

Technical Services and Centralized Processing for the Rural Public Library: An Overview

JAMES W. FRY

A U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION study in 1956 revealed that 26 million rural residents were without any public library service and that more than 300 rural counties had no public library within their borders.¹ On June 19, 1956, efforts to correct this dire situation occurred when President Eisenhower signed the Library Services Bill. Eisenhower stated: "The Library Services Bill...represents an effort to stimulate the States and local communities to increase library services available to rural Americans."²

The Library Services Act (LSA), forerunner of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), had a tremendous impact on the improvement of library services for rural America. LSA defined a rural area as any place with a population of 10,000 or less.³ In addition to expanded services and funds for books, LSA provided the impetus and funds for state-sponsored centralized processing centers. In a 1970 *Library Resources & Technical Services* article, F. William Summers noted that "prior to 1956 centralized processing activities were few: notably Georgia, Missouri, and New York."⁴ Summers listed the following reasons for the establishment of a centralized processing center:

1. Concentration of expensive cataloging tools.
2. Concentration of able catalogers.
3. Shortened lines of communication with corresponding efficiency and administration.
4. Greater use of standardized rules and procedures.

James W. Fry is Deputy Assistant State Librarian for Technical Services, State Library of Ohio.

5. Elimination of extra revising and editing.
6. Greater ease in maintaining cataloging policy.⁵

Centralized processing enables libraries to utilize their resources to greater advantage by having costly, time-consuming and redundant processing routines accomplished in a central location at a lower cost. A 1971 report in the Indiana Library Studies series noted that: "Many librarians have no real concept of their own internal cataloging costs and no real feel for cost analysis. Consequently, commercial or processing center charges may seem high to them, when they are, in fact, quite reasonable and cheaper than the library's present costs."⁶ During 1977 and 1978, this author conducted technical service cost studies among numerous small public libraries in both Ohio and Pennsylvania. The results revealed that the average in-house cataloging and processing cost ranged from five to seven dollars per unit. The cost analyses were based on: (1) personnel—number of staff, salaries, and fringe benefits; and (2) supplies—those items used in a technical service operation (i.e., catalog cards, book jackets, pockets, etc.), and commercial processing kits and services. Costs of building space, maintenance, and equipment depreciation were not included.

In the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the literature concerning centralized processing was abundant. In the 1970s the literature was less evident as state library agencies began to concentrate their efforts and resources on the development of multicounty cooperatives, improved reference and interlibrary loan services, book grants, and more recently, network development.⁷ A recent computer base search of the literature regarding cooperative technical services in the rural library provided 125 abstracted citations. The search terms included: cataloging—library—cooperation; acquisition—library—cooperation; technical processes—cooperative; technical processes—centralization; shared services—centralization; and public libraries—cataloging. Fewer than ten citations were even remotely applicable to the subject of this paper. While the literature has decreased, cooperative centralized processing centers continue to flourish.

In 1978 the Technical Services Directors of Processing Centers Discussion Group of ALA published the *Cooperative Regional Centralized Processing Centers Directory*. The group defined a cooperative regional centralized processing center as one which serves two or more governmentally separate library units, including school, academic, state agency, special, and public libraries, or a combination of these. The directory lists sixty-nine centers in thirty states (see Table 1). State

Technical Services and Centralized Processing

processing centers are those which operate as a department of the state library or as an affiliated agency⁸ (see Table 2). The centers range in volumes processed from 10,000 to 300,000. Of the sixty-nine centers listed, six indicated that they utilized OCLC in their processing programs. Per item cost was not noted in this paper since there is such a wide variance, ranging from under one dollar to over four dollars. In order to obtain a valid comparison, the same factors—salary (including fringe benefits), supplies, and overhead cost—would need to be accessed from each center.

