



## **A Brief History of National Support for Libraries in the United States**

**Michele Farrell**  
Institute of Museum and Library Services  
Washington, DC, USA

**Session:** **140 — *In search of inspiring perspectives on National Information and Library Policy* — National Information and Library Policy Special Interest Group**

---

### **Abstract:**

*This paper is a short review of federal government support for libraries in the United States. It takes a look at some of the U.S. legislation that has impacted the development of public, school, college, and medical libraries. It also describes organizations that have been involved with the passage of library legislation and the governmental structures that carried out the legislative mandates. Librarians and their organizations have influenced the passage of legislation so that libraries can improve service and accessibility to information.*

---

### **Depository Libraries**

As early as 1813 Congress ordered that certain publications be distributed outside of the federal government. The Printing Act of 1895 established the roles of the Federal Depository Library Program and the Government Printing Office. This act placed the Superintendent of Public Documents in charge of the distribution. In 1962 the Federal Depository Library Program (P.L. 87-579) set up a system of two depository libraries in each Congressional district. Importantly, it allowed for free distribution of materials, eliminating postal charges for the consumer. While libraries were collecting these materials prior to this legislation, there wasn't a cost effective and efficient way to obtain many types of government publications. In recent years, the electronic publishing phenomenon has meant that additional responsibilities needed to be added to the

Superintendent. The Government Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-40) required the Superintendent to maintain an electronic directory of federal electronic information, provide access to laws and other publications, and operate an electronic storage facility. Currently, there are 1,250 federal depository libraries where researchers can access U.S. government publications (Bogart, pg. 111). The need for access to legislative information also brought about the development of state libraries.

## State Libraries

Between 1816 and 1819 Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, New Hampshire, and New York established libraries primarily for the use of the state legislatures. When the State Library of New York was started the objective was to be a public library for the use of government and the people of the state (Lane, pg. 18). By 1840 there were 22 state libraries organized, and by 1876 every state had a library located in its capitol. These libraries primarily housed law collections (Lane, pg. 18). In 1890 Massachusetts was the first to organize a state agency for the extension and promotion of public libraries through the creation of a State Board of Library Commissioners. It is still operating today. By 1909, 34 states had created such commissions or boards (Lane, pg. 25). Today, the responsibility for public library development is written into the state constitutions in Michigan and Rhode Island (Himmel and Wilson, pg. 21). Over time state librarians realized that they needed to work together to resolve common issues so they came together in 1956 and formed the Association of State Library Agencies, a unit of the American Library Association (ALA). This unit is now called the Association for Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) and includes staff that work at state agencies as well as others who are interested in their work. It has over 800 members. The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies formed an independent agency called COSLA in 1973 (Casey, pg. 159). Limited to just the heads of the state libraries, COSLA is still going strong and meets twice a year to discuss library issues.

## Library Services to the Blind

The Library of Congress, large urban libraries, and state libraries have played a role in library development to provide materials for the blind. John Russell Young, the Librarian of Congress in 1897, established a reading room for the blind with about 500 books and music items in raised characters. Not only was the national library providing a collection but, in the 1890s, the Boston Public Library, the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Chicago Library, the New York City Free Circulating Library for the Blind, and the Detroit Public Library began to offer library materials to the Blind. The New York State Library was the first to create a department for the Blind. In 1913, Congress mandated that one copy of each book in raised characters, made for educational purposes under government subsidy by the American Printing House for the Blind, was to be deposited in the Library of Congress. Slowly materials were being made available for the Blind. A turning point came when President Hoover signed the Pratt-Smoot Act in 1931. It provided for broader support for services to the Blind. This act authorized an annual appropriation of \$100,000 to the Library of Congress to provide books for blind adult residents in the United States and its territories. This

program evolved into the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Services to the blind were also improved in the 1933 because a uniform system of Braille in English and the talking book were developed. In 1952, the legislation was expanded to include services to blind children. Ten years later the program added collecting and maintaining a library of musical scores and instructional text for the blind and in 1966, P.L. 889-522 authorized talking-book services to all persons who could not read standard print because of visual or physical disability. Still barriers remained and in 1996, Senator Chaffee introduced an amendment to the Copyright Act that eliminated the need for government and nonprofit agencies to seek permission from publishers or copyright owners to reproduce printed materials in special formats for blind or physically handicapped readers (NLS That All May Read, pg. 2). There are currently 57 regional libraries for the blind and 86 subregionals. (NLS Factsheet)

