

Political Factors Influencing Library Involvement in Adult Learning

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ONE ADULT IN FIVE does not possess basic competencies needed to function in our complex society. However, the smallest percentage of adults participating in planned group learning activities is from segments of the population with the least formal educational background. Increased opportunities for adult education programs in the United States have primarily benefited the white and the wealthy.¹ This situation presents a formidable dilemma to public libraries in their traditional role as agencies of adult education.

Concern for the library's role in adult education continues, despite the fact that the impact of inflation and change in public funding patterns have eliminated or curtailed choices for library services options. Overall public expenditures for libraries are disproportionately less than for other educational programs. Intensive efforts are required for adult education programs to attract target segments of the population, and libraries find that adult programs have a high cost in personnel and space.² Therefore, libraries face the difficult task of securing funds for programs despite poor attendance and shoestring budgets.

People, nations and funding sources think of books when they think of libraries. All too often we do not relate library programming to this image. Daniel J. Boorstin, Librarian of Congress, complained that one had to read fifty-five pages of the transcript of the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services before the word "book" appeared.³ However simple it sounds, a budget firmly rooted in

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“the book” will provide funds for information utilization and individually impressive programs. Since the public expectation is for library programs to relate to books and related information sources, the most feasible political approach to adult education is in information-providing roles.

Federal State and Local Political Implications

The American federal response to libraries' involvement with adult education is the Library Services and Construction Act, Title I (LSCA). Though they are not specifically earmarked in the act, many adult education demonstration programs are funded through LSCA. For example, federal funds constitute the largest source of money utilized by public libraries for literacy education services.⁴ Of all adult education activities, literacy is perhaps the most important and obvious for libraries. However, libraries' involvement in literacy has been in response to obvious needs where no other providers of literacy education are available or effective. Cooperation with other providers has been a principal factor in library involvement. A 1981 study by the U.S. Department of Education revealed how small libraries involvement in literacy actually is. The median annual budget of the surveyed public libraries was \$6,000. Generally, only 3.4 percent of this figure was spent for literacy. Overall, LSCA has too little money spread throughout too many programs and categories. Adult education applications using LSCA have not captured the attention of congress, and it is extremely unlikely that any specific legislation addressing libraries' involvement will ever come about, unless it addresses literacy..

In most LSCA programs there is no assurance of continued funding for successful programs. This creates a Jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none syndrome. Efforts are now underway to put in place technical amendments that would provide a new focus on access, adequacy and populations served. Technological applications would be emphasized, as would emphasis on the public library as a community information center.

Despite the low levels of funding under LSCA, the act has achieved a broad range of impacts and changes. An estimated 94 percent of the nation's public libraries (serving 197.8 million persons) were able in 1980 to cite at least one change in service or one new service resulting from LSCA, according to a 1981 Department of Education evaluation. This is in spite of the fact that LSCA funds only account for 5 percent of the total outlay for public libraries. LSCA has a widespread influence

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which is much more than the measure of funds would indicate (62.5 million in 1981).⁵

One glance at the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* will show the magnitude of federal support for adult education.⁶ The large number of individual acts led to the creation in 1964 of the Federal Interagency Committee on Education. Its purpose was to study and recommend methods of assuring effective coordination of federal programs, policies and administrative practices affecting education. It is difficult to find any trace of the committee's activity in library programs, although the American Library Association urged the committee in 1980 to coordinate an attack on illiteracy.

The federal financial role in adult education has decreased from a high of over \$1 billion in 1981 to an estimated \$206 million for categorized programs for fiscal 1983. The Community Services Block grants, meant for partial makeup of the categorized programs, has only made up \$336.5 million, and that amount is expected to decrease to \$100 million in 1983 (see table 1).

