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Library Services Improvement Act (1988-1989)

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## Library Services Improvement Act (1988-1989): Report 02

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# SUMMARY OF THE LIBRARY IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1988

In spring 1988, the Reagan Administration proposed a major restructuring of Federal support for library programs, and, for the first time, requested funding for the Nation's libraries. Designed to increase the impact that libraries have on education and lifelong learning, the new legislation reflects an appropriate and needed Federal role as we approach the 21st century.

The Library Improvement Act of 1988 would refine programs currently authorized under the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) and Title II of the Higher Education Act.

The legislation emphasizes three program areas:

Title I would improve library services to economically disadvantaged and handicapped individuals. Title II would increase access to library books and other materials through resource sharing. And Title III would support research and assessment needed to improve the quality of library services.

The Administration request for these activities in fiscal year 1989 is \$76 million.

## TITLE I: SERVICES TO DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE

Under Title I, \$45 million is requested to assist the States in support of local projects to provide new or expanded library services to economically disadvantaged or handicapped individuals.

Typical Title I projects would include, but are not limited to:

- adult basic education programs;
- literacy training;
- expansion of library collections in rural areas;
- English instruction;
- information and referral centers;
- summer reading programs;
- after-school homework programs;
- services to correctional institutions, nursing homes, or hospitals;
- specialized training of library personnel; and
- purchase and distribution of large-print books and other materials for handicapped persons.

Although Title I funds may not be used for the acquisition, expansion, or construction of buildings, funds may be used for minor remodeling if doing so would improve access to libraries for handicapped individuals.

State library agencies may either support projects directly or through subgrants to public and private agencies. Collaborative projects would be encouraged.

## TITLE II: RESOURCE SHARING

Under Title II, \$30 million is requested to encourage increased access to library books and other materials through new or expanded library resource-sharing networks. Under Part A, \$20 million would be allocated to the States for the development of interstate and intrastate networks or for the expansion of existing ones. The remaining \$10 million (Part B) would be earmarked for discretionary grants for the development or expansion of library networks across State lines.

Title II funds could be used for the following activities:

- specialized training of library personnel to operate library networks;
- acquisition and maintenance of computer hardware, software, and communications lines;
- purchase and/or restoration of materials to complete significant collections; and
- the support of other activities that lead to the sharing of books and other materials among libraries.

## TITLE III: RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

Under Title III, \$1 million is requested to support field-initiated research, evaluation, and policy studies needed to improve and strengthen all types of libraries.

Title III funds could be used for the following types of studies:

- studies on improving library services for economically disadvantaged or handicapped persons;
- investigations of methods to increase resource sharing and make library services more efficient;
- assessments of users' needs;
- assessments of the effectiveness and efficiency of library services; and
- studies in the area of funding and policy.

## DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS

All \$45 million of Title I funds and the \$20 million Title II-A funds would be offered as State formula grants. Each State would receive the same minimum grant; additional funding would be allocated based on each State's population. State library agencies would serve as the administrative and fiscal agent for these funds. In addition, the territories and outlying areas would receive one-half of one-percent of these Title I and II funds.

To receive the discretionary grant money provided for in Title II-B and Title III, eligible organizations - including libraries of all types - would apply directly to the U.S. Department of Education.

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE LIBRARY IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1988

**1. Question:** What is the Library Improvement Act of 1988?

**Answer:** The Library Improvement Act is a legislative proposal to increase the impact of libraries on education and lifelong learning by focusing Federal support on three high-cost areas which are of urgent concern:

- It would improve the contribution libraries make to the education of economically disadvantaged and handicapped Americans.
- It would increase access to a wider array of books and other materials by expanding the support for resource sharing.
- It would support the research and assessment needed to improve the quality of library services.

This measure has been designed to refine and refocus programs in the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) and Title II of the Higher Education Act.

**2. Question:** Why has the Administration decided to support funding for library programs now, after proposing zero funding for the past seven years?

**Answer:** Over the past 30 years, the existing law has become so elaborate that the Federal role in library programs is no longer clearly focused. As a proportion of the total spending on libraries, the Federal contribution is small.

The Administration is now proposing a restructuring of Federal support for libraries - one that addresses new and evolving priorities more effectively. The proposal targets Federal support to three areas of urgent educational concern: services for handicapped and economically disadvantaged people; resource sharing; and research and assessment.

The American library system has achieved *access* for the vast majority of citizens. Since LSCA was enacted in 1956, the percentage of Americans with access to library services has increased from 56 to 96 percent. Now, we are striving to define *quality* services by encouraging new and experimental approaches in areas where support is most needed.

