
Selection, Training, and Staffing for Branch Libraries

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A SEARCH OF library literature on the various aspects of personnel practices in branch libraries produces a great many items of helpful information, but in scattered sources rather than in systematic form. It is true, of course, that most general treatments of recruitment, selection, induction, and development of library personnel are applicable to the branch staff. The two most recent general texts on library administration, *Practical Administration of Public Libraries*, by Wheeler and Goldhor,¹ and *Local Public Library Administration*, edited by Roberta Bowler,² include useful material in their chapters on personnel and on branch management.

Considerable information on branch staffing patterns has been assembled in a variety of forms, usually ephemeral, and for a variety of reasons, sometimes by individual libraries when required to justify staff needs to budget authorities. Unfortunately, statistical formulas based on numerical analyses of existing practice can be completely unrealistic, even dangerous, when transferred to theoretically comparable situations. Therefore, better counsel can often be found in surveys of some of our larger cities, made by experts, wherein service objectives are presented as the rationale for the staffing pattern recommended. An excellent example of such a survey is Lowell Martin's *Branch Library Service for Dallas*.³

Bound to color any current discussion of library personnel in any of its aspects is the long-standing nation-wide shortage of professional librarians which has handicapped library growth and development and, in some cases, forced unwelcome compromises with desired standards.

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Selection of Branch Staff

Textbooks on personnel administration in libraries (and civil service examination announcements) are prone to describe desirable qualifications for librarians in terms that only paragons could possess in full. Although realism requires selection from what is available, certain definite qualities should still be sought in the staff assigned to branch positions.

The term "skilled generalist" probably best describes the professional background most useful in branch service to adults. Successful branch work has special requirements of its own. In a large city, the community branch is "the library" to many thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people. In addition to general intelligence and adequate professional training, tact, patience, and genuine interest in people are highly desirable qualities for branch service.

Clerical or other nonprofessional positions in branches equally require dependable, friendly, out-going people. In many libraries, positions in these classifications can be filled by part-time employees. Sometimes housewives living in the neighborhood can acquire sufficient typing ability or can brush up pre-marital office skills to qualify as clerks or clerk-typists. Some housewives even find it convenient to work as pages for a few hours a week. College and high school students, too, often prefer to work in part-time positions at branches near their homes. Thus many branches enjoy a labor market advantage over the central library, which is usually located in the congested downtown area.

The degree of authority and responsibility delegated to the branch librarian will be largely dependent upon the organization of the library system and the extent to which branch management practices have been standardized. Many large city and county libraries have regionalized their branch service. When this has been done, branch librarians usually have fairly quick and direct access to their regional supervisor for aid in decision-making when problems arise. Likewise, they will have received guidance through instruction and written directives on branch operations, often in very detailed form. In a more loosely-organized system, where a fairly large number of branches are under the supervision of a higher-ranking library official, one who perhaps also has other responsibilities, the branch librarian may have considerably more autonomy, and may even, within limits of overall policy, be somewhat free to develop procedures.

Leaving aside conflicting theories of branch organization, let us only

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point out here that the personality, practical experience and skill of the branch librarian are highly important to the smoothness of the branch's operation. The branch librarian must be a successful combination of administrator, supervisor, and bookman. He must also be the library's representative in the community, the first link between the people his branch serves and the often little-understood government agency of which it is a part. This is true of the branch librarian even in a regional system, where the regional supervisor sometimes acts as the delegate of the chief librarian or library board in planning service for the region and in dealing with its broad-scale problems.

A word should be said about the several types of nonprofessional supervisory positions which have been developed within the past few years in libraries, particularly about their special usefulness in branches. The importance of separating professional duties from clerical and having each performed by the proper classification of personnel does not need laboring here. However, even when libraries have sincerely tried to honor this principle in the observance rather than in the breach, it has often been necessary for librarians to learn clerical procedures in order to train and supervise clerks. This has been particularly true in branches, where clerical processes concerned with circulation occupy such a large proportion of the total operations. The emergence of a skilled, intermediate, subprofessional class (variously termed library assistant, library technician, or library aide) has provided a highly satisfactory solution to this problem. In some branches workload and staff are too small to permit this degree of specialization. In Los Angeles, twenty-eight library assistants now supervise all clerical operations in the twenty-one largest branches. A strong advantage of this classification is that it offers incentive and promotional opportunity to those who follow a career in the library but are without professional training and background.

