

# Introduction

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The *Revised Standards and Guidelines of Service for the Library of Congress Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped*, 2005, continues the tradition of collaboration between ASCLA and the LC/NLS in developing and promulgating these standards. The current project, structured similarly to that of the 1995 revision, began with the selection of a project director and the appointment of a working team and advisory committee to help guide the process and to provide ongoing input into the *Standards* by diverse stakeholders and communities. ASCLA, LC/NLS, and the project director agreed that all constituents had to be involved from the beginning of the effort. For this reason, although scheduled to begin in the early spring of 2003, initial activities were delayed pending appointment of all advisory committee and working team members. Once all participants were identified, the groups met by conference call in late May 2003 to discuss the general working principles and timeline; this meeting was followed by a full meeting in Chicago in August 2003 during which the team thoroughly reviewed the 1995 document, discussed potential changes, and drafted the working paper considerations. The committee also committed to an aggressive schedule of review and revision so that the team could meet the original deadline despite the late start.

Because of the success of using the Internet to facilitate document exchange and solicit comments, the advisory committee unanimously agreed to adjust the draft and comment cycle to allow for three comment periods—one for the working paper and one for each of two drafts, with the first draft comment period expanded so that the draft could be presented at major consumer group meetings. This schedule permitted the team to honor the original due date without compromising constituent input. The working paper, explaining the foundation on which the standards revision would be based, was finalized and released in September 2003. It was posted on the ASCLA Web site and distributed nationally to LC/NLS members, community groups, associated agencies, and interested individuals. LC/NLS and advisory committee members further solicited input from their constituencies. In addition, an open public comment session was held at ALA's Midwinter Meeting and electronic feedback was solicited through the ASCLA Web site.

From the feedback to the working paper and with input from the advisory committee, the working team completed the first draft, *Standards*, at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Diego, California. The draft document was released in February 2004 with the comment period extending through August 31. Thoughtful comments were received both at the two sessions facilitated by the project director (notably at the LC/NLS Network biennial meeting) and at numerous state, regional, and consumer group meetings throughout the spring and summer.

The advisory committee met again in late September 2004 to review these comments and give final direction to the working team, which completed the final revisions at an early October working meeting. The final draft was distributed to network libraries and final changes were discussed and agreed upon during a December teleconference with the advisory committee and working team. The final version was prepared and presented for acceptance at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in January 2005, meeting the original target date.

## **Purpose of this Document**

The *Standards* are meant to help LC/NLS network libraries maintain the best service levels for eligible individuals. The scope is similar to that represented in both the 1995 and 1985 *Standards*,

and aims to provide appropriate service standards for day-to-day operation of LC/NLS network library services and activities including direct patron service, collection development, outreach, and production of local materials. It has been the conscious intent of the working team and advisory committee to present neither a utopian vision nor a reflection of bare-bones services. Instead, the standards have been crafted to represent a level of excellence that we believe the LC/NLS constituency deserves, and to which all network libraries can aspire.

The *Standards* are meant to address standards of service. To the greatest extent possible, we have focused on the outcomes of an action rather than the specific means to achieve that outcome. In this way, we hope that the document will remain relevant over time, especially as the LC/NLS begins a major format shift and provides ever more digitally based services.

The guidelines portion of the document has not been updated from the 1995 version, which in turn was based on the 1984 document. The working team and advisory committee recognize the need for new quantitative guidelines and would have liked to include updated, specific guidelines in terms of staffing, space, and other resources required to meet the *Standards*. Unfortunately, the necessary research and independent benchmarking needed to provide such quantitative guidance has not been conducted; further, we suspect that both space and staffing guidelines relevant in 2004 may prove outdated once the migration to digital talking books is complete. We believe that the current guidelines are sound for the services they address and can be used as a starting point to gauge current infrastructure adequacy, and so we have included them again in this document. At the same time, we strongly encourage LC/NLS to conduct a new resource study once the digital conversion is complete and in time for the results to be included in the next standards revision.

### **How the Document Is Organized**

Following these introductory sections, the standards are presented as summarized:

- Section 1, Provision of Services, addresses service issues related to day-to-day operation of the LC/NLS program—from registration to providing talking books, information and referrals and other direct services.
- Section 2, Resource Development and Management, addresses the provision of recording and playback devices, and collection development and management.
- Section 3, Public Education and Outreach, provides standards for promoting LC/NLS services.
- Section 4, Consulting Services, covers both LC/NLS network consultants and regional library consultants and consulting visits, as well as more informal local and peer consulting.
- Section 5, Volunteers, addresses issues related to the use of volunteer services.
- Section 6, Administration and Organization, discusses the responsibilities of various agencies, administrative units, and network library types within the system.
- Section 7, Budget and Funding, provides standards for managing and administering network library finances.
- Section 8, Planning and Evaluation, addresses long-range and strategic planning efforts and associated evaluation efforts.
- Section 9, Policies and Procedures, relates to policies both for patrons and for library operations.
- Section 10—Reports, Statistical and Narrative—covers reporting standards required to monitor LC/NLS use and performance and to plan future initiatives.
- Section 11, Personnel, covers staffing and employee development standards for network libraries.
- Section 12, Research and Development, provides standards for LC/NLS in both developing new technologies and improving library service.

