

Lackawanna-Montrose Resource Sharing Pilot Report

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Background

While Evergreen was originally written for a system, Georgia PINES, that engages in statewide resource sharing and SPARK was conceived to emulate PINES, statewide resource sharing has not yet been the outcome in Pennsylvania. Multi-library systems who engaged in resource sharing before they joined SPARK were able to continue this practice after they joined, but, so far, have opted to do so only within the confines of their own system. The impediment to resource sharing on a large scale is not technical. It is psychological and historical. The early days of SPARK were fraught with hosting problems, administrative changes, and unstable funding so the focus was on just getting the system to work. Second, Georgia's statewide ILS dates back to the late 1990. PA libraries have had a longer time to get settled into their post-automation methods and procedures, and change can be difficult.

Despite this there are many in the SPARK community who are interested in pursuing resource sharing. Some of the most intense interest resides in the Lackawanna County Library System and the Scranton Public Library specifically. I was Head of IT and Technical Services there when they migrated to SPARK in March 2015. After migrating there was a movement to leverage the resource sharing capabilities of SPARK, and several of us at Lackawanna felt that the Susquehanna County Library in Montrose (hereafter referred to as Montrose) would be a good choice as partner. Their service area is contiguous to Lackawanna's, they are both part of the Northeast Library District, there is semiweekly van delivery between the libraries, and the two systems have a history of working together.

Description of Change

This change became possible only when Lackawanna and Montrose began to share an ILS with resource sharing capabilities which was true after March 2015. The legacy method was developed because there was no way for the ILSs in the two library systems to share data even though the Scranton Public Library, as a District Center, has long shared its resources with Montrose and other library systems in the Northeast District.

The legacy system worked like this:

1. If a Montrose patron wanted a title that was not in the Montrose collection, the ILL librarian at Montrose would check the web version of the LCLS catalog. If the item was held by a LCLS library, the Montrose staff member would place a hold on the title via the LCLS web catalog using the library's corporate library card.

2. The hold would appear on the pull list of the appropriate Lackawanna library. The Lackawanna staff member would pick the item and send the item to the Scranton Public Library ILL Department via the District-funded van system.
3. The SPL ILL Department would check the item out to the corporate account held by the Montrose library. The item would be sent to the Montrose via the District-funded van system.
4. At Montrose the library would catalog the item temporarily and check it out to the patron.
5. Upon return Montrose would delete the item from their ILS and send it via the van to the ILL Department at the Scranton Public Library.
6. Upon receipt the ILL Department would check in the item from the Montrose corporate card and send it to the LCLS owning library via the van system.

The Pilot system worked like this:

1. If a Montrose patron wanted a title that was not in the Montrose collection, the ILL librarian at Montrose checked LCLS holdings in the same interface they use for their regular work. If the item was held by a LCLS library, the Montrose staff member placed a hold on the title on behalf of the patron via the same interface they use for their other work. Patrons could also place the holds themselves from the public catalog.
2. The hold would appear on the Pulllist of a Lackawanna owning library. The Lackawanna staff member would scan the barcode into the Check In window and the item would go Intransit to Montrose.
3. The van would deliver the item to Montrose.
4. The staff member at Montrose would scan the barcode into Check In, and it would become available for the patron.
5. When the patron arrived, the staff member checked it out to the patron using regular Montrose procedures and rules.
6. When the patron returned the item, it was scanned into Check In and went Intransit to the Lackawanna owning library.
7. After the van delivered the item, the Lackawanna owning library checked it in.

Advantages:

1. There is precise, real-time information on the location and status of the item (e.g.; Intransit, On Holds Shelf etc.).
2. There is less need for staff intervention because patrons can place their own holds if they wish.
3. Since both libraries are on the same ILS, there is no need to re-catalog and then delete the item at the Pickup Library.
4. This system is bidirectional. Lackawanna holds can capture Montrose items and vice versa.
5. Staff members in both library systems do not need to switch between interfaces to process these types of requests.
6. All Lackawanna libraries could send the requested item directly to Montrose instead of sending it first to the ILL Department at the Scranton Public Library. This cut down on fulfillment time and staff time.

Preparation

On July 14, 2015, in my former capacity as Head of IT and Technical Services at the Scranton Public Library, I travelled to the main Susquehanna Library in Montrose and met with ILL Coordinator Amy Johnson, Director Sue Stone, and Cataloger Chris Hall. They had concerns and questions, but agreed to proceed with the Pilot project if some limitations were put in place. The first was that only staff (as opposed to the patrons themselves) could place holds on titles that would cross county borders. They also insisted that the Pilot be isolated to the main library in Montrose and not affect the Susquehanna branches. At this meeting we set a start date in September of 2015, but, as that date approached, it was mutually decided that it be postponed so more testing could occur. A new date of January 11, 2016 was chosen and the autumn of 2015 was spent with testing and configuration. We were assisted by Angela Kilsdonk at Equinox using consulting hours pre-purchased by PaLLS. During the fall of 2015 staff at the Scranton Public Library worked out some minor procedural changes to facilitate delivery. In December, when I left the Scranton Public Library to become Executive Director of PaLLS, Sylvia Orner, the Head Cataloger at the Scranton Public Library, assumed the leadership role at Lackawanna. I continued to monitor the progress of the project in my new position working with Lugene Shelly, SPARK Systems Coordinator, to resolve technical problems.

Training

Training: Very little training was needed. ILL staff at both libraries already knew how to use the SPARK system.

