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Funding Priorities and Funding Strategies

ABSTRACT

When planning a funding request, librarians must understand the societal forces affecting a library's parent institution and the forces affecting the library as a social system as well as a technical system. Before approaching a funding body, librarians must ask themselves whether issues that are important to them are also important to the funding body. When approaching the Council on Library Resources, specifically, librarians should be aware of four research areas of interest to the Council—human resources, economics, infrastructure, and processing/access.

INTRODUCTION

Senator Harry Reid (D.-Nev.) said, in a Senate debate on cutting the proposed 1991 budget for the Library of Congress, “We in this country have to recognize that the security of this nation, the defense of this nation, rests on more than things that explode. A secure, strong nation also depends on people being able to have books to read, to be able to gather and retain information” (Hall, 1991, p. 19).

Despite such insightful and appealing statements, we continue to see library budgets cut and operational costs increasing. Therefore, it is not surprising that library professionals interested in research look to foundations as an additional source of funds.

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It is important to understand that libraries are a major financial investment in this country, despite severe budget constraints. The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) estimated just a few years ago that over $6 billion was spent annually on libraries. The Foundation Center, headquartered in New York, has compiled statistics that appeared in a recent American Library Association publication on the role that private foundation funding has played in augmenting library activities (Smith & Borland, 1991). They reported the following:

- Total library funding from private foundations for 1989 (the latest year for which data were available) was approximately $72 million, about the same as in 1988. The total number of grants was approximately 500 (they reported only grants over $5,000).
- Libraries in general receive a very small percentage of total private foundation funding dollars—between 1 and 3 percent. Furthermore, grant funding is a small percentage of total library funding (approximately 1 percent).

So, the money available for libraries in general and research in particular is limited.

**SOCIETAL FORCES AND PARENT INSTITUTIONS**

The forces affecting the institutions in which libraries reside are also important to understand. In a recent issue of the *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science*, Carla Stoffle (1991), reporting on a session at the annual meeting of ASIS, summarized the societal factors affecting the parent institutions of libraries as follows:

- First is the switch from a manufacturing-based to an information-based society. I would modify that to say that we are seeing a switch to a service-based society where companies are focusing on customer service even though they may still manufacture goods—often in other countries. Universities, too, are beginning to view themselves in this service-based environment from a *business* viewpoint.
- Second, she points out an increased emphasis on “accountability.” Institutions are being challenged to their very core. Their worth is no longer accepted on the basis of anecdotal evidence. That was certainly true at Bell Labs, where I spent the past seven years. Characteristic of this trend, I see a new level of accountability emerging. Institutions are being asked to measure their performance and to have their leaders accept responsibility for this performance. If they do not achieve their goals, new leaders are brought in.
Institutions that were previously funded routinely are being asked to demonstrate their worth. My recent visits to a variety of institutions tell me that this trend is increasing, and it is not limited to educational institutions or industry; it is pervasive.

- The final factor identified in Stoffle’s article is the changing demographic makeup of the United States. This move towards more cultural diversity is more adequately described in a report titled *Workforce 2000* (Johnston & Packer, 1987) that was issued a few years ago. It carries implications for all institutions and organizations—profit and not-for-profit—in terms of the emerging labor force and customer base.

I would add two other factors to Stoffle’s three:

- First is the increasing globalization of our industries and institutions. We can no longer operate in isolation for both competitive and moral reasons. Companies and countries are no longer isolated. East and West are meeting in the marketplace as well as in political forums. And institutions such as libraries must learn how to open global boundaries as well.

- Second, a trend we can no longer deny: a shrinking economy in the United States in which even some of our most vital institutions are having to rethink their levels of spending. At the same time global economics is playing an increasing role, we see a fragmentation of Eastern Europe, the unification of Western Europe, and the continuing emergence of the Pacific Rim as a major economic force.

**SOCIETAL FORCES AND LIBRARIES**

If these are the forces acting upon parent institutions, what about libraries themselves? Certainly technology has played a major role in the evolution of libraries and will continue to do so even in (or especially in) tight economic times. But let me make my position clear regarding technology and its impact on our future in the library community.

We must look at our libraries as social systems, not merely technical systems, and we must act in social terms when we look to the changes ahead. Some people believe the future (especially the technological aspect of it) “unfolds” like a giant preprinted road map. Such people strive to peek beyond the folds and guess ahead about the next major event. This approach assumes a predestination that I find difficult to swallow. I believe we must shape the future, not let it shape us.

