
Centralized cataloging and processing for public library consortia

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Abstract

A consortium of small public libraries share an OPAC, an interlibrary loan system, and maintain reciprocal borrowing among its patrons. A study was conducted for this consortium to investigate whether or not it would benefit from centralized processing. Raw data show that the consortium should be able to save money with a centralized processing unit. However, there are other factors involved that may influence the implementation of such a process. This article reports the findings and outcome of that study.

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Introduction

The Municipal Library Consortium (MLC) of St Louis County is a group of eight independent public libraries in Missouri that formed in 1996 for resource sharing. The MLC consists of Brentwood Public Library, Ferguson Municipal Public Library, Kirkwood Public Library, Maplewood Public Library, Richmond Heights Memorial Library, Rock Hill Public Library, University City Public Library, and Valley Park Community Library. Each library extends reciprocal borrowing privileges to valid library cardholders of each member library. The combined number of volumes held by the Consortium is over 600,000.

As well as sharing library resources with each other, the MLC shares an integrated library system (ILS), Dynix. MLC has taken advantage of the Missouri State Library sponsored "Show me the world" project, resulting in the Consortium's bibliographic database being included in OCLC for the purpose of Interlibrary Loan (ILL). The Missouri State Library pays all ILL fees except for telecommunications, which is paid for by the Consortium.

A system administrator who is housed at the University City Public Library manages the business affairs of the Consortium. The library directors meet approximately ten times a year at various libraries with the system administrator. Each director takes a turn as president of the MLC with each term lasting two years. The hardware for the Consortium's ILS is also housed at the University City Public Library.

In 2001, with the impending retirement of the cataloger at the Kirkwood Public Library, their director was interested in the possibility of the MLC sharing cataloging and processing via the formation of a centralized unit. It was the hope of the director that a possible consolidation would be fiscally beneficial to the Consortium as well as bring about a uniformity of cataloging practices. To investigate this, an application was submitted to the Missouri State Library for a Library Services and Technology Act's (LSTA) "Bring in an expert" grant which could be used to study the cataloging procedures and processes of all the libraries within the Consortium. The grant was awarded in March 2002.



Methodology

The study was conducted in phases. The first phase was a search of the current literature. The second phase was the creation of a survey tool and visitation of the libraries. Collating and interpreting the results as well as following up with any secondary contacts was the third phase. Finally, the investigators drew a conclusion from the findings and made a recommendation to the MLC.

The literature search yielded limited results for consortia the size of the MLC. Much of the literature addressed implementation of centralized departments for statewide public library systems. Even though the literature was dated (30 to 40 years old), survey tools used for these implementations proved useful (Kocher, 1958).

Survey

The initial survey tool covered all aspects of a library's cataloging process. Who was doing the cataloging? Was that person a professional, paraprofessional, or other? How much time was spent in the cataloging and processing of library materials? Was the cataloging of library materials the cataloger's only responsibility? Was the cataloging and processing outsourced? What type of processing did the library materials require? Was the library interested in using centralized processing if offered?

The survey was distributed to, and filled out with, the library director or the cataloger at the time of each site visit. After the initial interview, it was determined that acquisition and staff salary information would be needed to fully complete the study. An e-mail was sent to each director requesting information on how many new items were received in the past fiscal year. What was the library's acquisition budget and what did it cover? What vendors were used for book and processing materials acquisitions? What was the salary of the person(s) performing the cataloging and processing duties?

All libraries but one responded to the request for the acquisition and staff salary information. A phone call to the director of that library still elicited no response.

Survey results

In all but two libraries, individuals without a Masters in Library Science performed the cataloging. However, each non-professional had cataloging training through Missouri Library Network Corporation's workshops or the University of Missouri.

In all but one of the libraries the person(s) responsible for the cataloging was also expected to perform other duties within the library. In a reversal of roles, one library had the reference staff and the director check the MARC records for all new cataloging. All libraries catalog non-print library materials, such as videos and DVDs. One library had the archivist, who is a professional, catalog the audiovisual materials.

BookWhere was the bibliographic utility of choice for the majority of libraries. The Consortium purchased this product but chose not to renew it in 2002. While the libraries can continue to use BookWhere, there will not be any updates available to them.

