



## Federal Library Cooperation

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FEDERAL LIBRARIES are moved to cooperate by the same forces that influence other types of libraries. They face a dearth of resources, a heavy demand in a broad array of subjects from a vigorous and growing constituency, and wide dispersion of resources. As all libraries do, they face the still-increasing volume of publication and information, and the seemingly inexorable inflation of the costs of all resources required for library service.

Federal libraries are being pressed from another direction toward cooperative programs. Just as many segments of society look to the federal government and its agencies for planning, leadership, program support, and subsidy to solve social problems, a strong segment of the American library community anticipates federal library involvement in national library systems. To date, almost all but the national libraries have been shielded from this pressure by the bureaucracy of agency missions which do not yet recognize national library support as an essential activity. But the pressure to change is present and growing, particularly with the strength of new federal planning efforts, as in the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science.

There are more than 2,000 libraries in the federal government, ranging over a broad spectrum of types and purposes. Among them are the Library of Congress which is in fact, if not in law, a national library; the National Agricultural Library and the National Library of Medicine; six presidential libraries; general libraries which serve the cultural, informational, educational and recreational needs of the military agencies; academic libraries; libraries in elementary and

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secondary schools on military bases and Indian reservations; and the technical, legal, research and other special libraries of the many government departments and agencies.

Most federal libraries are small; the median size of federal library collections in 1970 (excluding the national libraries) was only 16,500 total holdings—mostly books, but including journals, maps, technical reports, and films. Furthermore, their budgets are minuscule; the median in fiscal year 1970 was only \$27,000 for materials, staff and equipment. About two-thirds of the average library budget is devoted to personnel, and the typical federal library has fewer than three staff members, which may not include a professional. Only 7 percent of the federal libraries are in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area; 60 percent are scattered throughout the states, while 40 percent are located outside the continental limits of the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The organizational infrastructure for federal library cooperation is relatively simple and about as effective as can be expected for an activity that does not operate with a legislative mandate. Most federal library cooperative effort is voluntary, as is the tradition in American librarianship. A number of important cooperative programs operate under the terms of joint agreements between agencies, simple in outward respects, but frequently arrived at only with difficulty, given the independence of federal agencies and their steadfast focus on their own Congressional mandates.

Federal laws and regulations provide a matrix that conditions certain aspects of library cooperation. Library procurement regulations, for example, require that books discarded from a federal library be sent to the Library of Congress (LC), where they are available for selection and addition to other federal libraries. Federal law regulates the conditions for transfer of funds among agencies, and internal agency regulations may further refine these conditions. Cooperative activities must be tailored to meet these conditions if funds to support them are to be taken from agency budgets. The criteria guiding the application of data processing and the acquisition of data processing equipment are set by law and monitored by the General Services Administration (GSA). GSA also controls the use of telecommunications services by government agencies. This agency is therefore in a position to influence interlibrary cooperation in computer networking, among other things.

In the spirit of accountability for national resources, the national libraries, and occasionally other federal libraries, respond to expressions of national need by working with committees of various

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associations to formulate programs that will improve access to their collections for other libraries. For example, the publication of the LC catalog in book form was the result of joint planning by the Library of Congress and the Association of Research Libraries, and the published version of the National Union Catalog was prepared in response to recommendations by the American Library Association.

Currently, most federal library cooperative projects are the result of the work of the Federal Library Committee and its task forces. The committee was formed in 1965 under the auspices of the Bureau of the Budget and the Library of Congress. Its mission is to:

- (1) consider policies and problems relating to Federal libraries;
- (2) evaluate existing Federal library programs and resources;
- (3) determine the priorities among library issues requiring attention;
- (4) examine the organization and policies for acquiring, preserving, and making information available;
- (5) study the need for and potential of technological innovation in library practices;
- (6) study library budgeting and staffing problems including the recruiting, education, training, and remuneration of librarians.<sup>2</sup>

The membership of the Federal Library Committee consists of representatives from the cabinet departments, several independent agencies (some permanent and others elected), other branches of the government, and various regional libraries. The Librarian of Congress serves as chairman. The administrative work of the committee's executive office is handled by the Library of Congress, although it is not a unit of the library. Most of its work is done by task forces of volunteers from many federal libraries, including many not represented on the committee. Several of its major studies have been conducted with grant funds from other federal agencies. Under committee auspices, a group of federal librarians is beginning to examine the possible administrative and legal approaches to the establishment of a cooperative system for centralized services for federal libraries.

