

**STRENGTHENING LIBRARY  
SERVICES  
IN  
RURAL ILLINOIS**

**A Report  
by the  
Illinois State Library  
Rural Library Panel  
October 1992**



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**GEORGE H. RYAN \* Secretary of State and State Librarian**



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**GEORGE H. RYAN**  
SECRETARY OF STATE

October 1992

Dear Friends:

Members of the Rural Library Panel met with me in my office on June 25 to discuss rural library concerns and to present me with their report. "Strengthening Library Services in Rural Illinois" is a document that will help us meet the information needs of our rural citizens well into the next century. The panel members have given specific recommendations to the library community for expanding access to library services in the rural portions of Illinois.

I have already begun to implement some of these recommendations. I have appointed individuals with rural library experience to my staff at the Illinois State Library and to statewide committees. My staff has begun working in the areas of telecommunications and library education. We have awarded grants that address county-wide planning and rural partnerships. In the months ahead, I will be asking the library community to help us address other issues to improve the quality of library services in rural Illinois.

The dedication of the panel members was evident in the workload that they undertook and in the depth of the recommendations that they presented. I want to thank the panel members for sharing my commitment to the rural citizens of Illinois.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George H. Ryan".

GEORGE H. RYAN  
Secretary of State  
and State Librarian

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## **STRENGTHENING LIBRARY SERVICES IN RURAL ILLINOIS**

### **Major Recommendations**

- 1. As an educational imperative, establish as a goal that all Illinois citizens have public library service, and that students must have access to library services.**
  - Require that counties within regional library systems have universal library service plan developed by 1996.
  - Implement a statewide borrowers card.
- 2. Determine the feasibility of toll-free telecommunications access to the ILLINET Online statewide database and regional library system databases for library and public use.**
  - Solicit support from private sector for library telecommunication and computer equipment costs.
  - Provide grants to rural libraries so they may have access to automated library and information databases.
- 3. Structure rural library service around the strongest service entity in a community, be it a public library, school library or an academic library.**
  - Utilize federal funds to initiate cooperative, community based library services.
  - Establish an award for library contributions to rural life.
- 4. Develop new means of delivering library education to staff members in rural libraries.**
  - Develop with the Illinois Community College Board and local institutions a training program for rural library personnel.
  - Utilize satellite and other new technologies to deliver library education.
- 5. Take advantage of public sector - private sector partnerships to provide the financial support necessary to expand rural library services.**
  - Promote the "Adopt a Library Program" in rural areas.
  - Continue to promote larger units of public library service.
- 6. Commit to implementation of the recommendations of the Rural Library Panel by the year 1996.**
  - Develop a definition and vision of rural library service for the next century.
  - Determine what is a viable geographic size and population of a public library service area in a rural area.

## Introduction

On June 19, 1991, Secretary of State George H. Ryan announced the formation of a Rural Library Panel and charged it to hold a series of public hearings throughout the state in order to develop recommendations for improving rural libraries and making library service and information more accessible. In Secretary Ryan's campaign position paper, Strengthening Libraries in Illinois, he stated: "As Secretary of State, I will develop a plan to assure that library services are available in every community in the state. I want to know that the children growing up on farms and in rural communities will have the same access to information and resources as children in university communities."

Of the 624 public libraries in Illinois, 103 libraries serve populations of less than 1,500; 108 libraries serve 1,500 to 3,000; 89 libraries serve 3,000 to 5,000; and 92 libraries serve 5,000 to 10,000. Half of all Illinois land lies outside areas which are taxed for public library service. Even with twenty years of the Project PLUS (Promoting Larger Units of Service) program and other library extensions, 1.4 million people in Illinois do not have public library services, and there are 21 counties that have only one public library.

The members of the Rural Library Panel represented both public and private sectors interests in libraries, government, education and commerce. Persons appointed to the panel were as follows:

Debbie Aggert, Director, Ashland Public Library District  
Dr. Fred A. Banks, Superintendent, DuQuoin Public Schools  
Phil Bradshaw, Board of Directors, Farmers National Bank of  
Griggsville  
Brent Crossland, President, Illinois Library Association  
Dr. Donald Uchtman, Director, University of Illinois Cooperative  
Extension  
Jack Ewing, Macomb  
Cary Israel, Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board  
Nancy Kreczmer, Media Specialist, Jacksonville Public Schools  
John McCall, President, Knox College, Galesburg  
Joe Sciacca, Consultant, Lincoln Trail Libraries System, Champaign  
Janice Sherman, Director, Morton Public Library  
Karen Stott, Director, Savanna Public Library District  
Jim Ubel, Director, Shawnee Library System, Carterville  
Dr. Rhonda Vinson, Director, Office of Community Development,  
Southern Illinois University - Carbondale  
Jim Walsh, Carmi  
Dr. Norm Walzer, Director, Institute for Rural Affairs, Western  
Illinois University, Macomb  
Bridget L. Lamont, Director, Illinois State Library (Chair)

