



Standards for State Libraries

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THE FIRST STANDARDS for state library services were published in 1963;¹ the second and current version followed rapidly in 1969.² To those familiar with the wide diversity of organizational patterns among the fifty states, it is surprising that the standards exist at all. The problem, of course, is that no two state agencies are exactly alike and it is difficult to make useful comparisons. In many states the library functions are splintered into three or four separate agencies, and in a few instances, more than that. Some operate under separate state library boards or commissions; others, like New York and California, are parts of huge departments of education. In Illinois the chief administrator is actually the assistant state librarian and is subordinate to the secretary of state, who holds the additional title of state librarian.

The task of developing the standards could only have been accomplished by breaking down various library functions that are performed by state agencies and treating each function in a separate manner. How successfully the job was done, or to put it another way, how useful the standards have actually proved to be, will be discussed later in this article. It will be helpful to consider first the situation which led to the development of two sets of standards within such a brief period of time.

It was the passage of that pioneer piece of library legislation in 1956, the Library Services Act, that gave such great impetus to the movement for state library standards. State agencies which had been operating at a low profile with small, inadequate staffs were suddenly faced with the task of producing far-reaching plans for the use of federal funds and of acquiring additional staff to carry them out. Even the

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larger, well-established agencies were unable to assume the additional administrative, fiscal and planning burdens occasioned by the new legislation and added staff members who could help get the programs off the ground as quickly as possible. One state, New Mexico, was inspired to create a state library extension agency.

It was not surprising then that at the Allerton Park Institute in 1961 a number of speakers cited the improvement and the strengthening of state library agencies as the single most important result of the passage of the 1956 legislation.³ Harold Lancour, in summarizing the conference papers, noted that "some 800 new people have been added to the staffs of these [state library] agencies who could never have been hired without this additional money. Some of these were professional people, and some, of course, were clerical workers and bookmobile drivers. A total of 288 bookmobiles have been purchased from LSA funds and are now in use by public libraries all over the country. One can quickly see, in this somewhat dramatic way, how much this direct help would mean to public library development."⁴

Lowell Martin, in his keynote address to the conference, expressed some concern that the bookmobile might merely perpetuate a substandard quality of library service. But he, too, expressed satisfaction at what had happened to state libraries: "It is not by accident that I put the strengthening of state agencies first. Has it occurred to you what a gamble was taken in LSA from the beginning in depending on state library agencies for this program? I know that there have been a few strong agencies at the state level for some years. But the picture five or more years ago in state after state was not just one of some shortage of staff or some weakness in collection, but of downright deficiencies which made the state the weak link in the proposed chain of library development. The state agencies—including the weak state agencies—met the challenge."⁵ And, if Phillip Monypenny was similarly concerned that library service was being spread too thin,⁶ the state library people looked at the small miracle that was wrought with the \$7,500,000 made available annually, and yearned for more federal funds to enable them to do the things that so clearly needed to be done.

The added administrative responsibilities that were placed upon the state library agencies as the result of the federal legislation precipitated a demand for a serious study of state libraries. In 1957, when the National Association of State Libraries became the American Association of State Libraries and a division of the ALA, sentiment developed rapidly for a survey of state library functions and the development of

standards for them. In November 1957, Carma Zimmerman Leigh, the first President of the AASL, appointed the Survey and Standards Committee under the chairmanship of Alton Keller of the Library of Congress. The committee quickly drafted a proposal, and in 1960 the Carnegie Corporation made a grant of \$45,000 for the survey-standards project. Robert Leigh was appointed director of the survey and following his death in 1961 was succeeded by Phillip Monypenny of the University of Illinois.

