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1

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Public Libraries:
Is Independence Better?

Introduction:

Since the origin of public libraries in the United States during the nineteenth century, they have been primarily supported by public taxation, due to their intended purpose of benefiting all of society, and especially the economically disadvantaged.   Public libraries are provided in much the same spirit as public education, to uphold the American value that knowledge and information should be equally available to all, without regard to individual ability to pay.

The dilemma of how to pay for library services has involved considerable debate in the library community about the implementation of user fees to supplement revenue, as an alternative to taxation. A study of "Public Opinion Toward User Fees in Public Libraries" in 1998 states that 93% of public library support is provided by tax funded government entities and only 3% from fees and charges, including overdue fines. (Estabrook, 1998)

The study by Estabrook, et al., found that, when offered a choice of increased taxation, user fees, or service cuts to address funding issues, 47% of respondents favored taxation, but a close 44% preferred user fees, while 9% chose service reduction. The preference for taxes corresponded with more library visits, higher education, and higher income.   Those with less education who were not library users favored the other choices. This seems to indicate that self-interest may be a factor in this preference; library users prefer to spread the costs to everyone, rather than taking responsibility for their own use themselves. A source used in Estabrook's study had conducted a survey in 1993 that included a question asking respondents how much they thought libraries should spend per capita each year in providing services to the community.

Respondents were informed that currently the per capita minimum rate was $4, the average was $16, and the maximum was $100. Surprisingly, the average amount suggested by respondents was $34 per capita, almost twice the national average at that time. (Estabrook et al. 1998)

There are over 9,000 public libraries in the United States today, organized under a variety of tax-funded governance types. The majority, over half the public libraries in the United States, are municipal libraries run by city governments, which collectively serve approximately one third of the population.   Other types of governance include libraries that are departments of county or parish government, combined city/county libraries, non-profit agencies, and libraries that serve multiple jurisdictions through contract agreements.   A less traditional and less widely recognized form of library governance is the special tax district formed to fund an independent public library. These single-purpose government entities, of which there are approximately 771, are authorized by legislation in 19 states for the purpose of providing library services to the population living and paying taxes within their geographic boundaries. (Hennen, June/July 2002)

The following table shows the distribution of library governance types and population served, as of 1999.

Library Type	% of U.S. Libraries	% of Population Served	Ave. Per Capita Operating Expenditures
Municipal	54.6	34.2	$23.69
County/Parish	11.4	33.9	$19.10
Multi-jurisdictional	5.6	9.9	$23.52
Nonprofit Agency	9.8	3.1	$27.82
City/County	.6	2	$14.70
Special District	8.6	8.5	$29.65
Miscellaneous	.4	1.3	$18.45

(Hennen, June/July 2002. Data from 1999 FSCS.)

These figures show that library districts spend approximately 25% more per capita to serve their population than do municipal libraries, the most common library type. This difference raises the question whether these higher rates produce more and better services, whether they indicate wasteful spending, or whether library districts are simply more expensive to run.

The special district as a form of governance for the public library has attracted the attention of library leaders, who recognize its huge advantages in the form of funding stability and independent operation.   John Berry, III, editor of "Library Journal," in his editorial of June 15, 2002, calls for lobbying efforts to make library districts legal in every state of the nation, allowing libraries to go directly to their constituent voters for support, rather than continually begging for state and federal aid to subsidize sparse local budgets.   A library that is part of a larger governmental unit is at a disadvantage when competing for funding with essential services such as fire departments, police, and hospitals. As a special tax district, a library receives revenue directly through mechanisms approved by the state legislature and local voters, independent of other governmental functions. Proponents of the special district have called on the American Library Association (ALA) to write model legislation to expedite the formation of library districts with viable funding and legal structure, yet ALA has failed to respond. Though it is recognized that special districts, including library districts, have certain administrative advantages, should this form of governance be supported and promoted politically as best for the public?

Research Question:

Does the funding stability and independent operation of special district libraries produce a quality of services better than that of other public library types?

Literature Review

About Special Tax Districts

Special tax districts are independent, limited-purpose government units whose function is to provide specific services that may be difficult for general-purpose local government to furnish effectively and efficiently. They have been a fast-increasing form of local government since the 70's, responsible for diverse, specialized services such as waste management, industrial development, water supply, natural resource management, parks and recreation, and library services, as well as numerous other functions. From 1972 to 1992 the total number of special districts increased by 39 %. (Fletcher, 1993)

One advantage of special districts is that they are independently funded, making them financially stable and unfettered by restrictions that may affect general government agencies. They can be assigned their own boundaries that include multiple jurisdictions and/or partial jurisdictions for the best range of service delivery, and also a corresponding range of revenue collection. However, critics claim that special districts suffer from a lack of accountability, due to few checks and balances on spending. Though there are some very large special districts, most are quite small, which leads to the criticism that, since each serves a very small population, they represent a great proliferation of government entities.   However, few are invested with power to tax their constituents, and many are dependent on user fees and/or appropriation of revenue from other entities to fund their operations. (Fletcher, 1993)

