Personnel and Financial Administration

EDWARD A. WIGHT

The scope of what may properly be termed personnel work in public libraries has not been defined with sufficient clarity to make possible the easy identification and selection of pertinent items from library literature. Furthermore, subject headings in current indexes do not keep pace with the development of new concepts and terminology in a field in which that literature is rapidly expanding. The major groupings of subjects in personnel administration in public libraries may, however, be expected to follow fairly closely those used in the broader field of public personnel administration. A check of the subject headings used in four recent issues of Personnel Literature, a bibliography issued by the United States Civil Service Library, shows current matter listed under sixty to seventy headings. Among the larger topics included are: position classification, salary determination, recruitment and selection, training, performance evaluation, conditions of employment, employee organizations, and problems of organization and administration.

The first effort to encompass in one volume a fairly comprehensive treatment of the methods and problems in the field was Herbert's Personnel Administration in Public Libraries. Although now largely outdated, it still has some value for the neophyte and serves as a useful introduction. A second volume of broad scope is Personnel Administration in Libraries, edited by Martin. Because of the specific problems treated in the papers and the authority of the authors, it is one of the most useful volumes on the subject.

The Telford Report, published in 1927, is among the "landmark" titles in library personnel work. Indeed, it almost marks the beginning of the authoritative literature in this field. Using data from 6,000 positions in about 150 libraries, it is a factual study of the basic problems of position classification in libraries, and represents a stage of develop-

Mr. Wight is a Professor of Librarianship at the University of California in Berkeley.

[503]
ment which still has not been reached by many public libraries. The later *Classification and Pay Plans for Municipal Public Libraries* of the American Library Association uses the general framework developed by the earlier publication, but presents the material in very different form, without making significant improvement in the basic theory or techniques. The comparable 1951 report on the same topic has wisely abandoned the effort to tailor a classification plan for each library, in favor of statements of principles and methods, so that each institution may develop its own classification and pay plan to fit its particular situation and needs.

*Representative Positions in the Library of Congress* is noteworthy because, in addition to the large number of class specifications given, representing most of the levels and types of work in the library, the volume shows in charts and text the over-all organization and staff and the organization and major purposes of each separate organizational unit. A brief volume issued by the Virginia State Library Extension Division attempts to formulate specifications for typical classes of positions, and salary schedules for several variant forms of public libraries in that state. A publication of the New Jersey Library Association has somewhat similar purposes. The effort to define the professional and nonprofessional job content of library positions produced the useful *Descriptive List of Professional and Nonprofessional Duties in Libraries*.

For a number of years data on salaries currently paid were published in the *A.L.A. Bulletin* in connection with statistics for public libraries. The discontinuance of this annual compilation led to a special tabulation for a group of large libraries by Galt, of Buffalo, now continued by Enoch Pratt Free Library. Partly because of dissatisfaction expressed at recent American Library Association meetings with the proposed revision of the Association's minimum salary standards without inclusion of current scales, a study of salaries was made in 1952, and a first report based on that has appeared. Also, David summarized the economic status of library personnel in 1949, presenting salary data in a variety of classifications and for several types of libraries. For such information covering a wide range of individual public libraries, the best published sources are now the annual reports of the various state library agencies.

The selection of library employees and in-service training are given well-rounded consideration in two papers in the volume edited
Personnel and Financial Administration

by Martin. *Internship in the Library Profession* is the subject of an article by St. John. Alvarez has made a detailed study of the qualifications of 241 directors of public libraries in cities of over 10,000 population in seven midwestern states. Personnel and training agencies have been surveyed and reported upon in Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, and New Jersey. At the University of Chicago Library Institute in 1948 Munn read a paper entitled “Education for Public Librarianship” and Ersted one on the subject of “Education for Library Service to Children and Youth.”

A comparative study of service ratings in several public libraries was made recently by Elliott. Conditions of employment are included in the report of David previously referred to. Certification has been a topic of recurring interest for a number of years, and one compilation summarizing practices in the several states has appeared. This summary subsequently has been brought more nearly up to date. Kavanaugh and Wescott, after a survey of opinion, prepared a statement headed “A National Examination as a Basis for Library Certification.” Practices of individual states have often been reported in brief articles, but the recent proposals for New York seem to represent the most significant progress on this problem.

Personnel practices in a group of civil service and non-civil service public libraries were studied by Goldhor. A detailed treatment of the selection of the head librarian in a civil service jurisdiction applies the case study method to a single position, while a general report on civil service and libraries answers many of the common questions on this subject.