**3. Question:** What kind of appropriation are you requesting?

**Answer:** The new legislation proposes \$76 million for library programs in fiscal year 1989. Our request targets three key areas where a reasonable investment will do the most good:

- Title I of the proposed legislation would provide \$45 million to be allocated among the States for new or expanded services to economically disadvantaged or handicapped people.
- Under Title II, \$30 million would be authorized in fiscal year 1989 for projects that would increase access to library books and other materials through new or expanded resource-sharing networks.
- The \$1 million funding requested for Title III would go toward research and assessment of library services, an area that has received little public or private support.

**4. Question:** What do you hope to accomplish under the new legislation that you can't do under existing law?

**Answer:**

- The new legislation targets Federal dollars on urgent needs and high-cost areas: services for economically disadvantaged and handicapped people; resource sharing; and research and assessment.
- Under the new Title I, we hope to reach that segment of the public most in need of good library services and least likely to use what is already available. By designing library programs specifically to meet their needs and investing the bulk of our resources here, we hope to draw in the economically disadvantaged and handicapped and enhance their educational opportunities.
- The new Title II would stimulate greater sharing of resources among libraries. Although interlibrary loans and networking have increased in recent years, there are few incentives for libraries to serve more than their immediate clientele or lend materials outside of their service areas. The new legislation provides an impetus in the form of funding for developing library networks. The State formula grant program would focus on both interstate and intrastate resource sharing; while the smaller discretionary grants administered by the Federal government would focus on national networks crossing State lines.
- The way in which projects would receive funding under the new Titles I and II-A is specially designed to encourage experimental, creative approaches to improving library services. Administered by the State library agencies, Federal funds would be used as "seed money" for beginning new programs to

serve disadvantaged individuals (Title I) and enhance resource sharing among libraries (Title II-A). Program goals and objectives and an evaluation plan would be established for each project. At the end of the first two years, each project would be evaluated by guidelines established by the State library agency. If the projects were meeting their stated goals, they would be continued. Projects could receive Federal money for up to five years. After that, State or local governments or private organizations would assume responsibility for continued funding of projects which, by then, would be well established and of demonstrated value.

- Title III would provide more funding for assessment of libraries, so that successful programs could be identified and replicated or adapted by libraries throughout the country. This is in keeping with recommendations first made at the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services in 1979 and later in *Alliance for Excellence: Librarians Respond to A Nation at Risk* published by the Department in 1984. In addition, the new Title III addresses the need for research on the impact of computer and communications technology on libraries.
- Under the new legislation, States would have more discretion in administering the program. Collaborative programs among libraries and other types of institutions would be encouraged.

**5. Question:** How would library programs be affected by this legislation?

**Answer:** The legislation would target support for the high-cost areas of services to disadvantaged and handicapped people and resource sharing. The initial LSCA was instrumental in precipitating many improvements in library services during the last 30 years, most notably, easy access to libraries for the vast majority of Americans. However, funding needs have evolved from the most rudimentary needs to the more sophisticated needs of an increasingly technological society in which disadvantaged citizens are often left behind. The new legislation would support those high-cost areas that allow for the equalization of educational opportunity. It would provide the leverage for libraries to support innovative and experimental programs that, if successful, could be continued with non-Federal funds.

**6. Question:** What library services would no longer receive Federal support if LSCA and Title II of the Higher Education Act were replaced by the Library Improvement Act of 1988?

**Answer:** There are several important distinctions between the proposed and current legislation:

- Under the proposed Title I, many of the same types of programs would still be federally funded. However, the programs funded would have to be designed to serve the special needs of economically disadvantaged and handicapped individuals. Federal support would be targeted to those most in need, instead of diffused among programs and activities for the general population.
- The Library Improvement Act would not set aside money for Hawaiian natives and Indian tribes. Those groups would be eligible to receive support for library services through their State agencies and through discretionary grants.
- Under the proposed legislation, Federal funding for construction of new public library facilities would be discontinued. However, funds may be used for minor remodeling if doing so would improve access to libraries for handicapped individuals. Conditions have changed since LSCA was enacted 30 years ago, and the availability of library services is no longer a major problem. There are, however, other barriers to library services for many. These include poverty, ignorance, physical and mental disabilities, lack of resources in some areas, and lack of shared knowledge among library systems. We need to take into account these different conditions and redirect our support to areas where it is most needed. That is what the Library Improvement Act is designed to do.
- Many services provided for in Title II of the Higher Education Act would be incorporated into the Library Improvement Act. However, fellowships for minorities and women to pursue graduate study in library science would be eliminated. Federal financial aid for such study would, of course, continue to be available through Guaranteed Student Loans, as well as other sources described in the Department's publication *Higher Education Opportunities for Minorities and Women* (available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; stock number 065-000-00252-3; \$5.50).