

Even Anchors Need Lifelines

Public Libraries In Adult Literacy

A Study by Gail Spangenberg
Spangenberg Learning Resources

New York City
August 1996

Sponsored by
The Center for the Book
in The Library of Congress

Since 1993, through Spangenberg Learning Resources, Gail Spangenberg has directed a variety of studies and organizational planning and development projects. Her clients have included such diverse groups as Chemical Bank, U.S. Basics, The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Hewlett Foundation, New York Theatre Ballet, and the U.S. Department of Education. In 1994, for the Library's new President, she conducted a study of the New York Public Library's adult literacy program.

In the early 1980s, Ms. Spangenberg helped establish the Business Council for Effective Literacy and as its Vice President and Operating Head from 1983 to 1993 she was responsible for development and management of BCEL's policies, publications, and other adult literacy programs and services.

Before that she was Program Officer and Consultant to the Ford Foundation and Senior Consultant to Carnegie Corporation and the Russell Sage Foundation. At Ford, she had responsibility for grant programs in nontraditional and urban higher education, adult education and literacy, and educational technology. She developed the Ford Foundation project which produced McGraw-Hill's book *Adult Illiteracy In America*, by Carmen St. John Hunter and David Harman. She also spearheaded Ford's involvement in the BBC's pioneering national adult literacy campaign in the United Kingdom.

In the early 1980s she developed a major paper on adult literacy for the Carnegie Corporation, and for the Russell Sage Foundation she developed and implemented a range of management and computer systems, including that organization's social science research library and information services.

Ms. Spangenberg has served on many state and national literacy task forces, planning committees, and advisory boards, including the Definition Committee of the National Adult Literacy Survey conducted by the Educational Testing Service and the U.S. Department of Education, the ESL Adult Literacy Clearinghouse of the Center for Applied Linguistics, the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment's 1990 study titled *Worker Training: Competing in the New International Economy*, and numerous studies of workplace literacy for the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis. In her position at BCEL, she commissioned the Southport Institute study which led to creation of the National Literacy Act.

Spangenberg Learning Resources can be reached at 440 East 23rd Street, Ste. 11C, New York, NY 10010. Phone: 212-677-8656. E-mail: GSpan1@AOL.com.

INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEXT

After more than a decade of solid advances in policy development, research, and service outreach, the movement against adult functional illiteracy in the U.S. appears to be in retreat.

School-to-work transition efforts and family literacy have been the steady focus of the present administration, but other components on the adult literacy spectrum have faded from attention.

Furthermore, federal literacy funding for many strands of adult literacy (homeless programs, workplace literacy partnerships, and state literacy resource centers) has evaporated almost overnight, and more setbacks are likely, especially if state block grants are implemented.

The retreat is alarming and philosophically hard to justify, for regardless of the political lens through which one looks, an extensive accumulation of evidence attests to a powerful connection between the basic skills proficiency of

Americans and the well-being of America.

The current climate makes it hard, in some ways impossible, to plan effectively for the future of adult literacy. And matters are made even worse by government down-sizing and ideological warfare on the political front. The result is that a growing number of adult literacy programs—long used to inadequate funding—are limping along as never before toward financial disaster—and adult literacy professionals are increasingly frustrated and discouraged.

It would be natural in the current hostile atmosphere for literacy planners and practitioners to take a wait-and-see approach. But that would *guarantee* even more losses, and there is simply too much at stake for that to be acceptable. Indeed, the very forces that make it hard to stand and fight make it imperative to do just that.

Determination, re-dedication, and boldness of vision are needed as

never before. So is openness to forging new liaisons, developing new voices, and finding opportunity in established avenues of service whose full potential has not yet been used.

WHY THIS STUDY?

This library literacy study stems from a belief that the community-based public libraries are one of the strongest anchors for literacy education the nation could possibly have.

Public libraries have an organic presence in nearly every American town and city, ranking right up there with the local post office and the community college. They are deeply imbedded in the general public consciousness and have a permanence that many other organizations don't have.

Furthermore, it isn't hard to see that their reading and information services increasingly require a literate community of users.

In fact, it has been argued since the turn of the century that it is in the

best interest of public libraries, the general public they serve, *and* adult basic education for adult literacy services to be a central part of their mission. Indeed, in announcing this study, the executive director of the American Library Association declared that this educational service role “adds to the richness and relevance of libraries in communities throughout America.”

But it would be folly to advocate a stronger adult literacy role for public libraries without better understanding what they are already doing, what they think about that, and what factors will shape their current and future role.

How *do* state and local public libraries currently view the role of their institutions in adult basic education and literacy? What connections and understandings exist between public libraries and state and national planning groups, especially the state literacy resource centers legislated to have a central role in setting the statewide context? What

does actual public library involvement consist of now? What problems do state libraries and local public library literacy programs face as they look to the future? How well positioned *are* public libraries to take a stronger role in adult literacy service provision? What can be done to help them do this, assuming enough people agree that the goal is worthy?

Even Anchors Need Lifelines does not pretend to have complete answers to these questions. In fact, it will probably raise more questions than it answers. But the hope is that it will spark a new and more realistic appreciation of what the possibilities are and what work needs to be done to develop the public library role.

SPONSORS & ADVISORS

This study was sponsored by The Center for the Book in The Library of Congress. It took place during a nine-month period between September 1995 and May 1996.

Grant support was provided by the National Institute for Literacy (\$11,000), Harold W. McGraw, Jr. (\$11,000), McGraw-Hill Companies Inc. (\$9,500), and the

American Library Association (\$5,000). Center for the Book costs were somewhere in the vicinity of \$15,000 excluding publication expenses. Spangenberg Learning Resources donated major staff and material resources to the undertaking.

Many people from across the country contributed their time and thinking to this report. There is hardly anything in it that is not theirs. They are acknowledged in Appendices A-C.

General acknowledgments are presented in Appendix A. Appendix B lists the people who served in various project advisory roles. Many wrote memoranda to assist with data analysis, and their thinking will be evident throughout the report. Appendix C lists the names and addresses of the nearly 200 professionals who provided the raw material for this study by filling out questionnaires. To facilitate networking, phone and fax numbers as well as e-mail addresses are given for Appendix B and C contributors.

