



Focus Group 1 Summary

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1. Introduction

The Library of Texas is a program of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) and the Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund Board (TIF). The LOT hopes to bring the resources of Texas libraries to all Texans. The LOT will build upon the existing network infrastructure of Texas libraries and will encompass a number of components including:

- Online databases licensed by TSLAC for statewide access
- A government information locator and digital government information preservation program
- A virtual catalog enabled through the use of the ANSI/NISO Z39.50 information retrieval protocol
- An integrating search and retrieval interface to the LOT's multiple components
- A document delivery service based on interlibrary loan and other mechanisms.

The Texas Center for Digital Knowledge (TxCDK) at the University of North Texas, through the ZLOT project, has a contract with the TSLAC to demonstrate the feasibility of a Z39.50-based approach for distributed access to Texas' library resources. Specifically, ZLOT will develop specifications for critical components of the Library of Texas (LOT): a virtual catalog, an integrating search and retrieval interface, and a document delivery service framework.

1. Virtual catalog: To search across multiple library catalogs from a single interface to identify library resources without regard to geographical location of either the searcher or the resources.
2. Integrating search and retrieval interface: From a single interface, to integrate access to library catalogs, the state licensed online databases, and other resources.
3. Document delivery service framework: Once resources are discovered and identified, to provide resource delivery services, e.g., interlibrary loan for materials or electronic access for digital resources.

The purpose of this focus group was to collect qualitative data in three areas:

- User resource discovery needs currently not being addressed
- User expectations of the integrating search and retrieval interface
- User expectations of the ZLOT document delivery services.

2. Methodology

2.1 Description of the Participants

Participants were selected from stakeholder groups that represent a spectrum of potential users of the LOT. The stakeholder groups included public libraries, academic libraries, and the Texas regional library systems. Specific individuals were identified in three ways. First, members of the ZLOT project Advisory Group from the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area were invited. Second, two members of the Advisory Group, who serve as chairs of statewide library working groups, submitted candidates from the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. Third, library directors from the two largest libraries within the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area were invited.

In all, 16 persons were invited and eight agreed to participate. One participant was unable to attend. Of the seven remaining participants, three currently work in academic libraries (two large public institutions and one small private four-year institution), three are public library directors, and one works in a regional library system. Midway through the meeting, two of the participants had to leave for business reasons. A total of five persons participated in the entire focus group, three from academic libraries, one public library director, and one representative of a regional library system. These individuals served as representatives of the needs and expectations of their respective constituencies in the LOT.

Overall, this group was technically astute and each member had five to twelve years of experience with resource sharing in libraries. Four members were actively involved in statewide or regional library working



groups related to technology and resource sharing. Each of the libraries that participants represented provided both remote and in-house access to TexShare databases.

2.2 Description of the Process

The meeting was held on January 23, 2002 from 9:00 a.m. to noon in a classroom at the University of North Texas, School of Library and Information Science, in Denton, Texas. The three hour meeting began with introductions of the ZLOT staff, the TSLAC representative, and the focus group participants. The principal investigator presented an overview of the Library of Texas and the ZLOT project focus. Additionally, examples of three other state virtual library projects were demonstrated online. After a 15-minute break, the focus group discussion began.

Participants were asked to complete a brief form describing their background and their library's experience with TexShare. Participants were directed to consider the needs of their patrons as a primary focus for their comments; however, the needs of library staff were also elicited. The ZLOT project manager, who guided the discussion through the following five areas, facilitated the focus group.

1. Definition of LOT
2. Information discovery services
3. LOT search and retrieval interface
4. Resource access and delivery services
5. Concerns about LOT

At the close of the focus group, participants were asked to complete a feedback form, which allowed them to echo their contributions to the group meeting or make additional contributions regarding issues and user needs vis-à-vis the Library of Texas. Overall, participants communicated in an open and interactive fashion. Several of the participants knew one another from professional contacts and the meeting had a respectful collegial climate.

2.3 Data Analysis

Notes were taken during the meeting by the ZLOT principal investigator and a research assistant. Both the principal investigator and the research assistant analyzed their notes in accord with the needs and expectations specified in the purpose of the focus group:

- User resource discovery needs currently not being addressed
- User expectations of the integrated search and retrieval interface
- User expectations of the ZLOT document delivery services.

An additional area of analysis emerged during the focus group discussion:

- Authentication needs

The focus group moderator, who also contributed her analysis based on summary notes compiled after the focus group, integrated these two analyses. Additionally, participants' responses to the information and the feedback forms completed during the focus group were evaluated and included in this summary report.

