FINANCING RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEMS

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Introduction

In approaching this subject, there is a strong temptation to deal at length with library budgets and budget management. The literature of this subject is extensive, and, while it is of uneven quality, there is a considerable amount which is highly competent and quite useful. There is another temptation: to deal at length with how to get public officials to provide from the funds under their control the necessary money for the operation of rural public library systems. While this will certainly enter into consideration here, it will not be the major emphasis.

Having eschewed these temptations, I have chosen rather to take a "Cloud 9" approach and attempt to review the financing of rural public library systems from what might be termed an "orbital viewpoint." This has the advantage of being only dimly known and has the drawback of theoretical indefiniteness. However, it contains the promise that if we can avoid a Jules Verne treatment of the subject, we may come up with a better understanding of the problems to be faced in financing the public library developments which are the general goals of our profession.

The emphasis in this paper, as the title shows, will be on financing—the provision of capital and operating funds for rural public library systems. The definition of such a system will be taken to mean that the service area of the system, while it may include one or more urban communities and perhaps even a metropolitan center, includes extensive areas which are rural in the strictest definition of the Bureau of the Census. In fact the well-organized and successful systems, if we heed the advice of Lowell Martin¹ will probably be organized with

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urban libraries as their nuclei of strength. And, since these systems will, hopefully, conform to the general standards for public library service and offer the same kinds of services offered by systems which serve only urban areas, it might reasonably be questioned why a discussion of the problems of financing rural public library systems should be different in any way from a discussion of the financing of urban ones.

It is my own conviction that a number of distinctions can be made which will show that, while their problems are similar in some ways, there are differences of sufficient extent for us to distinguish between them with validity. I will elaborate upon this point wherever appropriate in the ensuing discussion, which is arranged to consider the factors which influence the financing of rural library systems, the social climate which controls such financing, the special problems presented by the inclusion of a number of discrete units of local government in the tax base for such libraries, and in conclusion some ideas concerning the various sources of support and the reasons therefor.

**Some Factors Which Influence Financing**

The first factor which I should like to point out is the high probability that virtually all support for public libraries will come from tax funds. Endowment funds are not, and have not been in this century, a major source of income for any but a very few public libraries, and the percentage of library income from this source continues to decline. Fines and rentals customarily are regarded not as means of support but rather as devices for the control of materials, and frequently do not remain under library custody but are turned in to become part of the general funds of local government. Other proposals for the public library to "pay its way," notably the proposal made by by Charles Armstrong in his paper for the Public Library Inquiry, have never been taken seriously by the library profession and are certainly in conflict with the basic principle of free public library service as we know it.

One important point made by Armstrong in his report is this: A first significant fact with regard to public library finance is its insignificance—in relation to the whole governmental budget. . . . If we turn to the place that public library expenditures occupy in the total annual expenditures for all purposes, public and private, in the United States, library support is too small to be separately identified in any statistical returns. 3

While these words were written in 1950-51, the more
recent statistical data do not change the picture appreciably. Public library expenditures could be doubled or trebled without requiring any significant allocation of either governmental expenditure or the gross national product.

Both of the above factors relate to the support of all libraries, but we now come to one which particularly concerns rural systems. The tax base of rural areas is made up almost entirely of real estate and personal property taxes. There are some rebates of state-collected taxes on such items as liquor, cigarettes, and portions of sales taxes in some states, which are returned to become parts of the local budgets in rural areas and may be sources of income for some rural libraries. There are also a number of reimbursable programs operating in the fields of education and welfare whereby some proportion of local expenditures in specific fields is reimbursed from state or federal funds, or from a combination of the two. While this source has been considerable in such expenditures as those for the public schools, the care of dependent children, and old age assistance, it still is not a significant source of public library support except in a very few states.

