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POST-WAR STANDARDS
FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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PLANNING FOR LIBRARIES

Number One

POST-WAR STANDARDS
FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES



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POST-WAR STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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of the*

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Carleton Bruns Joeckel, Chairman



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AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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FOREWORD

THESE standards were prepared at the request of the National Resources Planning Board in 1942, and are now released with that Board's permission. The A.L.A. expresses its appreciation of financial assistance provided by the Board and of the interest and advice received from members and staff. In particular, the National Resources Planning Board made it possible for the A.L.A. Committee responsible for the work to profit from the advice of more than two dozen librarians from all parts of the country and with widely varying experience.

In its *National Resources Development, Report for 1943* the Board emphasized the need for more adequate provision for library service, of \$1.50 per capita as the estimate for a reasonably good library, and recommended that annual expenditures for libraries be increased from \$50,000,000 to \$200,000,000, and capital outlay from \$3,000,000 to \$80,000,000. (*Part I. Post-War Plan and Program, IX. "Equal Access to Education,"* pp. 68-74.)

The Chairman of the A.L.A. Committee on Post-war Planning, Carleton B. Joeckel, Dean, Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, planned and directed the project, and wrote much of the final draft. To him and to the University of Chicago we express our thanks.

The A.L.A. is grateful also to the members of the Committee and to the consultants (listed opposite title page) who assisted by correspond-

ence, prepared drafts of the various sections, and revised them at a three-day meeting in May, 1942.

The preparation of these standards is the first of three steps in an effort to plan for the improvement of library service and for its extension to all people now without it, as soon as possible. The second step is to compare existing library service throughout the United States with the standards. The third is to prepare some kind of working program for the future.

It is expected that the standards will also be used by state and city planning and other officials, by library surveyors, library boards, and other interested groups in evaluating the library service of individual cities, counties, and states.

CARL H. MILAM
Executive Secretary
American Library Association

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INTRODUCTION

I

THE impact of the present national emergency and contemplation of the inevitable difficulties of the post-war reconstruction period have awakened the American people to a determination to help make a better world in which to live. This new world must be *for* and *made by* the people. To achieve these ends, the agencies for the enlightenment of the people must be prepared for enlarged responsibilities.

One of these agencies is the public library. It is a peculiarly American institution. It originated here, and here it has attained its highest development.

It provides the means of self-education for all people in the community. It is a source of information on nearly every subject. It furnishes good reading for pleasure. It stimulates study and research, and helps to make possible many literary and scholarly achievements. It is basic to the education and continuous re-education of the American people as citizens, workers, and as civilized human beings. It plays a significant role in making democracy work by helping citizens to be enlightened participants in public affairs. It has come to be recognized as an essential part of our social and educational equipment.

Important also in a program of education and social progress are the school, college and university libraries (allied with formal education) and the federal, state, research and special libraries. The public library must correlate its work with all of these as well as with other educational and social agencies in the community. This statement of standards is, however, concerned specifically with the public library.

The library's opportunity for usefulness after the war will be enhanced by the number and complexity of problems facing the American people. Old facts and old ideas will not be enough. The alert citizen is already attempting through reading to adjust his knowledge and his thinking to the probable new situations. By virtue of its very nature and innate potentialities, the public library now inherits an increasing responsibility in the over-all public educational system.

Anticipation of the post-war period offers an appropriate opportunity to consider the improvement and reshaping of our public libraries. We should hold fast to those elements of the present pattern which have continued to meet the severe test of experience, and which promise to fit into the readjustments that must inevitably follow the war. Those features which may have contributed to the growth of an enterprise but whose intrinsic values are insufficient to be worthy of perpetuation, must be discarded. New and untried ideas and devices should be sought. Good library service should be made available to the people now without it. In some cases, this may mean the extension of new service to areas now wholly lacking it; in others, the improvement of existing library service to conform to standards.