CatExpress, an OCLC cataloging product for smaller libraries, is the main bibliographic utility for one of the libraries. With the non-renewal of the BookWhere subscription a few of the other libraries are beginning to use this. Some other utilities that are being used to locate cataloging for materials are Z39.50 sites, Title Source II (Baker & Taylor), and First Search, another OCLC product.

Three libraries have contracted with their book vendor for some physical processing on their books. The other five libraries do all of their processing in-house. The average length of turn around time from when a book is received until it is on the shelf is 2.5-10 days, with one library not reporting. The fastest turn around time is 24 hours and the longest is one month.

When asked how much cataloging and processing the libraries would be interested in if a centralized unit were formed the answers varied widely. Four libraries replied none, but two would consider it if shown to be logistically efficient. One library would be interested in cataloging and processing for their children and audio visual materials. One library was interested in centralized cataloging but would continue with their vendor

processing. Yet another library was a conditional yes for both services. One library was a resounding yes for cataloging, processing, and acquisitions.

The most widely used vendor is Baker & Taylor for firm orders. Some other vendors used for ordering are Book Wholesalers, Ingram, Unique, and Amazon.com. Libraries also purchased books from local bookshops and individual publishers.

If ordering were offered as part of a centralized cataloging unit, two libraries would use this option. Of these two, one would use centralized ordering for bestsellers only. Another library that currently orders electronically would use this service if there were time and money savings. One library was of the philosophy that this seems to be a duplication of services. They select and order in the same work session. Another library would prefer not to use centralized ordering.

Each library was asked if they would be able to host the centralized unit. Six libraries answered no. One library had no objection to it but did not have the space. One library was agreeable to housing the new unit but would need some reconfiguration of their current technical services area.

Considerations

Before a decision on creating a centralized cataloging and processing unit could be made, several issues needed to be addressed. The most important consideration was whether the project was a fiscally sound investment for the Consortium. Other issues to be addressed included the location of the unit; how many staff would be needed; and how would they be administered. Yet another important issue was a philosophical one: to whom would the records belong? Finally, what would be the turn around time from receipt of the material to the item appearing on the shelf?

Would this project be fiscally sound for the Consortium? To determine this, factors such as anticipated staffing, cost of bibliographic utilities and processing costs needed to be compared with amounts currently spent. The approximate expense for cataloging and processing for the Consortium in FY2002 was

\$300,000. Due to incomplete information, this amount includes only an estimate for Maplewood Public Library, where costs are based on their Consortium percentage. See Table I for detailed expenses.

Staffing

In fiscal year 2001-2002 the libraries in the Consortium downloaded 9,928 bibliographic records into the catalog. During the same period, 1,937 originally cataloged bibliographic records were created and 29,717 holdings were added. If these numbers remain stable for the current fiscal year, cataloging costs can be ascertained for a centralized unit.

For the purpose of determining staffing requirements it was estimated that 10,000 bibliographic records would be downloaded into the catalog and that 2,000 original records would be created. According to Smith's (1988) study of cataloging production standards, a cataloger can be expected to catalog 250-400 titles a month. A title that needs original cataloging may take between 30-60 minutes depending on its complexity.

In the low range of copy cataloging of 250 titles a month for 10,000 records a year, a library would need 3.69 full time employees (FTE). In the high range of 400 titles a month for the same 10,000 records the library would need 2.27 FTE. The FTE is based on a staff member working 11 months of the year due to vacation and holidays. One half to one FTE would be needed to catalog the 2,000 original records for the Consortium.

It was assumed that the Consortium would have one professional cataloger for the original cataloging and to double-check the copy cataloging. The remainder of the staff would be paraprofessionals. The annual salaries are based on the 2002 Library Salary Survey compiled by the St Charles City-County Library for Class 2 Public Libraries. The amounts are taken from the highest range from the two public libraries in the Consortium listed on the salary survey. The cost of benefits is included in the total for annual salaries in the range of \$97,324 to \$155,861.