The Survey and Standards Committee, however, under the direction of Phyllis Dalton of the California State Library, decided not to wait for the completion of the survey to begin work on the standards, but to move quickly ahead, using as a basis the 1950 publication of the National Association of State Libraries, *The Role of the State Library*. This document listed five major services performed by state libraries: general library (to state government), extension, historical and archival, legislative reference, and law library. The decision to move ahead was a wise one, for the first standards as finally edited by Lowell Martin were published in 1963, three years before the survey appeared in final form. The publication of the standards made very little impact on the library world. The library press, for example, almost completely ignored the event. The state agencies themselves, however, used the sixty-two separate standards that had been delineated as a tool for self-evaluation and for comparison with members of their peer group, particularly with those state libraries located in the same geographical area or serving populations of comparable size. In addition, state association planning groups, such as the planning committee of the California Library Association, found the standards useful in describing the role of the state library within the projected overall state plan for comprehensive library services.⁷

The standards themselves clearly reflect the somewhat heady atmosphere of the time in which they were written. The federal government had said, in effect, "We will give you \$7,500,000 a year for five years. With it you will develop solid plans on how best to use this money to bring library service to the 35 million Americans in the rural areas who now lack library service." The standards reacted to this challenge by making the following the first of the sixty-two standards: "A plan for developing the total subject and reference resources which affect the economic, political, intellectual and cultural life of the state."⁸ The outreach approach is further emphasized in the fifth standard: "The general resources in state agencies and the wider resources in libraries as-

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sociated in cooperative agreements should be widely and genuinely available. . . . Library resources for Government and for the state in general must not only be acquired but must be mobilized for use."⁹ Not until chapter 3, in standards 14-20, are the library services for state government per se considered. It is difficult to believe that the situation would not have been reversed had the standards been written a decade or more earlier.

In dealing with the organizational pattern which had perennially divided the various state library functions among so many different agencies, standard 36 pointed to the advantages of a coordinated agency but, recognizing political realities, stopped short of a clearcut recommendation that all existing agencies be combined:

The several state library agencies dealing with the three broad areas of state responsibility should be unified as one department or division of government to the extent possible and advisable under state law and traditions. Reorganization need not be forced if the full state program is coming up to standards, but equally it should not be delayed because of inertia. Even as the state's responsibilities for schools are best handled in a single education department, so the library affairs of the state should be administratively unified. This unification enhances planning for full library needs, balanced development among library functions, coordination among related activities, effective overall budget preparation and presentation, and efficient use of facilities, as well as avoiding unnecessary duplication and lessening administrative overhead. Most important, a unified state library agency permits the strongest leadership at the state level. Unification does not mean subjection or neglect of particular functions; Standard 35 specifies that each function must have identity and qualified personnel. Every state, and every state library official, has an obligation to plan for orderly development toward unification of library activities in a structure that provides a proper place and prestige for all library functions maintained by the state.¹⁰

While this message is clear it is further modified in the interest of political realities in standard 38 which states: "The function of advising and supervising school libraries should normally be placed in the agency concerned directly with elementary and secondary schools in the Department of Education. . . . School consultant service must also be closely coordinated with other state library activities, in the interest of the expanding demands for library materials by students."¹¹

The standards avoid the question of whether all state libraries should become part of state departments of education in order to achieve greater coordination of various types of libraries, particularly the school and public libraries. This is not surprising; at that time a num-

ber of state libraries were actively resisting attempts to incorporate them into state education departments, and others found themselves overwhelmed by the formal education priorities of these huge bureaucracies.

There is little point in attempting a detailed comparison between the 1963 and 1969 standards, but certain broad differences are worth noting. The material is arranged differently, and although much of the language is carried over from one document to the other, differences in emphasis become increasingly apparent in reading the two versions. The 1963 standards, for example, definitely reflect a public library emphasis, which is completely understandable in the light of the 1956 legislation which was limited to the improvement of rural public library services. The rapidly growing awareness in the library community of the need to coordinate all library services can be seen clearly in the standards, which, in the 1965 edition, devote all of chapter 4 to the state and information networks and emphasize the state library agencies' responsibility to "promote the network concept for the optimum use of resources" (standard 37) and the need to exercise leadership in developing effective networks that exploit all techniques of communication.

