IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS THROUGH PROPOSALS

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What some of you may be hoping for is a blueprint for getting federal support for library programs. I should warn you that there is no such blueprint, for the simple reason that there is no universal proposal. Every particular combination of proposer and federal agency represents a special case. So the best I can do is to sketch some general considerations that the library community might take into account in shaping programs and seeking federal support for them.

Another difficulty springs from the fact that library support has no one comfortable home in the government structure. It cuts across the roles and missions of many federal agencies. Unless it specializes in some one field or function it does not correspond too closely to any one agency's interests. The National Library of Medicine interests itself in libraries or parts of them that serve medical research or medical education. The National Science Foundation has responsibilities to libraries that support scientific research or education in the sciences, and to libraries in general where they intersect the general process of disseminating scientific and technical information. And so on. So, besides being unable to give you a color-it-yourself proposal, I cannot give you a good road-map of the Washington library-support area. In particular, I shall not speak to the specific interests of the Office of Education, partly because the discussion of recent legislation that you are to hear will no doubt cover this topic. Some of you may ultimately get some guidance at the end of the year's deliberations of the National Library Commission that has recently been set up, but in the meantime it would be presumptuous for me to pre-empt whatever government postures toward libraries, or vice-versa, the Commission may come up with.

For now, then, as I said, all I can do is offer some general ground rules that may help libraries establish communication with the various parts of the Federal establishment that are prepared to help solve libraries' problems.

A. <u>Mechanics</u>

Different agencies of course have different detailed requirements regarding proposals submitted to them. Furthermore, they

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differ in their attitudes toward formal as opposed to informal pro-
posals, the latter being usually preliminary explorations aimed at
finding out whether a formal proposal may be welcome and if so what
aspects of a proposed program should be stressed or eliminated. In
general, however, a proposal must describe:

    . . . the work to be undertaken
    . . . why it is to be undertaken
    . . . how it is to be accomplished.

In addition, certain formal elements are required, such as:

    . . . vitas of the principal investigator and at least the senior
professionals to be associated with him.
    . . . reasonably detailed cost estimates.
    . . . statement of the proposed starting time and duration of
the work.
    . . . approval by the organization under whose auspices the
work is to be done.

    The Air Force's Office of Aerospace Research has produced a
very useful discussion of the proposal process in general called "As
Long as You're Up, Get Me a Grant."[1] Our own needs are described
in a pamphlet entitled "Improving the Dissemination of Scientific
Information."[2] Other agencies have similar publications which are
yours for the asking.
    A final note on the mechanics of proposal processing: do not
expect return-mail response. The time for review is more often
measured in months than in days, and so is the time for processing
a grant if the review is favorable.
    Beyond the mechanics of submitting proposals lies the problem
of how to go about creating one.

B. Relating Programs to Agency Missions
    Probably the most important first step is to get a clear under-
standing of how any ideas you may have mesh with the interests of
the agencies to which you might turn. This may not be easy, for
reasons mentioned earlier—the agencies may not be sure where their
responsibilities start and stop, and you may well have a plan that
cuts across them anyhow. However, each of them does try formally
to describe its area of concern, and you might do well to look over
that description. A letter or telephone call will elicit them.
    Then there is always an opportunity for direct discussion with
agency management. Most of us nowadays are bound to unsolicited
proposals, except when we are able to identify a job that we are pre-
pared to justify as necessary, which is not often. But most of us are
nevertheless more than willing to discuss our aims and yours, as
long as you remember that this is in a real spirit of matching your

needs and our proper concerns and not any kind of dickering. Here you must remember that we are your agents trusted to match public needs to public funds, and we take this seriously. Therefore in informal discussion you must help relate what you have in mind to what we try to bear in mind, and not simply assume that your individual priorities match our necessarily broader ones.

Some insight into what federal agencies are doing in information dissemination may be derived from a series of publications that our office in the National Science Foundation has had produced. This series is called "Scientific Information Activities of Federal Agencies."[3] There are thirty-four pamphlets, available from GPO. They do not have any particular library orientation, but they may help provide guidance to agency interests.

C. Identifying Program Objectives

Have some "feel" for what federal sector of library responsibility you are geared to, then try to pin down what kind of support you are looking for. Most federal agencies that might funnel public funds into this particular form of public service distinguish among several kinds of support. Here are some examples.

Are you looking for deficit financing, to get a fiscal injection that will let you dig yourself out of a hole that increasing demands for service and insufficient local funds have made?

