



Planning New Service Outlets

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THE TUMULT AND THE SHOUTING have faded away, and the reality of the regional library system as a legal entity now exists but is yet to be resolved from dissonance to consonance, from disparity to unity and into a smoothly functioning whole. For those librarians who walk away from "system libraries," the task ahead may appear formidable, but it is not so; for the very existence of the system, even though it may as yet be only in a skeleton form, implies that somewhere along the line many people are involved,—governmental officials, library trustees, librarians, and citizens. All these people had confidence in the idea of a regional library system, and it is on these confident ones we must rely and with them we must first begin to work.

The librarian or the administrator of the system of libraries needs to be enthusiastic about the task ahead and to believe in the workability of the principle of libraries joining together and pooling resources, money, staff, and books for better service. But at the same time it is well to know the limitations of the regional system, and to bear in mind that the difficulties usually are those inherent in any extension service, the one most evident being that of distance from the headquarters. This is as true of rural mail service as of library service. Any other faults or difficulties will be those found in any library service, such as limitations of time and money, the conflict of personalities within a large system, and ever-present human frailty.

It is important at the very beginning not to rush into services unprepared. There will be pressure from those who, having read the glowing accounts of the establishment of a regional library, expect that services will immediately spring forth full-blown.

It is advisable first of all to review carefully the whole situation and to make a broad general survey and plan for the contemplated services. This is elementary, but many librarians have forgotten this fundamen-

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Planning New Service Outlets

tal and have made the job unnecessarily difficult. The strengths and weaknesses of no two systems are alike in this respect; capitalize on the strengths and plan to turn the weaknesses to advantages or at least to make the weakest link in the system as strong as possible so that it will not nullify everything else.

In preparing the new services for a regional library, the total resources of the system must be evaluated and taken into consideration, viz., finances available, total book stock and other materials, and total staff and their individual skills and potentials. Has the headquarters been designated? If not, where is the most central place for it? How many outlets for service already exist, and are their locations plotted on a map so that coverage is easily seen? Will it be necessary to designate one or more of these as sub-regional headquarters? If the area to be served is very large, the need for sub-regional headquarters will become obvious immediately so that service may be given at the same level throughout the entire area to be served. Are there any legal matters to be completed, such as contracts to be made and signed before all units of the system can function? Are there library trustees to be appointed, and have the officials responsible been made aware of their obligation in this regard?

While this broad plan of service is being made, taking into account the entire geographical area to be served, it will undoubtedly become evident that there is need for more than one kind of service outlet. There may be some fortunate regional libraries where either all branch or all bookmobile service will be adequate, and, of course, this would simplify the planning immeasurably. But most regional libraries, especially multi-county ones, will be faced with the planning for both branch and bookmobile service, and even small stations (better called *community libraries*).

While considering the outlets which will be receiving services from a headquarters or sub-headquarters building, it is well at the same time also to look at the headquarters building itself and its adequacy for handling both bookmobile and branch service, and possibly direct service to the people in that community. In some ways this direct service complicates the whole problem, but on the other hand it offers the definite advantage of providing a resident staff who may be used as specialist consultants over the entire region. Some changes may be necessary in the headquarters building, some rearrangements of the book collection, and possibly quarters added for housing bookmobiles or other vehicles for delivery of books to outlying community libraries

or branches, e.g., either a station wagon or a delivery van, if the system is large enough to warrant this.

How is the decision made as to which type of service is to be given where? If the regional library is the direct result of a demonstration, the best kinds of services will have already been determined. The demonstration will also have shown where changes are needed, especially where the response was not as good as had been expected; these areas should receive close scrutiny and some study done of the reasons response was poor. Perhaps it was lack of interest or even downright blocking of the demonstration by government officials. This can be a tough thing to handle, and will call for great diplomacy. If there are influential people (this is usually translated into voters) who are in favor of the library services, the librarian must work with and through them to get at the officials to secure their approval. It is most difficult to administer a regional library system if the government officials are not willing to lend their support, not only their moral support but also their financial commitment. Often the trouble is a misunderstanding and can be quickly solved, but this cannot be counted upon as an easy way out.

