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West Virginia LIBRARIES

Vol. 52 • No. 3

Special Issue

July 1999

Himmel & Wilson Directions 2000 overview

*Editor's Note: The West Virginia Library Association voted at its Executive Board meeting in June to devote this entire issue of **West Virginia Libraries** to the Himmel & Wilson Directions 2000 Study which was excerpted by the West Virginia Library Commission at its May meeting. Plans are underway for the policy making process which will involve librarians in planning and implementation of certain recommendations from the study.*

Background

In November of 1997, the West Virginia Library Commission (WVLC) released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a project "to study and make recommendations in the way library services are delivered to the people of West Virginia." The purpose of the study can be summarized in the following words from the RFP: "To assure a cohesive and uniform service system throughout the State." The RFP called for an assessment of the public libraries of West Virginia and of the services and structure of the West Virginia Library Commission.

Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants was one of seven vendors to submit a proposal and was chosen to carry out the study. The Himmel & Wilson proposal described many ways in which information would be gathered. The three major methods for gaining insight into West Virginia's libraries were:

- a review of background documents supplied by WVLC,
- focus groups with librarians throughout the State of West Virginia, and,
- a mail survey of all public libraries in the State.

Personal interviews with many key individuals in the library community were also included as a mechanism to gain insight into

library service in the State.

The consultants reviewed hundreds of pages of background documentation including West Virginia Statutes related to library services, the "special laws" that govern a number of libraries, reports and publications of WVLC including statistical and budgetary reports, information regarding taxation and public funding in West Virginia including the report of the Governor's Commission on Fair Taxation entitled West Virginia's Agenda for Fair Taxation, a technology study conducted by RMG Consultants, Inc. in 1996, and reams of other documentation provided by librarians from throughout the State.

Formal focus group sessions for librarians and library trustees were held in fifteen locations that encompassed every region of West Virginia. Following is a listing of the locations of these sessions:

- Beckley
- Bluefield
- Clarksburg
- Flatwoods
- Hamlin
- Huntington
- Keyser
- Morgantown
- New Martinsville
- Parkersburg
- South Charleston
- Summersville
- Wheeling
- White Sulphur Springs
- Williamson

Over 150 people attended and participated in these sessions.

Less formal group sessions took place at the Mary H. Weir Library in Weirton and at the Putnam County Library in Hurricane. With the exception of the session in Flatwoods, which was held at the Motel/Conference Center, all sessions took place in library facilities and the five members of

the consulting team took the opportunity to tour facilities and to conduct an informal assessment of what they saw.

Linked to the focus group sessions were site visits to additional public libraries. Team members toured over twenty additional public libraries of all sizes and types, again, in all areas of the State. In summary, the consultants visited approximately 20 percent of West Virginia's public libraries.

Focus group sessions were also held in Charleston at the WVLC headquarters in two separate groups. Forty-three staff members participated in these sessions.

A mail survey was sent to all library administrative units (99) and, through the administrative units, to each of the 77 branch library locations. A more complete reporting of the survey process and results is included in a subsequent section of the report.

Finally, the consultants interviewed over twenty individuals identified by WVLC staff and by members of the Directions 2000 Committee. Some of these interviews were conducted in person and others took place over the telephone.

A total of fifteen separate trips were made to locations in West Virginia by the five consultants. The consultants spent in excess of thirty days on site in the State in the course of the project. One or more of the consultants met formally with the Directions 2000 Committee on three occasions, and the principal consultant for the project presented preliminary findings and recommendations at the December, 1998 meeting of the West Virginia Library Association (WVLA).

The following report then, is based on a considerable body of facts, on a wealth of informed opinions expressed by members of the West Virginia library community, and on the professional judgment of the consultants.

Focus Groups and Site Visit Findings

Site visits and focus groups conducted by the consultants revealed a great deal of diversity in terms of size, budget, facilities, collections, staff training, and overall quality of service. The quality of service observed was not strictly associated with size of library. High quality service and facilities were observed in a number of libraries of all sizes. However, it must also be said that inadequate service and facilities were also much in evidence across the board and regardless of size or classification of the library as a service center, affiliate, designate, or direct service library.

The consultants were consistently impressed by how much was done with so little. Overall, the operating budgets of West Virginia's libraries are dismal. Salary schedules for library workers are among the poorest in the nation. Nevertheless, the consultants were largely met with energetic, enthusiastic, and dedicated workers struggling to offer their communities the best service possible with the resources that are provided.

The consultants have conducted focus groups in libraries in many states across the nation and fully expected that certain common themes would emerge from the ses-

sions in West Virginia. Major themes of funding, the challenges of implementing new technologies, and training, especially training related to technology, were fully anticipated. The consultants were not disappointed in this regard. Those topics were dominant ones.

However, the manner in which these issues impact library service in West Virginia is unique. The library funding problem in West Virginia is a crisis of major proportions. If funding issues are not addressed, many West Virginia residents will be faced with deciding between two bleak choices: closing the library doors, or accepting very poor quality library service as the norm.

Governance and funding concerns come together in another issue identified as a problem in both the focus groups and in personal interviews. The current structure of affiliates, service centers, designates, and direct service libraries has resulted in inequity of service as well as in hard feelings and distrust between and among librarians. The different levels of service provided by service centers to their affiliates, the level of service provided by WVLC to direct service libraries, and the percentages of state aid withheld in compensation for service center and WVLC services are contentious issues that create far greater harm than the dollars involved justify. Clearly, these are issues that must be addressed.

