A Narrative History of Resource Sharing in the State of Maryland

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Abstract

The evolution of statewide resource sharing and reciprocal borrowing for Maryland public libraries is discussed. Beginning in the 1950s, the Enoch Pratt Free Library assumed responsibility for filling interlibrary loan requ3ests or the state due to the size of its collection. In 1971, Pratt became the State Library Resource Center and its interlibrary loan responsibilities became formalized. Through a series of technological advancements in library catalogs and interlibrary loan systems, Maryland has arrived at the MARINA system to facilitate sharing resources throughout the state. The state has a long-standing philosophy of cooperation, which makes the MARINA endeavor possible.

In 1971, the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland became the state Library Resource Center. As the Pratt Library has the largest collection in the state, the library has always responded to requests from around the state for interlibrary loan (ILL). In the 1950s, Pratt received state and city funding for its ILL efforts. As the population of Maryland grew and the tax base increased, the need for library service increased as well. The demand for collection support from Pratt increased and deposit collections were distributed around the state. Throughout the 1960s, state funding to Pratt increased to support the increased demand. In 1971, a law was passed making Pratt legally responsible for its role in state resource sharing. The law also helped to insure that financial resources would be made available for technological capital improvements.

The Assistant Director for Public Services at Pratt, Patricia Wallace, who was a key player in the technological development of resource sharing in the state of Maryland, describes the progress of interlibrary loan as trains running along different tracks avoiding collision. Trains progressed along the tracks of population growth, public library expansion, technological advances, and library policy/philosophy evolution. Fortunately for the state of Maryland, all trains have run fairly evenly with one another with technology keeping pace with the resource sharing initiatives of the state. MARINA, the current resource sharing system in Maryland, owes its success more to a philosophy of equity of access than to technological developments. Within Maryland, the public library systems operate without regard for county borders. Property taxes do not dictate public library patronage. The arrangement in the state allows for the fairest distribution of funding from federal and state agencies.

A cooperative borrowing agreement among Maryland public libraries has been in place since 1968. The agreement is a one-page document signed by all the public library directors. The agreement states that all public libraries are available for use by all Maryland residents with universal check out and return. The cooperative borrowing agreement is the work of a true

library visionary, Netti Taylor. She was the state librarian in Maryland for three decades starting in the 1960s and provided the leadership that is responsible for the current state of cooperation within the state. She established solid and lasting support for resource sharing. Technology has caught up with her vision and Maryland now provides one of the most successful statewide resource sharing endeavors in the country.

Technological Advances in Resource Sharing

With a well-established philosophy of resource sharing, the technology train was working to bring Taylor's vision to life. Pratt began receiving interlibrary loan requests in the 1950s and 1960s via the telephone and through U.S. Mail. In 1978, Pratt was the only library in the state with OCLC capability. At this time, only a few catalogs were available publicly. The Pratt staff had to consult numerous shelves of book catalogs for each county until a request was sound. Through the vendor, Autographics, Pratt was able to obtain a union catalog for the state on microfilm and then eventually on microfiche. By 1975, requests were sent via Teletype. Patricia Wallace was responsible for traveling the state and training individuals in the use of the Teletype. The 1980s brought the use of the CD-ROM for a statewide union catalog. The state's entire collection was easily transported on two-CD collection and were reluctant to let it go. However, the real-time benefits of online records were appealing enough to retire the CDs.

In 1985, Autographics designed Milnet, an automated interlibrary loan system, to provide computer links between participating libraries, access to the online union catalog, and an electronic mail system. This system facilitated interlibrary loan for six public library systems, three regional libraries, three academic libraries, and the State Library Resource Center. This system allowed for the first time overnight electronic transmission of ILL requests and put an end to paperlooping. This went a long way to decreasing turnaround time.

In the early 1990s and in the same spirit of cooperative borrowing, librarians from around the state developed the Sailor network (named for a famous Chesapeake Bay Retriever). The first goal of the Sailor network of offering free Internet services to Maryland residents was achieved by 1994. The second goal of the network of developing an interlibrary loan system that worked with the Sailor server was achieved in 1995 with SAILS, Sailor Automated Interlibrary System. The software product that facilitated SAILS was created by CPS Systems, Inc. and employed telnet technology. The SAILS system could integrate the creation of an ILL request with a search of the union catalog that contained current availability information. Also, capturing bibliographic data for requests was possible along with the tracking of requests.

