MINITEX/MnLINK Interlibrary Loan Policies Survey Report  
May 1, 2007

Executive Summary

The MINITEX/MnLINK Interlibrary Loan (ILL) Committee is reviewing the MnLINK Policy Recommendations, originally created by the ILL Committee and approved by the MnLINK Steering Committee on August 27, 1999. The recommendations were developed to establish guidelines for libraries participating in resource sharing through the MnLINK system. Three years after implementation, the policies were reviewed and revised by the ILL Committee and approved by the MnLINK Gateway Operations Committee on July 23, 2002. In June 2006, the MINITEX Policy Advisory Council approved an expanded report that addresses the handling of overdue, damaged, and lost materials.

The MINITEX/MnLINK Interlibrary Loan Committee is charged by the Gateway Operations Committee to review the policy recommendations and make revisions if appropriate. As part of the review process, the ILL Committee conducted an electronic survey, which was launched January 9, 2007. Invitations were sent to all participants in resource sharing throughout the state of Minnesota. The announcement with a survey link was sent via all known library e-mail lists as well as through print publications that included the URL for the survey. The survey was open from January 9 through January 25, 2007.

The survey asked if respondents agreed with the existing policies in the following areas:

- Locally owned materials
- Formats
- Loan Periods
- Renewals
- Recalls
- Overdue, damaged, and lost materials

Additionally, two open-ended questions solicited additional responses:

- What area(s) of interlibrary loan policy still need to be addressed?
- What interlibrary loan issue do you feel is most important right now?

146 persons responded to the survey: 55 from academic libraries, 66 from public libraries, 10 from special libraries, 10 from K-12 libraries, and 5 identified themselves as “other.” 54 respondents said they were directors, 59 were ILL staff, and 33 were other.
ILL Committee members collected the data from the online survey tool and compiled the results. For each of the questions, this report compiles data on the responses and gives an analysis of the results for that question.

Generally, respondents agreed with all existing policies. The chart below demonstrates the percentage of all respondents who agreed with each of the policies.

Visit these websites for further information about the workings of the ILL Committee:

- MINITEX/MnLINK Interlibrary Loan Committee: Policy Recommendations
  http://www.minitex.umn.edu/committees/ill/recommendations.aspx
- MINITEX/MnLINK Interlibrary Loan Committee
  http://www.minitex.umn.edu/committees/ill/members.aspx
LOCALY OWNED MATERIALS

Recommended Policy:
The borrowing library is encouraged to allow its patrons to make interlibrary loan requests for items that are locally owned if the item needed is not currently available because the item is: in use by another patron, missing from the shelf, at the bindery or in disrepair, non-circulating (i.e. reference), or on reserve for a course.

Survey Question: Do you agree with this policy?

Survey Results:
The results show that this policy is not universally accepted. 75% of total respondents (107 of 142) agreed with the policy and 25% (35 of 142) disagreed. Most of those disagreeing were from public libraries. Academic, K-12, and special library respondents generally agreed with the policy without commenting, but public library respondents, both directors and ILL staff, were very divided on the topic, and many had qualifying comments. The responses from the public library directors and ILL staff deserve attention, because of the heavy use their patrons make of MnLINK’s Gateway ILL, and the impact this has on public library staff, budget, and collections.

Of the 23 responses from public library directors, and associate/assistant directors, 15 (65%) agreed with the policy, and 8 (35%) disagreed. Most directors clarified that the only category of locally owned materials they had a problem with was for “in use” items. They mentioned these reasons: it is cheaper to deal with these requests locally; the number of requests in the local catalog helps with purchasing decisions; and patrons will most likely obtain best sellers more quickly from their own library system than through ILL.

Of the responses from public library ILL staff, 44% (11 of 25) agreed with the policy, and 56% (14 of 25) disagreed. All the comments came from those in disagreement. Their comments often included ‘reference’ in addition to ‘in use’ as a category for which they would not allow ILL. Two of the respondents commented on the “two different wait lists for locally owned items – the ILL request(s) and the local holds queue.” It was seen as “unfair” or “giving preferential treatment to patrons” by allowing them to request via ILL rather than going on the local hold queue. Ironically, these ILL requests were also seen as creating “false expectations for patrons,” because items with local high demand would probably not be available elsewhere, and both patron and staff time would be wasted.

Analysis: The interlibrary loan borrowing of items owned locally, but not currently available, is one of the more controversial policies. It is apparent that public and academic libraries have different perspectives regarding this policy. Academic, K-12, and special libraries supported the policy without much dissent. Their users often need to obtain items quickly because of assignment deadlines, and this policy serves their needs. Public libraries pointed to a number of reasons that make the borrowing of locally owned, and especially “in use” items problematic for them, as they strive to meet the heavy demands of their users for bestsellers. This is a key issue that will be further addressed by the MINITEX/MnLINK ILL Committee.
FORMATS

Recommended Policy:
All libraries should consider lending and borrowing materials in all formats. (Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States, 2001, section 5.2)

Survey Question: The recommendation for formats is that libraries should consider lending and borrowing material in all formats. Do you agree with this policy?