THE WORK PLAN

Following an initial definition period, the survey and analysis por-

tion of this study unfolded in a series of four discrete phases—interspersed with meetings, tracking of legislation, interviews, and other activities.

Phase 1 - questionnaire design and mailing list development. In September and October, questionnaires of varying length were designed, sent out for review, and customized for four different target groups: **chief officers of state library agencies (state librarians)...designated literacy contacts in those same state library agencies ...heads of state literacy resource centers...and local library literacy programs.**

Name and address lists were obtained from several sources as were nominations for local programs. The lists were found to be largely out of date, requiring extensive up-front telephone work to verify names, titles, and addresses.

The questionnaire for state librarians (Q1) consisted of five pages of general questions to probe their present thinking about the role of public libraries in adult literacy, and about matters of technology use, involve-

ment in state planning, and various funding and financial matters.

The questionnaire for state library agency literacy professionals (Q2, ten pages) included the same five pages sent to the state librarians plus five more. This was done to elicit more deeply detailed information and to learn whether state library agencies collect meaningful program data about local public library literacy programs.

In the main, Q1 and Q2 aimed to assess whether these important state agencies are providing significant leadership and support to local library literacy programs, and whether they could be a source of strong, new leadership as federal funding and power shifts to the states.

State Literacy Resource Centers were included as a third study strand (Q3, ten pages) because they were presumed to be the centrally important state level planning and resource entities envisioned in the National Literacy Act of 1991. As such, it was reasoned, they would have a key role in shaping the context in which public library literacy programs

operate, a role that should be understood better.

Some questions designed for SLRCs had to do with their perceptions about the status of public libraries as part of the statewide system for delivering adult literacy services. Others sought to examine the current and potential role and health of the SLRCs themselves.

In the fourth questionnaire for local library literacy programs (Q4, eight pages), some questions were the same as those asked of the first three groups while others were devoted to the specific purposes, features, and problems of the programs themselves. The primary goal was to discover the concerns and hopes of those who actually provide the services.

Questionnaires were sent to 82 local public library literacy programs in 32 states. The 63 responding programs are not a national sampling, but their experiences and circumstances are especially relevant because they are long established (9.9 years on average), are known to have solid track records, and have a

valuable accumulation of insights.

They were either nominated by national or state leadership organizations or selected by Spangenberg Learning Resources from three sources: research reports found in the ERIC database, the large pool of programs that have had multiple-year funding from the Office of Education Research & Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education, and programs reported on in various newsletters of the Business Council for Effective Literacy.

An effort was made to have geographic distribution and to include both small and large population areas.

Phase 2 - questionnaire production and mailing. During October and November, reproduction and color-coding of the questionnaires took place, letters of transmittal were written, and mailings went out. Additional literature was reviewed and telephone consultations were made.

Phase 3 - telephone follow-up and other communications activities. To improve the response

rate—and it did—extensive telephone follow-up occurred during December and January. Questionnaire returns were sorted and given preliminary review. Duplicate questionnaires were provided as necessary and clarifying consultations were held with many respondents.

Phase 4 - data synthesis and analysis. From February to May, data organization and analyses were done. In March, the data were prepared and sent to a panel of project advisors for review.

In addition, telephone interviews and informational calls were made to several national organizations: the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, the American Library Association, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Institute for Literacy, the Center for Applied Linguistics, the Public Library Data Service of the ALA, the National Clearinghouse for Adult Literacy/ESL Education, the National Center for Family Literacy, Laubach Literacy Action, and Literacy Volunteers of America.

PRESENTATION & OUTCOMES

An immense amount of information was collected in this project. Over 2,000 pages of raw material were generated. That was boiled down to a data book of nearly 321 pages, which in turn was reduced to the 51 tables seen in this report. Every question asked in the survey is covered here, along with a parallel discussion and analysis of the responses.

The report is dense and too much to digest in a single reading. But it has been written to be read as easily as possible. Each section is self-contained and can be read apart from all the others, depending on the reader's interest. It can also be navigated with little attention to the tables or examined in a deeply studied way.

The reader can also begin at the end, with the Conclusions and Recommendations section starting on page 116. The main findings for each section are summarized there.

Sections 1-6 deal in turn with the broad

themes of the survey. Section 7 gives direct voice to the respondents themselves. It recaps and reinforces the analysis and findings discussed in 1-6. As noted, the main findings are presented in Section 8, along with conclusions and recommendations.

The report sections are as follows:

1. The Public Library's Role (p. 6)
 2. The Use & Limits Of Technology (p. 18)
 3. Planning (p. 35)
 4. Finance & Funding (p. 48)
 5. State Level Program Data (p. 61)
 6. Local Programs: The Heart Of The Matter (p. 72)
 7. Lifeblood Issues & Leadership (p. 89)
 8. Conclusions & Recommendations (p. 116)
- Appendices (p. 126)

It should be noted that severe budget constraints placed major limits on this project. Detailed state-by-state comparisons, for instance, could not be performed—although such analysis

Q1	69% (35) of the state librarians themselves sent in completed returns. 24% (12) said that their agency's designated literacy contact speaks for them (CA, CO, LA, MA, MO, NY, OK, SC, VT, VA, WA, and WY). 8% (4) did not want to participate (AK, AZ, CT, NC).
Q2	85% (44) of state library agency literacy contacts responded. 14% (7) did not respond (AL, AZ, DC, NC, NV, RI, UT).
Q3	78% (40) of state literacy resource center heads (or their equivalents) responded. 22% (11) did not respond (AR, DC, GA, ID, MA, ME, NV, OR, RI, TX, WY).
Q4	77% (63) of the 82 nominated local public library literacy programs responded. 23% (19) did not respond (one arrived too late to be included).

is possible and would be useful and even necessary for some purposes.

For those who want to undertake deeper analyses of the findings, the complete study data will be published as a supplement to the report called *Even Anchors Need Lifelines: The Background Data*.

In addition, the Center for the Book may eventually issue some targeted resource publications for the field that draw on material in this report.

SETTING THE STAGE

For this study, adult literacy is defined as ***basic reading, writing, math, and ESL needed by adults to function in various contexts. Included are workplace/***

workforce literacy and family literacy (where the focus of instruction is on parents). The definition is consistent with that of the National Literacy Act.