This broader concept of library service, with its emphasis upon the coordinative function of the state library, had been strengthened with the 1965 addition of Title III to the Library Services and Construction Act, which encouraged library cooperation and provided \$40,000 to each state to be utilized for this purpose. In addition, and also lending support to this broader concept, was the 1969 report, *Libraries at Large*¹² which had been prepared for the National Advisory Commission on Libraries. Chapter IX, section A of the report prepared by Nelson Associates was entirely devoted to state library agencies. Significantly, it called attention to the growing leadership role of the state library and its lack of sufficient qualified staff to carry out its expanding mission, and recommended the addition of a new title to LSCA to provide funds for this purpose.¹³

The 1969 standards thus reflected the growing sophistication of the state library mission. Such words as planning, coordination, and evaluation are used with increasing frequency in descriptions of state library activities, and underscore current interest in output—analyzing and evaluating results. They are a far cry from the sentimental, missionary approach of not too many years ago which seemed to dominate the era of traveling libraries and county library development.

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The relationship of the state library standards to the standards developed for various types of libraries and the need for continuous revision of each of these documents is noted by John Humphry and Eleanor Ferguson in a recent article. As the authors observe, "The tide of change which is drawing together individual libraries is leading to declarations of new goals, many of which call for increased interdependence, while their publication will lead more members of the library profession to give thought to greater coordination. It appears, then, that a cycle of thought and action leading to what might be called a 'seamless web' of library service is under way, a cycle in which the state library stands in the center planning, assisting, and coordinating the growth, reaching out to work with the federal government and link it to all the libraries within its geographical area."¹⁴ The point is well taken, but one major difference between the state library standards and those for public, school, college and university libraries must be noted. The latter group contains measurable criteria—the number of books, the ratio of staff members to population served, etc.

In this regard, it should be remembered that tacit in belief in standards is the conviction that quantity, quality, or level of correctness involved can be measured for similar units and set up in some tabular fashion for comparison. While standards for other types of libraries still receive criticism as to how successfully they have established quantifiable norms, the state library standards have not even attempted to do so. F. William Summers has referred to them as a "shopping list approach to program building."¹⁵

Again, recalling the lack of comparability and of sound definition of the units to be measured, it is not surprising that the statistics committee for state libraries has had little success in compiling a statistical data base which could be used to support quantifiable standards. This committee, along with all the other statistics committees of ALA, was placed within its library administration division and shared in the intensive effort to coordinate and standardize library statistics on a national basis. The resulting documents, the *Library Statistics: A Handbook. . .*,¹⁶ *National Conference on Library Statistics*,¹⁷ and *Planning for a Nationwide System. . .*,¹⁸ speak to the problems to be solved if comparable data for all state library activities are eventually to be obtained.

Vexing as these statistical problems are to those who would like to have neat data packages, one is lead to believe they are but symptomatic of a much more profound issue which lies at the heart of state li-

brary standards, and indeed questions the use of the term "standards" itself. Does one actually conceive of a "standard" state library? Would it be desirable for every state to standardize library functions at the state level? Are the general precepts contained in the standards document even subject to standardization?

The ALA Committee on Standards in its first draft report issued in January 1972, shows that it has given much thought to ALA's use of the term "standard" and has attempted to differentiate it from "goal" and "guideline."¹⁹ It should be noted that this preliminary document wisely uses the term "ALA Standard" to place it within the context of usage and stature which this particular professional organization deems expedient and proper. Further work by the standards committee and acceptance of its final manual by the profession at large may extricate us from the semantic labyrinth. In this event, state library standards will undoubtedly become even more useful to the profession, but if they are veiled in the mystery of professional lingo, their impact upon governing and appropriating bodies may well be lessened.

In their present form, however, it must be concluded that the state library standards are not standards at all, and might more properly be termed guidelines or suggested performance criteria. As Summers has observed, they "appear to aim at the profession and its various segments and interests. It is difficult to imagine state executive or legislative groups being greatly impressed by the document."²⁰

We come to the point where we must recognize that no standards can measure such imponderables as the ability of the state library staff to assess the library needs within its jurisdiction; to plan for effective remedial action; to gauge with a high degree of accuracy what should and can be done within a given political milieu; and, simultaneously, to be sensitive to, and able to, interpret events and trends that will profoundly influence the shape of library service to come. (In this latter connection, the Serrano, California decision on school financing and its portent for library funding, and the possible effects of cable television on our basic communications systems, are two developments among many that may effect great changes in our educational system at all levels, and indeed, in the entire fabric of society.)