Bibliographic utilities

For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that the centralized cataloging unit would

Table I MLC annual expenses for cataloging and processing

	Brentwood public	Ferguson municipal public	Kirkwood public	Maplewood public	Richmond Heights memorial	Rockhill public	University city	Valley Park community	MLC totals less Maplewood
MLC percentage	8.15	10.18	26.76	6.35	10.16	5.44	29.79	3.17	100.00
Acquisitions budget (\$)	71,000.00	50,400.00	147,000.00		91,250.00	28,000.00	239,000.00	13,000.00	639,650.00
Cataloging expense – salary (\$)	24,750.00	20,498.00	49,165.00		37,230.00	9,081.00	62,613.00	3,000.00	206,337.00
Processing expense – salary (\$)	6,600.00				3,315.00		24,517.00	1,320.00	35,752.00
Processing expense – materials (\$)		709.00	13,640.00		4,300.00		13,500.00		32,149.00
Bibliographic utility costs (\$)									0.00
BookWhere (\$)	0.00	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CatExpress (\$)			1,470.00						1,470.00
Others (\$)			750.00				1,800.00		2,550.00
Totals (\$)	31,350.00	21,207.00	65,025.00	See below	44,845.00	9,081.00	102,430.00	4,320.00	278,258.00
Estimated Maplewood total (based on 6.5% MLC distribution)									18,900.00
MLC annual expenses for cataloging and processing									297,158.00

Notes: Kirkwood's process expense – materials is estimated based on 7,373 items added to the catalog in FY2002 using Baker & Taylor's processing fees. Rockhill's cataloging expense – salary is combined cataloging and processing costs. University city's expense for title source II based on cost of the product in 2000. Valley Park – cataloging and processing salaries – do not know if these numbers are salary or material costs. These are estimates of monthly costs

obtain MARC records from Baker & Taylor, the most widely used book vendor, and OCLC's CatExpress. Costs for bibliographic cataloging utilities were projected on the estimated 12,000 records that were used for the staffing salary estimates.

Calling on personal experience with Baker & Taylor MARC records, the study assumed an 80 per cent hit rate for the Consortium. Since Baker & Taylor charges \$0.25 per record sent, the cost for this service would be \$2,000. CatExpress would be used to catalog the remaining 2000 records. For FY2002-2003 OCLC is charging \$1,470 for a block of 2000 records (OCLC, 2002).

For the upload to OCLC for ILL, the records from Baker & Taylor would be loaded at a cost of \$0.15 a record. No information was obtained about uploading the originally cataloged records to OCLC. If those records are uploaded to OCLC as a billable item they will cost the same as the Baker & Taylor records. If they can be uploaded to OCLC as original cataloging the Consortium will realize a credit of over \$4.00 per record. The assumption used was that the Consortium would be charged the \$0.15. That cost would be \$1,500. The total costs for bibliographic utilities would be \$4,970.

Processing

Just fewer than 30,000 holdings were added to the catalog in 2001-2002. The costs were based on books being processed by the vendor. For the purposes of this study, the 30,000 items are books, 50 per cent hardback with jackets, and 50 per cent softbacks requiring a Kapco-like cover (see Table II). Libraries also receive video recordings in VHS and DVD formats, magazines, and books that do not require covering. Since this information was not separated out, the actual costs will vary.

The processing being performed by the vendor will be bar-coding, spine labeling, one stamping, and Kapco or Mylar covering. The total estimated cost for vendor processing of books is \$55,500.

Other considerations

Taking into account only the staffing, bibliographic utility, and processing costs, a potential saving of between \$83,669 and \$142,206 could be realized for the Consortium

(see Table III). However, there are still other factors to be considered that have not been addressed that would have a financial impact on the Consortium.

Location

The location of the centralized cataloging unit is very important to the success of the project. Several factors needing consideration are:

- The location needs to be central to all of the libraries.
- There needs to be an adequate labor pool.
- The transportation or courier system needs to be efficient.
- The location needs adequate space (Nelson Associates, 1967).

Two of the members expressed an interest in hosting the cataloging unit. Neither of these libraries was near the geographic center of the Consortium. One of the libraries would have required an addition to their current building. Both libraries would need additional staff to accommodate a centralized cataloging unit.

The largest library in the consortium in both space and volumes held would be best suited for a centralized unit. This library is centrally located to the entire Consortium. Their current technical services space is ideal for the operation. This conclusion is from a visual assessment of the library. They have nine staff people participating in some form of cataloging and processing. However, this library also houses the hardware for the Consortium as well as the system administrator and may be hesitant to take more on. Wherever the unit is located the Consortium will probably need to address overhead costs for the use of the space within the library.

Turn around time

While the average turn around time is 2.5-10 days from the time the item is received to the time it appears on the shelf, all libraries wanted the ability to get a popular book out in 24 hours or less. How the books arrive at the centralized unit has not been addressed. Will they be received at the ordering library, shipped on to the cataloging unit for processing, and then shipped back to the library for shelving? The time frame for this could be unacceptable to the library directors.