The opposite is true of special library districts. Generally they are formed for the purpose of levying tax revenue for their own support. Though many library users are not opposed to fee-

based services, in some states the law itself limits the library's ability to charge fees and requires that library services be supported by applicable tax revenue. (Weatherby, 1990)

Special Library Districts

The procedures for forming a special tax district to provide library services are set by law in those states that allow library districts. The process may involve public hearings, petition for a specified level of citizen support, or a referendum to establish a geographic service area and funding mechanisms. An unserved area may be designated to form a new district where no library services existed before. An established library may change from another type of governance to a special district. Multiple jurisdictions, with or without library service, may join to form a library district to bring services to all. Any of these processes involve surmounting opposition on several issues. If multiple library entities are consolidating to form a district, each administration may feel threatened by loss of their library's autonomy and identity. Local government officials may perceive this development as the erosion of their authority. When the formation of a new entity with the power to levy taxes involves voter approval, voters may be critical of new taxes and additional layers of government. (Brawner, 1993)

Whether a special library district is a viable organization depends largely on what specific laws govern it, particularly in the area of funding. These laws vary widely from state to state. In some states the library tax rate is fixed until the voters approve an increase. In other states, re-approval is required by law at fixed intervals, which can be a drain on resources. An ALA-endorsed model library district law recommended to state governments could promote uniformity and help ensure the perpetuation of financially stable libraries. (Brawner, 1993)

From the administrative point of view, while the library district form of governance has definite advantages, it also has some disadvantages. Colorado's manual of guidelines "Forming Library Districts in Colorado" (Colorado State Library, 2001) summarizes these:

Advantages	Disadvantages
• No competition for funding with city or county departments	• Added costs and responsibility for facilities and administration
• Autonomy in decision making and focus	• Added legal responsibilities for compliance and liability
• Stable funding and planning	• Funding increases depend on voter approval
• Greater accountability	• District formation requires work and commitment
• May result in higher funding	• Nobody to blame but yourself!

As a special district, a library has guaranteed funding which provides autonomy and predictability. Without competition over revenue from other governmental units, revenue actually may be higher than for a library that is part of a larger government. Because a district is formed through a local vote, and revenue comes directly from local taxation, constituents who understand this may expect greater responsiveness from their library. Without a "parent" to blame or to depend on, the legal and financial responsibilities of operating an independent government agency takes great commitment from library staff, administration, and board of trustees. (Colorado State Library, 2001.)

Because of the added costs related to facilities and administration, library districts appear to be more expensive to run than other types of libraries. However, though these costs may be absorbed by city, county, or other government for their libraries, they are still incurred by, and attributable to, the library. Therefore the representation of lesser costs to run city, county, or other dependent libraries may be deceptive.

Can Library Districts Be Cost-Effective?

Hennen (June/July 2002) suggests that in planning district formation, larger, possibly multi-jurisdictional, organizations would be most efficient, since administrative costs could be spread farther without increasing bureaucracy. However, the limited information available from previous research doesn't support this idea. In order to test the relative influence of organizational size on expenditures, Rhodes' study of Ohio metropolitan libraries compared the cost-effectiveness of multi-jurisdictional libraries versus comparable clusters of single library entities. For this study she used the most basic measure of library service, circulation of materials. Cost-effectiveness was determined by calculating the total cost of circulation-related service, using direct, indirect and administrative costs. From this information a cost effectiveness indicator was formulated consisting of the ratio of circulation cost per capita to circulation transactions per capita. The study concluded that there was no statistically significant difference between the comparison groups. Taken individually, the single-jurisdiction libraries scored slightly better in cost-effectiveness according to the parameters of the study. (Rhodes, 1999) This conclusion supports the idea that the many existing small library districts operate cost-effectively.

Some of Rhodes' sources pointed out that cost-effectiveness alone is not a good measure of real effectiveness, because lower costs may simply be a result of lower salaries, less professionalism, and other sacrifices of quality. Another source suggested that cost-effectiveness is not really possible for a governmental function "as heavily labor-intensive as public libraries." Though we don't have access to the full context of that remark, Rhodes believed that her study corroborated the statement. Rhodes also states that lack of accepted uniform standards and measures for libraries makes comparative study more difficult, though she observed that her

subjects did share an understanding about utilization of measures. In spite of fears of data discrepancies among libraries, Rhodes found that the libraries in her study shared uniform practices and procedures for data collection, recording, and interpretation. Rhodes further concluded that effectiveness may be better defined in terms of "higher levels of services offered and greater access to better resources," rather than cost-effectiveness alone. Variables other than size and organizational structure, such as management practices and staffing levels, may be responsible for cost-effectiveness as well as other dimensions of effectiveness. (Rhodes, 1999)

