



**Illinois State Library
Task Force
On
Rural Library Services
Report**

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F O R E W O R D

The recommendations made by the Illinois State Library's Task Force on Rural Library Service deal with providing adequate library and information services to rural Illinois. Citizens in rural Illinois, especially those in agricultural areas, require access to the same scope and level of complex information as those in Illinois' urban and suburban areas. Illinois libraries play an essential role in the provision of that information.

My thanks to all the members of the task force for a thorough report. Special acknowledgement is made of the contributions of the late Sid Campbell. Sid's thoughts on education and libraries were important to the deliberations of the task force, and his loss has been noted by the entire governmental and education community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Edgar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Jim Edgar
Secretary of State
and State Librarian

ILLINOIS STATE LIBRARY TASK FORCE ON RURAL LIBRARY SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

Building on a federally funded initiative to identify and provide rural Illinoisans information needs, a conference, "Libraries on the MOVE" (Mississippi and Ohio Valley Exposition, held June 1986, drew attendees from rural areas throughout the Midwest to share concerns, programs, and services; and consequently to develop a "Rural Library Agenda" for Illinois. (See Attachments)

The Rural Library Agenda called for further study and implementation of major rural library development concepts. In August of 1987, Secretary of State and State Librarian Jim Edgar responding to rural community concerns, appointed a special Illinois State Library Task Force on Rural Library Service with legislative, citizen, library trustee, and library community representation. He gave the committee the charge

"to develop strategies for the implementation of the 'Rural Library Agenda' with special attention to legislation for the unserved/underserved of the state, supplementary funding for poorer, rural areas, cooperation among all information providers and efficient technological applications for rural areas."

Secretary Edgar encouraged the task force to concentrate on developing creative, practical, and affordable recommendations for rural library service in Illinois.

The task force members met four times between August 1987 and March 1988 to discuss issues and concerns and make recommendations to the secretary.

Major issues of concern affecting rural library service in Illinois are outlined below. The task force report also makes seven major recommendations. Recommendations #1, 2, 3, and 6F involve legislative initiative action. Recommendations #4, 5, and 6, A, B, C, D, E, G involve study and program priority development action at the local, system, and State Library levels.

Statement of Concern

In the United States, at least 3.3 percent of the population does not have access to tax-supported public library service, according to state library agency reports in the 1985 38th edition of the American Library Directory. Eleven states report that at least 10 percent of their populations are unserved by public libraries. Illinois is one of these. The Illinois unserved population is approximately 15 percent of the

state's 11,473,375 total population and represents a large geographic area of the state. Approximately 50 percent of Illinois lies outside areas taxed for public library service. Both the population and geographic percentages are significantly higher in Illinois than the national average. The 1,707,531 unserved Illinois citizens are the largest in the United States followed by Texas, which has 1,037,531 unserved population.

Therefore, statistically as well as philosophically, the issue of lack of adequate public access to tax-supported library information service is a major concern to Illinois citizens in general and to legislative, local community, and library leaders in particular.

The MOVE Conference advisory committee defined a rural public library as "serving fewer than 10,000 people and either in a county with fewer than 150 people per square mile in 1980 or in a county with over 80 percent of its land in farms in 1982." By this definition, 332 of the more than 600 existing public libraries in Illinois are "rural." Operating expenditures per capita were much lower in rural libraries (\$9.88 in 1985) than in urban libraries serving fewer than 10,000 people (\$30.24).

Two funding issues come to mind when considering the "unserved" (i.e., untaxed for public library service) and the "underserved" rural citizens of Illinois. First, mandated tax-supported public library service throughout the state would appear to an "ideal" helpful first step in striving to provide Illinois citizens with equal access to information resources. However, the political and economic climate at local and state governmental levels does not bode well at this time for considering the sweeping tax reform which would be necessary to effect such a mandate. The reliance on property taxes as the basis of funding educational and local government services remains an impediment to major reforms.