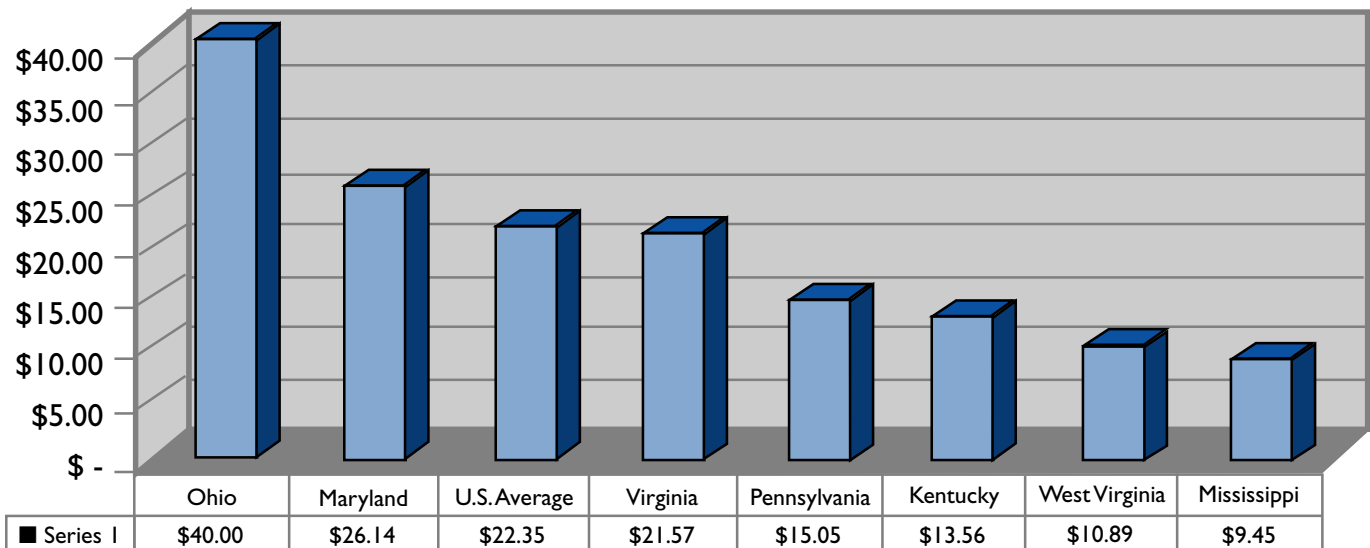
While the deployment of technology in West Virginia's public libraries is generally a bright spot, there are major questions about the sustainability of past, current, and emerging technology initiatives. On the training issue, West Virginia lacks the training infrastructure that is in place in many other states. Many states that have library and information science schools within their boundaries turn to these institutions for continuing education as well as for courses leading to advanced degrees. There is no American Library Association accredited library school in West Virginia. A second way that some other states provide for ongoing training is through state-funded regional library systems that have continuing education as one of their major functions. West Virginia also lacks this mechanism.

Several unique sub-themes also emerged in the focus groups. First is the fact that most public libraries in West Virginia have relatively short histories. Unlike the situation in many states, very few West Virginia libraries pre-date World War II. This short history creates problems that are discussed later in the report.

A second important sub-issue is that, in general, expectations for local funding support for public libraries are very low in West Virginia. Only a handful of libraries in the State even approach the national average

Chart 7

Total Library Income per Capita



for local funding. Many libraries get a majority of their support from the State of West Virginia. This expectation that public library service should be supported by the State rather than by local government is highly unusual.

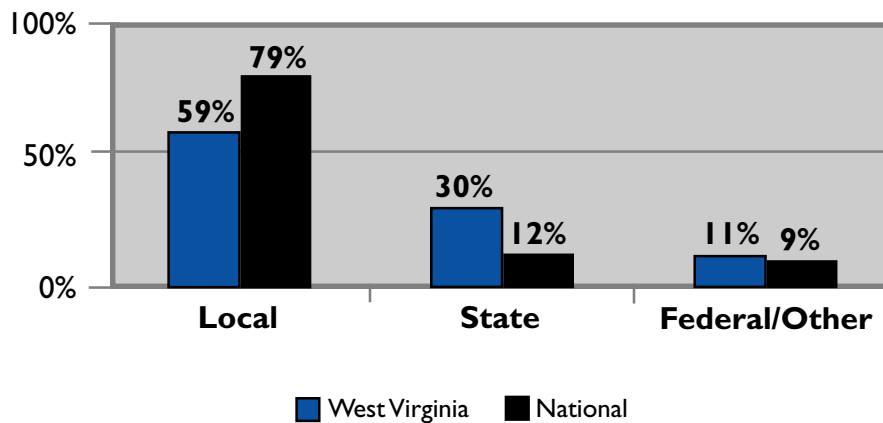
Sustainability is a third sub-theme evident in the focus groups that requires attention. The WVLC is perceived by many to be an organization that is better at starting than at finishing things. In fact, the creation of numerous small libraries in the 1970s has come home to roost as a major problem in

Comparison to National and Regional Norms

West Virginia's public libraries are among the poorest in the nation when viewed from a funding perspective. Data from the most recent year for which national information has been fully compiled (1995) shows that West Virginia libraries ranked second to last (50th of 51 including all states and the District of Columbia) with an average per capita income of only \$ 10.89. Only

Chart 8

Source of Income



the 1990s and will continue to challenge the Commission in the future. While the creation of instant libraries and outposts dramatically improved access to library service, no long-term method to ensure that these libraries would be funded at an adequate level was ever developed.

The emerging Gates Foundation program raises similar questions. While failure to pursue the opportunities afforded by the Gates funding would be tantamount to political suicide for the Commission, many states in which libraries are funded at considerably higher levels have raised real concerns regarding how what is started during the grant period will be continued when Gates funding ends.

The issues raised in the focus groups and problems that were observed in the course of site visits were explored in further detail in the mail survey of public libraries that was conducted. The findings of the survey follow.

Mississippi's libraries, with per capita funding of \$ 9.45, received less overall financial support. The national average (mean) per capita support for public libraries in 1995 was \$ 22.35, almost double West Virginia's level. **Chart 7** compares West Virginia's per capita support to that of other states (including surrounding states) and to the national average.

