



**Focus Group 4: Public Libraries
Summary
Austin, Texas - March 7, 2002**

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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 have been 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 integrated search and retrieval interface
- User expectations of the ZLOT document delivery services.

2. Methodology

2.1 Description of the Participants

Participants were from public libraries or Regional Library Systems in Texas, primarily in the southeast area of the state. In all, 22 persons were invited and eleven agreed to participate. Six of the participants represented a range of small to large public libraries. These persons ranged from library directors and assistant directors to library services personnel and a reference librarian. Two coordinators, one assistant coordinator, and an automation specialist represented three regional library systems. One participant was a library technology consultant with the TSLAC.

As a group, this was an experienced and knowledgeable gathering of library professionals whose average time in their current positions was nine years. Their involvement with virtual libraries was concentrated in efforts that created union catalogs at the county, regional system, or state level. A few of the participants were involved in technology infrastructure for their library or in statewide library automation projects. Many of the participants were acquainted with one another professionally and worked together in various professional activities. All but two of the libraries that participants represented provided both remote and on-site access to TexShare databases. Both of the remaining two libraries provided on-site TexShare access and the patrons of one of these libraries could access the TexShare databases via the Internet from other locations.



2.2 Description of the Process

The meeting was held on March 7, 2002 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. in a conference room at the Austin History Center in Austin, 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. Participants signed consent forms for participating in the study. 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.

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 are included in this summary report.

3. Needs and Expectations

3.1 Virtual Libraries

In feedback forms completed anonymously at the end of the focus group meeting, participants identified three characteristics of virtual libraries. These characteristics are listed below along with participant comments that exemplify them.

Ease of Use

- Transparent access to a large number of resources
- Common interface

Diversity of Content

- Some resources will not be digital



Expansion of Local Library

- Ability to provide access to library users wherever they may be
- Gives appearance of a larger library
- Helps users extend their reach when searching for information

3.2 Library of Texas

Also in the 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: Single Interface, Document Delivery Service, and Open Access. Comments typifying these concepts are listed below.

Single Interface

- May help to bring order to the jumble of resources now available
- Hopefully a single "face" to all of the electronic resources TSL offers
- The potential to improve the experience of users

Document Delivery Service

- The difficult aspects of delivery. The possibilities of access.

Open Access

- LOT is about getting and delivering resources thru expansion to all Texans
- Has the potential to equalize the resources available to poorer library users
- Collaborative effort - broad in reach

Participants identified the two most important user needs that the LOT would address in their libraries on the feedback forms completed at the end of the meeting as:

1. Resource availability
2. Remote access

Resource availability included having databases that public library users would want to use, having access to resources beyond the local library, and expanding users' worlds. Remote access included faster access to a wider range of information resources than a local library could afford, connectivity of all libraries, simplifying access to catalogs and databases, and knowledge of where materials are located and of how to get them quickly.

Two other user needs participants mentioned were ease of use and ease of delivery of ILL materials. One participant cautioned that if the LOT were not easy to use, it would not be used. Speed of delivery and user-initiated ILL were mentioned by another participant as important user needs.

When asked in the focus group meeting to describe their concept of the Library of Texas, one participant thought of the Library of Texas as "an entry point to all the resources in Texas libraries". Another participant described the LOT as a "strange looking animal in the shadows" that might take shape as an interface to all the services of the State Library. Echoing these views, one participant suggested the LOT as an umbrella for a number of things being done by the State Library. However, this participant thought the difference between the Library of Texas and TexShare was not clear. In general, participants expected the LOT would be "a library without walls" inclusive of all Texans.

3.3 Resource Discovery Needs

There was general agreement that the LOT would be an expansion of the local resources for many libraries. It was pointed out that the budgets of small libraries do not allow the same level of access to resources as larger libraries' budgets. The Library of Texas would begin to address this inequity. Another participant stated the Library of Texas would give small libraries the same ability to serve their users as



the Dallas Public Library. However, one person suggested locally available items do meet users' needs in some small libraries, where reading, rather than research, are the primary user needs.

While there was some agreement on the vital importance of online full-text content, there will be constraints in access among public libraries due to bandwidth and local hardware and software capabilities. There was also recognition that rights and permissions for access to the content have to be addressed. One participant was concerned about copyright violations if a single patron prints multiple copies of an electronic item. Another participant identified the "preservation of digital materials" as an emerging issue with which libraries will have to contend.

