

THE CENTRAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

CENTRAL LIBRARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A LONG RANGE PLAN

The history and raison d'être of Central Libraries

In the 1960's a new concept of public library systems and Central Libraries began. Public library systems were designed to guide, strengthen and support local library service. Central Libraries insured that each system and therefore, each local library, had access to a large and comprehensive collection of printed library materials for study and research, usually by loan to local libraries for the use of local patrons. The goal was to ensure that each citizen have, relatively close at hand, a significant collection of print or print-based resources available for on-site use and Interlibrary Loan.

The result was the establishment of 22 systems with their accompanying central and co-central libraries. Together they serve 741 local libraries all over the State. Central libraries represent a substantial investment resulting from a long term partnership of state and local cooperation and funding which could probably not be duplicated today.

Unique characteristics of Central Libraries

Central Libraries, like systems, come in many sizes and configurations. Some serve dense urban areas. Others have rural constituencies. However, 100% of New York's population are served by Central Libraries. 52% live a community where the Central Library is their local public library. Despite their differences, Central Libraries have many things in common.

- They house significant collections
- They are a principal node in providing access to resources.
- Their staffs have considerable expertise
- They are located in the principal economic centers of New York

- They are accountable on an annual basis for planning, budgeting, and expenditures of State funds.
- They provide a coordinated set of services with the public library systems

Changes which affect Central Libraries

Changes have occurred in the Central Library program over the past. These changes require shifts in how Central Libraries go about their work. The changes are:

1. Telecommunications and computers have reduced the importance of geographic propinquity for people.
2. Many kinds of information have been digitized already and we can expect this trend to continue.
3. New York State has declared that each of its 741 libraries shall be an Electronic Doorway to the universe of library resources; the Vice President has declared that “every library, every classroom in every school” should have a free Internet connection.
4. The gaps among individual libraries’ capacity to serve patrons continues to grow. These gaps arise from both disparities of economic means and philosophies of service and role.
5. The cost of library resources is growing relative to the ability/willingness of municipalities to fund them and especially their attendant capital and maintenance costs.
6. The revolution in how knowledge is stored and accessed is requiring the public library’s professional and support staff to retool and retrain.
7. The function and role of public libraries are undergoing drastic changes. No longer limited by what is available on site or in the system, the smallest libraries can expect to be asked for the most sophisticated material from any location in the world.

The Vision

Every library and each citizen in the State will be able to hold in their hands the materials and resources they identify from the Internet and other networks. Every library, regardless of its size or financial capacity, will be able to offer a world class service to all of their patrons.

The role of the Central Library in achieving the vision

Collection

In a world where many libraries will be relying on borrowing what they need, it should be obvious that some libraries must own it. However, the Central Library collection will no longer be exclusively print-based. Instead, electronic information and licenses to access this information will become more and more important.

Principal Node of Access

The Central Libraries will be the first point of access for documents, books and new electronic sources. The New York State interlibrary loan system will continue to depend upon Central Libraries for?

Staff

The expertise of Central Library staff in the interpretation and use of information will grow in importance. Central Libraries are typically the first in the State to test and make available to the general public the latest forms of information technology. This can only be done with expert and well-trained staff, who in turn can assist member libraries.

Economic Development

Their locations in the state's principal economic centers, their expertise as information providers and the growing role of information as an economic force have made Central Libraries focal points in the economic revitalization of New York State.

Achieving the Vision

1. Complete bibliographic database conversions in all Central Libraries, connect each of them to the Internet, and put FAX machines in all of the State's 741 local libraries and their branches.

2. Connect Central Libraries electronically to promote coordinated resource development and resource sharing.
3. Create and fund the networked connections from local libraries to their Central Libraries as a training resource for local communities as they utilize electronic resources.
4. Use Central Library experience to pilot new technologies for System and local library consideration.
5. Central Libraries need to be adequately funded for their basic operations so that they have the resources and freedom to innovate and to deliver a meaningful Central Library service to their “customer” libraries. This requires recognition that effective Central Libraries depend on a partnership of State and local funding. When too great a reliance is placed on either end, the Central Library program and service to System members will suffer.
6. Subsidize telecommunications costs and provide access for all public libraries to the telecommunications network.
7. Recognize that equality of access requires a strong public library presence outside the private fee for service structure which is evolving elsewhere.

Funding and legislative initiatives

The Central Library Directors’ Association has identified the following four legislative initiatives as top priority for action.

1. **Central Library Development Aid. (273)** This program provides funding to the twenty six Central and Co-central libraries who serve the member libraries of each public library system. Examples of services provided include reference, interlibrary loan, access to collections, automation and extended hours.
2. **Central Book Aid.** This program supports the purchase of non-fiction print materials for use by member libraries. Current law provides each central library with the same appropriation: \$71,500. We recommend that this program be

changed by adding a .05 cent per capita amount to the base. This change in formula would result in a more equitable allocation of funds to those libraries serving large urban populations.

In addition we recommend that this program be renamed the Central Library Information Resource Aid, and that a variety of print and electronic resources be eligible for purchase

3. Public Library Construction Funds. With the elimination of federal support for public library construction, the need for state support has dramatically increased. A recent survey of the Central Libraries shows that almost 50% of these libraries need to renovate, expand or build new facilities within the next five years. If the state supported these construction projects at a 50% match, 29 million would be needed. While this survey did not include other public libraries, staff at Library Development estimate that 203 public libraries need to renovate, expand or build, at a cost of \$167 million.

3. Public Access to Consumer Health Information. Central Libraries are often the gateway to consumer health information, both for our own library users and for the users of member libraries. Unfortunately, the access and connections to the collections of medical libraries are often tenuous or non-existent. The state funded Hospital Library Program should include a consumer health component, and access to these collections should be broadened to include direct access by Central Libraries.

4. Electronic Doorway Library Program. We support full funding of this program. We are also requesting that the proposed EDL law be modified by removing the requirement that grant applications from Central Libraries must be a cooperative grant application, involving two or more Central Libraries. We support cooperative projects, but do not want to restrict use of the EDL funds to *only* joint efforts. Total amount requested: \$300,000 (Central Library component)

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