The majority of financial support for public libraries in the United States comes from local units of government. Almost 80 percent (78.3%) of all public library operating income is derived from local taxes with the property tax being far and away the most common source of local revenues. **Chart 8** compares West Virginia's sources of income for libraries with sources of income for libraries nationally. The level of poverty in some West Virginia jurisdictions, state requirements for a minimum percentage county expenditure for public education, and a general aversion to property

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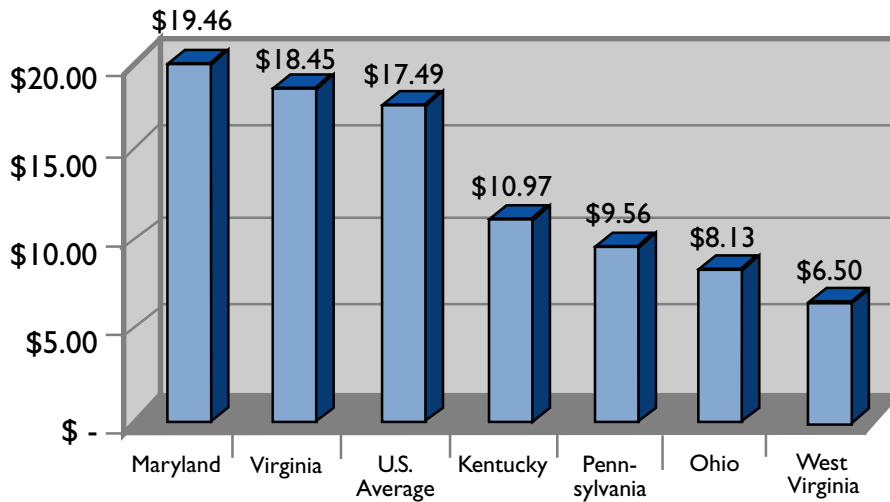
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<http://wvnmms.wvnet.edu/~wvla/>

Chart 9

Local Per-Capita Public Library Funding



taxes in the State make securing dependable funding for public libraries from local governments difficult to say the least.

West Virginia's local funding for public libraries is dismal. When two states that fund their public libraries very differently than most are excluded from the analysis, West Virginia, with only 59.7 percent of its funds coming from local units of government, ranks last in local support. The two states that fall below West Virginia in the percentage of local support are Hawaii and Ohio. The State of Hawaii operates a consolidated public library system; that is, all public libraries are State operated. Over 90 percent (92.2%) of Hawaii library revenues (a total of \$ 19.58 per capita) come from State tax sources.

Ohio public libraries also receive the bulk of their operating support from State revenues although the libraries are governed and managed locally. Seventy-one and seven-tenths percent (71.7 %) of Ohio's \$ 40.00 per capita support for public libraries comes from a dedicated percentage of the State's income tax. **Chart 9** compares local per capita support for libraries in West Virginia with adjoining states and with the national average. Note that although Ohio's local support percentage is lower than West Virginia's, Ohio's local support is greater in

actual dollars in spite of the fact that Ohio's state aid support is eight times that of West Virginia.

West Virginia's lack of stable financial support for public libraries should be understood as being a serious problem overshadowing all others. The extremely low percentage of *local* support coupled with

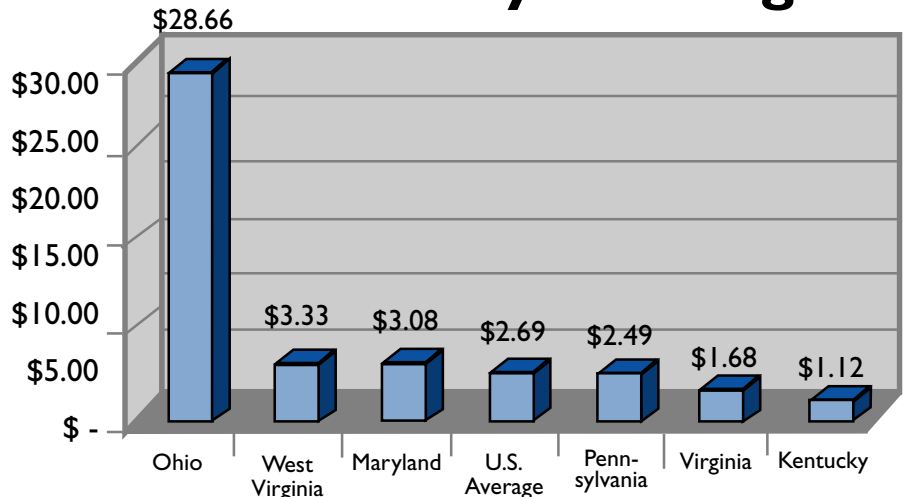
the low overall per capita support places West Virginia at the very bottom as far as financial support for its public libraries is concerned. Opportunities for significant improvement in library services in the State will be severely limited unless the revenue picture is substantially improved.

The West Virginia library community and the West Virginia Library Commission have attempted to offset the lack of local financial support with a strong program of direct state aid to public libraries. While the State has some reason to be proud of its status of providing per capita support above the national average (3rd highest at \$ 3.33 per capita in 1995 compared to the \$ 2.69 national mean), this funding by no means makes up for the lack of local support. The other two states with extremely low percentages of local support (Hawaii and Ohio) provided \$ 18.05 and \$ 28.66 per capita in state aid respectively. **Chart 10** compares state per capita aid.

In spite of severe financial limitations, not all library service in West Virginia is sub-standard. To their considerable credit, West Virginia's people and the libraries that serve them fared better on service measures than on funding. For example, West Virginia ranked 39th of 51 states in the number of circulations per capita and 27th in library visits per capita among the 44 states that

Chart 10

State Per-Capita Public Library Funding



reported data for FY 1995. West Virginia also ranked 27th among 43 states reporting the number of reference transactions per capita. It is apparent West Virginians are hungry for good library service and that a dedicated corps of underpaid library workers is striving mightily to provide what they can with the limited resources available to them.

Interviews with library directors revealed that, with very few exceptions, librarians and other library staff members are poorly paid both in terms of salaries and benefits. National statistics confirm this impression. West Virginia ranked 49th of 51, ahead of only Arkansas and Mississippi, in salary and wage expenditures per capita and only slightly better (48th) when benefits are included. Surprisingly, interviews with library directors did not reveal staff turnover as a major problem except in a few areas of the State experiencing significant economic growth.

Several other observations by the consultants are also supported by the national data. With a few notable exceptions, most small and medium sized libraries seemed to have collections of adequate size to serve their populations. However, consulting team members raised serious questions about the quality of materials collections seen in many libraries. Most libraries appeared to contain a large number of worn and badly dated books especially in the adult non-fiction and reference areas. It was noted that current periodical subscriptions in most libraries were also quite limited.