The real estate and personal property taxes are not generally regarded as "good" taxes by public administration specialists. But unless and until the units of local government which would be concerned with the support of rural public library systems have some other sources of tax funds, these taxes will remain the mainstay of tax-supported services, libraries included. And here comes a real difference between the urban and rural areas. Urban areas, in addition to their extensive compact residential sections, usually include substantial business and industrial installations which customarily carry a higher valuation per acre for tax purposes than do residential sections. This customarily provides a higher per capita tax base for the support of all services than would be found in rural areas where businesses are small and where almost the only industry is agriculture. With the exception of wartime, this century has seen agriculture in the general position of not receiving returns on investment and labor comparable to national averages, and this in spite of rather massive amounts of federal subsidy. (Note: A careful analysis of statistics is said to show that most of the subsidy has really benefited the handlers and processors rather than the growers.)

While the existence of oil wells, iron mines, and similar tax producers in a few areas does not invalidate this general statement, there is another factor worth considering here. In the post-World-War-II period there has been a conscious move-
ment toward the dispersal of industry into less vulnerable concentrations. This movement has resulted in the growth of industry in smaller centers, as contrasted with the earlier high concentration in metropolitan areas. But these smaller cities are urban within the definition of this paper, and the movement gives little promise of affecting the tax base in the truly rural areas with which we are concerned here. Perhaps it is interesting to note some recent reactions to this movement. The spokesman of a large firm recently made a statement which was reported in the newspapers to the effect that his firm, which moved its principal operations far out into suburbia some years ago, has decided that it prefers being back in the central city. He gave three reasons for this decision: the greater ease of securing qualified personnel to work in the central city, the greater ease of getting personnel to and from the place of employment when it is located centrally, and the desirable public relations aspect of "higher visibility" in the downtown area. If this becomes a trend, decentralization may well become even less important to rural areas than it is now.

Certainly one factor which further differentiates the rural side of the library picture from the urban is that in many rural areas there is nothing to start with, whereas very nearly all urban communities already have established libraries and are spending some money on library support. In fact, many of these, while their budgets are too small for them to offer any visible level of library service as independent units, could, if the same money were spent within the framework of a larger system, be receiving service which would approach or fully meet current standards. In this sense, the system budget would not have to be all new money. In other words, while the problem in most urban areas becomes one of persuading people to spend tax funds, which they are already spending, more wisely, the problem in rural areas often becomes one of persuading people to create new tax funds for the support of a service which they have never known.

The next factor I would mention is the fiscal requirements, or "need," to use Carl Chatters' favorite term. Here we are on fairly safe ground in assuming that it will take the same amounts of money to provide standard public library service to rural areas as it takes to serve a similar size population in a purely urban situation. While some writers in recent years, notably those who maintain that "the bookmobile is an extremely expensive method of circulating books," have tended toward the belief that adequate rural service costs more than urban service, I do not believe that this is true, but I am equally
convinced that it will not cost less. My reasons for believing this are many, and I will give a few which I regard as the most obvious.

Let us first examine personnel costs. The rural library systems will be competing for the same professional personnel that all other libraries are, and they must offer comparable salary levels if they are to be properly staffed. I have observed a trend in recent years which might indicate that they will have to offer more. Librarians as educated people with cultural interests show increasingly a preference for the kinds of advantages (good live music, other fine arts, and congenial associations) which are found more often in urban concentrations than in rural areas. We may find that, in order to induce professionally qualified librarians to work in rural areas, we must include an amount in the salary scale which allows for the extra travel expense involved in getting to places where such opportunities are available. To offset this, it seems likely that, if library nonprofessional salaries are made comparable to the salaries of people doing similar work in other segments of the community (i.e., office receptionists, stenographers, and sales personnel), the budget requirements for nonprofessional personnel may not be as high in rural as in urban communities. It also appears likely that rural library systems may not have to pay janitors in the same salary bracket as high-level professional personnel, as some urban libraries must now do. We may assume that these aspects of the budget will more or less even themselves out.

Of course, the costs of similar or identical library materials will remain similar or identical.

