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A "good neighbor" policy of library extension

by *Edna E. Bothe*

When a state library consultant in Missouri suggested to the members of a regional library board representing two small Ozark counties that a third adjoining county which had no library service be invited to join the region, she met with some opposition. After all, they had only recently taken a first step when they signed a contract to operate a joint service. "Isn't it possible that the area will become too large?" "Wouldn't our two counties receive less service if we added a third?" Behind the questions and remarks the consultant could almost hear them saying, "After all, what do these state people think? We let them talk us into this regional business, and it's been difficult enough to explain the advantages to our county officials and many others. Of course, we do appreciate the additional state funds that helped us get started, and we do know that we have better service as a region than we could have as separate county libraries. But it's expecting too much to add another county so soon."

These were unvoiced feelings which she could read in the faces of the ten very sincere and conscientious board members. Quickly she decided that these counties were not ready, and that the approach would have to be more gradual. They must get used to the idea first.

She sensed that they did want to be cooperative, as was shown by the next question: "Just what did you have in mind that we should do?"

She explained that the state library demonstration bookmobile in an adjoining county was serving a community which required a long drive from headquarters. "Your bookmobile," she said, "is serving a community only five miles from this point. The reverse is true in another part of your regional library service area. Could your bookmobile serve the community in X county which we are serving and our state bookmobile serve a community in your area more easily reached by us?"

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"Well, that sounds reasonable enough," one board member said.

"Why," said another, "I think that would just be being a good neighbor."

So by a small concrete example and a first step in cooperation, the fear of attempting something new and of effecting greater change is broken down. By appealing to natural qualities of neighborliness and good will and by demonstrating that cooperation is practical and profitable, citizens of an area become convinced that larger units of library service in the form of a regional or multicounty library system produce results in the form of the best library service at the least cost to the taxpayers.

REGIONAL LIBRARIES IN MISSOURI

The Missouri State Library has been conducting a regional bookmobile demonstration service since 1951. There are now in operation in the state eleven regional (multi-county) libraries comprising a total of 31 counties. These vary from two to four counties in each region. Many of the regions already formed are still too small and have inadequate resources to meet standards of good library service. It was because of this fact and because of the scarcity of professional librarians with administrative ability that the idea of the locally administered library demonstration was added to the Missouri Plan under the provisions of the federal Library Services Act.

In many instances counties adjacent to those having regional library service are already "good neighbors" in that they are in the same trade area and have many factors in common such as industry, agriculture, and transportation and communication facilities. Extending already established library service to a neighboring unserved county is a logical, practical, economical, and efficient method of improving existing library service and extending library service to unserved areas. This is true, however, only when the established serv-

ice is providing reasonably adequate service to its own taxed district.

For this reason a regional library wishing to conduct a demonstration in a neighboring unserved county must first meet certain standards in order to qualify for funds. Not only must the administrative librarian of the region be professionally trained and experienced, but the regional library must provide a professional librarian for giving bookmobile service to the rural areas of the neighboring county. This librarian must spend most of his time in guiding readers and advising local librarians and library boards. There must be regularly scheduled and publicized bookmobile visits to all communities in the county. The demonstrating library's book and audio-visual collections must be sufficient to meet the needs of the existing region and, with augmentation from grant funds, the needs of the demonstration area. Services must be provided for groups and organizations, provision must be made for a vacation reading program for children, and supplementary and advisory services must be provided to community libraries in the unserved demonstration area.

The initial step toward a demonstration may be in the form of a request to the state library for library service, from groups or individuals in an unserved county (which, as noted above, may already have community libraries). If a regional library service area adjoins the county, its librarian and board are informed of the request, and their attention is called to the possibility of a locally administered demonstration and the availability of funds to finance it. In other cases, a regional library which is interested in strengthening its own services by extending them to an adjoining county or counties requests information or applies to the state library. A consultant from the state library then surveys the proposed demonstration county to discover possible interest and to determine the feasibility of a demonstration.

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

The promotion of interest and demand for service in the proposed demonstration area proceed simultaneously with the development of a detailed demonstration plan by the librarian and board of the regional library,

working with the state library consultant. The plan includes facts to show that the addition of the proposed demonstration area to the regional library will strengthen and improve services throughout the region. It includes an itemized budget showing the costs of the proposed demonstration. This must be based on the estimated annual income realizable from a tax levy on the demonstration area. It also includes a projected budget and service plan for at least two years after the demonstration period. This is accompanied by a revised overall service plan for a region including the proposed demonstration area. The regional library board then formally adopts the demonstration plan.

In the meantime the state library consultant has scheduled a county-wide meeting in the proposed demonstration county to which representatives from all communities and organizations in the county have been invited. Many personal contacts by both the consultant and the librarian of the regional library have been made. Both attend this meeting and explain the proposed demonstration plan. Members of the group are encouraged to ask questions which usually result in the one important question, "How soon can the demonstration start?"

Missouri State Librarian Paxton Price describes locally administered library demonstrations: We and most other states have a program of spending federal funds directly by the state agency to demonstrate public library service in an unserved rural area. This is one method which involved only the state library. We have an alternative method at work which has been equally successful in three cases so far—giving federal funds to an existing county or regional library that is strong enough to handle the job but needs to be expanded into more adequate service and size by the addition of a neighboring county or counties. This method merely involves the transfer of funds from our hands to a local library which conducts the demonstration to a neighboring unserved county or counties. The demonstrated area then becomes accustomed to receiving service from its neighboring county or regional library and has no difficulty in making the mental jump when the time arrives for making a decision to align itself in service operations with its neighbor. This last method we call "locally administered demonstration."