Unless the regional library system was created by a fiat superimposed by some higher governmental authority, there has been a period of preparation and testing involving many people. It is important to listen to these people, not only the person in the little library way off in the farthest corner and the head of the big, strong library, but also to the citizens who are to receive the service. There is nothing better than a satisfied clientele and there is scarcely anything worse than a dissatisfied clientele, and it is the librarian's duty to discover what dissatisfactions there are, if they do exist. This does not mean that library standards are to be ignored, for the very success of the regional system will depend on service predicated on modern standards, even though the goals may not all be reached at once. For instance, in selecting books for children, it sometimes takes a lot of convincing that the modern children's books are better than some of those enjoyed by adults when they were young. But, indeed, the very essence of the kind of library service to be given by this new system is that it will be an upgraded service, approximating library standards as nearly as possible, and that it will be more readily available to more people.

In regard to the question of branches, determine how many communities there are in the region which already have libraries, both in large and small cities or towns, with library buildings or in rented

Planning New Service Outlets

quarters, in stores or supermarkets, or at the crossroads gas station. Which of these are weak, and why? Is it because the librarian does not know how to get the most out of the book collection and needs training, or is it that the collection itself is poor, needs weeding and revitalization with new and more interesting books? Would the addition of a phonograph record collection or regular deliveries of films bring people into the library? Is the branch library located among people of foreign extraction, where books in their own language would attract them? How about planning discussion groups for both adults and young people? Would it be advisable to have story hours given by a professional children's librarian sent out on a regular schedule from headquarters? Have the people in the community had a chance to talk with the library staff about what they expect and want from their local library?

The density of population differs greatly within the area to be served and often varies from fairly large cities or towns with suburbs to sparsely populated farming areas. In planning services to these disparate kinds of communities, the goal should be to give the same quality of service throughout, although the type of service outlet which is best for any given area will vary.

Bertha Cain in a 1950 article, entitled, "Will It Be a Branch or a Bookmobile?" listed four basic considerations,¹ and these are just as valid today as when they were written. They are size of community or area, available financial support, personnel, and book stock. She elaborates on these four points as factors in establishing branch service, in determining which communities should have branches, and in deciding on the size of the staff and book collection. "A branch is not a service station of a main library—it is a library in its own right and has a definite responsibility to its community . . . every move should be geared to carry out this major objective, whether it be through an established branch, sub station, or bookmobile service."²

Chapter twenty-four in *Practical Administration of Public Libraries*, by Joseph Wheeler and Herbert Goldhor, is a good source for the librarian developing plans for both branch and bookmobile services.³ They say:

Two main theories of branch library function have competed with each other. One envisages a branch library as a smaller-scale public library, offering reference and other special services as does the central library. The other assumes that branch libraries should be mainly agencies for the circulation of popular books at the neighborhood level.

Both theories are valid, since they apply to different types of agencies; but there should be far fewer of the small, weak distributing branches, and many more of the large, stronger branches which can give information service to adults and young people.⁴

Small, weak distributive types of branches subvert the entire philosophy of regional library service which is based on the premise that by pooling all resources in one central administration the consequent services may be extended over a wider area at a substantially higher level of service than is possible to the component parts individually.

Has there been a careful background of mutual understanding and agreement created between the larger agencies so that they are ready to loan books and materials back and forth, particularly to the smaller libraries, to the end that together all the branches and the bookmobile service may provide better service than can each one alone? This understanding is vital to establish from the beginning and to demonstrate that it really works. These are some of the parts of a long yardstick that should be applied in evaluating the branch system.

If all the personnel of the system grasp the fact that the important thing is to get the patron what he wants, then much difficulty and hard feelings will be avoided. The library patron does not care which corporate entity owns the book he wants to read, just so he gets it and promptly. As a matter of fact, borrowing books from another library, especially a library of some repute, impresses the reader, and this status symbol can be turned to the library's advantage in the community. Patrons should always be able to return books to any service outlet, no matter where originally borrowed. This requires a method to handle returns, but it is not difficult to do either by branch deliveries, bookmobile, or mail.