In 1961 the office of the Science Advisor to the President created the Committee on Science Information—later the Committee on Scientific and Technical Information (COSATI)—to study and coordinate information handling activities in major government agencies heavily involved in sponsoring scientific and technical research. Delegates to the committee were usually the principal information officers of the various agencies, although a few bureaus and the national libraries designated their chief librarians as members

or observers. Thus, although COSATI was not library oriented, it did provide a forum for deliberations among a few highly placed information officers and librarians on issues of information service important to both libraries and information centers. Responsibility for managing COSATI was transferred to the Office of Science Information Service in the National Science Foundation when the position of Science Advisor to the President was abolished early in the Nixon administration. It has more recently been replaced by an informal council of managers of federal information activities.

It can be argued that since all federal libraries are units of the U.S. government, they are not cooperating when they interact, but are operating as elements of a single system. The fact is, of course, that the federal government is so large, its facilities so dispersed throughout the country, and its various departments so compartmentalized by mission orientation, that any joint activity among federal libraries has all the attributes of cooperation among otherwise independent agencies.

The independence of federal agencies in program and mission gives rise to special problems that can be handled only through cooperation. The interpretation of laws and regulations meant to apply uniformly to the management of federal agencies varies so greatly among the agencies that many regulations have become more restrictive than helpful. Several projects of the Federal Library Committee have as their aim the codification and rationalization of varying interpretations of regulations, or the negotiation with administrative support activities such as the Civil Service Commission and the GSA for more uniform and serviceable interpretation of the rules of operation.

Basically, cooperation among federal libraries does not differ in many of its elements from similar activity elsewhere in the library world. Federal librarians are active in sharing resources through interlibrary lending, and have negotiated a code to govern this activity. Going further in this effort, they have prepared a detailed inventory of holdings of a selected group of approximately 190 libraries to facilitate both interlibrary lending and cooperative collection developments.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, federal agency missions do not overlap, although selected program elements among agencies might at times appear to serve similar goals. Since federal libraries primarily support agency missions, their collections thus tend not to overlap. They therefore achieve by normal operation the collection specialization that other parts of the library community must negotiate by design. This does not mean that nothing is left for federal libraries to do in cooperative collection development. Agency missions do change with time and political

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administrations, making it difficult for some federal libraries to maintain extensive research collections in great depth. Most agencies rely on the collections of the Library of Congress and the other national libraries for such material. The burden on these libraries is great, and perhaps ought to be relieved through some means of positive collection development for lesser-used research materials. Interdisciplinary missions in some agencies are also difficult to serve except through special arrangements with federal libraries maintaining collections on a rather traditional subject basis. In some cases, no federal library would have a usable collection on an esoteric subject. Again, the collections of the national libraries carry the burden of this service. For these and other reasons, the General Accounting Office has suggested that federal libraries engage in some programs of cooperative collection development.

The fact that federal libraries do specialize according to agency mission is of some value to library cooperation in general. By identifying the goals of various federal agencies, perhaps from the descriptions of them in the annual *Government Organization Manual*, interlibrary loan librarians can determine with a relatively high probability of success the location of special library collections on subjects pertinent to their users' needs.

Federal libraries share administrative burdens, as, for example, in joint use of one agency's contracts for the purchase of library materials and binding services by several additional agencies. They have sponsored research both in continuing education and in the role of libraries vis-à-vis information centers, aiming at an improvement in the development and use of resources. The educational research has resulted in the development of a number of courses for a post-master's degree program in federal librarianship at Catholic University of America as well as a series of executive management workshops. For several years, several of the large federal bureaus with many field libraries have conducted a joint workshop for field library staffs to make their library service more effective and to identify and work on problems that otherwise would remain submerged in general bureau management activity. One Federal Library Committee task force studied procurement practices and prepared a manual which brings together hitherto scattered and variably interpreted regulations.<sup>4</sup> It serves as a guide both to librarians of the many small libraries who may be generally unskilled in federal practices, and the harassed general managers of federal bureaus who know too little about library needs.

