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# ACRL guidelines for branch libraries in colleges and universities

*Approved as policy by the Board of Directors of the Association of College and Research Libraries, on June 26, 1990.*

## Introduction

These guidelines have been developed to provide a framework for academic librarians and administrators to assess the need for branch libraries and to develop policies for administering effective branch services. The ACRL "Standards for university libraries: Evaluation of performance" (*C&RL News*, September 1989) or *Standards for College Libraries* (1986) should also be consulted when evaluating existing branch services and performance.

In this document, the term "branch" has been used generally to define a library service unit under the administration of the library administration, with collections and staff, which is physically separate or divided from other library service units, with the exception of undergraduate libraries (which have been excluded from the definition of a branch library). "Branch" can include different types of libraries such as:

- a. libraries with collections and services organized to serve the needs of one or two academic disciplines;
- b. divisional libraries with collections and services organized to serve the needs of several related subject fields.

## The guidelines

Branch libraries under a variety of designations have been established to extend the services of the main university library at many academic institutions. Factors governing their development include the mission of the institution, historical appendages, campus geography, enrollment patterns, financial conditions, space requirements, instructional techniques, user expectations and demands, and external pressures. These guidelines identify the primary factors influencing the development and maintenance of branch library collections and services. A review of these factors as they

relate to local circumstances should assist librarians and their institutions in evaluating the need for branch libraries and enable them to assess whether branch libraries should be established or continued. The reviewing process is described in the following sections: programs, resources, external relations and communication, and evaluation.

## Programs

The needs of modern scholarship must be served by access to a broad spectrum of resources including the literature of a special field and all subjects of related interest. The primary mission of the branch library is to provide information and access to information to meet the instructional and research needs of its user group. A branch library's programs must provide for the requirements of its primary clientele as well as the cross-disciplinary needs of others in the academic community. An analysis of the need for a branch or an evaluation of an existing branch's programs should consider the following:

- a. the information needs of the total academic community;
- b. the primary clientele (students, faculty, academic departments) and their information needs;
- c. geographical location related to primary clientele and to the total community of users;
- d. collection development and management policies (including the cost of duplicating resources on the campus);
- e. the physical arrangement of the collections to meet the cross-disciplinary needs of the academic community;
- f. user services including hours of access, appropriate technologies, and staffing requirements;
- g. access to union catalogs, delivery systems, and specialized information systems;
- h. space and equipment requirements;
- i. operating costs and financial support requirements.

The decision to establish or continue a branch library should be accompanied by administrative policy statements clearly defining the responsibilities of the library system, including its branches.

Library policy statements supporting objectives and operating procedures of branches should cover the following: the purpose of the branch; administrative structure; collection management and development; services; staffing; resource allocation; and facilities. Branch libraries must be regarded as integral components of the central library system. This integration implies that the goals of branch libraries must be compatible with those set in the course of the overall budgetary process. Moreover, in assessing the success of the library system in meeting its goals, the achievements and needs of branches must be taken into account.

Branch libraries typically have a special relationship with one or more academic departments or research institutes. This special relationship may place specific responsibilities on branch libraries, to the extent that the associated departments and institutes depend on them to meet accreditation requirements, and special information needs. At the same time, a branch library must be integrated into the central library system and serve the entire university community.

### Resources

Effective branch libraries require adequate resources: personnel, facilities, and collections, to perform their mission. Implicit with the creation of a branch library is a commitment to funding its development, ongoing services, and growth while maintaining adequate support levels for library services required by the total academic community. Branch libraries must maintain the same standards of service, but not necessarily the same services, as the main library with respect to access, staffing, assistance to users, and adequacy of physical facilities.

**Personnel and Staffing.** Competent staffing must be provided to ensure the proper development and use of the library's services and collections. The staff is a primary link between the community's needs and the library's services and collections. In general, a branch library requires the full-time attention of one or more librarians, along with appropriate support staff, to provide adequate administration, collection management and development, and services. Specialized branch libraries often require librarians with specific subject backgrounds to meet the teaching, research, and learning needs of the users. The mission of the school(s) or unit(s) served and their level of dependency on library materials should also be considered in determining the level of professional staff required. The total number of professionals and support staff in the branch depends on the size and scope of the branch; staffing levels must be adequate to provide services and maintain hours of operation. The library administration, with its overview of sys-

temwide library needs, has the final responsibility to determine and justify branch staffing levels.