There is some debate as to whether preparation for such subprofessional positions can best be made with the aid of courses in junior colleges or trade schools. Unfortunately, such courses are not very satisfactory or complete. Moreover, clerical procedures in libraries differ sufficiently to limit the value of this kind of formal training.

Induction and Development of Branch Staff

The training of staff, both professional and nonprofessional, is a continuing process. There has been a growing and regrettable trend in recent years to criticize library schools for not producing graduates

TABLE 1
*Training of Branch Library Staff
 Los Angeles Public Library*

<i>Supervisor or Training Agency</i>	<i>Professional Staff</i>	<i>Nonprofessional Staff (Subprofessional and Clerical)</i>
Civil Service Department	Explains library personnel regulations to employee entering library service. Gives ½ day orientation session at City Hall on city government.	City-wide personnel policies and benefits, personal appearance and courtesy.
Personnel Office	Organizes 8 week (½ to full day weekly) orientation course in organization and services of Library with visits to Central Library Subject Departments and Technical Services, typical branches and Maintenance Department. Administrative officers and specialists, department heads, and branch librarians conduct the individual sessions. Conducts ½ day supervision workshop for new supervisors. Gives information on evaluation, rating and discipline of employees. Conducts special training sessions in telephone use and courtesy, etc.	Conducts 1 day orientation in organization and services of Library emphasizing clerical work; e.g., circulation of books, overdues, typewriter care and public relations. Various library officers present brief talks. Same Same
Director of Branches (Division Librarian)	Instructs on library policy and procedures through bi-weekly Branch Order Meetings, weekly Regional Librarians Meetings, individual contacts and weekly visits to branches. Conducts workshops, institutes, etc. for supervisors; e.g., on scheduling and work assignments. Supervises preparation and up-dating of branch management and procedure manuals.	
Coordinators of Children's Services and Young Adult Services (Principal Librarians)	Assist in training of Children's Librarians and Young Adult Librarians through regularly scheduled meetings and individual contacts. Conduct workshops, institutes, etc.	

Regional Librarian (Principal Librarian)	Instructs in library policy and procedures through regional staff meetings, individual contacts and branch visits. Assumes training of sub-branch staff as necessary.	
Branch Librarian (Senior Librarian)	Trains new personnel through orientation program and individual instruction. Gives in-service training through individual and group instruction. Works out written procedure for individual assignments. Reviews procedure with each change in personnel policy. Holds regular staff meetings at least every two weeks.	(Same in very small branch)
Senior Children's Librarian (Coordinating position)	Inducts new Children's Librarians and interprets library policy. Advises on children's room activities and plans for school-work. Assists in planning community work. Conducts workshops in region as needed.	Same
Librarian		Trains clerical staff in branch with no Library Assistant.
Library Assistant		Trains new clerical staff through orientation program and individual instruction. Gives in-service training of clerical staff. Individual instruction: Uses branch manuals and branch procedure workbooks. Reviews procedure with each change in personnel or policy. Conducts regular staff meetings. Plans agenda and schedules meetings of clerical staff. Encourages staff participation and follows through on decisions.

equipped with a "practical background" of library processes and routines. Actually, it should be expecting enough to have the fledgling librarian arrive with a broad grasp of the objectives of library service, the basic principles of library administration, and a good knowledge of bibliography and its organization. The last is the most important. Thus prepared, the new librarian is ready for the months, even years, of training he will require before he is really master of his art. Throughout the never-ending job of staff development to be done *within the library* three elements must always be present: communication, comprehension, and application.

