

Public Library Standards and Rural Library Service

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PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS have existed on the national level in the United States for nearly fifty years. State standards for public libraries have existed even longer. Insofar as most public library standards have established guidelines for quality library service to populations in all service areas, library service to rural areas might be considered as part of the standards. But what of the special characteristics and needs of rural libraries and their users? Do the national and state standards provide relevant guidelines for the rural library? It is the intent of this article to examine national and state public library standards to discover the extent to which rural library services have been considered and to identify aspects of the standards that might be especially applicable to rural libraries. It is also hoped that this analysis will result in some indication of the possible direction of future standards for rural library service.

Even a cursory examination of public library standards indicates that few have prescribed specific guidelines for rural library services. The lack of specific references in the standards to "rural services" may lie in the variety of definitions of the terms *rural* and *rural library services*. The term *rural* is often associated with "agricultural" or "sparsely populated" areas. In librarianship it is the characteristic of "size of population" which is most often associated with the term *rural*—but the population size perceived as rural varies considerably. The Library Services Act of 1956 defined "rural areas" as areas which do

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not include a town having a population of more than 10,000 persons.¹ A study prepared for the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Federal Funding of Public Libraries*, characterized "rural" public libraries as those outside Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs).² This definition would classify as "rural" some libraries in communities with populations of up to 50,000 that were not in an SMSA. The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines *rural* places as those with populations of less than 2500 outside of urbanized areas.³ The bureau's definition of *rural* is widely used in data relating to social and population characteristics. Some difficulties exist in applying this definition to library service, since it is not always possible to delineate library service in terms of places of less than 2500 population which are not in urbanized areas. However, because this definition is widely used, and since there is little agreement in public library standards or elsewhere on what constitutes the rural library service area, the Bureau of the Census definition of the term *rural* will be used here as the basis for discussing rural libraries.

Prior Studies

There have been a number of analyses and critiques of public library standards. Among the more significant are Lowell Martin's 1972 article in *Library Trends* entitled "Standards for Public Libraries" and Vainstein and Magg's 1959 *State Standards for Public Libraries*.⁴ There have also been numerous reactions to the various revisions of the national public library standards, including the lengthy literature that has resulted from efforts to revise the current public library standards by the Public Library Association's Goals, Guidelines, and Standards Committee. But there have been few attempts to analyze public library standards in terms of rural library service. The only such effort that could be located was a 1973 committee print prepared for the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Rural Development of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry.⁵ The committee print, written by Sandra Osbourn of the Congressional Research Service, consists of two sections. Section I deals with library standards and rural libraries and Section II with the quality of rural library service. Concentrating on the national standards, Osbourn cites many of the problems rural libraries have in meeting the American Library Association's *Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966* and the 1962 *Interim Standards for Small Public Libraries*.⁶ Osbourn noted that the development of these two sets of standards represents a "double standard" that exists within the profes-

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sion for large and for small libraries.⁷ She concludes that, even with the double standards established by ALA, library service to rural areas often does not meet the standards because of "inherent problems of inadequate resources, scattered population, and in some cases difficult terrain."⁸ A closer look at the development and content of national standards may help to evaluate the conclusion reached by Osbourn.

National Standards

Four sets of national standards for public libraries have been published by ALA since 1933. There are few references to rural library service or rural libraries in these standards. Most editions of the national standards do, however, provide guidelines for libraries serving specified population groups. It is recognized that rural libraries or libraries with rural service area responsibilities do not always correspond to the population categories specified. For the purposes of this analysis, however, standards relating to population categories within the range of the U.S. Bureau of the Census's definition of the term *rural* are assumed to be relevant to rural libraries and rural library service areas. The analysis of the national standards will thus focus on those standards and guidelines directed at smaller public libraries serving areas of under 2500 population. In addition to the four national standards, several commentaries and documents related to the standards will also be examined for relevance to rural library service.

The earliest of the national standards, the 1933 "Standards for Public Libraries," makes no direct reference to rural libraries or rural library service.⁹ Some mention is made of libraries in a "city of less than 10,000," but that is the smallest population group specified. The 1933 standards do speak to the problem of the small town which "must usually spend more than \$1 per capita to cover minimum essentials, or reduce unit costs by enlarging the area of service and support."¹⁰ Thus, the concept of the larger unit of service is presented as a solution to the problem of support of low population service areas. Little attention is given in the 1933 standards to the clientele of the small libraries who are living in the rural areas.