In late June 1973, a group of federal libraries began the Federal

Library Experiment in Cooperative Cataloging (FLECC). The group contracted through the Library of Congress with the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC) to provide the services for the experiment. The contract called for the addition of hardware and software at OCLC to allow federal libraries to access the OCLC data base via the TYMSHARE dial-up service, thus removing the need for costly long-distance leased lines to the federal libraries scattered throughout the country. This is an innovation for OCLC, which hitherto had provided access only by leased telephone lines. The FLECC group quickly grew to include about thirty libraries, operating on both leased lines and dial-up line service. An evaluation of FLECC is now underway. It is hoped that one of the long-range effects of the experiment will be the continued elimination of administrative barriers, real and imaginary, to effective joint action involving the commitment of financial and other resources by federal agencies to a common cause.

The General Accounting Office (GAO)—the agency of Congress which monitors the use of appropriated funds—has urged the expansion of cooperative practices. It has called for more action by the Office of Management and Budget in encouraging improved management and coordination of federal library activities. Specifically, it has suggested that federal libraries develop a storage facility for little-used material, make more use of microform publications, conduct a coordinated program of research on library operations, and establish a program of cooperative collection development and other activities such as control of serials and cooperative cataloging.<sup>5</sup> Because of the concept of the separation of powers, the GAO can only make recommendations to the Office of Management and Budget. Proposals from federal agencies to carry out these recommendations should be more favorably received by Congress for authorization, since they have been made originally by a part of the Congress itself.

While the three national libraries, including the Library of Congress, are actively involved in all of the activities mentioned above, cooperation among them and activities that open their resources to nonfederal libraries must be examined separately. Among other things, these libraries have a recognized mission to serve a number of public needs outside the government, and are funded accordingly. Even if this were not the case, they are such large and intellectually stimulating libraries that the results of cooperation among them take on an aura of far greater power than among other federal libraries.

Cooperation in collection development among the three national

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libraries and their forerunners has long been established. The Secretary of Agriculture suggested in 1893 that the Library of Congress transfer to the Department of Agriculture Library one copy of each book in selected fields of agriculture received under the terms of the Copyright Law.<sup>6</sup> Such an arrangement now exists, although it took many years to establish. A similar arrangement exists between LC and the National Library of Medicine (NLM). Thus, LC limits its own acquisitions in medicine and agriculture to works in the pure sciences. Both the National Agricultural Library (NAL) and the NLM are recipients of items acquired by the Library of Congress under the terms of the Public Law 480 program (now called the Special Foreign Currency Program).

This activity carries over into the area of bibliography. The NAL and the NLM each issue book catalogs of their holdings, and entries are not duplicated in the published version of the *National Union Catalog*. The NLM and NAL catalogs thus serve as supplements to the *National Union Catalog*. Each of these libraries has its own cataloging style, but the U.S. National Libraries Task Force on Cooperative Activities has worked to modify certain practices to achieve compatibility in descriptive cataloging.

Various aspects of the work of the three national libraries have long been vital components of library cooperation throughout the United States. Because of the size of these libraries and their cooperative effort with the library community in the development of cataloging standards, the records of books in their catalogs are a national resource of major value. These libraries have worked for three-quarters of a century to make this catalog accessible to the public through local libraries.

The Library of Congress began to share its cataloging efforts with libraries in 1901 through the distribution of its catalog cards. Prior to that time the Department of Agriculture Library had been sending its catalog cards to the Library of Congress to create a union record of the holdings of the two major libraries. With the advent of the card distribution service, the Library of Congress immediately began a larger union catalog effort, making arrangements to receive and file cards from a number of the nation's major research libraries, including the public libraries of New York, Boston and Chicago, special research libraries such as the John Crerar and the Newberry Libraries, the libraries of the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois, and the federal libraries in Washington, D.C. Other libraries joined the union catalog effort as they introduced printed or processed cards in

their operations. By 1926 the union catalog had received over 2 million cards. The Library of Congress upgraded its efforts with a grant from John Rockefeller in 1926 and created the Union Catalog Division in 1932.<sup>7</sup> In conjunction with the Association of Research Libraries, LC began to consider the publication of the *National Union Catalog*, a program begun finally in 1942. This catalog is still being updated and cumulated in printed form. Together the catalogs of the three national libraries form the primary source for cataloging information for a large and uncounted number of libraries throughout the world.