Second, the lower level of per capita funding support in rural and/or poorer levels of the state as a result of varying assessed valuations should be addressed in terms of revising equalization aid formulas as they now exist. Since property tax continues to be the major source of support at this time, the task force has concentrated on equalization aid formula recommendations as a means of increasing state financial support for rural library service.

Expanded coordination and rural resource leadership on the part of local libraries, library systems, and the State Library, and professional and educational associations and agencies are also addressed in the task force recommendations. Regardless of present or potential future levels of funding support for public libraries in Illinois, the task force recommends a concentrated, efficient effort to meet library information needs for rural citizens.

RECOMMENDATION #1 - Designate Equalization Aid Budget Line Item.

The Secretary of State's budget should contain a separate line item for equalization aid to public libraries. When the amount of money appropriated for equalization aid is not sufficient to fully fund all eligible applicants, available funds should be prorated.

Explanation

Currently the Secretary of State's budget contains one line item that includes both equalization and per capita aid to public libraries. When the amount of money appropriated is not sufficient to fully fund both types of aid at their statutory formulas, the law provides that first equalization aid be fully funded with remaining funds prorated among public libraries qualifying for per capita aid.

If more libraries qualify for equalization aid, and if the equalization aid formula is increased, the potential exists for a significant reduction of per capita aid in the event that both formulas are not fully funded. Separate line items would allow the Secretary of State and the General Assembly to make decisions on equalization aid independent of their decisions on per capita aid.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - Increase Equalization Aid Formula to \$7.00 Per Capita.

Legislation should be introduced in FY 1988 to change the equalization aid formula from \$4.25 per capita to \$7.00 per capita. Qualifying rules for equalization aid should remain unchanged. The Secretary of State's budget request for FY 1989 should contain funding at the \$7.00 per capita level.

Explanation

The Illinois State Library estimates that at the \$7.00 per capita level 269 public libraries will qualify for \$4,172,775 in equalization aid in FY 1989.

Equalization aid was designed to assist local libraries to provide funding in cases where lower local assessed valuations prohibited libraries from realizing adequate per capita funding, even though they were taxing at legal limits. The \$4.25 per capita average qualifying rate is much lower than the current national per capita support (\$12.97) and the current Illinois state per capita support average (\$14.92).

Raising the minimum per capita level of support to qualify for equalization aid to \$7.00 would result in 207 libraries serving populations under 10,000 to become eligible for funds. Sixty-two libraries serving populations over 10,000 would also be eligible and many of these communities serve rural populations.

RECOMMENDATION #3 - Establish Library and Information Resources Council.

The Illinois State General Assembly should establish a Library and Information Resource Council within the Citizens Assembly, to become active in FY 1989.

At the same time, the Illinois State Library is encouraged to strengthen and expand reference and library development staff liaisons with existing councils in order to assist with their information needs and in order to alert those councils to roles of library and information resources in helping to meet needs of target populations and issues.

Explanation

Currently, eight other councils within the recently-established Citizens Assembly deal with legislative and service initiatives related to key concerns of the state (children, energy, resources, mental health and development disabilities, economic development, public aid, school problems, women, and rural affairs). The legislative, library, and citizen members of the task force feel strongly that the establishment of an ongoing legislative-level advisory body will provide heightened visibility as well as general assembly accountability for library and information-related programs and initiatives on a statewide level. The "information needy" of our state, many in rural unserved and underserved areas, deserve a voice in policy and fiscal support issues affecting their quality of life.

Councils have sixteen members, hold four public hearings annually, and generate annual report/legislative initiative recommendation documents. In addition to the valuable input of the Illinois State Library Advisory Committee to the Secretary of State and State Library staff, the Library and Information Resources Council can provide ongoing legislative support leadership for helping to better meet rural (and urban) information needs.

RECOMMENDATION #4 - Study County Library Establishment and Support Options.

The maximum tax rate for county libraries should be adjusted from .08 percent to 15 percent in order for county public libraries to tax at the same rate of local support as city, village, and township libraries.