The 1943 *Post-War Standards for Public Libraries*¹¹ devote even less attention to smaller libraries and their clientele. Although a minimum size for library services is not specified, a population of 25,000 is indicated as the threshold for "efficient" library service.¹² The 1943 standards state that: "The smallest independent library unit which can be expected to provide some library service...should have a staff composed

of a professionally trained chief librarian and two full-time assistants."¹³ These standards do recognize that sparsely populated areas would have trouble supporting locally organized public library service. It is suggested that small libraries already in existence might contract for supplementary service from a larger library unit.¹⁴ The evolution toward larger units as a solution to the problems of small libraries is clearly another step forward in the 1943 standards, but again, little specific attention is given to the individual libraries with service responsibilities to rural areas.

The 1948 *A National Plan for Public Library Service*, although not a library standard as such, does address the special plight of rural library services. The *National Plan* suggests that rural areas should be served as parts of larger units through branches, deposit stations, and bookmobiles.¹⁵ The need to provide public library service to the rural resident, whom the national plan characterizes as the "forgotten man in library service,"¹⁶ becomes the central argument for the establishment of larger units of public library service. It is also the central focus of the effort for federal assistance to public libraries which culminated in the Library Services Act (LSA) in 1956 and set the direction for the 1956 standards which emphasized library systems.

The 1956 standards state that the community library should be part of a library system.¹⁷ The population categories discussed include groups smaller than those of the 1943 standards. The 1956 standards are also more ambitious in terms of guidelines for personnel. One full-time staff member for every 2000 people in the service area is prescribed. Libraries serving populations of 5000 or more are expected to have a full-time professional librarian.¹⁸ Those libraries serving less than 5000 population should have "close and regular guidance by professional personnel."¹⁹ The 1956 standards note that it would require twice as much per capita financial support for a library or a group of libraries serving a population of 20,000 to meet the minimum standard as it would for a library serving a population of 200,000. Thus, the concept of a larger unit of service is clearly endorsed as the most efficient way of providing library service. Nevertheless, considerably more attention is paid to libraries serving smaller populations than in the earlier standards.

The publication of the 1956 standards began a very eventful period for rural library development. Concern about the lack of service to rural residents was central to the Library Services Act of 1956.²⁰ Its purpose was to extend library services to rural areas that had no service or inadequate service. For the first time, many rural areas were introduced

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to library service. The number of persons served by public libraries eventually tripled. But not everyone felt that the approach taken by LSA was the best way to improve library services to rural areas.

In a conference sponsored by the University of Illinois in fall 1961, Lowell Martin discussed library standards and the Library Services Act.²¹ He raised some questions regarding the effectiveness of the effort to establish adequate library service to rural residents. Martin felt at that time that LSA had resulted in the fragmentation of library services and had sacrificed the strength of central libraries for the convenience of branches and bookmobiles. It was his opinion that the emphasis on extension of services to rural populations within the context of limited funds meant that in-depth services had to be sacrificed.²² He raised the issue of whether the primary effect of LSA had been to increase the number of people receiving substandard library service.²³ He also questioned why libraries should be different from other types of services, such as hospitals, schools, and shopping centers. The others have all followed the trend toward consolidation, but library service is the one service which we assume people will not use unless it is brought physically close to them.²⁴ As to the relevance of the 1956 national standards, Martin felt that they were reasonable, appropriate, and necessary, and should be met as soon as possible.²⁵

It quickly became evident that all did not agree with Martin's call for applying the 1956 standards to all libraries as soon as possible. Perhaps it was the recognition of the fiscal reality of public library support, especially in rural areas, that led to the publication of *Interim Standards for Small Public Libraries* in 1962. These standards were to be "interim" in the sense that they were to be applied until small libraries could join public library systems. The introduction to the *Interim Standards* acknowledged that "many librarians feel that no separate standards should be established for small libraries" because they believe that separate standards would encourage the small library to remain small and delay the development of public library systems.²⁶ The Subcommittee on Standards for Small Libraries responded that since two-thirds of the libraries in the United States serve populations under 10,000, whatever could be done to improve the services of this substantial group would benefit library development in general.²⁷ Not being able to come to an agreement on a definition of the "small" library, the subcommittee decided to present standards for groups of libraries serving populations of 2500 to 50,000. It was assumed that the estimated 40 percent of the public libraries which serve populations of less than 2500 should meet the qualitative standards set for the 2500-50,000 population

group. Some quantitative standards were provided for the libraries serving populations under 2500. These included standards for hours of service, materials, and staff.