In recent years the three libraries have begun large-scale automation projects, featuring in part an effort to apply computers to the bibliographical processes. Here the cooperative effort among the three libraries falters, not because of lack of desire, but because of the difficulties of making different machine systems compatible. The libraries created a joint task force to study compatible automation developments, and have extended the work of the group to include a wide range of cooperative ideas.

The NLM and the NAL are strongly committed to the delivery of information in their respective subject fields through cooperation with selected libraries throughout the nation. They have each enlisted medical and agricultural libraries across the country to serve as access points to bibliographical and information resources for local libraries and users. Each is basing its bibliographic activity on computer data bases. NLM's MEDLINE system provides on-line access to the MEDLARS data base in many non-federal libraries. The service has extended to foreign countries: eight foreign MEDLARS/MEDLINE centers were added to the system in 1974.<sup>8</sup> NAL awarded research grants to eight land-grant universities in 1974 for various investigations concerning the use of its CAIN (cataloging and indexing) on-line system in providing access to cataloging and indexing information in agriculture.<sup>9</sup> Both NLM and NAL conduct workshops for users of their systems. Both also provide user access to several other computerized bibliographic data bases.

Currently, the programs of the Lister Hill National Center for Biomedical Communications of the NLM exemplify the potential of a planned national library and information service. The Lister Hill Center was created in 1968 with these objectives: to speed the flow of new knowledge to application, to improve the education of medical students, to offer better communications for the continuing education of health science professionals, to facilitate the development of new knowledge, and to improve public understanding about healthful



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living and preventive medicine. Although the center thus carries on a number of activities that are unusual in libraries, the nation's health science libraries are important agents in helping the center achieve its goals. Much of the information that the health sciences need is in the open literature, and the center's goals require that access to this literature be facilitated. Accordingly, the center has designated and funded eleven regional medical libraries, chiefly in medical schools, to provide the managerial and document delivery backbone of the MEDLINE network. The regional medical libraries have now been augmented with the designation of regional resource libraries to further speed access to literature. The developmental work for MEDLINE, the on-line medical literature information retrieval system, has been completed, and is now operational at the National Library of Medicine. In its planning efforts, the Lister Hill Center has worked closely with the community served, particularly the professional societies in librarianship, the health sciences, and education. The work of the center is a model for a total communication environment for special information programs that might well be emulated in other subjects in a comprehensive national library and information program. Donald Hendricks's article in this issue of *Library Trends* is devoted to the NLM program in view of its possible relevance to trends in all subject areas.

Since 1969 the three national libraries have been attempting to create a national serials system with various components for processing and bibliographical control of serials. Efforts to establish an operating automated serials system have been shifted to the Conservation of Serials (CONSER) project, which is supported and managed by the Council on Library Resources. The system will use the facilities and software of OCLC. The National Serials Data Program at the Library of Congress is now responsible for assigning key titles and International Standard Serial Numbers, and for the validation of the data in the serials file.<sup>10</sup>

Elements of cooperation among the national libraries in collection development have already been mentioned. In addition to receiving medical and agricultural books acquired by the Library of Congress, NAL and NLM regularly select for their own collections duplicate materials from the LC's Exchange and Gift Division. Both of these libraries also receive materials and cataloging copy through the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging (NPAC) of the Library of Congress. NPAC was established under the terms of Title II-C of the amended Higher Education Act. Materials are selected by

dealers in twenty-four countries. The Library of Congress operates overseas shared cataloging centers that prepare preliminary cataloging for these books. In addition, the Library of Congress operates an acquisitions program that supplies books purchased with excess currencies in a number of foreign countries to some research libraries in the United States.

The heavy investment by the federal government in research and development since World War II, with its concomitant increase in the amount of information, has created a new class of information agent: the information center or the information analysis center. There are literally hundreds of such agencies, both within and outside the government. Those outside the government are often subsidized by government funds in recognition of the forces that created the information. For years there has been controversy over the need for these centers in addition to libraries. The proponents of information centers view the libraries as archival in function, operating with techniques that are slow, underpowered, insufficiently detailed in the intellectual analysis of their collections, and generally unable to perform the large and sophisticated task of handling vast quantities of information. Libraries are judged to be oriented toward the medium and not toward information.