If none of the above solves the problem of a weak branch or community library, then bookmobile service must be considered either as a replacement for the agency or as a supplement to service in the area if the population is scattered. Generally speaking, a policy should be established on how close to a branch or a community library bookmobile service will be given, e.g., within a radius of two miles, five miles, or ten miles. The two types of service can supplement each other but should not directly detract from each other. This is especially true in a system where bookmobile service is new and the stops are in the general area of long-established branches. Very often the bookmobile is resented by the branch librarian, and here is the place for complete understanding and mutual agreement before the bookmobile

Planning New Service Outlets

service is inaugurated. This has been pointed out by Irwin O. Sexton who says: "Determining the area served by a given stop can easily cause confusion, for today ardent library users will not hesitate to drive their automobiles a considerable distance to secure books from two or three different locations."⁵

Assume that it has now been determined which branches and community libraries are to be retained; the next step is to determine whether others should be added and where they should be located. This will require scouting the area in question to see if there are communities large enough to warrant the establishment of either a branch or a community library and if there is sufficient interest among the people who will benefit from such added service. If affirmative answers are found then the proper authorities must be approached, e.g., city councils or, in the case of unincorporated towns, local sponsorship organizations, and a building, store, or other location must be found for the book collection. A thorough knowledge of the community or area to be served is essential to determine where extensions of the service should be located. This whole process is time consuming but pays off in the end in economy of operation and in satisfied users. There is no profit to anyone if a service is imposed arbitrarily from the top without regard for its need or acceptance.

It is here that the local people who are interested in books and reading and in the regional system are of great help to the librarian. It only takes one or two interested people in a community to spearhead the movement for a branch or community library, and their enthusiasm will be of the greatest assistance to the librarian. In addition, they know the community and know what support can be given to the establishment of a library. It is wise to use the local librarian's knowledge of his community in making decisions for expanding service in an area. This has the added virtue that the librarian feels he is making a contribution to the whole system as well as advancing library services in his own community.

In some parts of any regional system, bookmobile service will be the best answer. Plans will be needed for making entirely new routes or inserting new stops in the old schedule so that there is complete coverage. Here, again, the scouting that has been done will be helpful in determining just where the most interested families live. Scouting for bookmobile service actually means door-to-door visits with a well-prepared, concise statement that will identify the library's staff member, his purpose, what bookmobile service is, and what advantages it

will bring to the resident and his family. There should be a policy adopted as to the minimum number of families which it is thought economic to serve. For example, should there be a minimum of five families before starting bookmobile service in a new area, or are the farms so far apart throughout the entire rural area of the regional system that it will have to be almost a door-to-door type of service? Obviously, the cost factor is important, but on the other hand the eventual goal is complete coverage with good library service. In cities, bookmobile service can be the precursor to branches when there are not enough funds to set up a branch system.

In the state of Washington, as an example, the Mid-Columbia Regional Library gives service by bookmobile in the dry wheat area of the state where the ranches are enormous in size, and there is no other way to serve these people except by stops at each individual ranch. The bookmobile has a loud speaker which will carry almost a mile; and as it approaches a ranch, the approximate time of arrival at the ranch gate is given, and people drive to the gate to receive service from the bookmobile. In other areas of the country, service is given by boat to remote areas. The warmth of welcome and the gratitude of people living in such places is rewarding. There is, however, always the element of cost, and this should be weighed carefully by the librarian.

Perhaps it might be more economical to give service by mail, with the likes and tastes in reading of whole families listed in a separate folder, and with books mailed to them, say once a month. This has proven satisfactory in many areas, and a warm personal relationship is established between the families and the library. In the Yakima Valley Regional Library, whole families of children have gone from the first grade through high school with their homework supplemented by reference service by mail from the regional library, in addition to everyday reading for the whole family.