The *Interim Standards* are unique in terms of their continuing status. Unlike the other national standards, they were not superseded by the 1966 standards for library systems, because the *Interim Standards* are concerned with libraries not yet part of library systems. The *Interim Standards* provide guidelines for small libraries until the libraries join systems. These standards can continue to be in effect as long as there are independent, small public libraries. For the first time, the small public library had been recognized by national standards and specific guidelines developed for them. Although neither the rural library nor rural library service is specifically mentioned, the *Interim Standards* do apply to most independent rural libraries by virtue of the size of the population most rural libraries serve.

In 1966 the Public Library Association approved a set of standards for public library systems. Thus evolved what has been termed the "double standard" for public libraries in the United States: the *Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966* concentrated on larger units of service, while the *Interim Standards* concentrated on library services to smaller populations not part of larger units of service.

The 1966 standards stated that the philosophy of library systems is based on the assumption that "people need similar library resources whether they live in cities, in suburbs, or in rural areas."²⁸ Although it was recognized that rural areas will differ from urban areas in terms of the specific nature of the materials and services provided, neither the relationship of the rural library to the library system nor the special needs for rural library service is explicitly defined in the 1966 standards. The independence of the community library is discussed, and it is noted that "some degree of independence must be sacrificed" if library users are going to be provided with greater resources and services.²⁹ Access to library service is seen as a necessity for every community, but it was stated that those communities without sufficient tax resources should operate within a library system. Although there are few references to rural libraries or libraries serving communities with small populations, the 1966 standards do state that the library should have one staff member for every 2000 people in the service area, and that the community library should have a professional staff member available to provide services to the public during all hours the library is open.³⁰

In 1967 the Public Library Association appended statistical stand-

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ards to the 1966 standards.³¹ These addenda specified that the community library in rural areas should be within thirty minutes' travel time of users.³² This is one of the few standards that specifically mentions service to rural areas. But the financial problem of providing such services is not approached in the addenda. Although the 1966 standards and addenda are among the first to indicate specific standards relating to rural areas, they do so on a very limited basis.

Since 1972 the Goals, Guidelines, and Standards Committee of the Public Library Association has been working on a revision of the 1966 standards. In the course of their deliberations, various position statements and working papers have been issued. One of the few references to problems relevant to rural service was in the "Task Force on Children's Services Working Paper."³³ This task force spoke to the removal of barriers deterring use of libraries by children: "These include physical and geographical remoteness of materials and services."³⁴ As far as could be determined, none of the other working papers mentions geographical remoteness or other characteristics that might be considered relevant to rural library services.

In 1977 the Goals, Guidelines, and Standards Committee of the Public Library Association issued "A Mission Statement for Public Libraries."³⁵ This statement has been slightly revised and reissued in 1979 with a statement on "Imperatives for Service."³⁶ These statements are to be used to develop guidelines for service until revision of the 1966 standards is completed. The mission statement concentrates on measure of library output rather than input. This approach may change the emphasis on minimum size of population served and provide the opportunity for smaller libraries and libraries serving rural areas to find relevant guidelines for measuring their activities. Manuals are being prepared for use by public libraries which will enable each library to individualize its services for its clientele.³⁷ It is too early to determine the exact impact of the new direction of thinking on national library standards, but it will undoubtedly have an effect on rural libraries and rural library services.

It is evident from the examination of national standards that there is little attention given to rural library services or the rural library. Most of the emphasis has been placed on larger units of service, with library systems assumed to be the most efficient way of providing adequate service to all populations. Only in the course of revising the 1966 standards has much attention been paid to the local library and its special clientele.

State Standards

As noted above, state standards predate national public library standards: New York State established public library standards in the nineteenth century.³⁸ The interest of individual states in developing their own standards did not end with the publication of national standards for public libraries by the American Library Association. In 1958, after twenty-five years of national standards, Vainstein and Magg found that twenty states had their own standards.³⁹ In 1975 Ladd Boyd, in a study submitted to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, found that thirty-five states had their own standards.⁴⁰ The growth of state standards is undoubtedly due to many factors, but the general nature of the national standards may have influenced many states to develop public library standards that reflect the characteristics and needs of their libraries. Many include separate standards for libraries serving small populations. Most of the state standards for public libraries also include quantitative guidelines specifying the number of staff, volumes, service hours, and other variables in terms much more specific than those of the national standards. To determine the current status of state library standards for public libraries, a survey of state agencies was conducted in late 1978 and early 1979. Thirty-five states were identified as having public library standards or guidelines. For purposes of this analysis, no distinction is made between "standards" and "guidelines." The terms will be used interchangeably in the discussion, even though some of the state agencies referred to "guidelines" and others referred to "standards."

