

Washington State Library SDL Project Report 2015

Findings and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

The Statewide Database Licensing (SDL) Project was established as a project of the Library Development Program of the Washington State Library over 15 years ago to facilitate acquisition of databases for libraries throughout the state of Washington. It was begun as a pilot project with 50% of the cost subsidized by Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (a federal agency) as part of the Museum and Library Services Act. This subsidy was expected to be phased out over time.

Because of the complex needs of the various libraries, the SDL Project decided early on to select generalized aggregated periodical database products and a collection of Washington newspapers that would be useful to a wide variety of library types and age groups. The idea was to maximize the benefits of the SDL Project while providing equitable access to libraries throughout the state, all at a reasonable cost.

Funding for Library Development Program projects is limited, and reductions in funding are a current and expected reality. Periodic review of the various projects is necessary to determine where funding should be continued, reduced, or eliminated. The Washington State Library therefore determined that it was important to assess SDL's utility by gathering multiple perspectives from library staff and library users. WSL contracted with MC² consulting to analyze usage data and conduct a survey and interviews to follow up the most recent previous survey, conducted in 2010.

Library staff from across the state representing the diversity of libraries participating in the SDL were surveyed. Those survey participants who indicated an interest in being interviewed were recruited via email to answer follow-up interview questions by phone. Library users were also recruited to participate in a separate survey to gauge their needs and levels of satisfaction with service offerings.

Results

With regard to SDL usage, the data shows an overall trend in decreased usage; however, there are some outliers and there are also differences in how much the usage decreased (or in some cases increased) depending on library type.

The eLibrary usage report shows the steadiest decline overall. From 2013 to 2014, Academic sessions decreased from 49,600 to 29,236; K-12 sessions decreased from 250,262 to 232,916; and Public & Special library sessions decreased from 42,142 to 29,170. Full-text access has also decreased, with "Any FT Format" access decreasing from 2013-2014. Academic libraries saw a decrease of 22.7% from 79,194 to 61,221 full-text documents accessed; K-12 libraries saw a decrease of 38.7%

from 851,060 to 521,612 full-text documents accessed; and Public & Special libraries saw a decrease of 17.1% from 59,352 to 49,219 full-text documents accessed.

The main ProQuest databases saw smaller decreases than eLibrary, overall, and even saw a large increase for one library type. Tribal libraries saw a very large increase in usage between 2013 and 2014. Session totals show an increase from 959 in 2013 to 6,153 in 2014, and full-text document access increased by 192% from 259 in 2013 to 758 in 2014.

In response to the survey, 407 library staff, representing all ten regions of the state and a variety of library types, participated. Based on this survey and consistent with usage statistics, overall SDL usage rates seem to be going down gradually since the 2010 survey, with some exceptions. A lower percentage of library staff reported using the ProQuest package of databases daily or weekly: down from 35.9% to 23.3% for daily and down from 35.2% to 31.1% for weekly. The percentage using the package less than monthly more than doubled from 13.8% to 29.4%. Significantly, over 28% of respondents said they did not know whether their library participated in SDL; there is a communication gap.

However, the responses regarding whether SDL should continue as-is did not change significantly from 2010. Over 85% of respondents thought SDL should continue with what it is doing, similar to the 89.3% that selected this option in 2010. Support for the status quo remains strong.

When given choices about how to deliver the SDL package, about 20% ranked SDL offering the same product to every library regardless of type as their top choice, nearly double the 10.2% choosing that option in 2010. In 2010, 21.2% said SDL should offer different products based on the type of library; in 2015, about 28% of respondents ranked that option as their top choice. The percentage saying SDL should offer the opportunity to pick and choose (and pay for) only the specific products they want was 64.4% in 2010; however, in 2015 only approximately 52% of respondents ranked that option as their top choice.

Clearly money is somewhat of a concern. 58.1% of respondents said they would choose less content for the same amount of money rather than the same content for more money. But in answering a follow-up question, an overwhelming percentage said they would prefer the same or similar content for the same amount of money (83.9%) rather than less content for less money (16.1%). Again, there is a strong preference for the status quo.

1016 library users also participated in a survey, many of them teachers. While usage rates of on-line library resources are declining somewhat since the 2010 survey, about 11% of teachers and non-teachers alike use on-line resources daily. In fact, while about 33% of non-teachers use the on-

line library tools for research, more than 83% of teachers say they have their students use the library on-line to do research and find articles.

Recommendations

Based on the usage and survey data and interview responses, we have several recommendations for the SDL project.

First and foremost, keep the dialogue open with libraries. Your most vocal supporters may keep you from hearing how many people out there do not know what SDL is or how to get the most out of it.

Regularly provide libraries with information about SDL. You can send out how-to emails, product or feature spotlights, links to training materials, and anything else library staff may need to be reminded about.

Keep in close contact with library decision-makers if any funding changes seem imminent. There were a high percentage of “I don’t know” responses from participants regarding finances and whether or not libraries would be able to continue to participate if the subsidy was reduced or eliminated. If SDL funding is truly in jeopardy at any point, we recommend you follow-up with library decision-makers to keep them informed and in the conversation as those decisions are made.

Continue providing Statewide Database Licensing. Most library staff appreciate SDL and see value in its continued existence. Most libraries would find it difficult, if not impossible, to provide these database and newspaper products to their customers without the consortia-style buying power of the SDL.

Continue the LSTA subsidy for SDL, at least for the time being, and provide information on other funding sources if SDL will transition to being unsubsidized. If SDL funding from LSTA is indeed at risk, libraries may benefit from a compilation of resources they can investigate in order to get funding for SDL so they can remain participants.

Provide training and other resources to help libraries get the most out of SDL. Libraries requested training in several areas to help them get the most out of SDL, from training on how to pull statistics for each of the products to training on how to use specific products in the package. We recommend putting out a short survey to find out which trainings are most needed, which formats are preferred, and where the biggest need is.

Put out an RFI (request for information) on pricing and options for a “cafeteria style” package to be compared alongside the regular pricing of the “one size fits all” package. That way

you have actual information on costs and parameters that can be shared with libraries next time you do a survey to ask them about their preference.

Repeat this (or a similar) Staff Survey every 2-3 years. It would especially be of benefit to do the staff survey more frequently, even if it is just a matter of sending out the same survey every other year to get a quick snapshot of where things sit and how they compare to prior survey years.

Finally, as many of the library staff said in the surveys and interviews: **keep up the good work.**