
Introduction

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ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT LINKS in the chain of operations for public library improvement and development today is a state library agency, empowered and adequately equipped to provide necessary professional leadership and assistance to localities.

If we consider state aid to public libraries in its broadest terms, all states, territories, and Canadian provinces have legal provisions to give some kind of help to local libraries. While they may possess this power, to various extents, none of these levels of governments have indicated even near satisfaction with their "equipment" in the sense of personnel, materials, and operational budget. To perform its widely recognized functions of surveying library conditions, planning, training, advising and counseling, lending materials, cooperating with appropriate groups, and coordinating activities, the state library agency must have an adequate number of highly qualified and experienced staff members, appropriate and sufficient materials, and the necessary supporting budget for operation. And, finally, to engage effectively in promotional activities to develop the state's network of public library systems, the agency needs a program of grants-in-aid or other direct aids to local libraries.

Although the idea of state aid to public libraries in the United States might be said to be over a hundred years old, significant library developments of 1956 gave it new impetus. A restatement of the national standards for public libraries called for the development of library systems, and important responsibilities were given to state library extension agencies in promoting these systems. The federal government recognized its responsibility for public library development with the passage of the Library Services Act, which required the states to produce a state plan for library development and assigned responsibility for administering federal grants to state library extension

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agencies. As a result, the total operation of the library function of state government has been greatly enlarged and improved. The library literature of the past three years is filled with progress reports on rural library development in which the state library extension agency's central role is made very clear.

Clearly indicated, also, in the library developments of the past three years throughout the country is the evident importance of the availability of grants-in-aids—both federal and state—to the success of any state's library program. In this mid-1960 period, fifty-two states and territories are participating in the federal grants program under the Library Services Act; and twenty-five of these states are making grants-in-aid to local libraries. Several other states are, at present, actively engaged in an effort to secure passage of state-aid bills; others are planning such legislative programs for 1961 or later.

This current activity in connection with state and federal aid plus the fact that relatively little up-to-date documentation is available caused the officers of the American Association of State Libraries to approach the Editor of *Library Trends* suggesting an issue devoted to the subject of state aid to public libraries. This issue, composed of papers written by political scientists as well as librarians closely associated with state library work, is the happy result.

The content of the combined papers, which was discussed and agreed upon by the Board of Directors of the Association of State Libraries, might be summarized as follows: (1) A statement dealing with the history and philosophy, the why, of state aid to public libraries. (2) Brief explanations of the current patterns of existing state-aid programs, giving attention to concepts, laws, rules, regulations, and administrative codes. (3) Recognition of the relationship of state and national library service standards to state-aid programs. (4) Recognition of the relationship of local, state and federal participation in public library development. (5) Attention to the need for continuous evaluation of state-aid programs, and (6) an account of at least one successful legislative campaign for state aid to public libraries.

The special purposes of the publication are, briefly, (a) to give assistance to states in planning and securing new state-aid programs, and (b) to help the states improve existing programs of state aid to public libraries.

The papers have been written by highly qualified and experienced persons who have, for the most part, carried responsibilities in plan-

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ning, securing, and administering state-aid programs to libraries. Although it might be said they were written *by* professionals, *for* professionals, it is hoped they will be read and used by library trustees, government officials, and other interested citizens. For, finally, public library development will advance at a pace compensatory with society's rapid changes only (1) if the state library extension agency is adequately supported and furnishes the necessary leadership on a statewide basis, (2) if there is full cooperation between the state library agency and the state associations of librarians and library trustees, (3) if there exists understanding and cooperation of agencies, institutions, and organizations holding allied interests with public libraries, and finally, (4) if there is, most importantly, a deep-rooted interest and support from local citizens, directed into effective channels of action. This book has been designed and prepared to contribute to this development.