Trends and Needs: The Present Condition
And Future Improvement of Group Services

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This chapter is intended to suggest some answers to the following questions: Where have we been? What are we doing? What should we be doing? How do libraries generally see the role of group services today? Adequate answers would require far more space and much fuller research than is possible under the circumstances. The writer will therefore attempt to provide a subjective judgment and forecast based on a series of surveys made during the past twelve years, as well as on the literature.

The first question may most readily be answered by reference to the literature. Among the works which can be cited are the following. The report of the ALA survey on Adult Education Activities in Public Libraries and State Extension Agencies of the United States,1 published in 1954, constitutes a convenient and significant baseline for tracing recent trends in group services in public libraries. Lee’s Continuing Education for Adults through the American Public Library, 1833–19642 provides a longer perspective from which these trends may be viewed, as well as some useful definitions and analyses of the educational objectives and responsibilities of the public library. In Monroe’s work, Library Adult Education: the Biography of an Idea,3 depth is added by her carefully stated and tested thesis concerning the phases through which library adult education has passed. Her discussion of shifts in emphasis between service to the individual reader and to groups is particularly relevant. A 1959 issue of Library Trends4 devoted to “Current Trends in Adult Education” is a convenient midpoint summary for the period under consideration.

In Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966, provision

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of materials and services to facilitate the educational development of
the community are described as among the basic functions of the
public library: "In the last analysis, service, collections of books, the
staff, and the physical environment recommended in this statement
of standards have meaning only as they reach all the people." The
extent to which all the people are being reached through the medium
of group services is a major concern of this chapter.

In 1962, an article which appeared in *North Carolina Libraries* was used as a basis for a survey of state library extension agencies to
determine their estimate of trends in public library services since 1954.
The results were reported in the *ALA Bulletin* in 1963. Later that
year, this was followed up by a similar questionnaire addressed to
eighty librarians in medium-sized and larger libraries, partly in an
attempt to offset any bias resulting from the state library agencies' natural orientation to the smaller library. The answers to this second
survey, never fully analyzed or published, have also been drawn on
to some extent in this paper. As several contributors to this issue have indicated, a questionnaire was compiled by this writer with their help, and circulated in August 1967. It was designed both to gather
information on current programs of service, and to provide facts and
opinions for comparison with the earlier surveys just mentioned. The seventy-two librarians to whom it was sent were chosen to provide a sample which would be representative in size, geographical distribution and type of governmental structure of libraries which were presumed to be providing adult group services. The bias of the sample is obvious, but a return of about 70 percent met the need to find out something of what is happening and of what (in these libraries at least) had changed since 1954, and to provide clues to their attitudes toward group services.

Some of the statements of trends originally formulated by Fox, Shue
and Penland in 1961 were again tested in this questionnaire. For example, in the 1962, 1963 and 1967 surveys, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the following trend was characteristic of library services in their state or library:

*FROM* satisfaction with service to individuals only

*TO* awareness of the fact that the individual's needs may be ex-
pressed either alone or within a group; and that groups have cor-
porate interests over and above individual interests.

The spotlight on the individual today reveals the many interests

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and needs he has which he shares with other people. Both he and
the librarian are becoming more aware of these interests. . . . Groups,
too, are making demands upon libraries for those services which
answer their needs.8

The extent to which respondents agreed with this statement rose
steadily between 1962 and 1967. Many factors which had contributed
to the library’s increased awareness of group needs and their ability
to meet them were cited. In correspondence, Marie A. Davis, coordi-
nator, Office of Work with Adults and Young Adults, commented,

Philadelphia’s “jungle” or most impoverished area is one of the most
highly organized areas in the city today—organizations which are
unconventional, non-traditional, lacking in the type of leadership to
which we have been accustomed, overlapping in many instances,
but nonetheless organized! In the past year or year and a half, the
so-called unmotivated, apathetic community has become mobilized.
Whether or not this form of mobilization will be effective remains
to be seen.9

Comments gave evidence both of the library’s response to changing
social needs, and to the pressures of the groups themselves; replies
mentioned “society’s focus on the disadvantaged,” “development of
techniques for new groups,” “increased and improved physical facili-
ties and added professional staff,” “recognition of needs of unorganized
groups,” “rapidly changing educational levels,” to give only a sample.