Organizations of employees is the subject of a thoughtful paper by Phelps, and the incidence of unions in libraries has been described by Berelson. The need for a new approach to the problems of morale is eloquently stated by Gardner. A group of papers on retirement for librarians was recently edited by Goldhor. Two publications prepared by the staff of the Minneapolis Public Library have been reprinted by A.L.A. The first emphasizes public relations with patrons, and the second supervision of personnel.

The effort to encourage individual public libraries to prepare well-rounded codified manuals of personnel organization and procedure should be stimulated by a recent publication of the A.L.A. Board of Personnel Administration. Many of the volumes recounting the sur-
vey of the Los Angeles Public Library have findings and implications for personnel and Volume IX is devoted exclusively to personnel administration. This is the outstanding example of a factual study of policies and practices in a single public library, and its findings and recommendations are of wide significance for other institutions.

The Public Librarian, one of the volumes growing out of the Public Library Inquiry, contains the largest amount of material within any one volume on the specific topic of professional personnel in public libraries. Among the general conclusions are the following: (a) public librarians “are not a clearly defined professional group,” (b) “both the general level and the career pattern of salaries for professional personnel in public libraries are inadequate and tend to be inequitable,” (c) a large proportion of the personnel do not have the collegiate and professional education called for, (d) “personnel in public libraries is inadequately organized and supervised,” and (e) “present public librarians are, on the average, oriented by temperament, interest, and training more toward the atmosphere and the working pattern of the traditional public library than toward the purposes and activities of the institution envisaged by the current official public library leaders.”

A survey of the literature on personnel in public libraries seems to indicate that while it is extensive, most of it is elementary and un-integrated. Perhaps with a view to remedying this, a subcommittee of the American Library Association Board on Personnel Administration has been working on the preparation of a bibliographic essay reviewing the literature on library personnel administration.

On the subject of financial administration, the relatively small body of substantial writing in the public library field may, for convenience, be grouped under the following topics: the place of the library in public finance; budget; income, including that from federal and state aid; expenditures; and accounting. Two volumes, neither of them now up to date but covering several or most of these subjects are those by Vitz and by Wight. The first, a collection of papers by librarians, emphasizes financial problems of the library in the early years of the depression of the 1930's, but includes points of view which still are pertinent.

Chatters treats the relationship of the library to the local government, an important problem not limited to finance. The trend toward home rule charters, now making rapid progress in some states, will
Personnel and Financial Administration

undoubtedly affect fiscal as well as other aspects of the public library program.

The best treatments of the function, structure, and operation of the public library budget are to be found in the general works by Vitz and Wight, referred to above. However, the theory and practice as expressed in these volumes are less adequate, though more specifically pertinent, than will be found in the general and specialized literature of public administration. Discussions of the library budget emphasize the income part of the budget—sources of income, methods of securing additional financial support, and winning the “budget campaign.” Drury and Shedd \(^4\) have prepared a “library finance handbook” especially for Kansas libraries.

The performance budget, representing a relatively new topic in public finance, has not yet been adequately described as it relates to libraries. Such a budget is set up in terms of (a) the specific anticipated work program, including volume of work performance, (b) cost per unit for each type of work to be performed, and (c) the total of the amounts of money required as shown by the products of the volumes of work and the corresponding costs per unit. Obviously a satisfactory performance budget cannot be prepared unless the basic work units have been defined and compiled and unit-cost data have been determined.

Two opposing points of view relating to local sources of tax income for library support are (a) that the proceeds of a definite tax or rate should be earmarked for the library, and (b) that the library should receive its support in the form of appropriations from the general revenue of the jurisdiction. The provision of a definite millage or a minimum-maximum range is common in general library legislation. A part of the proceeds of the intangible property tax is used successfully in Ohio. Librarians have tended to support the first point of view, while the general theory of public finance has tended to oppose such a piece-meal approach to the financial support of governmental services.\(^4\) In fact, public administrators would tie all aspects of public library administration and finance more closely to the local government.\(^4\)

The volume by Armstrong,\(^4\) published in mimeographed form for the Public Library Inquiry, contains data on income and expenditures from the Inquiry sample of libraries and for the several states, and represents an important and unique contribution.
Three particular aspects of library income have dominated the library literature of the past two decades, namely the library in the depression, federal aid, and state aid. The first and second of these topics often are considered together. Duffus described the financial plight of "our starving libraries" during the depression years of the early 1930's, following studies of ten American communities. Stanford reported a comprehensive investigation of federal aid during the depression years. Descriptions of the programs of two states are included in his volume. Scores of articles about local and statewide programs have appeared. Chatters gives a succinct overview of the implications of financial aid from central government—state and federal—and makes general suggestions about future policy.

