

# LSCA: The INCOLSA Experience

by Barbara Evans Markuson, INCOLSA

If Congress eliminates LSCA, it will end one of its most effective programs. This observation is based on four decades of library service, in the Library of Congress, in national consulting, in computer-based information services, in the development of Indiana Cooperative Library Service Authorities (INCOLSA) as a cooperative library network, and in many years of service on LSCA committees and as a grant reviewer at the national and state levels.

LSCA works. It has a minimum of red tape.

Program goals are taken seriously. Fraud and abuse are virtually unheard of. Throughout the country, lay and professional groups are involved in oversight and decision making. It benefits all types of libraries. Most

importantly, LSCA makes an enormous impact on the way millions of Americans get library and information service every hour of every day.

LSCA facilitates change. In contrast to Federal funding that perpetuates the status quo, LSCA facilitates beneficial change. For example, when the original LSCA legislation was written, library technology was basically an electric typewriter. Today, in the rapidly changing world of electronic information, LSCA helps keep libraries, their users, and library networks in the race. It has done this, not just by funding computer projects, but, more importantly, by helping to promote, create, and support new types of library infrastructures from local consortia to state, regional, and national library networks.

Put simply, libraries have had to cope with a revolution in almost every aspect of information service. That we are coping is due in large measure to the availability of LSCA funds for studying, testing, and implementing new forms of information, in new ways, and from new infrastructures. Infrastructure is just a fancy word for the interlibrary mechanisms by which

individuals as well as institutions can achieve consensus, take action, and provide cooperative service to users. With the rapid changes in information technology in the last decade, the need for new infrastructures became critical. Without these infrastructures, most libraries would not have been able to develop the technical and support services in order to meet current information delivery challenges.

The Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority (INCOLSA) is one of these new infrastructures.

As a statewide network, hundreds of our members and tens of thousands of their users have benefited from LSCA funding.

INCOLSA began with discussions in the early 1970s among the large state-supported academic

institutions. They were struggling with how they could begin to do computer-based cataloging and cope with the future impact of automation. With the encouragement of the State Librarian, discussions were broadened, and an LSCA grant was written to hire a consultant to do a statewide survey and study. This effort led to the organization of INCOLSA by some 40 libraries in early 1974. This visionary effort, at a time when the prevalent resource sharing technology was the photocopier and the teletype, made INCOLSA one of the first statewide networks to be established. From its beginnings, INCOLSA served public, school, academic, and special libraries throughout Indiana.

Initially LSCA funds helped underwrite basic services; these now are funded from state funds and member fees for services. Subsequently LSCA funds have been used as seed money to help introduce new technologies to our member libraries to benefit their users. Some examples are listed below.

In 1975, we joined the national cataloging cooperative, OCLC, using an LSCA Grant to place 25 OCLC terminals in 25 libraries to begin cooperative

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*"The Local Library adds more to a person's life than space. It enhances, teaches, and influences what we believe and think."*

*State Senator John R. Sinks*

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computer-based cataloging in Indiana. Today, we have more than 350 terminals linked to OCLC for access by librarians for cataloging, interlibrary lending, and reference; and thousands of users can access this national union catalog, and other databases via Internet. State and local funds now support this effort. No LSCA funds are used by INCOLSA today for OCLC access or equipment.

In 1976, LSCA grant funds helped transfer one of the oldest cooperative projects in the state, the Crawfordsville Processing Center, to INCOLSA. Since that time, thousands of items have been cataloged for member and non-member libraries; and many years ago this service was able to become economically viable, through member and state funding, without the use of LSCA funds.

In 1980, we used LSCA grants to hire an Information Retrieval Specialist to introduce our members to online searching of computer databases in their libraries. This effort, one of the first in the country, developed into a program widely recognized as a leader in the U.S. Today information retrieval is widely used in Indiana from elementary school to advanced research libraries. Costs are reduced through INCOLSA's cooperative purchasing contracts. Currently, we manage more than 190 authorizations for online databases, and more than 400 libraries purchase one or more CD-ROM retrieval databases each year. Initially, this online searching was done by trained librarians. Today in libraries throughout the state, children and adults are doing these searches and they love it.

Several years ago, a real impetus for user access resulted from a special LSCA grant, sponsored by the State Library, Area Library Service Authorities (ALSAs) and INCOLSA. This grant provided public libraries throughout the state with more than 60 CD-ROM workstations and appropriate databases of high user interest. We have never looked back.