In 1954, Adult Education Activities in Public Libraries stated “while
slightly less than 10 per cent of the libraries were doing a great deal
in helping adults and young adults continue education in group ac-
tivities, the majority of libraries were equally divided between those
doing a medium amount and those doing a little.”10 Lee confirms the
change in attitude demonstrated in the surveys in his statement, “The
major change during the period [1957–1964] was the gradual ac-
ceptance by libraries of services and programs for groups.”11

Perhaps the appearance and rapid acceptance of the term “outreach”
best sums up the more aggressive approach and fresh movement in
the direction of group services and of librarians’ attitudes toward pro-
viding these services. The 1954 survey found 32.6 percent of the li-
braries taking services outside the library to groups.12 The 1962, 1963
and 1967 surveys, quoting Fox, Shue, and Penland, asked for reactions
to the following summary of trends:
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FROM library service within the library only

TO service throughout the community

Librarians are assuming less and less that their duties are bounded by the library walls, but are looking up from their desks and out at the community, and are perceiving the need for library service in community life. Hence, they are going out into the community, making contacts with groups and individuals, bringing the library to them. They are holding program institutes and workshops, sponsoring and co-sponsoring discussion groups, film forums and other activities. To reach individuals not connected with groups they are using the various communication media: newspaper, radio and television. Library talks and publicity are not confined to book reviews, but are concerned with making people aware of educational needs and of the library as a resource to fill these needs.\textsuperscript{13}

Responses to this statement in 1962 showed high acceptance by state library agency heads and nearly universal acceptance in the 1963 follow-up to librarians of medium-sized and larger libraries. Comments made in the 1967 survey give evidence of the strong influence of the availability of Federal funds on the one hand, and the increased orientation of the library to “specific groups such as the aging, handicapped and, to the extent that we can identify them, the functionally illiterate,” to quote the response from the Memorial Hall Library, Andover, Massachusetts. Rockford, Illinois, reported that “We are sought and expected to furnish leadership, and more and more people are depending on us as an educational resource.” Many of the means cited are such familiar practices as using mobile units, taking materials to meetings and establishing deposit collections, but the priority given to the work of the adult services librarian in making community contacts and freeing him from desk assignments is high in comparison with 1954.

The emergence of such federally supported programs as VISTA, the Community Action Program and the Job Corps, has in each case forced libraries into a re-evaluation of their own programs and relationships to community groups and agencies. Not infrequently, they came to realize they must assume a more aggressive stance in order to retain the leadership role as a community educational agency which they, at least, had considered well-established. Identifying and reaching the non-user, particularly the disadvantaged, “the unseen man,” and coming to an understanding of the ways in which the library

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could become a vital factor in his life has in very recent years brought
a new focus into group services. Elaine von Oesen has written in
North Carolina Libraries, “North Carolina’s public libraries had more
books, more personnel, and better physical facilities in 1966 than in
1941, though they were still below standards for minimum good public
library service. . . . A new awareness of the different needs and atti-
tudes of people in the lower economic and educational segment of
the community is beginning to affect service patterns.”14 Lowell
Martin puts it forcefully: “A public library that fails to work with
other community agencies is engaging in irresponsible isolationism.”15
The fact that “civic issues” have become “social issues” and that com-
munity development as an aspect of adult education has correspond-
ingly changed its target population is increasingly reflected in the
library’s approach to group services.

Trends toward both cooperative arrangements between libraries
and the involvement of libraries in a total community program were
increasingly evident in the 1962, 1963 and 1967 surveys. A first step,
the strengthening of state library agencies was identified by Grace T.
Stevenson in her article in The Handbook of Adult Education in the
United States, when she said that notable progress in establishing
adult services had been made through the guidance and encourage-
ment which had come from the state library extension agencies, and
that three factors in their doing so have been ALA’s publication and
implementation of standards for public libraries, the effects of ALA
projects supported by grants from the Fund for Adult Education, and
the strengthening of state library agencies through the Library Serv-
ices Act.16 The concurrent development of systems and various co-
operative arrangements between libraries cited by this writer in 196317
is even more fully evident as an essential ingredient in the improved
status of group services in 1967.