### Public Library Development and the Library Services Act

After World War II, many changes took place in the United States. The Interstate Highway System was created and American war veterans were going back to school, starting families, and finding jobs. The library field worked to move legislation forward to create an early foundation for the *information* highway. In 1948, the ALA Committee on Postwar Planning published A National Plan for Public Library Service (Prentiss, pg. 85). This planning document was instrumental in bringing about landmark legislation. On June 19, 1956 Congress passed the Library Services Act. This act authorized a maximum of \$7.5 million a year in federal funds to enable states and territories to extend and improve public library services in areas with less than 10,000 population (P.L. 597) (Frantz, pg. 2). President Eisenhower said it should “stimulate the state and local communities to increase library services available to rural Americans” (Frantz, pg. 3). In 1960, P.L. 86-679 was passed and this extended the Library Services Act for five years. Some of the achievements of the Library Services Act include the purchase of 288 bookmobiles and the addition of approximately 800 new staff to state library agencies. (Lancour, pg. 114) It also helped establish multitype library systems and public library systems. The movement toward regional and statewide library networks would continue under the Library Services and Construction Act.

### Federal Support for Public Library Construction

On February 11, 1964 President Johnson signed into law the Library Services and Construction Act P.L. 88-269 (Frantz, pg. 3). Known as LSCA, this act was part of the Great Society program that President Johnson designed to help poor and working class Americans. The program was managed by the Office of Library Programs in the Office of Education, which became the U.S. Department of Education in 1979. Amendments were added in 1966 which extended the law P.L 89-511 and made it effective through June 30, 1971. LSCA broaden the scope of funds so that it was no longer limited to rural libraries. Some of LSCA’s accomplishments included the purchase of 375 bookmobiles, the addition of 14 million books to library collections, and approval of 363 local public library construction projects in 53 states and territories(U.S. Congressional

Record, pt.11:13901). LSCA operated from 1964 to 1996 and was replaced by the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). However, starting in the 1970s Presidential support changed. Funding for LSCA continued, but each new administration questioned the need for support.

#### Library Services and Technology Act

Federal funding for libraries continued to be questioned by Congress and in response the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996 Title II P.L. 94-462 was passed and it included the Library Services and Technology Act. The Museum and Library Services Act created the Institute of Museum and Library Services. This act transferred the library programs from the Department of Education to IMLS. The other major change was there would no longer be funding for construction. LSTA funds can go to state, public, school, or academic libraries, but the vast majority of the funds go toward projects in public libraries.

The legislation specified that the director serves for four years and that the position rotates every four years between someone with museum experience to someone with special competence in library and information science. It further clarified the administration of the agency by stipulating that there be a two Deputy Directors, one for museums and one for libraries. The legislation also states that the deputy director for libraries has to have a graduate degree in library science. The agency can receive gifts, bequests, and other contributions to assist with the functions of the agency. The purposes of the program are to stimulate excellence and promote learning and information resources in all types of libraries for all individuals of all ages; promote access through state, regional, national, and international networks; provides linkages among and between libraries; promote services to people of diverse geographical, cultural, socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities, and to people with limited functional literary or information skills. Only 3% of the funds can be used for administration of the program. The legislation states that 1.75% of the funds should support Native American Grants and 3.75% to support National Leadership grants. There is also a competitive grant program for the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, Guam, American Samoa, and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. In the Grants to States Program, where the bulk of the funding resides, each state is given a minimum allotment of \$340,000 and the US territories receive a minimum of \$40,000. This legislation also stipulated that if computers were acquired for public use that the library certifies that it made the computers safe for children's use.