Public library service is a responsibility of democratic government. For almost a century public libraries have been actively supported by local and state governments through systems of legislation and taxation. The federal government, also, has recognized the importance of a nation-wide system of library service through a large and continually expanding number of federal services to libraries and readers, through the establishment of a Library Service Division in the Office of Education, and through recent reports of its planning agencies.¹

The major purpose of this study is the formulation of working standards for public library service which may be used (1) as a measuring instrument of the adequacy and efficiency of present library service, and (2) as a guide in planning library development in the post-war reconstruction period. The study has been prepared at the request of the National Resources Planning

¹ Advisory Committee on Education, *Report of the Committee* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938), pp. 138-41; Carleton B. Joeckel, *Library Service*, Advisory Committee on Education, Staff Study No. 11 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938); National Resources Planning Board, *National Resources Development, Report for 1942* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), p. 122; White House Conference on Children in a Democracy, Washington, D. C., 1939-40, *Children in a Democracy; General Report Adopted* . . . January 19, 1940 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940), pp. 41-42.

Board by the Committee on Post-war Planning of the American Library Association, assisted by a group of consultants experienced in public library administration and service.

As a preliminary to the statement of standards in detail, the precise scope and limitations of this report should be made clear. First, the word "standard," as used throughout the study, is defined as a qualitative or quantitative measure expressed in general or statistical terms, which may be used as a criterion or test in evaluating the adequacy and efficiency of public library service. Broadly considered, library standards should provide measures for organization and administration, personnel services and book resources, support and operating costs, and physical equipment. In all these fields the two concepts of adequacy and efficiency must be emphasized. Library service should be "adequate," in the sense that its general level is sufficient and suited to community needs; it should also be "efficient," in the sense that maximum results are achieved with the resources available.²

The difficulties encountered in the formulation of public library standards have often been noted.³ They are of course similar to difficulties in appraising various other functions of local government, the measures for which have sometimes been characterized as fragmentary and inconclusive.⁴ Indeed, it seems easier to advance reasons why the precise statement of library standards is almost impossible than it is to formulate satisfactory standards. At the beginning of this study, certain of these difficulties should be frankly recognized as admitted limitations of the standards here proposed.

First, the range of variation in objectives and types of service of American public libraries is very great. To compare the kind of services rendered by the New York Public Library with that offered by a library in a town of 1000 population is perhaps absurd; yet both are "public libraries." Again, variations in the composition of the population of local units of government may materially affect standards of library service and support. Among these are differences in educational levels, in the racial elements in the population, and in the proportions of adult and juvenile population. Variations in

² Clarence E. Ridley and Herbert A. Simon, *Measuring Municipal Activities* (Chicago: The International City Managers' Association, 1938), pp. 3-6.

³ Arnold Miles and Lowell Martin, *Public Administration and the Library* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), Chapter VIII, "Library Measurement"; Emma V. Baldwin and William E. Marcus, *Library Costs and Budgets* (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1941), pp. 5-6; Thomas H. Reed, *Municipal Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1941), pp. 549-50.

⁴ Reed, *ibid.*, pp. 326-328; Ridley and Simon, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-6.

the taxpaying ability of different units and in density of population will also affect the quantity and quality of library service a given unit is able to provide. Variables such as these make the equitable application of a uniform system of measurement to all libraries difficult.

Moreover, there are important differences in the relations of the public library to college, university, school, and special libraries. For example, in some cities there are in operation two separate systems of publicly-supported libraries, the public libraries and the public-school libraries. In other cities a single library system embraces both these types of service in a unified organization. To apply the same per capita measures of performance to the public libraries in both situations is obviously unfair.

But perhaps the most serious difficulties arise in connection with the measurement of the actual or potential clientele of the library. Public library service to adults is a minority service. The extent of library use is highly variable both as to the total number of users and also as to the services required by each user. Improvement in library facilities and advancement in educational standards and economic status of the community may raise the proportion of library users considerably. The public school system, in contrast, is responsible for a fixed and measurable clientele, which uses school facilities for regular daily periods and for relatively well-defined purposes. Nor is library service concerned with such measurable quantities of work as are found, for example, in street-paving or street-cleaning, or in the field of public works generally. The services of the public library are more closely comparable in this respect to those of agencies of public recreation or to museums and art galleries, also fields in which actual performance is difficult to measure.