As in the analysis of national standards, the primary concern here in the analysis of state standards is with the provision of standards for the smaller library or the smaller population service area which might be considered relevant to rural library services. The state standards that specify criteria for measuring performance of smaller libraries do not necessarily come from rural states. Of the eight states with more than 50 percent of their population listed as rural by the *County and City Data Book*,⁴¹ only two have standards that specify criteria for libraries serving populations of less than 2500. Three of the predominantly rural states do not have separate state standards, and the other three do not provide specific guidelines in their standards for libraries in categories of less than 2500 population. It is recognized, of course, that the proportion of the total state population that falls under the Bureau of the Census's definition of "rural" does not necessarily reflect the extent of development or the relative significance of rural libraries in the state. Some

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states have a large number of small libraries in rural areas, but also have large urban concentrations. Both New York and Illinois are over 80 percent urban, yet each has several hundred public libraries serving populations of 2500 or less. Some of these are small towns in urban areas, but many are just as rural as those rural libraries in Nebraska and West Virginia and other "rural" states.

When standards of the thirty-five states were examined for guidelines that might apply to rural libraries or rural library service by virtue of size of population, certain patterns relating to service became evident. Five of the more commonly listed categories found in the state standards are: (1) number of staff, (2) educational requirements for librarians, (3) hours of service, (4) number of volumes, and (5) physical space. Summary data are presented for these five categories in Tables 1-5. Not all of the state standards have guidelines relating to every category, thus the number of states listed varies from table to table. Twenty-five of the state standards examined specify guidelines for staffing of public libraries (Table 1). Although over 70 percent of the standards examined specify guidelines for staffing in relation to population served, less than 50 percent are concerned with population levels of 2500 or less. The majority of the states either set staffing guidelines at levels higher than 2500 or do not set staffing guidelines in relation to population served at all.

TABLE 1. STATE STAFFING REQUIRED IN
RELATION TO POPULATION SERVED

<i>At Least One Staff Member per:</i>	<i>Number of States</i>	<i>Percentage of States with Standards</i>
2000 population or less	10	29
2500 population	6	17
3000-4000 population	5	14
5000 or over	4	11
Not specified	10	29
Total	35	100

Table 2 provides data on the minimum educational qualifications for head librarians. Although less than half of the states covered have guidelines for minimum educational qualifications, the majority of those that do specify something less than a master's degree in library science. In fact, the high school diploma is indicated as the minimum

educational qualification in 40 percent of the states specifying minimum educational requirements. Most of the standards in which a high school diploma is stated as the minimum requirement are for libraries serving populations of 2500 or less. Rhode Island, however, does specify the high school diploma as the minimum educational level for librarians in libraries serving as many as 5000 persons. Two of the three states that have established the master's degree in library science as the minimum educational requirement do so for libraries of all sizes. Illinois calls for the services of a "professionally trained librarian either directly employed by the library board, contracted for through the library system, or jointly employed by two or more libraries."⁴² Ohio specifies that the director of any library should be "professionally trained."⁴³ Idaho recommends that libraries serving populations of more than 5000 have professionally trained librarians.⁴⁴ Educational requirements for librarians in libraries serving fewer than 5000 persons are not specified in the Idaho standards.

As indicated in Table 3, nearly half of the standards specify twenty or fewer hours per week as minimum hours of service. All the standards that set fewer than twenty hours a week for service did so for libraries serving populations of 2500 or less. It seems that many states are resigned to limited hours for small libraries, or are at least realistic in terms of the potential support for hours of service in small-population areas.

Table 4 presents the minimum number of volumes specified in the various state standards. Although twenty-two (63 percent) of the states with standards do specify a minimum number of volumes per library, only eight of these do so specifically for libraries serving 2500 or less. Ten of the twenty-two do not specify population as a criterion for minimum number of volumes. It might be assumed that the guidelines in these ten states would apply to all libraries, regardless of the size of population served. The smallest population specified for minimum volumes ranges from 250 or less (Kansas and Nebraska) to 10,000 (Minnesota). Many states use a "volume per capita" formula as well as the minimum volume figure and indicate that a library should use whichever results in a greater number of volumes. Only the minimum volume figure is considered in Table 4.