Survey Responses:
Overall, approximately 84% (123 out of 146) of the respondents agreed with this policy. The response rate varied from 100% agreement from K-12 (10) and special libraries directors (4) and 94% agreement from academic library directors (16), to 82 % (23) agreement from public library directors. Approval from ILL Staff showed a drop, down to 79% approval by public library ILL staff (23) and 72% approval by academic library ILL staff (23). A total of 42 comments were made regarding this question.

Comments from the public library directors and ILL staff included: concern over potential damage to audiovisual materials, and the overuse of ILL for video/DVDs to the extent that it may affect local collection development or turn ILL into a public “Netflix,” all to the detriment of the local user to whom the material is unavailable. Various comments noted the inappropriateness of lending various categories of items: DVDs (entertainment, popular movies, TV series), reference, microfilm, periodicals, computer software, framed art, storytime kits, new or fragile materials, with one stating that inexpensive materials of all types should be considered for purchase rather than borrowed. One comment noted the loss of the state-level professional collection, which now results in requests for professional resources that libraries may be hesitant to lend because of their own anticipated staff usage. Many comments endorsed the use of the terminology “should consider” in this policy, which allows for local decision making as to whether certain formats are loaned, even on an exception basis.

Comments from academic libraries were predominantly from academic ILL staff and addressed the reluctance to lend video/DVD for various reasons: the need to retain audiovisual items in house for classroom/student use, concern for loss/damage, videos owned are rare/irreplaceable, decision to lend is not within their control. Various comments included preferences that the following not be loaned: CDs, DVDs, reference, record albums, and curriculum materials. Many responded that those who borrow should lend, and those who lend should be able to borrow.

Comments from the special libraries stated that libraries should consider lending all formats, but expressed concern over the potential cost involved in replacing lost or damaged audiovisual items. K-12 directors stressed that curriculum materials need to remain available for classroom use within the owning libraries.
Analysis:
While the majority of comments addressed the issue of the explosion of video/DVD lending, recurring themes within the overwhelmingly positive endorsement of the policy were concerns over potential damage/loss, the need to retain certain formats for priority usage by local patrons, the endorsement of the terminology “should consider” in the policy which leaves the decision making to the lender/borrower, and the reminder to all that where one benefits, one should also contribute (those who borrow should lend, and those who lend should be able to borrow.)
LOAN PERIODS

Recommended Policy:
The recommended minimum interlibrary loan period is four weeks. A shorter loan period may be set for recently published material, material that is in heavy demand, or material that is used in curriculum.

Survey Question: The recommendation is a minimum loan period of four weeks. There are exceptions such as AV materials. Do you agree with this policy?

Survey Responses:
The recommended loan periods met with the approval of 89% (130 out of 146) of those responding to the survey question. There was a 17 point spread in rankings between types of libraries; the highest ranking of 100% approval came from K-12 libraries (12) and the lowest from public libraries (69) showing a somewhat lower approval of 82.6%. Academic libraries (55) and special libraries (10) were very similar in their responses, with 94.5% and 90% approval respectively.

Of the respondents to this question, only a small number (18.5%) chose to record comments, 5 from academic libraries, 2 from K-12, 19 from public libraries, and 1 from special libraries for a total of 27 comments. They fell into three basic categories. One-third of the respondents felt the time frame was sufficient or should be extended to six weeks. The second third felt the lending period should be shortened; almost all of these respondents mentioned a loan period of three weeks. The final third expressed concerns about audio-visual (AV) and other popular materials.

The first and second groups were evenly divided. It’s interesting to note that comments from these two groups were predominantly from public library staff. Many people in the first group (longer loan periods) expressed concerns about processing and transit time eating into their patrons’ actual use of the items. A majority of people in the second group (shorter loan periods) voiced concerns related to fairness. Their patrons are only allowed a three week loan period, so they stated it was unfair that ILL patrons were allowed a longer lending period. One person felt it should be a maximum loan period rather than a minimum.

Reading the actual policy in addition to the survey statement may have allayed the concerns of many in the third group. Many of them were apprehensive about lending heavily used materials for four weeks. (The second sentence of the current policy already takes into account that concern.) One person suggested we set a specific minimum loan period (less than four weeks) for AV items. Whereas, a few other people felt AV materials should have the same loan period of four weeks. Both K-12 libraries commented on the need for more turn around and use time, especially for AV materials.

A couple of individuals mentioned issues related to people ignoring the due dates and materials being gone from their libraries for unacceptable periods of time. Along with this was the concept of the need to “honor” one another’s loan periods for materials.

