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# The Video Policy Statement

Probably the greatest obstacle to librarians becoming involved with cable technology is their own inertia and natural hesitancy to pioneer in a new field. There are many good reasons why librarians would rather wait for developments and solutions offered by others experienced in coping with cable communications. For example, unused to the interface of technology with library operations, many librarians fear being thought ignorant and also feel an insecurity resulting from a lack of experience with this newest of communications hardware. Furthermore, by dealing with community video producers, cable operators and franchising agents, the librarian must assume a role that extends beyond the normal perimeters of library service. However, certain circumstances urge immediate aggression by librarians into the development of cable television.

If libraries ever hope to use cable or video communications and attain some of the projected possibilities that have been outlined by other papers in this volume, they must become involved now, during the developmental stages of the media. The Federal Communications Commission has opened the door by allowing five years for the experimentation in the use of cable television for local community programming. Even so, in 1977 the FCC will re-evaluate the free provision of local public access, educational and local government channels, and reassess the public interest use of these channels.

As for the insecurity of being thought ignorant of the complexities of the technology or lacking the necessary expertise, one only has to talk with others, including the local cable operators, to realize how few "professionals" have had substantial experience in programming for the community. Many libraries, in fact, have found their traditional programming skills a boon for the program-poor cable operator, and yet others have learned that their interest in cable can act as a catalyst for involving other community organizations. In San Francisco

there is a natural alliance between the broadcasting expertise of the schools and universities and the cablecasting interest of the library. Additionally, most local politicians lack the necessary information concerning cable television and its potential, and in many cities officials have encouraged librarian guidance and advice. Lastly, unlike other library services which libraries can adapt to their own needs based upon other's experiences, cable communication services are designed and operated at the local municipal level, and for any significant library video development there is a necessity for a grassroots involvement of the library into the local business and political arena. A simple outline of all the problems and possibilities would be desirable, but in this highly embryonic field there are few experts, and even they possess but limited experience. Hopefully, by recounting our experience in San Francisco, others will learn some possibilities to help in their own situations. However, any effective video project will be based upon individual, personal effort.

Library administrators can be instrumental in helping to establish new directions for their libraries. "Working librarians," however, are usually left to carry out the administration's policies. In San Francisco the formula was turned around; the staff provided the energy for the establishment of the library's video policy and the administration provided a support climate of encouragement and made efforts to implement the policy. Although San Francisco Public Library does not own any video equipment and has done no cable programming, it is an institution situated in the midst of a large (30,000 subscribers) cable system.

In January 1972, prior to the FCC regulations, Mr. Anderson, then City Librarian, requested that Jim Shugart, the library's audiovisual technician, and I develop a grant proposal for an experimental cable library project to be submitted to the state library for LSCA funding. In less than one week, a proposal was sketched which, although it received enthusiastic response, did not obtain funding. However, rather than be discouraged, we resolved to plan more adequately for the next proposal and to seek alternate means of funding. We gave an orientation workshop outlining some of the potentials of cable television to the staff and asked for volunteers to help develop another project proposal. Following the meeting Anderson, in his only official address to the task force, outlined the need to operate as an ad hoc committee, and asked that a proposal be submitted by December 1972. He also requested that, rather than just develop a video project, the group should attempt to outline a long-range plan of the library's video development (one which could be integrated with the library's traditional services) in which the project would be an initial step. Therefore, even before the task force became organized, it had been given the essentials of successful staff participation: (1) a goal to be obtained—in this case, not only the formulation of a policy, but also the development of a preliminary project; (2) guidelines that illustrated what would make the policy acceptable to the administration; and (3) a time frame in which to operate.

With unprecedented enthusiasm and feeling of responsibility the twenty librarian-volunteers immediately agreed upon the priorities of getting organized, getting educated, and keeping in contact with the rest of the library staff. At the first official meeting of the "Video Task Force," a proposed organizational structure was adopted and members volunteered to join six action committees. Each action committee was given certain objectives and was headed by a designated "communicator." Each communicator was expected to keep communication flowing between the committees and cooperatively to arrange general task force meetings. As originally established, the committees were:

1. Policy and Programming—Master planning for collection development, programming and cablecasting, and outlining program priorities for implementation.

2. Research, Educational, and Public Relations—A current awareness committee to keep all members posted of developments, keep San Francisco Public Library staff informed of the task force's activities, and develop a basic collection of print materials about cable television.

3. Experimental Collection Development—Plan a core collection of pre-processed videotapes by contacting known video producers locally and nationally. Also investigate methods for videographic control (as compared with bibliographic control).

4. Political Action—Education of city officials to cable's potential, and lobby for revision of San Francisco franchise to comply with FCC regulations. (This was the only committee the city librarian joined as a member.)

5. Funding—Inquire into the possible funding sources for video projects—internal, local, state and national.

6. Business Communication—Maintain contact with the local cable operator and other business interests that might support the library program.

To be briefly critical of the task force's organization, it was not long after the committees began operation that the need became obvious for more coordination than was possible through the committee communicators. Although I served as a voluntary coordinator for the first few months, in November the library funded a temporary half-time video coordinator position. Also, when the task force's action committees were established, we were unaware of the tremendous interest which would be raised outside the library or the consequent need to keep in contact with interested segments of the community.