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF PROCESSING CENTERS BY STATE

<i>State</i>	<i>State Library Agency</i>	<i>Other (Public, Academic, School)</i>	<i>Total Centers</i>
Alaska	x		1
Arizona	x	4	5
Arkansas	x		1
California		3	3
Delaware		1	1
Georgia		1	1
Hawaii	x		1
Illinois	x	2	3
Indiana		1	1
Kansas		4	4
Kentucky	x		1
Louisiana	x		1
Massachusetts		3	3
Michigan		4	4
Minnesota		4	4
Mississippi	x	1	2
Missouri		2	2
Nevada	x		1
New Jersey		4	4
New York		10	10
North Carolina	x	1	2
Ohio	x	3	4
Oregon		1	1
Pennsylvania		1	1
South Dakota		1	1
Tennessee		1	1
Utah	x		1
Vermont	x		1
West Virginia	x		1
Wisconsin		3	3

Source: Meinersmann, Lee, comp. *Cooperative Regional Centralized Processing Centers Directory*. Chicago, RTSD/Technical Services Directors of Processing Centers Discussion Group of ALA, 1978.

TABLE 2. STATE LIBRARY AGENCY PROCESSING CENTERS

<i>State</i>	<i>Date Established</i>	<i>Volumes Processed FY 1977</i>	<i>Total Staff</i>
Arkansas	1954	45,181	19.0
Hawaii	1963	318,177	41.0
Kentucky	1957	173,944	23.0
Louisiana	1968	54,459	19.0
Mississippi	1969	51,000	20.0
North Carolina	1960	150,881	25.5
Ohio	1959	76,608	19.0
Utah	1965	130,000	18.0
Vermont	1936	17,921	6.5

Source: Meinersmann, Lee, comp. *Cooperative Regional Centralized Processing Centers Directory*. Chicago, RTSD/Technical Services Directors of Processing Centers Discussion Group of ALA, 1978.

Cooperative Processing Services

Based on information supplied in the *Cooperative Regional Centralized Processing Centers Directory*, over 80 percent of the participants are small public libraries. Most of these small or rural libraries process between 500 and 1000 volumes per year. Approximately one-half the centers provide cooperative acquisition services. Some would argue that no substantial savings would result from cooperative acquisition since jobber discounts are nearly as high on an individual library basis. Furthermore, the cost of maintaining this service would reduce the overall cooperative acquisition discount.

The State Library of Ohio processing center requires that each participant sign a contract or agreement which sets forth the responsibilities of both the participant and the center. The processing center agrees to receive, catalog, classify, process, and ship materials according to the participant's profiling specifications. The profiling specifications include: classification (Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress), location of the ownership stamps, plastic jacket, accession number, and any special location stamp, such as "reference" or "juvenile." The agreement also specifies the per item processing fee.⁹ The participant agrees to make payment within thirty days of the receipt of a statement for services rendered by the center. The center or the participant may terminate the agreement at any time without the other's consent, providing that at least thirty days' written notice is given.

While the number of nonbook materials (films, microforms, tapes, phonorecords) has increased, the overwhelming majority of items pro-

Technical Services and Centralized Processing

cessed continues to be hardcover and paperback materials. The processing of the low volume of nonbook items, for the most part, remains an in-house activity. A full-service processing center provides catalog cards and physical processing—stamping of the book, spine labeling, book pockets and cards, and plastic jackets. The materials arrive at the participating library ready for shelving.

Turnaround time for materials received from the jobber (or direct from the participant) to shipment of processed materials varies from center to center. Under normal conditions, 80-90 percent of the materials are shipped in five to fifteen working days. Original cataloged items may take thirty to sixty working days.

The Illinois State Library, with the assistance of the Library Research Center of the Graduate School of Library Science at the University of Illinois, is evaluating the Illinois Library Materials Processing Center at Rockford. In conjunction with this evaluation, the Library Research Center is conducting a survey of cooperative regional centralized processing centers throughout the country. This survey will update the 1978 *Cooperative Regional Centralized Processing Centers Directory* by providing specific information regarding such areas as turnaround time, costs, and automation.