Most libraries large enough to have branch systems have definite programs of induction and orientation, some fairly elaborate. A few have budgets and work programs flexible enough to permit actual rotation of new professional staff members among various kinds of work situations to give them a fair sampling of the library's total service program. Whether or not this is an ideal situation, the fact remains that not many libraries can afford the luxury of it, and must be content with more concentrated methods.

The Los Angeles training pattern may be fairly typical of the large-system approach, as shown briefly in Table 1. For librarians, the formal orientation course is deliberately delayed until the new employee has been on the job for six months or more. Experience over a number of years has shown that the brand-new librarian is not yet ready to absorb the full benefit of the course, and can profit by actually working within a unit and becoming familiar with its procedures and problems before attempting to understand its (and his) place in the total organization.

For new librarians in branches, one of the most important aspects of the orientation course is the opportunity to learn about the complex resources and services of the Central Library and the workings of the departments which function for the entire system in the purchasing, cataloging, processing, binding, and shipping of books and periodicals. Although unable to rotate its new staff, Los Angeles does send a new branch employee to the regional library in his area for one week to acquire general background in library policy and practical working procedures before beginning his specific assignment.

Training is a two-way street, because it requires continuous communication between supervisors and learners. It should not be forgotten that administrators and supervisors are continuous learners, too,

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gaining in strength and effectiveness through contacts with their staff. Ideally, in democratic administration, the entire staff can eventually participate in the development of policy if full channels of communication are kept open. As new staff members grasp the scope and complexity of the library's objectives and work processes, they become in effect self-trainers. It is the library's duty to create a climate which is favorable to self-development.

In branch libraries, the supervisors at various levels will be the key to staff development, and much will depend on their individual skills. Nevertheless, the library administration should provide the program within which they can operate and the tools which they can use. Table I mentions some of the tools which have been developed for training branch staff. It might be useful to describe a little more fully those which are most helpful in continued self-training and development.

After all due credit has been given to face-to-face communication, through individual and group instruction, staff meetings and conferences, the fact remains that in any institution of reasonable size and complexity it is essential to put into written and easily available form, in full detail for study and continuous reference, the policies, procedures and routines by which the library's operations are carried out, and to keep this material up-to-date by swift communication of changes in written form. The Los Angeles Public Library, through the years, has developed a series of manuals to form the backbone of training and continuing self-training throughout the system. These manuals are particularly useful in branches, where procedures can be standardized to a much greater degree than in Central Library subject departments, which are in many ways quasi-special libraries.

A multi-volumed General Manual covering the policies, rules and procedures which two or more of the Library's major divisions have in common is distributed to all units, both departments and branches. There are chapters on history and organization, general personnel information and rules, and business management (budget preparation, control and reporting, cash transactions, transportation, delivery service, mail, supplies, buildings and equipment). Remaining to be put into final form are the chapters on objectives and book selection policy, acquisition, cataloging, and physical preparation of materials, reference and advisory services, circulation services, and maintenance of the collection.

Three existing branch manuals have been in use for up to a decade or more. They are loose-leaf volumes giving detailed descriptions of

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procedures in various aspects of the Library's technical services as they affect branches. They cover registration, circulation, ordering, cataloging, and binding, all from the point of view of the branch staff. These are veritable bibles in branch operation, and are constantly referred to by both supervisors and staff.

Not issued yet in its completed form, but sent out to all branches in parts, is a branch management manual, which includes the following sections:

- Supervisor's guide for inducting and training new employees
- Duties and responsibilities statements (covering all classifications found in branches)
- Statements on service to children and young adults (including line and staff relationships)
- Scheduling in branches
- Assignment of duties in branches
- Branch management checklist (guide for Branch and Regional Librarians to achieve uniformity of practice and good staff performance)
- Checklist of duties for use with new staff members
- Branch records, orders and shipments.

