

GratisNet – always evolving

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Abstract

GratisNet is a dynamic collaborative network of health libraries from around Australia, which facilitates interlibrary lending at low cost to member libraries, ensuring that resources are utilised and the load is shared. Governance is through a national committee of state representatives, who ensure the GratisNet website and database is kept useful and relevant for member libraries.

GratisNet, the collaborative network established to facilitate interlibrary lending between health libraries, is always evolving. From its inception in NSW in 1982 with 14 founding libraries, it has expanded to a national network of over 220 member libraries today. Network membership provides free* interlibrary loans (ILL) for journal articles, based on the principles of co-operation, utilising resources, and sharing the load. A web-based union catalogue of journal holdings (both print and electronic) and related online forms provide a quick way of locating and requesting a journal article for a client. The website has been hosted since 2002 by Prosentient, who provide support and assistance for upgrades to the system.

(upon payment of a modest annual membership fee)*

Until late 2015, governance of GratisNet was provided by state-based committees who took turns in being the national governing body. This has now changed to one national committee of 14 members, made up of state representatives – all volunteers – from all eight states and territories. Each committee member has a specific role, other than being their state representative.

The national committee oversees the GratisNet website and database and through the implementation of upgrades and changes, which keeps the website useful and relevant for members. A portion of all membership fees go towards expenditure on these upgrades. The committee meet as a team by teleconference on a quarterly basis, but collaborate frequently by email. Different committee members look after the website, statistics, holdings, communication, membership, and the manual. All this work is done in addition to their paid employment, which illustrates their dedication to the philosophy of GratisNet by volunteering their time and effort on keeping the network running.

When a library searches for a particular journal on [GratisNet](#), they receive a list of libraries that hold the particular journal with a holdings statement and format – print or electronic. This list of libraries is ranked, based on the ILL traffic of each library over the previous year. This ranking (if requesting libraries follow it) ensures that the workload of libraries is as evenly distributed as possible. The intended outcome is that each library will receive incoming requests equal to outgoing requests as much as possible. Recently the rankings were changed to a national ranking from the previous state-by-state rankings. This new national ranking reflects that most ILL traffic is now electronic, and posting within states is no longer the most common way of sharing material. The change to national rankings had some teething issues in the early stages, but regular automatic updating (daily at some

stages) has ensured that anomalies are being ironed out. The committee believes that GratisNet is a national organisation, so our processes need to reflect this.

Book and chapter interlibrary loans are also possible through GratisNet, if a library wishes to participate. This is a fairly basic procedure, with requesting libraries locating book holdings on Libraries Australia and then completing an online book request form which is sent to a participating library. This is another way that GratisNet facilitates the sharing of resources in a cost-effective way for health libraries. GratisNet encourages its member libraries to add their book holdings to the Australian National Bibliographic Database to facilitate this resource sharing.

We continue to strive for ways to improve service delivery using standards of best practice. The majority of publishers stipulate that articles sourced from their online journals must either be sent via post, fax or secure upload. In response to these requirements, this year we implemented a secure document upload and delivery system devised by Prosentient Systems. This allows the supplying library to send a secure link for the document to the requesting library via email. In turn, on receipt of the link, the library can then send it directly on to their client, streamlining the process and complying with the licensing demands of publishers.

GratisNet has adapted and evolved over the years, in line with the ways libraries have changed over the years. It has moved from a printed union list to today's dynamic holdings statements on the website; from being a network of separate state-based systems to a truly national network of member libraries; from mainly physically-posted journal articles to uploaded PDFs from online journals; from state-based rankings to a national ranking system. It is anticipated that GratisNet will continue to evolve in response to changes in the ways that evidence-based practice information is published.

GratisNet encourages libraries from health and related fields to join the network. The positives are many: resource sharing, relatively cheap interlibrary loans, a collegial atmosphere, and being able to help other libraries. Please contact any of the National Committee representatives for further information.

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