Again, the role of Federal funds in the movement “FROM isolated
efforts toward community service TO cooperation with other agencies
and groups in promoting educational services . . . working with com-
munity councils and agencies and others . . . to determine which serv-
ices can best be provided by the public library, which by other agencies,
and which by a community-wide group” and “FROM individual li-
braries striving alone to meet standards of good service TO coopera-
tion between libraries in the state in every practical area to provide
better service to individuals and groups”18 is clear. Both approaches—
establishing working relationships with other community agencies
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and the interaction between libraries of an area—were frequently cited for their added value in stimulating review of activities to avoid duplication and to promote fuller utilization of existing resources.

A thoughtful response to the 1967 survey from Boston points out that while in 1954 that library had well-established patterns of co-operation with other agencies and community groups, today the library is "involved with governmental and poverty agencies in long-range planning which requires a greater commitment of library resources over a longer period of time with some resultant loss of autonomy. By participating in basic adult education centers, for example, we become an integral part of a total operation, rather than jointly cooperating."

Marcus A. Wright describes in a recent issue of the Wilson Library Bulletin a cooperative approach to a public relations program in a rural system which might well provide a basis for reaching adults not only with "an understanding . . . of what comprises good library service and of its availability and value to citizens of all ages," but with group services to meet a wide variety of community needs and interests.

What kinds of services are now most frequently provided for community organizations and agencies? The following typical services suggested in the 1967 survey are listed here in rank order:

1. Compilation or other provision of booklists
2. Provision of meeting room facilities for community groups
3. Assistance in program planning
4. Provision of exhibits of materials
5. Co-sponsorship of programs with community organizations
6. Directory of community clubs and organizations
7. File of community resources
8. Film previewing
9. Calendar of community adult education activities
10. Moderator and leadership training
11. Program planning institutes

Other services designed to provide information on community activities were noted by eight libraries.

A similar question, concerning the group activities offered by the library as part of its own programming, gave the following result:
1. Book reviews and book talks 41
2. Instruction in the use of the library (including class visits and tours) 38
3. Discussion groups on special subjects or issues 32
4. Film festivals, musical concerts, large group meetings on special topics 30
5. Film discussion groups 23
6. Listening groups (poetry, drama, etc.) 16
7. Listening groups (music) 15

Other activities mentioned included programming for special age groups (e.g., “preschool mothers,” teens, senior citizens); programs for new citizens with films to acquaint them with this country, and talks by consuls about the countries they represent; training in story-telling (for baby-sitters, Sunday School teachers, etc.); TV book reviews on regular weekly programs; creative drama and writing groups; and art exhibits.

A direct comparison with the 1954 survey was made possible by including a table which listed in rank order the eighteen community groups most frequently served by the library.20 Respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their current services to these groups. Since many libraries did not attempt to rank all eighteen, the results are somewhat inconclusive, but some indications of change in emphasis are clear. Those groups remaining among the first eight (given in rank order for 1967) are: women’s clubs, including study and reading clubs, remaining in first place; subject interest organizations, moving from sixth to second; parents’ organizations; informal local clubs; cultural or aesthetic organizations; missionary societies and church groups; young adult groups; and religious groups. Appreciable upward movement was evident for intercultural agencies, industrial groups, and labor unions, while services to fraternal groups, farm organizations and patriotic and veterans’ groups showed relative drops in frequency. To quote again from Davis, “many of the ongoing programs, particularly lecture series, are attended by family groups including parents and young adults. The young college crowd and young marrieds have been particularly interested in annual lecture series in which we present literary figures; for example, last year we started the series with Susan Sontag.”21

Since 1954, groups not mentioned in the ALA survey have received increasing attention. Although, generally speaking, they do not come
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within the definition of organized community groups, they are included in the revised public library standards as having identifiable and specialized needs.22 The 1967 survey showed clearly that the focus of Federal legislation on the needs of the culturally disadvantaged, the functionally illiterate and the older person in our society has been reflected by a marked increase in library services to these groups, and in the development or adaptation of techniques for identifying and reaching them. A major gap, however, was revealed in the limited extent to which libraries have instituted or increased services to patients in hospitals, nursing homes, and so on, and to inmates of correctional institutions, where many of the disadvantaged, under-educated and the elderly may be found.