Explanation

The 1974 Dunn Report (Report of the Library Financing Subcommittee of the House Revenue Committee) recommended that county tax rates be raised from .04 percent to .15 percent over a three-year period, but this has not yet been achieved. Currently, there are two county libraries in Illinois.

The Illinois State Library and the Illinois Library Association should, by the end of 1988, conduct a comparative legal analysis of existing laws governing county library service establishment and laws governing district establishment and support. Any resulting legislative reform recommendations should be proposed in FY 1989.

Explanation

The existing county library law would appear to be in conflict with some aspects of both the district and local library laws, especially in regard to establishment options and referendum requirements. Since the recent trend in Illinois has been toward establishment of or conversion to district libraries, these apparent conflicts are becoming more confusing and a hindrance to rural public library planning.

This task force also concurs with issues outlined in a background paper prepared for the 1986 MOVE rural conference:

Countywide public library establishment as a legal possibility has, for all practical purposes, not been aggressively pursued or studied systematically. Such establishment is currently subject to limitations which make such boundaries of service less than desirable since service is based on referendum approved by a majority of voters outside incorporated areas. It is unclear how the establishment of a county library would affect existing tax-supported areas. The tax levy rate limits of .04 percent - .08 percent are far below other library taxing body limits.

While the law does not preclude contracting for service with existing libraries or systems, it does not seem to clearly address the coordination and cooperative involvement of villages, cities, townships, or districts which are already taxing for public library service.

RECOMMENDATION #5 - Continued Support of Project PLUS and Project LIME programs.

The Illinois State Library should continue to encourage the formation of larger units of library service in rural areas, serving minimum populations of 5,000. Libraries serving large geographic areas would seek practical ways to provide local library outlets in small communities, often in cooperation with schools, senior citizen centers, and other community organizations.

The Illinois State Library should periodically review Project PLUS (Providing Larger Units of Service) and Project LIME (Library Mergers) guidelines, especially noting any changes needed in the per capita funding levels to keep pace with state averages, and noting any relevant changes in district library conversion procedure requirements.

RECOMMENDATION #6 - Coordinate Statewide Commitment to Rural Library Service Development.

Rural libraries should be committed to providing the same level of service as urban libraries. Two levels of library service, one for urban residents and a second less complete level for rural residents, cannot be justified. All libraries should strive to provide equal access to information through available local, state, and national networks. A minimum level of service is the right of all Illinois citizens served by tax-supported public libraries whether in rural or urban settings.

To this end, the task force encourages the following continued and expanded activities at the local, system, and State Library development leadership levels:

- A. The task force endorses statewide public library standards to encourage quality library development in all parts of the state. Locally, rural libraries should establish service priorities, but access to state and national information resources throughout ILLINET should be a basic service in all rural libraries. The American Library Association's Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries, are models of local planning suitable for rural library planning as well.
- B. The Illinois Library Association, Illinois Coalition of Library Advocates, and other associations should give increased attention to rural library issues on their agendas in providing continuing education activities throughout the state. (Adapted from MOVE Conference recommendations.)
- C. Service to special populations in rural areas (i.e., older adults, children and young adults, nonreaders, physically and developmentally disabled, non-English speaking) should be maintained and improved. (Adapted from MOVE Conference recommendations.)
- D. Rural libraries should take the lead in organizing networks of locally operating information providers, such as chambers of commerce, cooperative extension services, farm bureaus, social service agencies, and education institutions. The Illinois State Library and library systems should take leadership roles in setting up model pilot project for facilitating this cooperation and dialogue. (Adapted from MOVE Conference recommendations.)
- E. Rural libraries should continue to improve access to information through the use of new technologies implementing and replicating County Access Center and/or Scientific and Technical Information (STI) services on a countywide or library systemwide level. (Adapted from MOVE Conference agenda.)

Explanation

Information needs of small businesses, agriculture, local government, and social service can be better met with increased access to a wider range of technical expertise and bibliographic and information databases than can currently be provided at the small local library level. Preliminary demonstration success of technical outreach and cooperative linkages on a regional basis merit further exploration and testing in Illinois.