Among operating costs, the bookmobile operation is the difference between urban and rural which usually gets the most attention, although it is by no means the only item of importance. A properly organized bookmobile service costs no more than a properly organized urban small branch library. The personnel (at least one professional librarian and one driver clerk) costs are similar to the personnel costs of the urban small branch. The costs of gas, oil, maintenance, and garaging are quite similar to the costs of heat, lights, other utilities, and upkeep for the branch. While the initial capital investment is much lower for the bookmobile, it repeats more frequently for the bookmobile than for the branch, and so about levels out this part of the expense. And, of course, it bears the same relationship to the managerial overhead of the system that the branch does.

An item which has received little attention in the literature is the matter of branches in rural library service. The
urban library, if wisely operated, can plan its branch system in order to give the maximum coverage of its compact area with maximum accessibility to the greatest number of people. It is not impossible for a single branch to have 40,000 or more people within a one-mile or ten-block radius. There are many rural areas in which a 20-mile radius (one-half hour driving time) will not include a total population of one-fourth as many people. The current trend toward larger farms with fewer people operating and working on them will only intensify this problem. However, if we are to maintain any reasonable standard of accessibility of service, we are going to have to operate stationary libraries in many locations where the potential for population to be served is much lower than urban branches usually have. Realistically, we must recognize that these libraries will be manned for the most part by nonprofessional personnel, since the exigencies of the situation will require us to use local personnel. Therefore, although these rural systems may show a larger proportion of nonprofessional personnel than do urban systems, any apparent differential in cost will probably be erased by the need for giving adequate professional guidance and supervision to such locations, which will entail expenditures for travel and other items. The idea of having a staff professional who alternates in serving as local librarian in a number of places is just beginning to be tried, and so far as I am able to learn there have been no adequate reports on either the costs or the effectiveness of this method.

This brings us to the last of the factors which influence the financing of rural library systems, or perhaps to the first element in "climate"—whichever you prefer. This is something that everyone working toward the establishment of rural public libraries has observed. Most rural people do not know what real public library service is, and accordingly have little or no conception of what it can mean to them—do for them, if you will. Where the rural areas contain any appreciable number of people who have lived in the service area of a fine urban library system and who have learned to value it and to use it, it becomes relatively easy (I said relatively—not just easy) to locate enthusiastic and capable leadership for the library establishment movement. If, however, we are going to have to demonstrate to all people within a rural area to convince them that the public library is a good thing to have, it is going to take us a long, long time to make any significant progress toward our goal of public library service for everyone.

There may be some mitigation of this situation in the growing educational level of the rural resident. Any significant
educational experience outside the rural locality will probably include the use of libraries, and where and if people with such experience return to make their lives in rural areas, we may secure from them the local leadership necessary to make the establishment of public library service a reality.

The Social Climate

It is obvious from the above that we have already begun looking at one of the elements in the social climate which controls the support provided to public library systems in rural areas. Upon closer look, it becomes obvious that unless rural people, in quantity, want public library service and indicate their willingness to provide financial support for it, they are never going to get it. I will never forget a remark by Leon Carnovsky in one of his lectures at the University of Chicago Graduate Library School to the effect that "every one who deserves public library service has it, and those who deserve good service have good service." I can also vividly recall my disagreement with his statement. I think that what he meant was that public libraries have in the past depended almost entirely on local initiative for their establishment and support, that people with initiative and the willingness to provide the appropriate support had already attained the distinction of having library service. My disagreement was at that time based on my conviction that most people without public libraries were in rural areas, and that most of them did not yet know that the library profession had solved the problem of providing them with good public library service at a "reasonable" cost, that is, without a disproportionate share of either their taxes or their annual incomes.

However, the fact remains that many rural residents still do not know what a public library can mean to them, and most are not yet informed on how they can go about obtaining it when they do know what it means and have decided that they want it.

