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FEDERAL LIBRARIES ON THE INTERNET:
The Role of FEDLINK
By Steven P. Kerchoff

Since 1991, the Federal Library and Information Network (FEDLINK) has provided information, technical support, and training to federal libraries and information centers accessing the Internet. FEDLINK, the network component of the Federal Library and Information Center Committee (FLICC), provides library and information science educational opportunities for federal information professionals and technical staff. FEDLINK personnel also offer guidance in administering, organizing, accessing, and automating library information resources.

In the summer of 1991, FEDLINK established an Internet Planning Group (IPG) to define the role FEDLINK should play in helping federal libraries learn more about Internet, to determine the best way for FEDLINK to achieve access, and to track new Internet developments.

Initially the group explored the possibility of providing federal libraries with Internet access via a FEDLINK node. A survey of FEDLINK members indicated, however, that many libraries were already gaining access through their agencies' connections. Furthermore, the IPG determined that it would not be cost effective for FEDLINK to serve as an Internet host, in part due to the broad geographic distribution of the network's membership. The IPG focused its efforts instead on the provision of information about Internet through publications and programs, and on the development of an Internet training program. Members of the planning group published a series of three introductory articles on Internet in FEDLINK Technical Notes (See attached bibliography). FEDLINK's 1992 Fall Membership meeting focused on Internet, with IPG members describing the challenges and potential benefits for federal librarians using Internet.

In January of 1993, the IPG collaborated with the FLICC Education Working Group to sponsor "How Internet Works for Federal Libraries." Speakers presented a non-technical introduction to the Internet and its role in libraries, and then members of the IPG provided Internet demonstrations. FEDLINK Technical Notes later published a summary of this program (see Bibliography). Early in the spring of 1993, FEDLINK initiated its formal Internet training program with a half-day
"Internet Overview." The overview included a review of the Internet's development, and description and demonstration of basic Internet functions: electronic mail, listservs, telnet, and ftp.

The success of this endeavor led FEDLINK network staff to begin team teaching a two-day "Internet Workshop" a few months later. The workshop, which remains popular nearly two years later, allows extensive hands-on experience with telnetting to various types of hosts, sending E-mail and subscribing to lists, transfer of text and graphics files, navigation of gophers, and use of such tools as Archie, veronica, Jughead, and Mosaic. The course also includes discussion of Net culture, netiquette, and potential applications of Internet in reference work.

Participants in this workshop have requested additional training on specific topics, and FEDLINK staff anticipate adding several new training courses in calendar 1995. Proposed topics include "Getting More Out of Email" (advanced features of Bitnet and Internet mailing lists), "Internet Tools: Gophers, veronica and More" (accessing and navigating gopher servers, searching using veronica and Jughead, client tools such as Mosaic and Cello), "File Transfer (FTP) Tips and Tools," and "Government Information on the Internet."

FEDLINK has also facilitated cooperation among Internet trainers in various agencies with the establishment of a Federal Internet Trainers Group. At its initial meetings in February and March 1994, the group discussed the environment for training within federal agencies, technical issues of training, and the application of Internet services within federal agencies. The group's agenda for an "ideal" Internet training class can be retrieved via ftp (see Bibliography).

FEDLINK has made extensive use of Internet email, listservs, and file transfer to disseminate information of interest to federal librarians. When the U.S. Office of Personnel Management issued draft standards for the federal librarian, library technician and technical information specialist series, FEDLINK staff posted the draft standards on LC's ftp server, and used several library-related lists to announce their availability for discussion and comment. The standards, now issued in final form, were also posted on the LC server (see Bibliography). A popular FEDLINK publication, The Catalog of Microcomputer-Based Library Software (CMBLS) has also been posted on this server.

When Vice President Gore's National Performance Review issued its report (From Red Tape to Results: Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less) via Internet as well as in print, a FEDLINK staff member drafted instructions on how to retrieve the report from several sites and posted this information on several listservs. The information was also published later in FEDLINK Technical Notes (see Bibliography). Several federal libraries retrieved the report and made it available to agency personnel within hours of its release.

FEDLINK has also established its own listserv, FEDLIB-L, to provide information about FLICC/FEDLINK programs and services to members and other interested parties. The list also
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FEDLINK has also assisted those federal libraries who choose to access the Internet via commercial providers. In many federal agencies, computer security is a primary concern. To avoid incurring any of the risks involved with a direct Internet connection, these agencies have chosen to access the Internet via dial access. Using such sources as the "PDial" list, FEDLINK has provided information about commercial dial access providers and has consulted on how to compare costs and services.

In its role as an OCLC-affiliated regional network, FEDLINK has provided technical support for libraries accessing OCLC via the Internet. OCLC has offered Internet access to its online reference products, EPIC and FirstSearch, since fall of 1990 and fall of 1991 respectively. An additional reference product, ContentsAlert, provides delivery of serials tables of contents to an Internet email address. In the spring of 1994, OCLC began a pilot program offering Internet access to the PRISM cataloging and inter-library loan service. FEDLINK network staff have provided technical consulting on configuring Passport software to access OCLC via Internet. Network staff have also provided assistance with cost comparisons and with system configuration. FEDLINK staff have also assisted federal librarians in subscribing to such lists as OCLC-News and FirstSearch-L, and in utilizing OCLC's Electronic Data Exchange capabilities for downloading cataloging data and uploading inter-library loan requests.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE VIA FTP

Internet Workshop Agenda
ftp to ftp.loc.gov
Login anonymous, send email address as password
Directory pub/flicc
Filename: trngout.w51

OPM Standards
ftp to ftp.loc.gov
Login anonymous, send email address as password
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Filename:
- gs141012.txt
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DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE VIA GOPHER

From Red Tape to Results: Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less
Gopher to cyfer.esusda.gov
Directory /ace/policy/npr/reports
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