West Virginia's 29th rank on volumes per capita, coupled with its 48th ranked expenditure of \$ 1.67 per capita for collections, tends to indicate that West Virginia's libraries are in serious need of extensive weeding, or "de-selection" of materials. Library shelves contain a good number of books of marginal value.

"Turnover rate" measures the number of times an average item in a collection circulates in the course of a year. A turnover rate of between two and three (meaning that an average item circulates 2 to 3 times during the course of a year) can be considered within the normal range for a typical public library. It should be noted however, that libraries with sizeable research collections that are non-circulating usually have considerably lower turnover rates.

Turnover rates above three normally in-

dicate that a library has a well-selected collection that is very actively used and that contains very little "dead-wood." A turnover rate below two usually indicates that the majority of items in the library's collection are of little interest to people in the community. The collection may contain some well-chosen materials but the predominance of old, worn, or irrelevant materials on the shelves makes quality items difficult to locate. While many West Virginia libraries have excellent turnover rates, the number of libraries with rates under one is alarming (32 of the 98 administrative units) and the overall average for West Virginia public libraries is only 1.72.

While the condition and age of the collection in many of the libraries serving larger populations is somewhat better, most of these collections are undersized. There are very few public library collections of any real depth in West Virginia. Fewer than a dozen public libraries in West Virginia reported that their book collections were in excess of 100,000 volumes in 1997. Furthermore, several of these reported collections include branch holdings that typically duplicate a significant percentage of holdings at a main library or in other branch locations. Only two libraries, the Kanawha County Public Library and the Cabell County Public Library, reported collections in excess of 200,000 volumes.

West Virginia's 42nd rank in serials holdings per 1,000 population confirms another of the consultants' suspicions. West Virginia's periodicals holdings are considerably below the national average. This reduces the value of the public library to students and accentuates the need for access to online periodicals databases.

Another concern is prompted by West Virginia's relatively high rate of reference transactions (27th rank) coupled with its low spending (48th rank) on new materials. The accuracy of answers to reference questions is suspect if collections contain dated materials since they often contain information that is no longer accurate or relevant.

An additional important factor impacts both public library funding and the overall depth of West Virginia's public library collections. Only a small percentage of West Virginia communities have a long history of public library service. As was mentioned

earlier, three-quarters of the libraries responding to the consultants' survey indicated that their public library had been founded since 1950. Over half of the libraries indicated they were not in existence as recently as 1970.

One can speculate that this lack of history negatively affects local funding in two ways. First, the public library is forced to compete for funds with well-established departments and institutions such as police, fire and schools that have been in existence for much longer periods of time. Taxpayers have grown accustomed to funding these services. Libraries lacking this historical base are often left fighting over the scraps.

The second potentially negative impact is that community leaders and elected officials in places without a long history of library service often lack firsthand experience and knowledge of the benefits of libraries. They are less likely to advocate for increased library funding than are individuals who have fond memories of going to the library as a child or those who have experienced using the library's resources as a student.

This lack of a long library history also has a negative affect on the depth of library collections. Libraries one or two decades old often lack important historical works, research tools, and in-depth backfiles of periodicals.

In spite of significant odds, West Virginia libraries have managed to keep pace with most of the nation in regard to Internet connectivity. Only nine of one-hundred and eleven (8.1%) of the libraries responding to the consultants' survey of West Virginia public libraries reported that their library lacked an Internet connection. All of these library outlets were branch locations. The 91.9 percent West Virginia connectivity rate compares favorably to the most recent national data reported in *The 1998 National Survey of U.S. Public Library Outlet Internet Connectivity* (Bertot & McClure). This report indicated that 83.6 percent of all public library locations nationwide (including branches) were connected. West Virginia's progress is particularly good given the rural nature of much of the State. The Bertot and McClure report found public libraries in rural areas were less likely to be connected. The national rural connectivity rate was reported at 78.4 percent.

Recommendations

The consultant team's recommendations are grouped into six major categories which have been identified as areas of concern through an extensive review of background data, input from the West Virginia library community gathered through focus groups, personal interviews, and the mail survey of all West Virginia public libraries. The six categories are:

1. Funding
2. Governance and Structure
3. Continuing Education/Professional Development
4. Collections/Resources
5. Technology
6. West Virginia Library Commission Services/Organization

FUNDING

The consultants recommend the development and pursuit of a "partnership" funding strategy aimed at increasing both State and local funding for public libraries. The long-term goal of the funding effort should be to increase the overall funding level of West Virginia's public libraries to the national average with approximately half of the funding coming from State tax revenues and half coming from local revenue sources.

The consultants have followed the activities of the Governor's Commission on Fair Taxation with interest. WVLC also needs to monitor activities related to this Commission's report on tax simplification. WVLC should carefully consider whether a shift from local property taxes could provide an opportunity to gain additional dedicated funding for libraries.

If a major shift in the structure of taxes does occur, it may be appropriate to pursue the target of attaining funding equal to the national average using a split between state and local funds more heavily weighted toward the State of West Virginia. We believe that the basics of the funding program suggested below are sound even if the majority of support for libraries came from the State.

State funding should be distributed using a multi-part formula consisting of three components. The first component, a simple per capita distribution, would be based on the service population of the library receiving the aid. The second element, an equal-

ization component, would provide additional State assistance in areas (counties) that do not have an adequate tax base to meet local funding targets established for the program. The third component of the funding program would be an incentive program to encourage the establishment of library administrative units based on a larger unit of service (county or multi-county) and on the hiring and retention of a professional (MLS) administrator.

The initial target for the per capita factor of the formula would be a doubling of current aid from roughly \$ 3.25 to approximately \$ 6.50. Reaching this target would trigger structural changes and distribution changes covered in the GOVERNANCE & STRUCTURE section below (essentially the abolition of the service center, affiliate, designate, and direct services library framework with a "free-market" model). Specific standards related to percentage of budget spent on materials, hours of operation, etc. should be established as a requirement for the receipt of basic aid.

A reference is made to the Massachusetts Public Library Initiative process later in this section. While the consultants recognize that Massachusetts and West Virginia are very different, it is the process of including the library community rather than the tax environment that is of greatest importance. The development of standards for the receipt of basic state aid payments in West Virginia could be a part of a planning initiative similar to that undertaken in Massachusetts. More details regarding this effort follow.