Are you interested in research in library operations, or a pilot project that will give insight into some aspect of library operations in general? In this case, be prepared to defend the proposition that your findings can be generalized. You will not be shot down because you cannot prove in advance that your proposed research or project will pay off, but you may be if you cannot say who outside of your own operation will benefit if it does.

Do you want to set up a permanent operation that you cannot fund with local support? Say so, and explain why federal funding is justified when local support is absent. This opens a Pandora's box of questions about the federal versus the private or local role in support of services. In most cases, operating support will be forthcoming only when it is clear that the operation will discharge some clearly defined federal responsibility that cannot be met in any other way.

Are you planning an extension of more-or-less conventional or archival services, with more books and monographs and serials and space? If so, be ready to prove a real requirement that cannot be filled by reference to other services in the area, by borrowing less-used material from other sources, or the like.

Or, on the other hand, are you planning to branch out into new and nonconventional kinds of services that have not been offered in the past? There is a fair amount of interest in this sort of thing at present, although you will run into the difficulty of trying to prove that a service will be used when it has not yet been tried. What we are looking for is a new idea that has been thoroughly tested!

D. Establishing Background

A final pointer that may be helpful is the suggestion that any of you seeking federal support do his homework in advance. Those in Washington charged with channeling public funds to libraries do not pretend to be omniscient, but it is not safe to assume them altogether ignorant. Even if they were, they might turn to reviewers or referees who are not. Therefore to establish competence it is necessary for supplicants to show familiarity with major operations and research that parallel or relate to a proposed program. This is particularly true with respect to research and experimental efforts, but applies across the board. In weighing competing demands for support it is impossible to judge each suggestion strictly on its own merits without regard to the overall pattern, and federal sources need all the help they can get in fitting any specific plan in with related ones.

In addition to the specific suggestions offered so far, I might briefly discuss two broad subjects not so much by way of offering advice as to bring some perspective to library trends that will probably affect any plans you make that involve federal support.

E. Automation

In view of the proven contribution that computers can make to library housekeeping, it is likely that many of your plans will include them. There are three points that need to be made in this regard.

First, there is an enormous amount of activity currently going on in the automation of libraries, without too much evidence of coordination. The spectre of duplication of experimenting, systems design, and even programming is rising, and inter-system compatability needs are becoming more and more obvious. In this atmosphere, it is clear that the homework referred to earlier is really essential.

Second, there is a certain lack of realism about what automation can do. For housekeeping detail, record keeping, and even manipulating files as an aid in searching through them they are probably invaluable. The day when they will provide a complete reference service without human intervention is still far down the road. Failure to recognize this limitation, and resulting over-optimism as to manpower savings and reference efficiency, is not likely to sit well with government grantors. Most of them have been burned by certain projects that did not pay off as promised.

Third, there is nevertheless a promise in automation that often goes unrecognized. That promise is the potential for exchanging and sharing the housekeeping records. Most of you are probably familiar with computerized catalog cards and the National Library of Medicine's ventures in experimenting with files on magnetic tapes. These are examples of computer potential, though admittedly still in the developmental stage. Any plans that involve library automation had better show careful consideration of the possibilities and implications of connecting any one computer-based record-keeping system with others that are engaged in parallel efforts. This is the more true as plans for national systems with emphasis on automation emerge. Any one system proposal that ignores the problem of ultimately looking into ultimate national configurations may be looked at as potentially schismatic.

Two good reviews of this area are: "Cooperation, Convertibility, and Compatibility Among Information Systems,"[4] recently issued by the National Bureau of Standards; and an article by Black and Farley on "Library Automation" in the American Documentation Institute's Annual Review of Information Science and Technology.[5]

F. Load-sharing

Another general principle that potential Federal supporters of library programs have to take into account is the increasing requirement of cooperative load-sharing arrangements—at local, regional, and national levels. This is a tired horse to beat, but it is so much a part of future library operations that perhaps its importance cannot be overemphasized. For an overview of the numerous load-sharing efforts now under way, see Carrington's "Bibliography of Library Cooperation" in Special Libraries.[6] The doctrine of local self-sufficiency is dead, and proposals based on it alone will likely get into trouble.

As I warned at the beginning, I have not been able to produce any very concrete courses of action that will lead with certainty to federal support of any specific programs. I expect, though, that if you bear in mind the various factors that I, at least, think should be kept in mind, you will not have much trouble in obtaining the increased support that recent legislation intends you to have. I wish you luck.

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