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Enhanced Resource Sharing Through Group Interlibrary Loan Best Practices: A Conceptual, Structural, and Procedural Approach

Lars E. Leon, June L. DeWeese, Carol Ann Kochan, Billie Peterson-Lugo, and Brian L. Pytlik Zillig

abstract: Members of the Greater Western Library Alliance Interlibrary Loan Committee have spent more than two years developing a Best Practices model for Interlibrary Borrowing and Lending for consortia and local operations. The model includes the practices to be followed, a monitoring plan, and a process for regular evaluation. The GWLA Interlibrary Loan Committee has not yet determined the regular evaluation process, including the timeline. We anticipate that process being established in Spring 2003.

With the advent of the twenty-four hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week global information age, library patrons have increasing expectations for quick delivery of interlibrary loan materials. Libraries have sought to meet those expectations in various ways, including by contracting with document delivery vendors to supply materials directly to patrons and/or by developing consortium catalogs that allow patrons to order books from any library in a consortium. In recent years, libraries also have experimented with interlibrary loan automation systems to reduce the labor-intensive nature of interlibrary loan operations, with the intent of speeding the delivery of interlibrary loan materials.

The Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), currently comprised of thirty member libraries, has a history of resource sharing. Member libraries provide priority interlibrary loan service to other members. Since 1994 members of the consortium have agreed to provide second-day air shipments for loans and use Ariel® or fax for article delivery

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to partner libraries. These processes enable the GWLA interlibrary loan operations to provide better service. However, even with these processes, the GWLA Libraries sometimes do not meet the expectations of all of their patrons. Each should be working toward the goal of meeting those expectations on a daily basis with an understanding of the importance of a balanced level of service to its local patrons and service to other libraries.

In 1998, the GWLA developed *a Strategic Planning Initiative* that recognized the ever-increasing importance of sharing member libraries' resources. During this time, the concept of a centralized/consortial interlibrary loan system was a predominant trend. Therefore, one initiative recommended a partnership "with a vendor to develop an unmediated requesting system for GWLA patrons." This initiative's goal was to reduce the staff workload at both borrowing and lending libraries. Requests made by patrons would go directly to another library in the consortium. The ideal system would also automatically provide call numbers and locations; thereby saving time in processing the requests at the lending library. Requests for items identified as noncirculating or "in use" at the potential lending library would be denied automatically and placed in a review file for the borrowing library's interlibrary loan staff to choose other lenders. Another important initiative was to develop a set of best practices for resource sharing among member libraries.

GWLA Process to Develop A Best Practices Framework

The Task Force first surveyed the GWLA interlibrary loan operations to determine a philosophy of resource sharing within the consortium and any appropriate goals for this philosophy. Specifically, a critical service issue that was discussed included various opinions about turnaround time. The Task Force thought that it was also important to identify barriers that the disparate yet in many ways similar operations faced in meeting their targeted goals.

Of the twenty-four libraries surveyed, twenty-three responded, which provided an excellent consortium-wide view of philosophies, barriers, and other useful information. With this information, the Task Force could develop a framework of consortium-wide understanding that could be supported by interlibrary loan librarians and staff, Deans/Directors, and other Libraries' staff.

The Task Force developed a document that outlined a framework for action and presented the draft to all GWLA ILL operations for review and discussion at the annual meeting in May 2000. The Task Force revised the draft and presented it to the GWLA Deans/Directors, who discussed it and approved it in principle. After an additional comment period by Deans/Directors, the Task Force presented the final draft to GWLA Executive Committee, who approved it in the Spring of 2001. The GWLA ILL Librarians are currently working to implement the criteria described in the document. The final version put forth a solid framework of best practices for consortia resource sharing.

Overview of GWLA Best Practices Framework

Best Practices are highly effective or innovative operating procedures and philosophies that produce outstanding performance when implemented. Most best practices are al-

ready in use by high performing effective operations and are achievable by others, while some best practices are theoretically important but need to be tested.

The Task Force organized best practices into three hierarchical levels: conceptual, structural, and procedural. **Conceptual Best Practices** are at the highest level and constitute the philosophical framework within which interlibrary loan operates, and they include goals and standards. **Structural Best Practices** are at the middle level and provide an infrastructure that allows for the implementation of conceptual and procedural best practices. Structural best practices include resources as well as the consortium and institutional framework and expectations. Resources include staff, equipment, technology, and organizational structure. **Procedural Best Practices** are at the base level, comprised of daily routines, procedures, tasks, and ways of processing the workload.

