Zones of Cooperation: Aspects of Network Development

Ruth M. Katz

In North Carolina, network development and multitype library cooperation that will lead to improved library and information service for our citizens are the shared responsibility of the Division of State Library,[1] individual librarians, and the various governing and advisory groups having a role in library funding and development. The specific goal of developing a comprehensive plan for statewide network development has been assigned to the North Carolina Library Networking Steering Committee by the State Library Commission. More detailed information about the Steering Committee and its work appears elsewhere in this issue.

The Steering Committee believes that activities that should be addressed in a statewide plan include, but are not limited to, building a statewide data base, encouraging zones of cooperation (ZOCs), employing appropriate technology, improving document delivery, addressing education and training needs, estimating funding requirements and developing a public information program. Task forces organized by the Steering Committee are focusing on each of these topics. At this time, forty librarians are involved in committee or task force deliberations. The base upon which the current effort builds includes the work of the State Library Ad Hoc Committee for Multitype Library Cooperation, the NCLA Networking Committee and the King Research Inc. (KRI) study of networking feasibility.

Although the acronym ZOCs caught on very quickly, not everyone who served on the Steering Committee or who read the KRI report had a good idea of what a ZOC might be. Originally described by KRI as a "zone of convenience," the definition was changed to "zone of cooperation" to improve understanding.

ZOCs are best seen as a way of organizing for cooperative activities without loss of independence by individual libraries or of the ability to set and change priorities. A group of libraries form a ZOC and share resources when it is convenient for them to do so. Factors affecting convenience include, but are not limited to, geographic proximity, similarities in types of patrons, dissimilarities in collections, existing cooperative relationships, and special relationships among libraries or librarians. ZOCs provide needed flexibility in establishing a statewide network because a library can belong to more than one ZOC and because membership within a ZOC can change over time as the needs or priorities of member libraries change.

Request for Proposal

With help from the Steering Committee and the two active task forces, the Task Force on ZOCs worked to develop recommendations for a pilot project similar to that suggested in the King Research Inc. study. When the Division of State Library made a commitment to allocating some anticipated LSCA funds to one or more pilot projects, the idea of developing a Request for Proposal (RFP) and soliciting grant applications through the RFP process was finalized.

The task force identified several points it considered essential for the development of pilot projects and, with the approval of the Steering Committee, incorporated these in the RFP. The key points are that projects should include two or more types of libraries (with school library participation seen as highly desirable), encourage local cooperative ventures, provide spinoffs for statewide use (e.g. machine-readable files in MARC format), and lead to improved products and services to users—including other libraries. These and other eligibility factors appeared in the RFP as did detailed guidelines for preparing and submitting a proposal. The third part of the RFP described how proposals received by the Task Force on ZOCs would be evaluated and listed evaluation criteria in each of five general categories: likely impact of the proposed project on a need defined in the proposal, attainability of proposed objectives, adequacy of management plan, appropri-

Ruth M. Katz is Director of Academic Library Services, Joyner Library, East Carolina University. She is a member of the North Carolina Library Networking Steering Committee and chairs the Task Force on ZOCs.

ateness of budget and likelihood of ongoing commitment.

When the RFP was finalized and approved, the Division of State Library and the Department of Public Instruction distributed it to libraries and school systems throughout the state. The availability of the RFP was announced in *Tar Heel Libraries* and other newsletters so that any interested individual could obtain a copy by contacting the State Library.

All indications are that the process worked very well. Seven proposals were received for review. Two of these were selected for funding and the first contracts were awarded in October 1983.

When the 1983-85 Steering Committee and the task force chairmen met in October 1983, new work agendas were distributed and the membership of each task force was finalized. It was clear that the amount of work was increasing, that communication and cooperation among the task forces were absolutely necessary, and that the complex issues facing the Steering Committee would require a considerable amount of intense discussion. In other words, the existence of two pilot projects moved statewide networking from a feasible concept to a practical reality.

The Task Force on ZOCs had an immediate need to develop and release the second RFP for model ZOC projects to be funded for state fiscal year 1984-85. This work was accomplished in February 1984. Evaluation of the two operational ZOCs also was a high priority task. This work is being accomplished with the assistance of other task forces—both project monitoring and project technical assistance are provided to the pilot ZOCs. The results will be documented for use by other ZOCs and for consideration in a proposed organizational design for a statewide library network.

Project Clone

A brief description of the work underway by the pilot ZOCs will illustrate some of the early benefits of multitype library cooperation. Five libraries in Nash and Edgecombe counties have joined together to develop a union COM catalog of their combined monographic collections—about 166,000 titles. Microfiche readers are already available at the libraries (Edgecombe Technical College, Edgecombe County Memorial Library, Nash Technical College, North Carolina Wesleyan College, Braswell Memorial Library) and at all the high schools in the two counties. The participating libraries are located in a small geographical area but local citizens would not have true access to the combined collections without a union catalog. The project is named CLONE, standing for Cooperative Libraries of Nash-Edgecombe.