**Facilities.** Branch libraries must be housed in suitable quarters for maintaining the collections and provide favorable study and research conditions for users. Neither users nor materials must be endangered by poor environmental conditions or crowded space. Comfortable, well lighted, clean space with adequate and appropriate seating and convenient access to the collections and all equipment (including workstations, microform and audiovisual equipment) is necessary. Related materials, not accessible in the branch, must be safely and appropriately housed in other libraries or in storage locations with reasonable and adequate retrieval and delivery systems (such as direct document delivery or telefacsimile) and/or convenient hours for onsite use at the storage location. Finally, proper cleaning and maintenance of the branch facility is essential to ensure its attractiveness and usability.

**Collections.** The branch library purchases or provides access to the necessary range and depth of library materials, as described in the collection policy of the branch, to meet the information needs of its primary constituents and support the academic programs which it serves. The collections should ideally provide for a significant part of the literature and information needs of its primary constituents. Increasingly diverse patterns of interdisciplinary research by a branch's users may make this ideal difficult to achieve. When the primary constituents must go beyond the branch to meet some of their needs, the branch librarians must provide effective assistance in accessing alternate sources.

The value of a collection is determined by its usability as well as by its quality and size. Policies governing access must be clearly stated and readily available. In addition, effective bibliographic access must be provided to the branch's collections, and the branch must also provide access to the online catalogs and union catalogs of the library system.

Finally, the collections must be adequately housed with proper environmental controls and systematically arranged in an understandable fashion, with safeguards against loss, mutilation, and theft, so that they are accessible to all users. Provisions must also be made for the preservation of the collections. Additionally, appropriate equipment must be available in the branch for using any special formats included in the branch's collections.

### Communications

As components of a centralized library organization serving the specific needs of a discrete client-

tele, branch libraries require ties with a number of agencies and individuals, on a multitude of levels. The goal of all communications should be to assure the effective operation of the branch within the service structure. There are two types of communication that need to be developed and monitored closely:

- a. communication about library services (e.g., publicity);
- b. the communication which constitutes library service (e.g., reference service). Communication in the following relationships must reach a healthy level to ensure successful library performance.

**Primary clientele.** The branch library must serve as an effective liaison between the faculty, staff, students, and administration of the schools or departments served by the branch and the library administration. Such a liaison function mandates the establishment of formal and informal mechanisms to involve the primary clientele in decisions related to the library.

Branch librarians should employ a variety of methods to maintain awareness of the research and instruction needs of their clientele. Participation in appropriate departmental activities—seminars, orientations, and committees—helps incorporate the library and its staff into the intellectual life of the department or school. Efforts to work with new faculty, programs, institutes, etc., can be particularly productive.

**Central library and other branch libraries.** The branch library must participate in formal and informal contacts with both main library departments and other branch libraries to exchange information about functions related to technical and public services. A structure which encourages the exchange of information and expertise among branch libraries is also desirable. The establishment of connections with each other and with essential centralized services is paramount to effective and comprehensive branch library service.

**Professional organizations and governmental relations.** Branch librarians must make an effort to keep the appropriate professional organizations (e.g., ALA, ACRL, state library associations, and the professional organizations of the disciplines served) aware of the special issues affecting branch libraries.

### Evaluation: Achievement measures

Since branch libraries are to be regarded as integral components of the overall library system of a university or college, the same basic principles described in "Standards for university libraries: Evaluation of performance" (*C&RL News*, September 1989) apply also to branch libraries. The criteria for achievement and the mechanisms for the evaluation of achievement may also be influ-

enced by the special relationships that may exist between a branch library and the particular disciplines it serves, especially when these disciplines include library performance in their accreditation requirements. Criteria for use in evaluation of branch libraries include:

**Adequacy of the budget.** Provision must be made for an adequate budget to support the branch library's services and collections.

a. Is the budget in line with that of comparable branch libraries in comparable institutions?

b. Does the budget support the purchase of or access to the necessary range and depth of library materials as described in the branch's collection policy and as required by the accrediting bodies for the branch's disciplines?

c. Does the budget support appropriate numbers and kinds of staff for the programs needed?

d. Does the budget provide adequate support for operating expenses?

e. Does the budget provide adequate support for new programs and innovations?

f. Does the branch librarian have adequate influence in the process of budgetary development? Does the librarian have adequate knowledge of overall library system goals set in the process of budgetary development?

g. Does the branch librarian have the appropriate level of discretion and control over the expenditure of the allocated budget?