Present library standards, it may be conceded, are perhaps little more than norms of service attainable in current good or best practice. Probably it would be possible by further use of scientific research methods to develop more accurate standards of library performance based on educational levels, occupations, age distribution, economic ability of the population, and similar measurable factors. But such an approach to the problem is beyond the present resources of the Committee and its consultants.

In defense of present methods of stating library standards, however, certain practical considerations may be emphasized. In the first place, the statistical enumerations of library service which are used as the bases for quantitative standards are generally both accurate and uniform in defini-

tion. For years the American Library Association has been using uniform statistical report blanks which have been accompanied by careful definitions of the various items reported. These report forms have been used by increasing numbers of libraries, and they have now been formally adopted by the United States Office of Education in its reporting of public library data. The standards derived from these statistics have been carefully checked by many libraries for a long period and have been revised from time to time.

In the second place, public library procedures throughout the nation have been rather closely comparable—perhaps unnecessarily so. But the fact that services and technical processes are to a considerable degree similar from city to city serves to inspire greater confidence in the normal results achieved by good libraries in widely-separated places. Years of conscientious and efficient service in good libraries have established levels of achievement against which the libraries of the nation may safely be measured.

Five methods of stating standards have been consciously employed in drafting this study. Description of the same measure in different ways should tend to minimize undue emphasis on the per capita statistical standards which have been most commonly used in the public library field. All these types of measurement have their place in a comprehensive statement of standards.

First among the various methods is the statement of standards in general qualitative terms. Examples of this method are found in the standards for college libraries adopted by the Carnegie Corporation's Advisory Group on College Libraries⁵ and in the standards for colleges and universities formulated by the North Central Association.⁶ The application of such general standards as these to particular institutions would normally be made by surveyors or inspectors able to translate generalities into specific interpretations. For the layman or the nonspecialist board member, on the other hand, the use of general qualitative standards is more difficult. Yet the mere statement of qualitative considerations tends to focus attention on the essential elements in library service.

In contrast, the use of certain simple and easily obtained statistical measures is relatively easy. This has been the traditional method employed by

⁵ *College Library Standards*, adopted by the Advisory Group on College Libraries of the Carnegie Corporation (New York, 1932).

⁶ "Proceedings of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education," *North Central Association Quarterly*, XIII (1938), 71.

the American Library Association in framing public library standards.⁷ Such measures of library adequacy are particularly subject to the objections enumerated above. The best-known standard of this sort—the widely publicized dollar per capita standard—has almost inevitably become a slogan used by library administrators and friends of libraries in the perennial campaign for adequate library support. Nevertheless, the use of these numerical measures is at least partially justified by careful analysis of the statistics of service of many good libraries in different size-groups.

The third method, the statement of library standards in terms of satisfactory minima of library service, is obviously useful in counteracting the indiscriminate application of per capita standards to small libraries. It is only common sense to recognize the concept of a minimum below which library support or library collections should not fall, no matter how small the community served. Despite the somewhat arbitrary determination of such minimum points, they have the important advantage of calling attention to library situations which are clearly unsatisfactory even though per capita statistical measures may be high.

Another method is the statement of standards in terms of proportions or ratios. Most statistical items which may be used as library standards are parts of a larger whole. Book expenditures, for example, are part of total library expenditures; registered borrowers of libraries are part of the total population; and professional staff members are part of the total library staff. To apply proportions of this sort to specific measures will aid in maintaining a qualitative view of library operation.

Finally, standards may be expressed in terms of specific items of service. For example, the Advisory Group on College Libraries specifies that "a trained librarian should be available for reference service whenever the library is open."⁸ Obviously, the use of this method might be greatly extended. Here it has been limited to essential items in the pattern of library service.