This need for insight, judgment, and political acumen is particularly apparent as the state library moves into its new role as a regulatory agency in connection with administering considerable sums of federal and state aid funds. Acting as political pragmatist and strategist in developing criteria for the use of these public monies, it has had to de-

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velop and promulgate standards and regulations which may or may not match those to which it ascribes as its national goals.

As used by the professional associations, the term standards denotes a level of services and resources which is deemed minimal, but which represents defensible goals toward which the profession should be moving. It is in the professional interest that these national standards be well in advance of average performance. At the state level, however, standards must be set at that sensitive point somewhat in advance of present performance, but attainable under the local exigencies of law, financial ability, and tradition. In almost every case such standards, when enforced by whatever carrot-and-stick method available, are below those which the professional associations have adopted. It is inevitable that this dual standard exist. National standards promulgated by the profession are nonenforceable. State standards incorporated into regulations governing receipt of public funds must be enforceable, and the disparity between the two becomes an area for negotiation.

The administration and enforcement of regulations and standards at the state level thus require highly political judgments. Librarians and trustees of the better institutions, those upon whom the state library must depend for advice and local leadership, are apt to see the standards proposed in state regulations as woefully inadequate, substandard, and indeed a threat to their own level of performance. If the state endorses a standard lower than that for which librarians have fought valiantly, then, they claim, their local appropriating bodies might be tempted to reduce their support. Quite often their budget appeals have been guided for years by the national standards. The lesser level, endorsed by the state, thus represents a "cop-out"—a "sell-out."

Conversely, the weaker libraries (of which there are usually many more) look at the state standards as unattainable—a threat or even a plot to put them out of business and to steer the state funds to the stronger libraries. The new regulatory power of the state is seen as a menace, the promise of state aid as a delusion, and these apprehensions are quickly conveyed to local legislators.

State standards, therefore, must strike that sensitive balance which is acceptable enough to assure their adoption, but which does not alienate so many that they are unenforceable. Since they must be formulated in a vacuum, without experience and without sufficient data, they usually incorporate some escape clause which allows for individual review, proof of hardship, and sincerity of intent. Negotiations, including formal hearings with trustees and municipal officials who seek excep-

tions from what they consider to be inordinately high standards of local effort, call for immense tact and political acumen on the part of state library administrators, and for an almost intuitive sense of where to compromise (to save a program) and where not to (to save professional integrity).

The growth of the suburb as a discernible political entity apart from the rural and urban camps which have been traditional rivals in most state legislatures, interjects yet another factor to be reckoned with in formulating tenable state standards and regulations, and in striking the required balance. As legislative reapportionment proceeds, it is quite possible that state libraries will find their most telling supporters in the suburban communities. Generally habituated to superior city services, the suburbanite is more apt to want, and to be able to afford, quality library services than those of his country cousin or his increasingly impoverished city neighbor. Even so, the state library must appreciate the wide range of conditions which geography and demography engender and take care that the standards which are promulgated through regulation do not victimize some and overly reward others. The more people which per capita state aid reaches, the more defensible the standard in terms of the state's obligation to return service for tax dollars collected.

Enforcement of standards through regulation, however, is still a minor facet of state library involvement with improving levels of service. Patient persuasion, exposure through inservice workshops, propaganda, and old fashioned missionary work will continue to be primary tools of state library extension activities for the foreseeable future. While they are slow, and results are hard to document, they foster good will and often soften the carrot-and-stick approach which is irritating to many. They also provide an essential channel for communication with those libraries yet ineligible for state aid or which are so small that joining forces with another library or with a system should be encouraged.