Five public hearings were scheduled throughout the state in the Summer and Fall of 1991. Over 350 people attended the hearings which were held on July 29 in Effingham; on August 14 at Carl Sandburg College in Galesburg; on August 26 at the Watseka Public Library; on September 10 at the West Frankfort Public Library; and September 23 at the Illinois State Library in Springfield. During that period, written suggestions were also received from throughout the state regarding rural library development and library service in unserved and underserved areas.

This report and its recommendations are based on the testimony at the hearings, correspondence received and subsequent deliberations of the Rural Library Panel. The report reflects the recurrent themes which were evident throughout the hearing process and expanded or confirmed in written correspondence.

## Action Agenda

1. **As an educational imperative, establish as a goal that all Illinois citizens have public library service, and that students should have access to library services.**

Betty Head, Director of the Shawneetown Public Library, testified that Galatin County has a consolidated school district, but only the children living in Shawneetown may check out books from the public library. Access to information is vital for human and economic development, and the accepted, familiar and logical access point is the public library. The financial framework of public and school libraries must be improved so libraries can meet the needs of their users. Rural library users are able to use their library card in other libraries in Illinois. Libraries in rural areas have borrowing privileges in the 2,700 libraries in the Illinois Library and Information Network (ILLINET), so library users in rural communities should have the same access to information as available to library users in urban communities.

A concern expressed throughout the hearings was that while equal service cannot be guaranteed, a minimum level of service can be guaranteed. Examples of inequities are in the areas of annual receipts, salaries and hours of service as reported to the Illinois State Library in Fiscal Year 1990-1991. Public libraries serving populations up to 3,000 have the average annual receipts of \$29,336, or \$9.78 per capita, compared to public libraries serving populations of 50,000 to 75,000 which have average annual receipts of \$2.25 million, or \$30.00 per capita. The budget for salaries and wages for public libraries serving populations up to 3,000 is \$11,921 compared to libraries serving populations of 50,000 to

75,000 which have average salary and wages of \$1.2 million. Also, the public libraries in rural areas are open fewer hours than libraries located in other parts of the state. Public libraries serving populations up to 3,000 are open an average of 25 hours per week compared to public libraries serving populations of 50,000 to 75,000 that are open an average of 70 hours per week.

To implement this recommendation, the Illinois State Library will take the following actions:

- Direct the library systems to develop and implement regional plans to provide comprehensive local library services. A variety of options can be utilized, such as a major push to hold library establishment or expansion referenda throughout the system area on a single day; organizing county-wide library service areas, including contractual arrangements; and developing joint school - public library service entities.
- Implement and promote a statewide borrowers card program throughout the State of Illinois. All types of libraries are encouraged to participate in this voluntary program.
- The strategies under this recommendation and other recommendations in this report negate the need for non-resident cards beyond 1997. People in the unserved areas of the state will be given opportunities prior to the next century to assure the provision of public library service in the areas where they reside. If they elect not to take advantage of the opportunity, then library service providers are to concentrate on the needs of the citizens providing tax support for libraries.



2. **Determine the feasibility of toll-free telecommunications access to the ILLINET Online statewide database and regional library system databases for library and public use.**

Kendi Kelley, Director of the C.E. Brehm Memorial Public Library District in Mt. Vernon, described telecommunications cost escalation at the West Frankfort hearing. She stated her library's telecommunications costs increased from \$156 per month in 1982 to \$572 per month in 1991 for one data circuit for its shared automation program. Jan Beck Ison, Director of the Lincoln Trail Libraries System (LTLS) stated that a LTLS member library located one hundred miles away from the system database pays a \$400 per month telecommunications charge for a dedicated circuit. Juanita Moore of the Centralia Public Library stated at the Effingham hearing that libraries are trying to keep pace with technology because "we don't want to be put back in the 1950s."

Although many school libraries own the needed computer equipment, the telecommunications costs keep the library staff from accessing databases, thereby depriving students of fair access to library resources. Vital information that library users need is in regional library systems and statewide databases, but it is useless unless it is accessible. The financial barriers to accessing information need to be minimized.