Analysis:
There was general agreement on this policy. The vast majority agreed with the minimum interlibrary loan period of four weeks. The people who disagreed were fairly evenly divided between an even longer loan period (six weeks) and a shorter one (three weeks). From the comments received it’s apparent that we may need to emphasize the second part of the policy that states: “A shorter loan period may be set for recently published material, material that is in heavy demand, or material that is used in curriculum.” Overall, the current policy appears to be satisfactory to the majority of libraries.
RENEWALS

Recommended Policy:
The borrowing library may request one renewal per item. The lending library is strongly encouraged to grant renewals on materials whenever possible. However, the lending library does have the right to refuse to renew materials. If the lending library does not respond to a renewal request, the borrowing library may assume that a renewal has been granted for the same period as the original loan (Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States, 2001, sections 4.11, 5.8).

Survey Question: The recommendation for renewals is that one renewal be granted per item. Do you agree with this policy?

Survey Responses:
The recommended renewal policy met with the approval of 85% (123 out of 144) of those responding to the survey question. The handful of K-12 library (11) and special library (10) respondents diverged somewhat, with K-12 showing 100% approval while special showed 60% approval. The more numerous public library (66) and academic library (58) respondents diverged less, with public showing 82% approval and academic 95% approval.

The largest number of comments (20 out of 34) stipulated that the renewal not be automatic, but rather approved only on the condition that the item has not been requested for use at the owning library. One responder added other conditions: that the renewal request be made in a timely manner and that the lending library be allowed adequate time to respond.

A much smaller number of comments were evenly divided between those advocating a more liberal policy of allowing second renewals (5) and those advocating a more restrictive policy of no renewals (5). The former were primarily from academic library staff and the latter primarily from public library staff, but the numbers do not seem large enough for significant conclusions to be drawn from that difference. Those advocating no renewals suggested a loan period of four to six weeks should be adequate and already a substantial amount of time to be gone from the owning library.

Analysis:
The recommendation of one renewal per requested item is widely approved. The percentage of positive responses would have been even slightly higher except for a misapprehension that the renewal may be considered automatic and unconditional. That misunderstanding was expressed most often, however, by administrative and other staff not directly involved in interlibrary loan operation. The most useful change to the policy recommendation would appear to be the addition of more explicit statements about the conditional nature of the renewal and about the expected timing of the renewal request and the response to it.
RECALLS

Recommended Policy:
The lending library has the right to recall all materials. Materials may be recalled at any time. Whenever possible, the patron should be allowed a minimum of four days to use the material before returning it. Recall due dates supersede all previous due dates (Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States, 2001, section 4.12).

Survey Question: The recommendation for recalls is that recalls are a right of the lending library and the recall due dates supersede all other due dates. Do you agree with this policy?

Survey Responses:
The recommended recall policy met with the approval of 85% (124 out of 146) of those responding to the survey question. There was a 20 point spread in rankings between types of libraries; the highest ranking of 100% approval came from special libraries (10) and the lowest from public libraries (66) showing a somewhat lower approval of 80.4%. Academic libraries (55) and K-12 libraries (11) were very similar in their responses, with 89.7% and 90.9% approval respectively.

Of the respondents to this question, only a small number (12.8%) chose to record comments, 4 from academic libraries, 2 from K-12, and 16 from public libraries. No special libraries staff chose to comment. Two comments favored recalls; both responders were from public libraries and were staunchly in favor of the practice. Several people termed themselves “torn” on the subject. Negative concerns that were voiced included the observation that to recall an item is a staff-intensive process and that it can be difficult to actually get back an item that has been recalled. Several comments focused on the needs of the borrowing patrons and urged a grace period or a minimum loan period. One response advised that recalls be “used sparingly and with a good reason.”

Analysis:
The overwhelming number of respondents were in favor of allowing recalls on loaned materials. Those opponents who wrote comments felt that borrowers need a minimum loan period.
OVERDUE, DAMAGED & LOST MATERIALS

Recommended Policy:

1. The Committee strongly recommends that all libraries implement a means of automatically generating overdue notices for their patrons who have borrowed interlibrary loan materials. The borrowing library retains responsibility for all communication with their patrons.

2. The committee strongly recommends that lending libraries send an invoice not later than six months after the due date. The borrowing library may request an invoice from the lending library at any point that they determine the item is lost (or damaged). If the lending library does not provide an invoice within six months of the due date (or within six months after being requested by the borrowing library), the borrowing library may assume there will be no charge for the item.

3. The committee strongly recommends that once a request has been updated to “Checked in” on the interlibrary loan system of the lending library, the borrowing library is no longer responsible for the item.