TABLE 1
MAJOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS: FUNDING

	FY 81	FY 82	83 Est.
Adult Education—State-Administered Programs	\$100,000,000	\$84,500,000	\$ 0
Special Services for Disadvantaged Students	64,000,000	57,000,000	57,000,000
Talent Search	17,000,000	15,500,000	0
Continuing-Education Outreach—State-Administered Programs	2,200,000	(12.8 million rescission)	
Upward Bound	66,500,000	60,000,000	25,000,000
Consumer and Homemaking Education	30,000,000	29,000,000	Block*
Vocational Education—Basic Grants	518,000,000	395,000,000	Block*
Vocational Education—Program Improvement	93,000,000	88,000,000	Block*
Vocational Education—Program Improvement Projects	7,500,000	7,000,000	Block*
Vocational Education—Special Programs for Disadvantaged	15,000,000	14,300,000	Block*
Indian Education—Adult Indian Education	5,500,000	5,000,000	3,500,000
Veteran's Cost of Instruction Program	6,000,000	0	0
Educational Opportunity Centers	8,000,000	7,000,000	0

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TABLE 1—Continued

	FY 81	FY 82	83 Est.
Bilingual Vocational Training	2,500,000	2,200,000	0
Regional Education Programs for Deaf and Handicapped	3,000,000	2,800,000	Block*
Women's Education Equity	8,000,000	5,700,000	0
Bilingual Vocational Instruction Materials, Methods	400,000	338,000	0
Vocational Education—Indian Tribes and Organizations	6,000,000	5,000,000	Block*
Training for Special Programs	760,000	880,000	0
Fund for Improvement of Post- Secondary Education	13,500,000	11,400,000	11,900,000
Education Research and Development	36,000,000	25,500,000	25,600,000
Migrant Education—High School Equivalent	6,000,000	5,500,000	0
Migrant Education—Coordinating Community Services Block Grant	3,000,000	0	0
	0	336,500,000	100,000,000
Totals	\$1 + billion	\$822,000,000	

OTHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants	\$370,000,000	\$278,000,000	0
Rehabilitation Services— Basic Support	854,000,000	772,000,000	Block*
Rehabilitative Services— Special Projects	24,600,000	20,700,000	Block*
Rehabilitative Training	21,500,000	19,000,000	Block*

*Part of Block Grants

Source: *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Management and Budget, 1982.

Virtually every federal agency has undertaken some form of adult education in recent years. In 1972, the National Advisory Council on Adult Education identified some fifty adult education programs under the auspices of agencies other than the Department of Education. There are presently eleven federal advisory committees concerned wholly or in part with adult education. Six are presidential committees, and five are appointed by the secretary of education.

The roles of the federal advisory committees should not be underestimated, even though present federal policy advocates curtailment of education programs generally and a lessening of federal advisory committee activity. Adult educators need to study and take an active interest

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in the federal advisory committees, which have been referred to as the fifth branch of government.⁷ A list of those committees relevant to adult education follows:⁸

Presidential Advisory Committees

The National Advisory Council on Continuing Education (NACCE), formerly The National Advisory Council on Extension and Continuing Education (NAXECE); established 1965 (Title I, HEA; Education—Amendment of 1972 and 1980, legislative change of title).

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education (NACVE); established 1968 (Title II, VEA; Amendments of 1968 and 1976).

The National Advisory Council on Adult Education (NACAE); established 1970 (Title III, ESEA; amended to Title XIII, 1978)—originated as the National Advisory Council on Adult Basic Education (1966, Title III, ESEA).

The National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE); established 1972 (Title XI, ESEA).

The National Advisory Council on Women's Education Programs (NACWEP); established 1974 (Title IX, ESEA).

The Intergovernmental Advisory Council on Education (IACE); established 1979, by U.S. Department of Education Organization Act, Public Law 96-88 (the IACE is in development: it will advise on the impact of federal education activities, assess compliance, and make recommendations on the federal role in education).

Secretarial Advisory Committees

The Board of Advisors to the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE); established 1972 (Title III, HEA; Education Amendments of 1972).

The National Advisory Council on Bilingual Education (NACBE); established 1974 (Title VII, ESEA).

The National Advisory Council on Career Education (NACCE); established 1974 (Title VIII), ESEA; Educational Amendments of 1974; Career Education Incentive Act of 1977.