The second portion of the formula recommended for West Virginia (equalization) would reward all libraries reaching local funding targets based on the relative prosperity/poverty of a county based on property valuation and other measures of wealth with some additional aid. However, the amount of aid awarded under this part of the formula would be inversely proportional to the relative wealth of the county. Distribution of these dollars within counties to multiple libraries would be based on service population within the county. The initial target for this aid package would be approximately \$ 1.75 per capita based on the State's population (although the money would not be distributed on a per capita basis).

The initial target for the third portion of the formula would also be \$ 1.75 per capita (again not distributed on a per capita basis). These dollars would be awarded only to those libraries directed by professionally trained (Master's degree in Library Science) staff and structured to serve an entire county, multiple counties, or a population base of a specified size. The intent of this aid is to encourage the growth and development of libraries in two ways. The first is to have all libraries in the State headed by professionally trained personnel. The second goal is to develop units of service with an adequate tax-base behind them to sustain a quality program of library service over time.

This portion of the formula could include some flexibility. For example, part of the program could be based on subsidizing the salary of a professionally trained director or it could be used to provide scholarship assistance to current library personnel working on acquiring their MLS. One state, Illinois, even provides scholarships to non-library employees who agree to work in the state for a specified period of time after their graduation. Mississippi provides "personnel grants" to libraries as incentives for employing professionally trained staff.

Incentive payments could have "steps" to help libraries move toward standards. For instance, libraries could receive a portion of the incentive dollars as a library director completes coursework in library science. If the MLS is seen as too high a target initially, WVLC could work with academic institutions in West Virginia or with the University of South Carolina to develop a certificate program that could qualify libraries for incentive payments. However, the consultants believe that the MLS standard should remain as an important target and that libraries achieving it should be rewarded with incentive payments.

In regard to larger units of service, several states have made significant progress in library funding using the county governance model. North and South Carolina are good examples. Other states that have moved in this direction (Arkansas and Mississippi) are still struggling and have had mixed success.

What the consultant team has presented here is an aid program intended to create a partnership between the State of West Vir-

ginia and local units of government (including counties) for the funding of public libraries. The specifics of the program should be developed within the West Virginia library community with participation of the West Virginia Library Commission, the West Virginia Library Association, and the entire West Virginia library community (librarians, trustees, friends, local officials, etc.). A model for participation in the development of this type of program is currently underway in Massachusetts under the guidance of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

The West Virginia Library Commission should also closely track and become involved in ongoing discussions and deliberations on tax-reform/tax-fairness now underway in the State. State funding for libraries needs to be ongoing, and those states that have been most successful have managed to secure a dedicated source of funding for libraries that is ongoing and subject to inflationary growth.

Several additional funding issues need to be raised, explored, and pursued. The first is the attempt to secure ongoing support for library technology through State Lottery revenues. This effort is a worthy one and should continue. However, this should NOT be seen as a replacement for the comprehensive program outlined above. Secondly, West Virginia should pursue a specific aid program for library building purposes. Several states have such programs in place that could be used as models (Delaware, Massachusetts, etc.).

Finally, the West Virginia Library Commission should explore the possibility of taking a role in encouraging the development of private funding sources to enhance library service. Several states (Oregon, Kansas) are using LSTA dollars to fund positions that either identify and assist libraries in applying for grants or foundation funds (other than LSTA) or help libraries develop local foundations in support of library services. The consultants believe there is wealth in West Virginia that is largely untapped by the library community.

GOVERNANCE & STRUCTURE

As funding for West Virginia's public libraries gradually increases, the current system of service centers, affiliates, designates, and direct service libraries should be elimi-

nated. The consultants believe the current structure has largely outlived its usefulness and is now more divisive than helpful. However, it is also recognized that some libraries are largely dependent on services provided whether by a regional service center or by the West Virginia Library Commission. Therefore, the consultants recommend that the current system be retained (with some modification) until such time as the direct per capita aid reaches a specific threshold. (A \$ 6.50 per capita amount is mentioned above as a possible level.)

A significant level of funding of this magnitude is necessary before taking this step because most libraries that move from being affiliates or direct service libraries will lose support services on which they have become dependent. A significant increased level of State funding must be available to allow them to purchase these services on the open market or to develop the internal capacity to handle the displaced tasks. The increased funding will also supplant the loss sustained by service center libraries that now retain a portion of the state aid provided to affiliates.

When the threshold is reached, all libraries should receive all of their state formula funding directly. As explained above in the FUNDING section, libraries would receive different amounts through the equalization and incentive portions of the state program. The intent of this portion of the recommendation, however, is that all dollars generated by the formula would flow directly to the libraries without any portion being retained either by the West Virginia Library Commission or by a service center library.

With the additional dollars available through the enhanced state-aid package, West Virginia's public libraries could pursue a "free-market" system of securing needed support services. All libraries would be free to contract with any other library, with the West Virginia Library Commission, or with private vendors for services such as cataloging and processing, technical assistance, payroll services, etc. In the case of services provided by the Library Commission, charges should be based on the recovery of actual costs rather than being subsidized in any way. Subsidization of libraries serving relatively poor areas would happen through the equalization portion of the state-aid formula, not through the provision

of services.

The consultants believe there are many library administrative units in West Virginia that are simply too small (population served) and lack an adequate tax base behind them to sustain effective library service. Earlier we mentioned two choices open to many communities - - closing or offering substandard service. There is actually a third option.

They can:

- Close,
- Continue to offer sub-standard service, or,
- Merge with other libraries to form a larger unit of service with a viable, sustainable tax-base.

The creation of so many new libraries in the 1970s did extend access to library service to many West Virginians who had no service or marginal service in the past. However, the creation of instant and outpost libraries without an accompanying sustainable funding program has created problems as well. The design of the funding package presented above is intended to encourage small independent libraries to merge into large units of service. The consultants do NOT believe the West Virginia Library Commission should force these mergers in any way. It should, however, encourage such mergers through financial incentives and the withdrawal of artificial support systems.

CONTINUING EDUCATION/ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

West Virginia lacks many of the continuing education support systems available to librarians and library staff in other states. West Virginia has no in-state library school, and while some service centers do provide some continuing education and training, the State has no formal structure of library systems with specific responsibilities to perform an ongoing continuing education function.

