



Vermont Department of Libraries

Interlibrary Loan Courier Service One Year Pilot Report

January to December 2016

Background and context:

The Department of Libraries (VTLIB) supports and encourages Vermont libraries to maintain interlibrary loan services for their patrons. Interlibrary loan is a critical part of providing equal service to Vermont citizens, regardless of where they live. Interlibrary loan allows Vermonters to expand the walls of their local libraries to include the collections of their peer libraries in the state. Ideally, this means that a citizen in a town like Middletown Springs has the same access to materials that a citizen in a city like Burlington or Rutland has.

Unfortunately, the free movement of books, DVDs, CDs, and other materials through interlibrary loan has been stymied by cost. Libraries in Vermont sent their interlibrary loans through the United States Postal Service. With an average cost of \$3.00 per item to ship them through the USPS, this made a significant dent in library budgets. Because of this expense, many libraries limited interlibrary loan, or solicited monies from patrons for the service. In at least one instance, a large library reached the limit of their interlibrary loan budget just half way through the year.

To support interlibrary loan, the Department of Libraries has historically provided Resource Sharing Grants to libraries. With some of these grants totaling as little as \$50 per library per year, libraries expressed their appreciation for this funding, but it simply was not enough to effectively subsidize the transport of interlibrary loan materials.

Many other states have interlibrary loan transport programs, either via third party courier services or through their own fleet of transport vans. The Department of Libraries explored various state and regional intrastate programs. With one of the smallest state populations in the US, no existing models specifically fit, but it was clear that the money spent on postage could be better put to use for a courier service-based transport system for interlibrary loan materials.

In January 2016, the Department of Libraries partnered with the Green Mountain Library Consortium (GMLC) to start a one year pilot program for transport of ILL materials. GMLC negotiated a contract with Green Mountain Messenger, the largest courier service in Vermont, to transport materials to and from public libraries in the state. VTLIB agreed to subsidize the service by paying half the cost of one stop per library per week (\$7.50). Larger and many medium-sized libraries paid for additional stops themselves.

The initial group in the pilot includes the Department of Libraries' Midstate Library, Main Library, and 79 public libraries throughout the state, including 28 of the 31 largest public libraries. In June and July 2016,

9 more public libraries were added, bringing the total number of libraries in the system to 90. A total of 88 of Vermont's 183 public libraries participated in the pilot, which began on January 26, 2016.

Libraries that did not participate in the courier pilot continued to send and receive interlibrary loan materials through the USPS. Libraries in the pilot program continued to fulfill these interlibrary loan requests from non-participant libraries by shipping materials through the USPS.

One year review:

Time savings:

Eighty of the ninety participant libraries reported that they saved staff time filling interlibrary loan requests. Previously, staff would have to use new or recycled packing material to pack the books and then take them to the post office. The courier service uses a bin and zippered bags that only require simple labeling. Put the right label on the bag, throw it in the bin, and it is ready to go. The average amount of time saved per library is 2.7 hours per week, or a total of 11,232 hours spread across these eighty libraries.

That is over eleven thousand hours of staff time spent on other tasks that provide better library service for citizens.

Increased volume:

A total of 136,962 items were transported via the courier system from Jan. 26-Dec. 31, 2016. Overall, including mailed items, 2016 saw 153,168 items transported through the mail or through the courier service. Over the last previous annual period available, the participant libraries sent 89,503 items through ILL. This is an increase of over 60,000 items sent to Vermonters over the same amount of time. This represents a 58% increase in interlibrary loans from the previous year.

Of the 85 libraries that reported data for the previous annual period, 75 saw an increase in interlibrary loan volume. The Maclure Library in Pittsford experienced a jump of over 260%, the Brownell Library in Essex Junction saw an increase of 140%, the Orwell Library 200%, and many others saw similar numbers. Because this increase was across the board, from Vermont's largest public libraries to our smallest, it raises the profile of these libraries and emphasizes their usefulness to their constituents.

Each one of these lent items is a book, DVD, CD, or other library item. From pleasure reading, to business information, to research, each of these items provided information that would likely otherwise be unavailable to the citizens who made the request. This is a significant uptick in the economic and quality of life value of interlibrary loan service in Vermont.

Cash savings:

The courier system costs significantly less for most libraries. Overall, the 75 participant libraries that provided historical financial data saved a total of \$67,305.32 this year on interlibrary loan transit costs over the last reported year.

Nine libraries saved more than \$2000 over the previous year, with one large library in the state saving \$6461.85 over the previous year.

Nine of the 75 libraries that reported full financial data reported a cost for the service over the previous year's transit expense. Of those nine, six libraries reported costs under \$100 for the entire period. One library reported a cost of \$529.73 over the previous year, but their comments have been universally positive. One recent example: "We are receiving them (items) faster and our patrons have been really happy about this." This library has no plans to leave the service, despite the extra cost.

Even including the nine libraries that are paying something extra for the service, the average savings per library that reported full financial data is nearly \$900 per year. This is money that can be spent on collections, programs, or library facility costs. \$67,000 goes a long way in Vermont libraries.

Satisfaction with the service:

The Department of Libraries solicits information monthly from every library participating in the interlibrary loan Courier Pilot Project. In addition to the financial, staff time, and volume information above, VTLIB also solicits comments about the service. The overwhelming majority of comments are positive. Some examples from a variety of libraries:

"This is a much more efficient system. Thank you!"

"Love the system. I wish every public library was a part of it."

"Still love it. It takes longer to keep the statistics than it does to use the system."

"Much easier than before. I am spending less time packaging items and having to make less trips to the post office."

"We love the courier service. Fast, simple and cost effective."

"At this point, we can hardly imagine doing without this service. Losing it would cost us considerable staff time, and library users would have longer waiting times for materials. We're delighted with the efficiency of the whole project. It's a huge success!"

"It's so much easier packing and unpacking the items."

"This program is saving so much time & money."

“Thanks again for this program.”

“We've saved 40% on ILL costs since this program began.”

“Great.”

“Fabulous system. I was going to the post office twice a week spending an average of 75.00 per week. I am saving postage, staff time and mileage.”

“FANTASTIC!!! Thanks VTLIB - we NEED this!!”

Summary:

By all measures, this pilot project has been an unmitigated success. 58% more materials are getting into the hands of Vermonters who need them. Libraries saved over \$67,000 in transport costs. Reported satisfaction with the program is almost universally positive.

The Department of Libraries will issue an RFP in Spring 2017 for a courier vendor. The goal of the Department is to extend courier service to all libraries in Vermont so that interlibrary loan service is truly equal across the state.

The Vermont Department of Libraries has a planned launch date of June 1, 2017 for the new resource sharing system to replace the antiquated VALS system. This technological leap forward will remove barriers to interlibrary loan service. In combination with the courier service, it is expected that resource sharing will continue to expand.

It is rare to launch a program that exceeds even the most optimistic expectations. This is one of those examples. VTLIB is fully committed to continuing and expanding this service.