3. Needs and Expectations

3.1 Virtual Libraries

Participants identified three characteristics of virtual libraries. These characteristics are listed below along with participant comments that exemplify them.

Ease of Use

- Interoperability of databases



- Simplicity of the single interface to multiple resources
- Reuse of existing access and authentication schemes

Ease of Delivery

- Good delivery of found items
- Dependable, on-target results

Expansion of Local Library

- Services supplemental to and external to the traditional library
- Information access for everyone
- Remote access from homes

3.2 The Library of Texas

In feedback forms completed anonymously at the end of the focus group meeting, participants' identified three key concepts that characterized their perception of the Library of Texas. These concepts are labeled as: Open Access, Beyond TexShare, and "It's Happening". Comments typifying these concepts are listed below.

Open Access

- Opening of access to resources of many libraries
- Universal availability to patrons

Beyond TexShare

- Other components, in addition to the virtual catalog comprise LOT
- Resource sharing increasing beyond TexShare
- Ability to send ILL requests

"It's Happening"

- An attempt is being made to provide easier and simpler user access
- Very good potential
- It's being worked on

The two most important user needs that the LOT would address in the participants' libraries are:

1. Resource availability
2. Remote access

Resource availability included local library patrons' needs to locate resources, including rare materials, from "information-rich" institutions across the state. Additionally, remote patrons might need to have the local library staff facilitate their information discovery processes beyond the services provided by the search interface. Remote access included the need to extend local library privileges to remote users throughout the state while simplifying resource discovery methods.

3.3 Resource Discovery Needs

In general, there is a lack of awareness among patrons regarding the resources available to them through the library. One library director stated, "People do not know what is available through TexShare". Even when patrons are aware of TexShare databases, it is not always clear what is "contained" in the databases. For example, what journal titles does a particular database include? A listing of database contents would be helpful for resource discovery. While each library can do this separately, it is redundant effort. A centralized listing of database content would be more efficient. As one participant put it, "A standard page that lists the contents of a database could be a starting point."



The ability to conduct a single search across multiple databases would enhance users access to information resources. Too often, multiple searches are required and users are discouraged with the process. It would be helpful for patrons to conduct a single search across pertinent databases to discover information that answers their questions.

In some cases, a single library has more than one integrated library system (ILS) available to patrons and would like patrons to be able to conduct a single search. The ability to conduct a single search across multiple catalogs would enable easier and faster resource discovery.

Patrons need to be able to discover resources in multiple sources through a single search process. "LOT should allow students to find variety of resources by (subject) area, for example, students taking chemistry would find what they need under one (subject)." There are so many resources available on so many different subjects a user needs to see some grouping of resources to help them with their selection of resources. The categorization could be by types of materials (e.g., digital resources, images, etc.) or by subject area (e.g., resources that deal with physics). Such groupings would help the user to begin a search rather than simply searching across lots of resources in the hope of finding something.

Centrally purchased resources that are available to all libraries, for example e-books and e-journals, need to be visible in local catalogs. One approach is to develop and load records for these resources into the local catalog. Another approach is to have a centrally developed and maintained database resource that would be available to all libraries either for searching or for loading into their local catalogs. "Records can be done once for all. Let's not redo the wheel."

Resources in different languages are required to serve multilingual populations throughout the state. It may not be sufficient to simply provide a search interface in another language (e.g., Spanish) if an information retrieval system indexes and searches its resources in a single language (e.g., English). One university turned off a foreign language search interface because it created an expectation on the part of users that foreign language search terms could be used. This was not the case. The LOT needs to address the multilingual needs of patrons, even if this is not possible in the first rollout.

Many users need help in using library resources. There is a need for "an intelligence to help users understand what resources are available and how to use the resources." Technology by itself may not be able to make intelligent choices of selecting the right database or collection to search. Even with categorization of resources and database descriptions, there may continue to be a need for people resources in libraries to assist users.

3.4 Expectations of the Integrated Search and Retrieval Interface

Participants expect a common search and retrieval interface for LOT resources. Patrons prefer a simple, "get-to-the-point" interface. Users become frustrated when forced to navigate layer after layer to find the right information. One participant made an analogy between this navigation-intensive type of interface and the automated voice response systems used by telephone systems.

Searching interfaces need to be developed to accommodate different user needs and capabilities. Participants do expect to have both basic and advanced search capabilities in the LOT. "The initial interface must be simple and with basic functions. Then the searching interface can move from simple to sophisticated." A basic search interface would be either a simple keyword search or one that offers author, title, and subject searches. Advanced search capabilities would include such criteria as date of publication, date ranges, format, and language. For example, a technical services librarian may expect to search using criteria such as ISSN or ISBN.

