
A NATIONAL PLAN FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

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The "National Plan for Public Library Service," published by the American Library Association*, is presented in three principal parts: first, we have the ideals of dynamic library service in Chapter I contrasted with present-day realities in Chapter 2; Chapters 3 through 7 give us the core of the plan and outline a proposed system of public libraries and integrated library functions designed to provide a high level of service throughout the nation; Chapters 8 through 12 implement the basic scheme by consideration of a number of related topics—library collections, personnel, buildings and citizen interest.

I should like to give you the highlights of this important plan as brief-

*American Library Association. Committee on post-war planning. "National Plan For Public Library Service"; prepared by Carlton B. Joeckel and Amy Winslow; with a chapter by Lowell Martin. (Planning for Libraries, No. 3). A. L. A., 1948. \$3.00.

ly as possible. The National Plan is required reading for all librarians. Let me urge you to get a copy and read it for yourself.

Chapter 1 entitled *The Potential Role of the American Public Library* shows us the picture as it should be. The American public library fits into the American adult educational system as does no other institution. Its function is to mediate between seekers for knowledge and the recorded materials which contain and promote knowledge. It attempts both to promote enlightened citizenship and to enrich personal life.

How can the American public library best realize its full potentialities as an intelligence center for all the people? This service objective can be accomplished by providing suitable materials, by distributing these materials, and by helping people use needed materials. These elements of effective library service deserve further comment. In providing suitable materials we should remember that there are four levels of required materials needed in practically every American community. They are—sources of information on topics of general interest (national affairs, for example) and significant books of contemporary literature including local interest material; research or scientific materials; specialized material on hobbies, personal problems, vocations, etc.; and the popular level or material for leisure time interests. It is important that these materials be distributed through branches, traveling collections, and bookmobiles to people especially in their clubs and associations. The librarian helps the search by arranging materials in the library to reflect community interests using such topics as *Home Life, Vocations, Hobbies*; by analyzing ma-

terials through the card catalog, book annotations and subject cataloging; and by giving personal aid which takes into consideration the readers purpose, interest, reading level and background.

In addition to these ingredients of effective library service every library should have a clear sense of purpose, a sense of the reading process, and a sense of community identification. A clear sense of purpose means a conscious dedication of resources to such specific objectives as—changing the indifference and ignorance of the individual as a voting citizen, promoting tolerance by means of knowledge concerning peoples, promoting appreciation of the cultural output of the twentieth century, and fostering intelligence in consumers. It is important to limit goals so that service will be unified and concentrated under the banner of purpose. A sense of the reading process starts with knowledge of the contents of printed materials, takes shape with knowledge of readers, grows with knowledge of how printed materials are used in the community, and reaches maturity when the effects of reading are known. The understanding of reading is the dynamic quality lacking in many static libraries. Librarians must know content and readers thoroughly. A sense of community identification is achieved when the library enters into that life beyond the individual and family sphere. One test of the effectiveness of a community library is the extent to which not only the individual but the group life of the community can be grasped by watching the library in action.

The unit result is not spectacular—merely an individual seated in the library or in his home, absorbing wisdom and beauty from a book suited to his interests and abilities, but multi-

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plied a thousand fold in every section of the country the result is significant in the eternal search for personal fulfillment and a better group life.

Now for the picture as it really is in Chapter 2: Taking Stock of the American Public Library. In this chapter we learn that there are serious deficiencies in present-day library service, 35 million or one-fourth the people of the U. S. have no public libraries; most public library units are too small in population served, total income and income per capita; book collections, personnel and buildings are inadequate. This postwar plan recognizes these deficiencies and proposes a pattern of organization designed to strengthen service in action. The essential features of such a plan are presented in Chapter 3 under the heading Patterns of Local Organization.

The goal of the National Plan is to bring into the life of every American an adequate, purposeful public library. The National Plan says that this can be done more effectively through larger local units of service working through local, state, and federal governments. The plan calls for 1,200 library units with a minimum annual income of \$37,500 for a population of 25,000. This would represent 1.50 per capita as against .52 per capita for the United States in 1946, and .30 per capita for North Carolina in 1946. The larger units chosen should suit the region and pre-existing pattern of library organization. Some types of units are: independent municipal libraries in larger cities; county libraries for rural areas like North Carolina; and regional libraries for two or more counties.

Chapter 4 is on the Role of the State in Public Library Development.

We learn that the general objectives of the state library program are to systematize public library service and to put good libraries within reach of all the people by insuring a strong legal foundation for its libraries, furnishing dynamic leadership, providing an integrated system of auxiliary services supplementing the facilities of local libraries, helping local units secure financial aid, and striving continuously to improve the quality of its public library personnel through certification laws and regulations.