The Community Education Advisory Council (CEAC); established 1974 (Title VIII, ESEA; Education Amendments of 1974 and 1978).

The National Advisory Council on Ethnic Heritage Studies (NACEHS); established 1978 (Title IX, ESEA; Amendments of 1978).

The impact of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities on adult learning activities in libraries has been substantial in recent years. Under the Division of Public Programs, Humanities Projects in Libraries, the Endowment encourages public interest in academic and public library humanities resources and stimulates their use. Thematic programs, exhibits, media, publications, and other library activities that spark the public interest are funded. The division also seeks to enhance the ability of the library staff to plan and implement these programs. Community libraries, library systems, state library agencies, library organizations, library schools, and school and academic libraries are eligible to apply. The grants range from \$20,000 to \$100,000. For example, under the Humanities Projects in Libraries, a grant was made to the Library of the Central Agency for Jewish Education in Miami, Florida for a "Senior Adult Library Outreach Project" that created a bilingual reading/lecture/discussion series specifically designed for senior citizens. Criteria for selection of grant applications relate to the project theme, public participation, humanities resources in the library, and responsible and knowledgeable staff.

Another important source of adult education funding through the National Endowment is the Division of State Programs, which develops fifty councils in the states to fund project grants. This program has established a link in each state to the National Endowment. Twenty-six thousand projects have been funded, many of these in libraries. In fiscal year 1981 the programs reached 28 million Americans. Funding for Endowment-based programs has been decreasing in recent years. While \$23,948,000 was granted through the state-based programs in 1981, only an estimated \$13.2 million will be granted for 1983.

The trends of federal support in adult education are toward less categorical funding and more block grants, involving fewer total dollars. States with high demand, abundant resources and a diversified tax structure will fund some of the dismantled federal programs. Local dollars for adult education are not likely to increase. Certainly a substantial amount of funds has been directed toward adult education. Current and future political trends point to cutbacks in areas that have a low measure of quantitative return. Unfortunately, some federally funded programs in adult education fall into this category. According to the National Advisory Council on Adult Education, the Adult Basic Education program has targeted 60 million adults without high school educations, but has reached less than 5 percent. In order to reverse the trend of funding cuts, more effort should be spent on determining why

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so few adults were taking advantage of the plethora of programs available in 1981 and 1982. Until more people are reached, the new federalism will continue to cause categorical programs to become block grants, thus forcing increasing competition among programs.

Involvement of State Library Agencies

Most state libraries are adept planners. Some state library agencies have staff with the attitude and interest to encourage adult education activity. In virtually every state library agency there are individuals who act as catalysts for creating a state or LSCA-funded program that will make a significant impact in the community. The key to real success for any adult education program in any library lies in the attitude and interest of the local staff, regardless of the funding and planning done at the state level.

State librarians or directors of state libraries know the local political process which differs in each state and community. They also know the governors, legislators, library trustees, and library directors. They should be in tune with the realities of the state's educational needs and economic resources. These men and women are in a position to steer the agency into a role of demonstrator or initiator, trainer, coordinator, and disseminator of adult education. They can provide their best efforts of securing healthy and broadly based state-aid funds for local use options. In many cases they actually have the final word in determining how LSCA funds are spent. There are likely to be identifiable adult education projects in each agency's long-range plan, a five-year document required by the LSCA.

All states have statutes regulating the promulgation of agency rules and regulations. These laws, in each state commonly called the Administrative Procedures Act, specify the method by which state agencies can issue rules and regulations that have the full force and effect of law. State library agencies have the responsibility to establish standards by which public libraries operate. Such standards usually provide for the basic aspects of service, such as payment of staff, opening hours, compliance with other rules and laws, and locally maintained financial support. State agencies enforce their rules by withholding services or funds.