Another study shows that public suspicions about poor accountability and irresponsible spending in special district public libraries are not well founded.   Songmin Ahn's 1995 study of Illinois libraries examined whether production costs vary with library governance structure and size, with the conclusion that district libraries do not have higher operating expenditures than other types. Ahn's observation was that district libraries maintain spending levels for collection materials comparable to other library types, even though they have additional administrative and infrastructure costs. District libraries appear to compensate by spending less on staff. The district structure allows boundaries to be set to include all those who use, or potentially could use, the library, and all are taxed for library services, eliminating the drain of use by non-payers. Because larger districts can utilize economies of scale and eliminate the expense of serving free-riders, their spending levels are similar to other library types and they produce the same range of services. District libraries are the most financially flexible and politically responsive of all library types because they depend directly on local support, and this actually makes them more accountable. Even when tax support is low, some districts have the autonomy to institute supplemental user fees, and to pursue funding from other entities.   This study concludes that

formation of special library districts will continue to be a viable option for localities that wish to establish a new library, or to perpetuate and develop an existing library. (Ahn, 1995)

Standards and Performance Measures

From the standpoint of the public, what standards or measurements demonstrate effectiveness in a public library? Library standards have excited much criticism from library professionals and others, partly because libraries don't utilize standards in the same way as other professions. They are often viewed as minimum standards, i.e. standards of adequacy, rather than standards of excellence. One of the primary uses of standards is justification for funding aid for libraries that fail to measure up to the minimum. However, this failure is most often met with supreme indifference from the public. (Rohlf, 1982)

While most of the individual states have formulated minimum standards for public libraries, and the American Library Association (ALA) publishes guidelines and standards for various areas of library service and operations, there is currently not an accepted set of standards with which to measure the general effectiveness of public libraries.

John Moorman's 1996 study compared state standards to see whether there is a national consensus about measures of library performance. Using standards documents from twenty-three states, Moorman's comparison is based on four measures: hours of service, library resources (volumes in the collection), staff, and operating budget. He concluded that there are almost as many approaches to evaluation as there are states in the nation, even in using these numerically based measures. Standards were established by states for a variety of reasons, primarily to serve as eligibility criteria for state and federal aid, as benchmarks of minimum performance, or simply to serve as guidelines for library development. Though states often used standards of other states as resources in developing or revising their own standards, they were

not likely to adopt the same standards as another state. State standards were established primarily to address local in-state needs, not to contribute to a nation-wide scheme of standards. Moorman's ultimate conclusion was that the standards established by the individual states have little in common with one another, as well as little application to a nationwide assessment. What they do reflect is the general condition of libraries in each state, and also the political realities of their local existence. (Moorman, 1997)

Prior to the nineteen-seventies, public library standards published by ALA were based on professional opinion rather than empirical measures. In the early seventies the Public Library Association Standards Committee concluded that a new approach should be taken toward library performance, with the idea that evaluation of library performance should be based on user experience and satisfaction, rather than on preconceived numerical standards. The Committee developed a series of twelve performance measures intended to quantify local use of services and customer satisfaction. By utilizing percentages and per capita calculations, they enable comparisons among entities of different sizes on the state and national level, as well as locally. (Rohlf, 1982)

Detailed procedures for data gathering and analysis utilizing recommended measures are continually being revised and published by ALA. They are intended to function as a process for libraries to engage in self-evaluation and planning, rather than presenting goals for attainment. These measures and definitions were published in <u>Output Measures for Public Libraries: a Manual of Standardized Procedures</u>, American Library Association, 1987.

- Title fill rate: how many requests for specific titles are satisfied during the user's visit.
- Browsing fill rate: the proportion of browsers who find something of interest in the collection, without searching for something specific.
- Subject and author fill rate: how many requests for information on a subject or by an author are filled during the user's visit.

- Reference transactions per capita: reference questions asked per person by the service population.
- Reference completion rate: staff's estimate of the proportion of reference questions asked that were completed on the day they were asked.
- Circulation per capita: the average number of items checked out by each member of the service population.
- In-library materials use per capita: number of materials used in the library, without being checked out, per person in the service area.
- Annual library visits per capita: average number library visits per person in the area served.
- Registration as a percentage of population: the proportion of the people in the service area who are registered to have library cards.
- Collection turnover: average annual circulation per physical item held.
- Program attendance per capita: number of people attending programs per person in the area served.

Each year the U.S Dept. of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducts the Federal and State Cooperative System's (FSCS) survey of public libraries to collect statistics about public libraries in the United States.   Data gathered includes figures such as size of service population, number of annual library visits, circulation, and collection size, which can be used to calculate some of the recommended measures listed above.   This survey is a census of all libraries, conducted through the state library agency of each state.   Response is tied to federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding distribution.   Concerned about getting their fair share of federal funds, state library agencies mandate that individual libraries keep the records necessary for the completion of this survey.

