

Guidelines for Developing an Interlibrary Loan Partner List MnLINK ILL Subcommittee Report

Adopted by the MnLINK Policy Advisory Council on 3/20/2003

The next few years will bring great changes in statewide resource sharing, including the migration of the PALS libraries to the ALEPH system, the completion of the University of Minnesota libraries' migration to ALEPH, the migration of several other library systems and gateway sites to various ILS vendors, and the advent of the MnLINK Gateway interlibrary loan (ILL) system. The MnLINK Gateway ILL software, Fretwell-Downing's Virtual Document Exchange (VDX), allows libraries to develop lists of lending partners to which their requests will automatically be routed. This is a capability that already exists within the PALS ILL system and is planned for ALEPH ILL. This document is designed to provide guidance to ILL managers on the development of partner lists.

A list of lending partners (partner list) is simply a list of libraries with which you have mutually agreed to conduct the direct borrowing of library materials. When developing a partner list, the first libraries to include are those with which you already have agreements, including MINITEX. It will not be necessary to contact these libraries in order to confirm that you will continue your past ILL agreements. However, to add additional libraries to your partner lists, it is essential for potential ILL partners who have not sent requests directly to each other in the past to communicate with each other to determine whether a beneficial ILL partnership can be established and maintained. This holds true for all libraries regardless of which ILL software is used to manage ILL activity.

A good resource to use in expanding your partner list is the MnLINK/MINITEX ILL Policy Database, available on the web at:

<http://www.minitex.umn.edu/illpolicy/>

This database gives policy and delivery information to help you choose suitable partners. It also includes contact information for the interlibrary loan departments at potential partner libraries.

If you will be using different resource sharing software than a potential partner, you will need to verify how requests will be sent between your libraries before beginning a partnership. Although current delivery patterns may preclude putting a certain library on one's partner list at this time, there is always the need to look to the future in considering changes that may make sense within the delivery process. Initiate discussions with the appropriate people including the MINITEX delivery staff, when considering such changes.

Criteria for Developing an Interlibrary Loan Partner List

There are several things to consider when developing your partner list, including delivery options, staffing levels, and response time. The MnLINK Interlibrary Loan Subcommittee has developed this document to assist you in determining what factors are relevant to your institution when developing your list of lending libraries for your partner lists. The benefit of a well-constructed partner list is an increased likelihood of obtaining the materials for your patrons in a timely manner.

The following elements are important when considering how to determine partner lists for purposes of interlibrary lending/borrowing:

1. Local or Existing Agreements
2. Type of Institution
3. Format of Material
4. Equity/Load Leveling
5. Policies
6. Speed/Responsiveness
7. Staff Availability
8. Delivery

1. Local or Existing Agreements

Libraries throughout Minnesota have a history of sharing resources with other libraries through local agreements. These local arrangements, based upon geographical proximity and local cooperation among different types of libraries in the community, were expanded through the development of multi-type and multi-county library systems. A long standing principle of the MINITEX Library Information Network states that libraries are expected to use locally available resources, whenever possible. For example, libraries in Mankato, St. Cloud, Moorhead and Duluth have made extraordinary progress in using locally available resources before checking elsewhere in the state. Geographical proximity also affords opportunity for library staff members handling ILL transactions to interact and develop relationships that facilitate ILL and resolve its problems. The willingness to lend materials to libraries locally contributes to the creation of good will towards the lending library within the community.

Existing agreements, such as the PALS Direct Borrowing Project, may not change in the new ILL environment, but rather evolve into an ALEPH direct borrowing arrangement. The existing role of MINITEX in filling requests from the U of M Twin Cities collection and as a referral center or "library of last resort" will not change. Including MINITEX on a partner list means that libraries do not need to list every library in the state, just their most productive partners, because of MINITEX's continuing role as a referral center. For non-returnables, MINITEX is still the best source for journal articles, due to access to the collections of the

University of Minnesota – Twin Cities libraries, and would be well placed at the beginning of a partner list for non-returns. It should also be noted that within the VDX software MINITEX as the lending unit for the University of Minnesota Twin Cities collection can be cited separately and at a higher level in the partner list than MINITEX as a location of last resort.

