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Assessing ILL/DD Services: New Cost-Effective Alternatives

There is general agreement that the 1996 ARL Interlibrary Loan (ILL) and Document Delivery (DD) Performance Measures study resulted in significant improvements in the operations of interlibrary loan departments. Based on that experience, in 2002, members of the ARL Statistics and Measurement Committee encouraged a follow-up study to see whether departments had become more efficient and whether costs had been reduced or further contained. The committee also encouraged this new study as a way to demonstrate how benchmarking data can be used to improve the cost-effectiveness of library operations. This study of ILL/DD services in 72 North American research, college, and governmental libraries updates and expands the 1996 study and, importantly, adds a component measuring user-initiated (unmediated) interlibrary loan and document delivery.

According to the new report, user-initiated ILL/DD operations provide better service than mediated ILL/DD services. In most cases, user-initiated services have lower unit costs, higher fill rates, and faster turnaround times than mediated services.

**KEY FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSING ILL/DD SERVICES STUDY:
MEAN PERFORMANCE**

	Five User-initiated ILL/DD Services*	Mediated ILL/DD
Borrowing Unit Cost	\$2.39–\$14.70	\$17.50
Lending Unit Cost	\$3.27–\$12.06	\$9.27
Combined Unit Cost	\$6.16–\$26.76	\$26.77
Borrowing Fill Rate	84%–90%	86%
Lending Fill Rate	82%–87%	58%
Borrowing Turnaround Time	2.5–6.6 calendar days	7.6 calendar days
Lending Turnaround Time	0.1–1.5 calendar days	1.5 calendar days
Borrowing Transactions	5,790–37,327	16,698
Percent Returnables	0%–100%**	44%
Lending Transactions	4,540–30,716	41,088
Percent Returnables	0%–100%**	45%

* Includes ILLINET Online, INN-Reach, RAPID, URSA, and user-initiated commercial document delivery (CDD). Loansome Doc is excluded from summary data because only three libraries submitted data. Local document delivery is also excluded from this summary because of the different nature of the service.

** ILLINET Online, INN-Reach, and URSA handle returnable requests, while RAPID and user-initiated CDD are designed to handle nonreturnable requests.

The report also compares performance of the mediated ILL/DD operations of the 44 ARL member libraries that participated in this study and in the 1996 study and found that, when adjusted for inflation, borrowing unit costs in research libraries have decreased 19% and lending unit costs dropped 13%. Turnaround time for mediated borrowing dropped by about 50% since the 1996 study.

The report details characteristics of high-performing mediated operations and lays out strategies for how libraries may improve local performance that center around increasing the use of user-initiated services, reducing turnaround time, and using appropriate staffing levels. To assist ILL managers in understanding the findings and applying these strategies, ARL will conduct workshops on evaluating performance with further analyses of local practices and implementing the changes recommended in the study.

Ordering Information

Assessing ILL/DD Services: New Cost-Effective Alternatives

Mary E. Jackson, with Bruce Kingma and Tom Delaney

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