Boston Library Consortium to implement controlled digital lending for interlibrary loan

New report released as resource for other libraries and consortia

September 14, 2021—The Boston Library Consortium (BLC) will implement controlled digital lending as a mechanism for interlibrary loan among its interested member libraries, under a new plan approved by its Board of Directors at their August 2021 meeting. In this resource sharing model, items that traditionally would be loaned physically could instead be digitized and lent digitally under controlled conditions.

The BLC has released a new public report, “Consortial CDL: Implementing Controlled Digital Lending as a Mechanism for Interlibrary Loan”, so that other libraries and consortia can benefit from the BLC’s work.

“The Boston Library Consortium was founded on a shared commitment to make resources more readily available,” said Dorothy Meaney, President of the BLC Board and Director of Tisch Library at Tufts University. “Consortial CDL powerfully expands and reimagines resource sharing across the consortium.”

Controlled digital lending (CDL) enables libraries to lend legally acquired materials in a digital format under conditions that emulate physical lending. With CDL, libraries limit the total number of copies circulating in any format to the number of physical copies they own, maintain regular lending period limits, and utilize digital rights management to prevent copying and redistribution. Under the new plan outlined by the BLC’s CDL Working Group, the BLC will work to implement CDL as a mechanism for its consortial interlibrary loan (ILL) activities.

“By transforming how patrons access the BLC's physical collections, consortial CDL is a value multiplier for the BLC, amplifying the benefits of engaging in CDL institutionally,” said Charlie Barlow, Executive Director of the BLC. “Our vision for consortial CDL is for any BLC member's patrons, anywhere in the world, to have convenient access to BLC library collections in the format of their choice.”

The BLC’s exploration of CDL began in September 2020, when its Board of Directors approved the creation of the CDL Working Group to assess the potential for a consortial implementation of CDL. The group, consisting of 14 representatives from 11 member libraries and the BLC executive director, researched the national and global CDL landscape,
engaged extensively with stakeholders from across the BLC, and consulted with a range of external organizations working in the CDL space.

“The BLC contains a range of institutions and technology infrastructures. Because of this diversity, consortial CDL models and tools pioneered by the BLC can effectively scale across libraries of all types,” said Nathan Mealey, Co-Chair of the Working Group and Associate University Librarian for Discovery and Access at Wesleyan University.

“In particular, the BLC’s emphasis on interoperability can lead to the development of solutions that meet the needs of nearly all consortia, whether using shared systems or not,” adds Co-Chair Michael Rodriguez, Collections Strategist at UConn Library.

Governed by a new CDL Steering Committee, the consortial CDL for ILL implementation is underway with the goal of having a system available for BLC members by summer 2022.

For the latest updates, visit blc.org/cdl

About the Boston Library Consortium
Founded in 1970, the Boston Library Consortium (BLC) is an academic library consortium serving public and private universities, liberal arts colleges, state and special research libraries in the northeastern United States. The BLC members collaborate to deliver innovative and cost-effective sharing of print and digital content, professional development initiatives, and projects across a wide range of library practice areas. For more information, visit blc.org

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