In the Grants to States program each state receives an allotment based on the total population of the state. Each state can use only 4% of the allotment for administering the program. States are required to provide maintenance of effort. They have to submit a plan to IMLS establishing their goals and priorities, describing the activities they plan to fund, how they will independently evaluate the success of the activities, describe the procedures they will use to carry out the activities, and procedures for involving the libraries and library users in policy decision regarding implementation of their plan. The plan covers a five year period. The states are required to make their

plan public. The next plans will cover 2013-2017. In the last statistical survey of the state libraries, which covered fiscal year 2010, the total expenditures of state library agencies was over \$1 billion. Of that total \$171,751,000 were federal funds, \$861,581,000 were state funds and \$37,031,000 were other funds. Other revenues are from local, regional or multijurisdictional sources, private sources such as foundations, Friends groups, and corporations or revenue generated by fines and fees for service. (FY 2010 SLAA survey, pg. 84) As these figures illustrate, State and local funds make up the majority of funds used to developed libraries in the U.S. While construction is no longer funded with federal funds, state and local jurisdictions are still spending their own funds for this purpose. Library construction as reported in the State Library Survey for fiscal year 2010 shows that \$35,799,000 was spent on construction in the 50 states and DC. The move away from construction to the use of technology was a major shift in funding priorities for libraries in the U.S. Now federal funds were to emphasize the effective use of technology in library services and to continue to provide funds for the underserved.

As a result of this legislative change, many state libraries developed projects that included computer software and hardware. Other services including interlibrary loan, shared catalogs, training classes for staff, literacy and reading programs, digitization of collections, and statewide database licensing and purchasing are just some of the projects funded with LSTA. The basic activities of LSTA help to put technological infrastructures in place, train staff to provide services using the new technology, and provide literacy and cultural programs for people of all age. Many state libraries use their allotment to support Libraries for the Blind and Handicapped. Currently, 40 states and DC support this activity.

The legislation suggests that state library administrative agencies (SLAAs), this is the formal terminology for the state libraries in the legislation, may establish a state advisory council with broad representation to assist them in administering the program. A council can include public, school, academic, special, and institutional libraries and libraries serving individuals with disabilities. The federal government monitors state library activities to be sure that funds are going toward the legislative priorities and that other federal rules regarding nondiscrimination are enforced. Importantly, the state library decides what the best use of the funds within the established legislative priorities.

The National Leadership Grants are designed to increase education and training in library science including graduate fellowships, traineeships, institutes, or other programs. There are research and demonstration grants to enhance library services through the effective and efficient use of technology. Advancing digital resources and collaborative projects are also supported. There is a national competition for these grants held with review panels made up of experts in the field who recommend proposals for approval by IMLS. Final approval is given by the Director of IMLS.

There is a grant program for Native Americans and Native Hawaiians and the Laura Bush Program which funds library education and training. From 2003 to 2012 the funding was \$36,129,000 for the Native American program, \$197,890,000 for the Laura

Bush program, \$120,527,000 for the National Leadership Grants, and \$1.6 billion for Grants to States.

#### Museum and Library Services Act of 2003 P.L. 108-81

The Museum and Library Services Act of 2003 updated the Act from 1996. Due to the increasing demand to justify federal spending, this legislation states that the director should published analyses of the impact of the legislation, identify trends, report on effectiveness, and identify best practices. It also increased the basic grant to a state library to \$680,000 and \$60,000 for the territories. Emphasis is on services that target persons having difficulty using a library and underserved communities whether they are in urban or rural areas, including children through 17 years of age, from families with incomes below the poverty line. In addition the National Leadership Grants continued to cover education and training but also added recruitment to its funding goals. The Reauthorization of Museum and Library Services Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-340) allows IMLS to continue its work. President Obama signed this act in December 2010.

#### College and School Libraries

The year 1965 was significant for academic and school libraries. The Higher Education Act of 1965 Title II B (P.L. 89-329) was passed providing assistance to college and university libraries. These institutions received a total of \$45,905,720 from 1966 through 1994. The funding provided training and 1,474 doctoral, 282 post-master, 3,365 master, 16 bachelor, 53 associate, and 77 traineeships were awarded (Fry, pg. 302).

Federal school library support also began in 1965. School Library Standards had been written as early as 1918. However, the 1960s Standards for School Library Programs prepared by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) resulted in federal legislation to support school libraries. The American Association of School Librarians conducted an extensive campaign to familiarize school personnel with the importance of school library programs and the role that standards could play in improving them (Michie, pg. 8-9). This helped to garner support for school library legislation and in 1965 President Lyndon Johnson's administration passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title II P.L. 89-10. For the first time direct federal assistance for the acquisition of school library resources, textbooks, and other instructional materials was supported by the federal government. Title II provided direct assistance for school periodicals, books, audiovisual materials, and other library materials. This was a formula grant and each state received funds based on the number of public and private school students enrolled. The U.S. Office of Education was responsible for this program and each state had to submit a plan for approval. In 1996 the legislation was amended and states could use five percent of their grants, or \$50,000, whichever was greater, to finance the administration of the program. Altogether, 49% of all public schools reported that ESEA Title II had a substantial influence on the establishment and growth of school libraries. (Michie, pg. 5)

