



November 17, 2008

**An open letter to the OCLC membership on the WorldCat
Record Use Policy**

Dear OCLC Colleagues:

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Recently OCLC staff revised the WorldCat Record Use Policy. This was at the request of the Board of Trustees and after consultation with many librarians. The Policy was last revised in 1987. Those earlier guidelines had come under justifiable criticism by libraries and others as being restrictive and out-of-date. The dramatic changes in the information environment since 1987 called for a new Policy that reflects the realities of library practice in the 21st Century.

The Board of Trustees has reviewed and supports the Policy. The revised Policy and supporting materials are available to you at <http://purl.org/oclc/wcrup>.

The WorldCat database is the creation of thousands of librarians and library staff who worked to realize the vision of Fred Kilgour, to create the world's most comprehensive database of bibliographic records and library holdings. This work has continued now for almost 40 years.

The shared infrastructure that OCLC has created has helped libraries improve the efficiency with which they process and share collections, and has reduced overall library costs. WorldCat has been built by the accumulated intellectual effort of librarians and library staff. OCLC further uses its collective investment to build shared infrastructure; to secure additional data sources; and to improve the quality, coverage and currency of the database with the ultimate goal of serving libraries and the users of libraries around the world. This is the basis of the OCLC cooperative model.

For the year ended June 30, 2008, WorldCat grew by an astonishing 22.2 million records and 150 million location listings—the fastest rate of growth since 1971. OCLC has worked hard to create agreements with national libraries, union catalog organizations, and others to load their files. At the same time, OCLC and its member libraries continue to invest in the quality of data in WorldCat using both manual and machine processes.

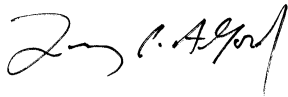
The combination of records and locations makes WorldCat an incomparable research resource and an unequalled guide to library collections for users of all types of libraries. Its value depends on its comprehensiveness and the quality of its data and its ability to link that data to particular library collections.

Our aim in updating the Policy is to further promote innovative use of WorldCat while maintaining the comprehensiveness of data and holdings that are at the root of its value. The Policy also encourages the establishment of the provenance of the records that make up WorldCat, both as good practice and to ensure responsible use of those records on behalf of the cooperative with a fair return to libraries by those who would use the records from outside the cooperative.

I strongly believe that the revised Policy is good news for the OCLC cooperative and the advancement of research, scholarship and learning.

Although the Policy was not formally reviewed by the OCLC Members Council, some delegates have offered suggestions for clarification and improvement that have been incorporated in the Policy. OCLC will continue to consider changes to the Policy suggested by member libraries and by Members Council delegates. The OCLC Board and staff remain committed to encouraging and assisting in the use of WorldCat by individual members, consortia and others to find new and creative ways to make WorldCat more useful and libraries stronger.

The WorldCat model has worked well for four decades and has become a vital part of the library landscape. The new record Policy is an important step in ensuring the continued future of that resource for libraries and librarians. We welcome your comments and suggestions about the best ways to preserve this essential resource for future generations and to use this resource to strengthen libraries. Please send your questions and comments to recorduse@oclc.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Alford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Larry" being more prominent than the last name "Alford".

Larry Alford
Chair
OCLC Board of Trustees