



STATE TECHNOLOGY
CONSULTING PILOT
PROJECT

*by Martha Roblee and
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The Indiana State Library began making technology grants to public libraries in 1996 after the General Assembly approved technology funding of \$2 million per year for public libraries. Indiana's public libraries were thrilled to have a chance to receive a grant to help meet the challenge of incorporating technology into the library. All stages of technological development were represented by the requests.

After the first year of grants, it became apparent to State Library staff that libraries also needed help in planning for technology. Many of the grant requests included funding for individual consultants. Some requests also showed a lack of understanding of state goals and information infrastructure which led many libraries to pursue implementation of technology on their own. A common strategy seemed to be to move forward with what they felt was the best solution at the time and within their budgets. As a result, some libraries had not fully utilized the benefits of the State initiatives and implemented strategies which did not always work well with the next steps a year or two down the road.

State Library staff did not have the background to advise libraries in detailed technology planning. INCOLSA staff, while having a better background to provide help, were so thinly spread that they could not visit each library and provide the level of on-site help needed. Obviously, one approach could have been to allow funds within each grant for consulting, but that did not seem like a cost-effective way to use state dollars. After wrestling with various possible solutions, the State Library decided to advertise for bids for a small project to be a pilot for future projects. The bidders were asked to work with a group of eighteen libraries, of all sizes and levels of automation, to survey the libraries' technology needs and propose a plan for automation for each. The library could then choose to implement the plan or not. The successful vendor was also required to become familiar with the state's current telecommunications Backbone infrastructure and to make sure all solutions proposed to libraries would fully utilize that network.

All Internet connections purchased by the State Library for public libraries are through the State

Backbone, which is managed by the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System (IHETS). It is a high-speed transport system capable of simultaneously handling data and video. This system is interconnecting colleges and universities, K-12 schools, public libraries, state government offices, and other public sector clients. One goal is to facilitate information generation and distribution within the state of Indiana. The Access Indiana Backbone Network builds upon the foundation of Indiana's original Internet Backbone for higher education, INDnet.

Another goal of the project is to use the small initial group to gain experience on the needs of libraries and develop a model that could be used by other libraries. It is hoped that the results of the pilot will help the State Library with state level planning for future grants and provide directions to take.

One of the exciting aspects of the project is the preparation of a plan that libraries will be able to use in preparing for two-way interactive video, very similar to what INCOLSA has been using for distance education and meetings. However, instead of needing a separate line for the video, libraries with a T-1 Internet connection through the State Backbone will be able to use the same line for both Internet and video. The video capabilities would allow staff to attend meetings at another site, participate in training programs, and talk to other librarians face to face, all without leaving the library. This capability is already available on the Access Indiana Backbone.

The company selected to provide consulting assistance, DataServ, Inc., specializes in designing, implementing and supporting next-generation digital technology solutions for the education community. Headquartered in Farmington Hills, Michigan, with regional offices in Indianapolis, Columbus and Cleveland, Ohio, DataServ has assisted libraries and educational communities with more than 8,500 individual technology initiatives and projects in the past 12 years.

The project kicked off with a meeting at the New Castle Public Library on March 4, 1999. All eighteen libraries in the counties of Delaware, Fayette, Hancock, Henry, Jay, Rush, Shelby, Union, and Wayne were in attendance. Martha Roblee of the State Library and

DataServ staff Adam Weber, Marvin Sauer, and Dave Lloyd presented an overview of the project. DataServ made appointments with all the participating libraries to visit during March and April. The schedule calls for the project to be completed in summer, 1999.

PROJECT OUTCOMES INCLUDE:

1. Providing valuable information for the State Library to incorporate into a model for moving libraries to the State Backbone.
2. Assisting the State Library in developing grant applications and initiatives, as they continue to plan for incorporating video and multimedia into libraries.
3. Increasing awareness and opportunities for all libraries regardless of size and location throughout all of Indiana.

EARLY ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

DataServ's Systems Engineer Dave Lloyd conducted onsite visitations and surveys at each of the 18 libraries from late March through mid-April. He discovered that each of the libraries, whether large, medium or small, urban or rural, is challenged with the same primary concerns: funding and space. Libraries already challenged to house volumes of printed material are now pressed to also provide room for technology in the form of workstations and video conferencing systems.

Insuring library directors and their staffs that they have access to expertise to implement this technology along with the necessary ancillary equipment and resources to adapt it to their individual environments is

no small task either. Understanding the technology terminology, such as workstation, server, NT, Novell, Category 5, ATM, IP, LAN, and WAN are vitally important in the technology decision making process. Staff, library directors, and their boards are all challenged in this regard. Electrical power, security, and staff development are additional concerns that must be addressed as technology is integrated into the library setting.

A PLACE TO BEGIN

Each library will receive a documented evaluation that will include DataServ's findings, analysis, and recommendations, along with a detailed budgeting spreadsheet that will outline all technology-related costs associated with the implementation of data, voice and video.

These libraries that have been through the gauntlet of technology implementation on a broader scale will serve as models with a wealth of information and experience to share with those who are about to make the run.

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