The survey conducted by the consultants indicates that larger libraries are able to meet many of their continuing education needs in-house, through contracts with commercial providers, and through participation in national and/or regional conferences. Smaller libraries, however, are largely dependent on two continuing education providers, the West Virginia Library Commission and the West Virginia Library Associa-

tion. While nothing in these recommendations should be construed to suggest the lessening of the role of these organizations in providing continuing education for librarianship, these efforts need to be bolstered to a considerable degree.

The consultants recommend a multi-faceted program of initiatives to address the critical need for ongoing education and training.

1. The development of two new annual "Marshall" programs that would provide three - five day on-site programs of library education at Marshall University (or at some other appropriate institution).

One program would be aimed at library workers without library degrees (especially those who are new to libraries or new to the State of West Virginia). Sessions in this program would concentrate on basic library skills and basic technology skills. The second program would be aimed at professional librarians and would concentrate on higher level reference and technology skills.

2. The establishment of five to eight "regional library education centers" to be located in libraries to achieve access to training within 1-1/2 hours drive time from any location in the State.

State or LSTA funds should be used to provide state-of-the-art distance education classrooms for approximately 12 - 15 participants at the Library Commission offices and in five to eight other locations. Host libraries would donate space for conversion to classroom use. This space and its resources would be available to other community groups and organizations when the facility is not in use for library education purposes.

The classrooms should be equipped with computer workstations for interactive technology-based training and for two-way voice and video communication among all participating sites.

3. The establishment of a permanent continuing education position within the West Virginia Library Commission's organizational structure.

A staff position should be devoted specifically to the development and coordination of continuing education programs for library staff on a statewide basis. The

expectation should not be that this person would do all of the training. The Library Commission should provide funding to this unit adequate to contract with subject specialists to cover specific training/continuing education needs determined by a broad-based standing committee of librarians from throughout the State. The West Virginia Library Association should be formally represented on this committee on an ongoing basis.

4. The establishment of a professional development scholarship program aimed at exposing West Virginia librarians to exceptional library practices through field visits and participation in national and regional conferences.

The West Virginia Library Commission should fund an annual "field-trip" to an exceptional public library in another state for up to a dozen West Virginia library workers selected through a competitive application process. A small number of scholarships to cover all expenses associated with attendance at regional or national library and technology conferences should also be provided.

5. The use of a broad range of West Virginia Library Commission resources for educational purposes.

WVLC's "State Library" facility (the library in the WVLC facility that is open to the public) and the staff of that facility should be looked at in two ways. First, it should be viewed as a back-up reference resource. This aspect is covered below in the COLLECTIONS/RESOURCES section. Secondly, the State Library should be seen as a training center. An internship program should be established to allow libraries to send staff members to the State Library for a one-week period during which they would work side-by-side with State Library reference staff. The program should cover expenses for participants and compensation for a substitute/replacement staff at the participating library. Alternatively, West Virginia Library Commission staff could be "exchanged" to cover local libraries as a part of this program. This would afford Library Commission staff valuable ongoing front-line experience.

The consultant team believes these five

initiatives, if fully implemented, would result in a measurable improvement of library service in the State in a relatively short period of time.

COLLECTIONS/RESOURCES

The strength and quality of library collections in West Virginia is an issue that needs to be addressed in several ways.

First, dollars need to be available for the purchase of new materials. Consequently, distribution of basic (per capita) state aid to libraries should include a requirement that a set percentage of the aid be used for collection development purposes.

Second, ongoing efforts need to be made to improve the selection/deselection (weeding) skills of West Virginia librarians.

Third, an ongoing and permanently funded program of providing online full-text periodical/journal resources needs to be a given. An expansion of the current Library Commission effort to provide *ProQuest* should be pursued. Statewide programs worthy of examination as models are Michigan's *AccessMichigan* project and Ohio's *OPLIN* program.

Finally, the State should play a role in developing the reference/research strengths of several large libraries. These libraries should receive non-competitive grants specifically to build their reference/research capacities. These libraries should be seen as partners with the Library Commission in providing statewide reference/research service. Partnering with large academic libraries on these efforts is also strongly recommended.

To the extent possible, the libraries should pursue a cooperative collection development strategy aimed at building specific strengths somewhere in the State. The State of Kansas is a good model for this type of cooperative collection development.

The West Virginia Library Commission should also explore the possibility of developing a "night-owl" reference service in cooperation with these libraries to raise the public's awareness of the information role of public libraries. "Night-owl" service provides telephone reference in hours after libraries are typically closed. New Jersey has a program of this type that is worthy of consideration. West Virginia's institutions of higher learning could prove to be a valuable partner in this effort.

While additional quality reference service is one outcome of this effort, a major side benefit is increasing the visibility of libraries in the minds of the public.

On an issue related to the WEST VIRGINIA LIBRARY COMMISSION SERVICES/ORGANIZATION category, the current "Gifts & Exchange" program needs to be closely scrutinized. The program is greatly appreciated by some libraries; it is of little consequence to others. However, the consultants' concern with this program is not whether the program is liked or disliked; rather, the problem relates to the quality of materials that it puts on the shelves of West Virginia's libraries.

While some excellent titles are made available to libraries, many of the books provided are of marginal value. This program needs a thorough review and its relationship to the rotating collections and WVLC's AV Department holdings needs to be clarified. It is our understanding that all three programs are currently being restructured.

TECHNOLOGY

West Virginia's libraries have made great technological strides in recent years. Internet connectivity is good, especially when the rural nature of much of the State is considered. At least basic Internet training has been provided, and most libraries are actively using at least some of the electronic resources available to them.

The state's long history with the VTLS library automation system has been both advantageous and problematic. The fact that shared automation systems are in place in many areas has been helpful in encouraging regional resource sharing and in "breaking the technological ice." On the other hand, the single vendor path has created many difficulties ranging from Y2K readiness to the portability of bibliographic records.

The consultants believe the West Virginia Library Commission does have a responsibility that accompanies its stewardship of a sizable number of State dollars that have been spent and are being spent for library technology. We do not agree with the assessment that libraries should be free to select any system they wish when there are State or Federal dollars involved. Libraries should, however, be free to select any system meeting certain technical standards.