On planning bookmobile service, Gretchen Schenk comments:

A detailed knowledge of the county and its population centers is required in preparing for bookmobile service. Good county maps are the first requisite. Those available from the county surveyor's office, rural mail carriers, county planning commissions or agricultural extension service, showing the location of each house, church, and school, are best.

Much time will be saved if, before beginning to lay out proposed routes, the administrator will consult other county employees who

Planning New Service Outlets

have already broken trail in similar direct-service ventures. The county school superintendent's staff, home demonstration agents and other rural organizers and workers will know convenient meeting places and possible suitable stops, but county nurses know the back roads best of all! These county workers will often be pleased to introduce the . . . librarian where necessary and can frequently advise regarding problems in community relations and physical hazards such as unsafe bridges or dangerous roads.⁶

This applies to regional library service geared to several counties as well as to one-county service. The variety of terrain, distances, the kind of bookmobile that one is operating, staff resources, and the availability of a good book collection are factors that will determine the bookmobile schedule.

Inevitably the question of providing bookmobile (public library) service at the schools will come up. There are pros and cons in abundance on this subject, but in a system of libraries covering a regional area there is no question but that this type of service will be necessary. Children are an important segment of the total population the library serves, and it is necessary to reach them, where they are, with books which are not too curriculum-related or associated with school work. To be sure, many of the books in the school library will duplicate those on the bookmobile, but the association of the bookmobile is non-school. Some librarians say that they wish they had never started bookmobile service at schools, but this is usually after a trying day, and the worth of the service is unquestioned.

A decision must be made as to how close to cities and towns bookmobile service at schools will be brought and whether the bookmobile will be taken to the smaller communities where the school libraries may be exceptionally weak. This should be studied very carefully and the long-range effects of such service given consideration. Some regional libraries will not go to the public schools in an incorporated city or town, or will not serve such schools if they are within, say, a two-mile radius of the headquarters or a branch library. In planning bookmobile service at schools, resources of staff and book collection should weigh heavily in the decision, for once this type of service is started, it is most difficult to withdraw. It is imperative to work with the school librarians, the school principals, and the superintendent of schools in determining just how far the regional library will go to bring *public library service* onto the school grounds. Some school administrators and some librarians argue that it is all public money

which is being expended and that it makes little difference as to which agency pays for the service. Other librarians insist that their job is to give public library service and that it is up to the school administrators to provide good school libraries. Certainly where there are good school libraries, bookmobiles are used much more heavily and in a more discriminating manner by the children and the teachers.

Stewart W. Smith's article, "Potentialities and Capabilities of Bookmobiles for Library Service," in *Library Trends*, January 1961, provides well-reasoned arguments for bookmobile service at schools,⁷ and this should be read by all librarians planning bookmobile service. That entire issue of *Library Trends* is devoted to current trends in bookmobiles; in addition to the articles by Stewart Smith and Irwin Sexton, already mentioned, the issue covers such phases of bookmobile service as selection of the vehicle, personnel, budgeting costs, operation, publicity, and public relations. Recommended, too, is "Public Library Bookmobile Operation," by Mary Craig, with a helpful bibliography.⁸ This is a study comparing the bookmobile service of the Ft. Wayne and Allen County Public Library (Indiana) with current practices elsewhere.

The evaluation of the total book resources for the entire area to be served is vital. Undoubtedly with the addition of many new outlets of service it will be imperative to add more titles and a greater spread of titles, with more duplication. This should be set in motion as soon as possible so that books may be received and processed promptly and thus enable the extension of services to proceed as rapidly as possible. There is nothing more disappointing to a library patron than to have service begin with inadequate books for borrowing. Book purchases should not be made at random or just in quantity to fill up the shelves, but with the knowledge of where there are gaps in the total collection to be filled. Due notice should be taken of special collections in the system. Fluidity of the book collection is a most important factor and should be understood by all member libraries and officials at the very beginning. Ownership of books or property can be vested in the original libraries, but an intra-library loan system to make all resources available to any member library or any patron should be set up. Reference service should also be planned so that the patron in the farthest point geographically has access to the same service as does the one nearest the headquarters. Unless the new system is able to maintain a quality of service better than that previously available, patrons and librarians have every right to complain.