Many of the early articles about federal aid are concerned with the dangers inherent therein, and are now primarily of interest to the historian. Joeckel's report on the problem, and the wide experience of libraries with various forms of emergency federal aid during the depression years, have done much to promote the acceptance by the profession of the general principles of federal participation in financing extension of library service. The published hearings on the federal library service bill contain evidence supporting the now approved point of view, as well as details covering the proposed distribution of federal aid to the several states. Late in the fall of 1952 plans were announced by the American Library Association to reintroduce in the 83rd Congress the library service bill which failed to be brought to a vote in the 82nd Congress.

Wachtel published in 1933 a study of state provisions for the support of municipal public libraries. An excellent brief history and statement on the present status of state aid as of 1945 is given by Merrill. Reports on the need for aid of that sort, and on plans for specific programs, are common in the publications of state agencies and associations. Possibly the most careful of these have emanated from New York State. The Report of the Governor's Committee on Library Aid gives important background information, together with the text of the State Aid Law of 1950. Programs of assistance are now operating successfully in many states, under widely different plans and methods of support. Possibly the outstanding tendency in the best of the state-aid programs is the emphasis upon strengthening the services of small libraries by some type of consolidated or integrated large-area plan.
as distinct from the early methods of equal small grants or direct per-
capita payments.

Public library expenditures in cities of over 100,000 population
have been studied by Deily in relation to the total municipal ex-
penditures and the economic ability of the jurisdictions. Kaiser has
made comparisons of trends, including expenditures, in a group of
large public libraries from 1900 to 1946.

Library accounting is similar in principle to general accounting,
and consequently has received relatively little attention. Special
manuals for public libraries have been prepared by Brown and by
Bray, but local needs will probably continue to dictate the practices
of individual libraries. The chief advance in recent years has been
the introduction of machine methods. Parker describes library appli-
cations of punched cards in financial administration.

In a chapter on "cost accounting" Wight refers to significant
studies up to 1943. The data for the Montclair survey of costs in
thirty-seven public libraries, reported by Baldwin and Marcus, repre-
sent the largest body of information on this subject. Possibly the most
significant contribution of their effort is the compilation on the dis-
tribution of time in various types of activities, which was a by-product
of the cost investigation.

An important analysis of the financial administration of a single
library system is given in one of the volumes of the survey of the
Los Angeles Public Library. On a lower key there is Yabroff’s survey
of business procedures in the Racine (Wisc.) Public Library.

Examination of the literature reveals no example of a library which
has integrated cost accounting with its general accounting. Obviously,
such a process will require refinements in practice and routine re-
ports regarding the volume of work accomplished. The units of per-
formance which are recorded must be directly related to the cate-
gories into which expenditures are classified or can be segregated,
since the unit cost is the total expense of an operation or activity
divided by the number of work units accomplished. Performance
budgeting, which has been referred to earlier, requires unit cost data,
thus illustrating the basic unity of budgeting, accounting, and cost
accounting.

The present writer suggests that consideration be given by public
libraries to cost accounting and performance budgeting, using a few
simple basic types of activities or services which are common to prac-
EDWARD A. WIGHT

tically all libraries, such as (a) acquisition and processing, (b) preservation and storage, (c) circulation, (d) information and reference work, including the advising of readers, and (e) other services. For the first four of these the count of number of items gives the performance data. With the exception of the volume of information and reference services these figures are now typically recorded. The “other services” consist primarily of a variety of activities for individuals and groups, such as forums, concerts, and exhibitions, where the basic count is the number of persons served. Within each of the five broad types of services suggested as measures of performance, unit costs would probably vary widely with different types of materials and programs. Some libraries would want to make further refinement of the data, so as to determine the variations in unit costs among a variety of activities. The total cost of performing the anticipated number of units of work should add up to the total budget request. The costs of activities and operations which are nonproductive of any of the recorded work units, such as administration, and building operation and maintenance, must be allocated to the various appropriate work units.

References

Personnel and Financial Administration


[511]


Personnel and Financial Administration


52. Merrill, Julia W.: State Aid to Public Libraries, in Joeckel, op. cit., ref. 44, pp. 195-211.