A community relations committee should have been established in lieu of the Business Committee and Public Relations Committee to keep in active contact with the various interested people and organizations. As it occurred, many activities fell outside the perimeters of any committee and the task force coordinator was forced to handle inquiries for information from the community

and represent the library at numerous community meetings. By the time the policy was adopted, not only had a Citizens' Cable Coalition been established, but also a Municipal Consortium and a Cable Subcommittee of the San Francisco Educational Consortium, all of which wanted the library's input. We also learned that the establishment of a funding committee was premature to the adoption of a policy statement. Organizationally it would have been better to combine the print-oriented Research Committee with the tape-oriented Experimental Collection Development Committee into a unified Video Collection Committee responsible for collecting both print materials and video catalogs.

The most surprising flaw in our organization was the initial misconception of the importance of the Political Action Committee. At first fearful of including any active political involvement, this committee was established to ask questions of City Hall and try to clarify cable regulations. Rather than being taken aback, City Hall welcomed the Political Action Committee and encouraged it to contribute suggestions for a revised cable franchise. The committee assigned itself the goal of drafting suggestions for the revision of San Francisco's franchise ordinance in accord with the policy statement. After the adoption of the policy statement this duty became the major task of the library task force. At this time, having developed a broad base of knowledge and staff encouragement, the Political Action Committee metamorphized into the Franchise Committee, and members became spokespersons before the board of supervisors. It also held a cable workshop for city officials and agencies and helped organize a Municipal Cable Consortium. With growing interest in cable communications (there had been five places of legislation introduced in one year), the library has been developing political expertise and has become a major voice in the politics of cable communications in San Francisco. As a result of the testimony before the board on behalf of the Municipal Consortium, the library was given a seat on a Citizens' Cable Television Task Force established to help advise the board on cable matters.

Despite the flaws of its initial organization, the task force began operations very smoothly and quickly. Emphasizing its second priority, an immediate program of self-education was adopted. Lacking a video coordinator in the early days, each committee held its own meeting and the communicator typed out the meeting's minutes, which were circulated to all other task force members. With the establishment of the video coordinator, these minutes were compiled into an informal newsletter entitled "Cable Coordination Report" which was distributed not only to task forcers but also to every branch and subject department. To aid the flow of information, the Research, Education and Public Relations Committee made arrangements to have the main library subject departments order a separate copy of all cable materials for the task force. These materials are sent unprocessed and uncataloged to the task force's coordinator. Through special permission the task force was also given a small petty cash fund

to purchase mimeographed reports and other inexpensive documents that would not normally be ordered by the library. In turn, the committee recommended titles and acted as a resource for information about video and cable.

Everyone read and discussed the material at committee meetings. Working collectively, we were able to develop an expertise and have specialists in a matter of weeks, far sooner than would have been possible for any individual. I believe this is an important lesson for administrators who do not have to concern themselves with the infinite details of technological development, but can concentrate on the concepts and request pertinent information from others who have thoroughly investigated the field.

It was but a few weeks before task force members found that their contacts were less searches for information than a provision of answers to questions from others. This natural development of the task force's expertise and its recognition as a source of cable information for the community led it to the fourth priority: to act as a clearinghouse of information for San Francisco's Videosphere and to be aggressive in educating the rest of San Francisco to the potential of cable television.

To facilitate communication between the library and the community, especially in the early planning stages, the task force held monthly meetings to which all library staff were invited and to which special invitations to community organizations were sent. At a monthly meeting Allen Rucker of Top Value Television showed his tape of the 1972 Republican Convention in Miami and explained his use of inexpensive ½ inch video equipment which allowed him and his crew to tape the entire convention for less money than the networks spent on coffee!

At the next meeting the Collection Development Committee featured tapes from the Video Free America cooperative, and guests included officials from the Office of Economic Opportunities. For the November meeting, the task force decided to test its draft policy statement on a broad representation of San Francisco's video community. At a crowded meeting, the City Hall franchise regulator, representatives from the cable operator, independent San Francisco video producers and librarians talked about different philosophies of video and cable development. Comments about the library policy ranged from outright enthusiasm to a local educator's comment: "you librarians should keep to the book." As a result, our activities began appearing in newspapers and magazines, not merely as news items, but as feature stories about the library's proposed new role in the electronic age.

I cannot itemize all the contacts the various task force librarians have made throughout the year but I will mention our most recent community education series of programs. Every Wednesday for nine weeks, the library held a program in nine branches. After a brief slide show that illustrated the present and potential use of cable communication, portable video equipment was

demonstrated, and then a special-interest video group was given time for a presentation. A feminist group presented a powerful tape on the psychology of rape to a group of women, an Asian group's tape compared redevelopment of Japantown to the Japanese relocation during World War II, and a gay video collective told of their community's disenfranchisement from mass media. Other video groups featured Chinese, Blacks, children's television, long-hairs, Spanish, and college students.