In summary, the standards presented in this study are based on uniform statistical data. They have been developed by careful analysis of library services and costs and are stated with deliberate restraint. In addition, they

⁷ *Standards for Public Libraries*, adopted October, 1933, by the Council of the American Library Association, with changes as included in the *Classification and Pay Plans for Municipal Public Libraries* adopted by the Council, December, 1938 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1939).

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

have been checked by experienced librarians, and they represent a substantial consensus of opinion as to working measures of library adequacy and efficiency in 1942. They are close to the realities of present good library service. In order to prevent undue emphasis on mere factual norms, special efforts have been made to state the standards in different forms and to emphasize qualitative considerations. The standards should be useful for two purposes: (1) as working measures for library boards, library administrators, and interested citizens, and (2) as a national measuring stick in the formulation of state, regional, and national plans for future library development. Actual achievement of the standards is not beyond the resources of the nation, provided local, state, and federal governments join forces in a coordinated program.

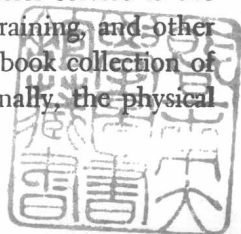
Summary of Standards

The essence of the many standards for public libraries contained in this study may be compressed into three basic elements, all of which are necessary in a planned program of library development:

1. Complete public library coverage
2. Library service of adequate quantity and dynamic quality
3. Large units and cooperation in library service.

Underlying all other standards is the specification that public library service should be available without exception to all people and in all political jurisdictions throughout the nation. This standard of complete coverage is based on the premise that the services of the public library—opportunity for enlightened citizenship, continuing education, and intellectual and cultural development—are essential in a democracy. Therefore one of the major goals of the post-war period should be to provide good library service to the 35,000,000 people now without it.

Achievement of the all-inclusive standard of adequate and efficient service to the people is the great task of public librarianship. To some degree the performance of the public library in meeting this standard may be evaluated by quantitative measures. The financial basis for better service should be assured by reasonable standards of support for minimum, average, and superior levels of service. A second requirement for better service is the setting of standards for the general education, special training, and other qualifications of library personnel. A third essential is a book collection of sufficient size, good quality, and proper proportions. Finally, the physical



basis for better service should be provided by well-located and functionally-planned library buildings. Given these four essentials for better library service, the quantitative units of services performed may be expected to reach satisfactory levels. Libraries should measure their services accurately and should test the results against the standards stated in this memorandum.

But improvement of the quality of library service is equally important. Library service embraces many intangible elements of quality and excellence which cannot be precisely measured. These intangibles reach their highest levels when they bring personal satisfactions to the library user in intellectual, cultural, and social growth and development. Such results are made possible through personal relationships between librarians and library users and by the atmosphere of the library itself. Since these intangible factors cannot be definitely measured, the individual librarian is peculiarly responsible for their inclusion in the general framework of library service.

Necessarily related to the standard of service is the standard of size: public library units should be large enough to be efficient. The need for larger units is recognized in many functions of government, and the public library should be no exception to the general trend. Larger library units will make more books and more services available through the pooling of resources and will improve administration through centralization. Grouping of small libraries into effective service areas may be achieved through complete consolidation or through cooperative schemes which retain the essential autonomy of present units. Organization of large library units should be accompanied by the general integration of supplementary library services at all levels of government—local, state, and federal. Further experimentation should be made with cooperative or centralized cataloging and purchasing, storage reservoirs for little-used books, regional bibliographic centers, and similar devices. Library service cannot be adequate and efficient until its pattern of organization is also efficient.

Standards in Relation to Library Planning

This statement of public library standards has important implications for the planned development of libraries after the war. The formulation of the standards is in itself the first step in planning the reconstruction of the public library system to meet post-war needs and demands for book service. The standards may be used as a measuring stick of the adequacy and