A **standard** is a reference point against which an organization may measure its operating procedures or outcomes. The Task Force identified standards on two levels: service goals and levels of achievement. **Service goals** are general levels of performance, such as fast turnaround, adequate administrative support, and accurate fulfillment of requests. **Achievement levels** are quantitative and specific, such as average turnaround; lending staff ratio to number of transactions; and percentage of error rate in fulfillment.

The GWLA Best Practices document, including service goals and achievement levels, is a dynamic and changing work. Its purpose is to bring the standard of service offered in each ILL operation to a consortium-defined base level of performance or higher. Experience, new ideas, and new technology will prompt changes as needed.

GWLA Best Practices Framework—Specific Recommendations

Conceptual Best Practices

Conceptual best practices constitute the philosophical framework within which interlibrary loan operates in the parent library and within the consortium. To be successful, commitment is needed throughout all levels of each library within the consortium.

Priorities:

- Recognize that excellence in Borrowing cannot exist without excellence in lending.
- Provide equal support for Lending and Borrowing to achieve responsive ILL on a consortium-wide level.
- Serve local patrons and patrons of every other library in the consortium equally.

Leadership by Library Administrators:

- Incorporate resource sharing needs and activities into the library's strategic plan.
- Acknowledge the importance of patron needs.
- Recognize resource sharing as an integral component of collection development.
- Investigate and coordinate collection development and resource sharing activities.
- Provide adequate resources (staff, money, equipment, etc).
- Stress to interlibrary loan staff that the role of technology in resource sharing is to perform routine tasks, which in turn frees staff to perform the more challenging and sophisticated tasks.

Evaluation: The consortium and individual ILL units should regularly evaluate current and emerging practices, technologies, and other factors that affect the abilities of libraries to provide the most efficient service possible. This is a critical practice that will enable each library and the consortium to improve continuously through adjustment to ILL operations that reflect changes in technology, user demands, and information-seeking behaviors.

The consortium and individual ILL units should regularly evaluate current and emerging practices, technologies, and other factors that affect the abilities of libraries to provide the most efficient service possible.

Communication: Effective sharing of information and ideas provides guidance and ensures the success of cooperation. Library administrators and interlibrary loan librarians communicate with each other, with their counterparts within the resource sharing consortium, and with their institutions' administrations.

Access to Material: High performing operations with a consortium-wide view maximize access to their own and each other's material. Specifically, they lend anything a local GWLA patron can charge out and remove from his/her local library. An exception is material on reserve. They also make accurate holdings information easily accessible to other libraries. For example, libraries that cannot participate in the Online Computer Library Center's (OCLC) Union List should be supported at the administrative level to enter selectively local data records. Libraries should also strive to ensure that licenses and other contracts allow for sharing information with other libraries through interlibrary loan whenever possible.

Continuous Learning ILL Operation: Interlibrary loan operations take place in an environment of continuous change and high performing ILL operations must be committed to continuous learning. Before new knowledge in ILL operations can be incorporated, new behaviors need to be formed and re-formed.

Structural Best Practices

Best practices at the middle level provide the infrastructure and resources that allow for the implementation of conceptual and procedural best practices, and include staff, equipment, technology, and organizational structure.

Resources and Infrastructure

Staff[1]

- Determine and maintain appropriate staffing, including adequate numbers, thorough ongoing training, appropriate skill levels, and maintenance of those skills.
- Cross-train staff so everyone knows every task, can train others, knows which job needs doing, and understands how borrowing processes affect lending and vice versa.

- Encourage flexibility and independence.
- Provide training so staff uses the equipment and technology more than just adequately.
- Identify and eliminate gaps in training.
- Find ways to boost morale, decrease turnover, encourage attendance (e.g., try a student work contract).
- Consider staffing an evening shift.

Equipment and technology

- Maximize technology wherever possible.[2]
- Provide individual work stations for each staff member with access to OCLC, bibliographic databases, the library's OPAC, and the Internet.
- Provide opportunities for staff to participate in development, implementation, and evaluation of technology.
- Provide an adequate number of Ariel® work stations to handle traffic.
- Implement a state-of-the-art image-transmission technology for noncirculating items.
- Implement an ILL database manager to handle record keeping.
- Network individual workstations to share ILL data.
- Utilize systems that fully implement ISO ILL standards.