4. The committee strongly recommends that the lending library inform the borrowing library as soon as they have determined an item has been damaged. It is also important that the borrowing library contact the lending library immediately if an item received through interlibrary loan is damaged. The lending library is responsible for determining the appropriate charge to assess on damaged materials. It is critical that both the borrowing and lending libraries package ILL materials properly to prevent damage that may occur in shipping.

Survey Question: Do you agree with the recommendations in this report?

Survey Responses:
Over 92% (129 of 140) of respondents agreed with the policy recommendations in this report. This may not give a complete picture for this question because the respondents who disagreed only had problems with one issue. Some of those who responded in agreement also had problems with one issue. There was no disagreement with policy recommendations # 1 and # 4.

Recommendation # 2 seems to cause some minor concerns. There were four comments (2 from academic libraries & 2 from public libraries) suggesting that 6 months is too long; they were centered on the idea that the requester may move.

Recommendation #3 received 6 comments (2 from public libraries, 2 academic libraries, 1 special library and 1 K-12 library). The public libraries concerns centered on the concept of the Federated Library system. With the Federated Library system each headquarters/ILL office is borrowing materials from its associated libraries. Their belief is that when an item is “Checked In” on the interlibrary loan system, the material still has not made it home to the lending library. The other comments centered on the idea that the borrowing library is responsible for materials while “In Transit”.

10
Analysis:
There seems to be an overall recognition of the need for a uniform policy recommendation. However, there is a concern about “when” a request should be the responsibility of the borrowing institution. The comments suggest that they believe an item “In transit” was not their responsibility. This issue may need a broader explanation about why this policy recommendation is important. If it is fully explained that the item would not have been “In transit” had the request not been placed, the rationale behind the recommendations may become more acceptable. We may need to further promote the basis for this policy that is contained in the Interlibrary Loan Code of the United States, which states that the borrower is responsible once the item leaves the lender.
**ILL Policy To Be Addressed:**

**Survey Question:** What area(s) of interlibrary loan policy still need to be addressed?

**Survey Responses:**
Only 28% (41 of 146) made comments to this question. Of the 41 responses to this question, approximately 25% (10) commented that the policy was adequate or complete. Respondents included public, academic and K-12 libraries.

Approximately 15% (6) public libraries responded that the policy needs to address requests made by patrons when the item is locally owned.

Almost 10% (4) of the respondents stated that more work needed to be done on limiting the number of requests made by patrons. The respondents included staff at all levels from the public libraries.

Mediation of requests was a concern for only 7% (3) of the respondents, the majority of whom were from academic libraries.

Further discussion needs to take place about requesting items that are new and “in use” in the local system. About 7% (3) of the respondents, all from public libraries, wished for further discussion and policy development about how to handle “very new” or high use materials.

The following comments were provided by 5% (one or two) or less of the respondents:
- terminology defining “library” and “gateway”
- how to handle multiple volumes or sets
- how to handle replacements
- reports should filter by pickup location, format, and date
- recommendations about fast turnaround of requests

**Analysis:**
While one quarter of respondents feel the stated policy is adequate or complete, a wide range of concerns were expressed by others to this open-ended question. Improving efficiency and remaining cost effective under heavy workloads emerged as trends. Further discussion is desired on such disparate issues as handling increased A-V requests, protection of new purchases for local users, requesting multiple volumes or sets, and faster turnaround times. Comments for and against the policy of “locally owned” lending, especially of “in use” items, suggest the possible synthesis of collection development, just-in-time acquisition and ILL budgeting. Policy recommendations may foster such integration of workflows. Concerns over setting limits on items requested, mediation of requests, and automating status notification, seem to require more technical solutions.
Current Interlibrary Loan Issues

Survey Question: What interlibrary loan issue do you feel is most important right now?

Survey Results:
The response rate to this question was 52% (76 of 146). The responses were mostly from public and academic libraries with 26 responses from academic libraries and 34 responses from public libraries. There were a few responses from special libraries and K-12 libraries.

This was an open-ended question that sought to identify key areas of interlibrary loan that may or may not be addressed in the MINITEX/MnLINK ILL policies. There were areas that rose to the top in the frequency they were mentioned. These included:
- delivery of materials
- cost/funding
- staffing for ILL
- collection development
- ILL for locally held items
- borrowing/lending of all formats
- patron request limits
- licensing of e-resources to include ILL
- NCIP and ISO standards support
- uniform policies on loan periods, lost book fines, etc.
- patron notification for unfilled requests
- increased volume of ILL

Analysis:
The issue of delivery was brought up by both public and academic libraries. The biggest issue for academic libraries is the need to open up borrowing and lending of all types of materials for ILL purposes. For public libraries the key issue was the volume of requests and stresses on funding, staff and local collection development. These issues along with the list above and other feedback from the survey will be discussed by the MINITEX/MnLINK ILL Committee in future meetings and addressed in other forums as well.