The current school legislation is called the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and includes the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries (Subpart 4 Sec. 1251). This legislation provides for increasing access to school library materials. It states that scientifically based research should be used to implement effective school media programs and to evaluate the quality and impact of activities. Funds were to acquire up-to-date school libraries media resources, acquire advanced technology, develop and enhance information literacy, information retrieval, and critical thinking skills of students. It would facilitate Internet links and resource-sharing networks among schools and school library media centers, public and academic libraries; provide professional development for school library media specialists, and activities that foster increased collaboration between school library media specialists, teachers, and administrators. It was replaced this year by Innovative Approaches to Literacy which it provides \$14.3 million for school libraries (Library Hotline).

### Medical Libraries

In 1944 the American Library Association criticized the Library of the Office of the Surgeon General of the Army and made recommendations for improvement. The Medical Library Association also pushed for changes, but it wasn't until August 1956 that P.L. 84-941 The National Library of Medicine Act, an amendment to Title II of the Public Health Service Act, renamed the National Library of Medicine and put it under the Public Health Service. In the 1960s, the National Library of Medicine commissioned studies on the needs of medical school libraries and requested assistance from the Medical Library Association to collect data and statistics on problems facing medical libraries (Cummings, pg.377). This helped to bring about the Medical Library Assistance Act of 1965(P.L. 89-291) which provided funds for improving and expanding basic resources, training in medical library sciences, construction, special scientific projects, research and development in medical library science and related fields, establishment of regional medical libraries, biomedical publications, and regional branches of the National Library of Medicine. The National Library of Medicine chose not to establish its own regional branches, but chose to support regional services through existing libraries. This program is now called the National Network of Libraries of Medicine. There are eight regional offices working together to assist in providing health resources across the country.

### U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science

By 1970 professional library associations were making their influence felt and P.L. 91-345 was passed to establish an independent agency to advise the President and Congress, as well as other federal, state, local, and private agencies on national and international library and information policies. It was authorized to : conduct studies, surveys, and analyses of the library and informational needs of the nation; appraise the adequacies and deficiencies of current library and information resources and services; evaluate the effectiveness of current library and information science programs; develop overall plans for meeting national library and information needs; and promote research and development activities which will extend and improve the nation's library and information-handling capability. It was composed of 14 part-time members, appointed

by the President. Its funding rarely exceeded \$1 million. During its existence it issued over 70 reports that were the product of surveys, studies, forums, hearings, task forces and conferences. NCLIS played a role in the transformation of the Library Services and Construction Act into the Library Services and Technology Act. The IMLS assumed the policy responsibilities of NCLIS in 2008. At the same time, the Department of Education transferred two statistical surveys, the Public Library Survey and the State Library Survey to IMLS.

There are a number of challenges for the future including the financial crisis which has caused legislators to ask whether libraries will remain a priority; the aging of the population and their changing needs especially in regard to health care and its costs; and the viewpoint of the younger generation who may not view the professional organizations and the library structures that are currently in place as essential for their life. Since the arrival of Internet publishing, collection building and maintenance, and accessing information has changed dramatically. Currently, I have an iPhone and I can ask it a question through a service called Siri and it provides an answer. Does it give correct answers? Not often, yet it is competition for libraries. Will the younger generation understand the limitations of this service and the long term ramifications of receiving information from a for-profit source? This is a key question and only time will tell. The library field has worked hard to share its values of open, public access to information and to make materials available for free or minimal costs. This has allowed many people to be lifelong learners. Will this continue to take place in America? That remains to be seen.

Federal funding for library services has been seen as a tool for innovation, experimentation, supplementation, and stimulation of library development. The American Library Association, the American Association of School Libraries, and the Medical Library Association are just some of the organizations that have been instrumental in getting support for library legislation. Their members come together to discuss and develop legislative agendas to assure that the American public has full access to a wide range of information. Through local chapters and by working with state library organizations, the associations have been able to assist librarians trying to learn how to obtain funding for libraries.

