

# Moving Toward ILL System Global Interconnectivity

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During the last half of 1998, significant breakthroughs were made toward achieving the goal of interoperability of interlibrary loan (ILL) messaging systems. In this short timeframe, limited testing by a few vendors grew to the introduction by The Library Corporation, Ameritech, and Pigasus Software, Inc. of ILL systems able to exchange transactions using the international standard for interlibrary loan communication, the ISO ILL Protocol. In addition, OCLC, RLG, MnSCU/PALS, Clio Software, and Fretwell-Downing have expanded their testing with other members of the ILL Protocol Implementors Group (IPIG) during this time and several of these plan to introduce Protocol-compliant systems this summer.

Development of Protocol-compliant ILL messaging systems is occurring in tandem with completion of the IPIG Profile—the document that records a common set of decisions, options, and values agreed upon by IPIG members. Compliance with the IPIG Profile will advance interoperability among systems claiming compliance, as these systems will implement the same optional choices and be developed using the same understandings of the international standard as documented in the IPIG Profile. Systems conforming to the IPIG Profile may be able to communicate with systems that cannot or choose not to conform to the IPIG Profile, but interoperability can not be assured.

In late February, IPIG members finalized work on the IPIG Profile. The draft will be submitted to all IPIG members for a formal vote this spring and, assuming approval, the document will be available for use by vendors if they wish their ILL systems to be capable of operating with other Protocol-compliant ILL systems. Reaching consensus on the IPIG Profile has required many compromises on the part of all IPIG members. As one example, the IPIG Profile requires that email be supported for communication, but strongly recommends support for direct-connect communication systems (such as the systems now in use by OCLC and DOCLINE) as an optional communication method. Although some IPIG members strongly preferred direct-connect, the group did understand the need to require one type of communication to ensure that systems can exchange ILL requests. After considerable debate, the IPIG opted for email as the required communication method to ensure that systems are able to exchange ILL requests.

Collaboration among IPIG members has been consistent and at a high level. A toolkit developed by The Library Corporation is used by RLG and several other vendors as the basis of their ILL applications. The first months of 1999 brought a wave of new testing—testing of new messages by partners that had tested a few messages in 1998, and transmission of the first test messages by several IPIG members.

The current state of system interoperability and the status of testing will be featured at the ARL Directors Forum on Managing ILL/DD Operations on Friday, June 25, 1999 in New Orleans. The Forum will showcase ILL systems that use two different types of communication supported by the ILL Protocol and IPIG Profile. The first, peer-to-peer, permits ILL departments to send email requests directly to other ILL departments. Peer-to-peer communication requires each partner to maintain a separate copy of the transaction, but it also eliminates the requirement that both libraries must use the same messaging system. The second type, direct-connect, is more familiar—use of centralized ILL systems such as OCLC or DOCLINE—in which the two libraries access and update a single copy of the request. The Directors Forum will also provide a tool for the library community to evaluate the validity of the growing number of marketing claims by vendors offering Protocol-compliant ILL systems.

The need to send and receive ILL requests easily and cost-effectively across national borders has surfaced in two of the AAU/ARL Global Resources Program projects: the Japan Journal Access Project

and the German Resources Project. Both projects have encountered issues of how interlibrary loan and document delivery requests should be transmitted because the ILL systems in the U.S., Japan, and Germany are not yet fully Protocol-compliant. The ARL ILL/DD Performance Measures Study confirmed the cost-effectiveness of ILL operations that use a single messaging system, which would be possible if all ILL systems were able to send and receive ILL transactions via the ILL Protocol. At some future date, a Japanese library will be able to use NACSIS, the union catalog and ILL system used by Japanese university libraries, to send an ILL request to a U.S. library, which would receive it via OCLC. In February, NACSIS agreed to implement the ISO ILL Protocol, an important step toward interconnectivity. It is hoped that this testing will lead to a U.S. library using OCLC to send a request to a German library that would receive and respond to it via their preferred ILL messaging system. Discussions about testing the Protocol by the German system, GBVdirekt/NA, have just begun.

A number of IPIG members are poised to move from testing to production use of the ILL Protocol as soon as the IPIG Profile has been formally approved. The IPIG Profile is an important infrastructure step in facilitating global sharing of resources as advanced by the AAU/ARL Global Resources Program.

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