

Introduction

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THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF STATE library development agencies have grown rapidly in recent years, and there is every indication that this trend will continue in the years ahead. Because of this expansion of responsibilities and because the last issue of *Library Trends* devoted to state library agencies was published more than twenty years ago in April 1956, the Publications Committee of *Library Trends* thought a new issue describing the variety of activities of state library agencies would be of great interest to the library profession.

Another reason that an issue on state library agencies seems especially appropriate at this time is that the Library Services Act, a federally funded program administered by the state agencies, was passed in 1956 and first funded not long after the 1956 issue of *Library Trends* appeared. Thus, this issue can provide much information on the impact which the Library Services Act (LSA) and its successor, the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), have had on state library agencies and their programs.

In addition to statewide library development, states are responsible for various other library functions, including those of general libraries which serve state government, and sometimes those of the public, legislative reference, law, and state historical libraries. This issue, however, is concerned primarily with the library development agencies as they have a great impact on libraries of all types and are therefore of much interest to a large segment of the library profession.

What are state library development agencies? Briefly, these agencies (sometimes called state library extension agencies, state library administra-

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tive agencies, or just state library agencies) are those units of state government assigned by state law the responsibility for the extension and development of public library services throughout the states and for administration of state plans in accordance with the provisions of LSCA. Since LSCA and, in some cases, state-financed programs authorize funds for development of library services for other than public libraries, the state agencies are also active in development of library services in state institutions, for the blind and physically handicapped, and of cooperative library programs involving different types of libraries. Some state library agencies also have responsibility for school library/media programs. In other states, those programs are under a unit of the state department of education. Moreover, having a central role in state government, and statewide library development as their major mission, state library agencies are in a unique position to provide leadership to all types of libraries in an effort to extend and improve library services.

The history of state library development agencies can be traced to the 1890s when several New England states established what were then called state library commissions. By 1900 a number of additional states had established such commissions. The commissions were given responsibility for development of public library services throughout the states. It should be noted that these agencies were considerably younger than state libraries — which began in the very early histories of the states — and were started in order to provide library materials and services for state legislatures and state agencies.

In their early years, the library commissions were primarily concerned with extending minimal library services throughout the states. They sent out boxes of books called “traveling libraries” to community organizations and groups in unserved areas, and provided financial and other assistance to small communities in their efforts to establish public libraries.

Perusal of the 1956 issue of *Library Trends* reveals that state library agencies had made considerable progress since their early days. In that issue, state agency leaders were much concerned with development of “larger units of public library service,” especially multicounty and regional libraries. In some states much progress had been made in this work, but in many states there were few, if any, multicounty or regional libraries. Writers in that issue were also very concerned with other forward-looking matters, including planned development of statewide library programs, increased state financial assistance to libraries, and development of sophisticated information services for state government. They also speculated

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on the potential impact of the Library Services Act, which passed that year.

Readers of this issue will quickly discover that the state agencies have made a great deal of additional progress since 1956 and that various development activities which were then in the infancy stage are now full-grown, successful programs. For example, public library systems, almost nonexistent in many areas in 1956, are now flourishing in many states due largely to the promotional efforts of state agency personnel and to the federal and state funds provided by the state library agencies. Library services to residents of state institutions have vastly improved in recent years, and much of this improvement is due to LSCA funds, which enabled many state library agencies to hire full-time institutional library consultants and to purchase books and other library materials for the institution libraries.

As is implied by various writers in this issue, the Library Services Act and the Library Services and Construction Act have had a tremendous impact on state agencies and their services. First of all, the very existence of two state library agencies is the direct result of the federal program. Those states did not have state library agencies and established them in order to become eligible for federal funds. Many of the agencies had very small staffs, and the federal funds made it possible to hire additional consultants and other staff who were desperately needed to promote library development. As noted above, there has been much progress in development of public library systems and of library services in state institutions.

A number of other programs which were greatly assisted by LSCA are described in various articles in this issue. The first article is a general overview of the state library agencies — their organization and services, place in state government, problems and potential. Since most members of the library community are not very familiar with the state agencies, it seems especially appropriate that this issue begin with a detailed summary of the current status and trends.

The second article discusses the increasingly important role of the state agencies in coordinating planning and evaluation of all types of library services statewide. Experience shows that some agency is needed to take responsibility for bringing together library and community leaders for purposes of considering future development of library services throughout each state, and the state library agency seems to be the most logical agency to carry out this important task.

The third article is a detailed discussion of the use of federal and state

funds for library development and the potential and problems for these types of financial assistance.

In the fourth article, the writers note that library services to state government have long been overshadowed by the statewide library development function. However, as state government becomes increasingly dependent on reliable, current information, many state library agencies are now recognizing that development of sophisticated information systems for government should have high priority. This activity is typically coordinated by general state libraries rather than by the library development agencies.

The fifth article offers an overview of programs which are of increasing importance — library services to the blind and physically handicapped and to the residents of state institutions.

The sixth article discusses the role of state agencies in improvement of school library/media programs. For a number of years after federal funds were made available to the states for school library materials through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), some of the states provided not only the ESEA funds but also effective leadership in the development of school libraries. Unfortunately, in recent years state activity in this area has been reduced in a number of states.

The following article notes that continuing education is receiving increased emphasis in all professions, including librarianship, and that state library agencies play a central role in development and provision of continuing education offerings for the library profession. Many state library agencies are now calling library leaders together to plan coordinated, statewide continuing education programs for all types of librarians. This work is the direct result of an institute on planning for statewide continuing education programs which was sponsored by the Continuing Library Education Network and Exchange (CLENE) and attended by representatives of twenty-five state library agencies.

The article on education of state library agency personnel points out that the master's degree in library science is an essential qualification for state library agency professional staff, but that much continuing education is needed. Mounce also notes that the need for appropriate continuing education is not now being met, and that steps must be taken to improve this situation.

Several writers have noted that one of the most serious problems for state library agencies is attracting and keeping qualified personnel, particularly because state salaries are often so low. State library consultants and other development personnel often need qualifications equal to those

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of heads of large libraries, but their salaries are almost always much lower. Even chief state librarians often receive considerably less pay than the heads of large public or academic libraries.

The ninth article discusses the value of national standards for state library agencies, and the writer points out that such standards can be used to assist in improvement of the agencies in the various states.

The last article describes the role which the state agencies will play in the developing national networks. The writer feels the states should assume responsibility for development of library services throughout the states and for any multistate programs which may be desirable, and that the federal government should provide what the states cannot. He indicates that the role of the state library agency as "a coordinator, a catalyst, an initiator, and an even-handed funding agency is essential," and that the "full-service" national network "can best be accomplished through the traditional division of responsibility between the states and the federal government as established in the Constitution."

The state library development agencies have made great contributions to the development and improvement of library services throughout the states, but much remains to be done. The years ahead, during which national and statewide library and information networks will be developed, will be a great challenge to the library community. The state library agencies will play a central role in these activities, and they will need to provide dynamic leadership and solicit wide participation from library and community leaders in planning for library services for the future.

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