In Los Angeles, several devices are employed to make sure that the information in the manuals is kept current. If possible, important and far-reaching changes in policy or procedures are always scheduled to go into effect only after the new pages for the manuals have been sent out, and after there has been an opportunity to explain the changes and answer questions in staff meetings. If an unavoidable time lag occurs in codifying and distributing amendments or supplements to the manuals, temporary directives are sent out to cover the gap. If necessary these can be included in the *Administrative Bulletin*, which is issued very frequently, usually daily, or in the bi-weekly *Branch Librarians' Conference Bulletin*. Explanations of the reasons for broad policy decisions or the texts of important policies adopted by the Board of Library Commissioners are included in *Operation LAPL*, issued irregularly as an administrative newsletter.

Replies to a questionnaire on communication circulated by Harold Hacker⁴ in 1964 indicate that the Los Angeles pattern of manuals may be fairly common. Of the twenty-one large libraries questioned, seventeen said they maintained coded manuals of policy statements and procedures. Fifteen used written bulletins or circulars to announce a new policy, while twelve held administrative staff meetings for this

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purpose. Sixteen issued an information publication to employees on a regular basis.

Various other aspects of the total branch program play a part in the continuous training process, including some which do not have training or staff development as their specific objective. Here may be mentioned service ratings, which annually provide the supervisor an opportunity to discuss short-comings with his staff, to give encouragement, and to stimulate new directions for self-development. Staff participation in conferences called to discuss branch needs in books, personnel, and equipment or to find a solution for problems which have arisen, can serve as a spur to further thinking and reading on the subject, both forms of self-training. Committee work, whether on book selection and evaluation or on administrative problems, is another way by which branch staff can take part in the process of developing the services of their branch and of the library as a whole. Community contacts should not be overlooked for their training value. While the branch librarian and the children's librarian are most likely to encounter occasions to work with community groups, the entire professional staff should be given as much time and opportunity as possible, particularly as they show ability and liking for it, to take part in cultural, educational, and civic activities which have implications for library service. Libraries with active adult education programs offer additional training ground for staff development in working with the public.

Staffing Patterns in Branch Libraries

The number and classification of staff required to carry out the work program of a branch library will be highly dependent upon the service objectives of the library system of which it is a part. Thus, as indicated in the introduction to this article, over-reliance upon numerical staffing patterns developed for branches in other areas can be a dangerous practice. In order to accumulate some current information about the factors employed by other libraries in establishing the number and classification of branch staff, a questionnaire was sent to a number of other large library systems. Eight replies were received. Some of the data assembled thereby are set forth in Table 2. Other comments offered by the respondent librarians will also be drawn upon as they are appropriate.

A figure frequently quoted as a rule of thumb estimate, but never quite pinned down to its original authority, is "one full-time staff mem-

TABLE 2 *Branch Library Data*

Library	Population 1960	Number of Branches					Other Extension Units	
		Regional	Com- munity	Sub- branch	Other	Total	Sta- tions	Book- mobiles
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Chicago Public Library	3,550,404	3	36	19	—	58	1 ^(a)	4
New York Public Library (3 boroughs)	3,345,087	3	78	—	4 ^(b)	81 ^(b)	—	3
Brooklyn Public Library	2,627,319	7	31	—	20 ^(f)	52	—	2
Los Angeles Public Library	2,479,015	7	47	7	—	61	—	4
Free Library of Philadelphia	2,002,512	1	28	—	10 ^(g)	39	239	3
Queens Borough Public Library	1,809,578	4	48	—	1 ^(b)	53	7 ⁽ⁱ⁾	3
Detroit Public Library	1,670,144	1	27	—	—	28	9 ⁽ⁱ⁾	2
Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore	939,024	—	15 ^(k)	8	—	23	3	2
St. Louis Public Library	750,026	—	19	—	—	19	1 ^(l)	3
Average	2,130,345	3	37	4	4	46	29	3

^(a) Exclusive of schools, hospitals, and business houses.

^(b) Includes Donnell Library Center, Municipal Reference, Municipal Archives, Lincoln Center, and Picture Collection.

^(f) Reading Centers and a Business Library.

^(g) Reading Centers.

^(h) Borough Hall Library.