To implement this recommendation, the Illinois State Library will take the following actions:

- Work with the business community to underwrite funding for telecommunications access to statewide and regional library databases.
- Encourage rural libraries to solicit support from local businesses to

assist in the purchase of computer equipment which can be used to access online databases, such as ILLINET Online and other information databases, as well as to assist with library operations and to be used for public access.

- Inform rural libraries about the availability of online databases that will be helpful to users, especially in the areas of economic development and health care.
  - Continue to address library applications of the Illinois Department of Central Management Service's fiber optic network. This effort should include working with netILLINOIS, a collaborative effort among information professionals, to establish an education and research network for the State of Illinois.
  - Identify rural libraries for participation in national resource sharing network through netIllinois.
  - Determine which types of automation technologies are the most appropriate and cost effective for a rural library service area, as well as investigating a way to locate operational computers that public and private entities intend to replace and place them in libraries.
- 3. Structure rural library service around the strongest service entity in a community: a public library, school library or an academic library.**

Ruth Childers, Director of Olney Public Library, testified in Effingham that public librarians should think of themselves as the rural community's information specialists. She said partnerships among libraries should be formed, and the libraries "in each community are different and should build on their strengths." Rick Dulaney of Cissna Park, a model joint school-public library facility, testified in Watseka and outlined the

success of the combined school-public library facility in Cissna Park. The combined operation is successful because of community support, and he pointed out that a joint facility project "should not be viewed as a way to save money, but as a way to better utilize money."

To implement this recommendation, the Illinois State Library will take the following actions:

- Establish an LSCA funding priority to organize and establish combined multitype library units of library service. LSCA grant applications should be solicited by the Illinois State Library in FY 1994 for planning cooperative service ventures.
  - Explore the option of schools contracting for library services for students from the local public library.
  - Consider establishment of a funding priority for combined public-school library facilities under the Secretary of State's Public Library Construction Grant Program.
  - Establish an award program to recognize library service entities which contribute to the quality of life in rural communities. This activity should be pursued as a partnership with the private sector as a means of underwriting the program.
4. **Develop new means of delivering library education to staff members in rural libraries.**

Kenneth Wagner of Kewanee Public Library District stated in Galesburg that it is difficult to attract qualified library personnel from outside the community because Kewanee cannot afford competitive wages, and "we have to rely on local people who need training." Jane Hill of the Marrowbone Public Library District stated in Springfield that it is

important for rural library staff members to have access to continuing education activities that are conveniently and centrally located so "librarians can help librarians." Continuing education opportunities for staff are limited, and the long distance to travel to workshops limits attendance in rural areas. Also, the one-person library would have to close to permit the one librarian to attend a meeting.

Because of limited budgets, hiring a librarian with a masters degree in library science is out of reach. Staff members without the MLS degree have the same demands placed upon them as a patron places on librarians with professional degrees. It was noted during the hearings that a degree is less important for some rural librarians than a certification for competency.

To implement this recommendation, the Illinois State Library will take the following actions:

- Work with the Illinois graduate schools providing accredited masters degrees in library and information science, and with the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and the Illinois Community College Board in developing a consortium to provide education and training for rural library personnel.
- Support innovative rural library education programs with Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) grants.
- Develop a recognition program for individuals working in rural libraries with certificates for levels of continuing education achievement.
- Utilize satellite technology as an alternative means to deliver continuing education for library staff members and trustees.

- Solicit funding from foundations and the private sector to underwrite library continuing education activities, especially in the areas of accessing information databases and library management.

**5. Take advantage of public sector - private sector partnerships to provide the financial support necessary to expand rural library services.**

Speaking at the Lincoln Trail Libraries System 25th Anniversary Forum on November 18, 1991, Secretary Ryan stated that in FY 1992 "we significantly increased the amount of federal grant funding for our rural libraries. We steered a total of \$1.36 million to rural library initiatives...a 60 percent increase in funding from last year. Moreover, those grants comprise about 45 percent of the total funding program, compared with just 30 percent last year. I saw that effort as a step toward equalizing the vast differences that exist in funding for our rural and more urban libraries." Funding provided from the Office of Secretary of State and the Illinois State Library help rural libraries help themselves and their users. Grant programs for establishing and enhancing public library and school library services should continue to expand in order to assure that rural libraries take steps towards progress. Since 1972, 146 Project PLUS grants have been awarded for approximately \$8.8 million, with 101 successful referenda that have resulted in 656,175 people receiving public library service.