And we must realize that we are confronted with a paradox. We must introduce change—and, I believe, radical change—if we are to continue to play the vital role that libraries have played in the past.
To state the paradox simply: to remain what we are, we must change; if we do not change, we won't remain what we are.

The issues that must be addressed by all of you can be stated in concise terms:

- How to manage constant or declining funding while the costs of materials continue to rise; and
- still respond to increasing and complex demands from library users—and respond we must to maintain libraries as the vital social institution they have been.

FOUNDATIONS

You undoubtedly see parts of these issues that you want to address, and the part you want to address is important to you. But is it important to a foundation that might provide financial resources for your study? Again, the Foundation Center provides some excellent guidance. A newly issued National Guide to Funding for Libraries and Information Services (Olson, Kovacs, & Haile, 1991) provides detailed information on almost 400 foundations and corporate sources. It also provides a “filter” of important questions you should ask yourself before approaching the foundation:

- Does the foundation’s interest include the specific type of service or program you are proposing?
- Is the foundation interested in your geographic area?
- Is the amount you request consistent with the foundation’s funding practices?
- Is there any policy of the foundation that could be a barrier to your request?
- Does the foundation prefer shared funding, or does it like to be the sole source?
- What types of organizations does the foundation support?
- Are there specific deadlines or other procedures that must be followed?

Do not rely entirely on this new publication—as good as it may be, you should look at material available from the foundation itself, such as its annual report.

COUNCIL ON LIBRARY RESOURCES

Focusing specifically on the Council on Library Resources (CLR) now, I want to describe how we would suggest you go about preparing a funding request. Before you send in a full-blown proposal, give us a preproposal letter (or phone call).
• Discuss the general problem you want to address.
• Why is it important to you?
• Why should it be important to CLR?
• Why should it be important to other groups—i.e., are the results likely to be extensible?
• What are the general ballpark costs?

If we move on to the proposal stage, then more detail will be required, especially in the areas of assessment and dissemination—i.e., how can we measure the results to know if what was done was effective, and how can we communicate those results?

CLR spent just over $1 million last year, and I expect our new and expanded set of programs to increase the annual funding level, but let me caution you. The areas of interest to CLR in the future will be based on the strong belief on my part that we cannot continue as we are. We must be prepared to be held accountable for the benefits as well as the costs of what we do. That is true for libraries, library researchers, and yes, even CLR.

Furthermore, CLR’s future work will reflect my belief that libraries must be viewed, first and foremost, as information delivery systems, not as warehouses. The dilemma is that libraries have many roles: that of warehouse, gateway, intermediary, communication channel in the scholarly process, and preserver of what we know. The major challenge must come in what we see as the driving force or motivation for libraries. For what will their leaders be held accountable? When these leaders have their backs to the wall (as many now do), what will be the essential vision and force that motivates their decisions? Will it be risk averse or bold? How will the success of the institutions they lead be measured? I believe CRL can help bring about necessary changes in this community, and I believe we can help bring about those changes with a sense of urgency that is essential.

The same questions hold true for library education and research. How will leaders be measured? I believe we must see a closer relationship between library research and the major libraries located near library schools. I believe information science, rather than being a threat to librarianship, can be a powerful ally, and we need more interdisciplinary research demonstrating this fact. I believe library educators need to place a greater focus on research—and research that is externally funded. And I believe that library researchers who are risk averse will not serve their institutions well. There is a call for boldness and urgency there as well.

Research focused on libraries can be a vital force for change. But beyond that, CLR is also concerned with the broader issues faced by related information service providers, including computer centers providing database services; university bookstores that can work in
conjunction with libraries; bibliographic utilities that support library operations; and university, commercial, and professional presses that provide input to library collections, because these are all part of the interconnected world in which libraries now operate.

And that leads me to identify four general areas that I believe need significant attention and that I intend to see CLR focus on over the next few years in the form of research projects as well as other related efforts.