The extensive authority given state boards and commissions via the promulgation of rules and regulations amounts to setting policies and priorities as circumstances dictate. For example, it is conceivable and possible for a state library agency to require plans for adult education from every library seeking state financial aid. Procedures for the formu-

lation of rules and regulations vary, but most require publication of the proposed rules in advance, an open meeting to hear arguments and some legislative oversight of agency rule-making practices. Entire new directions of library development can be generated by the policy-making authority of state library agencies through the regulation-making process which provides for all voices being heard and all evidence being weighed.

Of all the services provided by the state library agency, raising support for public libraries in the form of state aid is the most important and has the most direct benefit to the communities. Only thirteen states do not have state-appropriated funds for public libraries. State library agencies are much more likely to spend their energies on increasing state funding for libraries than on lobbying for state funds for adult education. How state aid funds are used is actually a local option; they can be earmarked for adult education activities if local community needs warrant doing so.

In addition to fund allocation, the licensing and certification of personnel, consultative and coordinative services, and assistance in needs assessments and library performance evaluations are common. In Wisconsin, the state library has certified and licensed librarians since 1923. In Oklahoma, the state library is equipped with specialists in continuing education, adult services, children's services, performance evaluation construction, and audiovisual services. In states where few trained librarians exist in rural libraries, one is likely to find state agency consultants traveling the highways providing advice to library boards and city officials. The American Library Association (ALA) publishes biennially *The State Library Agencies: A Survey Project Report* that provides a ready statement of the scope, funding and responsibilities of America's state and territorial library agencies. It is also common for state libraries to coordinate library planning and program development with other state agencies and institutions, including departments of corrections and mental health. Over one-half of state libraries coordinate planning and program development with state education agencies and human service agencies. The nature of this coordination ranges from the exchange of information and resources to joint budget planning.

Not all state library agencies have the resources to be effective. If it were not for the LSCA, a few would cut their annual expenditures in half. State agencies are likely to cite as barriers to their involvement in adult education programs a lack of community demand, library unawareness of the need, lack of funds, and unavailability of staff.

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Agencies that overcome these barriers have strategies that include increased public awareness of the need, greater cooperation between libraries and government agencies, and increased funding.

Political Involvement at the Local Level

The most significant political clout a library possesses is the pride the community has in its library. Today's politically effective librarians know this and how to take advantage of it for support of responsive adult education programs. These librarians are no strangers to politics and dealing with people. They spend a great deal of time meeting with other community leaders, organizing friends-of-the-library groups, working with trustees, speaking before organizations and clubs, and raising funds.

Traditional political techniques of involvement in the community political process are required. It is at the community level that the vast amount of library funding exists. It is also at this level that the greatest potential for raising additional revenue lies. Techniques of canvassing, speeches, mass media use, and direct mail are not new frontiers to the politically astute library director.

For adult education programs, there are two effective and subtle ways for increasing awareness and support. The first is library responsiveness to citizen participation in program planning. Program attendance will drastically improve in direct proportion to the amount of the target group involvement in planning. Many mistakes are made by providers planning alone and ignoring the citizens they are serving. The second is knowing the power structure and having the right amount of personal contact with it. Understanding the budget process is the first step in identifying individuals in official capacities. Leaders of target populations, reporters and allies in the ranks of other educational providers are of additional help in compiling a list of influence-makers.

Coordination with the Community

Libraries that have high visibility, esteem, credibility, soundly developed collections, and a variety of services will capture the attention of the public. For effective growth the library must know its mission, based on community population needs and a thorough knowledge of other public and private agency services. Financial support derives from public perception of usefulness, and programs are a motivational and educational vehicle through which the resources of the library and other community services can be delivered to their clientele.

In order for the library to help achieve and promote public awareness of the total adult educational services available, cooperation between libraries and other community-based agencies and organizations is essential. As public libraries respond to needs for adult independent study, a natural tool would be the development of a community task force on adult education. A collaborative approach with all identifiable providers will firmly establish the library as a community learning center.

