5. Overview of Service Network

5.5 Subregional Libraries

1. **Definition.** A subregional library is generally a public library (city, county, or multicounty) serving a minimum of 200 readers in a specific area in cooperation with its regional library for the blind and physically handicapped. The subregional library provides many of the services of the regional library; however, its collection is generally limited to recorded books. A minimum collection, comprised of one copy each of the current and the immediate past year's production of recorded books, must be maintained. The size of the actual collection will depend on the number of users served. Braille, because of its bulk and its limited number of copies, and local magazines, because of the routine procedures and record keeping involved, are generally more effectively circulated from a central point in each area, i.e., the regional library.

2. **Book Collections and Circulation.** NLS provides the subregional library with recorded books. Compatible playback equipment on which to play the books is provided by NLS through the local machine lending agency. The initial collection is shipped to the subregional library from its regional library, multistate center, or NLS. Book collections are kept current by direct shipments from the producers, who send or or more copies each of all new recorded books as they are produced. Larger subregional libraries may participate directly in the automated copy allotment system and may select multiple copies of individual titles by title. Others will receive uniform numbers of recorded books, as requested by the subregional library; this number may be changed by the library on written request to the NLS Production Control Section. Additional copies as needed should be requested from the regional library. The bulk of the subregional's circulation is handled by mail as "free matter for the blind or handicapped;" service to walk-in patrons is encouraged and generally grows rapidly as word of the program spreads throughout the library's service area.

3. **Responsibilities of a Subregional Library.** The subregional library has the following responsibilities:
   - provides mail and walk-in recorded-book service, which includes lending books recorded on disc and cassette and the equipment on which to play them;
   - assists patrons in the selection of books on patron request;
   - registers new borrowers and forwards information to the regional library for its master file;
maintains readership and circulation statistics and reports them to the regional library on a semiannual basis;
publicizes service to encourage use by as many eligible patrons as possible;
enlists assistance and support for service from civic groups, volunteers, special interest groups, news media, and others;
requests publications, forms and supplies directly from its multistate center, if this procedure is approved by its regional library;
forwards requests to its regional library for user requests it is not able to fill;
encourages readers to use as many local library services and become involved in as many regular library activities as possible; telephone reference, recorded music, loan copies of paintings and sculptures, book discussion groups, special tours or outings, children's story hours, puppet shows, films, and special exhibits are examples of only a few services and activities in which the subregional library should encourage reader involvement;
informs the regional library of program developments and problems that arise;
coordinates its programs and services with local agencies serving blind and physically handicapped readers;
develops a corps of volunteers to produce reading material in special form unavailable from other sources, deliver and demonstrate equipment, assist readers in preparing request lists, and otherwise complement professional staff services;
works with volunteers to ensure that maintenance and repair of equipment is provided in timely and responsive manner.

4. Responsibilities of the Regional Library. The regional library has the following responsibilities in relation to its subregional libraries:

- provides consultant services to subregional libraries in its service area, including regular visits to all subregionals with written evaluation reports and recommendations at least once a year;
- maintains a back-up collection with appropriate reserve systems for filling interlibrary loan requests;
- develops a corps of volunteers to braille and record materials, to maintain and repair equipment, to deliver and demonstrate machines when possible to assist readers in preparing request lists, and to perform other appropriate services until the subregional has established such programs at the local level;
- develops a collection of local and special interest materials available for duplication for subregional library needs;
- maintains a tape duplication facility to support the subregional's collection development needs for additional NLS books as well as locally produced recorded materials; the provision of tapes should be covered by agreement between the two libraries;
- assists the subregional in training staff and volunteers;
coordinates development of programs and services among subregionals in the area;
assists the subregional in planning and conducting workshops for local librarians, civic groups, volunteers, special interest groups, and others;
advises the subregional library in identifying sources of funds for the subregional operation;
develops and coordinates with subregional area-wide publicity and public relations efforts;
maintains a master file of all readers in its total service area, including basic biographical information and types of service received;
provides direct magazine and braille service to all readers in its total service area unless otherwise contracted for;
provides reference service on blindness and physical handicaps;
serves as a liaison between the subregional and the multistate center and Library of Congress;
obtains from the Library of Congress and/or other sources machines, accessories, parts, and supplies to support the subregional, and as a machine-lending agency, maintains master machine inventory files.

5. **Advantages of Subregional Service for the Reader.** Subregional libraries can bring individual blind and physically handicapped readers into the local library community. They accelerate the readers' receipt of materials. They may provide individual instruction to new readers on all aspects of service. They help reduce the barriers to reading inherent in dealing with an agency far removed from the readers' homes and by its location in a public library calms apprehensions the readers might have had in making use of the resources and services provided by the public library. Many individuals will appreciate being included as local library patrons rather than being segregated as a "client" of an agency for the blind and physically handicapped. For perhaps the first time, readers can feel that the local public library is truly their library, providing materials they can use, the individualized service they need, and a tax-supported service to which they are entitled.

6. **Advantages of Subregional Library Service for the Public Library.** The public library rightfully assumes the duty of serving the total community for which it is responsible by offering subregional service to blind and physically handicapped readers in the community. Subregionalization increases circulation because of the personalized service offered; blind and physically handicapped people not only use libraries in much larger numbers proportionately than their sighted counterparts, they also read more and are highly appreciative of good service.

The public library may also benefit from the public relations effects of serving blind and physically handicapped readers. Service to this group
has proven its ability to capture the interest of civic groups, volunteers, and the news media. Subregional service can help validate the premise that libraries exist so that all may read.

7. **Advantages of Subregional Library Service for the Regional Library.** Because subregional libraries represent *extension* in the physical sense of the word rather than a decentralization or fragmentation of service, the role of the regional library can become even more vital in providing library service to blind and physically handicapped readers. Freed from the major portion of routine circulation activities, regional libraries can devote more time to intensifying area or statewide outreach and publicity programs, to planning meaningful programs of service, and to strengthening collections through the development of an active corps of volunteers for recording and transcribing. The list of possible accomplishments in limited only by the imagination and energy of the regional and subregional librarian.

The regional library's relationship to the subregional is similar to that of NLS to the regional: the regional library provides bibliographic support, coordination, communication, and consultant services. The regional library acts as the in depth book collection resource for its area, providing older and less often used titles as needed and producing titles when necessary. It coordinates the efforts of the subregional libraries and the work of volunteers. It shares its expertise in library service to blind and physically handicapped readers through workshops for subregional libraries, volunteers, and agencies and organizations working with present and potential readers.

**Establishment and Closing of Subregional Libraries.** Procedures for the establishment and closing of subregional libraries are covered in section 9.4.3 of this manual.

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For more information, network librarians should contact their network consultant.