Looking back over the 20th century, which saw so much growth in the development of libraries and information services in the United States, it is striking to realize how much librarians from the World War II generation laid the foundation of the information highway. They created strong library organizations that clarified to national political leaders the importance of library services. Today, those library organizations continue to provide leadership for the advancement of library services. Their leadership will continue even as the tools and techniques for accessing information are changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will be the responsibility of the next generation of library leaders to see to it that the federal government continues to play an active role in library development and to guarantee that all citizens have access to information.



## References

- Bogart, Dave. Ed. Library and Book Trade Almanac. 56<sup>th</sup>ed. Medford, New Jersey: Information Today, Inc. 2011.
- Casey, Genevieve M. Administration of State and Federal Funds for Library Development. Library Trends, Fall 1978 v.27 No 2. pg. 145-163.
- Cummings, Martin M. MD. and Corning Mary E. The Medical Library Assistance Act: An Analysis of the NLM Extramural Programs, 1965-1970. In Bulletin of the Medical Library Association 59(3), July, 1971, pp. 375-391.
- Davenport, Nancy and Judith Russell. Meeting the Information Needs of the American People: Past Actions and Future Initiatives. U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. Washington, DC. March, 2008.
- Federal Depository Library Program P.L. 87-579.
- Frantz, John C. and Nathan M. Cohen. The Federal Government and Public Libraries: A Ten-Year Partnership Fiscal Years 1957-1966. Illinois State Library.
- Fry, Ray. M. U. S. Department of Education Library Programs, pg. 292-352 in Bowker Annual. R.R. Bowker, 1995.
- Havlik, Robert J. "The Library Services Branch of the U.S. Office of Education: its Creation, Growth, and Transformation" in Library History Seminar No. 3 Proceedings, 1968, pp. 112-123.
- Himmel, Ethel E. and William J. Wilson. The Functions and Roles of State Library Agencies. Chicago, ALA, 2000.
- Hopkins, D. M. and Butler, R.P. The Federal Roles in support of School Library Media Centers. Chicago: American Library Association, 1991.
- Innovative Approaches to Literacy. Library Hotline v. 41(18) May 7, 2012
- Improving Literacy through School Libraries subpart 4 sec 1251 <http://www.2ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esae02/pg7.html>
- Jones, M.L. Survey of School Media Standards. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977.
- Lane, Rodney. P. The Role of the State in the Development of Public Library Services. Division of Library Programs U.S. Office of Education, 1974.
- Lancour, Harold. Summary. In In The Impact of the Library Services Act: Progress and Potential. Allerton Park Institute No. 8 University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science, 1962 pp113-119.
- Michie, J. S. and Holton, B.A. Fifty Years of Supporting Children's Learning. A History of Public School Libraries and Federal Legislation from 1953-2000. (NCES 2005-311)

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Miller, K., Swan D, Craig T, et al. Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal Year 2009. (IMLS - 2011-PLS-02) Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Museum and Library Service Act of 2010 P.L. 111-340, December 22, 2010

Museum and Library Services Act of 2003 P.L. 108-81, September 23, 2003.

Museum and Library Services Act of 1996 Web resource at: [www.ims.gov/about/ims\\_legislative\\_timeline.aspx](http://www.ims.gov/about/ims_legislative_timeline.aspx)

NLS Factsheet- National Cooperative Network

NLS: That All May Read. Library Services for Blind and Physically Handicapped People. Washington DC, The Library of Congress, 1983.

Prentiss, S. Gilbert. Research for What? In The Impact of the Library Services Act: Progress and Potential. Allerton Park Institute No. 8 University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science, 1962, pp. 79-86.

Riddie, Wayne. Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA): Reauthorization Issues. Washington, DC. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service December 29, 1994. Pp. 1-14.

Swan, D.W., et al. State Library Agencies survey: Fiscal Year 2010. Washington, DC. Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2012.

U.S. Congress, Senate. Congressional Record, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d Sess., 1966, 112, pt.11:13901.

U.S. Department of Education Library Programs, 1996. In Bowker 42nd ed. 1997. Medford, N.J.: R.R. Bowker, pp. 302-334.

Vaughns, Erica, NLS Other Writings. Talking Rooms: Walking through History at the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Headquarters. 2009, pg. 7-8.