

2019 ALA RUSA STARS International Interlibrary Loan Survey

Executive Summary

Introduction

A key part of the RUSA STARS International ILL committee's charge is to evaluate trends in international interlibrary loan and resource sharing, and to this end, it has conducted four surveys since 2007 inquiring about libraries' international borrowing and lending practices. The 2019 survey is the third iteration to target a global audience and the first one to offer multiple translations of the survey instrument in the hope of increasing the diversity of respondents. The survey was widely distributed to libraries worldwide in coordination with IFLA's Document Delivery & Resource Sharing Section, and translations in six of the seven official IFLA languages (Arabic, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish) were provided.

Survey Creation & Distribution

The 2019 survey builds upon the 2015 and 2011 instruments, reusing most of the questions, which allows for longitudinal analysis of quantitative data over the past decade. Notable changes include rephrasing questions to improve translations, reducing Anglophone-centric response options, and eliminating questions that had not yielded actionable data in prior iterations. Additionally, committee members added three new open response questions that delve deeper into how the global library community can improve this service for future users.

The process of revising, translating, and preparing for distribution occupied the committee for 13 months (For details on timeline and tasks, please refer to the committee's meeting minutes on ALA Connect). The survey was open from March 5 to April 16, 2019. During this time period, committee members shared the survey with 307 resource sharing listservs, networks, and professional contacts across 106 countries; members of IFLA's Document Delivery & Resource Sharing Section and the IFLA Regional Office managers also shared the survey with their professional networks and distribution channels. For the first time the committee actively employed social media as part of its distribution strategy, resulting in 51 referrals from Facebook and 13 referrals from Twitter.

Results

317 of 394 surveys were completed, representing 65 countries across six continents. For the first time, the 2019 survey was translated into other languages, and each of the five translations was used at least twice. The committee believes that offering the translations increased the diversity of respondents. Most notably, eight countries that had not been featured in one or both of the 2011 and 2015 surveys answered the survey using one of the translations: Argentina (Spanish), Belarus (Russian), Chile (Spanish), Costa Rica (Spanish), Côte d'Ivoire (French), Russia (Russian), Saudi Arabia (Arabic), and Senegal (French).

Questions repeated from the 2011 and 2015 surveys made it possible to examine changes over time. The most substantial longitudinal changes from 2011 to 2019 were in the areas of requesting, shipping, and payment methods. The use of email and resource sharing networks remained the most common request methods, at 80% and 52% respectively, while the use of fax dropped sharply from 33% in 2011 to 8% in 2019. The use of courier services such as FedEx or UPS increased from 15% in 2011 to 23% in 2019. Most significantly, the acceptance of IFLA vouchers as payment grew from 50% of respondents in 2011 to 73% in 2019.

Three new questions were added to the 2019 survey. They are listed here, along with analysis of the responses received to each.

Why do you participate in international interlibrary loan?

There were 214 responses to this question. While expressed in different ways and languages, some common themes emerged. One was the thrill of borrowing from or lending to a far flung library. Another was the idea that international ILL widens the pool of resources available to researchers and students. Related to this, many respondents expressed the sentiment that lending to international libraries was the right thing to do and that it benefited and enriched all of us.

What would make international interlibrary loan easier for your library?

There were 220 responses to this question. At the top of the list was easier payment options, such as electronic IFLA vouchers. Cheaper shipping methods was also mentioned numerous times, as was the need for a comprehensive international catalog.

Has your interlibrary loan office undertaken efforts to improve or expand international borrowing/lending in the past five years?

Several of the 75 responses to this question mentioned that they had joined or were planning to join an ILL network such as OCLC, NILDE (Italy), or Subito (Germany). Another common effort to improve international ILL was accepting IFLA vouchers. As mentioned earlier, the percentage of survey respondents that accept this payment method has increased 23 percentage points since 2011.

Dissemination of Results

Committee chair Hilary Thompson presented the survey results at the 16th IFLA Interlending & Document Supply Conference in Prague, Czech Republic, October 9-11, 2019 as part of the session “Perspectives: Users, Service Evaluation.” The paper, “[International Interlibrary Loan in a Changing Environment: Results from the 2019 RUSA STARS International ILL survey](#),” was published in the [open access conference proceedings](#), and a recording of the presentation can be viewed on [YouTube](#). A revised version of this paper co-authored by Hilary Thompson, Kurt Munson, and James Harper was submitted to the journal *Information Discovery & Delivery* in March 2020. Committee members are currently considering other avenues for disseminating the

survey results, including facilitating a discussion on this topic as part of a virtual ILL Discussion Group Forum and partnering with the International Relations Round Table to propose a joint program for the 2021 ALA Annual Conference.

Recommendations for Future Surveys

Should the RUSA STARS International ILL Committee continue conducting this survey in the future, we offer the following recommendations:

- Continue offering a multi-lingual instrument, and expand translations to include Chinese.
- Reuse 2019 questions wherever possible to support longitudinal data analysis and to minimize efforts involved with reviewing translations.
- Review 2019 questions critically with an eye towards shortening the survey. Consider omitting any questions whose answers were not used in dissemination of results.
- Undertake a comprehensive review and update of the existing survey distribution list, especially for Africa and Latin America. Expand the distribution list to include more Arabic-language, Russian language, and national libraries.
- Coordinate closely with IFLA's Document Delivery & Resource Sharing Section on survey distribution.

Additionally, the committee may want to consider the following edits to the instrument, which emerged from the 2019 data and questions posed to the chair during the data collection period:

- Modifications to existing questions:
 - Add Carribean to "Central or South America" option for continent question
 - Add "research library" option to library type question
- Question to add:
 - What payment methods do you use to pay an international lender? (Borrowing)
 - Add follow up open response question that displays to respondents who report that copyright or licensing impedes international ILL (Lending)

Conclusion

Based on the 2019 survey results, we recommend that future iterations of the RUSA STARS International ILL Committee undertake the following:

- Educate the RUSA STARS community on trends and best practices related to international ILL.
- Follow up with IFLA's Document Delivery & Resource Sharing Section about recommendations to improve international ILL deriving from the survey (e.g., a widely accepted "library books–no commercial value" sticker to expedite customs clearance and electronic IFLA vouchers to facilitate payment)
- Continue studying international ILL, through another iteration of this survey or by other means. In particular, the value of international ILL to users merits further exploration.

Respectfully submitted by:
STARS International Interlibrary Loan Committee
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