But in addition to this lack of experience, knowledge, and understanding, there is the economic factor. I can still hear the earnest voice of a gentleman who came to one of our meetings where we explained the Minnesota program for rural library development under our Library Services Act Plan. He came up to me in the "kaffeklatsch" which customarily follows such meetings in our part of the country and said, "If only we had had this program five years ago. At that time, the farmers were so prosperous they would have voted for it like a shot. But now, well I don't know." I have already mentioned the ba-
The fact that agriculture has not shared in the general prosperity of our country except in wartime. In fact, while virtually all other segments of our economy have enjoyed high levels of prosperity in recent years, agriculture has experienced what amounts to a major recession—not a real agricultural depression like that witnessed by this country between 1923 and the late 1930's, but a real recession nevertheless. This is unquestionably the principal factor in the addition of any new service to what people regard as an already heavy tax burden. You and I know, and statistics prove, that the public library tax burden in the United States is infinitesimal, but in a social climate what people believe to be true is true, or for all practical purposes might as well be. A recent poll (the Minnesota Poll conducted regularly by the Minneapolis Tribune) gives us a quotable quote which has a bearing here: "There are few who are not automatically in favor of lower taxes." The pollsters might have added that there are many who are automatically opposed to any additions to present taxes. In securing any measure of local support for new rural public library systems, whatever tax funds are allocated to the library are going to be "new" or "additional" taxes.

Still another element in the support picture is the general climate of taxes: the kinds and their allocation. Most library support, as noted earlier, has been found to come from the property (real and personal) tax. Some areas, notably Ohio with its intangibles tax on which libraries have a substantial first claim and Michigan with its penal fines devoted to county libraries, are the exceptions rather than the rule; and the library results in both states have been far from uniform. The intangibles tax produces very substantial revenue for libraries in some localities, only slight amounts in others; the penal fines appear to be substantial in only a few counties where traffic is heavy, or which are apparently not very law-abiding. Although both of these revenue sources have been with us for a number of years, they are under repeated challenge in their respective states and there appears to be little tendency on the part of other states to adopt them.

Contemporary public administration thinking generally is opposed to the principle of instituting a specific tax for a specified purpose. Gasoline and tire taxes devoted entirely to highways notwithstanding, it is generally believed that the proceeds of such taxes usually bear little relationship to the financial requirements of the service to be supported, and in some cases their existence has militated against the service's receiving its due share from the total public revenue.
In this connection, how I wish that long ago when cigarette taxes were being adopted one cent of this tax on "sin" had been devoted entirely to public libraries. If such had happened, we would now have all the money we need to run all the libraries in the country on a more than adequate basis. However, I repeat that the institution of such "devoted" taxes would be against both the principles and the trends of current tax development.

All this means that libraries in the main will probably have to continue asking for their funds from general revenue sources (principally the property tax at the local level) and be forced to look toward those levels of government having the stronger taxing authority if libraries are to be adequately supported in the future.

The Special Problem of the Variety of Governmental Units

The Brookings Institution came out many years ago with a series of findings showing that our present units of government are antiquated as being too small for efficient operation in our present times. The findings pointed a special finger at the county (or town in New England) showing that these (certainly the counties) were based on the principle that any citizen should be able to reach the county seat, transact his business, pay his taxes, satisfy other of his legal or fiscal requirements, or serve his term at jury duty, and return home within a single day. There is now hardly an area in the United States where a grouping of counties would not satisfy this requirement. Indeed, in many states it is quite simple to go to the state capitol, transact any necessary business, and return home easily the same day. The recommendation growing out of such findings was to combine counties into a greatly reduced number of administrative districts retaining the many jurisdictions and functions now reserved for counties (or towns) and adding a number of other appropriate functions for which the district could serve most adequately as the jurisdiction intermediate between the state and its cities and villages. Incidentally, such a move was deemed a possible solution to the great problem of metropolitan government facing us today.

I recall quite vividly the effect that such recommendations had in one state. The adoption of the proposal would have meant many fewer sheriffs, county clerks, and petty functionaries. The "court house crowd" rose up in arms, and at one time it appeared doubtful that the legislature would even authorize payment for the report. Needless to say, the proposal got buried; and I doubt if many people even know of the existence of
the report, let alone its recommendations.