In the early 1980s, INCOLSA managed an LSCA project which converted the card catalogs of five of the seven largest public libraries in the state; a separate LSCA grant later converted another public library from this group. This effort added millions of holding records to the Indiana database on OCLC for resource sharing and, also, allowed the users of these libraries to enjoy

online computer catalogs as the cooperative databases were loaded into local systems.

INCOLSA also used LSCA grant funds, in the early 1980s, to convert Indiana's paper based union list of serials holdings, produced from key punch cards, into the OCLC database. This effort helped introduce electronic cataloging of serials, promoted resource sharing of journal articles, and subsequently enabled the Indiana University Library (IUL) and INCOLSA to work on a USDOE grant project with OCLC. This project developed a national electronic union list system and allowed IUL to convert its serial holdings, the largest in Indiana, into this system.

In the early 1980s interest in automation of local circulation and catalog access mounted. Through LSCA grants, INCOLSA members were able to attend workshops and training sessions about this technology. A statewide survey of desirable features in local automated systems was designed which could be used to help develop requests for vendor proposals. Subsequently, INCOLSA obtained two LSCA grants to provide seed money to establish shared local systems, called clusters. Two such clusters were developed by INCOLSA and provided online catalogs and circulations to four academic libraries and 12 public library members, both small and large. These clusters operated successfully, through shared local funding, for more than seven years. Today all cluster members have migrated to other shared systems or to their own local system. Another LSCA grant helped to develop a similar cluster system operated by the South Bend Public Library.

Microcomputer technology was just beginning to influence the library world when, in 1984, INCOLSA used LSCA grant funds to hire a microcomputer specialist to develop training and cooperative purchasing services. Over the past decade thousands of library staff members have learned to use microcomputers through this program, and hundreds of microcomputers have been purchased, using local funds, through this service.

LSCA funds have also helped defray the costs of training, making it more accessible to smaller libraries — school, public, academic, and special. LSCA support has also allowed INCOLSA members to obtain early alerts on new technology through technical briefings. For example, in 1986, (ancient history when it comes to

technology) we held the first briefing on CD-ROM technology and had to search nationwide to find four companies that could demonstrate products. Thus Indiana libraries were among the first to adopt CD-ROM, and INCOLSA negotiated the first cooperative library CD-ROM contracts in the U.S.

With the use of LSCA funds Indiana library users have moved from access to the card catalog and printed reference books to the era of a global information superhighway. Our most recent LSCA grants focus on Internet training and deployment. Hundreds of library staff have received Internet training; an Internet POP is installed at INCOLSA and more are planned for installation in other locations in the state, and over 500 authorizations have been issued for Internet access.

During this same period, as other articles in this issue will report, we have also used LSCA grant funds to support a highly participatory, voluntary restructuring of multi-county Area Library Services Authorities and INCOLSA into a single statewide network with central and regional services. In effect, LSCA has again been used to create an even more effective interlibrary infrastructure for the challenges that we face today.

For the first time, we have an integrated statewide cooperative network service plan. This plan increases attention to network services that focus on library users. After all, LSCA is not for librarians or for libraries, ultimately LSCA is justified by its impact on the citizen seeking access to information and knowledge.

I firmly believe that this collection of articles demonstrates that Indiana's LSCA programs have been designed to benefit Indiana citizens. Users must continue to receive the benefits that only a program like LSCA can provide – an ongoing

identification, testing, demonstration, and deployment of new methods of library information access and user service. Indiana shows that the LSCA dollar has an incredible rate of return – it's one of the best investments of any Federal program.

### Preventing Blindness

I drive the turnpike daily  
between Harrisburg and Wheeling  
pastures mile after mile.

Fenceposts ripple past my window.

Weeks and weeks of traveling the same road.  
And the mules only in the pasture on Sunday.  
Only on Sunday?

I broke the monotony with a can of pop  
at the gas station grocery.

"Old timer, why are the mules out only on Sunday?"  
"Ma'am, they come from the coal mines  
One day a week to the sunlight so they won't go blind."

God, thank you for placing me in this field,  
Exposing me to the sunlight  
of this experience in the library.  
I have come to write  
and break the darkness  
of my own underground  
and keep from going blind.

*Mary Thomas wrote "Preventing Blindness" while attending the Let's Write About It workshops at her public library in Putnam County, Indiana.*