Though the FSCS survey gathers a substantial amount of information, some important core library services are not well addressed, such as programming and technology-related services.   Altman and Hernon suggest that libraries complement quantitative measures with surveys, focus groups, and other customer feedback to assess quality and reputation, with the idea that customer opinion is the real barometer of quality. Their description of effectiveness is that it "encompasses the relationship between the library and its clientele, is often defined in

terms of customer expectations and the need for the organization to meet or exceed these expectations, involves the long-term, general examination of these expectations, and creates a reputation that will become known to the library's community and funders." (Altman, Hernon, 1998) However, these complementary measures address library performance strictly at the local level without a basis for comparison to other libraries, or to state, national, or international standards.

Research Design

This study attempts to compare the effectiveness of public library tax districts with other types of public libraries using data about services, technology, and operating funds. If library districts produce a greater advantage for the public over other types of library governance, perhaps district formation should be promoted by library leadership as a means of creating and supporting better libraries.

This study utilizes data from the FSCS survey, as calculated to produce per capita and percentage measures, producing some of the measures recommended by PLA. To follow the recommendations of Altman and Hernon, as well as ideas about measures promoted by PLA, the study uses an original survey of public libraries to gather information about services and other aspects of the library not included in the FSCS survey. Because there is not a widely accepted set of performance standards for public libraries, library districts and dependent libraries must be compared to one another, rather than to a set of benchmarks, in order to determine their relative effectiveness.

Sample Design

A disproportionate, stratified random sample of public libraries nationwide was used as the target of the study. The independent variable is the libraries' governance structure, i.e.

library district versus other governance type, while the dependent variables are the various quantitative and surveyed measures. The sample is broadly stratified by size of service population, with most libraries serving relatively small populations, in order to allow for comparison of small library districts with small dependent libraries, and large library districts with large dependent libraries. This study focuses primarily on services, technology, and financial data about income and expenditures, and does not attempt to incorporate organizational variables such as characteristics of management and administration.

The original sampling frame for this study consists of 9129 public libraries that responded to the FSCS survey in the year 2001, the most recent year for which data is available. Of these, approximately 9%, are special library tax districts, while the rest are municipal (55%), county/parish (11%), multi-jurisdictional (5%), non-profit agency (15%), or other (2%, primarily Pennsylvania commonwealth libraries). School libraries, combined school/public libraries, tribal government libraries, and those with other or undetermined legal basis, as indicated in the FSCS survey, are eliminated from the sampling frame, as their governance does not pertain to the interest of this study. (NCES, June 2003)

The distribution of libraries by service population is extremely skewed toward lower population levels, with very few libraries serving large populations. (Lakner, 1998) FSCS data shows that 45% of all public libraries serve populations of under 5000, and 76% serve populations under 20,000, while only .3% serve populations of 1,000,000 or more. Special library districts have similar statistics: 66% serve populations under 20,000, while only five library districts (.6% of the 771 included in the FSCS) serve populations over 500,000, and only two (.3%) serve populations over one million (Las Vegas – Clark County Library District and King County Library District in Seattle). Of the non-district libraries, 69% serve populations

under 20,000, while only .9% serve populations over 500,000 and only .3% libraries serve

populations over 1,000,000.   (Data from FSCS Survey, 2001, via <u>Bibliostat Connect.</u>)

Estabrook and Lakner's 1995 survey of attitudes of local government toward public

libraries, as well as Hennen's annual library evaluation process, both utilize stratification of

library groups by size of their service population for differing reasons.   Hennen uses a percentile

ranking of libraries to weight his scores, so that smaller libraries can be equitably compared to

larger ones. Lakner's discussion of sampling design for his study described a random sample of

equal numbers of libraries divided between two population strata in order to group libraries by

the size of population served.

Lakner (1998) comments that larger libraries tend to have more variation among

themselves than smaller libraries, and that there are also wide variations between larger and

smaller libraries.   Based on the recommendations in Lakner's study of sampling for library

surveys, libraries serving a population over 500,000 will be eliminated from this study as being

atypical of the general universe of libraries; the largest libraries have their own political and

practical problems that are not generalizable to each other or to the rest of the library

community.   Lakner and Estabrook's 1995 study also omitted libraries serving populations less

than 2500; however, this would eliminate over one third of all municipal libraries.   For purposes

of the current study, small libraries are included, because as a group they constitute a significant

part of the library universe, and because they are the group that perhaps stand to benefit most by

becoming independent districts, possibly through consolidation with other small libraries. These

parameters produce a sampling frame of 771 library districts and 7761 libraries of other types.

I considered using a sample only from the nineteen states that allow library district

formation, but decided against this. When the legal environment is structured to allow districts,

the law may give them advantages, while states with no districts may have a more favorable environment for non-district operation. I also considered omitting the 893 libraries that reported having no electronic services in 2001 and the 345 with no internet access, but decided against it, since they may have advanced in technology since then. Also, the use of technology, or lack of it, is an important point of comparison in evaluating services.