Naturally, laws concerning libraries establish certain base standards for governance, finance and other factors, but such standards are often extremely minimal. Laws are difficult and risky to amend or replace and often lag considerably behind changing conditions. By design, laws tend to be general, while regulations, which can be amended without legislative action, are usually much more specific. Perhaps the most telling aspect of laws in relation to standards is that of certification of librarians. The most recent study by the ALA in this area reveals that twenty-two states require certification of public librarians.²¹

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In three states, certification is permissive; in eight it is voluntary. Seventeen states have no certification law at all.

Here again, some escape clause in the certification legislation is almost necessary to its passage. The most prevalent is the "grandfather" clause which protects incumbents of certifiable positions upon passage of the act. Less frequent is the provision of alternate routes to certification beyond holding a recognized degree—evaluation of experience or provision of an examination mechanism to establish competence. Reciprocity with other states also contributes the flexibility needed to enforce these standards without hardship and in full cognizance of the pressures which a varying manpower supply can exert.

The greatest bulk of state library involvement with both setting and promoting standards of service is in the area of public library development. Much less is known about the roles of the states with respect to standards for other types of libraries, although it can be anticipated that state and federal support of library networks will gradually expand state library concerns in these areas as well. In New Jersey, for example, an amended law governing the state library was developed using the 1969 Standards for Library Functions at the state level as guidelines. Advisory responsibilities in the areas of "school libraries, libraries of institutions of higher education, industrial, commercial and other special libraries, State department and agency libraries, and the libraries the state maintains within the institutions carrying out its health, welfare and correctional programs and library service for the handicapped" are backed up with powers to "coordinate a state-wide system of libraries" and to "prescribe minimum standards of service . . . as may be necessary to effectuate . . . powers under the law."²² Thus considerable latitude is provided for direct involvement as the evolutionary process of total library service and network development proceeds. Again, one can be sure that the promulgation of such standards would have to receive the same care in respect to possible political repercussions as those for public libraries.

As the state agencies move into these areas, it is essential that they have accurate and timely data concerning all libraries and library conditions for their respective states. Building upon the tradition of the extension agencies to provide directories and raw figures concerning holdings, staff, and financing of public libraries, the standards go on to specify: "The state should gather, compile, interpret, publish, and disseminate annual statistics on all types of libraries in the state, including the state library agency. The state library agency should be a central

information source concerning the libraries of the state."²³ The following standard specifies that "the annual statistics gathered by the individual states should be designed to provide a common core of data among the states and for the nation" and that such programs "should be coordinated with those of the U.S. Office of Education."²³

With responsibility for the various types of libraries scattered among numerous state agencies, and with statistical programs concerning them at varying stages of development (some, such as statistics for special libraries and those in institutions are often nonexistent), it is not surprising that these standards have seemed little more than pipe dreams. As has been implied, reliable statistics can contribute much to standards development and application as well as to the basic research from which new standards grow. The state/federal program envisioned by the National Center for Educational Statistics of U.S. Office of Education would undoubtedly have considerable impact upon the profession, and might place the evolutionary process in which state libraries find themselves in perspective.

Kenneth Beasley, in his interesting study of the changing role of the state library²⁴ cites the probable emergence of a managerial class and increased emphasis on research activities. While one may find his point of view vaguely disquieting in its connotation of public officials addicted to sliderules and flowchart methodology, there is logic in his speculations. As the budget crisis worsens under intensified competition for public funds, critical evaluation of objectives, output, and impact will surely become the order of the day. Standards and measurement of things that can be reduced to unitary factors—the cost of answering a reference question, circulating a book, of consultant services themselves—will come under increasingly critical scrutiny. Program planning and budgeting, management by objectives, and even more sophisticated evaluative techniques barely on the horizon will undoubtedly influence standards, both at the state implementation level, and at the national idealistic level. The profession's preoccupation with structural change (i.e., networks, and local-state-federal relationships as agents for improved services) must give way to careful evaluation of the quality of service as it actually transpires between the library and the patron. In the final analysis, the general public will measure in terms of prompt, economical retrieval of pertinent library resources and of accurate answers to reference questions whether its particular state agency and library network is measuring up to *its* standard. It is toward this end, after all, that all library standards must be directed.

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