This does not mean that other users may not use these search criteria but rather we need to provide user-selectable search interface choices related to information needs and searching requirements. In this regard, some users will prefer to escape the common interface and interact directly with selected databases. Appropriate search interfaces should be informed by what current systems offer. For example, databases such as EBSCO provide both basic and advanced search interfaces. The expectation of both



basic and advanced search capabilities is in accord with the searches chosen by the Z39.50 profiles at Level 0 and Level 1.

While there is an expectation that the LOT interface be simple and common, there is also an expectation that the interface support local customization for libraries to address their users' unique needs. One example of this would be a "hot link" from the LOT interface to search pre-selected catalogs of particular importance to a library's patrons.

Consistent with the need for resources to meet the needs of multilingual patrons, there is an expectation that patrons be able to filter materials by language in the search process. For example, it is not sufficient to have a Spanish language interface; it is necessary that one of the search criteria be language in order to limit the search results.

One important issue that will affect the inclusion of certain search criteria is the availability of the data in the bibliographic records. For example, if users want to search by format of material, such as video recordings, that data needs to be in the records.

3.5 Expectations of the Document Delivery Service

Users expect to know the availability of resources once they are discovered in the search process. Users expect to know several things: where the resource is located, if it is available for access, and what methods are available for obtaining it. As one participant put it, "we need to help users find the materials and then let them know immediately how they can get them." One possibility would be to indicate the status of the holding institution through an icon in the retrieved record. Clicking the icon might indicate if the holder is TexShare or if the patron's local library has borrowing rights with the holding library.

Participants also indicated that users expect to place both requests to hold a resource and requests for interlibrary loans directly from the retrieved record result. It is expected that LOT users will be affiliated with specific libraries. An important issue in regard to patron-initiated ILL, whether mediated or non-mediated through a local library, is the relationship of a user to a specific library.

Users also expect faster and more direct delivery of resources, including direct delivery to their desktop. "Users expect to find information as librarians find it. Then they expect the resource to be a mouse-click away from being delivered to their desktop." Soon users will expect delivery to their wireless devices.

Libraries are already providing numerous profiles that describe lending, ILL policies, and other information for resource sharing (e.g., for OCLC and consortia). LOT looks like it will also require policies, for example, an authentication policy for patron-initiated borrowing. Keeping policies updated and in synch will be a challenge.

3.6 Authentication Needs

Participants expected an integrated user authentication mechanism from the LOT that would not only protect the LOT users' privacy but would also provide a continuous service without regard to their change of geographical location within Texas. "People move around. The card needs to be authorized centrally." All participants were aware of the technical as well as political complexity of such a system. Any new mechanism should build on and incorporate current systems, such as university library identification cards, TexShare cards and local public library cards. As currently defined by law, the use of TexShare cards and databases extends to members of public and academic libraries. Extending the use to include all Texans is presently beyond this scope.

The most desirable situation would be to have an access/authentication mechanism that allows the fewest logins possible. Yet the organization and technical considerations for a single ID system are problematic. How does a university student automatically get his/her ID into the LOT system or how does the LOT system recognize a local ID scheme?



TexShare cards are one example of an authentication mechanism used by participating colleges and universities. These cards are issued by students' home institutions and authenticate students from one institution to another institution primarily for the purpose of establishing borrowing rights. TexShare cards are not available to members of the general public. "TexShare cards worked for students on campus but when public users come into our library, it becomes complicated. They need to register with the library."

One authentication approach that could be examined is what Mark McFarland at UT Austin created for academic library users to access TexShare resources. This approach builds a central authentication mechanism based on university ID's at participating TexShare institutions. This requires collaboration between the institutions and the centrally managed access/authentication site.

A unique identification system might be the best approach for users to authenticate for LOT services. However, a centrally maintained registry based on existing identification "cards", such as social security cards or drivers' licenses, elicits privacy concerns. "If we use one card for everything, privacy is an issue." Additionally, the question of how long registrations are valid is an important consideration (e.g., students from out of state who leave a college or university and local library users that move away). Further, there will be a need to collect LOT usage statistics and the access/authentication system will be important to this data collection.

4. Issues

4.1 Political and Economic

Users come to libraries with the awareness that there are resources the local library does not have in-house. The local library should be able to help users find what they want whether the resources are "under our roof or somebody else's." This can lead to unfulfilled expectations, however, since some libraries have non-resident fees that limit the availability of resources to their local residents. Such situations force the use of more costly ILL and can mean delays in users obtaining the information.