This study uses a random sample of 200 library districts and 200 dependent public libraries as being manageable for the time frame and resources available. This sample represents 26% of the group of district libraries, and 2.6% of the non-district libraries. Before selecting the sample units, the adjusted sampling frame is divided into the group of library districts and the group of dependent libraries within the parameters stated above. Then, based on Lakner's information, these groups are divided into two population strata, those serving populations under 20,000, and those serving populations from 20,000 to 500,000. Each sample is randomly selected from these two population strata, resulting in four sample groups:

- 100 library districts serving populations under 20,000
- 100 dependent libraries serving populations under 20,000

- 100 library districts serving populations from 20,000 to 500,000
- 100 dependent libraries serving populations from 20,000 to 500,000

The sampling frame is available through Bibliostat, a commercial service which provides a searchable interface and filtering mechanisms to enable statistics from the FSCS survey and other library sources to be analyzed. Libraries were selected for the sample using lists of computer-generated random numbers to select libraries from numbered alphabetical lists of library names.

FSCS Measures

The FSCS data used for this study consists of the following measures:

Services:
- circulation turnover of materials (how much of the collection is actively used)
- circulation per capita (the amount of materials checked out per person in the population)
- library visits per capita (the number times each member of the population visits the library)
- collection size per capita (how many materials are provided by the library relative to the population)

Expenditures:
- collection expenditures per capita
- % of operating expenditures on the collection
- % of operating expenditures on staff

Income:
- operating income per capita
- local government income per capita
- % of operating income from local government (as opposed to other sources)

These measures show effectiveness through evidence of how much library services and materials are used, as well as levels of income and expenditures, in relation to the group of people served. Collection turnover, circulation per capita, and library visits per capita (as a measure of the number of people who use library services) are measures recommended by PLA. Because these figures are ratios related to the size of the population served, they allow for comparisons to be made between libraries of varying sizes. (Rohlf, 1982) Since there are no universal library standards, library groups will be compared to one another, rather than to a benchmark.

Supplemental Survey

In addition to quantitative data from the FSCS survey, this study used a questionnaire to gather information not otherwise available about the sample libraries. The survey questionnaire consists of nineteen questions divided into the categories of funding, technology, and services. Questions require a variety of answer types: yes or no, number amounts, rankings (from very positive to very negative), and lists of options of which any number can be chosen. Option lists include "none" and "other" where more options can be written in. Questions address basic

library services that could be offered in even the smallest libraries, as well as planning, staffing, and technology.   Some questions address similar information in different ways, such as the number of programs for an age group, and the types of services for age groups.   The survey is addressed to the library director, but may well be filled out by other members of library staff. Completing the survey should only take a few minutes for a knowledgeable staff member; there are no calculations or text writing required.

The survey was conducted primarily through email, with twenty-seven printed surveys mailed to libraries for which no email addresses could be found. For those email messages which "bounced" back as undeliverable, follow-up research was performed immediately to find a deliverable email address, or an accurate postal address. The resources used to identify email and postal addresses were state library websites where directories of all public libraries in the state are published, web sites of individual libraries, www.publiclibraries.com, and the ALA Directory of American Libraries.   The sample libraries were offered several options for response, i.e. replying to the emailed survey questionnaire, completing the survey at an online web site, printing the survey from the email and faxing or mailing it at their own expense.   An electronic copy of the completed study was promised to participants, but no other incentives were offered.

The total response rate of the survey was 41%.   While some researchers recommend a survey response rate of at least 70% for statistical accuracy, a RAND study on electronically conducted surveys found that response rates were typically much less than this, ranging from 7% to 44% for web surveys, and from 6% to 68% for email surveys.   This study notes that response is better to surveys that employ multiple modes, and that the use of conventional mail, especially for longer or more complicated surveys, elicits a better response than electronic methods. The

data about surveys conducted since the mid-eighties in the RAND study indicates that the use of

random samples for electronic studies does not generally receive a high response rate. (Even

RAND employees had only a 44% response to a study for which they were the target group!)

(Schonlau, 2002)

Ninety-eight responses were submitted online, while fifty-five were sent as email replies,

and the remaining eleven were mailed or faxed. Response was distributed among the sample

groups as follows:

- Library districts <20,000 population   39 (39%)
- Dependent libraries <20,000 population   30 (30%)

- Library districts >20,000 population   49 (49%)
- Dependent libraries >20,000 population   46 (46%)

           Total: 164   41%

Sample Population and Survey Respondents

The response rate (41%), although not unusual, raises issues as to whether the

responding libraries differed from the non-responding libraries in a way that would affect the

findings. Because the sample was drawn from the libraries in the FSCS dataset, the author had

information about some characteristics for all members of the sample, respondents and

non-respondents alike.

Table 1 compares respondents and non-respondents in terms of size of population served.

With the exception of the large library districts, responding libraries are remarkably similar to

sample libraries on this variable. There were no statistically significant differences between

respondents and the total sample on this characteristic with respect to any of the library groups

(large districts, large dependents, small districts, small dependents).

