

## “zILLANE” Study Summary

The Illinois State Library contracted with the Texas Center for Digital Knowledge at the University of North Texas to conduct a study of the library automation systems administered by the 12 regional library systems of the State. The report is commonly referred to as the “zILLANE” Report” whose principal author is Dr. Bill Moen of the Center.

Library systems are statutorily mandated to provide administrative, technical and professional support to the various types of libraries within the territory of the 12 regional systems. The tenet of the law is that the level of this support should be equal across the State. However, as the “zILLANE” report indicates, the level of support and service provided through the automation systems varies significantly in each of the 12 regional library systems. The report provides an examination of these automation systems and suggests remedies to meet the mandate of the law and to ensure the quality uniform information access by all the people of Illinois.

The purpose of the “zILLANE” Report was to examine the structural aspects of the automation system, most importantly the cost structure. Each of the 12 library systems maintains an automation system but not all the libraries within the territory of a regional library system participate in the automation system. Funding for automation systems is primarily through a fee assessed on a participating library by the applicable regional library system, the annual operating funds for of the library system and direct grants from the State Library to the regional library systems.

The cost of participation varies in each system. For many libraries the cost is too expensive to participate. Some libraries have chosen not participate but instead have automated systems that are not connected to any other library or are connected to a smaller consortium of libraries. Also, special libraries may not want to participate due to the unique nature of their collections, the need to protect their proprietary information or due to cost considerations.

The benefits to a library to participate in an automated system include, but are not limited to the following:

- Resource sharing allows libraries to provide access to materials far beyond what a library could individually afford;
- Standardized formats for accessing records allow librarians to expand access without learning or having to use new automated systems;
- Permits libraries to collaborate on collection development; and
- Centralized cataloging, records maintenance and access to a centralized expertise reduces the impact on library resources.

While the benefits are numerous, there are concerns about automated systems. Among the findings of the “zILLANE” Report on the capability and practices of the regional library system’s automation systems are:

- Each of the 12 library systems has a different type of automated system;
- There is a substantial variation in the cost to libraries for participation;
- The quality of the record keeping (bibliographic control) varies for each system;
- Accounting practices and charging structure varies for each system;
- Participation rates by the libraries vary widely from system to system, from a low of 3% to a high of 68%.

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Due to variance of service and costs, not all libraries are receiving equal service. Further, the fragmentation of the delivery of service and resources to libraries, and therefore the public, places a limitation on the full capability to provide advanced information resources potentially to every resident. An attempt to coalesce this fragmentation through “VIC” (Virtual Illinois Catalog) operated by the State Library has not been realized. The purpose of VIC is to allow patron access to the material records of all libraries participating in regional library systems’ automated systems. However, due to logistical and functional limitations, VIC has not met the envisioned application for statewide access to library materials.

The twin goals of the library community should be to maximize the efficiency of resources and the availability information available to patrons through the automated systems. To that end, the “zILLANE” Report proposed numerous recommendations to the State Library and the 12 regional library systems for the enhancement of the automated systems. Included in the recommendation are proposals for the State Library and the 12 regional systems to:

- Develop standard reporting forms and implement an online data submission application process for regional library systems to report cost and revenue data for comparative analysis;
- Develop an “outcomes based evaluation” of the automated systems and a “best practices” guide available to each system for efficient administrative control;
- Establish a common set of standards for automated systems;
- Make training and resources available to regional library system and State Library staff to maximize contract negotiation with automation vendors;
- Develop plans to increase the participation rate of libraries within the systems via a formal recruitment plan;
- Initiate discussions for the merger or realignment of automation systems;
- Initiate discussions for the implementation of a statewide catalog for school libraries and a separate shared system for special libraries; and
- Explore the possibilities of implementing a new means of providing services and enhanced information access by the people of Illinois.

In summary, the analysis and recommendations of the “zILLANE” Report are meant to be a beginning point to implement an enhanced means of information delivery to the people of Illinois through their libraries. Three basic factors are driving the need for this implementation; one, the efficiencies that are capable through modern technology; two, the demand by taxpayers for maximizing the use of tax dollars regardless of the source; and three, the need for the public to access the avalanche of information that is now available in all formats. As the result of the “zILLANE” report, the Illinois State Library will be re-evaluating the entire scheme of financial and administrative support for automation systems as operated by the 12 regional library systems. Illinois is in a unique position to not only meet these challenges but to exceed the expectations envisioned by the “zILLANE” Report.