After the standards section, the guidelines are presented. These provide quantitative staffing and space guidelines for network libraries based on the benchmarking study conducted in the 1980s. Numerous appendixes have been included to help the reader both to better understand the document and to have a single source of information regarding LC/NLS services. These include:

- The working paper containing the considerations that went into creation of the document
- LC/NLS Service Eligibility Criteria for both individuals and institutions
- The Lending Agency Service Agreement for Sound Reproducers and Other Reading Equipment, which sets forth the responsibilities of LC/NLS participants who lend books or equipment
- A copy of the Pratt-Smoot Act and major amendments
- A copy of the ALA Patron Bill of Rights and its Policy on Confidentiality
- A copy of the Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy
- A glossary of terms used in the document

### **How to Use this Document**

We recommend that all people involved in providing network library services or in administering these services use this document as follows:

1. First, review all of the sections (or, for those involved in only selected service areas, the relevant sections) of the standards to become familiar with the standards of service recommended.
2. Next, examine the guidelines, keeping in mind that while these have not been modified for some time, they provide a basic reference to the resources needed to provide excellent service, particularly for areas not heavily impacted by the move to digital services and digital talking books.
3. Identify areas in which you believe your library is meeting and exceeding the standards as well as those where improvement may be a goal. At the same time, identify any standards that are not applicable to your particular institution.
4. Briefly annotate the standards, using the wide margins of this publication, or create a separate document that summarizes your analysis, paying special attention to areas where the library is exceeding expectations, where improvement is indicated, and where standards are not deemed applicable.
5. Focusing on the end service goals advanced in the standards, prioritize areas for improvement with input from all stakeholder groups and assistance as needed from regional or national LC/NLS consultants.
6. Use this prioritized “laundry list” as one of the primary inputs for strategic planning, for developing action plans for process improvement, and for requesting funding or applying for grants.
7. Use the analysis of standards met or exceeded to develop and promote success stories, and to create best practices that can be used in the future and shared with other LC/NLS members.

### **Who Should Use this Document**

LC/NLS participants, staff, volunteers, and members of advisory groups should use this document to review and analyze services and as a tool for strategic planning. Equal consideration should be given to areas where service could be improved and to areas where standards are being met or exceeded.

Service users should use this document as a guide to the service goals of the LC/NLS network. Administrative structures, operating plans, and support provided to network libraries vary greatly

from state to state, and can affect a library's ability to meet service standards. Service users can be powerful advocates in improving services, whether it be by volunteering for advisory groups, lobbying for increased funding, or becoming involved in friends groups and similar initiatives. Representatives of related consumer organizations and agencies should use this document both as an educational and awareness tool and as a way of assessing how the library services available to their constituents compare against the recommended standards. Again, consumer organizations are encouraged to work in collaboration with network libraries to promote LC/NLS use among eligible individuals and to improve service delivery.

Representatives of funding and administrative agencies are encouraged to use this document as a planning tool to identify both best practice areas and those that might benefit from procedural improvements and better resource allocation. The standards also can be used as a measure of how well library services in a particular jurisdiction compare against the recommended national standard.

Members of agencies serving potential users, such as public libraries, retirement communities and nursing homes, and schools serving students who have print disabilities, should use this document as an awareness and educational tool. Network library services can bring truly life-changing services to eligible individuals.

### **Comments**

The issuance of this standards revision comes on the eve of a major transition at LC/NLS—the move from analog to digital recordings. The change will impact all network library services—from distribution models to budgetary and administrative structures.

We have made every effort to create outcomes-oriented standards that will stand up to this transition. At the same time, we cannot predict how far-reaching the pending changes will be, and recognize that some standards and many of the guidelines may become obsolete once the digital program is fully in place. For this reason, we encourage LC/NLS and ASCLA to continue their tradition of viewing the standards as a living document, of reviewing the standards every five years, and of leading a new revision effort to be completed for publication no later than 2015. In addition, we strongly encourage LC/NLS to conduct a benchmarking survey similar to the 1984 study that led to the current guidelines after full implementation of the digital program and in time for results to be incorporated into the next revision.