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Library Profile/ Chicago Public Library

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Library Profile



Chicago Public Library

by Mark Knoblauch (Coordinator, Collection Management Division)

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The opening in 1991 of the Harold Washington Library Center, the World's largest circulating public library, marked a high point in the expansion of public library services to the citizens of Chicago. This immense edifice of 756,000 square feet appears to be a vast civic monument, but its fundamental purpose is to provide Chicagoans a comprehensive range of library services.

This central library of 1,800,000 volumes is the focus of a network of more than eighty branches that extend the library's outreach into virtually every one of the city's neighborhoods, putting a branch library within walking distance of each of the city's 2,900,000 residents.

Chicago's colorful, well-documented history of immigration has resulted in a city that geographically forms a patchwork of ethnically diverse areas, each with its own character, its own traditions, and its own cultural orientation. Thus, each neighborhood library branch takes on a character that may be much different from the next nearest branch. The library has responded to this diversity with an method of book selection and acquisition that attempts to reflect the differing needs of different segments of the city's population.

At present, each branch librarian bears total authority and responsibility for selection of books against an agency's budget. In 1991, the Library's book budget stood at over \$11,000,000. Contractions in the economy forced a cut to half that amount in 1992. Approximately 45% of the budget goes to the central library, the rest to the branches, and individual bibliographers within those divisions select titles as appropriate.

The Library's Collection Management Division coordinates the selection, purchase, cataloging, and processing of materials for all agencies. The Collection Development Division issues selection lists regularly that cover all titles in *Publishers Weekly* Forecast and *Library Journal* Book Review. The branches order a majority of their English-language materials via these lists, and they merely have to note the quantity of each title they wish and the funding they wish to charge. These lists plus any original orders are entered weekly into the Library's acquisitions system, BATAB, to generate purchase orders for publishers and wholesalers.

The Library has used BATAB since 1979 as its acquisitions system. Although BATAB is an ancient system as automated systems are defined, having started in 1969, the Chicago Public Library continues to find it particularly well suited to its needs for BATAB's ability to handle successfully an extremely complex funding structure involving over a hundred separate funds from City, State, Federal, and private sources, divided among over a hundred ordering units and further subdivided between adult and juvenile materials and print, nonprint, and serial categories. Few online systems even begin to match this heavy duty capacity.

Besides entering bibliographic data into BATAB, the Acquisitions Division assigns a vendor to each title ordered. As a Department of the City of Chicago, the Library buys materials in cooperation with the regulations of the City's Department of Purchases, Contracts, and Supplies. Quinquennially, the Library prepares separate specifications for American books, American periodicals, foreign periodicals, sound recordings, and the book leasing services. The City receives competitive bids against these specifications, and ensures that vendors adhere to legal requirements such as minority and women-owned business participation and anti-apartheid provisions. For specialized and non-English-language materials, the Library issues purchase orders directly to the publishers and distributors.

The Library's contract for American books specifies that the vendor will fully process all materials the Library orders. Thus, the wholesaler sends books directly to each of the ordering units. The books arrive with a book pocket, a spine label with the Library of Congress call number imprinted, a Mylar jacket, and a theft-detection target. Receiving agencies affix a bar-code label to the book and then enter their holdings into the library's database. The bibliographic record is already in place in the database, the wholesaler having supplied a MARC record to the Library on tape. Invoicing also occurs via magnetic tape.

Since the branches and central library have received their American trade books direct from the wholesaler, the Acquisitions Division staff spends most of its time preparing and receiving orders for nonprint and non-English language materials. A

worldwide network of vendors keeps the Library supplied with over \$2,000,000 of these materials annually.

This enormous amount of foreign-language materials and nonprint items consumes virtually all the Catalog Division's human and computer resources.

Over 75% of the Catalog Division's personnel are devoted to preparing records for non-English-language materials. The Chicago Public Library was the first public library to use OCLC's CJK system for East Asian Languages, and staff have acquired in-house software for Sanskrit and other non-Roman records.

Spanish titles account for most of Roman alphabet records. The Catalog Division last year provided records in 42 languages. Intensive public use of the Library's Music Division requires the Catalog Division to prepare full MARC cataloging for scores and sound recordings, all of which are contributed to other libraries via OCLC's database. The Chicago Public Library's unique contribution to the national database is in popular materials, the sort read or listened to by the average consumer. These materials tend not to show up as quickly in the OCLC database as do scientific and technical materials more in demand by scholars and researchers.

Until the Library's online public access catalog becomes fully operational and displays records in non-Roman scripts, the Catalog Division has used LSCA and other grant monies to fund production of book catalogs in Chinese and in Korean.

The Library's Processing Division performs the last manual steps in preparing materials for public use, applying book pockets, spine labels, and plastic jackets. The division prepares about 20,000 items per month for public use and also manages the Library's newly automated binding database.

The future of the Collection Management Division hinges on the Library's adoption of a new, fully integrated online system. If all goes as planned, the Library will introduce online ordering in 1994 and will upgrade other systems within Collection Management as well. These changes will transform some of the traditional jobs within the Division and will create new opportunities to improve and expand library services to Chicago's citizens. ☛