The four groups questioned in the 50 states and the District of Columbia—chief officers of state library agencies, key literacy contacts in state libraries, heads of state literacy resource centers, and directors of local library literacy programs—are referred to either by those designations or Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4. This short-hand device was used in the full data book and is retained here to facilitate cross-referencing.

As the table above shows, the study achieved an extraordinarily high

This assemblage of data is remarkable, giving us information about library literacy programs incomparably more extensive and meaningful than we have ever had before. (Dan Lacy, Duke University, formerly of BCEL & McGraw-Hill, Inc.)

It is significant to have this much raw data in one place. It would have been useful to have this 5 to 10 years ago when the discussion of the role of libraries in literacy began to intensify. (Bridget Lamont, State Librarian, IL)

response rate—especially from the state library personnel. That is an important finding in itself, indicating a deep interest in the topic under study.

Although it took extensive staff work to produce such a strong response, the rate is nonetheless remarkable. These are very busy people in the best of economic times, and when this survey reached their desks they were unusually concerned about their institutions and programs—and still are—because of federal and state cutbacks.

Moreover, it was a real eye-opener to discover the extent to which project questionnaires had to compete with literally dozens of questionnaires from other sources—almost a public policy issue in itself.

The recipients in all groups are deluged with survey forms, day in and day out, from every imaginable source— for purposes that range from the grand to the frivolous. Most are trashed on arrival, and those kept for later attention are routinely relegated to the bottom of the work pile where they are apt to be

forgotten. Yet several people contacted during follow-up were grateful to be reminded because they genuinely *wanted* to participate.

It is worthy of note, too, that if the response rate for state literacy resource centers actually seems *low* given their presumed role—why not a 100% response rate here, asked one data reviewer—one of the most shocking things learned in the study is that at the time the data were being gathered, many SLRCs had already been forced by federal funding cuts to close or drastically curtail operations. The circumstances of most SLRCs remain very bleak. It is a story that needs attention in its own right.

1: THE PUBLIC LIBRARY'S ROLE

The basic purpose behind the questions of this first section of the study was to probe facts and attitudes about the mission and the current and future role of public libraries in adult literacy service provision.

The section looks at what is on the minds of state and local public library professionals with respect to mission and role and also at what state literacy resource center heads think about these matters.

It also probes some of the forces that affect the extent and nature of public library involvement in adult literacy—such as funding and state and national understanding. And it seeks to draw attention to the benefits of library literacy programming to the country in general and to public libraries in particular.

MAJOR MISSION? A CAUTIOUS YES

Clearly, in R1, the majority in all respondent categories think the provision of literacy services should be a major mission of public libraries.

R1: Should the provision of literacy services be a major mission of public libraries? [Asked of groups Q1-Q4]		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
Q1	State Librarians (35 of 35)	66%	26%	9%
Q2	State Library Literacy Contacts (37 of 44)	81	8	11
Q3	State Literacy Resource Center Heads (38 of 40)	74	16	11
Q4	Local Library Literacy Program Heads (63 of 63)	91	6	3
R2: Are public library literacy programs a major component of your state's literacy-providing network now? [Q3-Q4]		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
Q3	SLRC Heads (38 of 40)	53%	42%	5%
Q4	Local Program Heads (63 of 63)	62	25	13
R3: Is the development of library-based adult literacy programs a major mission of the state library agency now? [Q1-Q4]		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
Q1	State Librarians (35 of 35)	51%	43%	6%
Q2	State Library Literacy Contacts (36 of 44)	50	44	6
Q3	SLRC Heads (38 of 40)	29	55	16
Q4	Local Program Heads (63 of 63)	46	33	21

While this is highly encouraging news, it is also significant that one-fourth of the state librarians do *not* think so, despite decades of advocacy by both library and education leaders. Moreover, about 10% of the Q1-Q3 respondents are not sure—so that on balance, about one-third of the respondents are still unconvinced about the appropriateness and importance of literacy service. Several study advisors were quite alarmed by this discovery.

Responses to questions R2-R3 are somewhat at odds with the findings of R1. Although two-thirds of the library personnel say they consider literacy a major public library mission, half indicate that development of library-based adult literacy programs are *not presently* a major mission of the state agency. This indicates that while library professionals generally embrace the provision of literacy services as a legitimate and central role for public libraries, there is

a difference between what many of them say and what they do.

Beyond this, the high negative response rate to R3 by state library people was thought by one of this project's data reviewers "to be most detrimental to local library literacy programs that feel strongly about their role in their respective communities."

However, responses to question R3a suggest that **lack of funding at the state and federal level is**

by far the biggest reason for the apparent discrepancy. Lack of adequate staff resources, also cited several times as a reason, is basically a funding problem.

Furthermore, many R3a respondees feel that it is better for public libraries to support the literacy work of *others* than to have the basic responsibility themselves.

Adding a further twist to the situation, the data also suggest that some of the respondees may not really know the facts, signalling that there is a communications problem within and among the different groups surveyed.

For one thing, state librarians and the designated literacy professionals within their agencies differ markedly in their views about the role and present involvement of public libraries in adult literacy. For another, library agency respondees claim to be doing more to develop library literacy services than local library literacy programs think they are doing.

State literacy resource center heads think there is even less going on.

R3a. Individuals responding that library-based literacy programs are NOT a major mission of the state library agency were asked to explain why, and to indicate if and when the agency plans to adopt or expand library literacy programming. [Q1-Q4]

	Q1 (12 of 15 responded)	Q2 (10 of 16)	Q3 (17 of 22)	Q4 (15 of 21)
Lack of funding/ not enough staff resources/ budget cuts/federal cutbacks/ no state legislative attention	7	4	11	11
State library prefers to support the work of others in literacy; basic responsibility belongs to someone else; others are better equipped to provide literacy services	5	3	3	3
Literacy is just a low priority	1	1	2	2
Planning is now in process	1	1		
More interested in children's literacy	1			
State library gives LSCA grants to local libraries to address community needs they think are important	1			1
State library emphasis in on building collections		1		
Technology is the shining star			1	
Barbara Bush is no longer in office				1

R4: In general, do you think that provision of literacy services in public libraries in the future should be more important, less important, or about the same as now? [Q1-Q4]

	More Important	Less Important	The Same As Now
Q1 State Librarians (35 of 35)	60%	3%	37%
Q2 State Library Literacy Contacts (36 of 44)	81	0	19
Q3 SLRC Heads (37 of 40)	70	11	19
Q4 Local Program Heads (63 of 63)	84	0	16

Similarly, there is a sizable difference in the response of SLRC heads and local programs as to whether library literacy programs are presently a major component of their state's overall delivery system (with the latter more likely to think so).

