What Would A Statewide Library Card Look Like?
Musings over Muesli, Thursday morning, January 24, 2008
Bruce Newell, bnewell@mt.net

Let's agree that interlibrary loans, that is, one library lending material to another, is a good thing, and something we want to encourage.

Second, let's agree that they way we have done interlibrary loans, and the way we have encouraged libraries to share their materials with other libraries, is rapidly becoming antiquated and non-sustainable.

Finally, let's agree that our task is to improve the fulfillment process here in Montana, for all willing libraries, and for all their users; that is:

> The "… array of library services designed to get requested library content into users' hands conveniently, efficiently, and affordably." (Darlene Staffeldt, State Librarian, Fulfillment Task Force Charge, August 3, 2007)

I like the fact that the FTF is thinking about the idea of a 'statewide library card' as a means of improving fulfillment processes, statewide, but I don't think we necessarily share a picture of what such an animal might be. I am not sure we disagree, but it's a pretty amorphous concept. To help advance the debate, and to help us move to common ground, I offer the following straw-man picture of what a statewide library card might look like. What do you think?

I think the Montana Statewide Library card will be:

- User-centric—Its success will be measured against patron satisfaction and end-user outcomes.
- Convenient—Library users will find that using it, whatever 'it' becomes, to be easier than not using it. Likewise, libraries will find that it reduces the per-transaction cost of library services.
- Local—It will not homogenize Montana libraries into a cookie-cutter sameness, instead it will enhance participating libraries' ability to provide cost-effective services that enhance local library services (regardless of the library community)
- Voluntary—Montana libraries will join because it makes sense for them to do so, not because they have to.
- Inclusive—All Montana libraries (big and small, east and west, academic, public, school, or special) will be welcome to participate.
- A terrific value—Its value (to library users and libraries) will far exceed its costs. And it will be,
- Affordable—Any Montana library who wants to participate will be able to afford to do so.
- It will increase net knowledge—Assisting libraries 'surface' local information so that their communities' stories are well told, and easily available to

everyone.
- ???

I don't think it will be an actual card (it doesn't need to be, and this adds complexity instead of reducing it), instead I think it will be a set of processes that all library users to use their local library(s) card at any participating library. This would include walk-in and electronic access.

For instance, if I, living in Helena, were to walk into the Missoula Public Library (or the MSU-Bozeman Renne Library), I'd be able to check out books with my Lewis & Clark Library card. Similarly, if I were to discover a book at Missoula Public online via Worldcat.org, I would be able to (online) place-a-hold and trigger delivery of this book using my L&C library card. This would be an interlibrary loan, but ILL processes would be foregone in favor of more efficient circulation processes.

I would not be able to access the Chem Abs database at MSU online, since I am not a student. The statewide library card system would sort out copyright and license restrictions for us.

These processes may be broken down into four parts:
1. Discover—Discover that a resource exists.
2. Locate—Discover services on found resources. A service may be as simple as notifying somebody of a shelf location.
3. Request—Request a service.
4. Deliver—The service is executed. A book is delivered, a document downloaded, or whatever.
   (Lorcan Dempsey, http://orweblog.oclc.org/archives/000865.html)

We can think of a statewide library card using these four processes to parse out outcomes (from the users' and libraries' point of view), and processes (from the how-the-heck-do-we-pull-this-off point of view). We can also profitably use these four processes to determine the funding and legislative steps necessary to make a statewide library card 'real'.

For instance—
If we want any Montana library user to be able to (1) discover library resources, anywhere in Montana (or the world, for that matter), we know that every library needs to offer their collection through something like WorldCat.org.

If, after finding that a resource exists, we want to see if an item is on the shelf (or is otherwise available, perhaps electronically, we need to be able to (2) locate the item. This means, again, every Montana library having their holdings in WorldCat, and also every library having a workable link from WorldCat to shelf status so that users can see if an item is available. In the case of digital resources, users need to be authenticated to ensure that they have the rights to

view or 'capture' the digital item.

