

PROJECT HI-NET AND
SHARED TECHNOLOGY:
A SCHOOL/PUBLIC
LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP

by Linda Hayward and Laura Bramble

In 1994 under the leadership of Barbara Markuson, staff from the Indiana Cooperative Library



grant for the benefit of Marion County libraries

has led to new levels of multi-type library cooperation in central Indiana. School, public and academic libraries have forged new partnerships and are making better use of shared technology than ever before. The focus of this article is the school/public library partnership that emerged from this grant, particularly the creation of a shared catalog and automated system.

BACKGROUND

In 1989, an anonymous donor made a generous gift to the Indianapolis Foundation for the use of designated public, school and academic libraries in Marion County. Thirty-six eligible libraries were identified in 1989 and the number has now grown to 38 libraries. These libraries include the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, six university libraries, and 29 (now 31) high school libraries. The Library Fund currently has assets of over \$26,000,000 and has funded over \$7,000,000 in library projects since 1989. Examples of funded grants include the purchase of online databases, computer workstations and CD-ROM products, as well as new books and other materials.

The eligible libraries began meeting informally to discuss proposals and use of the Fund. After getting organized and becoming more familiar with other types of libraries, the sub-group of 29 high school libraries met to gather their thoughts and dreams for high school library service in the future.

An early study on resource sharing included a recommendation for a union database in one location on a shared automated system. The recommended system would have been expensive and the group anticipated problems that they could not resolve. Which school would take on the expense of housing, maintaining and troubleshooting a large system? Would the schools' governing bodies pay for a joint staff? Would the schools be willing or able to continue in the program after the initial funding? As a group, it was agreed not to continue with the study's recommendation. Two more attempts to find a solution were unsuccessful.

Services Authority (INCOLSA) visited all the school libraries with an extensive questionnaire. The final report to the group recognized that the school libraries were understaffed and existing staffs were overworked. Another critical finding of the report was that the schools were not at the same level of technological development—making cooperative technology efforts difficult.

The group accepted the INCOLSA report and then proceeded to make some big decisions. In an extraordinary display of solidarity, the group of "haves" stated that they were willing to take little or nothing in grant money so the "have-nots" could advance to an acceptable level of technology more rapidly. This generous spirit has been evident throughout the entire group of eligible libraries, not just among the high schools. At the same time, the group created a base level that all Marion County high school libraries should reach as soon as possible: all libraries would have a direct telephone line; a fax machine; an automated library system, and Internet access for the librarian.

The Hi-Net group created a steering committee with representatives from local public and state high schools and parochial schools. Feeling that they lacked the grant writing expertise that was needed, the group accepted Markuson's offer of INCOLSA services in writing the grant. While it was decided that the bulk of the funding should go toward the automation goal, the group wanted to be certain that all schools were able to continue to develop their library and that they were not left out of the grant entirely. Hence goals were included that were appropriate for all high schools not just those targeted for technological upgrading. Still undecided about how to cope with the joint automation aspect of the proposal, the group proceeded with proposal development confident that a solution would come.

At about the same time, Edward Szynaka became director of the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library (I-MCPL), and, under his guidance, I-MCPL staff created a proposal called "A Collaborative Effort between I-MCPL and High School Libraries in Marion County". I-MCPL offered to place, at no charge to the

school, one PC in each of the 29 high school library media centers with a connection to the I-MCPL catalog. In return, each school would be expected to maintain a community information database of its activities. I-MCPL also offered to serve as the automation system provider on a cost-recovery basis for as many of the Marion County high schools as chose to join and to aid in converting their respective collections to electronic format where necessary.

This offer solved the problem of where to locate the automated system and system maintenance and troubleshooting issues that the individual schools had been reluctant to take on. It also gave the project a higher visibility in the community and a clearer vision of how a combined catalog could improve access to library materials for community residents and students. Unaware of any similar projects with a large public library, the group hoped that this project would serve as a model for other urban areas.