Moreover, the high percentage of Q3 and Q4 respondees that are *not*

If public libraries are not concerned and/or do not take a strong leadership role in literacy and/or fail to see the need for a reading populace—people who understand and appreciate the value of reading, thus of libraries—then what *is* important to a public library? Having an A1 reference collection that no one uses because the literacy level in the community is so low that most people wouldn't know about it or care? (Betty Ann Scott, FL)

R5. Given your view of literacy needs and services in the state, what new or expanded role might public libraries play to help meet the needs? Conversely, what role might be inappropriate for them because other organizations are better suited to it? [Q3, Q4]

	Q3	Q4
	# of Times Mentioned	
Coordination & collaboration (to avoid duplication of services and stretch limited funding/resources):		
Integrate/coordinate literacy work of libraries more closely with work of state departments of education, literacy program providers, and/or others at state, regional, and local levels responsible for literacy	14	12
Initiate more collaborative projects—sharing resources and expertise—with voluntary and community-based literacy groups, schools, social agencies, businesses	7	3
Participate more actively in statewide planning. Become full partners in literacy service delivery. Help build coalitions of interest. Serve as catalyst for bringing together literacy providers, potential adult learners, business and industry, and others	4	8
Work more closely with state literacy resource centers	6	
Be one of the “point” organizations for literacy in every community	1	
Provide space and other resources for literacy instruction and tutor training programs of outside literacy groups:		
Provide space/neutral sites/stigma free location for one-to-one or small group instruction/meetings/workshops	14	17
Help promote and recruit tutors and hard-to-reach students/ provide referrals, offer other outreach services	2	8
Open libraries for adult literacy instruction during weekday evenings	1	1
Collection & Materials Development		
Provide/develop reading materials/collections for adult new readers	9	17
Develop/house training and instructional materials for tutors and tutor training purposes	2	
Help log/catalog the literacy program collections developed by SLRCs, local programs, and others into regional/state library databases to which all have access	2	
Facilitate inter-library loans	1	
Sponsor bookmobiles		1
Take a more direct instruction/training role:		
Directly provide literacy instructional services, especially when no other group in the community is doing it or when patrons want them	2	6
Provide a stable base for direct training of tutors (including the training of library personnel)	4	1
Offer CAI-learning programs	1	3
Family literacy:		
Increase focus on family literacy support/programs	4	8
Serve as an entry point for adults, through their children’s services	1	2

sure is another indicator of generally inadequate communications.

In R4, the vast majority of people say that they believe the provision of literacy services in public libraries should be more important in the future than now—though nearly two-thirds of state librarians would keep the level about the same. But this response, while encouraging on one level, is at odds with the heavy negative responses of R2-R3, again suggesting that many of the respondents are ambiguous about what they think. Note, however, that only 3% of the state librarians said that adult literacy services should be *reduced*. Amazingly, a relatively high 11% of the SLRC heads thought so.

THE CURRENT & FUTURE ROLES

In question R5, SLRC and local program directors speak in fairly typical ways about the role of public libraries in adult literacy. Despite the changing financial circumstances of literacy and library groups, most of them think about the library’s role in terms of what already exists rather than what might be. The

call is largely for more of the same.

For example, a relatively large number of respondees indicate that the main service role of libraries should be to house one-on-one or small group volunteer tutoring programs for adults at the lowest basic skills levels. Data gathered in other parts of the study suggest that very many library-based programs do indeed have these elements, possibly the majority.

But these data also point to a wide range of eclectic programs and to

We have come a long way since the early 80s. We really seem poised to come together and coordinate. Ironical that the funding to support these efforts is about to go away.
(Jane Heiser, OERI)

It should be emphasized that collaborations are work! They are not automatic money-savers, but take time to cultivate and nurture.
(Virginia Heinrich, MN)

Table R5, cont'd

	Q3	Q4
Computers & Technology:		
Provide computers, computer services, software, and access to online services and other technology. Help develop related library and information processing skills in general, especially as these skills relate to understanding and use of technology	6	6
Help bring technology into local literacy programs (computers, distance learning, video)	1	
Provide Internet access		4
Maintain Internet home pages that profile and provide information on library literacy programs, services, issues		1
Information Services:		
Serve more as community centers of information and one-stop drop-in centers	3	6
Public Awareness & Advocacy:		
Take a stronger public relations, awareness, and advocacy role, sponsor community forums, sponsor discussions for patrons, hold readathons and workshops	2	7
ESL Services:		
Offer more ESL classes/services to immigrants, including voter registration and citizenship-testing services		3
Other:		
Provide leadership to local/county library literacy programs in the form of staff resources, fundraising, and curriculum/program development. Help service and planning groups cope with block grant programs	1	3
Be more supportive of local/county library literacy projects		3
Make literacy coordinator a regular library position		1
Train librarians to better work with/understand literacy providers		1
Be more sensitive to/supportive of needs of new adult readers		1
Provide testing services for potential adult literacy students to help those providing/planning instructional programs		1
Expand literacy services for the disabled		1
Roles that are appropriate or inappropriate:		
Job preparation and workplace literacy programs are inappropriate roles		3
In general, training, tutoring, and staff development should be left to literacy organizations, ABE programs, schools	1	6
Only low-level adult literacy instruction is appropriate for libraries		2
Librarians are not and should not be trained as educators	1	1
The leadership role belongs to others	1	1
Instructional services for the disabled and for people under age 18 should be a school responsibility		2
There are no inappropriate roles for libraries	1	

highly exemplary programs—some true national models, such as the New York Public Library program—in which libraries themselves provide the staff and instruction. The point is that the respondents did not, perhaps could not, look critically or freshly at this issue, although the question clearly invited it.