One participant thought that since the LOT was intended to serve all Texans school libraries should be included. Even if they are not included, students do patronize their local libraries to complete assignments.

3.4 Expectations of the Integrated Search and Retrieval Interface

One participant perceived the Library of Texas more as a common interface or a "front end" to services and content than as a content provider. As such the LOT could provide access to all the services of the State Library and address the confusion that several participants reported users experience vis-à-vis the various TexShare databases. This common interface model can be seen as a "one-stop shopping" model for LOT services and resources that would allow training to be done once regardless of the resources accessible via the LOT. Some participants noted that the interface should be "bug-proof" and "easy to learn". They reported that the confusing and hard to learn interface of TexShare has made it unpopular among some public libraries and some users.

In general, participants expected a common search and retrieval interface for LOT resources. The interface should allow all Texans to move from library to library and have a similar interaction with the LOT. Participants noted that often times a problem lies in "how to get to the content" rather than in the content itself. Therefore, the interface should be service-oriented and able to assist users in the retrieval process. One participant noted that the common interface could become a mechanism to buffer LOT content changes. By offering a consistent "front end", the LOT can be a way of "hiding" changes that occur in the content accessible via the LOT, that is, the interface remains the same even if the content changes (e.g., a database goes away).

Participants expected the LOT interface to be "flexible" enough to allow for a "local presence". Some participants believed their constituents "invested in the local libraries" and would like to see a local library interface. A link to the common LOT interface could be provided from a library's locally developed web site. In contrast to this approach, the common LOT interface could be what local libraries present to their users and a section of the interface could be consistently reserved for a local presence. Neither option precludes the other.

Participants noted that most of their users use keyword searching. Participants suggested that the commercial sector is providing searching models that libraries need to use. Another person said the LOT should conform to the searching behaviors of users versus having users conform to the access interfaces generally provided by library automation systems. However, local libraries have a wide range of users, some of whom are quite sophisticated and prefer to use a particular interface. This implies a need for a mechanism to bypass the common interface to search resources.

On the opposite end of the user spectrum, some libraries need simple interfaces. For example, in considering why librarians are not using TexShare today, it appears that the complexity of the interface might be a critical factor. It is conceivable that user information needs that might be addressed by the TexShare databases are not being addressed due to the complexity of the TexShare database interfaces. One participant stated that addressing the needs of librarians currently not using TexShare would be a challenge. However, this participant also suggested "too often we are focused on understanding our users, and not understanding our nonusers."



Participants also expected some mechanisms in the interface either to help users select resources or to present topics that are associated with pre-selected resources. For example, there could be a “panic button” that would allow a high school student to indicate that he or she needs the information now. In this case only resources immediately available (e.g., online content) would be presented to the student. It was also noted that the same research topics are assigned year after year by schools in accord with standard curriculums and it would be useful to organize resources in accord with these topics. One participant suggested, “Flexibility is the key in selecting catalogs to search.” A library can set up defaults for which catalogs it offers to users but the user should be able to easily override the defaults to choose others.

One participant stated that the LOT search interface must be in Spanish as well as English to meet their patrons' needs. However, it was not necessary for the resources to be in Spanish. Another participant added that their library's patrons of Hispanic descent do not speak Spanish and would expect an English language interface. There was general agreement with one participant who suggested the range of populations served across Texas is quite varied and demographic data would indicate what languages are needed in what areas. It would be helpful to provide a “click of a button” language capability, as offered on commercial web sites, to include Spanish, Hindi, Samsung, and Vietnamese. Additionally, one participant felt strongly that the interface must be accessible to the visually handicapped.

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 a resource is located, if it is available for access, and what methods are available for obtaining it. It is desirable to “advertise where the results come from”. This not only brings a local library presence to the interaction but also helps avoid users placing “ILL requests for items already in their local libraries”. Controls are necessary in the ILL request process so that if the local library has the item, that copy is used rather than generating an ILL request for another library's resource.

One participant cautioned that “availability” has multiple meanings and these need to be clarified in the search results. Is the item on the shelf? Is it physically available? Another person suggested that “collection codes” of some sort could be assigned to resources and presented in the search results. Such codes would be consistent with lending policies and would visually indicate not only if the item was available but also if the item was available for lending to local library patrons only or to others via ILL.