In the late 1990s, the DYNIX Corporation purchased the SAILS product from CPS Systems. DYNIX released the product URSA, Universal Resource Sharing Application, and SAILS changed to MARINA. Initially, MA_3RINA stood for Maryland Anything, Anytime, Anywhere Resource In Network Application. The URSA product is a Z39.50 based application that allows all 18 catalogs from the 23 Maryland public libraries to be searched at once.

The URSA product has greatly enhanced resource sharing in the state as it has automated many of the tasks of interlibrary loan and introduced patron-placed requests. Patrons access the union

catalog directly via the Web from anywhere, submit requests electronically, make journal article requests, review requests in progress, and determine availability for direct pick-up of items. As the URSA product is mapped directly to the libraries' circulation systems, many steps that previously required mediation are automated: holds placed, items checked out and in, creation of short bibliographic records for circulation of items at borrowing libraries. Advances in technology, an emphasis on access over ownership, and the progressive decentralization of lending from the Pratt/State Library Resources Center led to a reduction of interlibrary loan staff.

MILO, Maryland Interlibray Loan Organization

In 1960, the County Services department was formed at Pratt. The library was under contract with the Maryland State Department of Education to provide services to the public libraries in the state. That year 4 staff filled 1,782 requests. By 1970, 19 staff processed 54,536 requests. In 1976, the name of the department changed to MILO to reflect the complexity of the growing network of libraries that participated in resource sharing through the newly sanctioned State Library Resource Center. In 1981 due to the advances in technology, the same 19 staff processed 117,944 requests.

After 1990, requests processed by the MILO staff for the state reached its peak of 125,803 and has declined since then due to the decentralization of lending throughout the state and the spread of OCLC use to other libraries. For the past ten years, the staff has been reduced to half of its former levels with 9.5 staff members. With the increase in technology, the need for staff decreases. Current ILL processes are both streamlined and automated allowing for maximal efficiency.

The MILO department is a part of a library system that is unlike most other cooperative endeavors. For example, Tampa Bay Library Consortium, North Bay Cooperative Library System, and the Detroit Area Library Network, are all separate agencies that support cooperative borrowing within a consortium. As Pratt is also the State Library Resource Center, the management of the state's resource sharing network is through the MILO department.

The MILO department serves many functions including ILL services for Pratt patrons. With the help of 125 in-state referral agencies, MILO provides approximately 1,000 individual library agencies with interlibrary loan service. MILO brokers interlibrary loan requests for any library in the state as part of its statewide responsibility. Another major service provided by MILO is transshipping. MILO is the hub for six library delivery systems that deliver to public, academic, and school libraries throughout the state. For fiscal year 2003, MILO staff transshipped over 600,000 items.
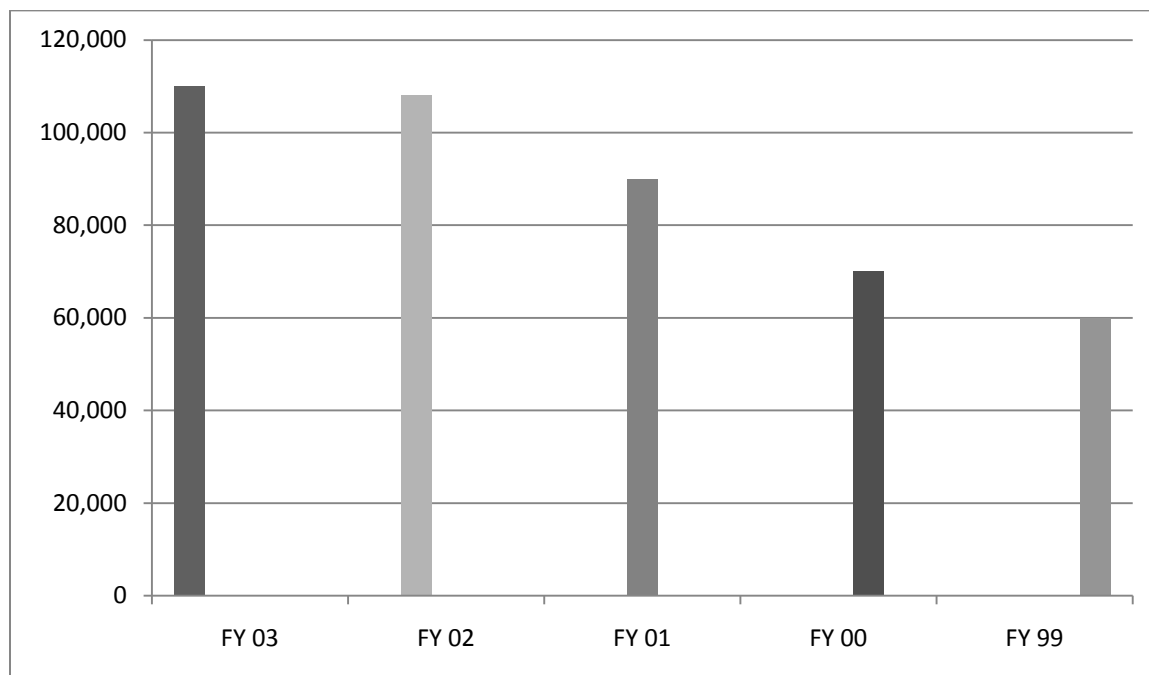
MARINA