HI-NET PROJECT BEGINS

In 1995, the Indianapolis Foundation Board of Directors approved Project Hi-Net and authorized funding for the ten areas outlined in the proposal:

1. Creation of machine-readable catalog records for 11 high schools: Bishop Chatard, Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory, Cardinal Ritter, Cathedral, Decatur Central, Eliza Hendricks, Indiana School for the Deaf, Indiana School for the Blind, Lutheran, Roncalli, and Seccina High Schools.
2. Provision of automated systems for these 11 schools.
3. Completion of the Indianapolis Public Schools automation project.
4. Outsourced cataloging and processing of new materials for the high schools.
5. Student access to electronic information for all participating schools.
6. High school media center network connections.
7. Technical and project management assistance.
8. Student and faculty involvement.
9. Innovation in information access and delivery.
10. Information and partnership initiatives.

Overall project management was provided through INCOLSA by Dennis Tucker who served as the coordinator of the project. Colleen Obergfell and the technology staff at I-MCPL provided technical assistance and coordination. I-MCPL, in its effort to show a commitment to this project, designated a cooperative projects leader – first, Charity Mitchell, later, Joe Hafner – to make sure that the project went as smoothly as possible.

Baseline goals were accomplished in all areas of the grant, though some more successfully than others. All school libraries received phone lines and fax machines if they did not have them. The Indianapolis Public Schools automation project was completed. Each school that was not part of the major automation project was given a small fund for use in improving student access to information – CD-ROM workstations, databases or upgrading CD-ROM towers. The student and faculty involvement projects did not develop as planned.

Hi-Net II continued the work started with the original Project Hi-Net. With this grant, Shared System members were upgraded to T1 connectivity. Each school was given \$12,500 each year for two years for the improvement of equipment, databases and services in accordance with their technology plan. Librarians could take advantage of continuing education opportunities offered by the state library cooperative network. More schools were able to join OCLC and convert their holdings to MARC format.

Probably the most complicated and certainly the most time-consuming task for Part I was the creation of a Shared System – the catalogs of the 11 high schools and the I-MCPL on a Geac Libs100+ system. The grant provided several PC's per school and telecommunications lines from the schools to I-MCPL. The schools were responsible for internal wiring. I-MCPL also offered Internet access to the media centers through their Internet connection.

The I-MCPL technical services staff bar-coded and converted catalog records to MARC format and added them to the database. In addition to I-MCPL's holdings of approximately 1.7 million items, 141,298 school items representing 125,788 titles were added to the database. Each school was able to set its own loan periods, fines and statistical categories.

Each school signed a contract with the I-MCPL for automation services and the cataloging and processing of new materials. This prevented the need for the members to create a separate, legal entity to operate the system. Since the membership is a blend of state, local and private organizations, this arrangement was the easiest and least expensive. The schools pay an annual maintenance fee for the system and all cataloging and processing costs are billed on a cost recovery basis. I-MCPL also offers acquisitions services to Hi-Net libraries and several member libraries of the Shared System select materials which I-MCPL staff then order, receive, catalog and process for them.

Each member library provides a representative to the Shared System Advisory Council which meets quarterly. This is strictly an advisory group but it is a useful forum for sharing concerns and discussing

decisions and issues concerned with the operation of the system. An Intranet site for school and Public Library staff has aided communication and provides important policy and procedure information for all staff. System reports are transmitted to the schools via this site as are technical instructions.

Lending between libraries was limited at first until delivery issues were resolved. Now Public Library patrons are able to place holds on school items and pick them up at a Public Library location and students and faculty are able to request books from the Public Library and pick them up at their school. While the expectation was that the Public Library would be the major lender, participants have been surprised by the number of school items that are requested by the Public Library patrons. The school always has the right to refuse the request so that has prevented the possible problem of multiple requests on popular topics. Circulation on the Shared System for 1998 was 9.5 million for I-MCPL and just over 30,000 for the schools. Not all schools were circulating on the system for all of 1998 so 1999 will be the first full year for the group as a whole.

All students and faculty have a regular borrower's card from the Public Library that can be used both at the Public Library and at school. The group has agreed not to collect fines for each other's libraries so students with Public Library delinquencies have to settle up with the Public Library not at the school and vice versa.

Two additional high schools have joined the eligible libraries group and elected to join the Shared System as well – Covenant Christian and Heritage Christian High Schools. Heritage Christian Schools decided to add their elementary school to the system as well. In addition, other community libraries may be joining the Shared System in the near future.