Chapter 5 emphasizes National Responsibilities for Public Library Service. The federal government, says the National Plan, should play an important but auxiliary role. It should aid public libraries through important services and subsidies, but it should not attempt to control local library service. The goal of the federal government is to raise the national level of library service, to aid in the advancement of public libraries as unique instruments of education, and to work through state and local governments to achieve a cooperative partnership in library development.

Chapter 6 stresses Coordination of Library Service. In connection with the organization of larger units of library service the systematic coordination of existing library functions and resources should take place. The National Plan says that public libraries should cooperate actively with other public libraries and also other types of libraries such as school, college and university, and special libraries. How? Libraries can do this by specializing in certain subjects or types of materials and by sharing both materials and services with libraries and users in a certain region. Some of the services and projects that could be shared are: the

book collection, reference and information service, reader's adviser, children's librarian, traveling book repair specialist, and a public relations program with joint use of traveling exhibits and posters. Cooperation between the public library and the college library in the same town involves determining their respective fields of specialization and emphasis in building up their book collections, avoiding unnecessary duplication, and reciprocity in circulation privileges. As for school libraries and public libraries, the goal here should be to provide a coordinated and complete service to school children without unnecessary duplication of activities. Each must see clearly its own role in a combined pattern of services to children and young people; likewise, each must understand and respect the role of the other.

In Chapter 7 on Public Library Finance we are reminded that the National Plan rests on adequate financing and that adequate financing rests on sound legislation to provide the same and assure continuity of service. What is needed is a minimum per capita library expenditure of \$1.50 with the goal set at \$3.00 per capita. This means \$200 million annually for a nation-wide public library system distributed 60 percent to local units, 25 percent to states, and 15 percent to federal government. Local units were \$50 million short in 1946 since they spent \$70 million instead of \$120 million. \$500 million is needed for new and reconditioned buildings, \$175 million for new and replenished book stock (at 2.50 per volume). The importance of the budget is stressed as the key to the successful financial administration of libraries.

Chapter 8 on Books and Library

Materials brings out some possible changes in collections of books and other materials in the large unit library. More books, especially more non-fiction, will be made more readily available through an effective system of cooperation between libraries. There will be large scale duplication of standard paper-bound books and pamphlets to be given away or exchanged for similar material with no charging record kept for this type of material. There will be a greatly increased emphasis on non-book materials such as: pictorial and graphic materials; recordings of music, poetry, plays and speeches; educational films; microfilms of newspapers and books not readily available in print. A change in policy will mean a change in collection as the emphasis switches from recreational objectives to education objectives.

Chapter 9 on Personnel of Post-war Libraries tells us that what is needed is a library staff fully qualified to fit books and materials to specific reader needs and to create and foster a desire for reading and information. In other words, a new concept of librarianship is needed. The librarian must be more than a mere dispenser of books with one eye fixed nervously on circulation figures. The emphasis in library service should be on quality rather than quantity. Some essential qualifications of the public librarian, present and future, are: the librarian must have a vision of the libraries place in society and its relationship to other libraries and other social institutions; the librarian must have a high level of general and professional education which will enable him to play a positive educational role as a leader in the integration of books and community needs; and the

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librarian must combine book knowledge with active community participation. This role calls for imagination, vision, initiative, fearlessness, self-confidence—an outgoing personality with true interest in and understanding of people and sympathy with their needs and abilities. To repeat, the librarian must know books and people and how to get the two together. As Pearl Buck says: "Librarians cannot consider their work done until they have books in the hands of readers and until they have the contents of these books in the minds and thinking of citizens."

Chapter 10 on The Public Library Building Program tells us that there is a new trend in library architecture based on a definite purpose to fit the library building to the essential functions it performs. The following principles are important: the library building should be easily accessible and attractive to readers; many public library buildings should be adaptable for expanded service in a county or regional system; and the public library building of the future should be planned and equipped as a modern education center.

Chapter 11 is about the Citizen and the Public Library. The American public library is an expression of democracy in action. If library planning is to succeed at any level of government, active citizen support is needed. The relationship between the citizen and his public library is a mutual obligation between two parties to a jointly useful contract. The library exists to serve the citizen as an individual or a member of many different groups. The citizen, on his part, may aid the library as an individual, trustee or organization member. We are reminded that the trustee role is of great importance in

developing efficient library service. With the chief librarian, the trustees are responsible for the formulation of library objectives and policies and the presentation of the libraries fiscal needs to tax-levying agencies. Friends of Library organizations are effective in helping interpret the public library program to the community and state and helping libraries get financial aid.

Chapter 12 on Research tells us that the results of investigation in the following important areas of public library research will add greatly to the efficient operation of libraries and may change existing concepts of the purpose of public libraries: government relations of public libraries; units and areas of library service; public library finance; internal administration of libraries; personnel administration; service to readers in all its aspects; and books and reading interests.

In conclusion we are reminded that although a national plan, this plan places primary responsibility on the local library unit. As the plan is changed and adapted to fit local needs, it is hoped that the principles upon which it is founded will have general application throughout the nation.