Organization

- Develop efficient workflow and workplace arrangement.[3]
- Centralize all interlibrary lending functions, including retrieval, shipping, and copying, if support units cannot meet standards.[4]
- Exploit opportunities to share information with collection development librarians.
- Provide adequate workspace.
- Support the use of express shipping contracts.
- Provide support for ILL Librarians and support staff to attend learning events, workshops, and conferences.

Evaluation: Have appropriate tools in place and gather data regularly. Assess information and make appropriate changes.

- Gather user satisfaction data rather than make assumptions about what users need. Use data to identify problems and areas that need improvement.
- Gather data on workflow, including turnaround time and error rate for each GWLA interlibrary loan operation, for other libraries, and for the consortium as a whole.
- Gather statistics on the number of transactions and staffing levels.
- Evaluate and adjust procedures and workflow to accommodate changes in technology, staffing levels, and patron needs.
- Assess levels of response by both borrowing and lending units from GWLA libraries in order to identify problems, incorrect practices, etc.

Communication: Interlibrary loan supervisors should communicate their needs and the trends in resource sharing to appropriate library administrators and library staff. In addition, they should participate in consortium communications via a consortium-wide ILL listserv and at annual meetings in order to coordinate resource sharing and to learn

from one another. Interlibrary loan supervisors must notify other GWLA operations when they cannot follow a standard for a period of time. Finally, communication with others in the ILL community is key in sharing information. Interlibrary loan staff should provide timely feedback to each other regarding specific interlibrary loan activity while keeping their interlibrary loan supervisors informed.

Procedural Best Practices

Best practices at the base level are comprised of daily routines, procedures, tasks, and ways of processing the workload. Many of these are best determined at the local level.

Daily Routines:

- Download and process OCLC requests at least once a day; twice is preferable.
- Read and respond to message files daily.
- Update requests throughout the day.
- Process mail and courier deliveries promptly.

Preferred Procedures:

General

- Give the GWLA lending requests the same priority as local borrowing requests. Because the GWLA libraries trust each other to make this commitment, they know that their own borrowing requests will be filled expeditiously.
- Emphasize doing the work correctly the first time, rather than double-checking everything.
- Eliminate duplication of effort, such as re-keying borrowing requests into OCLC work forms.
- Do not charge other GWLA Libraries.
- Use OCLC IFM for non-consortium financial transactions.[5]
- Enter serial local data records on the OCLC Union List and maintain entries or selectively union list if there is no other alternative.
- Look for group discounts for shared resources, such as the British Lending Library.
- Create, share and use macros whenever possible.
- Update accurately and expeditiously, recognizing that while all updating is ultimately critical, there are some update functions that need to be done ASAP including "shipped," "nos," "received," and "returned."
- Consult the lender's lending policies and availability in the lenders online catalog prior to making requests for special items.
- The GWLA Libraries should follow the National Interlibrary Loan Code

Borrowing

- Submit ILL data via ISO-compliant web forms and web clients. Provide some form of electronic request system for patrons.
- Support patron-initiated methods of requesting items (e.g. OCLC Direct Request).[6]
- Deliver borrowed items or notifications to patrons in the most expedited and convenient way possible, by using tools such as Prospero, Ariel®, or CLIO® and e-mail.

- Use serial union lists when ordering journal photocopies. The extra time expended is more than recovered in higher fill rates and decreased work for lending libraries.
- Use custom holdings.
- Use OCLC's "Reasons for No" feature, or equivalent, to communicate reason for a negative response with borrowing library.

Lending

- Expedite the search for call numbers and item retrieval.
- Coordinate item retrieval with branch libraries and remote storage areas.
- Check shelves only once when retrieving materials to expedite the borrower's turnaround time unless the library is the only supplier.
- Use expedited shipping vendors.
- Respond to rush requests within five working hours.
- Expedite data-entry by using barcode and wands, macros, etc.
- Use "Reasons for No."