Participants also indicated that users expect fast and direct document delivery and wish to place both requests to hold a resource and requests for interlibrary loans directly from the retrieved record result. Advantages of patron-initiated ILL include improved accuracy and timesavings. One important issue in regard to patron-initiated ILL is that lending libraries expect to deal with patrons through mediator library rather than interacting directly with patrons. It is important that a patron be “attached” to a particular library (i.e., be authenticated and accountable). One participant thought it would be nice to have real-time queries against a library's local patron database whenever a patron initiated an ILL request. The goal would be to immediately abort unauthorized ILL requests.

Participants generally agreed that users have an expectation of immediacy in the delivery of materials. As an indication of the importance of immediacy, one participant remarked “75% of our Internet users will walk out of the library if the T1 line doesn't work”. However, one person noted permissions and “rights to use” procedures impede the immediacy of delivery.

4. Issues

4.1 Politics and Economics

One participant expressed the view that the LOT “will be wonderful for all Texas libraries but difficult to sell to all”. Concerns regarding the implications and costs for local libraries were voiced and there was a general question regarding the commitment to this project for the long haul. One participant wanted to know if the LOT was a “change our life” sort of project and another cautioned “once offered, the public will want it available”. Sustainability of the project is a major concern at the local library level.



One participant thought LOT emphasis should be placed on information availability to a broad range of Texans. However, one of the major challenges of the LOT is to address the differential needs of communities throughout Texas. This variance manifests itself in the languages spoken, the librarian competencies, and the funds available. Additionally, the inequality of bandwidth access at the local library level is a physical barrier inherent to the electronic delivery of items to all Texans.

4.2 Technology and Technical Support

One participant described the most problematic issue with the LOT as "making it simple for the user that normally doesn't use libraries or technology". Another participant suggested that some librarians are "drowning in all this technology"; public libraries have come a long way in a very short time. Another participant said that a lack of familiarity with technology at the local librarian level is a challenge for the LOT, including librarians with MLS degrees. If librarians are not sufficiently trained and do not find the LOT easy to use, they will be unable to help users take full advantage of it.

One participant thought that adherence to standards and using open source products were important requirements for the LOT. This person also thought that Texas libraries could use "our clout to make vendors provide products that serve us and our requirements". Another person stated that the LOT "needs to work - free of bugs".

Participants also raised a concern that if commercial databases are to be purchased for the LOT, then technical support from the vendors may stop at the state level instead of reaching the local library level. Vendor agreements need to specify "vendors will have to respond to individual library needs".

Participants were also concerned with where support will come from when things are not working. Will there be a centralized support organization? Communication between local libraries and the State Library needs to be established for technical support.

4.3 Marketing

Participants identified marketing as a key success factor for the Library of Texas. Targets for marketing include the public, educators, and librarians. Two marketing activities were specifically identified: advertising and incentives. The advertising campaign will need to be aggressive and will have to go beyond "just a poster" in the library. 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. How do we get "buy in" from small, medium libraries with non-MLS librarians?

4.4 Funding

One key measure of a library's effectiveness is the number of patrons utilizing their services. Statistics regarding the use of the LOT will become very important when the local library has to pay for LOT content and services.

Additionally, the funding required to participate in the LOT, as well as sustainable funding for the LOT, are concerns for local libraries. They want to know "what they're buying into", for example, will additional printers and paper be needed? Funding issues will need to be addressed in order for LOT to succeed.

5. Analysis and Summary

Participants were open and interactive in this focus group meeting, which included stakeholders representing public libraries. The meeting was productive and participants reached agreement on several needs, expectations, and issues relative to the Library of Texas. In general, participants expected the LOT would be "a library without walls" inclusive of all Texans. Participants viewed the LOT as a collaborative effort with the potential to equalize the resources available to poorer library users. Resource availability includes having databases that public library users would want to use and having access to



resources beyond the local library. Remote access includes faster access to a wider range of information resources than a library could afford, connectivity of all libraries, simplifying access to catalogs and databases, and knowledge of where materials are located and of how to get them quickly. While there was some agreement to the vital importance of online full-text content, it was acknowledged that access constraints exist among public libraries due to (a) bandwidth availability, (b) "right to use" limitations of materials, and (c) local needs for research tools.

Participants agreed that the LOT should provide resource discovery using a single common interface. One participant perceived the Library of Texas as a "front end" to services and content. As such the LOT could provide access to all the services of the State Library and address the confusion and difficulty that several participants reported users experience vis-à-vis the TexShare databases.