Someday perhaps we will have a sensible solution to this problem, but until such a day, the formation of larger library units will involve the participation of a number of governmental jurisdictions in most cases. Even in those cases where a single county is large enough to be a single unit, it seems there will always be some cities or villages (having previously established small public libraries) which will prefer joining by agreement (with all sorts of clauses to protect their local autonomy) rather than by the simpler expedient of turning the library over lock, stock, and barrel to the newer larger unit.

Getting an agreement on how such a larger unit will operate is one thing; getting agreement on how much each unit will contribute to its support is another. Probably the biggest single problem here is the inequality of assessments between governmental units. Where townships (each one has assessing responsibilities) are involved, the problem is enormous, for even in those areas where the setting of assessments is a county responsibility, we can find that one county bases its assessments on a quite different scale of values than does its neighbor. Moreover, there are the special differences brought in by such factors as homestead exemptions or the special treatment of industry.

Some states have taken the forward step of adopting a statewide equalized assessed valuation which serves as the basis of distributing costs of any service supported on the basis of units larger than the one having responsibility for fixing assessments. This assures equal treatment on sharing of costs, although it may take a widely varying tax rate among the units themselves to produce the revenue required. The movement toward such equalized assessments is a gradual one, and some day this question may be solved for us; but until such a time as it is universal practice, many of us will be faced by problems arising out of differential rates of assessment among the units we are seeking to combine.

But an even more important consideration in the matter of multiple-unit support is that of how to determine the "fair share" of each. The simplest to administer is a uniform tax rate, but as we have already seen this can be considerably skewed by a differential in assessments. Another relatively simple expedient is a uniform per capita contribution from each unit. This has serious disadvantages. A unit containing a single large industrial installation might be expected to be a major source of support for the system, but if it has a small population, with
most of the industrial workers coming from residential areas located in other taxing units, the disproportion in taxation would be enormous. It would also be a regressive tax, since tax-paying areas would not be supporting the unit in proportion to their ability to do so.

It is nevertheless important to remember that factors like these—as well as others we might never have thought of, both inside and outside the areas of politics, prejudice, or pride—will enter into any proposal or negotiation toward combining smaller governmental units into single large library operating units.

A Recapitulation

Let us pause here for a brief recapitulation of what we have considered thus far.

We have observed the following characteristics of financing public library services in rural areas:

The fiscal needs of rural library services are about the same per capita as are the needs of urban services.

The support of such libraries will continue to be almost entirely from tax funds.

The fiscal needs of libraries are an insignificant proportion of public funds and a virtually invisible portion of national income.

The principal tax resource of rural areas is the real estate and property tax, which is one of the weakest—not a "good" tax from the point of view of ability to pay—and which rests on a tax base which is generally lower in rural than in urban areas.

Average incomes in rural areas are much lower than those in urban areas, and there is no evidence that this differential will be removed in the foreseeable future.

It appears probable that the major tax resource of rural areas will continue to be the real estate and property tax.

And we have also observed that the social climate which controls library income has two important elements:
There is a general lack of understanding in rural areas of the importance and benefits of having good public library service.

There is a growing opposition to any increases in property taxes.

Finally, we have observed that the problem of achieving larger library systems in rural areas is compounded by the necessity of combining a number of governmental units before such systems can be effectively organized and supported.

The Effects of LSA

The impact on public library support in the United States made over the past five years by the Library Services Act has been substantial. It is my conviction, based on an informed guess, that this impact has been felt even by libraries too large to be eligible to benefit directly from LSA. As for rural library service, I have made some attempt to arrive at an estimate of the amount of direct increase in state and local funds for this purpose, but despite the warm cooperation of the heads of all state library agencies, I cannot give even a reasonably accurate sum.

However, the Library Services Branch has furnished me with the most recent percentage increases, which are statistically more important than actual figures. At the state level there are two states which have increased funds for rural public libraries by more than 200 per cent, another 10 by more than 100 per cent, another 10 by more than 75 per cent and still another six by more than 50 per cent. Thus, more than half the states show an increase of more than 50 per cent. The amounts of these increases are unrelated to the percentages, since the states started from different levels, but they range from under $100,000 into the millions.