The consultant then explains the requirements. The group must express itself as favorable to and willing to work for passage of a tax levy to support permanent library service. During the demonstration period a citizen committee must assist in publicizing the service. A publicity representative must be selected for each community, who will advertise and work for the use of the service by the people of the community. A county promotion committee must assume the responsibility for securing funds when needed for promotion of a voting campaign for a tax-supported library.

A planning committee is selected from the group to work with the state library consultant and the regional librarian in carrying out the demonstration plan. A formal resolution agreeing to meet the foregoing requirements is then passed by the group.

The Missouri State Library, because of its experience in the establishment of new library service, assumes the responsibility of working with the local promotion committees, explaining legal procedures, suggesting promotion methods, and encouraging citizen activity in support of the project.

ADVANTAGES FOR EVERYONE

One of the most satisfying results of the locally administered demonstration plan has been the way in which small community libraries in the demonstration counties have worked with the regional librarians and consultants. Doors seem to open more easily to the regional librarian, and there is less fear of state control. The regional librarian and the community librarian are "neighbors" who plan together the weeding of the collection, the refurbishing of the library to make it more attractive, and the initiation of new methods and ideas. Naturally, the library board is also happy with the new arrangements. Many more new books, access to the total book and materials collection of the region, services such as films and recordings, exhibits, and art reproductions which the community libraries have never been able to afford before are now available. When the time comes for the demonstration to terminate, the librarian and board are eager for the vote to carry in the county so that they can continue to benefit from the regional service. They know that not only the additional services but the new at-

tractive furniture and equipment will be removed at the end of the demonstration unless it is brought to a successful conclusion and the vote is favorable. If the library happens not to be tax-supported, the librarian and board take the lead in the promotion campaign in their community in support of the vote for tax support.

Under Missouri law communities having tax-supported libraries are not included in newly established county library districts and therefore do not participate in the vote for tax support. After the county library district is established and the new county library board has joined the region by contract, the municipal library board may merge its library with the county district and thus become a library service center of the newly expanded regional library. The board and librarian, having been prepared for this step by the demonstration, no longer fear the supervision of the regional librarian nor the dissolution of the present library board. They understand the changes and the advantages to be derived from cooperation.

After a successful demonstration, such as the three which have been concluded in Missouri in the last three years, it is not difficult to persuade the county library board to join the region by contract. The state library consultant has only to remind the newly appointed board of what they have already experienced during the demonstration. They realize the advantages in time and money which will result from their request to join their neighboring regional library. Their county officials are also made aware of these facts. During one demonstration representatives of the county committee met regularly with the regional board during the demonstration. When the county joined the region, the members of this liaison group, with one exception, were appointed to the regional board. Under such circumstances, the first meeting of the regional board with its new "good neighbors" as full-fledged members is a happy occasion.

In summary, the advantages of the locally administered demonstration plan are:

1. Improved service through the establishment of a more adequate unit of service with enlarged area and increased income.

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plan for future needs, and determine whether he is utilizing library resources to the fullest.

There are a few comments concerning budget preparation which might be of interest to librarians. Budget estimates should be based upon work programs. Whenever possible, data should be provided which will realistically indicate the type and level of services which are being provided. Legislators often may be unfamiliar with the technical aspects of library work. Therefore, they must be convinced of the value of the work to be performed before they can be expected to vote the total amount of the department's request. It goes almost without saying that a professional librarian would not in any event want to be placed in the position of defending any unrealistic requests.

The city manager, like any chief executive, must exercise adequate control over the city's departments and activities. Organization control requires the establishment of standards of efficiency against which performance can be measured. Standards are extremely important to a city manager because they assist him to appraise the effectiveness of his organization in fulfilling its objectives. Reports are a most useful means of enabling a city manager to achieve the necessary control of municipal affairs. Such reports are meaningful not only in terms of explaining programs and service accomplishments, but also as a means of alerting the city manager to any significant increases, decreases, or deviations in the services being performed. The city librarian can render invaluable assistance to the city man-

ager by providing him with reports which explain library needs, services, and accomplishments in a factual, concise, and illuminating manner.

It is apparent that the emphasis in this article has been placed to a marked extent on the city librarian's role as an administrator rather than as a professional specialist. This has not been done with any intent of minimizing the latter function of the city librarian. It is clear that it is in this professional capacity that the city librarian renders his greatest service to the community. However, it seems fitting in this article to highlight the administrative nature of his position in terms of the librarian's relationships with the city manager.

A city librarian will be quick to point out that first-class library service cannot be bought at bargain basement prices. The city manager recognizes the validity of this assertion. Efficiency and economy should not be treated as if they were ends in themselves. It is well to remember that the quality of a service is not susceptible of measurement. But the nature of a city manager's job makes it necessary for him to consider all aspects of a program or service. The city librarian, of course, may view these matters from a slightly different standpoint. However, in the final analysis, it is only through a better understanding of each other's problems that the city manager and the city librarian, guided by principle and fact, will accomplish their mutual objective of enhancing the value of the public library as a vital community resource. ●●●

A "GOOD NEIGHBOR" POLICY OF LIBRARY EXTENSION

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2. Extension of adequate service to an unserved area.
3. Utilization of existing professional, experienced, administrative personnel in the demonstration, making possible the extension of service without the employment of additional state library personnel for such demonstration projects.
4. Economy in demonstration through the use of existing facilities of regional libraries.
5. Ease of convincing local community leaders, trustees, and librarians of the advantages of regional service because of the "good neighbor" policy.

These advantages have been proven by 100 per cent successful extension of service and the enlargement and improvement of three of Missouri's eleven regional libraries. This type of demonstration is one of the most effective methods of realizing the Missouri State Library's objectives—improving the quality of library service where it exists and extending it to unserved areas.

The members of its field staff are surveying other regional libraries which can meet standards for locally administered demonstrations and areas in which the "good neighbor" policy can be used to advantage. ●●●