

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 135

**City of Minneapolis  
Library System's Organization and  
Operation**

**July 1961**

135

APPROVED  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
JUL 5 1961  
DATE

Citizens League  
545 Mobil Oil Building  
Minneapolis 2, Minnesota

TO: Board of Directors  
FROM: Library Committee, Robert Colbert, Chairman  
SUBJECT: Survey of Minneapolis Public Library

This report is in response to the request made by the Citizens League Board of Directors on June 7 that the Library Committee prepare a recommendation for the July 5 Board meeting with respect to the Library Board's having an objective survey made of the Library system's organization and operations.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In brief, we believe that it is important from the point of view of public support, and for other reasons, that the Library Board proceed with all dispatch to have an objective survey made of the library system's organization structure, business and financial procedures, and the system's use by non-Minneapolis residents. This presumes that the Library Board will have set forth a clear definition of the library system's service objectives, including specifically the scope and nature of services to non-residents and the number and location of branch libraries in the City.

The organization structure survey is the key survey, and should be made by an outside agency, either a professional librarian or a management consultant firm with experience in making library surveys. If the latter is chosen, the firm should retain the advice of a professional librarian.

The Library Board might well seek the services of other City agencies in making a study of its business methods and financial procedures.

The Board should consider using its own staff to develop up-to-date information on use of the library's facilities by non-Minneapolis residents.

The failure of the June 13 millage referendum complicates the problem of financing the survey. However, the fact that the survey is essential to building public support for additional financing makes it imperative that the Library Board find the money for the surveys within available funds.

#### THE REPORT

##### Background

It is helpful to an understanding of the issue of a library study to review some recent events in the Library Board's work, particularly as they relate to the library system's administration and financing. In doing this, we have confined the review largely to the events as they appear in the official Board minutes, in

the belief that this is perhaps the best way to view the matter with a minimum coloration by the internal conflicts that have marked the recent record of the Library Board.

The first mention of the need for a survey of the Minneapolis Public Library appeared in the Library Board's minutes of December 15, 1960. The minutes recorded the resignation statement of Board member Mrs. H. E. Van Der Boom, which said in part:

"The (library) system appears to be top heavy with job classifications carrying high administrative titles and correspondingly high salaries. This problem ought to be analyzed. A complete review of the table of organization should be made by an outside business management consultant . . .

"I would be very happy to be proved wrong in my impressions of the administration of the Minneapolis Public Library. An outside survey could confirm or refute conclusions I have reached after serving for two years on the Minneapolis Public Library Board."

In response to Mrs. Van Der Boom's statement, Librarian Ray Williams at the Library Board's December 15, 1960 meeting stated in part:

"On December 12, 1957 a reorganization plan of the library was adopted by the Board and the organization with which we now move into the new Central Library faithfully follows that plan . . .

"I would welcome the suggested study of our organization plan by competent library analysts, confident as I am that we have devised and put into operation, squeaky in places as all new machinery is, an organization that reflects the best in modern public library planning."

At the December 15 meeting the Board members discussed whether a survey was needed, and if so, what it should cover, when it should be made, and by whom. The Board voted to consider the discussion a "declaration of intent on the part of the Board that something will be done at the appropriate time."

At its December 30, 1960 meeting, the Library Board adopted a resolution which in part declared the Board's "intention of making a critical examination of the activities and accomplishments of the Minneapolis Public Library system, with the assistance of independent consultants; major objectives being improved staff morale and a more favorable image in the minds of the public."

The Board also adopted a motion directing the Board President to appoint a special committee of three to:

"1. Receive from other Board members, staff personnel and the public suggestions for improvements of the Library operation and activities in all its phases, and to

"2. Consider the question of retaining the service of outside consultants to make an impartial appraisal of the Library's performance, and to

"3. Report its findings and recommendations to the Board -- as soon as may be reasonable after a shakedown period in the new building."

Subsequently, a committee was appointed consisting of directors Backstrom, chairman, Kohout and Leslie.

In early 1961 the Library Board concerned itself with the question of how to get approval of increased property tax authority, either through the Legislature or by charter amendment. In a discussion at the February 24 meeting,

"Director Laddy stated that she was repeating her stand not to accept or get behind any request for increased millage until such time as a survey was made in the Library.

"Director Backstrom reported that the committee appointed to consider the survey had met several times but had no recommendation to make to the Board at this time, and again indicated that the purpose of the committee was to determine the scope of the survey of the Library's organization, functions, etc., and not, as a committee make the survey. Also, funds would have to be found in order to conduct such a survey of the Library."

The Library Board failed in its attempt to get the Legislature to authorize increased property tax authority. Its final effort would have increased its tax power by .375 mill. In April the Board requested the Charter Commission to submit to the voters of Minneapolis on June 13 authority to increase its tax by 1.69 mills, and the Commission took action to do so.

In the campaign for the increased millage, <sup>eight</sup> ~~six~~ of the <sup>nine</sup> ~~seven~~ Library Directors published a letter urging a Yes vote and in the letter pledged themselves to having a survey made.

The Citizens League's Library Committee recommended that the League Board of Directors support the Library millage increase, and also urged that the Library Board "arrange for an objective study of the library system's organization and management as soon as practicable, and surely in time to affect the carrying out of the 1962 budget."

The League's Taxation and Finance Committee recommended a No vote on the Library issue. The Board of Directors took no action.

On June 13, the voters rejected the Library Board's millage request by a three to two vote.

At the June 15, 1961 meeting of the Library Board, Director Backstrom made an informal report of progress of his committee appointed to recommend scope and procedure of the survey. The subcommittee had held many meetings with numerous individuals representing different community interests, but had reached no definite conclusions or recommendations. In view of the fact that the terms of directors Leslie and Kohout were about to expire, and new Board members would take office in July, the Board decided to postpone any further action on the survey issue until the July meeting.