A document entitled *Compliance Standards and Guidelines for Automated Library Systems and Related Services for West Virginia Public Libraries*, which was produced for the WVLC by RMG Consultants, Inc in 1997 should be used as the basis for initial standards. However, these standards are already several years old. Ideally, the standards should be reviewed and updated at least once every eighteen months.

We believe that the promulgation of connectivity and compatibility standards designed to ensure long-term compatibility of automation systems is an appropriate role of the West Virginia Library Commission. Technology vendors, including library technology vendors, make connectivity and compatibility sound simple. Unfortunately, often it is not.

The availability of State Lottery funds for technology purposes and the requirement that these funds be spent quickly created a significant problem for the West Virginia Library Commission. Few of the decisions that were made or the actions that were taken received the broad discussion and consultation that they should ideally have had.

Greater participation in decision-making on technology issues must be a given in the future. However, the West Virginia Library Commission must not relinquish its leadership role in the implementation of technology. Information technology management is always a very sensitive topic. Adherence to standards often seems to have little to do with practical day-to-day applications and processes. A high degree of connectivity and compatibility is a legitimate concern on a statewide level. The only harmonious route from adherence to standards to smooth implementation is open communication.

It must also be recognized that the State Network also promulgates standards. The library needs to work within this framework and should seek to influence the statewide standards process.

The consultants recommend a statewide library information technology committee be established to facilitate the full understanding of present and future technological challenges. It is further recommended that this committee include information technology professionals from State government and from the private sector as well as librarians from the field and representatives of the West Virginia Library Commission. While the Commission will still be faced

with making some hard decisions that are unlikely to please everyone, an open discussion of the problems and realities of each situation will lead to a better understanding of decisions that are made and of the rationale for those decisions.

On another topic, the consultants recommend the West Virginia Library Commission actively explore a program to make two to three year old State-owned computers available to public libraries. While libraries need new and fast computers, the "cascading" of State-owned computers to libraries for use as OPAC terminals and Internet access stations could benefit State agencies, libraries, and the public.

In the mail survey, libraries clearly indicated technology training and technical assistance (nuts and bolts on-site help) were a great need. The West Virginia Library Commission's program of regional technicians is too new to evaluate at this point; however, it can be seen as at least a partial solution to a very serious problem. This program should be closely monitored and modified to make sure that it meets the needs of local libraries.

WEST VIRGINIA LIBRARY COMMISSION SERVICES/ORGANIZATION

When the consultants first visited the Library Commission offices in the spring of 1998, we were struck by its unkempt condition. Working conditions for staff members were, to say the least, less than ideal. In our review of background information, we were also surprised to find that the Commission had very few staff devoted to what is characterized as "library development" activities.

Traditionally, agencies characterized as "library commissions" have emphasized the library development aspect. A staff of "field consultants" usually carries out the work of such commissions.

Less than one year ago, the West Virginia Library Commission had only two staff members that could be considered field consultants. The WVLC needs, and is in the process of developing, greater capacity to help libraries through highly qualified on-staff consultants.

Several obstacles stand in the way of this development. First, salaries for professional librarians at the WVLC have been very low. Salaries must be sufficient to attract qualified personnel. Libraries in West Virginia will avail themselves of assistance that is offered by well-trained, well-informed, experienced

consultants. They are far less likely to accept assistance or advice from consultants who know no more than they know.

It is our understanding that progress is being made in the salary arena. This is good news for the WVLC in its effort to recruit qualified personnel.

A second obstacle to offering a successful program of library development is a feeling on the part of libraries that "they don't know what it's like out here." Field consultants need to be in the field. WVLC should seek opportunities for staff exchanges that would place field consultants in libraries throughout the State on a regular basis.

The consultants also wish to express a concern over a heavy dependence on Library Services and Technology Act to fund WVLC staff. While it is probably impossible to find a single state library agency that has no LSTA-funded staff, WVLC needs to insulate itself against collapse if and when Federal dollars for libraries are reduced or dry up.

To this end, the WVLC should closely examine all operations to determine if there are areas that can be reduced or eliminated to build its library development capacity. We have already mentioned the Gifts and Exchange program and the AV Department as areas that might be significantly restructured. This is not to say these services are necessarily bad. They may just be less important than other services, which over time will have a greater impact on the library service available to West Virginians.

The WVLC, like many other organizations, has gradually expanded its services to include programs and services beyond what might be considered "core" activities. The result is that the library community has little or no understanding of the overall function of the agency. Programs such as the Radio Reading Service and the television production program as it was previously structured are nice things to do but they are hard to justify given the overall state of West Virginia's public libraries.

The consultants believe that these services should be examined to see if they qualify as "core services." It may be that they can be restructured to meet this test. For example, the television production capabilities of the Commission could become a powerful continuing education tool.

The consultants recommend that the WVLC should pursue a planning process aimed at identifying the core services needed and wanted by the State's libraries. This process should involve all of the Library

Commission's stakeholders including Commissioners, the WVLC staff, librarians from the State, library trustees, and representatives of the West Virginia Library Association, the State Legislature, the Governor's Office, and the Department of Education.

We believe the West Virginia Library Commission has made significant progress in restructuring itself into a more effective agency during the last year. Physical working conditions have improved, greater focus has been placed on library development, and efforts are underway to recruit qualified staff.

Finally, a word about communication: perhaps the most vigorous complaints heard by the consultants regarding the West Virginia Library Commission are related to

communications between the WVLC and libraries and between libraries and the WVLC.

Several of the recommendations that appear in this report include greater participation of the library community in determining the direction of library service in the State. In particular, the suggestion of a planning initiative revolving around funding issues (patterned on the Massachusetts model) is intended to bring the library community together in pursuit of a common goal.

The West Virginia Library community has much to gain if it can find a way to work together. There is much to lose if factions within the library community work at cross-purposes.



WEST VIRGINIA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

*For the Advancement of Library Service and Librarianship
Established 1914*

May 24, 1999

Dear Public Library Division Member,

The Himmel and Wilson Directions 2000 report was approved at the May meeting of the West Virginia Library Commission. This report and the implementation of its recommendations will impact libraries and librarians in this state for years to come.