Local funds have not increased as rapidly by percentage, but again half the states show an increase of more than 50 per cent in the five years. This increase, however, represents a substantially higher sum of money, since the starting base was higher. Just as an example, the Minnesota increase of 216 per cent in state funds amounts to only $130,000; the local increase, while only 38 per cent, amounts to around half a million.

I think the point to emphasize here is that a modest amount of federal money has stimulated highly significant increases in state and local moneys in a relatively short time.
What is more, the results of the stimulation are growing rapidly.

Some Implications

And so we come to the question, "What does all this mean to the future support of public libraries, especially those serving rural areas?"

Let us face three readily provable facts: (1) the population of the United States at the present time is something over 180 million; (2) current public funds for public library service are in the neighborhood of $200 million; and (3) the costs of adequate library service in the most efficiently organized larger systems are at the present just above $3.00 per capita.

In other words, at the present level of population in the United States, adequate library support would come out to be roughly $540 million, so that we are currently over $300 million short of having enough money to run our public libraries even if all were organized on the most desirable possible basis; with the population increases currently projected, our requirements will be over $600 million during the professional lifetime of most of us gathered here, if the entire country is to be adequately served.

Of the monies already being spent, at the present time around $7.5 million comes from LSA (i.e., federal) funds, a somewhat smaller amount from the state funds, and the rest from local taxes. This means that local taxes are now furnishing well above 90 per cent of public library support, which in turn represents only about 43 per cent of the amount needed to provide adequate service for the 155 million people presently counted as served by public libraries—if all present service were organized on that most desirable basis, which we all very well know is not yet so.

If all the presently unserved population were to support a public library service with local funds in the same proportion that those now served do, the unserved areas would furnish just above $32 million of additional funds, bringing the total of local funds to around $220 million.

Where will the rest (approximately $320 million) of public funds needed for total adequate public library service in the United States come from?

An Exploration of Solutions

Although the above-mentioned $32 million of additional local funds would probably have to come in the most part from
property taxes, I believe that this is as much as we could hope for from such a source—and it may well be that the gradually declining strength of this tax source may require a downward revision of even that figure. To what tax sources, then, should we look for the remaining $320 million?

One of the facts of fiscal governmental life is that the strongest income-producing taxes now rest in the hands of the federal government, and that the next strongest are at state level. There is no indication that this situation will not continue; indeed, there is some indication that taxes from both these sources will increase in strength while the relative strength of local taxes will decline. In the light of the foregoing, it behooves us to consider the possibility that a much larger share of public library support in the future will come from state or federal sources, or from a combination of the two.

Any number of writers and speakers have in the past proposed various formulas for the sources of library support ranging all the way from 100 per cent to as high as 40 per cent state and federal, or perhaps higher. There is still a bugaboo about state or federal control. While it cannot be dismissed as a figment of the imagination because such programs do set standards for the administration and expenditure of funds and some standards of performance, the long history of state aid to the public schools and our own experience with the Library Services Act should dispel our fears along these lines and should be useful in dispelling the fears of local library and governmental officials.

Let us look for a moment to one of our neighbors. The Provincial Government of Saskatchewan, in a fine and rapidly developing program for public library development, is doing three admirable things: it makes establishment grants to those larger units which serve rural as well as urban areas, it erects a building to serve as the headquarters of such a unit, and it makes a continuing annual grant of 75 cents per capita to its regional libraries. If such a policy were general in the United States, state aids would be at a level of around $135 million in this country, rather than the present amount which is less than five per cent of that. This $135 million is less than one-fiftieth of what is now granted from state sources for the support of public schools. It seems to me the public library is important enough as an adult educational institution to warrant the states' making grants to the extent of two per cent of the amount allocated to local school districts. Unfortunately, the public library has so often permitted itself to become primarily a service to children that it is not recognized as an adult educational insti-
tution by very many people. Recent notable efforts to correct this situation have appeared in the national publicity stimulated by National Library Week. But we still have a long way to go before the general public and the appropriations authorities who are drawn from that general public accept the importance of the public library to adult education as a matter of course. (As an aside here: It is my conviction that our newly established larger units should concentrate their efforts in adult education services from the beginning. The old myth that concentrating on children's services is bringing up a generation of adult users is exploded when it is realized that such libraries rarely if ever have anything for that generation when it does become adult, and they lose potential users in droves right at the age level when the children are acquiring adult library interests.)