RESULTS

Project Hi-Net comes to its official end in June, 1999. Training, financial actions and evaluations are wrapping up. A formal evaluation of the project is currently underway. The news is expected to be good because it is obvious how much progress has been made. Five participants in the project went to the Computers in Libraries 99 conference in Alexandria, Virginia to present a program on Hi-Net and to encourage others in similar efforts. They came away with the feeling that Hi-Net has enjoyed a much smoother

development process than some other groups are experiencing.

Obviously, a project of this magnitude could not have been undertaken without the generous benefactor who provided the funds. Just over \$2.1 million was spent on Project Hi-Net over a five-year period. However, we have identified these additional factors which we feel have been just as instrumental to the success of the Hi-Net Project:

"Don't think that all decisions were made smoothly or without spirited debate, for they were not. After all, our group is composed of many intelligent and strong-willed people. However, we know that we have accomplished more as a group than we ever could have hoped to accomplish on our own."

- An active and devoted Hi-Net Steering Committee that has always kept the good of the entire high school community in mind when making decisions about the grants. The same has been true for the entire group of eligible libraries who have supported this project as well.
- Commitment of school and public library leaders to the vision of a shared catalog and resource sharing and their willingness to commit resources to such a joint venture. The importance of this commitment cannot be overemphasized.

- Project support from the Indianapolis Foundation's Ken Gladish, Judy Ellyn and Tony Macklin who continually urge the eligible libraries to more visionary service and partnerships.
- The hard work of staff members from the schools, the I-MCPL and INCOLSA; their ability to put aside differences of opinion for the common good; and their willingness to trust each other. As one librarian commented, "Don't think that all decisions were made smoothly or without spirited debate, for they were not. After all, our group is composed of many intelligent and strong-willed people. However, we know that we have accomplished more as a group than we ever could have hoped to accomplish on our own."

What are the perceived benefits of this project? First and foremost, we have achieved a certain level of technological equity among the member libraries. While the standard is always rising, this parity will make it possible for the eligible libraries to consider more advanced future partnerships and resource sharing.

The high school libraries on the Shared System have the benefits of an automated catalog and circulation system without the sometimes-onerous burden of maintaining it. Some librarians have reported that the

connection to the Public Library and other schools has raised the visibility of their library within their own organization. Library staff has more time to devote to student service rather than spending time on catalog maintenance and materials processing and can take advantage of I-MCPL's economies of scale for these functions.

The Public Library has a closer working relationship with community schools with more opportunities for cooperative ventures. Public Library users have access to more material than previously. I-MCPL is able to make its services more convenient for the schools' students and faculty who are also Public Library users.

CHALLENGES

In retrospect, what were some of the problems and difficulties that needed or still need to be overcome? The automated system needs to be flexible enough to allow participating libraries to set their own parameters for circulation, reports, etc. The system needs to be able to handle limiting searches by location and separate displays of individual library fines and delinquencies. Ideally, libraries should be able to generate their own system reports.

School libraries are by nature more isolated than public or university libraries and have a greater need for technical support than larger libraries with technology staffs. INCOLSA and I-MCPL, while they did their best, did not have the resources to give the schools all the technical support they frequently needed.

How to identify sources of ongoing funding for services and how to serve as advocates for the services provided by the grant to administrators are other challenges. Automation is more expensive than no automation. How do you quantify the benefits of additional services to students and faculty and taxpayers?

Finally, the Hi-Net grant proposal itself was probably a bit too ambitious and over-arching to be totally effective. Some projects would probably have been better handled through smaller, individual grants.

What does the future hold for Hi-Net and the other libraries eligible for grant funds? The group has already used grant funds to create a Marion County database which nicely supplements the statewide Inspire project. (See "Marion County Internet Project" by Ann F. Bevilacqua, Lynn Hobbs, and David W. Lewis, in this issue of *Indiana Libraries*.) Grant support for this project will extend through 1999 and beyond.

The Hi-Net libraries continue to use the Library Fund at the Indianapolis Foundation for collection development grants for their libraries. These grants have required a component of matching funds from the schools and have resulted in a significant improvement in the schools' book collections.

The next challenge facing the libraries eligible for the Library Fund grants is already under consideration. What benchmarks exist for library service in a community? How do citizens know when service is adequate or not? What level of service should we expect from our school, public and university libraries? Taxpayers and grantors are asking these questions in increasing numbers and few libraries are immune. How does the Library Fund make the best use of its funds to provide library service to Marion County residents? That is the next big question for Marion County libraries.

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