RALC Courier Service Working Group

Executive Summary

Summary
After several months of statistical analysis and evaluation of alternate shipment methods, it is the recommendation of the Courier Service Working Group that the Richmond Academic Library Consortium (RALC) discontinue use of the courier service, to be replaced by individual institutions with the carrier of their choice. As a result of this change, use of the media booking form can be discontinued, and the RALC budget lines for Media Co-op Supplies and Courier Service can be omitted.

Rationale
The working group makes the recommendation to discontinue the courier service for the following reasons:

- The cost per shipment is highest for institutions that ship fewer items. At the annual cost of $1755, three institutions effectively paid more than $10 to ship each item they lent or borrowed in 2014-2015, for example. These smaller institutions are also those least likely to be able to afford high shipment costs.
- The limited number of deliveries per week and exclusion of branch libraries result in turnaround times longer than any other shipment method. With pickup/delivery only twice a week, it can take 5+ days for items to be delivered even to different libraries on the same campus. Such lengthy delivery times are less than optimal for patrons.
- No tracking service is offered and items are collected in unprotected bins. This results in items becoming misplaced and becoming damaged when rained on/dropped into puddles/etc.
- It takes additional time to train employees how to process shipments for the courier. This results in a longer workflow, leading to the potential for an increase in errors.

The working group makes the recommendation for institutions to decide individually upon a replacement shipment method for the following reasons:

- The cost to all but two RALC institutions will decrease. This determination was based upon shipment statistics from the last 5 years.
- Shipment delivery time will decrease. Regardless of shipment method chosen, pickup/delivery will include branch libraries at no additional cost, institutions will receive items more quickly via daily service from USPS or UPS/FedEx. This will improve the level of service offered to patrons.
- Tracking is offered by all alternate shipment options and items are shipped in sealed mailers, reducing the likelihood of loss or damage.
- No additional training for employees is necessary as all institutions already use alternate shipment methods for interlibrary loans destined for non-RALC institutions.
Alternative Shipment Methods
Institutions wishing to ship via USPS can expect an average cost of $2.43/item, which is the library rate for a 3-pound package shipped between two member RALC institutions. If tracking is added, the average cost increases to $5.18.

Institutions wishing to ship via UPS can expect an average cost of $3.64/item when the institution is eligible for the Commonwealth of Virginia’s incentive discount. Per Kelley Denton, the Commonwealth of Virginia Statewide Strategic Sourcing Officer who oversees the incentive agreement with UPS, all RALC institutions other than Union Presbyterian Seminary are eligible for this discount. She can be reached at (804) 786-0243 or Kelley.Denton@dgs.virginia.gov.

Most RALC institutions are not yet receiving the discounted rate, however, despite this eligibility. Institutions wishing to adjust their UPS accounts to reflect incentive eligibility should contact Caroline Mallory, Account Manager for UPS’s Mid-Atlantic District. She can be reached at (540) 797-2690 or carolinemallory@ups.com.

Reimbursement
RALC reserves the right to institute a reimbursement policy in order to compensate institutions doing a majority of the shipments. Should such a reimbursement policy be implemented, it is recommended that the Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA) model be followed: there is a given pool of money, and institutions are given the same percentage of that pool as they lend. For example: a library which lends 17% of all VIVA interlibrary loans is reimbursed with 17% of the pool. Note that the total amount spent on shipping and the reimbursement amount may not be equal, and that RALC interlibrary loans are already included in the VIVA reimbursement.

Statistics Tracking
As a result of these changes, the Courier Service Working Group recommends streamlining the statistics collected for RALC. Namely, we recommend collecting data only for the number of returnables (loans and returned items) shipped and copies sent electronically. The first statistic is necessary for budgeting purposes, and the second statistic helps RALC understand how institutions share with each other when used in concert with the first statistic. As a result of this change, it will no longer be necessary to use the Media Booking Form.

OCLC has created a custom report that tracks the number of returnables shipped by all RALC institutions. This will greatly streamline the statistics tracking for shipped items. The OCLC report also includes the number of electronic copies sent for institutions that use OCLC for this purpose; not all RALC institutions fall into this category, however. The RALC Public Services Committee chair will request a copy of this report from OCLC on a monthly basis, and will share the compiled statistics with RALC directors at the quarterly meetings.

Institutions which choose to ship via UPS and which would like to track actual shipping costs should contact their UPS representative in order to learn how to generate a report from the UPS billing website. These reports cannot be requested by institutions other than those to which the billing reports apply.