At the June 4th WVLA executive board meeting, I will submit a motion requesting that all members be contacted concerning their reaction to the report and their suggestions as to which recommendations should be implemented and how. If approved by the executive board, surveys, letters, etc. would come from division and roundtable chairs to all members.

In anticipation of this approval, the enclosed survey is a summary of the six main areas of the study. Please review these areas concentrating on how it would impact on you, your particular type of library, and your community. Please send your responses to me at Roane County Public Library by June 14, 1999. If you receive additional surveys from other roundtables or divisions, you can either return only one or specify that you have sent your response to others.

Many of you cannot get to WVLC meetings to voice your concerns and opinions. This is an excellent way to ensure your concerns are heard.

Sincerely,

Suzette Lowe
Chair
Public Library Division

Summary of Himmel & Wilson's Recommendations

Recommendations divided by six major categories:

1. Funding

- a.) Begin a "partnership" strategy — half of funding comes from local level and half from state level.
- b.) Use the opportunity of the Fair Taxation Proposal to seek dedicated funds for libraries.
- c.) State funds would be distributed using a 3-part formula:
 1. Simple and direct per-capita distribution based on population.
 2. Equalization component of additional state aid for libraries not having sufficient local tax bases.
 3. Incentive program of additional funds for libraries who consolidate into county or multi-county units and employ an MLS director
- d.) Any funding program developed "should be developed within the WV library community with participation of the WVLC and the WVLA."
- e.) Attempt to secure a dedicated source of state funds for ongoing technology needs and building projects.
- f.) Identify potential sources of private funds and use LSTA funds to help libraries set up foundations.

COMMENTS:

2. Governance and Structure

- a.) Elimination (as funding levels improve) of the current structure of service center, designate, affiliate, and direct services libraries.
- b.) All libraries should receive 100% of their per capita state aid directly. No portion would be retained either by the WVLC or some other public library.
- c.) Libraries would be free to follow an "open market" system and contract with other libraries if so desired for needed services such as cataloging, etc.
- d.) Small libraries with inadequate local funding support should be encouraged

to merge with larger libraries or close through state funding incentive programs. Those libraries should not be forced to merge or close by WVLC.

COMMENTS:

3. Continuing Education/ Professional Development

- a.) Development of "multi-faceted" program to address continuing education needs of librarians throughout the state.
 - 1.) Begin two separate annual "Marshall Programs" to be held for three to five sessions. The first would be for non-professionals, and the second would be for professionals.
 - 2.) Establish 5 to 8 regional educational centers equipped with computers in existing public libraries throughout the state.
 - 3.) Create a Continuing Education Consultant position at the WVLC. This individual would coordinate and develop continuing education programs throughout the state at the continuing education centers. This individual would not provide all the programs, but rather contract for workshops with professionals in other states.
 - 4.) Continuing Education needs would be targeted through a broad-based committee of librarians to visit excellent library systems in other states. The scholarships would be granted via a competitive application process.
 - 5.) Establish a professional development scholarship program that provides for librarians to visit excellent library systems in other states. The scholarships would be granted via a competitive application process.
 - 6.) Use WVLC's reference library as a "training lab" for librarians throughout the state to gain "hands-on" experience. In addition to an "exchange program" which provides for WVLC staff to work on the "front-lines" in the state's public libraries would go hand-in-hand with the "training lab/intern-

ship" program.
COMMENTS:

4. Collections Resources

- a.) Require that a certain percentage of per capita state aid be used for materials at all public libraries.
- b.) Hold regular collection development and weeding workshop for librarians.
- c.) The WVLC should provide on-line databases for public libraries throughout the state. These databases should be selected with maximum input from WV librarians.
- d.) Establish a non-competitive grant program of cooperative collection development for the larger public libraries whose purpose is to build the strengths of these libraries' collections with the purpose of interlibrary loan sharing of resources so that all public libraries in the state benefit.
- e.) Develop a "night-owl" reference service with an 800-phone line at various public libraries in the state as well as at the WVLC.
- f.) Eliminate "noncore" collection services at the WVLC such as the "Gifts and Exchange" program and the film library.

COMMENTS:

5. Technology

- a.) Develop state technology standards for automation systems in WV's public libraries. The starting standards should be the RMG Study.
- b.) On-going revision and review of these standards is essential.
- c.) Librarians throughout the state must have greater participation in making technology decisions in the future.
- d.) Library community also needs input in to standards of Statewide Network.
- e.) A statewide library technology committee should be established whose purpose is to study all technology issues, receive

input from the library community, and develop standards for automation systems and the Statewide Network.

- f.) Move 2- to 3-year-old WVLC computers out to small libraries in need of computers.
- g.) Provide for an on-going evaluation and review of the effectiveness and usefulness of the current WVLC program of providing technicians at the seen subhubs. Input into this evaluation should come from librarians throughout the state.

COMMENTS:

6. West Virginia Library Commission Services and Organization

- a.) To improve the effectiveness of WVLC's consultants an exchange program should be established in which consultants work

in public libraries throughout the state on a regular basis. If the consultants have had "Front-line" experience working with the public in public libraries, their advise and educational programs will be valued and respected more highly.

- b.) Consultants' salaries should not be paid from LSTA funds.
- c.) Extemporaneous services provided by the WVLC should be eliminated. These services include "Gifts and Exchange," the Radio Reading Service, and the television production service. If these programs are not eliminated, they should be restructured to more effectively provide needed services.
- d.) A survey and planning process should be established to determine the Welch's core services as "needed and wanted" by WV's public libraries. Broad-based input should be sought for this "needs assessment."
- e.) REAL COMMUNICATION about issues of importance and concern to librarians throughout the state must occur on a

regular basis. The key issues here are the issues being communicated about and the timeliness of the communication.

- f.) There must be a greater participation of the WV library community in determining the future direction of library service in the state. This includes particularly the direction and type of services the WVLC provides.
- g.) The WV library community is divided into factions, which often work at cross-purpose. This will continue unless those factors causing divisions are not changed and unless communication between all parties involved (WVLC, WVLA, directors, trustees, etc.) improves.

COMMENTS:



WEST VIRGINIA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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