If the item is a book, and a user wants to (3) request or place it on hold (if at her local library), or have it mailed from a distant library to her local library (or home), then an authentication system and moderately robust local library management systems need to be in place. This argues for helping libraries move up from stand-alone library management systems to something like the Montana Shared Catalog, and for enhancing the ability of libraries, currently using a more robust library management system, to automatically exchange patron information. I don't believe that NCIP (the NISO Circulation Interchange Protocol) is the right tool for this job—at least at this point. However it works, it has to be simple and ultra-convenient for library users to request items they've discovered and located.

Finally, if (4) delivery is not taken care of, then everything else is for naught. In the case of an electronic document, a statewide authentication piece is needed. I the case of a physical object, an affordable, flexible, and fast delivery system is needed. In some cases this will be the US Mail. In others, where feasible, warranted, and cost effective, a bulk delivery system (what we've talked about using the word 'courier') will be useful.

This is all just off the top of my head. You will certainly have things to add and find parts of my analysis you disagree with and want to change, but my thinking tells me we need the following if we are to make a statewide library card real:

1. OCLC membership and participation needs to be as nearly universal as we can make it. All libraries would be encouraged to add all their holdings to WorldCat, and to use OCLC services to streamline library processes and provide convenient library user access to statewide resources. OCLC will need to step up to the plate with some new consortia-related tools if this is going to happen. I suggest we buy OCLC services as a state, and make them available to all libraries at low or no out-of-pocket cost. (There will be local costs; participating libraries will almost certainly see their local and non-local patron service levels increase corresponding with better services.)
2. We will want a federated search facility (or something like it), something to make searching library materials easier for our users. Additionally, we will need a statewide authentication system, something that works better than NCIP and does more than Z39.50. These services should be available to any participating libraries' users.
3. We will need some sort of URL resolver to simplify getting to electronic objects, and improved library management systems to enable efficient verification of patron and item status as part of the interlibrary loan (or holds) processes. I suggest we open the Montana Shared Catalog to all who want to join, paying their start-up fees and finding a means of substantially reducing ongoing costs.

4. We need to set up bulk delivery systems where we can, and where it makes financial- and service-sense to do so, and to find affordable ways of helping libraries outside the scope of these delivery networks afford to provide enhanced delivery services to their users. This means, I think, two things: One: contracting with an existing courier service or services, and Two: finding a sustainable way of helping lower costs and improve services for libraries outside the scope of feasible courier services.

Statewide OCLC contract	$
Federated search	$
Statewide authentication	$
URL resolver	$
MSC new members	$
MSC ongoing costs	$
Courier service contract	$
Non-courier delivery service(s)	$

I propose that we put a package together that includes all these items, and present it to the Legislature.

I suggest that libraries participating in the statewide library card pay an annual fee, both to ensure local buy-in and to ameliorate incidental costs (such as training, meetings, minor service tweaks and enhancements, and so forth). Libraries would pay $X amount per year, and be able to participate in any or all of the Statewide Library Card program offerings. This cost would be based on staff size, specifically, paid FTEs (Full Time Equivalent employees), and would have a minimum of $150 per year, but no maximum assessment. It would be important to keep this cost low enough that all libraries, including those in rural schools, could participate.

Likewise, the cost should provide larger libraries with a significant savings in out-of-pocket expenses, so that they could afford to support increased use by non-local library users.

$150 per FTE per year would result in Roundup School/Public Library paying $ 260, and Parmly Billings Public Library paying $4,125. Public libraries alone would raise somewhere in the neighborhood of $ 51,000 per year.

The devil is indeed in the details, but this is my thinking about what a statewide library card is, how it would work, and how it would be paid for. I don't expect the Task Force to agree with everything in this think-piece, but I hope that it might help us move toward fulfilling our charge.

This was, again, just off the top of my head. What do you think? I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.