pertinent library-specific information. Approximately half the participating libraries share an electronic mail system through which messages and interlibrary loan requests may be sent. Each Consortium member has an electronic mail system handbook which defines terms, explains commands, and illustrates request formats which the libraries must follow when making an interlibrary loan request. Because of the proximity of all participating libraries, next-day delivery of the desired article is not uncommon.

Patrons of all member libraries may take advantage of any other participating library's collection simply by procuring a referral form from their library and presenting it at another library. These referrals work much like a library card, i.e., with a referral from one library, a borrower has borrowing rights at other Consortium libraries. The Consortium keeps annual records on the number of referrals processed by each library.

Currently, a number of the Consortium libraries are participating in the State Library's Open Access Pilot Project.

"Information sharing" is the last item on the agenda at each Consortium meeting. Librarians discuss and share information on a wide variety of topics of interest to the group, for example, CD ROM technology and products, government documents, and library promotion and marketing techniques. A unique benefit of membership in the Consortium is the valuable personal and professional contacts developed by Consortium librarians. Information obtained at a Consortium meeting has often been a catalyst for enhanced cooperation and resource sharing.

Trends in Cooperation

Cooperation is the key to successful resource sharing, and the members of the Linn County Library Consortium see a bright future in multitype cooperation. The Consortium is planning for the future by actively encouraging new members to join, developing walk-in accessibility to area libraries, increasing the diversity of its membership, and actively promoting the specialized resources of the membership through publicity and public relations.

New members are important to the growth of any organization. Already this year, Hamilton Business College and the Norand Corporation applied and were accepted for membership. A Consortium Committee works constantly to identify and contact potential members in order to ensure that organizational growth continues. As the Consortium broadens the scope of its membership, it provides access to those diverse resources already located in the community.

Library resources are valuable to the community only if those resources are accessible. The concept of walk-in access to library collections through a referral system and the Open Access Pilot Project have been actively promoted by the membership.

Once specialized multitype library resources are identified, cooperative efforts maximize their use. The Consortium

publishes bibliographies and promotes resources through public relations efforts. These efforts create a community awareness of the libraries and of their programs and resources.

The Consortium emerged in an era when independent multitype libraries worked alone, often serving the same populations. Although computerized multitype resource sharing is still in the development stage among the Linn County Library Consortium members, future possibilities are limitless.

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