Several of the cooperative cataloging and processing centers are currently utilizing the OCLC system. Since 1974 the State Library of Ohio has been a participant in OCLC. The Ohio Valley Area Libraries (OVAL) and the Southwestern Ohio Rural Libraries (SWORL) are multicounty cooperatives which actively participate in the state library's cataloging and processing program. In the future, through OCLC's local holdings record file, participants will be able to access their library holdings on-line through dial-up access terminals. This will provide interlibrary loan information as well as a basis for off-line services. The Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority (INCOLSA) operates a statewide cataloging and processing center and is also a participant in the OCLC system. INCOLSA provides computer printouts of the participants' records, based on the OCLC computer tapes.

Technical Services at the Local Level

A 1971 report on cooperative centralized processing for Indiana libraries concluded that: "(1) smaller libraries cannot afford and are not able to carry out successfully and economically all of the varied aspects of technical services at the local level. (2)...acceptance and adoption of

centrally produced cataloging copy meeting national standards is not only economic, but results in better service to library users than cataloging done on a purely local basis for almost all libraries."¹⁰ The report also noted that there was considerable resistance among smaller libraries to creating or joining federated, consolidated, or independent technical processing centers, based upon real, though unjustified, feelings that these centers may restrict selection, be too expensive, or produce cataloging and processing which is not suited to their users.¹¹ The authors of the Indiana report concluded that "while the centralized processing facilities which we have examined in detail undoubtedly could be improved, they are usually both more efficient and qualitatively better than the local library processing which they have replaced."¹² These observations and conclusions regarding technical services at the local level remain applicable to present procedures and attitudes. The author of this report has observed that some rural librarians in Ohio not utilizing a cooperative processing program spend 20 percent or more of their time involved with technical service activities.

Those rural libraries which do not participate in a cooperative centralized materials processing program utilize various options to fill their technical services needs. They either catalog and process their materials completely in-house or obtain their materials already processed from a commercial processing firm. Some utilize both options, cataloging in-house those materials that the commercial firm could not supply. For those libraries processing in-house, Cataloging in Publication (CIP) information has been extremely helpful. Many librarians fail to realize that in-house processing is the most expensive option. Many of the small libraries are also unaware of the recommended standards for in-house processing. In addition to the American Library Association's *Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966*, standards have been defined for the small public library in *Interim Standards for Small Public Libraries*.¹³ These standards were prepared by the ALA Subcommittee on Standards for Small Public Libraries in 1962. Those *Interim Standards* relating to technical services include fourteen guidelines under the heading "Books and Nonbook Materials," and thirteen guidelines under "Organization and Control of Materials."

Commercial processing firms provide an alternative for the rural library. This service provides a degree of standardization for the libraries' technical service programs. The Commercial Processing Services Committee of ALA's Resources and Technical Services Division offers a checklist for those libraries considering a commercial processing service. The checklist appeared in the Spring 1979 issue of *Library Resources & Technical Services*.

Future Considerations

As most researchers of rural public library programs soon discover, there is a limited amount of information in the literature regarding rural public libraries. This is especially evident in specific aspects such as technical service activities. This lack of information points out the real need for research on current rural public library service programs. However, there is evidence that efficiently operated, service-oriented, cooperative processing centers have been extremely effective in filling the technical service needs of many rural public libraries.

Most librarians would agree that we are living in the most exciting era in the history of American librarianship. This excitement has been created by the application of computer technology to library functions. The technical service function, namely cataloging, has been revolutionized by the introduction of OCLC nearly a decade ago. Today, the Washington Library Network (WLN) and the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) are also contributing to this revolution. This technological revolution has had and will continue to have a tremendous impact on all aspects of library service and on all types and sizes of libraries.

