



Communication, Collaboration and Cooperation: An Evaluation of Nova Scotia's Borrow Anywhere, Return Anywhere (BARA) Multi-type Library Initiative

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Partnerships and collaborations among libraries are proven to enhance collective resources. The collaboration of multi-type libraries offers a unique opportunity to explore the potential of different libraries working together to provide the best possible service to their community members. This article provides a detailed report of a multi-type library initiative composed of all public, university and community college libraries in Nova Scotia, Canada. The Borrow Anywhere, Return Anywhere (BARA) pilot program provided residents of Nova Scotia, 18 years of age or older, the opportunity to obtain a library card from any participating library and to borrow and return materials to any participating library, free of charge. The authors detail the progression of this initiative from its inception to the implementation of a provincial pilot program, and the results of three formal surveys.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology is redefining the library landscape. As a result, libraries are re-evaluating their present systems and collections in an effort to seek out opportunities to provide their patrons with the best possible access to their collective resources.¹⁻³ In a climate dominated by increasing patron need and decreasing library budgets, acquiring new materials and developing new services is not always viable; however, working in partnership with other libraries to enhance library services is a proven cost-effective approach to meeting the needs of library patrons. The fastest-growing trend now is for academic libraries (community college and university) or academic and public libraries to come together in a variety of ways.⁴ Nova Scotia libraries, in an effort to address patron needs, initiated a unique provincial partnership with its academic, public and college libraries called Borrow Anywhere, Return Anywhere (BARA). This was the first formal multi-type library program implemented in Nova Scotia, and the first time many library staff from various institutions had the opportunity to work together collaboratively.

Implemented in September 2009, the BARA pilot program invited residents of Nova Scotia, 18 years of age or over, to obtain a library card from any participating library, and to borrow and return materials to any participating library, free of charge. BARA relies on in-kind contributions of staff time and program costs from member-libraries, with the Nova Scotia Provincial Library (NSPL) providing coordination. Except for some financial assistance from NSPL to help launch the pilot, this program received no additional funding.

Using a simple web tool to track returned materials, BARA relies on the communication, collaboration and cooperation among the staff of Nova Scotia libraries for its success. The willingness of these individuals to work with each other has ensured no loss of returned materials and positive patron feedback about the program.

BACKGROUND

In 2009, Nova Scotia, with a population just short of one million residents, had 106 university, college and public library branches. These libraries have always functioned within different organizations; however, there has been an enduring willingness to collaborate in providing library services. Several pre-existing reciprocal borrowing programs have been in place in Nova Scotia for many years. For example, provincially, academic libraries in the Novanet consortium share an integrated library system and offer free reciprocal borrowing and delivery to participating libraries. Regionally and nationally, university libraries share materials through the Atlantic Scholarly Information Network (ASIN) and the Canadian University Reciprocal

Borrowing Agreement (CURBA). The nine public library systems, which collaborate through the Council of Regional Librarians, also offer free interlibrary lending services to their patrons. Moreover, an informal but effective interlibrary loan system is in place among all academic and public libraries, in which materials may be requested for delivery to a patron's home library at little or no cost.

Building upon strong working relationships, college, public and university libraries in the province joined together in 2007 to form Nova Scotia Library (now referred to as Libraries Nova Scotia), "with the goal of giving Nova Scotians barrier-free access to member library resources and services regardless of where they live, work or study".⁵ One of the shared services which this group identified for exploration was *One Card*, a Nova Scotia library card for use at any member library. Subsequently, a committee of representatives from each library type was established to determine the feasibility of a one-card program. In February 2008, this *One Card* Planning Committee convened and began a jurisdictional scan of similar projects in Canada and the US, as well as a review of options available within the technological structures of Nova Scotia libraries. In October 2008, a pre-conference session was held at the annual Nova Scotia Library Association conference, to provide attendees with an opportunity to discuss *One Card* and other multi-type library initiatives. Based on input from this meeting, along with the research they had conducted, the Planning Committee filed a report with the Nova Scotia Library Steering Committee, recommending that libraries in Nova Scotia develop a formal reciprocal borrowing program.

In March 2009, a Technical Implementation Committee was established with representation from each library type, with the mandate to develop a system for a provincial reciprocal borrowing pilot. However, Nova Scotia libraries use six distinct integrated library systems. Without incurring huge costs, there was no technical solution available which would allow one library card to be shared among all systems. Consequently, this committee did not recommend a one-card product, but instead recommended that the service of borrowing anywhere and returning anywhere be explored. In April 2009, the Libraries Nova Scotia Steering Committee approved a "borrow anywhere, return anywhere" model, to be launched for September 2009 as a one-year pilot project.

In preparation for the unveiling of the BARA pilot, an FAQ was drafted in April 2009 and presented by the Libraries Nova Scotia co-chairs at meetings of the Novanet Board and the Council of Regional Librarians. Each consortium gave its approval for the pilot program, and all participating libraries signed a Memorandum of Agreement. In May 2009, NSPL appointed its Manager of Systems & Collections Access, Denise Parrott, as project manager and a Procedures Development Committee was established to oversee the development, implementation and review of the pilot.

Over the summer, the Procedures Development Committee held two focus groups composed of staff from all library type. Through feedback from these focus groups, procedures for the pilot were developed. Soon afterwards, a slogan and logo were designed by Halifax Public Libraries staff for promotional needs; a website was created by NSPL staff to provide easy access to information and promotional materials for staff in participating libraries, and a web tool was developed by staff from Cape Breton University and the Nova Scotia Community College libraries to track returned materials. Each participating library identified one Key Contact, and the project manager disseminated all relevant information through these contacts.

On September 8, 2009, the BARA pilot was introduced to staff in participating libraries. Three weeks later, on September 28, the program was officially launched to the public. In recognition of this event, an official ceremony was held on October 21, 2009 at the Atlantic School of Theology Library. Nova Scotia's Minister of Education, Marilyn More, in her address to the media, stated, "This innovative program gives each library user a whole province full of choices. In other words, it's your

library, everywhere you are. And with no fees, it makes life more affordable for families too".⁶

LEADERSHIP, ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDING

There was no overarching authority for this pilot; the Provincial Librarian and the Novanet Chair assumed the roles of co-chairs for Libraries Nova Scotia, and the BARA project manager reported to these co-chairs on a regular basis. They, in turn, communicated with directors in their respective sectors: the Novanet Chair to academic library directors, and the Provincial Librarian to public library directors through the Council of Regional Librarians. The Provincial Librarian ensured that the Minister of Education (of which NSPL was then a division) was briefed.

The project manager was allocated time to manage the implementation and monitoring of the pilot program. She worked closely with the Procedures Development Committee, which included a representative from each library type, and these committee members communicated with staff in their respective jurisdictions.

The project manager communicated with Key Contacts at each phase of the pilot implementation and initially managed their concerns and questions. The project manager received and collated quarterly pilot report data from each Key Contact and distributed quarterly reports to the Libraries Nova Scotia co-chairs, the Procedures Development Committee and the Key Contacts. As the pilot progressed, Key Contacts began to contact each other directly to resolve issues that arose from the return of materials and to ensure that procedures were followed consistently, subsequently becoming less dependent on the project manager.

Expenses incurred during this pilot were primarily absorbed by NSPL, which assumed coordination of the pilot, provided leadership, printed promotional materials and covered meeting expenses as required. The cost of shipping materials to owning libraries was absorbed by participating libraries. In total, costs associated with this initiative were less than \$40,000.00.

HOW DOES BARA WORK?

Residents of Nova Scotia 18 years of age or older, including community college and university students, are eligible to register for a free library membership at any participating public, or academic library in the province. To accommodate this, Novanet libraries dropped their annual \$35.00 fee for Off Campus Borrower cards and public libraries, with visitor card fees, eliminated these fees for Nova Scotia residents. Each participating library maintains its own age and borrower-type registration requirements, and all privileges and restrictions for each participating library apply to the borrower. Participating libraries issue their own library card, but university and community college libraries accept library cards from any Nova Scotia public, or academic library, in lieu of issuing a separate card.

Once registered, the patron may use their library card to borrow materials according to the lending library's existing policies. The patron is responsible for the materials borrowed from each library, and they must adhere to individual libraries' policies. Borrowing restrictions, fines or other charges from one library system do not affect registration or borrowing privileges in other library systems. If a patron uses a single library card to register in multiple library systems, the patron must report loss or theft of the card to all library systems in which the patron is registered.

Materials borrowed from a participating library may be returned to any other participating library; however, local procedures may require that specific types of materials be returned directly to the lending library, including interlibrary loan and reserve items.

The receiving library attaches a BARA Return Slip to each item and notifies the owning library of the return using the Notification of Returned Items Web Reporting Tool. When this notification is received, the owning library removes the item from the patron's record. The

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