Recommended Standards and Levels of Achievement

Establishing consortium-wide minimal standards for ILL interaction provides the framework for workflow design and plays an integral part in helping all consortium members provide optimal service to their own patrons as well as to all of the GWLA patrons. Levels of Achievement include:

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Minimum Standards for the GWLA Libraries:

- Borrowing requests that can be readily verified should be sent to the best possible supplying libraries within twenty-four hours of receipt from patrons.
- Requesting libraries should process incoming materials quickly, making the material available and notifying the patron within twenty-four hours of receipt.
- Supplying libraries should use an expedited shipper, sending returnables so the requesting library receives the material by the "5th OCLC referral day."
- Supplying libraries should deliver non-returnables so the requesting library receives the material by the "3rd OCLC referral day."

Guidelines for Workflow Design:

All units should maintain staffing levels sufficient to meet consortium minimum standards. Some guidelines on staffing levels are:

- Borrowing: One FTE for each 4000 to 5500 requests received annually.
- Lending: One FTE for each 8000 to 10,000 requests received annually.
- Ariel® workstations should be available to receive twenty-four hours per day.

- Set a goal to fill between 85 to 95 percent of borrowing requests.
- Supplying libraries should deliver copies via Ariel® to permit electronic transfer to the Web or e-mail for patron access.

Continual Improvement and Review of Task Force Recommendations

These recommendations should be reviewed on a regular basis. The task force suggests the following:

Introduce these ideas to new GWLA libraries: The GWLA ILL Committee needs to provide this information and all other pertinent documents to new members so they understand current expectations and can actively assist in resource sharing improvement throughout the GWLA. A follow-up conference call with the ILL chair and a member of the ILL Best Practices Task Force to discuss this work should occur.

Develop tools to determine what the GWLA patrons want: As with many areas of library public service, determining what patrons really want is a challenging and ongoing task. The members of the GWLA wholeheartedly support efforts to assess what services patrons need and to critically evaluate the workflow based on these needs. Several ideas include: work with LibQUAL+[7] task force members to determine applicability to resource sharing needs, to identify and to consider other survey instruments, and to share locally designed instruments.

Share ideas with the library community-at-large: ILL Librarians should keep current with library literature and take advantage of speaking and writing opportunities. In addition, GWLA ILL should create an interactive website to provide information and gather feedback.

Continuously evaluate and improve this document: The GWLA should discuss the current document, identify specific focuses for the GWLA interlibrary loan meetings, and form small task forces to develop reports for GWLA ILL meetings. Several important elements that need further study include a patron survey instrument, development of quantitative standards, and tools for qualitative assessment of service.

Ramifications of Non-Participation

It is crucial for all members of the GWLA to use some of these best practices and standards to ensure the best service within the consortium. This is especially true of the "conceptual" best practices. The GWLA interlibrary loan community understands there will be times when a library cannot meet specified standards. When unable to comply, the interlibrary loan supervisor must notify other GWLA interlibrary loan operations. However, if this extends beyond a reasonable time or happens habitually, it is recommended that the following actions occur. Every effort should be made to find alternatives of similar value; for example, if Ariel® is out of service, fax may become a reasonable alternative. When experiencing a continuing problem with another GWLA interlibrary loan unit, the interlibrary loan supervisor from the concerned library should discuss the issue with the appropriate colleague at the other library. If these efforts fail, then the interlibrary loan supervisor should consult his or her library dean/director and GWLA Program Officer for Resource Sharing for advice and assistance in resolving

the issues. Libraries unwilling and/or unable to uphold consortium standards should either readily withdraw from the interlibrary loan aspect of the GWLA or never sign the ILL agreement.

Missing Elements in the GWLA ILL Best Practices Structure

Quantitative and qualitative analysis is needed to confirm that the current best practices structure can help libraries meet the needs of their patrons. Tools need to be identified and implemented across libraries. Identifying tools will be especially challenging because the GWLA libraries are geographically dispersed, politically diverse, and use a wide variety of policies and systems. A task force was created to explore these issues. These tools will be critical in determining the usefulness of the recommendations, as well as providing guidance for improvement.

The underlying data for the initial recommendations were based on the GWLA interlibrary loan operations' best ideas on service and excluded the users' perspective. Revisions to the best practices framework should take into account user needs and satisfaction, which must be ascertained. The GWLA interlibrary loan librarians will monitor the consortium's activity related to user satisfaction surveys and look for viable means of gathering this information. Additionally, they will strive to keep abreast of other consortium's activities in these areas in order to benefit the GWLA interlibrary loan operations.