Cooperation between all types and sizes of libraries will continue to develop and grow throughout the next decade. California's Proposition 13 points up the need for greater utilization and sharing of resources. Accountability and efficiency are watchwords, as both inflation and taxpayer revolt have their impact on all types and sizes of libraries. John Kenneth Galbraith argues that: "The public servant has to be better than the private employee. That is because he or she is so much more visible. Therefore all public management must involve a relentless search for better performance."¹⁴ It is hoped that computer applications to library operations will assist in this goal. The rural public library, if it is to be effective in the community, cannot be denied the opportunity of participating in and benefiting from the fruits of this powerful, dynamic phenomenon of the twentieth century.

As we move forward in the next decade, the rural public library and its clientele cannot be overlooked or ignored. In 1956 the Library Services Act was specifically aimed at improved library services for the rural public library. This "temporary" act, forerunner of the Library Services and Construction Act, was designed to assist the rural library by providing funding to improve inadequate library service programs to rural United States. If LSCA is replaced by a National Library Act, as proposed by Senators Kennedy and Javits, the rural public library must be included as a beneficiary of this act.

Cooperative processing programs that have not or are not planning to implement a computer-based system may face a difficult future. In order to survive and be effective, they will need to implement and utilize fully the advances of the technological revolution. The rural public library and its users cannot be relegated to second-class citizenship in the quest for access to information. In the coming decade, the rural public library must fulfill its role as an active participant in the national network.

References

1. Moshier, Marion L., comp. *State Plans Under the Library Services Act* (U.S. Office of Education Bulletin No. 10). Washington, D.C., USGPO, 1958, p. 3.
2. "Library Services Act Now Public Law 597," *ALA Washington Newsletter* 8:1, June 29, 1956.
3. U.S. Office of Education, Library Services Branch. "The Library Services Act: Progress Report." In Phyllis B. Steckler, ed. *The Bowker Annual of Library & Book Trade Information*. 9th ed. New York, Bowker, 1964, pp. 118, 120.
4. Summers, F. William. "State Libraries and Centralized Processing," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 14:270, Spring 1970.
5. Ibid. See also Mullen, Evelyn D. "Guidelines for Establishing a Centralized Library Processing Center," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 2:172, Summer 1958.
6. Roth, Harold L., et al. *Centralized Processing for Indiana Libraries* (Indiana Library Studies, Report No. 13). Bloomington, Indiana State Library, 1971, p. 15. (ED 055 618)
7. Fry, James W. *A Feasibility Study for Consolidating and/or Coordinating Technical Procedures in Beaver County Pennsylvania Libraries*. Harrisburg, State Library of Pennsylvania, 1977, p. 10.
8. Shawkey, Dallas R. "Processing Centers." In Robert Wedgeworth, ed. *The ALA Yearbook*. Chicago, ALA, 1977, p. 253.
9. State Library of Ohio Catalog Center. *User's Guide*. Columbus, State Library of Ohio, 1976, p. 35.
10. Roth, op. cit., p. 23.
11. Ibid., p. 24.
12. Ibid.
13. Public Library Association. *Interim Standards for Small Public Libraries: Guidelines Toward Achieving the Goals of Public Library Service*. Chicago, ALA, 1962.
14. Galbraith, John K. "Are Public Libraries Against Liberty?" *American Libraries* 10:485, Sept. 1979.

Additional References

Association of State Library Agencies. Interlibrary Cooperation Subcommittee, eds., comps. *The ASLA Report on Interlibrary Cooperation, 1978*. 2d ed. Chicago, ASLA, 1978.

Technical Services and Centralized Processing

- Hamilton, Beth A., and Ernst, William B., eds. *Multitype Library Cooperation*. New York, Bowker, 1977.
- Leonard, Lawrence E. "Cooperative and Centralized Cataloging and Processing: A Bibliography, 1850-1967" (*Occasional Papers* No. 93). Urbana-Champaign, University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science, July 1968.
- Magrill, Rose Mary, and Rinehart, Constance, eds. *Library Technical Services: A Selected, Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1977.
- Simpson, Donald B., comp. *The State Library Agencies: A Survey Project Report, 1979*. 4th ed. Chicago, Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1979.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank