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ABSTRACT

The needs and services of urban community information centers are examined in a study commissioned by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS). Following discussions of kinds of information and who needs it, there is a survey of current and recent community information proposals and programs. Major problems of these programs including organization and delivery of data, location of centers, staffing, and financing; the benefits derived from such centers; and the implications for NCLIS are also covered. Programs in Baltimore County, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia are described, and a bibliography is attached. (LS)

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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SCIENCE  
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URBAN INFORMATION CENTERS AND THEIR INTERFACE WITH THE  
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Examines the needs and services of urban information centers. The study outlines the most effective role urban information centers can play in a national program and suggests effective methods of interfacing. For example: (a) what are the basic information needs of those who use information centers? (b) how will they use and benefit from the national network? (c) what effects will national resource sharing have on satisfying the local library and information needs of the poor, minorities, blue collar workers, etc.?

MAY, 1975

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the NCLIS. Though related to the Commission's National Program, papers in this series are not an integral part of the National Program Document.

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J.E.S.

## 1. Introduction

The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science clearly states as a priority goal "a National Program that offers the most information services to the greatest number of people." Although the provision of information is an old, old problem, its elevation to a national priority for everyone is recent.

There are precedents for Federal attention to information problems. Since World War II, the Federal government has supported several massive information systems. The first provided information to veterans, both through government agencies and through specially organized Veterans' Information Centers. At one time, there were about 3,000 of them, but gradually their functions were absorbed by other agencies. Sputnik was responsible for the next attack on information problems. After 1957, scientific and technical research received high-level funding, and both the public and private sectors developed sophisticated systems to control the torrent of documents which resulted. The NASA program is one example of achievements which would have been impossible without an effectively organized system of support data. Another large-scale program is the MEDLARS/MEDLINE network of medical information. Because of it, printed and/or computerized access to a national store of records (the National Library of Medicine in the center) is accessible to researchers and practitioners throughout the world. It was developed in the 1960's during a period of national

commitment to improving medical services, which was paralleled by rapid development in the information sciences.

The next critical area which requires an all-out attack is the provision of human, life-supporting information. If, as John Diebold says in an article on scientific and technical research (Foreign Affairs, April, 1973), we are entering the third century of the Industrial Revolution with the development of a new skill, "the beginnings of control over the processing of information," we should no longer accept inadequate information for coping with daily problems.

#### 2.1 Who Needs Information

Everyone's world today is complex and growing more so. We have multiple opportunities and choices in all areas of our lives. Not only are we in personal contact with an increasing maze of public services and government programs, but we are also the end men for a gigantic communications and media industry. Common sense is no longer an adequate basis for living successfully, or even legally. We need information in larger amounts, in more areas, and from accurate, impartial and accessible sources. Information has become a staple in our daily lives, and the 1973 answer to the question, "Who needs to know?" seems to be very clear: Everybody. Three recent surveys support this answer.

The most extensive study is a literature survey by Thomas Childers and others entitled The Information-Poor in America (3). Childers collected and evaluated 3,000 documents before selecting 750 of them for this bibliography. He found that little had been done before 1968 in identifying those who are information needy, but now the field is being studied through many approaches - by social workers, librarians, municipal governments and the federal government. Groups whom he identified as the most seriously disadvantaged or deprived are the poor, elderly, imprisoned, deaf and blind, under-educated, unemployed, racially/ethnically oppressed. Clearly, information needs are now recognized as a problem and are the subject of a substantial body of research.

The Baltimore area, nationally recognized for innovative library programs, has been the locale of a two-year survey by Warner and others for its Regional Planning Council and Westat, Inc. (16). A cross-sectional, random sample household survey was made of the Baltimore Urbanized Area, which includes inner-city sections as well as suburban districts, and the findings indicate that the entire urban population has unmet information needs:

An overview of the literature revealed that urban residents apparently have a multitude of information needs which are not being met within the constraints of existing information resources and systems. There is general agreement in the literature that a focus on the information needs of urban residents is necessary to the development and management of delivery systems to meet these needs...<sup>1</sup>

1 Edward S. Warner and others, Information Needs of Urban Residents. (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Bureau of Libraries and Learning Resources, 1973), p. 1.

The most active information seekers were found to be the well-educated, the well-paid and the young, and the subgroups least likely to search for information were those with the least education, the lowest family income, persons living in tracts with the lowest median income, and the elderly. However, the study warns that "it would be unrealistic to conclude that (the disadvantaged) have fewer needs for information or services than the more advantaged segments of the population."

A third significant report reinforces the thesis that all segments of society have serious information needs. At the NCLIS Conference on Needs of Occupational, Ethnic, and Other Groups in the United States, held in Denver in May, 1973, specialists identified the needs of 17 specific groups. Those selected were: Scientists and technologists, Agricultural community, Business community, Labor, Educators, Biomedical community, Creative and performing artists, Social service personnel, Women, homemakers and parents, Children, Young adults and students, Aged, Geographically remote, Economically and socially deprived, Institutionalized, Mentally and physically handicapped, Culturally isolated. A simplified summary of the conclusions is that we all need information; we are "swamped" with it, and the library could become the key information center. We are facing the paradox of a glut of information and a mass of unmet needs.

Although the NCLIS' goal is information for everyone, some priorities were recommended at the Denver Conference (9). The Working Group on setting national priorities summarized as their first



recommendation: "preference should be given to designing systems for those who are presently less well served than others."2 It is hard to believe that the urban resident would not be high, if not first, on any list of the information needy, and the mandate of this paper is to focus on the problems of providing urban information.

2.2 Kinds of Information Needed

The kinds of information needed by urban residents fall into two categories: those common to everyone, and the needs of special groups. Since every citizen is a member of several groups, such as labor, the elderly, the ill, the renters, the landlords, those fearing crime, those in criminal custody, those needing legal advice, users of public transit, there can be no mutually exclusive lists for any single group.

The three reports already cited - Warner, Childers, and the Denver Conference on Needs - all contribute to identifying and specifying citizen problems. Data collected by Warner in the Baltimore area identified four topic areas that accounted for 52% of all problems/questions: neighborhood, consumer, housing and household maintenance, and crime and safety. 89% of the respondents mentioned at least one problem/question. When analyzed by demographic groupings, these data further described the information concerns of specific urban groups.

2 Library and Information Service Needs of the Nation; Proceedings of a Conference on the Needs of Occupational, Ethnic, and Other Groups in the United States. (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 240.

A survey by Voos, Information Needs in Urban Areas: A Summary of Research in Methodology (15) cited four topics as common to most city dwellers: consumer goods and services, housing and transportation, educational opportunities, and medical information. Preliminary accounts from the Neighborhood Information Centers Project agree with these major concerns, but show that their inquiries cover the whole range of human needs - health, social services, housing, and employment.

The specific subject areas are only one dimension of the total picture of information needs and the delivery system. Other aspects, less suited to statistical surveys but frequently mentioned, deserve consideration. Information services must consider factors like these:

- Promptness of delivery
- Accuracy of the data
- Physical accessibility of the information  
(telephone, neighborhood center, convenient hours)
- Format of delivery (written, oral)
- Language barriers
- Psychological climate of the center
- Respect for privacy and dignity
- Follow-up after initial inquiry

Another complication in the urban resident's information-seeking procedures is deciding where to turn in the confusing complex of many agencies, some with vaguely understood purposes and others which seem to overlap. Several studies have found that the disadvantaged are not even aware of what is available. The Childers survey states that "studies point out that disadvantaged people in general are

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significantly unaware of the social services that might be tapped for the solution of their problems."<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. Current and Recent Proposals and Programs

Many of the groups concerned with unmet needs are already operating some kind of information and referral (I & R) services and trying to make them more satisfactory, to both the providers and the users. These show the widest possible range in all aspects - purpose, sponsorship, organization, clientele, and effectiveness. Federal and local governments, social service agencies, the health professions, the library profession, and information science are all involved. I shall discuss some representative programs, with brief profiles of three of them appended to this paper.

The front line troops in transmitting information to the urban residents are the social service professions, and as the scope of social programs has widened, their clientele has broadened. In the past 10 years, they have been flooded with information to assimilate and with clients needing it. In 1966, Alfred J. Kahn, a professor at the Columbia University School of Social Work, published an important and still much cited study, Neighborhood Information Centers: A Study and Some Proposals (6). Combining a professional with a personal concern, he surveyed the problems of social and health agencies, professional and civic groups, and special citizen-aid programs working

<sup>3</sup> Thomas A. Childers, The Information-Poor in America. (Scarecrow Press, 1975), p. 40.

toward the "delivery of information to their clients/users, and documented the problems of people trying to locate information about these services in a large city. His recommended solution, patterned after the British Citizens' Advice Bureau<sup>4</sup>, was for Neighborhood Information Centers. "We need social utilities comparable to the general public utilities (gas, electric, phone) and public services (post office, water supply) which are recognized as vital to the adequate functioning of the individual, the family and the neighborhood in modern society."<sup>4</sup> Although made 10 years ago, this recommendation still has validity, and is still unimplemented.

In 1972, the United Way, an umbrella organization for social service agencies, issued a report reflecting their concern about information and referral services (14). This study acknowledges the fragmented approaches so far to I & R service, recognizes increasing federal concern in some areas, and reiterates the need for cooperation within the public and private sectors.

The Federal Administration on Aging (AoA) is currently giving a high priority to delivery of information to the elderly. The Federal Executive Board's 1974 report, circulated to federal department heads and agencies with a covering memorandum from President Ford, clearly emphasizes this priority. The AoA involvement was spelled out in the 1973 Amendment to the Older Americans Act of 1965 which requires that before June 25, 1975, there be established "information and referral

<sup>4</sup> Alfred J. Kahn, and others, Neighborhood Information Centers: A Study and Some Proposals. (New York: Columbia University, School of Social Work, 1966), p. 10).

sources to assure that all older persons will have reasonably convenient access to such program sources." Each of the 25 regional Federal Executive Boards is compiling an inventory of all I & R services - federal, state, local, and private. Several cities are already operating strong services, such as the Miami-Dade County Citizens Information and Service Program,<sup>5</sup> which had been initiated in 1971 with the cooperation of the United Fund and is now a component of the AoA network. In other areas new I & R services will have to be provided or strengthened. The goal is a national chain of strong, mission-oriented centers to serve one particular target group, the nation's elderly.

An experimental statewide network of I & R centers has been developed in Wisconsin under the direction of Dr. Nicholas Long of InterStudy in Minneapolis. The program, Wisconsin Information Service (WIS), set up 13 centers to establish resource files of information and to actively implement access to human services. Although they did not serve an urban population, his evaluation of the project in terms of its long-range objective to "formulate policy covering the best methods for helping individuals gain access to human services" should be of value to all information services.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Mark Glaiber, "Citizens Information and Service Program". RQ 12 (Summer, 1973), pp. 359-360.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Long, "Wisconsin Information Service: An I & R Network". RQ 12 (Summer, 1973), pp. 356-358. In a telephone conversation, Dr. Long said the federal funding had ended in September, 1974, but efforts are being made to continue WIS with new financing.

These are indicative of the social services' recognition of information as an essential part of their programs and a trend toward networks of I & R centers. However, social service information is only a part of a citizen's total needs.

The library profession's concern for adequate provision of information grows logically from the traditional reference assistance to users of library resources: During the last decade many libraries, aware of a decline in use and a growth in the number of non-users, have reorganized and expanded their services to meet a wider range of information needs, going beyond the print sources of information in the reference collections. This expansion of service has required a reordering of priorities, new systems of acquiring and organizing data, and a new philosophy of public service. Some of these new programs utilize telephone answering services and hot lines, three-way phone referrals, store-front locations, mobile units, and special information desks in the branches. Although many have been described in journal literature and in conferences, workshops and academic courses, the profession needs more research, more pilot projects, and more evaluative studies about procedures, financing, and feasible goals. One experimental program is just being concluded.

In 1972, a major pilot project, the Neighborhood Information Centers Project (NIC) was initiated through funding from the Office of Education's Bureau of Library and Learning Resources. Designed to be a research and demonstration program, it was implemented in five cities: Atlanta, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, and Queens Borough of New York. The purpose, as stated in the project proposal, is:

"to provide information or referral information assistance to people who may be in lower income brackets, poverty level, welfare assisted, who may have little or limited education, who may have difficulty in reading or in understanding information in printed forms and need interpretation to aid and enrich the lives of these people and the lives of their children, to demonstrate that a public library will play a meaningful role in dissemination of information by establishing an Information Center planned specifically for a neighborhood, and by meeting the varied information needs of the people served in the neighborhood selected."

The five library systems, organized in a consortium for administrative purposes, have developed their programs individually within the strictures of their existing services, the patterns of community organization, and the staffs of each system. One report on the entire program has been completed (5), and Thomas Childers is preparing a final evaluation.<sup>7</sup> Until this final report is available, no overall conclusions should be made, but some generalizations seem valid now.

- Community involvement is essential at all stages
- The political climate of the community and the city can help or hinder development
- A successful NIC needs the commitment of the entire library staff
- The NIC is best integrated completely with the total library program
- The problems of data base organization are not yet solved.

When the federal grant ends in June, 1975, the programs will be continued in some cities (Detroit, Houston and Queens), not necessarily in the

<sup>7</sup> Completion of this report is scheduled for Summer, 1975.

format of the pilot project. Positive gains are the revitalizing of the libraries, greater civic visibility, the meeting of previously unmet needs and, at least in Houston, a dramatically increased share of the city's 1975 budget.

Many other libraries are inaugurating new programs or reordering their priorities to emphasize community information. The Memphis Public Library, renamed the Memphis-Shelby County Library and Information Center, has recently received revenue-sharing funds to establish a central information and referral center for the city and county. Their information desks will emphasize switching and referral services. In Rochester, N.Y., an urban information center is being developed by the Monroe County Library System with help from LSCA funds. The San Francisco Public Library has pioneered in developing imaginative community services. Chicago and Washington have initiated special services. Partly as follow-up to the Warner study, the Baltimore County Public Library has established its first AID (Accurate Information Desk) Center in a branch library with plans to have them operational in every branch before 1976.

An ambitious attempt to deliver comprehensive urban information service was projected in New York City in 1971-1974. With impetus from Dr. Timothy Costello, then a Deputy Mayor, a plan for the Brooklyn Citizens' Urban Information Centers (CUIC) was developed to provide coordinated information for city residents. All city services, including government, social and health services, private agencies, were to be



covered, a design which met Professor Kahn's 1966 recommendation for "a new social utility." A one-stop neighborhood source for easy access to any information from an exceedingly complex maze seemed to be in the making, with the branches of the Brooklyn Public Library chosen as the delivery centers for the first phase of the program. Although funding had been contracted from revenue-sharing funds, it was withdrawn shortly after the program started, and the centers were never operational. However, the plan could be profitably studied by anyone involved in designing similar programs.

Paralleling the development of information services in urban environments has been the inauguration of similar services in many suburban and rural areas. Some are targeted toward community-wide information, while others, like the new Job Information Center in the Yonkers Public Library, are oriented to one specific purpose. There are as many varieties of information services as there are communities and librarians, and urban services can profit from their innovations.

City governments as well as libraries have been aware of the information problems of their residents, and some have tried to ease access to data for their residents. Little City Halls and Neighborhood Government offices appeared in the late 1960's and early 1970's in an effort to deliver more and accurate data in the communities, often with funding from the Model Cities programs. These faced several difficulties, among them the political overtones attached to the information and the expense of setting up these new municipal facilities. A recent report

by Yin and others, Neighborhood Communications Centers, examined some types of municipally-sponsored bureaus and found "There has generally been inconclusive information about the costs of these innovations, their permanence, and the amount of residual satisfaction they produce."<sup>8</sup>

Another kind of program was developed in Philadelphia, the Model Cities Community Information Centers (MCCIC). A grant from Model Cities funds in 1971 was used to assemble and computerize a data base of information relevant to the needs of Philadelphia's inner-city neighborhoods. MCCIC was designed primarily as a telephone service, using three-way phone hookups and two CRT display terminals. Its development drew on the combined expertise of social service professionals, librarians, and information scientists. However, it faced the common enemy - financing -- and closed after the Model Cities funding ended in June, 1974. It is important as one of the few on-line systems to have become operational, demonstrating that computerization is possible.

The urban information picture must be rounded out by mentioning some local sources used by citizens. Although the variety seems to be limited only by human ingenuity and energy, two groups have sponsored particularly popular programs, volunteer organizations and the mass media. Volunteers have a long history of providing information services through such organizations as Travelers' Aid and the League of Women Voters, through social service groups such as the Easter Seal Society

<sup>8</sup> Robert K. Yin and others, Neighborhood Communications Centers: Planning Information and Referral Services in the Urban Library. (Santa Monica, Rand, 1974), p. 8.

and Community Chests, and through business, professional and religious groups. Often these are local, independent services but have been significant in many urban areas. Other volunteer information has come from counterculture groups; hot lines for drug, housing and medical information, student information, etc. The mass media have tried some programs, many of them very popular. Newspapers now have action and consumer columns, and some radio stations have telephone programs, such as Call for Action in New York. Television is entering the field with some experimental information-question-answer programs.

Even this brief overview of information services now available to urban residents leads to three conclusions: (1) there is a recognition of the needs, (2) there is uncertainty about the best ways to meet these needs, and (3) there is no strong unified leadership. We are a long way from the NCLIS' goal of "information provided when it is needed, where it is needed, and in the form in which it is needed."

#### 4. Major Problems

It should be possible to identify some common patterns of success, failure, or trends in these recent experimental programs and the literature reporting them. There are five areas in which some generalizations can be made.

##### 4.1 Organization and Delivery of Data

The organization and retrieval of information have always been a basic part of library science, and reference librarians are

information brokers, matching needs with data in their information stores which are normally in print or multimedia format. Since much of the citizen and community information is not in the printed source, libraries have realized that it is expensive, in staff time particularly, to collect, maintain, and distribute. Special characteristics, some or all of which are pertinent to urban information, have caused problems:

- It is continuously changing
- It often does not exist in any printed or typed format
- Sometimes a person or a chain of persons is the only source
- It is the kind of information that people expect to receive without fees or direct charges
- If it is printed/typed, some of it is already out-of-date
- It has been collected by many different agencies in widely variable forms
- There is no standard geographical unit for urban data (census districts, postal zones, police precincts, fire districts, voting districts, municipal, county, state, regional jurisdictions are all used)
- There is no complete register of all source documents
- Terminology is chaotic (what do you call the old folks this month?)
- Data vary in scope. Some are important only to the neighborhood; some are operative for the entire city or state; some federal data are applicable nationwide
- It is difficult to predict what questions will be asked
- Questions may be asked in many languages
- The manner in which the information is delivered may be as important as the facts

--There may be problems of personal privacy (welfare payments, unemployment registers, police records).

--The city's political climate does not always encourage easy access to information and in some cases discourages it (budgets, council minutes, etc.).

It is possible to organize this information, using the traditional library skills, in indexes, files and directories. However, the job requires additional staff, use of non-traditional sources for information, two-way community communication, and constant updating. Part of Detroit's success is due to their having worked for two years to build the information files before the TIP program began and using a centralized staff to keep the records current and accurate for the local centers.

If the information service is to be chiefly a telephone service, one central data source may be satisfactory, and the problems of maintaining numerous duplicate files can be avoided. Philadelphia's MCCIC and Houston's NIC I & R services have used three-way telephone hookups, which proved especially efficient when the center is the intermediary in a referral situation. The user is able to participate in any modification of the original request and also can tell exactly how his request is being handled. Telephone service is a necessity in a spread-out area with poor public transportation. Telephones are steadily becoming more sophisticated and versatile, and should overcome the problems of busy signals, wrong numbers, and changed numbers which are at present common enough to be a barrier to efficient use. People run out of patience and dimes.

Some experimentation has been done with computer-stored data, distributed via phone or computer terminals. Philadelphia experimented with CRTs in two branch libraries in addition to its telephone network. Queens is presently supplementing its neighborhood data with a computer-produced microfiche system (IRMA). No demonstration has yet been tried on a scale comparable to the New York Times Information Bank, but many people feel the need is here. Milton Byam, Director of the Queens Borough Public Library, says in the NYLA Bulletin for March 1975 that "the whole cries out for cathode ray terminals, data-banks and twenty-four hour service."

Information scientists are showing increased interest in the problems of organizing and delivering this kind of information. Deahl believes that the Philadelphia MCCIC demonstrated the feasibility of a computerized data bank. Manfred Kochen, a mathematician and information scientist, has written on directory design of I & R systems (7) and is continuing research on the cost effectiveness of such a data base.

Although enough experience is now available in both manual and machine files to furnish some guides for designing new centers, rapidly-changing technology hovers on the horizon with promises of drastic developments in communication. The Yin study devotes a chapter to evaluating some recent capabilities in telecommunication for their possible use in information centers.

It does not seem realistic to expect that urban information centers, clearly a not-for-profit field, can afford to sponsor experiments with expensive new technology.

#### 4.2 Location of Centers

One of the basic requirements of an information service is easy accessibility, particularly in inner-city areas where failure is too readily accepted and expected. The Yin report, directed to municipal officers and not to the library profession, discussed the question of location of neighborhood centers and evaluated the library's suitability on these points: (1) Needs assessment, (2) Directory development, (3) Staffing, (4) Publicity, (5) Access and locations, (6) Record-keeping and followup, (7) Relationship to other agencies. The conclusion is "the library presents many advantages and no major disadvantages in the establishment of an information and referral center. 9

Frank J. Kopecky, a lawyer with experience in OEO's legal services programs in Illinois, also concluded that libraries are the best sites for information services. "Initially, I was skeptical of libraries as information centers, but I am now convinced that they could and should serve this function. They are neutral, already in existence, and are found in almost every community. They are staffed by trained personnel and they are a natural source for information. 10 The Brooklyn CUIC program, planned cooperatively by municipal, social service and library personnel, had selected public library branches as the most effective contact center. People who have never used the

9 Yin. op cit., p. vi-viii.

10 Frank J. Kopecky, "Office of Economic Opportunity Community Centers - A Critical Analysis". In Libraries and Neighborhood Information Centers; by Carol L. Kronus and Linda Crowe. (Urbana, University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library Science, 1972), pp. 71-72.

library before will need publicity campaigns to send them to the library for the first time, but the successes of programs like Detroit's and Houston's have shown that this can be done.

Since not all cities have enough branch libraries, serious consideration should be given to integrating all types of libraries into the information system. School libraries might be good contact centers, if there is inadequate public library service. At present, not many school librarians would welcome adding such a function, but if schools become year-round multipurpose institutions, their libraries might well be utilized. Community college libraries also have possibilities for this role.

Social and health agencies have developed I & R services as essential to improving the effectiveness of their programs. There is now an Alliance of Information and Referral Systems, in addition to the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association, which indicate the extent to which these professions have assumed the job of providing information centers, although skills in organizing information have not been a part of their traditional competencies. Some of their services are limited to the scope of a single agency and are housed in the agency's offices, but the demand is increasing for comprehensive, one-stop centers, like those proposed in 1966 by Kahn. Now is clearly the time to coordinate these service centers and any similar library services; competing and uncoordinated I & R centers will only increase the confusion for the users and be more expensive to the taxpayers.



Social and health I & R centers do not have as broad a data base as a library service, since they must focus on implementing their own programs. They also have the handicap of being in an advocate and/or adversary relationship to their users, with decision-making powers. Consequently, it is not possible for them to operate with the library's neutral climate, and many people are hesitant about consulting them freely.

When weighed against any other existing public facilities, the library seems to offer the most advantageous location for a centralized information center.

#### 4.3 Staffing

The ideal information specialist is sensitive to the needs of the inquirer, skillful at searching for data, and committed to finding a satisfactory conclusion to each transaction. Library science has always included searching skills, and is now responding to a demand for graduates with these new skills by offering specifically-designed curricula. The COMLIP Program at Columbia's School of Library Service is now graduating Community Media Librarians whose education has emphasized "the concept that the public library, because of its highly personalized and individualized service, could be the point where social agencies serving inner-city communities become humanized and comprehensible for the average citizen." Many other schools have initiated programs - Case Western Reserve, University of Maryland,

Drexel University, the University of Toledo. It is not possible to list them all, but it is evident that such programs are increasing. One, Rutgers' Community Information Seminar, has begun a newsletter, Ganglia, dedicated to communicating news about urban information services. Some of these programs include faculty from the social services to contribute their skills in dealing with groups who are not normally library users.

Paraprofessionals, especially from the neighborhood, have had key roles in staffing NIC centers. Both Detroit and Queens feel that their contributions have been essential. Obviously, careful selection and special training programs are necessary. One library found, for example, that the local ties of the paraprofessionals reflected a factionalism which was already disturbing community relations and were a handicap in maintaining the center's neutrality. A mixture of professional and paraprofessional staff can produce greater responsiveness to community situations than using only professionals. Although some programs have had success with volunteers, the current literature does not mention them often for large-scale programs. However, the British CABs have used them satisfactorily. Small services, such as hotlines, are still staffed by volunteers.

It is generally recognized that, while some librarians welcome the new services, the new demands, and the new users, others consider them a burden on an already understaffed institution. Workshops and additional training are necessary for any library that is adding an information service and, as used in Queens, have significantly

increased staff enthusiasm. Perhaps the CLENE network can assume some responsibility here. Cooperative training programs between social services and libraries should help both fields. And, if computer technology is involved, the information scientists must be a third segment of the training program.

The staffing pattern which has proved valuable in the NIC programs is the close integration of information center personnel, the existing library staff, and community paraprofessionals. Detroit, in fact, makes no distinction at all; every staff member is a part of TIP.

#### 4.4 Benefits From Urban Information Centers

Implicit in the entire literature of information centers is the cost to all citizens of insufficient information. Since the economically and socially deprived have the poorest access, a logical assumption is that they will benefit the most. Developing skills and habits of using information may be needed for those who presently have low expectations of success. But no person should be without food, health care, or educational opportunities because he does not know where to locate them. For middle class urban residents, potential gains are also high, and easier access to more information can improve their economic choices; make possible more effective roles in municipal decisions, make urban living more satisfactory.

Municipal agencies can also profit from a satisfactory information system. The view from the top is not necessarily much

clearer than it is to the citizen at the bottom. For example, consider the number of groups involved with child care centers - health and social agencies, religious groups, public schools, private organizations, non-profit cooperatives, municipal and federal programs.

Comprehensive data, even if collected for the user, can help administrators clarify existing services, locate duplication, and identify gaps. When such information is once organized to deliver to the public, it can be used in administrative operations as well. The complete report on the five NIC programs will show that some civic agencies are beginning to use the citizen data services.

Libraries have already found that initiating or expanding information services increases the number of people served. Outreach programs, job information desks, community center activities have been steps in this direction, but are short of a total commitment to the kind of service demonstrated by the NIC programs. An increase in numbers of users, greater visibility and vitality as a public institution, and closer integration with all municipal services can turn around the present vulnerability of public libraries to budget cuts and charges of elitism. Potential benefits to libraries are not, per se, a strong argument in favor of information services, but it is being convincingly demonstrated that libraries will gain from providing these services.

The benefits to the political sector from citizen access to information are related to the prevailing political climate. A closed,

patronage-oriented municipal administration can use much of this information as political small change. If summer job information can be given out through political channels, there is little enthusiasm in some mayoral offices for wide public access to information about these jobs. In contrast, an open administration can benefit from fast, effective, channels of information about such programs within local neighborhoods. The Houston Public Library has seen its budget appropriation increased substantially in 1975, when a more open city administration was voted into office. Local, neutral and effective channels of communication can be an asset to an open, progressive administration.

#### 4.5 Financing

The key problem is, of course, finding the money. Any idea of direct fees paid by the user is unrealistic since the poorest have the greatest need, and much of the data is already public property. To date, federal funding has supported all of the large experimental programs. The record of continuing them with local money has not been good so far, and too many programs have been discontinued after the initial grant ended. However, some of the NIC programs will continue after June, 1975, when the LSCA funding ends. When more evaluation of experimental centers is available, new centers can avoid some costly wrong directions in design and operation, and shared expertise in areas like file organization, adequacy in telephone facilities, publicity, and training programs should lessen initial costs. Hopefully, the

final MIC report will provide some help in preparing budgets for new centers.

A current trend in municipal operations should be studied by centers that plan to use computerized data banks. City governments are now turning to computer information systems in such areas as fiscal control, crime control, and deployment of municipal services. An administration which sees benefits from computerized information for managerial use should be more receptive to sharing some parts of its data with a citizen-oriented system. Social and health services, for example, might profit from data-sharing for I & R services. More needs to be done in proving the cost/effectiveness of information systems which are set up for management/administration, but might be shared for citizen use.

One question about costs must be considered. What are the costs, both monetary and social, of insufficient information? Many people know partial answers to this question; perhaps demographic studies can provide a more complete and scientific one.

##### 5. Implications for NCLIS

Congress, in establishing NCLIS, has recognized a need for improvement in information distribution. NCLIS entered the arena at a time when these conditions prevail: we are information-rich, but weak in delivery; the need extends to all citizens, but is most serious in urban areas; responsibility is diffused among many groups; many

uncoordinated solutions are being explored. Implicit in its 2nd Draft Report is the NCLIS' responsibility for all levels of information, the citizen's coping data as well as the scientist's. Especially relevant to the problems of urban information are the Report's statements on the capabilities of technology (pp. 15-19), the needs of the unserved (pp. 55-58), coordination with existing programs (pp. 59, 64), and throughout the report, the assumption that libraries are the most logical location for these centers.

There are several problem areas beyond the province of the 2nd Draft Report. One is recognition of the numbers of groups which are now trying to provide urban information service, ranging from federal bureaus to small volunteer community groups. (Day care is one area in which the entire range of agencies is involved.) This patchwork approach cannot benefit anyone. A second significant problem is the difficult nature of the data, whose complexities extend beyond the rules for bibliographical control. The difficulties in collecting, coordinating and sometimes generating records, and in the need for continuous updating, require a kind of processing which is not the real function of social service agencies, nor of the information scientists, who have not as yet given the processing of this miscellany a high priority. Library science skills in indexing and codifying data are being utilized successfully by some data centers; others are trying to combine the expertise of library and information science. Studies are needed to provide facts on the costs and capabilities of differing patterns of data organization.

A third and complex area is the value of network organization. This is presently colored by very critical looks at the idea of any kind of information network, even if operated for the citizen. Two facts are obvious: (1) some information is of local and neighborhood import only; and (2) some information is relevant on a state- or nation-wide scale. A network delivery system (comparable to MEDLARS/MEDLINE) should be explored for the second category of data. However, no system should interfere with purely local input, although patterns of efficient organization could validly be recommended.

It is apparent that urban information centers must have powerful friends, if they are to meet the needs which already exist and reach the country's 200-year goal of an 'informed citizenry. The NCLIS' mandate to insure the accessibility of information comes at a time when strong leadership is urgently needed to reverse the present proliferation of uncoordinated services. Three areas of responsibility should be assumed by NCLIS.

(1) Advocacy of citizens' information centers as a critically-needed public service. The White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services, projected for 1977, is an opportunity to dramatize the needs and the accomplishments to date, and might do for citizens what Sputnik did for scientific information.

(2) Research on effective design and implementation of information services, building on what has been learned from the Five Cities Neighborhood Information Centers, the Philadelphia MCCIC, and the AoA Centers. As Kahn realized in 1966, we need a "guardian of the experiments."



(3) Coordination of information services, especially those of the library and social service professions. Duplicating and overlapping will ultimately cost more and provide poorer service.

Only unified national support can effectively guarantee the free flow of information from the data-producing agencies, via a neutral, one-stop public service center, to any person who needs it.

### 6.1 Baltimore County Public Library AID Program

A well-designed information service, AID (Accurate Information Desk), is being implemented in 1975 by the Baltimore County Public Library. It responds to the findings of a major survey, Information Needs of Urban Residents by Warner and others (16), which found that 89% of the cross-section interviewed had at least one problem/question, but only 3% of them used libraries in answering them.

The program's stated mission is "to put patrons in contact with governmental, civic, social and sometimes private agencies for the services, activities or information they need." AID is totally integrated with other branch library services and involves the entire branch staff. Three social agencies have contributed to the planning and are cooperating with data provision and special training sessions for the staff.

A central clearinghouse is responsible for collecting and organizing the data, integrating information from local sources with data from larger, more comprehensive agencies, maintaining the files, developing a staff training program, and supervising publicity. The branch centers, in response to either phone inquiries or personal visits, will make telephone referrals to appropriate agencies. Each branch has a card file directory and a vernacular subject index to it.

One branch has begun the service for a six-month trial run, and BCPL hopes to be operating AID service in all branches before the end of 1975. Professional publicity prepared by a local agency is being used to advertise AID.

BCPL's AID Program, demonstrating a willingness to modify and extend traditional services in response to community needs, exemplifies the philosophical orientation of the new ALA RASD standards, "A Commitment to Information Services Developmental Guidelines."

## 6.2 Brooklyn Citizens' Urban Information Centers (CUIC)

In 1971 a New York City Deputy Mayor, Dr. Timothy Costello, proposed a comprehensive program for meeting the needs of the city's confused residents - the Citizens' Urban Information Centers (CUIC). He and others were clearly aware of the problems that people faced in coping with the multiplicity of municipal, federal and private citizen services and bureaus. The program was designed to be operated by the Administration & Management Research Association (AMRA), the City's research arm, headed by Mrs. Beatrice Fitzpatrick. Funding was promised from three sources: the City's revenue-sharing funds, the public library budget, and the Council on Library Resources. Originally, the Centers were planned for all five City boroughs, but the project was scaled down to a two-year demonstration in Brooklyn, hopefully with city-wide expansion later. Although the plan was not originally designed by librarians, branch libraries were chosen as sites for the CUIC centers, one to be established in each of the 55 Brooklyn Public Library branches. The final planning was a cooperative effort involving public and social service personnel, librarians, and community representatives.

The CUIC staff, recruited from government and business, the academic world, and library science, provided an interface of many types of experience. The common thread was recognition of the magnitude of information needs and the human costs of leaving them unmet. The central office would direct the program, maintain liaison

with city agencies, the libraries and the communities, recruit and train the paraprofessionals, and develop the data bank. Two paraprofessionals from each neighborhood would staff the information desks; provide new and updated community data, and promote community cooperation.

Despite a signed contract with the City, federal funds were not released to the program, and it was cancelled in December, 1974, before it could become operational. Although a victim of the present critical financial crisis, CVIC demonstrated that a large unmet need exists and that there is strong community support for information centers. Hopefully, in the future, a strong national program can protect such projects from municipal budget problems and shifts in local priorities.

### 6.3 Philadelphia Model Cities Community Information Center (MCCIC)

The most sophisticated use to date of a computerized system of total information service was tried in a center-city area of Philadelphia. Its goal was to improve the quality of inner-city life for the district's 285,000 residents through facilitating the delivery of human services.

MCCIC was initiated in 1970 by the combined efforts of social service personnel and information scientists, with participation in the early stages by staff from the Free Library of Philadelphia. Its original funding combined some LSCA Title I funds with a \$1.2 million grant from HUD's Model Cities program. Although it was essentially a telephone service, there were centers also in three library locations and one social agency.

The initial data base was compiled from existing printed directories and local material. This was then reformatted, indexed, reverified, and printed in a ready-access file, which could be searched through an index of 3,000 terms. Most of the inquiries were telephone calls, and extensive use was made of three-way phone hookups, and hotline service. There was also experimental use of computer display terminals located in the libraries, the only on-line urban information system that I could discover.

With the end of the Model Cities grant in June, 1974, the MCCIC program was discontinued. The design of its data base and the lessons learned are more milestones in the road toward a one-stop urban information center.

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