Significantly, however, there is prudent realization by both groups of the statewide need to avoid duplication of services. Above all else, there is a strong call for better coordination on the part of public libraries, more collaboration, and more library involvement in overall statewide planning—though little attention is given to what this would cost in money and service trade-offs.

A number of respondents consider libraries to be uniquely positioned in the community to help with various kinds of outreach. They feel that libraries should play a far larger role in promoting and recruiting tutors and hard-to-reach students.

The collections and development of materials

There are no stereotypical roles for either education or libraries.
(Judith Rake, IL)

should also be expanded, according to the two groups. An interesting new idea offered here is for libraries to draw the reading and training collections of SLRCs and local literacy groups into their cataloging systems,

thereby expanding access to the materials.

Beyond the suggestions offered above, which are of first-order importance, respondents put forward a second tier of ideas: Some would like to see

libraries take a more direct instructional/training role. There is interest in more family literacy programming. Some would like to see libraries provide much more computer and other technology support to local groups, including information services on the Internet. They want libraries to strengthen their role as community information centers and to provide awareness and advocacy leadership.

		Very Well	Not Well Enough	Don't Know
R6a. How well do you think LIBRARIANS in your state understand the potential role of libraries as education/literacy service providers? [Q1-Q4]				
		43%	57%	0%
Q1	State librarians (35 of 35 answering)	42	58	0
Q2	Library Agency Literacy Contacts (38 of 44)	26	58	16
Q3	SLRC Heads (38 of 40)	36	56	8
Q4	Local Program Heads (63 of 63)			
R6b. How well do you think STATE & NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE & FUNDING ENTITIES understand the potential role of libraries as education/literacy service providers? [Q1-Q4]				
		17%	77%	7%
Q1	State librarians (35 of 35 answering)	8	84	8
Q2	Library Agency Literacy Contacts (38 of 44)	3	71	26
Q3	SLRC Heads (38 of 40)	5	89	6
Q4	Local Program Heads (63 of 63)			
R6c. How well do you think LITERACY & EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS IN YOUR STATE understand the potential role of libraries as education/literacy service providers? [Q1-Q4]				
		46%	51%	3%
Q1	State librarians (35 of 35)	42	58	0
Q2	Library Agency Literacy Contacts (38 of 44)	39	45	16
Q3	SLRC Heads (38 of 40)	40	59	1
Q4	Local Program Heads (63 of 63)			

A few see a need for more ESL services, but this suggestion came from local library programs that specialize in such services. Considering the great national need in this area, and the fact that so many literacy programs countrywide provide substantial ESL services, it is surprising that the respondees were nearly silent on this subject.

MANY WHO NEED TO UNDERSTAND DON'T

The rest of Table R5 is a potpourri of ideas and perspectives, pointing again to some ambiguity about the library's role and mission.

The responses to questions R6a-R6c may partly explain why. It is astounding that so many respondees in every category answered "not well enough."

Overall, nearly three-fifths of them think that librarians do not understand the potential role of libraries as education/literacy service providers. This suggests that they do not understand the present role very well either. Note that librarians even think this about other librarians!

R6d. Respondees who responded "not well enough" to one or more of the questions R6a-R6c were invited to suggest steps that might be taken to improve the understanding of librarians, state and national legislative and funding entities, and/or literacy/education professionals at the state level. [Q1-Q4]

		Responded	No Response
Q1	State librarians (3 of 29)	10%	90%
Q2	Library agency literacy contacts (7 of 34)	21	79
Q3	SLRC Heads (7 of 36)	19	81
Q4	Local Program Heads (23 of 62)	37	63

State literacy and education professionals do not get very high marks either. But most troubling are the figures for state and national legislative and funding entities. On average, a full **80% of the respondees think that the very forces that affect them most through policy and funding decisions made at the state and national levels do not understand the role and potential of libraries in literacy.** The percentage of local program heads and library agency literacy personnel responding this way are a whopping **89% and 84%**, respectively.

Add to all of this the very high percentage of "don't know" answers, especially on the part of SLRCs and with respect to legislators and funding groups, and there clearly is a communications and

- Q1** Statewide publicity and marketing to increase awareness of legislative and funding entities. (AR)

Continued emphasis on why low literacy skills reduces our overall economic competitiveness and lowers the standard of living for our children. (IN)

Nurture individual care and concern at the community level. (TN)
- Q2** Statewide publicity and marketing. (AR)

Marketing. Making presentations to librarians and training librarians in how to effectively provide services and draw libraries more into partnership arrangements with other literacy groups. (IL)

Clarify what literacy is and the library's role in education. Do this by developing a descriptive statement of purpose with the most thoughtful members of the library community. Keep this statement before the public for comment and discussion until all reach common ground. (MN)

Get librarians to serve on literacy councils and to commit to community literacy groups services the library can offer. Improve communication with state and national legislative/funding entities. (MS)

It all depends on local leadership and personal understanding. (TN)

Focus on state legislative bodies. National legislative bodies do not make as much of a connection. (VT)
- Q3** All three groups need to have a better sense of the educational role of libraries and, if nothing else, how to contribute effectively to the development of literacy through special collections. Also, education/literacy professionals need to know they're not the only service providers. (MN)

Sensitize and train librarians to work with non-readers. (MO)

A more concerted and systematic statewide effort to collaborate, between and among all groups. At the state legislative level, there is a tendency to gloss over adult literacy issues. (NE)

Table R6d, cont'd

Every year librarians and ABE teachers come together for a joint staff development workshop (i.e. 10 librarians, 10 teachers). People involved in this program understand, and those who have had state library literacy grants are knowledgeable. (TN)

Develop master plans to exploit each other's resources to the advantage of clients. Schedule discussions to maximize resources and eliminate duplication. (UT)

Hold at least 2 statewide meetings with good representation from the three groups to develop awareness and collaboration. Encourage more partnerships involving both adult education/literacy and library people. Encourage membership on key statewide planning committees. (VA)

Q4

Legislators and educators need more exposure to the educational role of libraries, as opposed to the view that supports the library's role as the provider of entertainment or recreational reading materials. (AR)