MARINA is the latest stage in the development of resource sharing throughout the state. A total of 99 libraries use MARINA. Eighteen library catalogs are profiled through the URSA product. Libraries with profiled catalogs function both as lenders and borrowers. Currently, only public library catalogs are profiled; however, academic, school, and special libraries are profiled to make requests through the MARINA network. Requests through MARINA are preferred over other requesting venues such as faxing or through OCLC. Requests received through MARINA are less expensive and require less work on the part of the staff as all ILL requests are maintained through the URSA product. Currently, MILO staff has to maintain requests in both URSA and OCLC. However, it is now possible to link URSA and OCLC directly. In addition to saving time and money through maintaining only one resource sharing system, the direct connection will automatically transfer unfilled MARINA requests to OCLC. The MILO department is in the process of implementing the direct connection.

Perhaps the greatest convenience of MARINA to ILL staff and to library users is that ILL staff is not required to make requests. Patrons can place unmediated requests via the Web. If a user's local system does not have a certain title, the user can access the MARINA system at http://www.sailor.lib.md.us/m/marina/. After the user logs on to the system using his/her library card number, the user can search all profiled catalogs at once, check the availability of the title, and place a request.

Figure 1 shows the steady increase of interlibrary loan requests made via MARINA. The totals do not include OCLC transactions. Additionally, the MILO staff processed approximately 20,000 transactions through OCLC during the last fiscal year. Requests are sent to all libraries profiled to lend on the MARINA network. This has contributed to the decentralization of requests away from MILO and has spread the filling of requests around the state. The URSA product automatically places holds on requested items and generates a list of titles requested for each lending library on a daily basis. The decentralization of filling requests has led to a reduction in turnaround time. The wait time for a typical MARINA request is only two days.

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Fig. 1
Total MARINA requests for fiscal years 1999 through 2003

Future of resource sharing in Maryland

Ultimately, the goal is for the MARINA network to grow to include a greater number and types of libraries. Academic, school, and special libraries currently borrow through MARINA, and in the future, hopefully these types of libraries will help expand the state's resource sharing mission by becoming lenders. Promotional efforts are under review with the Maryland Division of Library Development and Services to raise awareness of both the MARINA system and the cooperative borrowing agreement within the state. With heightened visibility, the significance of the state's efforts to share resources will be impressed upon library users and library institutions alike

For Maryland ILL practitioners, assessing the impact of technology on request fill rates is an important next step in the development of statewide resource sharing. Many want to examine other aspects of collection sharing that still need improvement, for example, collection control and inventory practices. Like all ILL practitioners, Maryland ILL practitioners are interested in discovering and removing the barriers to a 99.9 percent fill rate.