- F. The task force supports the enabling legislation presented to the General Assembly in 1987 by the Illinois Library Association's School Library Funding Task Force for per capita aid to school district library programs which meet standards for ILLINET membership and would support reintroduction of this legislation in FY1988.

Explanation

There is community concern about the lack of required school library media program standards in Illinois. This has a profound impact on the quality of life in Illinois, especially in rural areas already without adequate access to library information services. Generations of students (future community leaders and taxpayers) are growing up without training in how to access information. (Adapted from MOVE Conference background papers.)

- G. The Illinois State Library is also encouraged to work closely with the Illinois State Board of Education, the Board of Higher Education, the Community College Board, and other educational institutions involved in planning cooperative and complementary library services.

Explanation

School/public library cooperation (and potential expansion of or adaptations to tax-supported library service for all citizens) could be enhanced throughout the state, especially in rural areas with high rates of unserved populations. Existing school districts, community college districts, or library system boundaries might provide a framework for dealing creatively with establishing or expanding tax-supported public library service areas.

PROJECTED COSTS FOR EQUALIZATION EXPENDITURES

	\$5.00	\$6.00	\$7.00
GROSS TOTALS	877,663.94	2,059,945.92	4,172,775.31
AVERAGE EQUALIZATION AID GRANT	6,011.40	9,405.15	15,341.09
LIBRARIES AFFECTED UNDER 5,000 POPULATION	103	136	163
LIBRARIES AFFECTED 5,001 to 10,000 POPULATION (UNDER 10,000 POPULATION)	27 (130)	40 (176)	44 (207)
LIBRARIES AFFECTED OVER 10,000 POPULATION	16	42	62
TOTAL LIBRARIES AFFECTED	146	218	269
ILLINOIS STATE LIBRARY			

AGENDA FOR RURAL LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT

Residents in rural areas have the same depth and variety of library and information needs as residents in the more populous areas of our state and nation. Rural libraries, however, are confronted with limitations of geography, size of community, and financial resources which often prevent them from meeting these needs. In an effort to improve rural library services, participants of the Libraries on the MOVE Conference, held in Carbondale, Illinois June 1986 have formulated the following recommendations for rural library development.

1. The state legislature should establish a commission to study and recommend improvements in the availability of library and information service to all residents.
2. The state library agency should develop a statewide, comprehensive plan for making library service available to everyone and should recommend guidelines for boundaries for units of library service.
3. Pending the development and implementation of numbers one and two, continuing support should be given to current projects for the extension of library service, such as Illinois's Project PLUS and Project LIME, thus maintaining current programs.
4. State library associations and other library advocacy groups should give increased attention to rural library issues on their agendas.
5. Resource sharing through multitype library systems, networking, and interlibrary cooperation, should be emphasized to strengthen rural libraries.
6. Additional opportunities for continuing education for rural librarians, library workers, and trustees should be made available.
7. Each rural library should implement a marketing plan based on a needs assessment, an analysis of current and possible services, and a commitment to public relations.
8. Rural libraries should take the lead in organizing networks of locally operating information providers, such as chambers of commerce, cooperative extension services, and farm bureaus. Rural libraries should also be members of regional, state, and national library networks.
9. Rural libraries should be encouraged to establish service priorities and to set up a system of basic services provided without charge supplemented by specialized fee-based services.

10. Rural librarians should be aware of "Avenues to Excellence" and other existing state and national standards. Supplementary standards for rural library service should be developed.
11. Rural libraries should continue to improve access to information through the use of new technologies.
12. Service to special populations, such as older adults, young adult readers, children, nonreaders, and disabled individuals, should be maintained and improved upon by the rural library.
13. A "County Access Center," located in a government facility and administered by a regional library system, should access and distribute the full-range of information services provided by local, regional, state, national, and international library networks to predominately rural areas using state-of-the-art communication technology.

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