Sample: Overall, the sample of small library districts serve a larger population than the

group of small dependent libraries, while the large districts serve a smaller population than large

dependent libraries. While the sample is broadly distributed among the fifty states, library

districts obviously are restricted only to the nineteen states where they are legally allowed, and

therefore are somewhat more concentrated. Illinois is represented by 73 cases (28 large, 45

small), while 36 are from Michigan (17 large, 19 small), and 31 are from Kentucky (21 large, 10

small). Among the dependent libraries, California and Texas are represented by 11 large

libraries each, while other states range from 1 to 8 representative cases.

Survey Respondents: The population served by responding library districts is

considerably larger than that served by dependent libraries.   Responses were well distributed

among the states, with most states represented by one case only. The highest concentrations of

non-district respondents were in New Jersey with six cases, and in Texas and California with five

cases each. Library district respondents were most concentrated in Illinois with thirty-seven

cases, and Michigan with ten cases. (Illinois has over three hundred library districts, by far the

most of any of the states.)

Table 1: Library Types and Population Served				
	Sample		**Respondents to Author's Survey**	
	n	*Population Served*	*n*	*Population Served*
Large Libraries		Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)
District	*100*	70,069 (86,638)	*49*	102,407 (165,250)
t= -1.569				
Dependent	*100*	79,942 (87,092)	*46*	80,617 (76,176)
t= -.045				
Small Libraries				
District	*100*	7,570 (5,403)	*39*	7,819 (5,414)
t= -.244				
Dependent	*100*	5,196 (5,021)	*30*	6,056 (5083)
t= -.821				

Source: Population data from 2001 FSCS Survey

Due to the small sample size and low response rate, caution must be used in generalizing the results of the author's survey to the population of all libraries. However, the results raise interesting questions, and perhaps give leads for further exploration. Some of the survey data corroborate the FSCS data, as well as conclusions of previous studies. Response was higher in the large libraries of both types, and in the combined groups of library districts. The group of small dependent libraries displayed a considerably lower response rate than the other groups, and this condition may have skewed the comparisons in their favor. One possibility about this group may be that the small dependent libraries who responded to the survey are also more active and responsive to their communities, and therefore display higher effectiveness. Nevertheless, the differences in response rate between small dependent libraries and small districts was not statistically significant (p.=.181). There is no evidence that a response bias favoring effective libraries would not affect all library groups equally. In any event, it seems apparent that there are some small libraries out there that are performing well and are rightfully proud of themselves.

Library Services

Table 2 compares independent and dependent libraries on basic service measures. These service measures indicate how much the collection is used, how many people use the library, and the level of resources available for people in the service population. Collection and circulation

measures address the physical collection, not users of databases or other online resources. On

each of these measures, a higher number represents a better level of service.

As Table 2 shows, among large libraries, district libraries outscore dependent libraries on

each of these service measures. The differences are substantively slight, however, and none

achieve statistical significance. In contrast, the opposite pattern holds among small libraries. On

all measures but circulation turnover, the small dependent libraries score better. Again, however,

none of these differences is statistically significant, although the small dependent libraries'

advantage in circulation per capita approaches significance (p=.071)). Surprisingly, smaller

libraries of either type appear to do much better than larger libraries on one measure: collection

items per capita. Smaller libraries have more than twice the items of their larger counterparts.

One possible explanation for this is that it is easier for smaller libraries to achieve more items per

capita because of their low population.

Table 2: Basic Services							
	Circulation Per Capita		Circulation Turnover		Visits Per Capita		Collection Items Per Capita	
	n	*Mean (SD)*	*n*	*Mean (SD)*	*n*	*Mean (SD)*	*n*	*Mean (SD)*
Large Libraries								
District	*100*	7.22 (4.25)	*100*	2.53 (1.15)	*100*	5.46 (3.55)	*100*	3.01 (1.64)
Dependent	*100*	6.75 (4.29)	*100*	2.38 (1.08)	*100*	4.78 (3.13)	*100*	2.89 (1.65)
	t=-.775		*t=-.946*		*t=-1.43*		*t=-.551*	
Small Libraries								
District	*100*	6.52 (4.33)	*100*	1.39 (.798)	*100*	4.72 (4.13)	*100*	6.50 (8.41)
Dependent	*100*	8.02 (6.97)	*100*	1.25 (.752)	*100*	5.41 (6.19)	*100*	7.79 (6.91)
	t=1.818		*t=-1.264*		*t=.931*		*t=1.179*	

Source: 2001 FSCS Survey

Age-Specific Services

While smaller libraries may offer only a general use facility, most libraries try to orient services and facilities to the needs and uses of specific age groups. A number of libraries reported blending children's and teenagers' services, as well as adult and senior services. A few survey respondents questioned why specific age groups, especially seniors, would want age-specific services or facilities. Certainly here in Las Vegas, where there is a large retirement population, seniors request and expect services tailored to their special interests. Parents of school-age children are often concerned about the influence of older children and teen-agers on younger children. Also, adult focus groups from the Las Vegas area have expressed a wish to have library service areas and seating away from children.