Table 5 is concerned with standards that specify minimum square footage for public libraries. Most state standards do not indicate a minimum square footage. Of the fifteen that do, six do so for libraries serving populations of 2500 or less. These range from 1000 square feet (North Dakota) to 2800 square feet (Iowa). Table 5 indicates that the

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TABLE 2. MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR HEAD LIBRARIANS IN STATE STANDARDS

<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Number of States</i>	<i>Percentage of States with Standards</i>
High school diploma	6	17
Two years of college	4	11
Four years of college	2	6
Master's degree in library science	3	9
Not specified	20	57
Total	35	100

TABLE 3. MINIMUM HOURS OF SERVICE SPECIFIED IN STATE STANDARDS

<i>Hours per Week</i>	<i>Number of States</i>	<i>Percentage of States with Standards</i>
6-8	4	11
10-12	4	11
15	5	14
18-20	4	11
24-25	2	6
30-32	3	9
48-50	2	6
Not specified	11	32
Total	35	100

TABLE 4. MINIMUM NUMBER OF VOLUMES SPECIFIED IN STATE STANDARDS

<i>Number of Volumes</i>	<i>Number of States</i>	<i>Percentage of States with Standards</i>
Under 2,000	2	6
2,000-3,500	5	14
5,000-8,000	7	20
10,000	4	11
15,000-50,000	4	11
Other guidelines*	13	37
Total	35	100

*Including standards that specify a per capita guideline but not number of volumes, as well as those standards that do not include any guidelines for materials.

majority of the standards providing guidelines for minimum square footage specify 2000 square feet or less. Ohio tops the list with 8000 square feet as the minimum specified.

TABLE 5. MINIMUM SQUARE FOOTAGE FOR PHYSICAL FACILITIES SPECIFIED IN STATE STANDARDS

<i>Square Footage</i>	<i>Number of States</i>	<i>Percentage of States with Standards</i>
1000-1750	2	6
2000	7	20
2500-3500	3	9
6000-8000	3	9
Other guidelines*	20	57
Total	35	100

*Includes those standards that give guidelines for specific funding or facilities, but not for total facility.

A sixth category found in most of the state standards is financial support. There is considerably more variation from state to state in the standards for financial support than for the other categories. Some states specify minimum budgets; these range from \$3000 to \$15,000. Other states specify per capita support minimums, ranging from \$4 to \$10.50. Still other states specify financial support in terms of tax rates. Because of the diversity of approaches to establishing minimums for financial support in the state standards, it is not possible to make a meaningful generalization regarding patterns. Part of the difference may reflect the rapid inflation rate in recent years, with the newer or more recently revised standards reflecting the inflated dollar value. But some of the difference may reflect the different perceptions of resources for support of public libraries in various states. State standards specifying minimum budgets seem to reflect the attitude of the national standards, i.e., that smaller libraries serving smaller population areas have to spend more per capita than libraries serving larger population areas.

Comparison of State and National Standards

State standards give considerably more attention to smaller libraries than do national standards. Even the *Interim Standards for Small Public Libraries* does not include guidelines for population service areas as small as those included in many state standards. By comparing some of the most recent national standards, the 1962 *Interim Standards*

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and the *Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966*, with the various state standards for public libraries, the following similarities and differences become evident. The 1966 *Minimum Standards* call for one staff member per 2000 population. The *Interim Standards* specify from one to one and one-half full-time equivalent staff members as the minimum for libraries serving less than 2500. Both sets of national standards are in agreement with most of the state standards examined, although 25 percent of the states' standards do specify minimum staffing for areas with populations higher than 2500.

The difference between state and national standards for minimum educational requirements for librarians is greater than that for number of staff. The *Minimum Standards* specify that one of the three staff members for every 6000 served should be a professionally trained librarian. The *Interim Standards* specify employment of a college graduate for the library serving less than 5000 population. Both sets of national standards establish levels considerably above the minimum educational requirements in most of the state standards. Three-quarters of those state standards specifying minimum educational requirements indicate two years of college or a high school diploma as the minimum educational level required.