**Size of the collections.** There are no absolute standards for the size of collections. The fundamental criterion is that the collections should provide for a significant part of the literature needs of the primary constituencies served by the branch, as described in the library's collection development policy. The evaluation should be concerned with the following specific considerations:

a. Are the size and growth rate of the collection in line with those of comparable branches at comparable institutions?

b. Do the size and growth rate of the collection meet the requirements of accrediting bodies of the branch's primary constituents?

c. Does the collection profile match the academic programs as described in the collection policy? Is there sufficient breadth to allow a timely response to changes in curricula or research interests of the primary constituencies? Are there areas of chronic undersupply or oversupply?

**Access and availability.** The usefulness of a library's collection is ultimately determined by the effectiveness of the bibliographic and physical access provided.

a. Does the catalog effectively inform the user about what is owned and where it is located?

b. Is bibliographic access to a branch available from other libraries in the overall system?

c. Are the collections properly housed and ar-

ranged for physical access? If a portion of the collection is housed in a remote location, can such materials be conveniently obtained by users?

d. Are collections actually available? Is availability measured in a meaningful way at regular intervals?

e. Can the branch library provide convenient access to materials not owned by the overall library system?

**Preservation and conservation.** Provision should be made for maintaining the branch's collections.

a. Does the branch have proper environmental controls? Is there provision for moving rare or fragile materials to a more protected environment if conditions within the branch are not adequate for housing such materials?

b. Does the branch have an emergency plan?

c. Is there adequate provision for the preservation and conservation of damaged, aged, or brittle materials in the branch's collection?

d. Does the branch have adequate safeguards against loss, mutilation, and theft?

**Adequacy of services.** Typically, there will be a trade-off between proximity to primary users, optimized by a pattern of numerous smaller branch libraries, and range and depth of services, optimized by larger, more centralized service points. The pattern adopted by any given library system will be partly determined by user preference, partly by historical accident, and partly by opportunities for improvement and change. Each branch should attempt to measure the permanence and success of services offered, whether through statistical methods, or by user surveys, or by other means.

a. What range of services is offered?

b. Are the services offered appropriate to the particular information needs of the primary constituents of the branch? Are there services that are omitted that the primary users would value more than the services that are provided?

c. What statistics and other measures of quantity and quality are kept?

d. What is the ratio of public services staff to the number of primary constituents?

### Evaluation: Assessment

The mechanisms for evaluation and reassessment should include the ongoing communication processes discussed in the previous section. The budgetary process is particularly important as a mechanism for assessing the achievements of branch libraries and for assuring that the goals of the branches are consonant with those of the overall library system. In addition to ongoing evaluation processes, the goals and achievements of branch libraries should be periodically subjected to more formal mechanisms of examination, either as part of the assessment process of the library system as a whole, or in the context of a separate evaluation of the primary constituencies of specific branch libraries. These mechanisms will vary with the style adopted by the parent institution for self-examination, and with the special requirements of the disciplines served by the branch library. In all cases, they should include reportback, discussion, and adjustment.

**Reportback.** Reporting should include full and frank statements of the findings of the examining body. Reporting should acknowledge successes and failures, and should include suggestions for improvement.

**Discussion.** Appropriate forums should be provided for the discussion of all aspects of branch library programs, with the intention of providing all parties with the opportunity to examine the interrelationships between resources and expectations without preconditions.

**Adjustment.** The outcome of reporting and discussion should be a reassessment of goals and objectives. Budgetary and operational limitations should be taken into account, and realistic expectations for the future should be established. By this process, the university, the overall library system, and the branch library can maintain a match between resources and mission. ■ ■

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## ALA student membership promotion

ALA, in coordination with the leaders of the 26 official ALA student groups, has published a brochure, "Put ALA on Your Resume: A Guide for Student Members." Topics include ALA's Placement Center, student member dues, discounts on publications and graphics, student chapters, involvement in ALA, and the professional support offered by ALA's program offices. Students are also advised on how to receive copies of the *ALA Check-*

*list of Publications* and the *ALA Handbook of Organizations*, and where to find the complete list of ALA-sponsored scholarships and awards. The brochures are available from the deans of ALA-accredited library schools and officers of the student chapter groups. Free copies are also available from: Katherine G. Wilkins, Manager, Membership Promotion, Membership Services, ALA, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. ■ ■