

Standards for State Library Agencies

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EARLY IN 1977, upon the recommendation of its executive board, the Association of State Library Agencies (ASLA) appointed a Standards Review Committee to prepare a revision of the 1970 *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level*.¹ The author was asked to chair this committee. The 1970 standards, in turn, had been preceded by 1963 standards, the first to use this title.²

Shortly after the formation in 1957 of the American Association of State Libraries (AASL) as a division of the American Library Association (ALA), a Survey and Standards Committee was appointed. With the 1956 enactments of the federal Library Services Act, state library agencies were thrust into the spotlight as administrators of the state-based federal program. The Carnegie Corporation in 1960 funded a survey of state library agencies. The Survey and Standards Committee worked closely with the survey program. An ALA grant made it possible for the committee to broaden its membership and to consult with representatives of other interest groups.³

Consequently, the 1963 *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level* covered a broad range of functions. A total of sixty-two standards was included, covering library resources, statewide library development, organization of state library services, the state and financing of local public library programs, personnel, and physical facilities for state library service. Based on the then-incomplete Carnegie-funded survey of state library agencies, the 1963 standards recognized to a degree the diversity in or-

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ganizational patterns and functions exemplified in these agencies. The published guidelines also pointed out that in many states some functions were not being carried out at all, and that others were being pursued with no great energy. Most of the 1963 standards, however, dealt with two major functional areas: (1) the provision of library materials to library users and state government officials through a state resource library; and (2) public library development responsibilities. Admitting the diversity among the states, the standards nevertheless advocated "to the extent possible and advisable under state law and traditions" unification under one department or division.⁴

The Standards Review Committee, which worked from 1968 to 1970 on the first revision of standards, found much to admire — and preserve — from the first edition. The changes incorporated reflected changes in American society generally, as well as specific currents in librarianship. Title III (Interlibrary Cooperation) of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) both promoted and reflected changes emphasizing coordination of different types of libraries through networks. In its fourth chapter, "The State and Information Networks," the 1970 standards mark a change in spirit as well as specific content as compared with the first edition. "Leadership" and "coordination" appear and reappear as the central activities of state library agencies. The statement in Standard 39 that "The state library agency should exert leadership to effect exchange of information and materials through networks that open new sources and channels for the flow of information"⁵ was its ringing new challenge. Although the computer revolution came to American libraries much later than its early prophets expected, there is no doubt in 1978 that library automation is crucial to meeting state standards for the provision of materials and services.

Other chapters of this issue will assess how well state library agencies are now accepting that 1970 standard. To the current ASLA Standards Review Committee, its thrust is today dominant, and new standards must reflect this interest and need even more strongly. Consequently, in its first meetings the committee emphasized leadership and coordination as the very core of activities for state library agencies. It asked the ASLA president to appoint voting representatives from the American Association of School Libraries, the Association of College and Research Libraries, and the Public Library Association to the committee.

Given the diversity among the states in history and political tradition, demographics, and library and education structures, the concept of standards has many difficulties. For state library functions, perhaps the use of

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the term *guidelines* may be more easily justified. Both the 1963 and 1970 editions of *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level* might be well described as annotated checklists of desirable functions. The revision now in process will not easily change this pattern.

Another concept difficulty concerns the advisability of dealing with areas where other library groups have adopted fairly detailed standards, e.g., standards for library services in state institutions. In earlier editions, certain public library standards were included because public library development functions were the common denominator of state library administrative agencies.

The differing evolution of state library networks creates another problem in developing state standards. State-level networking may be nearly nonexistent in some states. In others, it may be dominated by the state library agency or by the largest academic library. Finally, and probably most frequently, there may be several library networks in a state, each serving a special function or a special type of library. How, then, can a committee draft a standard, or even a guideline, which will be useful to all states?

Official ALA approval for the formation of a new division in 1978, the Association of Cooperative and Specialized Library Associations, does bring together three functional responsibilities (and presumably standards-making authority for them): state library agencies, multitype library cooperation, and hospital and institution libraries. Perhaps this reorganization will make it easier to articulate state-level responsibilities in some specialized areas for appropriate inclusion in standards.

Whether they are called state library agency standards or standards for library functions at the state level, there will not soon be measurable quantitative standards that could be considered reasonable and appropriate. Specialists in functional areas in the states may be able in the near future to quantify standards in rather limited areas. In most cases, however, standards (or guidelines) for state library functions will continue to serve as nonquantified pointers to functional areas where state responsibilities are of key importance. Consistently and skillfully used by state library agency staffs, state library associations, networks, and planning committees in an individual state, they can bring into focus questions and concerns of great importance for the improvement of library services. Such standards must be included systematically in statewide library planning and evaluation. For a particular function, then, a national standard or guideline can become the starting point from which library planners can devise a state goal or standard.

References

1. American Association of State Libraries. Standards Revision Committee. *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level*. Rev. ed. Chicago, ALA, 1970.
2. American Association of State Libraries. Survey and Standards Committee. *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level*. Chicago, ALA, 1963.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. iv-vi.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
5. American Association of State Libraries. Standards Revision Committee, *op. cit.*, p. 15.