

APPENDIX B

Rhode Island LSTA Interview Report

Ten individuals identified by the staff of the Rhode Island Office of Library and Information Services were interviewed via telephone about the programs and services of the DOL. Five of interviewees were Talking Books Plus patrons, four were library directors, one was both a director and a RI Library Board trustee, and one was a trustee. A list of their names follows at the end of this report.

Talking Books Plus Patrons

The Talking Books Plus patrons interviewed ranged in age from 35 to 93 and lived in Barrington, Warwick, Bristol, and Providence. The consultants asked how long they'd been using the service, how they learned about it, what its best feature was, and what needs to be improved?

The eldest in terms of age had used the service for only three years; the longest term user had been a patron of the service since 1955. They had learned about the service from a social worker, from a doctor, through a friend of a relative, and through the office for vocational rehabilitation. Their reading interests included poetry, literature, drama, "about families," mysteries, "everything except westerns and science fiction," and "mostly nonfiction." One person had tried to learn how to read and write Braille, but he "found it very cumbersome."

What is the best feature of the service?

I have no difficulty getting what I want; actually seems to be getting faster; things are available more quickly.

Variety of selections available; the computer can select for you, but you can also choose materials on your own.

Personal attention each person gets.

They're wonderful! Andy helps with the machines; he can get new ones fast. Sometimes the tapes are bad; Ken has helped with those.

The RI Talking Books program is excellent; they're very patient.

I can't praise them enough! They're just delightful!

What needs to be improved?

I would like to get the CD players sooner. Books on subjects I like are sometimes hard to get.

Maybe the tapes could be rewound when they come back in.

It's not easy to get anything recorded for you specifically. Last year I asked NLS to record for me and I don't know if I'll get what I requested; you have to wait and see.

I can't think of anything; when there are problems with the machines, you get a new one in a day or two. Andy gets things right away for me. The service is excellent! I'd go to Washington and picket if they ever cut the funding!

I have heard about the new technology. I have no objection to change as long as the new technology is easy to use, that's important, and reliable. Be careful that it's sturdy! The cassettes are not reliable, but they're better than the discs.

Everything is in flux now; NLS has moved to a different digital format than RFB&D (Recordings for the Blind and Dyslectic). Next year the two organizations won't be using the same digital formats. They should have used the same digital format. With RFB&D you have to buy your own players.

Anything else? Other comments?

It's a wonderful service. The librarians (Andy and Hope) are very helpful to me and my customers. Online sometimes tells you things are being recorded, so you know it'll be ready soon.

They're getting ready to go digital; the new machines will be great. It would be wonderful if there were more titles available, especially nonfiction. They need more nonfiction. A RI senator got legislation passed—anything that's published can be digitized.

I use recorded books for a source of information and entertainment. Have always been a reader. I have about 20 books waiting for me right now, but I'm not in a hurry to get through them. I can't speak too highly of the folks in the Providence office.

I get good service both from RI and NJ NLS programs. NJ has a bigger program. I know both the librarians at the RI Talking Books. They're very receptive to my comments and criticisms. They let me select my own books online. They're very good at explaining the program and finding titles.

The digital format issue really needs to be examined; it should be the same for both services. I don't understand how the NLS player will work. I'm afraid the flash memory cards will be lost in the mail; no one has explained it to me. Getting a CD in the mail sounds better; the loss would be in pennies and you wouldn't need Internet access to use it. Internet access will be expensive. I wonder how much the players will cost.

Library Directors and Trustees

The directors and trustees were asked questions similar to those that were asked in the focus group discussions: which 2 programs/services of OLIS are most important to your library; how has that changed in the last five years; how could the current programs/services be changed to be more effective; what could OLIS stop doing; and what are the top two priorities for the next 5 year plan. They were also invited to add any other comments they would like to make at the close of the interview.

Which 2 programs/services of OLIS are most important to your library?

Those interviewed cited delivery service and LBH most frequently. State grants in aid (not LSTA funded) were also mentioned as important.

Of highest importance statewide are LBH—Talking Books and summer reading. It's hard to pin down; OLIS takes a small amount of LSTA money and leverages it. Libraries just couldn't do without OLIS. RILINK, for example, has gotten LSTA funds and it links school libraries.

Delivery service and LBPH. That's the same as 5 years ago. It would be better if the public libraries got the money directly rather than keeping it at OLIS. Our needs have increased; I wish we had more access to the federal dollars.

Their help and expertise in getting through the expansion process and getting money has been really important. Also state aid.

#1 is the state grant in aid; we get a substantial amount. The other thing recently is that we just finished a construction project that we had a 50% match on.

The effort now underway is the multi-type approach, bringing all libraries under one initiative. I would like OLIS to do it, but there is resistance to the turf loss. Academic libraries didn't get any LSTA funds until recently in RI.

Delivery system should be enhanced to 6 days/week.

Of most value to us? #1 support of resource sharing among all types of libraries. We're looking forward to a shared system; #2 statewide delivery; #3 continued professional development of any sort.

How have things changed over the last five years? What progress has been made?

The comments were wide ranging.

RILINK has grown in participating libraries; Talking Books is more solid. It's fabulous! Summer reading; we have a superb children's librarian in OLIS; the Mother Goose program has been a huge help to children's success.

OLIS has become greater leader in technology; workshops on web development, etc. They have tried to promote multitype services in the state; they used to be more involved with public libraries. Now the message is that multitype is important. OLIS is also trying to get the state legislature to support multitype more.