Generally, libraries have a main all-purpose area which may or may not be designated for adults, who are generally considered the mainstream service population. Special areas for other age groups are an added value. As Table 3 shows, the great majority of libraries report having a special children's area, but areas designated for teens and seniors are much less common. Significantly more large districts report providing teen areas than large dependent libraries (p=.032), but other differences between groups are statistically insignificant. Small libraries in both groups are more likely to offer special areas for seniors, while they are rare in large libraries.

Table 3: Areas for Age Groups in Library				
		Children	**Teens**	**Seniors**
Large Libraries	*n*			
District	*49*	95.9%	73.5%	8.2%
Dependent	*46*	91.3%	52.2%	4.3%
		p=.356	p=.032	p=.445
Small Libraries				

District	*39*	92.3%	53.8%	15.4%
Dependent	*30*	86.7%	60%	20%
		p=.442	p=.609	p=.616

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

Providing a collection of materials in a variety of media is the public library's primary

service. Designated materials collections for children and adults are fairly standard. As shown

in Table 4, the majority of all groups report offering teen collections, but senior collections are

offered by only half of small non-district libraries, and slightly more than one quarter of each of

the other library groups. The percentage of dependent libraries in offering senior collections

approaches significance (p=.076), but overall there is no significant difference between sample

groups in this measure.   As in Table 2, the small dependent libraries and the large districts are

consistently the high scorers in their size groups.

Table 4: Age-Level Collections				
		Children	Teens	Seniors
Large Libraries	*n*			
District	*49*	95.9%	83.7%	26.1%
Dependent	*46*	91.3%	80.4%	22.4%
		p=.356	p=.681	p=.679
Small Libraries				
District	*39*	94.9%	82.1%	28.9%
Dependent	*30*	96.7%	90%	50%
		p=.717	p=.352	p=.076

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

Staffing is a key component in effective service provision. Table 5 shows that specialized children's services staff are reported by the great majority of larger libraries, but slightly less that half of smaller libraries. Large district libraries outscore the other large libraries in having staff to serve teens, approaching statistical significance (p=.076). Library districts report having more staff designated for teens and seniors, while the dependent libraries report more children's staff.

Table 5: Staff for Age Groups				
		Children	**Teens**	**Seniors**
Large Libraries	*n*			
District	*49*	85.7%	55.1%	19.4%
Dependent	*46*	91.3%	37%	17.4%
		p=.573	p=.076	p=.901
Small Libraries				
District	*39*	45%	20.5%	12.8%
Dependent	*30*	48.3%	13.35%	3.3%
		p=.799	p=.435	p=.166

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

Computer stations may be segregated by age groups in order to offer age-appropriate
electronic services and resources, as well as to allow differences in policies. Table 6 shows that
designated computers for children are most common, while computers for teens and seniors are
relatively uncommon. Both sizes of dependent libraries report having more computers for all
age groups. Some libraries reported that their computers were available for use by all ages,
rather than being designated. Differences between groups for this service are insignificant.

Table 6: Computers for Age Groups				
		Children	Teens	Seniors
Large Libraries	*n*			
District	*49*	71.4%	24.5%	2%
Dependent	*46*	78.3%	26.1%	4.3%
		p=.547	p=.759	p=.520
Small Libraries				
District	*39*	43.6%	7.7%	2.6%
Dependent	*30*	53.3%	13.3%	10%
		p=.422	p=.442	p=.190

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

Programs are offered in libraries to educate about library resources and services, to encourage community groups to interact with the library, and to draw in non-users who then become library users. Programs for children are especially important in supporting the development of pre-literacy skills, and later, the enjoyment of reading.   Programming is one service area where service to adults is not the default, as it tends to be in other service areas.

Table 7 shows that library districts report more programs for nearly all age groups than the dependent libraries.   Small district libraries approach significance in outscoring other small libraries in the area of teen programs offered (p=.084).   However, large dependent libraries are significantly higher in the area of children's programs (p=.072)

Table 7: Mean Number of Programs for Age Levels								
		Children		Teens		Adults		Seniors
Large Libraries	*n*	Mean (SD)	*n*	Mean (SD)	*n*	Mean (SD)	*n*	Mean (SD)
Districts	*35*	200.06 (166.762)	*35*	28.71 (45.399)	*37*	74.81 (110.188)	*23*	23.57 (59.17)
Dependent	*35*	279.26 (194.669)	*30*	17.17 (25.739)	*36*	60.28 (83.177)	*17*	22.88 (33.192)
	t=1.828		*t=-1.233*		*t=-.635*		*t=-.043*	
Small Libraries								
Districts	*36*	62.28 (79.304)	*30*	6.77 (9.779)	*31*	15.58 (25.054)	*26*	7 (21.905)
Dependent	*27*	47.96	*24*	3.04	*28*	10.50	*19*	3.84

		(47.01)		(5.544)		(14.341)		(6.185)
	t=-.894		*t=-1.762*		*t=-.942*		*t=-.609*	

Source: Author's survey

Outreach services promote library services to the public, and bring services to users who can't come to the library in person. Literacy services are included here because they reach out to those who need help with reading skills, creating new library users.