Library directors, boards, friends, and administrators have to believe it before we can convince anyone else. These people don't tend to come to workshops, but when we can get them to attend we *do* get through to them. (FL)

Generally, legislators, funders, and literacy professionals tend to see the current role, not the potential role. One has to have worked in the literacy field or have had a consciousness-raising experience to appreciate the impact libraries can have on the provision of basic education to the community. The best way I know to raise awareness is to meet and talk to functionally illiterate adults, especially those who have been in a library-sponsored literacy program. (FL)

Librarians need to be educated about the role they can play as tutors, promoters, materials developers, and the use of their buildings as literacy sites. We need to let legislative/funding entities know at every opportunity the important role libraries are playing in the literacy field through increased lobbying. I think literacy and education professionals are fully aware already, just choosing to ignore the current and potential role of libraries. (GA)

Many people think that library literacy programs are less professional than other library departments. They are thought to be mostly voluntary in nature and to have unprofessional administration and staffing. While that is not always so, it is in many cases. Administrators of library literacy programs should have a degree and experience in adult education, reading, or education, comparable to a librarian's degree. Other professionals would then take them more seriously. (IN)

More information should be provided to all legislators. State and national departments of education should provide more information and supports. Sharing through conferences and newsletters is good, but something more innovative would be even better. I don't have any innovative ideas at the moment. (IN)

All of these groups have some individuals who understand the issue very well, but they could do more to improve the understanding of their colleagues. (MA)

Special efforts are needed to change the attitudes of local librarians who look on literacy service as an inappropriate social service role. (MA)

Territorial issues of "professional" educators vs. community-based teachers must be eliminated. (MA)

Money is just not in the library budget. It could be, with a different attitude and role (literacy) acceptance at the state and federal levels and in the library associations such as ALA and equivalent state organizations. These groups should partnership with the national literacy organizations —LVA, Laubach, NIFL—and work out a plan or formula for staffing and costs at local libraries. (MI)

Many librarians immediately understand building leadership through school visits and summer reading programs, but this understanding does not always extend to adults or immigrants. Also, funders and the general public often regard libraries as book repositories rather than organic knowledge and community centers. (MN)

A high profile statewide campaign, such as Library Card Sign Up for Adult Literacy Students, needs to be launched in order to raise awareness of librarians and the other two groups. (NC)

Libraries in the state need to enhance their public relations efforts to promote library literacy services. There could be an alliance of representatives from state library literacy programs that would serve as a forum to set policy, design programs, develop comprehensive initiatives, and

Interesting that all categories polled did not feel that the potential role of libraries is well understood. We need to do more public relations both nationally and at the state level. In California, where libraries have been responsible for *all* the literacy promotions in the state, all providers have benefited. SLRCs can take on some of that responsibility but not in every state. Our statewide meeting with NIFL in 1995 did much to help other entities see the value and impact libraries can have. One comment heard repeatedly was that educators were surprised at the quality and professionalism of the library literacy staff! Our recent adult learner conference also opened the eyes of some educators about the work of libraries. (Carole Talan, CA)

Table R6d, cont'd

share resources and information. Legislatures need to be better informed about the range of library literacy services provided to their constituents and the impact of those services. Literacy and education professionals tend to view library literacy services as secondary to those offered by traditional educational institutions. That needs to change. (NY)

Library literacy programs need to be given greater visibility. Strong local programs are often not known about or felt statewide. Direct mailings that provide information about the programs would be helpful. (OK)

We need more of what we are already doing: library newsletter articles, workshops for librarians, provision of "starter collections." Individual libraries should be encouraged to link up with local literacy providers by someone traveling the state to facilitate this. (OR)

Librarians could receive grant money with strict guidelines to insure that adult literacy will be the focus—e.g. a family literacy project would need to include an adult instructional component as well as a children's component. Staff would need training on the needs of adults with low literacy skills. On another front, literacy professionals need to be reminded that libraries exist as learning resources. Their funding should require evidence that collaboration with libraries is being carried out. (PA)

Librarians are expected to do more and more with less and less, and they have to worry about funding for essential library services. Librarians would be more inclined to be involved if there were increased funding for library literacy. (PA)

These groups need to visit quality local programs, and talk with adults who have received help from library literacy programs about how it has changed their lives. (TX)

Librarians need to be more sensitive to the need to make their institutions more accessible and approachable to poorly skilled adults. (WI)

information problem of *tremendous* proportion. Except for about 20% of the state librarians, whose views may have been somewhat tempered by political pragmatism, the leanness of the "very well" response for legislators and funders literally jumps off the page.

**BUILDING
UNDERSTANDING**

In R6d, the low response rate in virtually every category suggests that remarkably few of these professionals have thought very much about the poor understanding they think exists or how to overcome it. One project

advisor even wondered if, when it comes right down to it, some may just not care. This verges on the incredible, considering that the well-being perhaps even the survival of library literacy programs depends *heavily* on the depth of understanding the three groups have—to say nothing of their impact on the ability of state libraries to provide support and leadership.

But the answers of those who did respond show that some people in all categories have a fairly clear grasp of contextual reality, and some good ideas. The narrative part of Table R6d gives their responses—expressed pretty much in their own words so as to give a sense of texture and nuance. (Responses that simply restated the problem or an earlier opinion are not included.) Considering that the basic role of the local programs is to provide literacy services—not leadership to develop the statewide context—their thoughtfulness and far larger response rate is quite impressive.

In the main, the ideas given in R6d have long been recognized as vital to advancing adult literacy. Building awareness and

understanding through targeted and general public relations campaigns, for example. Or improving the content and flow of information to legislators, funders, educators, librarians, and other groups with a role and a stake. Or developing better lines of communications and more varied and effective collaboration. Or workshops, meetings, and publications for librarians...board members...legislators...the public...and any other groups who need to be sensitized, trained, or otherwise brought on board. Such things have been good all along. Even more would be better now, and the respondees see it.

One action urged by many of them is that more presentations to librarians take place. Such presentations would have many purposes, one being to arm librarians and library groups to more actively promote library literacy services at the state and national levels—lighting the flame for the torchbearers, so to speak.