Problems / Issues

1. Contrary to what was agreed to in July, other Susquehanna branches were being affected by this Pilot. This was quickly rectified through a policy change in SPARK.
2. Holds placed by patrons without staff mediation were targeting copies contrary to what was promised. This was never resolved.
3. Since the Lackawanna public catalog is limited to only LCLS libraries, patrons could not search for Susquehanna items. The Susquehanna OPAC allowed users to search all of SPARK. This inconsistency was never rectified.
4. Susquehanna operated under the impression that newer materials would not be targeted, but I do not recall this being agreed to at the July meeting and no such limits were put in place.
5. Susquehanna was concerned that their items would remain in Lackawanna for up to six months fulfilling holds. There is a configuration setting in SPARK that will allow this to happen.
6. Montrose received permission errors when checking in materials. We did not learn of this until after the Pilot was completed. This could have been easily rectified.

Termination

The original Pilot was designed to last six months. At the end of July both libraries agreed not to continue.

Statistics

Circulation: LCLS Items to Montrose Patrons (Pre-Pilot July-Dec 2015): 341

Circulation: LCLS Items to Montrose Patrons (Pilot Jan-June 2016): 609

Circulation: Montrose Items to LCLS Locations (Pre-Pilot Jan-June 2016): 1

Circulation: Montrose Items to LCLS Locations (Pilot Jan-June 2016): 21

Conclusions

Despite some configuration issues early on, the technology worked as expected and was ready and able to support resource sharing in SPARK.

The statistics quoted above reveal a doubling of Lackawanna items circulated to Montrose patrons during the Pilot period as compared to the previous six month period. There was only a slight increase in Montrose items circulated to Lackawanna patrons. This is mainly a reflection of the larger Lackawanna collections, but can also partly be explained by Montrose's discomfort at sending some targeted items to Lackawanna.

Both library systems reported that resource sharing increased staff efficiency. According to Amy Johnson at Montrose, "ILL staff efficiency was increased because incoming interlibrary loans took less time to process. Items were simply checked in, holds slips printed and patrons called/contacted. Desk staff efficiency was increased part of the time.... To check out, all they had to do was scan the barcodes." Tessa Mitchell from the ILL Department at the Scranton Public Library also noted that LCLS libraries could now send items directly to Montrose instead of routing them first to Scranton PL: "Everything was delivered as soon as it became available no matter what (LCLS) library it was coming from...."

The service did not engender any documented patron complaints, but Amy Johnson pointed out the benefits: "Someone in Lackawanna discovered that we have a decent collection of fun cookbooks – baking mainly – and they requested several titles that we sent." She also described how patrons were empowered to have more control over their requests: "They were able to see the LCLS items in their list of checkouts and were able to renew online without the need to involve the interlibrary loan staff."

The Pilot did uncover several issues that will need to be addressed in future resource sharing endeavors:

1. It is important that all participants embrace the concept of resource sharing in a consortium and agree on its parameters. *The Pennsylvania Inter-Library Loan Procedures Manual* from 2011 states the following:

...interlibrary loan is reciprocal and restrictions of the past may no longer be appropriate. Items such as the following may be requested and lent if within the guidelines of individual library or consortium policy:

- a. Best sellers and popular items
- b. Bound volumes of periodicals
- c. Multiple copies

d. Recently published titles

e. Titles owned locally

Montrose operated under the assumption that best-sellers, popular items, and titles owned locally should not be transmitted in this manner. The Scranton Public Library, in keeping with its policies that govern the provision of materials to its District libraries, believes there should be no such restrictions. When I met with Montrose staff in July of 2015, we never discussed this important issue in any detail. Both sides just “assumed.”

2. Currently in SPARK, “Max Foreign Circulation Time” is set to six months. This means that an item could remain in the foreign library system fulfilling holds for that period of time. In future resource sharing endeavors, participants will need to agree on a value for this setting.
3. Policies governing resource sharing should be placed in a Memorandum of Understanding that would be signed by all participating libraries and PaILS. The agreement should also address copyright and confidentiality.
4. During the Pilot, PaILS did not intervene in what was viewed as a relationship between two member libraries. Our only role was to facilitate resource sharing through configuration changes in SPARK. In the future PaILS should be actively involved in negotiations, be a party to all agreements, and arbitrate disputes between participating libraries.
5. The Lackawanna County Library System public catalog “scopes” to “Lackawanna County Library System.” LCLS patrons cannot see holdings of other SPARK libraries including Montrose. (Staff members, however, can see holdings of all SPARK libraries.) Montrose has the opposite problem. Scoping on its public catalog is set to all of SPARK so patrons can see items they cannot obtain. I have learned that scoping can only be done on the consortium (SPARK-wide), library system, or “library” (system member, branch) level. You cannot create “scoping groups” that would allow you to scope to resource sharing partners only. Additional development would be needed to do this. Since the ultimate goal is SPARK-wide resource sharing, we, in my opinion, should not invest in such development at this time. If the PaILS Board decides, at some future time, that consortium-wide resource sharing is not a viable goal, we can revisit this development priority.

Since all of these issues either can be easily resolved or are not serious and the advantages of resource sharing were clearly demonstrated in the Pilot, I feel it should be actively developed in the consortium as soon as possible. I plan, in the fall of 2016, to convene a Task Force with the goal of establishing a resource sharing initiative among the four District Centers currently in SPARK and the three that will be added in late 2017.

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