In the early stages of the project, the participating librarians got input from potential vendors and from State Library staff to help them understand about costs, data base maintenance, retrospective conversion and the establishment of catalog policies and guidelines. The CLONE team decided to produce a two-way divided catalog (author/title, subject), to use NCUC symbols already assigned to the libraries, and to designate one of the public libraries as the authority control center for the union list project. Member libraries agreed to have their individual catalogs updated quarterly. The union catalog will be updated semi-annually. The frequency of update can be changed if it proves to be unsatisfactory.

One product already available from Project CLONE is a questionnaire used to evaluate the capabilities of potential COM catalog producers and to solicit cost estimates.

Western NC Project

The second pilot ZOC includes thirty-eight libraries located in twenty-three western North Carolina counties. The participants have a long history of cooperation, including compiling a union list of periodicals, but can no longer support projects through use of regular staff members and students and with simple data processing equipment made available by the institutions in which the libraries are located. From 1975, when the fourth edition of the union list appeared, to 1983, the number of libraries increased from 20 to 38 and the number of periodical titles increased from 6400 to 7000. The large population served by participants in this project (615,000) and the uniqueness of the collections held by some of the libraries should make the product useful throughout the state. The methodology proposed for merging serials holding data from a variety of formats should be useful to other groups of libraries. The union list will be built from the holdings of Western Carolina University, University of North Carolina at Asheville, and Appalachian State University. Then holdings data for the Historical Foundation of the Reformed Presbyterian Churches will be added. The Foundation collection of 1700 unique and mostly out-of-print titles is the fourth largest serials collection in the region. It is estimated that the four libraries hold 90 per cent of the titles in the region. Additional details about methodology,

fees, and working arrangements with the contractor (SOLINET) are being distributed by the project office.

The Western North Carolina Project is being assisted by the Task Force on Document Delivery whose members have designed a study methodology to gather data on interlibrary borrowing and lending and on document delivery. The methodology will enable the participants to study the effects of a new edition of their serials union catalog as soon as it is delivered. If data collection is implemented rapidly, baseline data from the previous edition of the union catalog also may be available. Instructions for implementing and standardizing data collection have been prepared. This will be another product available for statewide study and use.

Conclusion

The pilot ZOCs described above are the first visible results of the effort toward statewide library networking. When a second group of model projects is selected in June of this year, the variety of ZOC groupings and range of projects available for site visits and discussion by librarians should be adequate to move the networking plan ahead at an accelerated pace. The task forces, especially the one concerned with technology, are continuing to address the question "what do librarians want the network to be/do?" Much work is being done toward identifying a technological design and a time frame for phased development of a network.

Many other topics remain to be addressed. It is generally agreed that the technical feasibility of networking has increased greatly and that economic feasibility is improving with leadership coming from the private sector. More attention now should be focused on the professional and political impacts of networking. Some of the questions are

Will competition among libraries for funds reverse the trend toward networking and resource sharing?

How will local governments perceive the changing roles and funding needs of "public" libraries in schools, community colleges, universities, and of municipal public libraries?

What changes may be needed in the organization of libraries and the use of library facilities?

What will happen to the relationships between libraries and private sector providers such as publishers, bookstores and data base vendors?

The already established ZOC projects and the newly funded model ZOC projects that will operate in 1984-85 will provide many of the answers to these questions. Then the task forces and the Steering Committee can derive decisions and recommendations from field-based knowledge.

The Steering Committee is devoting a major part of its calendar year 1984 agenda to gathering input and exploring options for network development. Care will be taken not to impose a grand design that limits the options of individual libraries or groups of libraries. Librarians throughout our state can participate in the network development process by visiting ZOC field sites, following published reports of networking activities, discussing the concepts and the specifics that are being proposed and directing questions and ideas to the State Library for use by the Committee and its task forces.

References

1. North Carolina General Statute 125-2(10) lists the following among the duties of the Department of Cultural Resources, under which the Division of State Library operates: "To plan and coordinate cooperative programs between the various types of libraries within the State of North Carolina, and to coordinate State development with regional and national cooperative library programs."

Errata

A typographical error appeared in Renee Taylor's article, "The Employee Perspective in the Evaluation Process," which was published in the Spring 1984 issue of *North Carolina Libraries* (pages 12-14).

The first four sentences of that article should have read as follows: "Evaluations. No one is ecstatic about making or receiving them; however, they are necessary. When the time approaches for my work to be evaluated, I usually become a bundle of nerves and eagerly anticipate the end of the ordeal. Not until this year, when I became a member of my library's performance appraisal committee, did I know that supervisors dread the process too."

The editor regrets the error.