Another cluster of ideas has to do with clarifying the role of libraries in adult literacy. "Do this," says the literacy

representative of one state library agency, “by developing a descriptive statement of purpose with the most thoughtful members of the library community. Keep this statement before the public for comment and discussion until all reach common ground.”

In still another grouping of ideas, **respondees feel that traditional educators do not recognize or accept the role of libraries in literacy service.** They think this turf problem should be addressed as a priority.

Master planning of one kind or another is also suggested. Ideas range from the greater involvement of librarians in planning councils and committees at the state level to the formation of new state and national alliances that would explore new program approaches and funding formulas.

“Money is just not in the library budget,” says one local program head. “It could be, if there were a different attitude and role acceptance at the state and federal levels and in the library

R7. What do you personally see as the economic and social value(s) of library literacy programs? [Q1, Q2, Q4]

		<u>Responses</u>	<u>No Response</u>
Q1	State Librarians (29 of 35 responded)	83%	17%
Q2	State Library Literacy Contacts (36 of 44)	82	18
Q4	Local Program Heads (57 of 63)	90	10

A sampling of views held in common by respondents in all three categories is given below. Emphasis is on survey responses that were expressed in terms of library literacy programs, not literacy programs in general.

The mission of today’s public libraries is for lifelong learning. Adult literacy programs are critical to the economic growth and stability of America. The statistics alone are overwhelming that people who cannot read cannot contribute to the economic and social infrastructure. Literacy will not solve every problem but its affect will be felt by less dollars spent on corrections and welfare and more participation in educational and political programs. (Q1, AL)

An educated, motivated workforce will mean economic strength and viability to our state and community. The public library is the best positioned public agency to coordinate and lead these programs. (Q1, HI)

Library literacy programs can have significant economic and social value. In much the same way as other public library programs/services, library literacy programs influence and affect local communities. In a selfish way, library literacy programs offer public libraries the opportunity to “grow” their own users. (Q1, IA)

Library literacy programs provide a community-centered and individualized method of assisting adults to acquire essential reading skills. Libraries offer a perfect environment for the new reader or literacy student to begin using their newly acquired skills. This training brings the student into contact with government in a positive way, and facilitates the transition to becoming an independent learner and self-supporting member of the community. (Q1, MI)

The social value would be in the area of including another segment of the population in the planning of Library Programs. The segment being the “new reader.” In the area of economics the library would serve more patrons and circulation would increase. In budget justifications members can equal dollars. A more literate population also means more and/or better jobs that in turn equal more revenue for local businesses and a larger tax base. (Q1, SD)

Economics—resource materials readily available, flexible hours of operation. Social—library setting is generally nonthreatening to nonreaders enrolled in literacy classes. Some new readers become lifelong users and break the cycle of intergenerational illiteracy. (Q2, AR)

Library literacy programs provide a sense of stability and safety in many communities whose residents are disproportionately represented in the lower literacy levels as documented by both the [national adult literacy] and Illinois surveys. Libraries also provide unlimited sources of information to meet any student’s needs. Library staff also are a resource to assist those adults and families lacking the skills to locate information for themselves. As tax-supported entities, public libraries provide most of these services at no charge to clients. Money for such services is often an issue with literacy patrons. (Q2, IL)

Table R7, cont'd

A literate citizenry is an informed citizenry; an informed citizenry is a participative citizenry. Libraries are the most available and approachable institution for *all* learners in lifelong pursuit of jobs, education, and participation in democracy. (Q2, LA)

Library literacy programs highlight a key role of the library as a source for lifelong learning. They reach out to a population which has a right to library services and programs which are traditionally under-represented in the community. (Q2, MA)

Library literacy programs can help advance the literacy level of the community, which, in the long term, advances the literacy level of the state. Higher literacy can lead to economic development, higher incomes, and greater self-pride. These factors can enhance the quality of life for new readers and the library community as a whole. (Q2, MO)

Libraries are a permanent institution in a student's community. Services are available at no cost before, during, and after a student's enrollment in a formal education program either through the library or elsewhere. A library can be used for intergenerational learning. It provides community, job, and entrepreneurship information. (Q2, NY)

To create lifelong learners, thinkers, and seekers of information for self-enlightenment. To create families that instill a lifetime of love of reading for pleasure and knowledge. To create communities that encourage learning and self-growth. (Q2, VT)

Unless we have a literate population, forget democracy. Libraries are one of the foundations of democracy. (Q2, WI)

Library literacy programs provide meaningful volunteer opportunities for individuals who want to serve their community by tutoring other adults. The programs enable adult learners to make significant life changes based on educational gains and increased self-esteem. These changes include finding a job, changing jobs to find a better one, discounting dependence on welfare, becoming a U.S. citizen, and becoming an active participant in the democratic process by voting. (Q4, Literacy Program, Napa City County Library, CA)

Socially, libraries are comfortable places to learn, and librarians are seldom judgmental. Economically, with a corps of volunteers, 200-300 adults per year can be taught during the course of the year...good value for having only two library personnel in our department. (Q4, Project LEAD, Miami-Dade Public Library System, FL)

Promotion of employability and economic self-sufficiency...citizen participation in government and community life...crime prevention...family literacy, effective parenting...enhanced quality of life (personal fulfillment, self-confidence, self-sufficiency)...improved health and

Table R7, cont'd

safety...lifelong learners who know how to utilize the wealth of resources and services of the library. (Q4, DeKalb County Public Library, GA)

Library literacy programs reach the most isolated adult nonreaders who have few, if any, other hopes except the literacy program. For ESL students and families, the programs provide cultural education as well as literacy skills. Literacy programs focus on life skills, parenting, job hunting, etc. and provide assistance to people with no other assistance available. (Q4, Literacy Program, Thomas Crane Public Library, MA)

Social values—libraries are easily accessible by the public and easily located. Age of patron or formal education is not a barrier. There is a degree of anonymity for patrons, making it less embarrassing for adults to seek help. Economic—libraries can house literacy programs at zero or low-cost overhead. Library staff can handle inquiries as part of their regular routine. (Q4, MARC Literacy Program, Greenville Public Library, MI)