The foregoing serve only as indicators of the directions being taken by libraries in the provision of group services today. Reporting is likely to center on activities which stand out because they are new undertakings, and represent special efforts. When librarians become aware both of groups which they should be serving, and of techniques and materials which they should be employing, there is usually a stage of hesitation, based partly on a lack of the necessary skills, staff, facilities and budget, and partly on an insufficient sense of commitment or feeling of urgency. As professional leadership tackles these obstacles, and as the library’s role in the total community program becomes more evident, commitment becomes firm, and the tide of activities, using new tools, materials and combinations of resources, quickens and rises, until this new area of concern becomes so much a part of the ongoing program of the institution that it no longer is singled out for special mention. Discussion group programs and services directed to older persons are cases in point.

A serious gap in the information available for this issue of Library Trends concerns administrative attitudes toward provision for group services. When, and on what basis, have administrators made decisions to channel funds and staff into expanding their services to groups? How do they decide on programming in the library, and on its content, and how is the emphasis on this programming balanced with services to community groups—going outside the walls? How have they found and trained personnel to work with people where they can be found, as Brooklyn has done, for example, in bars, beauty shops and barber shops?

Eleanor T. Smith, formerly Coordinator of Adult Services, Brooklyn Public Library, and now Library Services Program Officer, U.S. Office
of Education, Region II, has provided in correspondence an analysis of the experience of the Brooklyn Public Library in the last decade which illustrates well the development of a program based on an administration’s stated policy of offering group services. It is also an honest evaluation of unsolved difficulties. She says:

All of our group services are directed toward:

1. Introducing library materials and services to adults who do not yet use the library.
2. Guiding adults who do use the library to more purposeful reading and to make more use of library services.
3. Cooperating with other education oriented organizations as a resource agency, an exhibitor of library materials related to their projects, as a participant in their programs, an outlet for their publicity, and/or a locality for their meetings.

These are the years also when we have been most experimental in kinds of programming and when we have offered a diversity in the hope of appealing to the varied interests of adults in our changing community. These have varied all the way from such pioneering programs as daily (Monday through Friday) activities for Senior Citizens and formal classes in reading improvement, to very informal instruction in preparing for Civil Service examinations for semi-skilled jobs. Long before the Poverty Program got started, we offered many programs on health education and consumer education in deprived neighborhoods. I believe we were the first public library in the country to cooperate with the New York Stock Exchange in offering investors information programs.

Various other programs of live music, poets reading their own works, and actors in play readings have been regularly scheduled as well as other cultural subjects with speakers and on film. Lectures have been offered to the public dealing with preparation for retirement. Along with all these we have had continuing book discussion groups both sponsored by the library and by the Great Books Foundation. To give more educational value to travel programs we once presented a series designed through information and advice to make Brooklyn travelers more welcome as visitors abroad. Adult elementary classes regularly come to us from the Board of Education for library orientation. Outside the library our work with adult groups has been constantly expanded, partly because we have freed more staff from desk schedules so that they could operate more frequently beyond the library walls.

We give book talks to community groups, take exhibits out to
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various organizations' meetings, and, upon request, speak about library services when we are invited to meetings. When we lend our facilities to outside groups, and we usually approve only those with educational or civic aims, we offer to arrange book exhibits in the meeting rooms related to the topics under discussion.

The prognosis for future development of services to groups at this writing seems more hopeful for activities outside our walls. If you go to where people are, and adults certainly are not in most of our agencies in large numbers ever, they seem to be interested in learning about what the library has to offer them. It must be stated, however, that this expanding activity has not resulted in increased use of our library system. . . .

