

The Role of State Library Agencies in National Plans for Library and Information Services

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THE SUCCESS OF A full-service national network of library and information services is wholly dependent on an effective resource-sharing system. If one supports the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science's (NCLIS) statement on a national library and information service policy that information is a vital national resource and essential to well-being in a democratic society, then one must be willing to accept as policy full and unselfish cooperation. Resources must become the resources not only for primary constituencies, but for all. Acceptance of this concept and its implementation will assure provision to primary clientele of an enriched and improved service, as well as equal opportunity of access to all who desire it.

Translating ideals, goals and objectives into reality requires careful planning, delineation of responsibilities, the lessening of psychological barriers to cooperation, and a true service and funding partnership between the federal and state governments.

The NCLIS rationale for the development of a "full-service" national library and information service network is that it can best be accomplished through the traditional division of responsibility between the states and the federal government as established in the Constitution. Locally, the states should assume the responsibility for evolving rational hierarchies for the provision of service to the constituents within their borders. Each state should define the paths along which transactions within its own borders should flow for maximum utilization of its own resources. Beyond

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the state level, the responsibility should be assumed by the federal government, i.e., what the states cannot provide, the federal government should. NCLIS is not opposed to regionalization or to multistate organizations, provided they serve a clear and useful function. However, it is a fact that Congress is made up of representatives from fifty individual states, each of whom is concerned primarily with serving his or her own constituency. As a result, federal funding has almost exclusively been allocated on a state-by-state basis, allowing each member of Congress to be equally placated. To change this pattern on a national scale is a task of insurmountable difficulty. It constitutes a threat to the viability of the individual members of Congress which they would probably not be willing to endure. Thus, there is no viable long-range base for regional activity except as negotiated through the individual states. This is not to deny that regional mechanisms do exist and, on occasion, have proven effective. The Regional Medical Library Network, the New England Library Information Network, the Southeastern Library Information Network, Amigos, and the Bibliographic Center for Research are examples that are familiar to all. Some services are available on a "national" basis, such as the Library of Congress's MARC services, OCLC, and the Center for Research Libraries, while others are state-based, such as the Illinois Library Information Network, the New York State Inter-Library Loan, the Minnesota Interlibrary Telecommunications Exchange, the Washington Library Network, the California Library Authority for Systems and Services, and the Wisconsin Library Loan System.

It is clear that a full-service national network of library and information services can only become a reality if there is careful articulation among local, state, multistate and national planning and implementation activities. The role of the state library agency as coordinator, catalyst, initiator, and even-handed funding agency is essential, extremely difficult and challenging, and requires sensitivity and political acumen of the highest quality. The responsibility cannot be "assigned"; it must be understood and assumed if it is to be effective.

The partnership at the federal/state level requires the state to accept the major share of the cost of planning, coordinating and supporting intra-state components of the network, as well as a fair share of the cost of participating in multistate planning operations. Each state must provide funding and/or matching funds for the development of resources and services, including specialized services for special constituencies and special forms of statewide network assistance. Each state library agency must solicit the widest possible participation of library, information and user

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communities in the governance and management of the multitype statewide library network if the state is to be an effective partner in a national network. State library agencies must recognize those regional agencies in their area which have an effective role to play and participate in their funding and governance, and they must make certain that their services benefit the residents of the state. Only in this way can states justify the use of state funds as well as federal funds, i.e., Title III of the Library Services and Construction Act. Regional organizations that are state-based and mainly state-funded will have a stability that will ensure their continued and effective existence.

In cooperation with federal and national agencies, state library agencies have, over a number of years, provided statewide services. For example, in cooperation with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), state library agencies have for years coordinated the collection of library statistics through the LIBGIS (Library General Information Survey) system. They have also provided training and consultant assistance to help local libraries understand the data elements on the forms, resulting in the collection of more accurate statistics. With the current demand for accountability and the development of new statistical methods which are designed to measure the effectiveness of library services, many state library agencies are providing training opportunities to learn how to use these new statistical measures.

Another area which is in support of one of NCLIS's objectives, i.e., continuing education, has also received the attention of state library agencies. Some states have participated in the development and continuing support of the Continuing Library Education Network and Exchange (CLENE) program, which provides the opportunity to exchange continuing education ideas with educators and practitioners in both the library and allied professions. Responsibility of state library agencies to provide leadership for continuing education within the state is essential if progress is to be made in the appropriate use of the new technology. Training sessions for learning the use of OCLC and other data bases are often provided either by the state or through a regional organization in cooperation with the state.

One of the more difficult areas of cooperation in which state library agencies can provide assistance is in the development of cooperative collection development and effective resource-sharing. The formulation of a broad statewide policy on collection development acceptable to all of the major academic and public libraries can go a long way in avoiding needless duplication in building collections. This is not only true for periodical

literature, but for monographs and multimedia as well. This is a most difficult problem to resolve, because the institutions which participate are required to make a long-term commitment. If resource-sharing is to be truly effective, the state must not only provide help in developing agreements on collection development and bibliographic control, but most importantly, must help to provide a statewide delivery system which will assure the patron that resource-sharing really works in a timely and effective fashion. The responsibility of the state library agency to cooperate with the states in its area (through regional organizations where they exist and through state-by-state cooperation where they do not) is necessary for the development of an effective national library and information network.

In summary, the states represent a basic node in the developing full-service library and information service network. Each state must have an agency which will assume the legal responsibility for providing coordination in order to develop a user-oriented, multitype library network. Responsibility for fostering this coordination of library resources and services throughout a state has usually been assigned to a state library agency. The state library agency must make certain that its legal responsibility is broad enough to give it the authority to undertake the coordination function, as discussed in this paper and enunciated in other articles in this issue.

State library agencies must make intelligent use of their federal funds to assure not only that all of its residents receive basic library services, but that cooperation between types of libraries provides an enrichment and a level of service that is commensurate with the rhetoric. It is all too easy for those who believe in cooperation and the sharing of resources to talk about its advantages, but in the final analysis, if the individuals who work in libraries do not have an understanding of and belief in cooperation, the goal will never be achieved. Perhaps the most important contribution that can be made at the state level is to undertake a major effort to develop the attitude of service to the user — the user being the individual who walks into the library whether he/she comes from that area or institution, or from another geographic area or institution.

Equal opportunity of access, which will satisfy the individual's needs and interests, regardless of location, social or physical condition, or level of intellectual achievement, is an achievable goal; all that is needed is the commitment and the willingness to make it a reality.