Planning New Service Outlets

One of the most difficult problems in integrating long-established libraries into a system involves this question of the fluid book collection. No longer can it be "my" library and "your" library; it must be "our" library. Library trustees and government officials, however, need to be reassured of permanent ownership if this poses a problem in the regional system. At the same time they must be made aware of the necessity for mutual trust in the lending of books and materials. However in the case of books or other materials which have been given to specific libraries with strings attached concerning their use, these limitations should be respected; if patrons need to consult this material, arrangement should be made for them to do so where they are housed. John Richards has written an excellent article on the fluidity of book loans.⁹

Thorough understanding of system policies by all library boards of trustees, supervisors, or other officials is an absolute must. If there are contracts, then the mutual obligations should be clearly understood. Ownership of property involved and its control should be made clear. Local fears and misconceptions can be reduced to a minimum and allayed if they are thoroughly discussed, e.g., fear of loss of local autonomy, the tenure of librarians and staffs in member libraries, the loss of control over book collections, and many other things that worry librarians and trustees of small libraries when they become part of a larger system. These are reasonable fears; they arise out of ignorance very often, but they are none the less real. The importance of making the total resources of all member libraries available to all people in the region should be stressed. This is often hardest for long-established libraries to accept, and it is here very often that the fear of losing their book collections which have been built over a long period of years becomes a big factor. Service to all parts of the regional area cannot be adequately given unless this fluidity of the book collection and materials is understood, and the idea accepted. This takes tact and diplomacy along with enthusiasm; it will not work if an arrogant approach is used. Ultimately this whole thing comes down to people and their relationships with each other. Hawthorne Daniel in his book, *Public Libraries for Everyone*, has this to say:

When new regional library plans are advanced it is most uncommon for opposition to arise among those who have played a part in the establishment or operation of such municipal libraries as may be affected. It is not unusual for such people to imagine that the new plan calls not only for the creation of a new and larger library entity but also

for the reduction or elimination of such libraries as already exist. Properly operated, of course, regional libraries are all but certain to strengthen and to increase the usefulness of such local libraries as are affected—even of long-established libraries with many loyal friends in the communities they serve. And, with broader opportunities for service, as well as with the more efficient and more economical methods that regional administration make possible, the integration of smaller units into the larger one is all but certain to benefit not only those portions of the region that formerly had inadequate library service or none at all, but also even such local and formerly independent libraries as had previously served their localities well.¹⁰

In order to avoid later cries of anguish, it should also be stressed and understood throughout the entire system that there will be constant evaluation and revision of the services. Just because a branch has been set up in one area of the region does not necessarily mean that it will always be in that location. A branch or community library must justify its continuance by its use, and in the evaluation process, some criteria of optimum economic operation should be determined. Shifts in population may necessitate relocation. Then, if the branch does not measure up after every reasonable step has been taken to make the service vital and adapted to the particular area, the branch should be closed and consideration given to bookmobile or mail service. This evaluation also applies to bookmobile stops and should be done at least once every year. The very flexibility of the bookmobile service lends itself very readily to changes in schedule which will make optimum use very easy to attain. Economy of bookmobile service should not outweigh the necessity of a more permanent service by a branch; and when a bookmobile stop becomes too heavily used, then consideration should be given to establishing a branch or a community library.

Flexibility, in fact, is the key word in the operation of all phases of regional library service, whether it be in use of staff anywhere in the system as needed, fluidity of book collection, changes in service outlets and bookmobile schedules, or directive emphasis in the budget to enlarge or to expand service for maximum coverage and use. Because libraries have come late into the scramble for the tax dollar, their very survival may depend on the joining of their strengths in systems of libraries, not in a defensive manner but to fulfill the demands for their services in this age of increased educational opportunities for all people.

Planning New Service Outlets

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