I hope there is no one here who feels that we cannot on rational grounds defend the principle that the state has a concern and responsibility for public library service which justifies its providing a modest level of state support for this purpose, at least to the extent of a small percentage of what they provide as aid to schools. I certainly feel that we can. And since most states wisely set minimum levels of local support to qualify for school aid, state library agencies would be wise to do the same. Some kind of equalizing factor also is usually present in state aid programs for schools, with the result that such programs represent a greater proportion of school expenditures in those areas with large numbers of educable age children and low per capita tax base than they represent in areas with fewer children and a higher tax base. I believe that this same principle should apply to state aid programs for public libraries, now and for the future. Just to pull a figure off the top of my head (but a figure which I assure you bears a close resemblance to the percentage of school aids now in effect) such programs would provide approximately an equal amount to that provided by local funds, which was estimated as you will recall at approximately $220 million. This leaves a balance of approximately $100 million to be raised if public library service at an adequate level is to be available to every American.

The Role of the Federal Government
The federal government has in principle traditionally shown a concern for the education of its citizens. While the amount of money involved has not been a significant proportion of federal expenditures, the programs themselves have achieved a significance far out of proportion to amount of money involved.
We need only cite the Morrill Act and the Library Services Act, one of the oldest and one of the newest, to prove this point.

The federal government has a tremendous advantage in being able to collect taxes where the money is and to spend the proceeds where the need is. Therefore, it should not be considered irrational, although it might be considered overly optimistic, to say that the remaining $100 million required for adequate public library service should come from federal funds. Competent librarians, working with governmental theorists and with favorably minded members of Congress, should be able to work out a fair distribution of such funds just as they have done with the Library Services Act and many another service program in which federal funds have participated in the past and are participating at present.

The partnership of the federal and state governments working with local government for the development of public library service has worked so phenomenally well in the last five years that it behooves all of us to urge an expansion of the present small scale effort into a program which could assure good public library service for every one. The $100 million represents only a tiny fraction of the cost of many of the other social services already supported in part by the federal government. Why not libraries?

Conclusion

We have faced the fact that there must be a substantial increase in the amount of public funds spent for public library service if every citizen of our country is to have adequate service. Using some generalizations, which I feel are valid, especially as regards the relative taxing strength of the governmental units, I have arrived at a proposal that the support of public library systems be provided on an approximate basis of 40 per cent local funds, 40 per cent state funds, and 20 per cent federal funds.

It appears to me that to ask for an expenditure of $3.00 per capita of the United States for public library service, with some built-in method of equalizing through state and federal funds, is not an exorbitant request. Indeed, in the light of what this country spends for such amenities as bridge, baseball, bowling, and beer, what we are asking for is a trifling amount.

Regardless of the formula, or the source of the funds, we must return to the fact that, if the job of providing adequate public library service for all is going to be done, there must be very nearly a trebling of financial support. It is clear that to achieve this, we must do several things. First of all, we
must convince ourselves that we have not been aggressive enough in seeking tax support for the agency for which we are responsible; secondly, we must realize that we may have to change some of our own practices before we can convince the public and public officials that our agency is worth supporting to the extent that its practical necessities demand; last but not least, we must conduct an unrelenting campaign at all levels of government for the funds required if we or our successors are to realize our modest goal of adequate public library service for everyone.

References


3. Ibid., pp. 4-5 passim.