Certainly we could benefit from more databases; CLAN does the databases and those are self funded; public libraries pool their money for the databases.

How would you measure that? Are we more visible? Yes—the library futures has a working group. Individual libraries are also using their local media more. For example, when we started wireless in the library we started pretty low key. I'm amazed at the new people who are coming in; we have a budding teen group. We've made a concerted effort on outreach and partnerships with schools.

How could the current programs/services be changed to be more effective?
Again the responses ranged widely.

Get more money from both the state and LSTA funding. The small OLIS staff is really stretched. I believe RI libraries could raise more money privately. State gives libraries 25% of their operating budgets and half of the construction costs. I'd like to see public libraries lobby to get more money. Other thing the state legislature could do is support shared database licensing and a single catalog for the whole state. They just need to do it!

I'm not sure what OLIS provides. They oversee the distribution of state money, maintain standards, collect stats, and oversee state construction money. Those are all important services to us, but I'm not sure what else they should do. We're capable of running our own summer reading. OLIS is of more benefit to small libraries. We have contracts to serve statewide.

OLIS has been doing a good job in reaching out; they work hard on their website. You don't have to go back to check on whether they've changed anything recently because the RSS Feed lets you know. Karen M helps a lot. OLIS has tried to streamline the online report. Directors asked for the report not to be so complex. The annual reports are much better now.

Maybe libraries themselves need to use the resources more proactively. OLIS is constrained by being a department of state government; they can't lobby; aren't independent.

A regional representative used to visit and share information, but I don't know when I last saw a regional representative. It would be helpful to bring that program back.

Libraries need to know what the OLIS needs are; the communication seems to be top down; we need better communication from them on their needs. Too often the communication is negative. OLIS needs to open up to let us help.

We really need a key state agency. OLIS could be that, but it has been hard for them. The Library Futures planning (strategic planning for multi-types) was important. OLIS should really be building on that. We need a stronger voice from OLIS in the strategic plan, and for OLIS to demonstrate this can make a difference. We need leadership.

What could OLIS stop doing?

Suggestions related to the governor's audit were mentioned, but the interviewees did not have other alternatives to offer.

They have been a step child of government and we've put up with it! They're so lean they can't cut out anything.

When the current governor came in, he said he was going to do an audit. The professional collection at OLIS could be merged into URI library school; LBH could be moved to another state agency. Most of the state libraries rallied and said no, we needed a separate OLIS. The influence of OLIS has diminished; they have lost positions. Public library service is changing everywhere; we have to identify and adapt; be relevant going forward.

I'd have to think about that. There's a good balance now in what they provide; they do a lot to help handicapped people. ILL delivery system...I wouldn't want that to go away, that's our life blood.

That's hard to say; I think more in terms of what they should do. They are mandated to serve LBH. Maybe they don't need the professional library, maybe they could drop that and work with the URI grad program, HELIN and CLAN to help to insure professional development. They should work on economic development in the state and the value of libraries in that as well as educational development of library professionals within the state.

What are the top two priorities for the next 5 year plan?

Those interviewed want OLIS to provide strategic direction on several things: increased funding for public libraries, a single statewide catalog, a statewide library card, multitype cooperation, a statewide PR campaign, and equalizing access to information.

I want money for public libraries for economic development, early literacy, etc. statewide. The only place this can happen is at state level. OLIS needs to provide strategic direction on that. There also needs to be one catalog and a statewide library card.

Continue trying to create multitype statewide so that we're all going in the same direction. We get big breaks in products and service purchases because of that.

Maybe make the case for libraries as an important part of their communities, a PR campaign perhaps. Libraries need constant validation in the minds of legislators and communities. We can't be complacent; have to get the word out. A statewide campaign can have an umbrella effect for all libraries.

The effort now underway is the multi-type approach, bringing all libraries under one initiative. I would like OLIS to do it, but there is resistance to the turf loss.

The delivery system should be enhanced to 6 days/week.

Unless they get more money I don't see that they could do more; they do have to administer state programs. If they got databases and a statewide catalog, we could shift and operate differently.

Focus on technology equalization. OLIS is good with the Gates Initiative, platform for technology; brokering and advising for access. Schools are more different than they should be—too many haves and have nots. OLIS is in the department of administration, so they have difficulties with the department of education.

We need to coordinate access to information resources; you are a student AND a resident; that means you should be able to access the databases from home as well. OLIS could champion this.

Be the agency to bring us all to the table. How do we go forward with the strategic plan? HELIN has an interest in an online access shared catalog; so does CLAN; and schools should be included.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Their added comments were:

Flexibility is needed in the next 5 year plan. Things are changing rapidly. RI public libraries have cutting edge technology because of the Champlin Foundation.

I'm pleased with OLIS for the most part. They're a presence without being intrusive. They have to tread a fine line with support without being micromanagers. Each little town is ferocious in its independence! There are 38 separate cities and towns in RI; each with one or more libraries. We'd never allow the state to tell us what to do!

OLIS is good at getting input. I call Karen and Joe; OLIS is helpful with the RI Center for the Book too.

The LSTA program is wonderful.

Interviewees:

Debbie Barchi, Director, Barrington PL

Peter Deekle, University Librarian, Roger Williams University, and Library Board of RI

Joy Dennis, Barrington

Aleatha Dickerson, Providence

Beatrice Miller, Warwick

Suresh Ramamurthy, Providence

Frederick A. Rounds, Bristol

Joan Prescott, Director, Bristol PL

Joan Ress Reeves, Library Board of RI

Dale Thompson, Director of the Providence PL