Regardless of the reason for the creation of this new class of agency, there is now a need for cooperation and collaboration between information centers and libraries, as well as among themselves. Interaction between these two kinds of agencies has been negligible and hard to attain, but not because there have not been mechanisms and attempts at cooperation. The National Bureau of Standards conducted a major literature review of the work that has been done on cooperation and compatibility among information systems.<sup>11</sup> This study clearly delineated the issues and problems of cooperation which serve to guide interactive developments. Several federal agencies designated their librarians to serve on COSATI, which was heavily populated with information specialists. The Librarian of Congress was an official observer at COSATI meetings, and the directors of the NAL and the NLM were members of the committee. Nevertheless, libraries were held as something less than front-line agencies in the cooperative efforts of COSATI.

The Federal Library Committee sponsored several studies relating to libraries vis-à-vis information centers. One such study was a thorough literature analysis of the background for the formation and programs of the two types of activities.<sup>12</sup> Several other studies followed

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this survey, but failed to create an understanding that could remove the barriers between agencies. Perhaps all that can be said in the final analysis is that libraries and information centers are becoming more alike. The schism between librarians and information center specialists is still severe, although arguments between the groups have abated, as if there were an understanding of the value and role of each in supporting coexistence. A COSATI report on a national document-handling system suggests a mechanism for merging these two types of activities by placing responsibility for information and document-handling programs at the agency level, rather than at the information or library department level.<sup>13</sup> A number of federal libraries now operate information centers, such as the Food and Nutrition Information and Educational Materials Center at the National Agricultural Library, but these library activities still tend to be literature-based.

Planning for national programs of library functions and services has been occurring for more than a century. Almost invariably, one or more federal libraries are either involved in the planning effort or included as agents in the proposed national activity. Few of these plans have been put into effect or have completely achieved their goals. Several, of course, have become vital components of U.S. library service, e.g., the National Union Catalog and the NLM's Biomedical Communications Network.

In the early 1850s Charles Coffin Jewett, librarian of the Smithsonian Institution, proposed the creation of a national cataloging enterprise, wherein the Smithsonian Institution would create and maintain a file of bibliographic records on stereotype plates from which it could produce on demand printed catalogs of individual libraries' holdings.<sup>14</sup> Jewett's work was preceded by his inventory of U.S. public libraries based on a German model in which the holdings of the nation's public and academic libraries were summarized.<sup>15</sup> This list set a precedent for similar inventories that soon followed. The Jewett cataloging plan failed after a few brief sample catalogs had been issued, principally because of the lack of agreement on a national standard for cataloging rules and because the stereotype plates warped and could not create a flat printing bed.

The need to create order among the activities of the greatly expanded and vigorous information agencies of the federal government subsequent to World War II generated considerable planning effort, many proposals for the integration of various agencies' information activities, and the creation of national

information programs. By the early 1960s, at least twenty such plans proposing the establishment of comprehensive information and document handling services had been generated, the majority of them for science and technology. Most of these plans focused on information rather than on agencies. They generally proposed the elevation of information handling to the status of national priority for action, suggested an organizational framework for information handling networks, and called for the creation of administrative and operational units, products and services tailored to meet perceived needs. In only a few cases were existing federal libraries suggested as nodes in the networks, and then only with major modifications of their missions and programs.

The most comprehensive and perhaps the most fundamentally sound proposal was prepared by COSATI.<sup>16</sup> COSATI surveyed the nation's needs, reviewed the score of previous proposals, and issued its proposed national program for document handling in science and technology in 1965. The plan featured the concept of a "responsible agent system" suggested in an earlier study by Alvin Weinberg.<sup>17</sup> This is a "system concept in which a competent authority [e.g., the President] establishes a particular organization [e.g., an administrative unit of the federal government] as the agent having the primary responsibility for assuring the satisfactory performance of all tasks [but not the sole responsibility to perform the tasks] necessary to provide information services and in particular limited subset of the broad spectrum of science and technology."<sup>18</sup> The precedent for the responsible agent system was the work of the Atomic Energy Commission and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in providing comprehensive information packaging and dissemination programs in their respective subject areas as an integral part of their agencies' missions. Each of these agencies established depository libraries to which it distributed indexing and abstracting services and technical reports in hard copy and microform for use by scientists throughout the country. Most of these depositories were in university libraries; many were overseas. If the COSATI report's recommendations had been put into effect, presumably many more libraries would have been involved as depository and access nodes in information networks for a vast array of subjects. The responsible agents for each of the many science subjects of concern to the federal government proposed by the COSATI report were principally the executive departments of the federal government and a number of other federal research units. The COSATI report very carefully and thoroughly reviewed the nature of library