First is the area of human resources. We need to look at the end-to-end issues of attracting, educating, maintaining, and advancing individuals in the information services profession. We should not focus major emphasis on the question of what to do about failing library schools, but rather on the question of what to do to assure a steady stream of talented people into leadership roles in libraries and related information service organizations. Some specific questions I would pose for study in this area include the following:

- What can be done as far upstream as possible to attract bright young people into the information profession?
- How and when should these people receive their basic education and their first professional degree in the information services area?
- How can we assure that professionals in this arena will be able to serve the culturally diverse audiences that will make up their user population?
- What mechanisms are needed to assure that continuing education becomes a normal part of the professional's life and that the people already in the profession receive the training necessary to continue to serve their users well?
- How can mentors as well as other developmental mechanisms be used to assist in creating strong leaders?
- As leaders reach the end of their careers, what can be done to assure that their skills and experience are used to "prime the pump" and create more leaders in the information profession?

Second is the area of economics of information services. Over time, we need to address the full range of economic issues associated with libraries and related information services, including both micro- and macroeconomic issues. At the outset, however, I believe we should focus on microeconomic issues and, more specifically, on those questions that will lead to a deeper understanding of information service operations in libraries. We need to be able to answer questions such as the following:

- How much do we really know about the specific functions that a library performs in terms of being able to measure these activities?
- What are the unit costs of these functions, and how/why do these costs vary across libraries?
• How do these functions fit together to form information services (e.g., document delivery), and what is the overall cost of these services?
• What are the ways in which we can measure benefits of these resulting services in order to perform cost/benefit analyses from the user's viewpoint as well as from the viewpoint of the institution in which the library or service provider resides?

I am convinced that the cost and value of information services must be understood and that quantitative analyses are essential to the responsible management of libraries now and in the future. In addition, I believe that many of the tools and techniques used in the “total quality management” programs currently receiving major attention in U.S. industry are appropriate for the redesign of our information services. We need to understand more fully how these tools can be applied in the information service arena.

Third is the broad concept of infrastructure. This umbrella term includes the systems, services, and facilities that are drawn upon to help libraries and other information services operate more efficiently and effectively. Included in infrastructure are communication networks, bibliographic utilities, software and hardware vendor communities, and publishers. Also included as a major component of infrastructure is the current array of physical structures that are viewed as essential to information service operation—e.g., the buildings that house libraries as we now conceive of them. Questions that should be addressed in this category include the following:

• How will emerging, as well as in-place, electronic networks modify the balance of power as well as the allocation of resources among different information service segments (including the public library segment)?
• How can publishers and libraries work together via experiments that demonstrate processes of change that are beneficial to both segments as well as to the end-users?
• What alternative designs for library facilities can demonstrate a focus on service rather than structure and illustrate that form can follow function when the function is clearly understood and articulated? (For example, storefront branch libraries are an illustration that libraries need not be edifices to be edifying.)
• How can system vendors and bibliographic utilities work together when large central operations and local systems seem to be on a competitive collision course? Is there a long-term strategy that makes sense for both and serves libraries and their users well?

Although the concept of “infrastructure” is extremely broad, I believe that a few well-chosen projects can begin to move us toward
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a more rational environment in which both information producers and information consumers are served well by libraries.

Fourth, and finally, is the dynamic duo—processing and access. All processing undertaken by an information service should be for the purpose of access. The two should not be separated (just as the Commission on Preservation and Access has made the point with regard to preservation). If we look carefully at today’s libraries, we find that much of the resource is consumed to support internal processes. It is often unclear how these processes directly (or indirectly) benefit the user. There are many research questions that can be addressed on both the processing and access sides that could significantly influence the cost and/or benefit of library processes. Examples of questions I believe should be addressed include the following:

- What steps are necessary to reduce the cost/time of cataloging significantly from where they are today, and how radically can the processes be revised?
- If the users were to design their ideal information access mechanism, what would it be and how would it vary across different user segments? How would it vary from what we now have (our imbedded base)?
- How would such a design change the current internal processes in libraries necessary to sustain an access system?
- What actually occurs when users “browse” a physical collection, and how could the processes be transferred to electronic access systems?
- What mechanisms help create the serendipity that occurs when a user accidently discovers information or develops new ideas in unusual ways while in contact with information resources? How can those mechanisms be enhanced—especially where physical resources may be curtailed?

These four areas—human resources, economics, infrastructure, and processing/access—represent the broad umbrellas under which specific research projects and other efforts will be launched by CLR (and I hope by other organizations as well that are interested in the evolution of information services). As I said earlier, CLR stands ready to help those who are willing to undertake the necessary (and painful) effort of redesigning the information delivery systems we call libraries. And we look forward to continued interaction with people who provide us feedback on our efforts and directions.

REFERENCES