To implement this recommendation, the Illinois State Library will take the following actions:

- Study the public library equalization aid program in order to develop a strategy so qualifying libraries will meet the minimum criteria for public library service, as outlined in the Project PLUS guidelines, through annexation or merger within five years. Equalization aid

should be re-evaluated before the end of the decade to see if the grant program's goals have been accomplished while taking into account that libraries in economically depressed areas will continue to need support.

- Continue to use Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) grants to promote larger areas of service. LSCA grants for Project PLUS, which is for the establishment and expansion of public library districts, should continue until the end of the decade.
- Investigate with the Illinois State Board of Education the possibility of grant funds to promote cooperation among schools and public libraries in order to ensure students in rural schools have basic or improved access to library service.
- Promote the "Adopt a Library Program", a collaborative effort between public libraries and local Chambers of Commerce to promote how the local business community can assist libraries.

**6. Commit to the implementation of the recommendations of the Rural Library Panel by the year 1996.**

At the conclusion of the final Rural Library Panel hearing in Springfield, panel member Cary Israel of the Illinois Community College Board stated that the major issue facing rural libraries is dwindling financial resources in a period of greater demands for library and information services. He indicated that libraries and education are growth industries, and society needs to recognize their value. At the Rural Library Panel's working session on October 28, 1991, panel members agreed that rural library development needs to be addressed on an on-going basis, and in order to assure that the Rural Library Panel's

work is brought to fruition, the Illinois State Library commits itself to implement the recommendations in this report.

To implement this recommendation, the Illinois State Library will take the following actions:

- Develop a definition and vision of rural library service towards the 21st Century.
- Determine what is a viable geographic size and population of a public library service area in rural Illinois.
- Develop a statewide marketing strategy to promote the value of libraries in rural communities.
- Establish a program to encourage citizens to volunteer in libraries in rural communities. Volunteers have been a key component in eradicating illiteracy in the state, and that commitment to literacy training by volunteers should be fostered, as well as encouraging them to participate in other library activities and programs.

## **7. Other recommendations**

In addition to the major recommendations, the Rural Library Panel has identified other actions which the Office of the Secretary of State and the Illinois State Library will take, including the following:

- Investigate and monitor legislation in other states which allow for a tax on video rentals, earmarked for public and school libraries.
- Promote alternative sources of funding, such as the Illinois Rural Bond Bank, the Illinois Development Finance Authority and tax increment financing districts. The Illinois State Library should

explore packaging a bond issue for libraries interested in making their facilities accessible to people with disabilities, as well as renovating libraries that are in need of structural upgrades or new construction.

- Promote the library's importance to a community's economic development, by emphasizing the value of libraries to businesses and governing officials. The role of libraries needs to be communicated by the state library and library systems.
- Identify successes where rural libraries have contributed to economic and community development.
- Ensure that individuals representing the needs of rural libraries are appointed to Illinois State Library committees.
- Investigate funding options to provide tax support for public library service, including using the state income tax as a potential source of revenue for libraries; taxing the residence in a rural area rather than the home and farmland; and the state providing minimum funding for public libraries with local funds to pay for supplemental expenses.
- Appoint staff at the State Library with rural library experience.

### Conclusion

The Rural Library Panel considers its statewide hearings and recommendations as the first steps in an on-going process of developing rural Illinois libraries to their fullest potential. As a new century approaches, it is clear that economic development will be a major endeavor for rural communities. Community library and information services



provided by an informed staff are a vital resource in improving the quality of life in a rural community. The condition of rural libraries is not unique to the Prairie State, and the recommendations in this report reflect an emerging national vision of rural library development.

In September 1990, at the Wilson Symposium on the Future of Public Libraries in Omaha, a foundation for rural library planning for the year 2000 was formulated. The symposium participants identified the need for library staff and trustees to have opportunities to attend continuing education; the need for new approaches towards funding and supporting library services; the need for affordable telecommunications to allow librarians and patrons to access library and information databases; and the importance of the library being a leading institution in order to foster economic development in rural communities.

As indicated by those who participated in the hearings throughout Illinois, a rural library means different things to different people...a congenial place with social benefits; a window to total information; a place children can walk or bike to; a comfortable place to curl up with a book; and a vital component for economic development, just to name a few. A rural library can help achieve our vision of children growing up in rural Illinois able to re-invest the knowledge and skills they acquire from their local libraries in their communities.

