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Reauthorization of the Library Services and Construction Act

A Position Paper from
The Urban Libraries Council
January 1994

Framework

ULC affirms that the federal government is an appropriate source of funding for some kinds of public library services. It is appropriate for the federal government to support services which are part of national networks. It is traditional for the federal government to promote equity by providing funding for institutions and projects which increase access to basic information and educational resources.

ULC also affirms that the nation's public libraries can be effective partners in implementing national goals in many areas. Of particular concern at this time are the libraries' abilities and willingness to guarantee that all residents have access to the information highway, and that all children have access to resources they need for learning.

ULC believes that an effective effort to reauthorize the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) in these times of reinventing government and deficit reduction:

* must be grounded in a proposal that acknowledges and meets the needs of federally elected officials to be fiscally responsible as well as responsive to the needs of their constituents;

* must reflect an understanding of the appropriate roles of governments at the federal, state, and local levels for financial support of public libraries;

* must be enthusiastically supported by the library community and be supportable by a wide coalition of advocates outside the library community; and

* must help public libraries provide services for all people.
The Proposal

I. Technology Section

It is proposed that a portion of the federal money for public libraries be allocated to the states via the state library agencies to be used by them in support of their plans to guarantee that all residents have access to electronic information, whether it originates locally, nationally, or globally. It is further proposed that each state library agency annually report on the increase in the numbers of residents with convenient, affordable access to the information highway until 100% of the residents can be said to be "connected".

Money could be used for hardware, software, training, graphics, planning, etc. It could be applied to meet the needs of the general population or of targeted segments such as small businesses, the visually handicapped, etc. In other words, it would be flexible, able to be applied to the states' plans in the ways most appropriate to each state's situation.

Issues that would need further attention include definition of what "access" here really means and the possible development of levels of access, regulations concerning local (state) levels of effort, how much money should be sought, and how it should be distributed. These are all solvable, but require further discussion.

Rationale:

* Builds on the model of the first Library Services Act by having as a goal access for all residents of the country.
* Reflects the White House Conference priority of access to technology.
* Addresses a role acknowledged to be appropriate for public libraries by the federal government.
* Would be fairly easy to administer.
* Would have measurable results.
* Reflects appropriate roles for state and federal governments.
* Is simple to understand!
II. Equity Section

It is proposed that a portion of the federal money for libraries be used to enhance services for children of all cultures who live below the federal poverty level. Local public libraries would receive (via the state library agencies) per capita aid to enhance services to eligible children who live within their service areas. Local libraries would be accountable to the state library agency for uses of the funds and must demonstrate that the funds were applied in such a manner as to enhance services available for eligible children.

Money could be used to extend branch hours in communities where many eligible children live, to enhance library service to preschoolers, to hire children's outreach specialists, to provide additional support for homework assignments, to operate family literacy programs, to develop programs to serve the children of new Americans, to purchase computers, etc.

Issues that would need further attention include the development of guidelines for eligible projects and appropriate levels and kinds of evaluation, the establishment of the appropriate age limits (12? 17?) for eligibility, and requirements for reporting to state library agencies.

Rationale: *Reflects a top White House Conference priority.

*Is easily included in the Department of Education's mission to promote equity.

*Builds on existing federal models for compensatory funding.

*Is fundable since both education and the needs of children living in poverty remain priorities for this administration.

*Is inexpensive to administer since numbers of eligible children and library service areas are readily obtainable and change little from year to year.

*Can be shown to have benefits in the districts of all House and Senate members.

*Is a natural for the development of a strong coalition of advocates.

*Is simple to understand and would be easy to lobby for ($1 per child 17 and younger would mean $11,428,316).
Support for LSCA Reauthorization

Whereas library services for youth are playing a vital role in implementing National Education Goals helping children and young people develop as information literate citizens; and

Whereas public librarians serve as a pre-existing nationwide and accessible network providing services for youth of all ages and income levels; and

Whereas services to children and youth are the top priority of the 1991 White House Conference on Library and Information Services; and

Whereas LSCA provides essential support for library services for youth and promotes cooperative activities and service delivery regardless of type of library;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Association for Library Service to Children strongly supports the reauthorization of LSCA and, further, that the President of LSCA on behalf of the board and membership underscore to the ALA Task Force on LSCA Reauthorization the necessity of citing specifically in LSCA proposals services to children and youth.

ALSC Legislation Committee 2/7/94

Approved by the ALSC Board 2/7/94