Attendance at programs in our libraries . . . has been declining in recent years. . . . We evaluated our programs for years in an effort to determine why they are failing to attract a substantial audience. These are some of the reasons given:

1. Our publicity does not reach the audience for whom the programs are intended.
2. People are afraid to come out at night to meetings or they prefer to stay home and look at TV.
3. Librarians generally do not care to conduct group services. They will accept "canned programs" but do not consider this type of activity important in adult services.
4. In a large metropolitan area many organizations compete for the leisure time of adults, and the library has a low priority.23

Several questions were included in the 1967 survey in an attempt to determine the extent to which staff positions include specific responsibility for service to community groups, how frequently the staff includes specialists trained in disciplines other than librarianship, and the existence of access to the services of an adult services consultant, or other specialist in group services through such agencies as a state library, regional library system, university extension service, and state or local adult education department. The answers showed wide variation in practice and, by implication, in philosophy, and warrant fuller discussion than is possible here. Responses showed that though a little more than half of the libraries have positions which include specific responsibility for service to community groups, no common pattern of position title or departmental location emerges. A third of these libraries include a specialist trained in other disciplines—again, widely varying in title and specialization, with a slight edge toward public relations, audio-visual services and graphic arts or exhibit work.

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Reports of a good proportion both of new positions being established, and reassignment of work loads to free professional librarians for contact and/or group work, suggest that a trend toward a stronger commitment to group services may in fact be emerging. The series of articles, "The Library Administrator Looks at Adult Services," in a recent issue of the ALA Bulletin, provides a representative though far from complete gamut of approaches to serving adults. Some see the library in its traditional role as an independent educational agency in the community, and do not yet express themselves in terms of "outreach." Others, enabled to expand services because of improved library facilities, have scrutinized their community relationships and responsibilities, with resultant orientation toward greater involvement with the activities of community organizations and groups.

Greenaway places particular emphasis on the need for libraries to recognize the new directions in which they may move in an era of ever-increasing resources obtained through cooperation and Federal and state support, and states a strong case for re-orientation of library services toward adults and toward the institutions and organizations in the community. The need for again undertaking to re-establish goals, refresh the library's knowledge of its community and its needs, and develop services designed to meet these needs more directly and more precisely, is evident throughout the literature. Schwab and Greenaway have pointed the way for administrators who are still hesitating to take those difficult first steps toward identifying and reaching the unserved groups in their communities.

Perhaps it is worthwhile to look once more at two relevant statements of standards for serving community groups and organizations: "The library system provides materials and services for groups and institutions. . . . The library should have a positive program of service to the groups and organizations in its area," and "The library system serves individuals and groups with special needs. The library has the responsibility to serve all the people in the community." The evidence is ample that while these standards are recognized, there is a wide gap between philosophy and performance, and that an accepted philosophy may not result in full commitment. There is, however, also evidence of growing commitment to the idea that "all the people in the community" means just that, and that librarians are beginning to realize that the elusive individual nonreader may be first reached and identified and subsequently given the services he needs, through using the group services approach.
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It is in this area, and in that of attaining the “seamless web” of library service through cooperation, not only with library agencies, but with all community organizations and resources, that the future of effective library service to “all the people in the community” lies. Wilson Thiede expresses the need for adult education agencies to develop more meaningful programs in their communities and suggests that “the massive problems confronting adult education today require radical educational adaptations in the society.” Throughout his analysis he points out ways of bringing “adult education into creative, effective and full partnership in the society”—ways which involve putting “workers in contact with workers” and working “with other community adult organizations to present a unified image” and to establish adult education “as a primary activity.” The public library should be an integral part of this total effort to serve the total community.

References

8. Fox, et al., op. cit., p. 75.
10. Smith, H. L., op. cit., p. 64.
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17. Phinney, op. cit., pp. 265-266.


27. Standards Committee . . . of the Public Library Association, op. cit., pp. 32-33.
