IFLA Guidelines for Best Practices for Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery

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Abstract

In March of this year, the IFLA Standing Committee on Document Delivery and Resource Sharing approved and released a new document to assist resource sharing departments world-wide with working to their highest potential. This new document contains the IFLA Guidelines for Best Practices for Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery and it is the hope of the committee that libraries around the world will find it a useful resource as they seek to continuously improve their resource sharing operations. These guidelines are based on solid research that has been replicated in various countries and they are relevant and applicable to any library conducting interlibrary loan and document delivery services.

These Guidelines are divided into General Recommendations, Staff, Technology, Users, Recommendations for the Requesting Library, and Recommendations for the Supplying Library.

The next steps for the Committee is to disseminate and promote the use of the IFLA Guidelines for Best Practices for Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery advocating and representing them and educating our interlibrary loan colleagues on their use. We plan to spread the word and lead by practice. We invite you join us in this effort.

In March of this year, the IFLA Standing Committee on Document Delivery and Resource Sharing approved and released a new document to assist resource sharing departments world-wide with working to their highest potential. This new document contains the *IFLA Guidelines for Best Practices for Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery* and it is the hope of the committee that libraries around the world will find it a useful resource as they seek to continuously improve their resource sharing operations. These guidelines are based on solid research that has been replicated in various countries and they are relevant and applicable to any library conducting interlibrary loan and document delivery services. First, let's look at the process of the development of best practices.

Best practices come from the benchmarking process. Benchmarking can be defined as comparing and measuring your policies, practices, philosophies, and performance measures against those of high-caliber performing organizations or services anywhere in the world. Your benchmarking investigations will provide the necessary insight into exactly what practices, processes, and procedures make a high-performing work so well. You can then begin to introduce these practices into your own service. Benchmarking has several benefits:

- It supports a culture of change and of continuous improvement.
- It supports a learning organization.
- It helps to break established patterns of behavior and thought that may no longer be productive.
- It provides models for excellence.

You may be wondering why you should consider implementing best practices in your own interlibrary loan and document delivery services. You may feel that your practices, policies, and procedures have served you and your staff well for years and that you have trained your users to know what to expect from your service. Let's examine some data on customer service in general to answer this question.

Two decades ago, a customer experience research consultancy called TARP Worldwide was commissioned to conduct studies of customer services for several large and well-know corporations. Their results were sobering:

- The average business only hears from 4% of its unhappy customers. Of the 96% who don't bother to complain, 25% have "serious" problems. In other words, one complaint equals 24 others, six of which are serious.
- Complainers (4%) are more likely to stay with a company than are non-complainers. Complaints tell you what needs fixing in the system and timely problem resolution has a positive impact.
- About 60% of the complainers will stay if their problems are resolved. 95% of them will stay if they feel the problem was resolved quickly.
- Customers with a problem will tell between 10 and 20 other people about it.
- Customers who have had a problem resolved by a company will tell about 5 other people about their treatment.

It is important to consider these numbers when you think about your own service. No interlibrary loan and document delivery service can afford to ignore them because these findings apply equally to us and affect how our users perceive and react to our manner of service provision.

- TARP also formulated what they call the "85/15 Rule". This rule holds that 85% of service delivery problems are caused by poor systems or processes; only 15% are caused by individuals providing the service.

In other words, if you put good people in a poor system, the system will win 85% of the time. Looked at another way, by solving your system problems, you solve 85% of your service problems. Each person and each process has critical positive or negative potential. These findings provide us with powerful motivation to apply best practices in our own service.

Now that we have the motivation to seek change, where should we look for benchmarking partners? Consider organizing a site visit to other libraries that you know from your own experience have high-performing interlibrary loan and document delivery services. Another resource would be other libraries that have conducted their own benchmarking and best practices studies and published their results. You should also consider looking outside of the library world for benchmarking partners. Consider each process involved in the interlibrary loan and document delivery process. UPS or Fedex would make excellent benchmarking partners for shipping procedures. For quick supply of goods and services, consider an organization like Amazon.com, but perhaps closer to home.

The benefit of the *IFLA Guidelines for Best Practices for Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery* is that they distill the research results from several studies in different countries and provide you with research-based recommendations. What the committee found in compiling these guidelines was that the various studies all had similar findings, which reinforces their validity and usefulness. The *IFLA Guidelines* are based on a combination of studies conducted in four countries and include:
- From the USA: the 1998 Association of Research Libraries' interlibrary loan and document delivery study, conducted by Mary Jackson
- A national study from Australia
- A study conducted in the Nordic countries, and
- New Zealand

Because the ARL study was a major influence on the studies conducted by the other countries, we will examine the list of best practices that resulted from it. The following data has been provided courtesy of Mary Jackson, ARL Senior Program Officer. The ARL Interlibrary Loan Study looked at four major performance measures:

- Direct cost
- Turnaround time
- Fill rates, and
- User satisfaction.