Library literacy programs often serve adults who are at the most beginning levels in their reading and writing development, and who would otherwise not be eligible to participate in traditional reading and writing programs that serve populations reading above 4.0 [grade equivalency level]. The literacy program [here] serves people in communities identified as being most in need based upon current economic and educational profiles. In addition, libraries are often volunteer programs enabling community residents to give something positive back to their neighborhoods. (Q4, Centers for Reading and Writing, New York Public Library, NYC)

As adults improve their reading, writing, and math skills, they earn higher wages, which results in more taxes to support libraries. Also adults who are tutored in libraries or who are shown how to use library services become enthusiastic supporters. Another observed benefit is the modification of negative attitudes toward other people. (Q4, LEARN Project, Eugene Public Library, OR)

Since I live in a state with high illiteracy rates and we also have inadequate schools, high rates of traffic accidents (you don't have to be able to read to get a license here), signs in the grocery store that are virtually illegible, rising rates of AIDS, and a low standard of living, I think that illiteracy contributes greatly to a fearful, conservative, and often ignorant populace. Library literacy programs that promote literacy work to reduce all of that, *and* to give people the idea that information to help solve problems is available to *everybody!* (Q4, Literacy Program, Greenville County Library, SC)

Social values abound. It is an extension of the reading spectrum and the democratic principles which libraries hold dear. It gives the library a fuller and altruistic component to its mission. (Q4, Literacy Programs/Lifelong Learning, Seattle Public Library, WA)

associations. These groups should partnership with the national literacy organizations—LVA, Laubach, NIFL—and work out a plan or formula for staffing and costs at local libraries.”

“There could be an alliance of representatives from state library literacy programs that would serve as a forum to set policy, design programs, develop comprehensive initiatives, and share resources and information,” says another program head.

GREAT ECONOMIC & SOCIAL VALUE

Question R7 shifts the debate to a quite different track. The very high response rate here points to a broad awareness of adult functional illiteracy as a problem centrally important to the nation. The link between adult basic skills proficiency (which enables adults to function well in skill-dependent tasks) and the economic and social fabric of the country is recognized by the majority in every group.

However, most of the answers in R7 were given in terms of literacy programs generally, not

R8. What benefits do libraries themselves get from providing library literacy programs (e.g. increased patronage, higher circulation figures, greater community visibility/support, cultivation of adult readers as new clientele)? [Q1, Q2]

		<u>Responses</u>	<u>No Response</u>
Q1	State Librarians (31 of 35)	89%	11%
Q2	State Library Literacy Contacts (37 of 44)	84	16

	<u># Times Mentioned By</u>	
	<u>Q1</u>	<u>Q2</u>
Better community visibility and support, and a higher public sense of relevance	24	30
Cultivation of adult readers as new users/ greater library use	23	20
Increased patronage, customers, advocates	17	19
Higher circulation figures	16	15
More family literacy use and programming	3	3
Collaboration with community groups, which can grow into other program connections and partnerships	5	5
A sense of bettering the overall community, setting an example of success, better public relations for the library, building good will in the community	5	3
Recognition as the lifelong learning institution in the community/visibility as an education agency/ recognition as an integral member of the education community		4
The opportunity to show that libraries today are more than books, a new and wider identification as involved and active in the community		2
A way to demonstrate why the public should invest in libraries	1	
A stronger self-assessment of the library role	1	
Political visibility	1	
A more informed and engaged citizenry	1	1
Through support of workforce literacy, contributing to the local, state, and national economy	1	

library literacy programs in particular. (Note: Only a sampling of the most responsive returns are included in the table.) This squares with the call so many respondees made earlier for activities to

better define the role of public libraries. But more than that, it underscores a need to better and more widely *articulate* that role, in ways that make

it distinctive and definably different—and that also make it much more natural and immediate in the thinking of librarians and other library literacy personnel.

A case can be made for library literacy programs as the irreducible backbone of the literacy movement during the hard times when literacy and government support for it falls from the public spotlight. Why cede that role to the state education folks? Claim that turf.

(Forrest Chisman, Southport Institute for Policy Analysis)

Interestingly enough, the responses that *were* given in relation to library literacy programs are substantial and full of insight and conviction. Taken together they make a poignant and compelling case for library literacy programs—and again the responses from local program heads are remarkably sophisticated.

In the aggregate, they reflect a profound understanding of the public library as a respected, trusted, and permanent institution firmly anchored in the community, a bulwark of democracy and civilized society closely tied to the needs, circumstances, and interests of the public it serves.

They recognize the organic connection between a library's commitment and leadership in providing

adult literacy services, its ability to attract community interest and funds, and the economic vitality of the community in terms of jobs and an improved tax base.

They see the public library as a barrier-free, non-threatening haven where adults in need of upgraded skills can go for help (whether given by an outside tutoring group or directly by the library) and where they can count on being treated with respect.

Moreover, the respondees stress that **library literacy programs are uniquely able to reach the most isolated and poorly-skilled adults and to serve these people at a relatively low cost, or where the adult learner is concerned at no cost.**

And, not least, library literacy programs are seen as valuable public service opportunities for people who want to volunteer

and *give back* to their communities.

Any organized effort to mold a guiding definition for the role of public libraries in adult literacy—one that the field as a whole could rally behind and use to present a united front—would be off to a running start if it took to heart the ideas in R7.

BENEFITS TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES THEMSELVES

In question R8, the value issue was explored from a different angle. Library personnel (Q1 and Q2 groups) were asked about the specific benefits *libraries* get from providing library literacy programs—and some examples were given to help direct the thinking.

The question elicited an even larger response than R7, suggesting that whatever ambiguities may exist about the nature of their role in

literacy, librarians and library agency literacy professionals recognize that their institutions gain in many ways from providing literacy services.

Not surprisingly, the “starter” examples given in the question are seen as far and away the most important benefits, with greater community support, cultivation of new adult readers, increased patronage, and higher circulation figures mentioned in that rank order.

But other benefits came repeatedly to mind as well—an increase in the use of libraries by families, for instance, along with more interest in family literacy programming.

Opportunity in collaboration with community groups, some say, because that can grow into links and partnership projects with other groups—a kind of building-the-bridges benefit.

And personal and professional satisfaction—sometimes its own reward—which comes from a sense of having bettered the community. Moreover, good deeds feel good and they engender good will.