Margaret Monroe gives four required conditions for collaboration among providers of adult education: "(1) a conscious preparation of staff with information and skills to carry out the library's collaborative work; (2) mak[ing] the library a source of information on independent-study opportunities;... (3) having the resources for independent study programs; and (4) making available the interlibrary loan system."⁹

Nonlibrary providers involved in adult education offer a multiplicity of services, and serve populations that vary greatly in terms of age, ethnic characteristics, and educational background. For funding to be firmly rooted and continuous, the library should exercise caution at all times so that duplication of services is nonexistent. Cooperation with other libraries therefore appears as the first consideration. A look at the adult education services of the public and private schools, community colleges, federally funded categorical programs, ethnic and bilingual communities, prisons, hospitals, and senior citizen groups provides personal contacts essential to creating and maintaining a community awareness of educational opportunities.

Most cooperative efforts will not be formal, although written agreements and contracts are preferable. The informality of cooperative efforts is often effective. Communication with nonlibrary providers is likely to be on an as-needed basis, with less frequent formal meetings. The important objective is personal contact with other providers. The establishment of a community education task force can be the vehicle by which the library can be a *de facto* community education coordinator, providing program leadership.¹⁰

Professional Associations

Librarians are found among the memberships of such groups as the American Association of University Professors, the American Association of University Women, the American Society for Information Science, historical associations, Parent-Teacher-Associations, the Rotary Club, the Lions Club, and the League of Women Voters. The

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AFL-CIO is a group that has traditionally supported library funding.¹¹ These groups all usually engage in more political activity than do library organizations. Rarely does one find a library organization endorsing a state politician, but it is very common to find education associations and others exhibiting the courage and dedication to work for and help fund the candidates who support their objectives. This lack of political activity is the major weakness in library organizations.

Activity in professional organizations at the community level is a result of the personality, attitude and interest of the library director. At the state level the roles of professional organizations and state libraries are inseparable in affecting positive results. There is a fine line between informing and lobbying. A statewide organization can organize and lobby; a state library agency can inform. The state agency can work within the governmental/political structure with key legislators and the governor, while the statewide organization can develop layers of legislative networks, coordinate with friends' groups, and finance events for specific ends. No one can do it alone. The joint meetings, strategy sessions and communications between state associations, community organizations and individual libraries can spell success or failure in reaching a goal.

At the national level, the most successful library association on the political front is, of course, the American Library Association. The largest of its kind anywhere, the ALA and its divisions are a formidable lobby and watchdog for libraries in the United States. The trend is for an even stronger association as the issues of intellectual freedom, censorship and federal policy on telecommunications, copyright and funding continue. The ALA's Washington office is extremely effective in providing up-to-the-minute information on pending congressional action.

Future Funding Patterns

The involvement of libraries in the political process will continue to grow and to be refined. The funds for library service will continue to be mostly community-based. The specific, categorical legislation that we all once enjoyed will eventually vanish. Federal funding will continue to be severely lessened, and state funds for libraries will grow slowly as the economy reflects lower interest rates and increased productivity. The days of federal protection of individual library programs are coming to an end. It has been, it is now, and it will be a local community challenge to increase the quality of life in the city and town, to raise the educational level by providing varied opportunities, and to supply the

salaries and other resources to meet the educational needs of the adult populace.

Summary

Adult learning in the United States is the primary responsibility of the individual. One has ample opportunity to take advantage of a plethora of choices for improving a skill or learning new ones.

Statistics show light attendance at library-sponsored learning activities. Funding for adult learning projects is plentiful and almost entirely nonlibrary based. The trend is toward less federal involvement. Libraries, as a rule, have been successful coordinating forces of adult education programs in the community. Much of the success of libraries' involvement depends on the expertise and political acumen of the library director and staff. Libraries that eschew traditional services for expanded outreach activities risk endangering the support of the public.

State library agencies are a potent source of support for adult learning activities. Libraries should be aware of the state and national activities that provide programs and opportunities for adult learning. The ALA is particularly adept at lobbying for the interests of libraries at the national level. State library associations are still timid, as a rule, about taking political stands. The final and true test of a library's political involvement in adult education is local support. That support is directly related to the community involvement of librarians and trustees, and an understanding by all of the purpose and function of the library as a stable, unbiased educational force.

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