⁽ⁱ⁾ Includes 6 hospital collections and 1 firehouse collection.

^(j) Stations are located in prisons, hospitals and homes for the aged.

^(k) 10 "major," 5 "neighborhood."

^(l) School deposit, classroom libraries.

ber for each 20,000 annual [branch] circulation." ^{5, 6} Examination of the total staff reported in Table 2 indicates that this "standard" is too low to be currently useful.

The ratio of professional to clerical staff in these nine branch systems shows an interesting range, from a high of 55 percent professional staff to a low of 26 percent. The average percentage can be placed against the statement in *Public Library Service* that, "Existing studies of the nature of library tasks indicate that the professional staff

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For Nine Large Public Libraries: 1965

Annual Branch Circulation	Branch Staff						Annual Circulation per Staff Member (exclusive of custodial)
	Total Staff (exclusive of custodial)	Professional		Clerical and Subprofessional		Custodial	
		Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total		
I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
9,047,561	549	143	26.0	406	74.0	71	16,480
13,396,473 ^(b)	1102 ^(c)	526 ^(d)	48.0	576 ^(e)	52.0	173	12,157
9,155,493	644	321	50.0	323	50.0	104	14,217
12,390,010	539	210	39.0	329	61.0	48	22,987
5,502,461	362	129	36.0	233	64.0	43	15,200
7,737,246	441	237	54.0	204	46.0	61	17,545
4,296,859	286	147	51.0	139	49.0	36	15,024
3,956,232	218	119	55.0	99	45.0	34	18,148
Not supplied	112	36	32.0	76	68.0	23	—
8,185,292	473	208	43.0 ^(m)	265	57.0 ^(m)	66	16,470

^(b) Includes Donnell Library Center, Municipal Reference, Municipal Archives, Lincoln Center, and Picture Collection.

^(c) Includes 22 paid from private funds.

^(d) Includes 12 paid from private funds.

^(e) Includes 10 paid from private funds.

^(m) All percentages have been taken to the nearest whole number.

in a library system should be approximately one-third of the total personnel, and the nonprofessional staff (. . . excluding maintenance personnel) approximately two-thirds.”⁷ (Note that this statement is made with relation to a *total* system, not branches alone.)

As in any well-run library situation, staff in branches should be sufficiently varied in classification to provide the specialized skills required for efficient pursuit of the branch’s total service program. Usually these should include librarians assigned to adult reference, young adult work, and children’s services. Work assignments should be clearly defined, understood, and posted for the information of the entire staff. Employees who are not sure just what their job is sup-

posed to be are bound to wander about in a maze of inefficiency. A now classic story in California tells of the management analyst who asked a library staff member to describe exactly and in detail just what her duties were. Her report read, "I do whatever needs to be done."

In addition to the library's total service program, various quite specific factors must be considered in developing staffing patterns for a branch system. The questionnaire circulated to the libraries listed in Table 2 stated that certain of these factors were assumed to be operative, for example, amount and type of circulation and reference work, hours open to the public, size of buildings, and the presence or absence of adult education activities. The replies brought forth several other factors, one of which was "number of floors and the degree of effective control which can be maintained over all reading areas" (Free Library of Philadelphia). From Enoch Pratt Free Library came this comment:

Factors in social structure of the branch community as 1) heavy concentration of racial or national groups; 2) a rapidly growing community or a rapidly changing community creating unusual problems; 3) presence of natural or artificial barriers which distort the service area; 4) institutions, industries or commercial centers which bring people, not necessarily residents, to the area; 5) a low reading potential demanding unusual stimulation or a high reading potential creating unusual demands.