The *Minimum Standards* do not specify minimum hours for libraries serving fewer than 10,000. The 1962 *Interim Standards* specify fifteen hours per week as the minimum hours of service in a small library. The state standards vary considerably from this minimum with eleven states exceeding it, and eight having minimums of less than fifteen hours.

The *Minimum Standards* provide quantitative guidelines for materials for library systems only. The *Interim Standards* specify 10,000 volumes as the minimum size of a book collection for a small community library. Most state standards differ greatly from the national standards on number of volumes required. Only four of the state standards list minimum volume guidelines which exceed the 10,000-volume minimum of the *Interim Standards*. Four states have guidelines that match those of the *Interim Standards*, and fourteen specify material holdings below that of the *Interim Standards*.

The *Minimum Standards* do not specify minimum size for physical facilities for community libraries. The *Interim Standards* specify 2000 square feet as the minimum. It appears that some states have adopted the *Interim Standards* on physical space, since 20 percent of the standards examined also indicate 2000 square feet as the minimum. However, almost as many states have exceeded the 2000-square-foot minimum of the *Interim Standards*.

Minimum level of financial support is not specified in either of the national standards. As noted above, in most instances the state standards do not specify minimum financial guidelines. This is an area which both the national and the state standards seem to avoid.

In summary, the state standards have less stringent guidelines than those of the national standards in the areas of educational requirements for librarians and minimum size of book collections. In guidelines regarding hours of service and size of staff there are relatively few differences between state and national standards. In the area of minimum square footage for physical facilities, a number of states exceed the national standards, but most of the state standards that specify total square footage are either the same as or below the national standards. The smaller library would, in general, have less difficulty meeting state standards than the national standards. It is evident that the state standards give more consideration to smaller libraries than do the national standards.

Rural Libraries and Existing Standards

As we have seen, national and state standards do not pay much attention to rural library service as a separate category of concern. Many of the state standards are, however, concerned with smaller libraries, which in most states would include a large number of rural libraries. Rural library service received the attention of the federal government and of state library agencies through the legislation establishing the Library Services Act. One effort to measure the results of the federal legislation against the various state standards adopted took place in 1976 when the ALA Washington Office conducted a survey of state library agencies on the progress made in the twenty years of the Library Services Act (LSA) and the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). The report of this survey was published in 1977 as part of the hearings on the Library Services and Construction Act Amendments of 1977.⁴⁵ Because the first eight years of the federal legislation concentrated on library services to rural areas, some of the questions directed toward the progress of LSA and LSCA can serve as an indication of the progress of rural library service. Since much of the population that was unserved when LSA began in 1956 could be classified as "rural," the ALA survey is one of the few evaluations of programs which include library services to rural areas.

The ALA survey reports that in 1956 thirty-eight states had some counties without public library service; in 1976 there were eighteen such

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states.⁴⁶ Thus, an important improvement in reaching the unserved was accomplished in the twenty years of federal programs. Of these eighteen states, however, ten had over 20 percent of their counties without library service, and two states (North Dakota and South Dakota) had over 50 percent of their counties without library service.⁴⁷

According to the standards adopted by each state, 3 percent of the total population of the United States had adequate library service, 16 percent had no service, and 81 percent had inadequate service in 1956. In 1976, 13 percent had adequate service and 4 percent had no service, but 83 percent had inadequate service when measured against the standards adopted by each state.⁴⁸ Although there was an increase in the percentage of people served adequately, the percentage with inadequate service also increased. "Inadequate" may be an improvement over "no service," but much remains to be done in most instances to bring this service up to adequate levels. In 1956 seven states indicated that they had adequate service for 100 percent of their population; in 1976 twelve indicated that they had adequate service for all their population.⁴⁹ That leaves thirty-eight states with overall public library services less than adequate when measured by the adopted standard of the state. Given the fact that 7 percent of the nation's libraries in urban areas receive 55 percent of the total public library funding and 65 percent of the nation's public libraries in rural areas receive only 17 percent of total funding,⁵⁰ one might assume that the rural library is represented heavily in the "inadequate" category in most states. Clearly, rural libraries are just as much the "forgotten man in library service" today as they were in 1948. National and state standards essentially ignore rural public libraries or else downgrade guidelines to the point that what would be inadequate for others becomes adequate for rural library service.