The MnLINK Gateway allows libraries to expand upon local and existing arrangements in an effort to serve patrons better. When making expansion decisions, however, a library must also consider other factors, keeping in mind the goal of high quality service to the patron.

2. Type of Institution

Another factor to consider when expanding partner lists is the type of institution or library. Many libraries already send ILL requests to libraries with collections that are somewhat similar to their own. It's important to remember that MnLINK provides the opportunity to improve service to the patron by allowing libraries to look beyond similar library types when expanding their partner lists. Expansion options should be weighed against local arrangements and available delivery options.

3. Format of Material

When setting up partner lists, the requesting library staff should consider the format of material routinely requested. Before adding a library to their list, they should check to make sure the library lends the format of material needed.

- Does the library follow the *Policy Recommendations of the MnLINK ILL Subcommittee* on loaning all formats of materials?
- How will each type of material be delivered, and how quickly can it be delivered?

4. Equity/Load Leveling

In creating its partner lists each library should consider the effects of its list in terms of volume equity and load leveling. Generally, a library should try to borrow from libraries to which it lends, thus balancing a high volume of items loaned with a high volume of items borrowed and a low volume of items loaned with a low volume of items borrowed. On the other hand, photocopy requests might best be directed to the MINITEX Office located in the University of Minnesota Libraries, which is funded to provide high level services including electronic delivery from the University and other collections staffed for high volume photocopying. The MnLINK Gateway VDX software will include features (such as random selection within groups of partners) to assist in load-leveling efforts. Questions of volume equity and load leveling must be balanced with other factors in creating partner

lists, and each library will need to consult with its partners in creating and periodically revising its partner lists.

5. Policies

It is essential to determine if a potential lending partner's policies will have a positive or negative impact on a library's ILL service. For example, circulation policies are a critical set of factors to consider when developing partner lists. If the lending library's circulation policies are too restrictive, service to users can be negatively impacted. Questions to ask when evaluating the circulation policies of a library under consideration for inclusion in a responder group include:

- Does the potential partner follow the *Policy Recommendations of the MnLINK ILL Subcommittee* regarding standard loan periods, renewals and recalls for ILL items?
- Does the loan period combined with the delivery system allow the user sufficient time to use the requested item?
- Do the potential partners follow the *Policy Recommendations of the MnLINK ILL Subcommittee* regarding overdue fines and lost or damaged materials?

6. Speed/Responsiveness

Speed and responsiveness are primary considerations in choosing libraries to include as ILL partners. These qualities can be measured by several factors including:

- How frequently does the library check and respond to requests?
- Do the requests go to a central lending unit or directly to the library holding the item?
- How quickly can the library retrieve items (especially if it has satellite or branch library locations) and get them into the delivery system?
- How accurate and well-maintained are the holdings in a library's catalog?

7. Staff Availability

Another factor closely related to speed and responsiveness is staff availability.

- Are there sufficient staff available to manage increasing ILL requests?
- How many hours per week are ILL staff available? Are there hours of the day or days of the week when ILL staff are not available?
- Is the ILL service open year round with only minimal breaks for major holidays or is the ILL service closed for extended periods over semester/quarter breaks or summer? Do these closings coordinate with a potential partner's closings?

8. Delivery

Delivery issues are important when determining an ILL partner list. A basic point libraries need to consider is whether or not potential partners participate in their current delivery system(s). For requests of "non-returnables" or photocopies, libraries should take into account whether potential partners are willing and able to fill requests within 48-72 hours. For example, libraries that can receive documents via Ariel might place other Ariel sites with an Ariel scanning workstation at the top of their "non-returnables" ILL partner list. If a library's patrons have the capability to receive article copies via electronic delivery to the desktop, this is an additional consideration in building a partner list. Libraries that want to receive and send photocopies by fax will want to list similar libraries in their partner list.

For requests of returnables, a library may want to consider pickup points prior to their own, if the delivery system sorts and drops off materials on a planned route, as is done in the CLICNET delivery system. Or, consider central drop-off places where deliveries intersect so that items will get to their customers most efficiently. A library will also want to consider the frequency of delivery from potential ILL partners. For example, the MINITEX Delivery System standard is delivery five days a week, often with delivery in the morning and pickup in the afternoon. As libraries evaluate the deliveries, they may discover that nearby doesn't always mean quick delivery.