The questionnaire also asked for comment on any new service concepts which might affect branch staffing. Philadelphia sent a description of its huge new Northeast Regional Library, which requires a staff of eighty, including twenty-six professional librarians, some of them subject specialists with advanced college degrees in their fields. At the other end of the scale in Philadelphia are reading centers, described as "essentially self-service agencies stocked with books that patrons can use with little or no guidance. . . . Limited reference and information service is maintained by one full time and one part time library technician." Brooklyn also described its reading centers, which are book dispensing units manned by clerks and supervised by nearby District Libraries. New York mentioned its Trainee Program in which an average of sixty library school students are employed at all times. Approximately 50 percent of these work with the library full time. They are assigned to limited professional work which increases in scope and responsibility as they get nearer to their degree. St. Louis

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stated that the Human Development Program, supported by the Federal Government in its war on poverty, will probably affect several branches. Necessary additions to staff "will depend on how their program develops but chiefly on availability of funds to the library."

Queens Borough also cited the war on poverty: "With the designation of 10 branches as Operation Head Start agencies, a shift in usual staffing was necessitated. In some instances an experienced children's specialist has been designated as branch librarian in these agencies. Special part time personnel with suitable background and education have been hired with Federal funds granted for this project to present special programs following a training course."

Enoch Pratt Free Library mentioned two trends:

The elimination of registration files in branches, and the centralization of all overdues in Circulation Control Department has resulted in using one less clerical staff in some branches. Some of the responsibilities formerly assigned to professional staff have been shifted to the clericals.

Metropolitan Maryland Library Service: an experimental program which provides the registered borrowers of 8 metropolitan public library systems with free borrowing privileges in all outlets of the participating libraries. This may result in heavier use by county residents of those Pratt branches which are readily accessible to their homes or traffic patterns.

Doubtless many other factors could be cited. The student "invasion" of public libraries must surely have a serious effect on changing branch services and resultant staffing. In New York it is producing a new kind of agency—one designed solely for student use. Branches with especially difficult discipline problems have always had to be given special consideration in staffing. What of the new classification now appearing on staff rosters, "Proctor" or "Monitor"? The persistent shortage of professional librarians has strongly affected staffing patterns, leading in Brooklyn to an entirely new kind of library unit. Automation of library processes is only beginning to make itself felt as a force in altering traditional staffing patterns, but it may, perhaps, eventually become the most powerful force of all.

Meanwhile, budget restrictions continue to inhibit the development of "ideal" staffing patterns, or, where they are developed, they are likely to remain an ideal rather than a reality. One item in the questionnaire asked, "Do you have any formulas, standards, or manning

tables which indicate how much staff in each category is assigned to a given type of branch?" Here is how Queens Borough answered:

Our manning table establishes one full time clerk for each 37,500 volumes circulated and one full time professional librarian for each 20 hours of service per reference point as required. As the . . . manning table will show, these requirements do not match our allocated positions. Staffing follows rather closely the "present pattern" section of the manning table in most instances. However, the "present pattern" section equals actual allocated positions for the various agencies which, in some instances, is unrealistic. Actual staffing is based on a combination of factors which point up need and not any simple formula that could be universally applied. If our total staffing ever equalled the required staffing we could probably adhere to a formula method very closely.

A number of libraries besides Queens supplied formulas, manning tables or other standards of staff allocation for branch libraries. These included Chicago, Brooklyn, and New York. Chicago uses six formulas depending upon grading of the branches as regional, branches in separate buildings, store branches, and subbranches in three circulation-size groups. New York's manning tables assume that within a forty-hour work week the average professional spends twenty-five hours in public service, ten hours in collection building, programs, etc., and five hours for ill time, vacations, and in-service training. Los Angeles standards also provide in general that professional staff may be scheduled for twenty-five hours of the forty-hour working week for work with the public. Enoch Pratt is now studying its professional staffing pattern, but currently the major branches have a minimum of five professionals and three clericals, and the neighborhood branches have a minimum of four professionals and three clericals.

If any conclusions can be drawn on the subject, it might be said with safety that libraries may continue to find the exchange of information on staffing patterns interesting, and possibly even useful. But it must not be forgotten that local concepts of branch services vary greatly, both among cities and within library systems. Although a certain degree of standardization may be desirable, as much flexibility as is necessary to meet a wide variety of special factors must be maintained.

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