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Library of California: One Library - 8,000 Doors

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A Library of California, consisting of all types of libraries networking to share their resources, was conceived in 1985 when a group of 100 librarians and library users met in Pomona. The participants evaluated the need for a network, and agreed to ask the State Librarian to form a task force to explore how the network concept might be applied in California. The California Library Networking Task Force that resulted consisted of about 30 people who met and developed a broad description for a California network. Finally, with many librarians involved, and after more than ten years of drafting, planning and meeting with legislators, the Library of California Act became a reality when Gov. Wilson signed SB409 on September 28, 1998. The act can be found in the California Education Code, sections. 18800-18870. Regulations are in the California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Chapter 24, subchapter 2.

The bill creating the Library of California included an initial appropriation of \$5 million to establish the new cooperative effort, and for regional library network development. The role of the State, through the LoC, is to reimburse libraries for services they provide to people who are not a part of their regular clientele and to create a platform for statewide resource sharing. This program will replace the reimbursement system currently in place for public libraries. The passage of this act affirms the importance and contributions of libraries in the advancement of the state.

Although there have been various cooperatives functioning in the state for many years they are primarily in public libraries. LoC has been expanded to include school, academic and special libraries as well. The state has now been divided into seven regions and most of northern California is in Regions II (Golden Gateway), III (Sierra Valley) and VI (Heartland). Each region will have its own organizational structure consisting of by-laws, Councils and Boards of Directors, and each regional plan must be approved by the Library of California Board. Membership is purely voluntary, but there is no membership fee.

Each library that decides to participate will identify what it can share, such as databases, facilities, reference or special collections expertise, and determine how it will share those materials beyond its own walls and clients. As members of the Regional Library Network, the libraries can receive services designed to enable the sharing of information among libraries statewide, including document delivery, telecommunications, back-up information service, and training. There is an effort for all member libraries to obtain equitable access to the resources and services through a telecommunications infrastructure. This would apply especially to rural libraries which are not physically located near major library collections. The individual library also becomes eligible for grants that support resource-sharing.

How will membership in the Library of California benefit law libraries, and, ultimately, their institutions? Legal researchers would be able to access highly specialized and expensive online databases at the law library because statewide licenses have been negotiated at a sizable discount. This has already been done in the Sierra Valley Network, which has been able to make FirstSearch and the Electric Library available to its charter members. As an

example of the shared resources available to members, an attorney researching patent information which is not available in his law firm library, could search the extensive patent collections of the California State Library, Sunnyvale Public Library and the Los Angeles Public Library. Expertise of the librarians in these locations and relevant documents would also be available to him.

The librarians in the various regions have been working for the past two years to establish their regional networks through meetings and committees designated to meet the goals as outlined in the LoC act. As a result of these meetings, they have designed mission and vision statements, have created time lines and long range planning documents, and have assembled their initial charter members. Law librarians have been active in the planning meetings from the beginning, and will continue to play an active role in the ongoing proceedings. The regional networks hope to have their plans approved by the Library of California Board in December 2000, another step in the plan to bring increased shared resources and services to the people of California during the 21st century. To learn more about the Library of California, visit its web site at www.library.ca.gov/loc

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