While the LOT would provide a common interface, patron's local libraries would "have a presence" within the interface. If a library chose not to implement the LOT interface as its primary interface at the local level, then a common link to the LOT could be present within the local interface. In this manner users would have similar access to and interaction with the LOT at all access points across the state. One major advantage in this approach is that users need to learn only a single interface. Additionally, it would be possible to logically separate users' experience with the interface from the content of databases and catalogs. This holds out the possibility that content could come and go although the interface remained constant.

For public libraries a simple interface is a must. Participants expect that the LOT search and retrieval interface will use basic keyword search options similar to those available on the Internet. However, more sophisticated users will expect to bypass the common LOT interface and directly search their preferred databases. Participants also expected some mechanisms in the interface either to help users select resources or to present topics that have pre-selected resources associated with them. There was general agreement that it would be helpful to provide a "click of a button" language capability that includes Spanish, Hindi, Samsung, and Vietnamese. In certain areas of Texas, it is a requirement that the interface be in both Spanish and English. However, the resources do not need to be bilingual. Additionally, one participant felt strongly that the interface must be accessible to the visually handicapped.

All participants agreed that users expect ever faster and better document delivery. They recommended highly that, along with the search results, availability information be available for each resource. One suggestion was to create "collection codes" for resources that corresponded to borrowing policies and to make these codes visible in the search results. If interlibrary loan is needed to acquire a resource, users should be able to initiate the ILL request directly from a record in the search results. This offers benefits in accuracy and timesaving. However, all user-initiated requests must be mediated for purposes of authentication and accountability. Diagram 1 presents a picture of some benefits of user-initiated ILL.

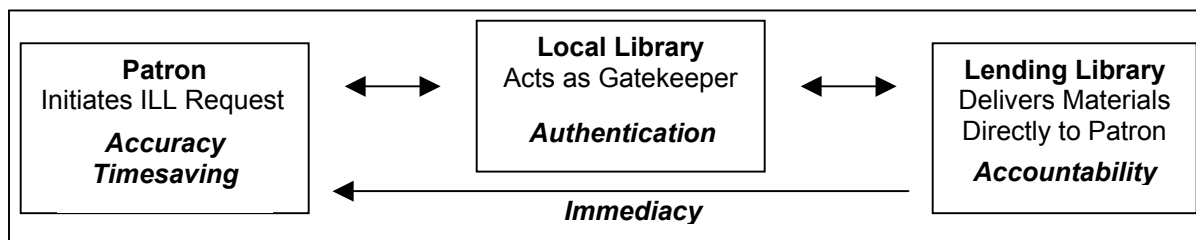


Diagram 1. Benefits of User-Initiated ILL

Concerns regarding the implications and costs for local libraries were voiced and there was a general question regarding the commitment to this project for the long haul. One participant wanted to know if the LOT was a "change our life" sort of project and another cautioned "once offered, the public will want it available". Sustainability of the project at the state library level is a major concern at the local library level. Funding for the LOT will be another major challenge to public libraries. Many of them have limited



budgets and funding sources. They need to be informed of both the initial investment and the operational costs in order to budget for them. Sustainable funding at the local level is a critical issue.

Training and technical support are important issues for public libraries. A lack of familiarity with technology at the local librarian level is a challenge for the LOT. If librarians are not sufficiently trained and do not find the LOT easy to use, they will be unable to help users take full advantage of it. Many public librarians are challenged by information technology and seem to be "drowning" in all the technology introduced in recent years. This is particularly true in small public libraries. Training will be a high priority for the success of the LOT. Additionally, vendor agreements need to specify that vendors will respond to local library's requests for technical support or that mechanisms are in place within the LOT (e.g., at the State Library) that provide helpdesk support.

In order to make the LOT a success, marketing is crucial. The marketing campaign will need to be aggressive and will have to go beyond library posters in order to raise public awareness of the LOT. Marketing also needs to be extended to librarians and educators. Likewise libraries and librarians will need incentives to participate. It may be possible for LOT services to enable librarians to reach new markets. By targeting their library services and the new LOT services at either current or new patrons, libraries can help define their strategic markets. Diagram 2 is a matrix depicting the intersection of patrons and services in the market planning process.

	Current Services	LOT Services
Current Patrons		
New Patrons		

Diagram 2. Target Marketing Matrix

In expressing their views about virtual libraries in general, participants provided some practical guidance in regard to building the LOT. They stated that best practices from the private sector as well as standards should be used. Additionally, they indicated that vendors should be involved and that care should be taken to not use too much "jargon" when discussing the LOT. Rather, emphasis should be placed on accessible resources for all Texans.