

## **Operational Plan For Automation**

### **Introduction**

Virtually every System service makes use of some form of automation. Information Services depends upon large automated databases. Consulting and administration make daily use of networked computers and printers. The System's books and accounting ledgers are kept through the use of powerful accounting software. Continuing education employs an automated registration system, videoconferencing, and online meeting software. RPLS maintains a website and several listservs to disseminate information to the membership. Email is used for communication, both among our staff and between our staff and other institutions.

Automation is found in all types and sizes of our member libraries. Many RPLS libraries participate as full online members in the LLSAP (Local Library System Automation Project) resource-sharing network. Other member libraries search the LLSAP database through the Web. Most member libraries also access ILLINET Online, the Statewide Illinois Library Catalog (SILC) and several OCLC databases (including FirstSearch and WorldCat). Personal computers are used by our member libraries both to access remote databases and to perform a variety of in-house jobs.

The purpose of this Plan is to address some of the major issues that RPLS must face in an era of ever-expanding technology. The issues discussed in the Plan are general issues that arise regardless of the service applying the technology. More specific information for particular services can be found in other Plans, such as the Plan for Interlibrary Loan and the Plan for Bibliographic Access.

### **RPLS Responsibilities**

As we, and our member libraries, plan for the future, it is important that there be a clear understanding of the role the System will play in this area. System resources are limited, and many important automation projects must be primarily local efforts. This does not mean that the System does not have a vital role to play in fostering the wise application of automated technology. It does mean that the ways in which the System can stimulate the use of automation should be focused and defined. Rolling Prairie Library System will provide the following important functions:

- RPLS will continue to provide an example of the efficient and productive use of automated technology in delivering services to its member libraries.
- RPLS will continue to support the development and expansion of our LLSAP by hosting central site services, by offering training and consulting to LLSAP participants, and by promoting the growth of the LLSAP among our members.
- RPLS will continue to provide one or more consultants to advise member librarians on evaluating the use of automation technology in improving library services. Advice will

be available to member libraries on a wide variety of automation-related topics, including the LLSAP, OCLC, technology planning, and library applications of common software.

- RPLS will continue to provide security for central site servers through firewalls, server security configuration, and appropriate protective software.
- RPLS will continue to incorporate automation topics in its annual continuing education calendar. The topics will address a variety of user backgrounds and levels of experience. Opportunities will be provided for demonstrations of appropriate technological advances in convenient locations. RPLS will also continue to provide a computer lab for hands-on instruction in various computer topics.
- RPLS will serve as a conduit for important automation-related information from other appropriate agencies. The system will cooperate with the Illinois State Library and others in spreading information about automation grants, access to bibliographic databases, new technologies and other important areas of automation.

### **Member Library Responsibilities**

Member libraries should strive to take advantage of opportunities to extend the use of automation in their local library. To be able to meet the challenge provided by these opportunities when they occur, member librarians should make a consistent and continuing effort to stay informed about those developments that relate to their particular needs. Librarians should participate in all workshops and demonstrations that relate to their use of technology.

Automation of library services is not inexpensive. Library administrators and boards should address the funding of automation projects in their financial planning. They should also be prepared to avail themselves of any grant opportunities that are consistent with their needs and ongoing resources.

Automated technology provides a gateway for local libraries to the growing bibliographic riches of regional and state databases. To be able to bring these resources to their patrons, every library in the System should have the equipment and connectivity needed for access to remote databases and to the Internet. Local libraries installing this equipment should also make realistic plans for the training of staff to provide the service and for assuming the additional costs involved.

Finally, all member libraries should understand the importance of conforming to accepted standards such as MARC for the storage and transmission of bibliographic data. A commitment to these standards should be reflected in the planning and decision making regarding vendors and equipment.

### **Access to Other Automation Projects**

The System has a responsibility to play a leadership role in the development of practical, user-friendly links between all types of automation projects. RPLS maintains a presence on the Internet with links to our LLSAP catalog and to member library websites. We are an active

participant in the statewide SILC project, and our LLSAP database is available through that interface. The LLSAP also participates in quarterly backloading of bibliographic and holdings data into WorldCat.

### **Testing and Implementing New Technology**

Another element of the System's leadership role in the automation area is its ability under certain conditions to act as an agent for introducing new technology to its member libraries. An early example of this aspect of System leadership was the beginning of the LLSAP in 1977. At first, only the System headquarters collection was entered in the LLSAP database. However, as member librarians learned the advantages of this new technology by seeing its use at RPLS headquarters, a willingness to try automated circulation and resource sharing through a shared database grew. When grant funds became available for the libraries to join an LLSAP, the demonstration by the System of the effectiveness of the new technology provided a foundation from which expansion could take place.

For new technologies to be tested at the System level, several important criteria must be met:

- The technology should have a direct and immediate impact on the ability of the system to reach one of the goals set in its current long-range plan.
- Although new and perhaps unfamiliar to our particular area, the technology should have enough of a track record to justify a reasonable expectation of successful application.
- The technology should lend itself to cooperative ventures with member libraries or other appropriate agencies.
- The technology must be either affordable in the context of the System's own financial resources or made affordable by grant support or joint ventures.