By analyzing the results of the multiple item data collection instrument, ARL was able to pinpoint high-performing borrowing and lending operations in comparison to their peers. Once these high-performers were identified, site visits were made to each institution to study what practices, processes, policies and procedures contributed definitively to their high performance as lenders or borrowers.

ARL was able to identify the following practices that characterize high-performing borrowing operations:

- Maximize use of technology
- Use a single messaging system
- Maintain a paperless office
- Send articles directly to patrons
- Are willing to pay lenders/suppliers
- Use staff with interest in technology
- Have directors that support the activity

High-performing lending operations were found to have the following practices:

- Encourage borrowers to use their library first
- View lending as a business
- Maximize use of technology
- Ship materials via Ariel, fax, or expedited methods
- Oversee the entire process (mailroom to billing)
- Check the stacks for materials only one time
- Charge for sending books or articles
- Accept credit cards, IFLA vouchers
- Have directors that support the activity

When the Standing Committee on Document Delivery and Resource Sharing was selecting and compiling the *IFLA Guidelines for Best Practices for Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery,* the findings from the ARL study were combined with those from Australia, New Zealand, and the Nordic countries. Discussions were held at the IFLA Conference in Oslo, Norway, via email, and at the committee's Midterm Business Meeting in Rome, Italy, where the final draft of the *Guidelines* was approved.

These Guidelines are divided into General Recommendations, Staff, Technology, Users, Recommendations for the Requesting Library, and Recommendations for the Supplying Library. I'd like to introduce them and review them with you here:

The Committee advocates the following **General recommendations:**
- Streamline the process within your own library
- Define performance indicators for service levels and turnaround time and monitor your performance against them
- Evaluate your own routines and change them accordingly
- Reduce the number of hands through which the requests are passing
- All requests should be handled in one electronic system, preferably with the ability to interoperate with other ILL/DD systems
- Keep statistics to suit national monitoring schemes and local needs
- Make holdings available on Union Catalogues and keep them up-to-date, with an indication of availability for resource sharing
- Explore reciprocal arrangements

In terms of **<u>Staff</u>**, who are a crucial component of the service, the Committee urges that you:
- Use the expertise of skilled staff members
- Staff members should continuously be able to develop competencies and be trained in using new tools and resources
- Encourage the exchange of experience at the local or international level

The appropriate use of **<u>Technology</u>** is a very important component of best practices for resource sharing and document delivery, particularly in regards to speed of processing:

- Hardware and software must be up-to-date
- Encourage users to submit requests electronically
- Give the end users the ability to check the status of requests online
- Handle all communication about requests electronically

As we discussed earlier, meeting **<u>Users</u>** needs and expectations will make or break your service so it is important to include the user in these *Guidelines*:
- Focus on the needs and preferences of the end user
- Perform user surveys on a regular basis

The Committee endorses the following **recommendations for the Requesting Library**:
- ILL should be an integrated part of the Library's service to users
- Introduce new technology in all processes
- Do not limit unreasonably the number of requests from users
- Involve the end user as much as possible in requesting
- Give end users access to union catalogues with requesting facilities
- Process requests from end users quickly
- Use your experience to select supplying libraries according to speed of service and cost
- Adhere to conditions of suppliers and treat material with care
- Offer IFLA vouchers as payment

- Deliver the material as fast as possible to the end user:
  - Send copies electronically if at all possible
  - Check speed of supply on a regular basis

Recommendations for the Supplying Library include:
- Use experienced staff to collect requested material from your collections in order to minimize mistakes
- Use the fastest delivery methods
- Try to satisfy requests in the best possible way
- Be sure that your license agreements for your e-resources will allow ILL/DD
- Create online order forms and/or interoperate with other ILL/DD systems
- Make your library's lending policies available on your web site and in policy directories

- [Accept IFLA vouchers](#)

These *Guidelines for Best Practice* are a solid foundation from which to work but they are not written in stone. Your priorities may vary, depending on the needs and expectations of your institution, your consortium, or your own users. Some examples of additional items would be:

- Design user-friendly procedures
- Understand and meet users' needs – conduct user studies (surveys, focus groups, etc.)
- Use an ILL request management software package
- Place regular borrowing requests with potential lenders the same day they are received in your office. (Problem requests may take longer)

How should a library go about implementing these new *IFLA Guidelines for Best Practices for Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery*? Don't let yourself be overwhelmed by the length of the list. Take incremental steps, focusing at first on some area that you know to be problematic in your own operation. Making process improvements to streamline your workflow is another important step. One very productive method of doing this is to flowchart every single step in your interlibrary lending and borrowing processes. The creation of this flowchart will provide you and your staff with the opportunity to question your procedures, to identify redundant or out-of-date processes and give you a good start on streamlining your processes. Another approach to implementing these Guidelines is to create a small group of libraries which agree to put them into practice together, or to introduce them into an existing group, such as a library consortium that you are already a part of. Some of these Guidelines may be cultural, since the countries where they have been developed have been similar in terms of infrastructure, economy, and other factors. Developing countries may find the need to adapt these Guidelines or to conduct studies of their own to create relevant guidelines for their service.

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