

The quiet revolution

Inter-library loan and document delivery

A recent seminar at the National Library of Australia raised some critical issues about high-performance Inter-Library Loan (ILL) and Document Delivery (DD). The National Resource Sharing Working Group (NRSWG) arranged the presentation as part of its role to ensure that a robust, reliable and cost-effective inter-lending system, built on co-operation and agreed service standards and policies, is in place to serve Australian libraries and their users.

The seminar was presented in October by Mary E Jackson of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in the United States. She presented the key findings of the Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Performance Measures Study she had undertaken for the ARL. Mary was the principal investigator in the two-year study of the performance of ILL operations in 119 North American research and college libraries. She has since been running a series of institutes in the United States and speaking to people around the world to publicise the findings of the study and to use them as a mechanism for improving ILL/DD practices.

Mary outlined the four main performance measures of the study — direct cost, turnaround time, fill rates and user satisfaction — to discover the characteristics of high-performing borrowing and lending libraries. Critical to high-performance borrowing libraries was the maximum use of technology. These libraries regularly reassessed and updated their technological infrastructure to maintain or increase the efficiency of their borrowing. High-performing borrowers also used a single messaging system wherever possible, encouraged user-initiated ordering, chose lenders based on turnaround time and fill rates rather than cost, and used staff with an interest in technology.

The study discovered fewer high-performing lending libraries. The two libraries that did perform well had deliberately set out to make themselves libraries of first resort. Unlike most libraries, they saw ILL as a core service they provided and encouraged other libraries to come to them first with requests. This demonstrated what was



Charu Sood, National Library of Australia; Mary Jackson, Association of Research Libraries; Susan Magnay, chair, National Resource Sharing Working Group

the most statistically significant result of the study — the greater the lending volume, the lower the unit cost of ILL services. These libraries ran their ILL services in a business-like manner and were able to function on a cost-recovery basis by taking advantage of lower unit costs. Both libraries had substantial collections to allow them to provide this type of service.

Other characteristics of the high-performing lenders included: maximising their use of technology and controlling the entire lending process from mailroom to billing. Looking for material in the stacks only once and they accepting all forms of payment (including credit cards). Also critical to both high-performing borrowers and lenders were managers who supported ILL/DD activities in the library. This included encouraging improvements in processes and making staff accountable for performance.

More information about the NRSWG, Mary's presentation and the ARL Study can be found at <http://www.nla.gov.au/initiatives/nrswg/>. ■

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