### Need for survey of Minneapolis Public Library

We find a number of persuasive reasons for the Library Board's fulfilling its announced intention of having a survey made of the Minneapolis Public Library.

1. It seems very likely that many voters at the recent election were concerned about the publicized claims that a survey was needed at the Library, and felt that until the causes were taken care of, the Board should not have additional financing. Thus, the survey would seem to be an essential step toward restoration of public confidence that apparently was lacking, as indicated by the referendum results.

2. It seems that until the survey is made there will be little chance for restoration of harmony between all the Board members and the staff. One of the Board members has repeatedly insisted on having the Board commit itself to having the survey made, and possibly would withhold approval of library policies and administration at least until a survey has been made. The survey of itself can not produce harmony, but it should serve to resolve doubts which have been cited as the cause for criticism of the administration.

3. Our study in connection with analysis of the Library Board's millage request reached the conclusion that Minneapolis has relatively high expenditures for library service, compared with other cities. This conclusion is not new among those who have examined comparative library statistics. In the circumstances, the Library Board should be concerned to know fairly precisely why we are a high expenditure system, and to know that existing funds are being spent effectively. The survey should help in obtaining this knowledge.

4. No matter how foresighted the planning, moving into a new building requires substantial adjustments of staff and procedures. A survey, coming after the new building has been occupied for long enough to have an adequate "shakedown", should be helpful in making the best adjustment to the new building.

5. Every organization can profit from an occasional independent analysis of its operations.

### Definition of library system's service objectives

It seems obvious that the Library Board's decisions on the nature and scope of a survey will have to be based on a clear definition of what the Board conceives as the service goals of the library system. For it is only in reference to the system's goals that organization, methods, and procedures can be evaluated by the survey agency.

The goals should be stated in terms of what is attainable within available resources. They should specifically include, among other things, definition of the scope of services to non-residents and the number and location of branch libraries in the City, since these are two particular matters about which there has been uncertainty in recent years.

### Type of survey and surveying agency

The informal progress report of the chairman of the Library Board's committee on survey at the June 15 Board meeting indicated that the committee, after considerable exploration, had not reached any firm conclusions on the exact nature and scope

of the survey. This is perhaps evidence of the care with which the committee is proceeding, as well as the fact that definition of the survey task is not an easy job.

We certainly have not given the subject as much attention as the Board committee, and therefore do not presume to know as much as they. However, drawing on the background of our own committee members in the matter of organizational studies as well as knowledge of the Minneapolis Public Library and its present problem, and after discussions with several individuals in an official or professional position to have intelligent views on the projected library survey, we reach the conclusion that at a minimum the library system needs study of organization structure, business and financial procedures, and use by non-Minneapolis readers.

We offer the following suggestions on the nature, scope and conduct of such a study.

1. The study should be conducted in phases, and recommendations, if found reasonable by the Board after due consideration, should be put into effect immediately.

Phasing -- taking readily separable parts of the entire library system and operation by themselves -- is preferred to a comprehensive survey which would attempt to accomplish all phases rather simultaneously and would result in one report and submission of all recommendations at one time.

Phasing has the virtue of faster implementation, and facilitates getting and keeping the Board involved in the final results of the survey. The latter appears particularly important to us as a way of providing greater assurance of Board involvement which is desirable for assuring that the Board and administrative staff work closely together.

2. The first phase should be a study of the library system's basic organization: the assignment of duties and responsibilities of the library organization, showing lines of responsibility. Sound organization is at the heart of effective operations.

3. We believe it is essential that the organization study be done by an outside agency, because it is easier for an outside agency to view the organization with a fresh, detached look. This is important, from the standpoint of public acceptance.

4. The organization study should be done under direction of a professional librarian or by a management consultant firm which has had previous experience in library surveys. In the latter case the firm should have the advice of a professional librarian.

In our view, a survey agency which did not meet these requirements would need to spend some time familiarizing itself with the goals and practices of library service. This would be at the expense of those paying the bill -- the taxpayer -- and might still fall short of the specialized competence required. Furthermore, it would appear to us that such a survey would have less chance of ready acceptance by the Board and administrative staff. Such acceptance is essential if the survey report is to be effectively implemented.

On the other hand, we would not insist on a professional librarian's having charge of the study, because public confidence in the result is also essential and we recognize that this might be better obtained if the final responsibility is one step removed from an individual who might be suspected of over-sympathy with the professional librarian point of view.

5. Once the basic organization study is completed, the Board might consider having a management consultant firm do a study of the Library's financial and business procedures. It is possible, however, that the Board might be able to obtain help on this type of study from other City government agencies, such as the staff of the City Coordinator, the Board of Estimate and Taxation, or the Park Board.

6. Finally, we suggest that at least part of the study of non-resident use might be done by the library staff itself. Using techniques developed by Frederick Wezeman in his 1955 study of City-County library integration, the staff could gather pertinent data on the question of non-Minneapolis use of the library facilities. This is an aspect of the Library's operation in which the basic need is up to date information of the kind which could be developed by the staff itself.

#### Financing the survey

Loss of the referendum to authorize increased taxing power complicates the Library Board's task of finding money to finance the survey. It appears to us, however, that the Board must find the money, for we cannot escape the conclusion that the survey is essential for reassuring the public of the soundness of present library organization and practices. Until this reassurance is given, we believe that the Library Board has little chance to get the public to approve the additional financing that the Board seeks for its desired expansion of library services.

#### The fundamental need

It is our observation that a fundamental need in the development of improved public understanding of and support for the Minneapolis library system is a close working together of Board and staff toward the objective of good library service. We believe that with good faith on the part of all concerned, the steps we have suggested will aid in achieving this important goal.