Identification of Elements Unique to Rural Library Service

In the course of gathering information on state standards for public libraries, each of the state agencies was asked to comment on the special characteristics and needs of rural libraries which might be taken into consideration in developing public library standards at the state or national level. A number of respondents were not supportive of the concept of separate standards for rural libraries. Some felt it would be best to concentrate on standards for regional systems. Others felt that interim standards for the small rural library would be acceptable if set at a realistic level. Although there was no clear consensus in favor of separate standards, most respondents identified two or more special

needs of rural libraries which might be considered in developing national or state standards.

Table 6 presents a summary of the forty-eight responses received from the fifty state agencies surveyed. Only those characteristics cited by three or more state agency respondents are included in the table. Funding for rural library service is clearly a primary concern of the state agencies and probably underlies most of the other concerns expressed. Adequate staffing, collection development, and hours of service are difficult to maintain without appropriate funding. Because rural libraries by definition serve sparsely populated areas, per capita costs of service are necessarily high. Rural areas seldom have the strength of the tax base that urban areas have. Thus, rural areas are caught in a vicious circle of needing more money to provide adequate services, yet having fewer resources for obtaining that money.

TABLE 6. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND NEEDS OF RURAL LIBRARIES AS IDENTIFIED BY THREE OR MORE STATE LIBRARY AGENCY RESPONDENTS

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Number of Times Cited</i>
Lack of funds	22
Need for cooperative activity	15
Inadequate staffing	11
Geographic isolation	9
Need for improved collection development	6
Need for special methods of delivery of materials	3
Limited hours of service	3

Guidelines relating to cooperative activities are also considered important by the state agency respondents. The need for increased cooperative activity undoubtedly reflects the "larger unit" orientation of most of the national and state standards, but many of the respondents from state agencies see even more need for cooperative efforts.

Staffing, as noted in the analysis of the state standards, is one area where many states have made special adjustments through establishing guidelines which are less stringent than the national standards. Staffing is the third most frequently noted area of concern of the respondents from the state agencies.

Geographic isolation was listed by only nine state agency respondents. It may be that improved telecommunications and better delivery systems have overcome some of the barriers of service to rural areas. It is

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also possible that geographic isolation varies considerably from state to state. Certainly, for those libraries and library users that have problems of geographic isolation, it is a significant barrier to adequate library service.

One might argue that most of the "special characteristics and needs" identified by the state library respondents are really not unique to rural libraries. Urban libraries can certainly claim some of the same needs, especially the need for more funds. But these special characteristics and needs are particularly crucial for many rural libraries which are operating on very limited financial resources. In Iowa, for example, more than 180 libraries reported total annual expenditures of less than \$5000 in 1977-78.⁵¹ It is difficult to do much in the way of providing adequate library service with such limited finances. It is not for lack of local support that these small libraries have such limited financial resources. Many are supported at per capita rates considerably above those specified in state and national standards. As noted earlier, it is the inherent sparsity of population of rural areas that leads to limited financial support and thus makes it difficult to compare them with urban areas.

Conclusion

Larger units of service, of course, have been the traditional solution for the problem of providing service to sparsely populated areas. As has been noted above, the national standards have evolved to the point of considering only libraries that are part of library systems. Larger units of library service have been effective in many areas, but the development of library systems has also resulted in the increase of the number of small libraries in rural areas providing less than adequate library service. The attention given by many state standards to small libraries suggests that the need to set standards for such libraries has been recognized.

If adequate rural public library service is to be provided to those who now have inadequate service, considerably more attention will have to be paid to relevant standards and guidelines for rural library service. The approach to establishing standards for public libraries through local needs assessment promises to be a challenge to rural libraries. We may be entering the era of the "multiple standard" which will replace the "double standard" that has existed in the past. But there are some important challenges ahead for libraries providing services to rural areas. Although needs assessment at the local level may help establish a better awareness of appropriate services, financial support

and staffing will remain a problem in most areas. The ability to distinguish between "needs" and "wants" will become crucial. Rural library service in many areas has been available at a level so much below that provided in urban areas that expectations of rural residents may be considerably lower than those of their urban counterparts. The involvement of the community, of course, will be an important factor in determining the future quality of rural library service. Clearly, past techniques of establishing standards have not always been successful. It is hoped that the proposed techniques for determining standards at the local level will be able to stimulate the adjustment of resources to meet the needs, rather than an adjustment of needs to meet the resources. *The Public Library Mission Statement and Its Imperatives for Service* may provide a new opportunity for rural libraries to formulate appropriate standards and guidelines, but the inherent inefficiency of smaller units of service will still have to be confronted.

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