Surrounded by high visibility, and in an energy-charged environment of staff involvement and community support, the Policy and Programming Committee deliberated the direction of the library's video program. From the beginning it was realized that the task would be difficult. Twenty individualistic librarians with different philosophies of standard library services rarely agreed unanimously on the experimental library services. At the first meeting of the committee a fight almost broke out over which program would be best for the library:

> "We should have a videotape collection of all San Francisco-produced tapes."
> "Oh, should we ignore quality?"
> "No, we should only purchase 'professionally' made tapes."
> "What's professional? Don't you understand the whole concept of people's video?"
>
> "The best thing we can do is produce our own tapes."
> "Should we also start publishing books?"
>
> "We should start slowly and concentrate only on collecting books and information for a central information center."
> "We should stop talking and start making video, even before we get this policy statement written."

Ideas and criticisms flew in all directions. To minimize conflicts we decided to draw up individual ideas of priorities. Needless to say, no one list was the same as another. However, the areas for discussion were clarified. One task force member's list which acted as one helpful guide in fleshing out the policy statement follows:

### POSSIBLE LIBRARY INVOLVEMENTS IN VIDEO/CATV
(in order of increasing energy, resources, etc.)

1. Printed information about videotape-CATV
2. Videotape archive for reference
3. Videotape circulation to groups (outside the library)

3.  Videotape circulation to groups (outside the library)
4.  Videotape circulation to individuals (outside the library)
5.  Internal programming to groups (audience viewing)
6.  Internal programming to individuals (on-line closed-circuit television)
7.  Production for staff (inservice training, continuing education workshops)
8.  Production for public (community education, public relations, video tours of library)
9.  Cooperatively shared production facility (public, education, municipal?)
10. Use of cable system (bicycled tapes)
11. Cablecasting link with cable system (microwave or wire)
12. Library-operated cablecasting facility

In terms of standard library practice the above list of priorities could read: acquisitions, storage, circulation, programming, production, and cablecasting. For each of these areas, the task force members tried to consider as many problems as could possibly be projected. Even at its conclusion, the task force considered the statement merely as a fundamental "working paper" subject to revision as experience developed. We learned that through the discussions many of our attitudes changed, and we designed the document to be flexible. However, it has given us a foundation on which to build and was an excellent tool to help clarify our thoughts and feelings. Each library will have to develop its own policy based upon the many variables of its own situation, including flexibility of the physical building, availability of a cable system, attitudes of the cable operator, other community interests, etc. However, I will briefly outline some of the major areas for evaluation and discussion of all the above priorities.

*Economics*—How much would this particular project cost? How would this project be more economical than another? How would the adoption of this service affect the total cost of the project? Could there be long-range savings by adopting a more expensive initial program?

*Technology*—Which format is the most flexible? Which format would best suit this individual program service? How sophisticated should the equipment be? What additional equipment is necessary for each service? How can some equipment serve various functions?

*Practicality*—Where could this project be placed: branch or main library? How much room is needed? Where could we expand? How much staff is needed for each program? for the total project? Where should equipment be stored? What security is necessary?

*Library Philosophy*—How would this program relate to normal library functions? What current library services could be adapted to use this new medium? What new services could be instituted? How shall the clerical and professional staff be involved? How does this affect our overall policy of library services?

*Community Philosophy*—Whom are we attempting to serve with this project: traditional patrons? Which presently unserved populations? Should our cablecasting focus be on public access programming? educational programming? programming for the municipal channel? How does this choice affect what we do? What effect might this project have on the library's image in the community?

In addition to the policy statement, supplemental reports were also submitted to the administration at the final presentation of the statement, including a rough budget and specific spatial and staffing recommendations.

As noted, the library's policy statement was presented at a general meeting of video people, the cable operator and a representative from City Hall. The policy was also given exposure to the rest of the library staff. Copies of the draft document were given to all library departments and branches and criticisms were solicited. We followed up all comments by explaining our position or amending the document. In January, the final draft was presented to the library's administrative council for its evaluation and revision. The major criticism of the document was its almost too comprehensive scope. However, the task force explained the need for a flexible document that could act as a long-range goal rather than short term set of objectives. Anderson asked each member of the administrative council to write detailed criticisms of the document. These comments were then given to the Policy Committee for review. At its final meeting, the Policy Committee reviewed the criticism of the administrative council and clarified those sections of the document that caused confusion. At the next session, the document was accepted by the council and referred to the library commission for adoption. On February 6, 1973, the San Francisco Library Commission adopted the Video Center Policy Statement, six months after the original presentation to the commission which outlined the task force's plans and objectives.

Task force activities have continued as we continue our boot-strap approach to the library's cable development. Fortunately not all libraries have had to expend such initial energy. In San Jose, for example, a progressive cable system, a knowledgeable city manager, a supportive library administrator and an energetic library staff have joined forces to plan a library-operated municipal channel. Once again I emphasize that the spirit and potential of any individual community will have the most telling influence upon its own library's plans and decisions. If any single library ever intends to use modern telecommunications for its information services, each of its librarians must overcome inertia and take the first step immediately.