Table II Processing costs (Baker & Taylor)

Holdings added per year	No.	Spine label	Bar-code	Stamp	Mylar	Kapco
Unit price		0.20	0.20	0.10	0.85	1.85
Hardbacks	15,000	3,000	3,000	1,500	12,750	
Softbacks	15,000	3,000	3,000	1,500		27,750
Subtotal holdings	30,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$3,000	\$12,750	\$27,750
Total vendor processing cost		\$55,500				

Table III Summary of costs

	Cost range	
	High (\$)	Low (\$)
Total in-house staffing cost	155,861	97,324
Vendor costs		
Total vendor processing cost	55,500	55,500
Total bibliographic utility costs	4,970	4,970
Total vendor costs	60,470	60,470
Annual total costs	216,331	157,794
Estimated consortium cost (2001-2002)	300,000	300,000
Potential savings	83,669	142,206

The Consortium has established courier service arrangements with St Louis County Library for its borrowing between libraries. An increase in usage would probably result in an increase of fees from the County Library. This was not addressed in the estimate of costs to the Consortium.

To save time, could the books be shipped directly from the vendor to the centralized cataloging unit? This gives way to other questions:

- Does the ordering library wait until the books return from the centralized unit to receive and invoice the shipments?
- How will problems be reconciled? What if a title is received that was not ordered? What if a shipment is damaged?
- Would the central unit need access to the acquisitions module?
- What materials get priority treatment or are "rush" orders?

Centralized acquisitions-cataloging facility

Would it be more efficient to establish a centralized acquisitions-cataloging facility? The MLC may migrate to EpixTech's Horizon product. The acquisitions module has the ability to electronically e-mail orders to book vendors. Each library on the acquisitions system

can generate orders. The centralized acquisitions-cataloging unit can gather the orders and send them to the vendors. If no bibliographic record exists in the catalog for the order, a MARC record may be requested from the vendor. At the time the order is received it may then be received and invoiced and any ordering problems resolved.

A less complicated form of acquisitions may be to centrally order bestsellers. All of the libraries order bestsellers for their patrons. An ordering policy can be established as to the quantities that each library needs. When a bestseller is published, the centralized unit can automatically generate the order (Gibson, 1995).

Loss of bibliographic control

Another concern that would need to be addressed is the loss of bibliographic control. Each library cataloger is very possessive of their bibliographic records. The "this is MY record" attitude would have to be overcome. The Consortium members would have to understand that the bibliographic records belong to every library in the system. Each library should be able to add holdings to any record. Any library should be able to edit or enhance a bibliographic record. Yet, no one

should remove anything from a bibliographic record that would negatively affect access or cause a loss of useful information.

The MLC has a cataloging committee that has already established some cataloging guidelines. The centralized unit could follow these guidelines when cataloging. The need for this committee would be even more necessary to monitor adherence of those guidelines and to make any adjustments when necessary. Authority should be given to the cataloging unit for clean up of the database.

An important question that arose was: If an MLS professional were doing the cataloging, would there be a need for the double and triple checking that is taking place in some libraries with reference staff? If not, perhaps staff time could be freed up for other projects. This would have additional cost saving implications.

Conclusion

The information used for estimating the cataloging and processing costs was based on how many bibliographic records, original cataloging, and holdings were added to the database. This information was not broken down into what percentage were books (hardback and paperback), videos, magazines, or any other type of material that a library orders for its patrons. This would need to be ascertained, as well as, the specific processing needs for each library.

What would the compensation be to the library that houses the new department? Who would be in charge of that department? Would the head cataloger be in charge? If so, to whom does that person report? Would it be the director of the host library, the system administrator, or the Consortium? If the

director of the host library or the system administrator of the MLC becomes the supervisor, does that person get extra compensation? All of these questions need to be addressed.

If acquisitions were added to the charge of a central cataloging and processing unit, additional staff would be needed. The same is true of authority control for the catalog. The staffing required for authority control in a centralized environment could change, and the question of who does this and how many staff would be involved also needs to be examined.

Given the information in the study for staffing, cataloging, and processing costs the creation of a centralized cataloging and processing unit would be feasible. If the Consortium should decide to move forward with centralized cataloging or even a combined centralized acquisitions-cataloging unit, a more in-depth study would be needed.

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