The standards were set at a point where most of the GWLA interlibrary loan operations could meet them with minimal additional resources. These standards were seen as necessary in order to reach consensus and implement the framework. Once the GWLA interlibrary loan operations better understand their patrons' needs and they have the tools to evaluate their activities, these standards will need to be improved.

Recommendations to Other Groups Considering Best Practices

Other libraries that want to establish policies of best practices at a group level should consider the following recommendations related to support, how a task force could work, and the ideal results.

The interlibrary loan librarians need the support of their respective Deans/Directors. To reach the needed agreements at a broad consortium level, there may be difficult local choices that must be made. The success of the GWLA Best Practices process can be attributed to the GWLA's Executive Director's office and the participation of a GWLA dean liaison who provided good advice and guidance from a dean/director perspective.

The task force should develop timelines and keep other ILL librarians informed as the process evolves. The task force should obtain input from all participating libraries through a variety of methods, including surveys and in-person meetings. A clear understanding of the consortium's philosophies and the environment is necessary in order to identify what works best for the group as a whole.

Librarians should reach consensus on over-arching principles (conceptual best practices), what is needed to support those principles (structural best practices), and what may work in the individual environments (procedural best practices). They should also

develop specific practices that clearly communicate standards to guide expectations and facilitate workflow analysis. Finally, they should identify mechanisms to keep the structure dynamic.

Conclusion (effects on service, user satisfaction)

Individual libraries can use some best practices independently to provide improved services. Other best practices require implementation by both the requesting and supplying libraries to provide improved service. In addition, there are still others that must be used by groups of libraries in order to provide optimal service. A GWLA library that uses the full range of best practices will not only provide the best service to their patrons but also will provide the best service to their consortium colleagues. Attaining this level of service demands a system-wide commitment to each other.

The GWLA member library collections are the foundation of GWLA resource sharing, but it is through a climate of cooperation that this group will facilitate access to these materials. The group recognizes that compliance is voluntary; however, interlibrary loan staff have always been willing to embrace innovations that will benefit the library users they serve, near and far. The GWLA interlibrary loan members also know that to be successful these recommendations need support beyond interlibrary loan units. The interlibrary loan staffs of the GWLA are excited about the possibilities of a consortium-wide commitment to these recommendations.

The GWLA Deans/Directors approved the recommendations in Spring 2001. To implement fully the recommended best practices structure, consortium libraries will need to review local practice and policy. Statements such as "serve local patrons and patrons of every other library in the consortium equally" can challenge some long-standing beliefs. However, these challenges must be met if the consortium is to maximize access to the combined holdings of all member libraries. Tools will be developed to evaluate how each member library contributes to the consortium effort. Deans/Directors will need to be supportive by considering and by implementing new policies, by supporting changes in workflows, and by providing necessary funding.

The interlibrary loan staffs of the GWLA are excited about the possibilities of a consortium-wide commitment to these recommendations.

Implementation of these commitments on a consortium level should not dramatically affect a library's ability to provide service to non-consortium libraries. In fact, libraries should find that improved practice leads to improved service to others. In addition, as the consortium shares what it is doing, that information may benefit other libraries as they consider and implement similar practices and principles. As more consortiums enhance services to each other, the national and international resource sharing structure will be improved.

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- The authors are very grateful for the leadership role Mary Jackson, Senior Program Officer for Access Services at the Association of Research Libraries, provides on interlibrary loan "best practices" on an international scale. One of many tools the Task Force referred to in our information gathering stage was Ms. Jackson's work on best practices. This resulted in our final report including several specific recommendations from Ms. Jackson, which were identified in her book and also identified through the accumulated experience of member operations. These ideas were applied and expanded to a consortium setting.
- In addition, the authors appreciate the broad support for resource sharing by the GWLA Deans and Directors. In fact, the Task Force work developed concurrently with the pilot interlibrary loan automation project, where the GWLA Library Deans' group asked the interlibrary loan librarians to "*Evaluate and improve current ILL practices among member libraries within the framework of the (North American Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery) NAILLD principles and in support of the consortium-wide system implemented per 1.1.1,*" referring to the GWLA Strategic Plan Outline.[8] It was soon evident to those GWLA libraries participating in the pilot project that a centralized system would be insufficient to meet all of the GWLA libraries' needs. The member libraries needed an enhanced foundation of services and agreements that would serve the consortium—with or without an unmediated requesting system. Therefore, the Best Practices Task Force was formed to explore these additional issues.

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