There is also a tension between libraries serving their local or primary community while making resources available to users throughout the state. "There has to be one (LOT) policy not multiple policies. Rich communities may not want poorer communities to use their resources. Also an academic library is not going to allow itself to be overwhelmed by the surrounding community's needs."

Resource sharing across the state of Texas will affect individual libraries in regard to staff workload and time allocation. Additionally, policies regarding (a) the use of collections and (b) authentication mechanisms may need to be modified or developed.

4.2 Marketing

Participants identified marketing as a key success factor for the Library of Texas. Two marketing activities were specifically identified: advertising and incentives. It will be important to advertise the services available through the LOT to both the general public and the libraries. The TexShare databases are a case in point; many library patrons are unaware of the availability of the TexShare databases through their local library. Likewise, it may be important to provide incentives to libraries to encourage their participation in the LOT.

4.3 Funding

One key measure of a library's effectiveness is the number of patrons utilizing their services. Counting patron usage of virtual library services will be critical in order to assure buy-in from local libraries.

Additionally, the funding required to participate in the LOT, as well as sustainable funding for the LOT, are predictable concerns for local libraries. Funding issues will need to be addressed in order for LOT to succeed.



4.4 Existing Services and Resources

The role of OCLC and its services must be taken into account as we develop the LOT. OCLC provides many services and resources, so there is a need to consider using those rather than developing a duplicative service within the LOT.

5. Analysis and Summary

Participants were open and interactive in this first focus group meeting, which was very productive in terms of identifying issues and requirements. While representing different constituencies, the participants were able to reach agreement on several needs, expectations, and issues relative to the Library of Texas.

Participants agreed that the LOT should provide integrated resource discovery using a single interface. The single LOT search and retrieval interface should provide a self-contained user experience yet allow for local library customization to address special needs. Users often prefer a simple, to-the-point interface and are frustrated when required to navigate through multiple layers in their discovery process. Likewise users who routinely use more advanced search criteria, such as data ranges or SIC codes, will be frustrated if these criteria are not readily available in the search interface.

Initially, the LOT search and retrieval interface should be simple with basic search options, such as keyword, author, title, and subject. When possible, the sophistication of the interface should be enhanced to accommodate more advanced users, including library professionals who prefer the advanced searching capabilities of vendor databases. Users also prefer resources to be organized for easier access, such as by topic area.

Participants identified a need for foreign language materials as well as for a multilingual search interface, in particular a Spanish language interface. Hispanics are a growing population in Texas and often occupy the lower portion of the economic scale. Their needs have not yet been adequately addressed.

Participants agreed that user authentication is a complex issue. It deals with both technology issues and policy issues. The LOT needs to develop a mechanism that provides easy access to qualified users without regard to changes in their geographical location within Texas. Participants pointed out strongly that the new mechanism also needs to take into consideration user privacy issues. Any LOT authentication method should take advantage of available delivery systems but not be solely limited to them.

All participants agreed that users expect ever faster and better document delivery. Delivery directly to users' desktops whenever possible is a user expectation and delivery to their wireless devices is not far in the future. They recommended highly that along with the search results, both availability and delivery information should be available for each resource. For example, if interlibrary loan is needed to acquire the resource, users should be able to view pertinent ILL policies and initiate the ILL request directly from the record if they are in conformance with the policy. It is important to note that the identification of potential constraints between libraries and their users for accessing and obtaining information points to a need for LOT policy statements, such as a Principles of Cooperation.

As appropriate, resources should be organized and maintained centrally not only to save labor but also to provide users with up-to-date information regarding the resources available to them. Participants indicated that redundancy of effort at the local level is common. They hope that centrally created and maintained resources and records will save labor resources.

A need emerged for supporting LOT services consisting of databases that provide information and enable robust services. These databases can be described as central repositories of information that can be used locally by libraries to enhance services that get the resources discovered through the LOT to users. In particular three candidate databases emerged:

1. Profiles of the content of databases: A central repository listing the contents of individual online databases, especially full-text and A&I databases



2. Profiles of libraries: A central repository of information about libraries including such as information about ILL policies.
3. Access/Authentication database: This one is less clear but needed nonetheless.

Z39.50 client and server products conforming to one of the relevant Z39.50 profiles (e.g., Bath, U.S. National, or Texas) can fulfill some of the participants' expectations and concerns, such as searching by language and format. Other needs and expectations involve issues that are more complex and will need to be addressed at a policy level. Participants were in agreement that a "do it once for all" approach is highly desirable for the LOT and in fact this approach might contain the germ of an incentive for many libraries to participate.