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operations as a part of its analysis of the inadequacies of the existing document-handling services before outlining a role for libraries in the national system.

In an activity directly related to federal libraries, the Brookings Institution undertook a study of the needs and deficiencies in federal library services in the early 1960s. This study, conducted by Luther Evans, pointed up possibilities for greater coordination among federal libraries and for possible reduction of duplicative services. The major conclusion of the Brookings report was that the reference libraries of the federal establishment represented a great but neglected national resource and that the change most needed was a more dynamic concept of the federal reference library. The report specifically recommended the establishment of a council to advise on policies and action needed for more effective library services.<sup>19</sup> The creation of the Federal Library Committee was the result of that recommendation.

Probably the most comprehensive planning effort for a total national library program is currently in progress under the auspices of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. Early drafts of the national program document clearly indicate a major role for federal libraries in national library service. The plan requires the utmost in collaboration and cooperation among libraries to meet national needs. By necessity, the relationship of all libraries to the national program is indicated only in general terms in the document.<sup>20</sup> A background study on national bibliographic and resource centers conducted to support the program statement in more detail better indicates the role of various types of libraries. Here the key position of federal libraries is shown to be essential in the creation of bibliographical support for enhancing the organization of collections and access to them. Likewise, federal libraries are particularly, but not exclusively, indicated among examples of libraries that would serve as resource centers for physical access to library materials.<sup>21</sup>

In many aspects of cooperation, federal libraries differ little from other libraries; they act together much like libraries in a consortium. They engage in normal cooperative practices that are well developed and widespread in library work. To the extent that they gain strength through these activities they serve non-federal libraries better in matters of cooperation. By definition, the national libraries offer services of considerable importance to other libraries both inside and outside the government. Merely by their size they attract requests from other libraries for access to their collections, although they tend to organize this activity so that they become libraries of last resort after

local resources have been exhausted. The catalogs of their holdings have become national and universal bibliographies. To support local bibliographic efforts they have developed exportable catalogs, including machine-readable products.

Both NAL and NLM have created national systems and networks for bibliographical and physical access to literature in their fields of concern. These involve other libraries in a hierarchy of resources, with well-developed protocols and special mechanisms for access. These networks can serve as models for other subjects. Several proposed plans for national library programs are, in fact, generalized descriptions of these specific models.

The entire concept of national programs for document and information handling is changing and the trend is toward systems or networks composed of many parts including libraries, information centers, data centers or clearinghouses, with federal agencies being proposed as nationally responsible for all aspects of information work in their respective subject fields. Federal libraries are organized principally to support the work of federal employees and are not free to commit themselves to a broader objective of actively serving national library needs. Before federal libraries can take on this expanded service outside their agencies, the agencies themselves rather than the libraries will have to change their missions to include national library service as a goal. This requires citizen action. Federal agencies do not set their own missions. These are determined by congressional and administration policy and action.

This does not mean that federal library resources cannot be used by the public without official administrative action. Federal librarians are sensitive to the fact that their libraries may contain unique resources, or resources arranged so as to offer special services, and that these resources may be under-utilized within present authorizations. On two occasions the Federal Library Committee and COSATI sponsored national conferences on federal library resources aimed at assessing federal library resources and clarifying issues in opening access to them.<sup>22</sup> The second conference was joined by the Association of Research Libraries. Various elements of the proceedings are now beginning to appear in new national plans. It is hoped that the exposure of these public resources to non-federal librarians and the new acquaintances made at the conferences have improved cooperation among individual libraries under current conditions, although there has been no assessment of such use. The pressures of national planning may require that the library community convene

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similar meetings on a regular basis, not only to improve current use of federal resources, but also to gain insights on action required for future improvements in national library service.

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