

providing physical access is fully developed today, but it is still not truly available to most people. It is essential that this form of service be strengthened and enlarged now. Indications are that machine retrieval may someday be a complete reality in all areas of information, but until this is true, it will be necessary to take care of most physical access by present methods. The accelerated growth of significant information makes it imperative that we adopt machine methods as quickly as possible, but at the same time proceed to strengthen present methods of physical access for use during the interim period, be it ten, twenty or more years.

RECOMMENDATION

The essential framework for effective federal action is now lacking because there is no agency within the federal structure with either the responsibility of the authority to see that an adequate solution is developed and implemented. Therefore our fundamental recommendation as the essential first step is: *That there be established within the federal government a single agency with the responsibility to assure that there is ready access to all significant published information by all elements of the economy, and with the continuing budget support that will enable it to fulfill this responsibility.*

It is emphasized strongly that this is not a recommendation for a monstrous, monolithic, federal agency to replace all existing channels for disseminating and providing access to information. There must be many channels for these purposes and basic library service is best provided, as it is now, by libraries directed and supported by the local community of users (whether this community is a city, town, or other political division; a university, college, or other school; a corporation or other commercial organization; or a governmental department or agency), and dependent on commercial publishers and distributors, and on scholarly functions in the whole process of access to information and its transfer, dissemination, and preservation. Each such community is expected to continue to provide the basic library services for itself capable of satisfying most of the community's needs, while the national agency's function is to augment these by providing for the common use of all libraries those collections and services that the local community cannot afford but can be supported only by the nation-wide community, and to provide a means for coordinating and standardizing the work of libraries, publishers, and associations, to avoid unnecessary duplication of their effort and expenditure. In the provision of these new, augmenting services, the national agency should have the authority to itself establish and support, directly or through contract with other organizations, the national service libraries and bibliographic facilities required.

Which of these alternatives the agency elects in each case should not now be specified in detail, in part because there is insufficient information to do so accurately, and in part because the system requirements, and the techniques for satisfying them, will undoubtedly change with time, and the national library/information agency must be free to change its actions accordingly. Indeed, the first function of the proposed agency must be to investigate the present system more thoroughly than any group or organization now has the resources to do, initiate research on both technical (equipment) and functional problems, and itself determine its own best actions to fulfill the responsibility named above and to accomplish its mission. But what can be specified now are the major organizational requirements if this agency is to perform effectively.

First, the agency's responsibilities should be limited to *national* library services, that is to services to be made equally available to all the nation's libraries, including the federal libraries, rather than for it to attempt to combine basic library service to the federal government itself with service to the nation as a whole. The principle this recognizes is that the divisions, departments, and agencies, of the federal government need access to information for their own use, and as in universities, research establishments, industry, and other elements of the economy, the primary satisfaction of these needs requires a library directed by and primarily responsive to the needs of the agency being served. It is no more possible for a federal library, merely because it is federally supported, to give first priority attention to the needs of libraries in the nation as a whole from a collection and staff organized and supported primarily to serve the needs of a local community of users than it is for a non-federal library, such as that of a university, to do so. Such a federal library, getting its budget support from the federal agency served in order that the agency's information needs might be met,