As shown in Table 8, over half the large library districts report offering literacy or ESL (English as a second language) services, followed by the dependent large libraries at almost one third; this difference closely approaches statistical significance ($p=.052$). The great majority of small libraries do not offer these services. Possible explanations could be that they are not needed in the community, or that they are offered by local schools or other educational institutions. Other commonly reported services are homebound delivery and school visits. District libraries reported higher percentages in both areas. Differences between groups are insignificant, however.

Table 8: Outreach Services		Literacy	Homebound Delivery	School Visits	
Large Libraries	n				
District	49	55.6	46.9%	59.2%	
Dependent	46	34.9	39.1%	52.2%	
		p=.052	p=.443	p=.492	
Small Libraries					
District	39	5.1%	43.6%	46.2%	
Dependent	30	6.7%	40%	40%	
		p=.786	p=.765	p=.609	

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

Other outreach services reported include bookmobiles, participation in community

events, offsite programs for both children and adults, and deposit collections at various

community sites.

Table 9 is the first of three summary tables that score the data gathered in this study.

Summary tables are shown for the three areas of interest of the study: services, technology, and

finance. Each of these summary tables lists measures, and tallies the high scorer in the size

groups of libraries. For the purposes of this study, large library districts are compared to large

dependent libraries, and small library districts are compared to small dependent libraries.

However, the summary tables also illustrate comparisons of all district libraries with all

dependent libraries. A tally of the high scores for each group of libraries is shown at the end of

each summary table. Scores that are statistically significant (p=.10 or less) are marked with

asterisks.

Table 9 is the summary table for measures of basic library services. It indicates that that

there are statistically significant differences in some services to teens between the large libraries,

with district libraries being the high scorers. Specifically, the large library districts more often

provide physical library areas and staffing for teens. Teens are often considered an underserved

population, so the provision of these services is an accomplishment. Other significant high

scorers are small dependent libraries in offering special collections to seniors, and large districts

in providing literacy services.

Table 9: Summary of Service Measures				
	Large Libraries		**Small Libraries**	
One small and one large library are marked as the high scorer in each measure.	**District**	**Dependent**	**District**	**Dependent**
Library Usage				
Circulation per Capita	1			1
Circ Turnover	1		1	
Visits per Capita	1			1
Collection Items per Capita	1			1
Reference Transactions Per Capita	1			1
Physical Areas				
Children	1		1	
Teens	1*			1
Seniors	1			1
Collections				
Children	1			1
Teens	1			1
Seniors	1			1*
Staff				
Children		1		1
Teens	1*		1	
Seniors	1		1	
Computers				
Children		1		1
Teens		1		1
Seniors		1		1
Programs				
Children		1	1	
Teens	1		1	
Adults	1		1	

Seniors	1		1	
Outreach				
Literacy	1*			1
Homebound	1		1	
School Visits	1		1	
Total	19	5	10	14
	Large Districts	Large Dependents	Small Districts	Small Dependents

*p=.10 or less.

These scores illustrate a pattern that perhaps merits attention in subsequent studies: large

districts and small dependent libraries are the high scorers, while the large dependent libraries

and the small districts have much lower scores. Overall, districts outscore the dependent

libraries. The single exception to this pattern is that dependent libraries as a group appear to be

more effective in offering public use computers for all age groups.

Technology

Technology is an important part of all libraries, both for internal uses as well as for

services. Table 10 shows that most libraries in all groups have formal plans in place for

developing and upgrading their technology on a regular basis. Of those that have a plan, most

are able to follow it, but district libraries of both sizes are more likely to, even though more

dependent libraries have such a plan in place.   The difference between the groups of large

libraries in ability to follow their plan is statistically significant (p=.025). One rationalization

might be that dependent libraries' parent organizations are largely responsible for technology

planning for their jurisdictions, while district libraries manage this responsibility on their own,

resulting in a higher commitment to follow their own plans.

Table 10: Technology Planning				
	n	Have a Plan	n	Follow Plan

Large Libraries					
District	*47*	74.5%	*35*	80%	
Dependent	*44*	84.1%	*38*	55.3%	
	p=.259		*p=.025*		
Small Libraries					
District	*39*	59%	*23*	65.2%	
Dependent	*30*	56.7%	*17*	47.1%	
	p=.847		*p=.251*		

Pearson Chi-Square Source: Author's survey

   Respondents were asked for reasons why an existing technology plan could not be followed, but the great majority did not answer. The few who did respond to this question indicated that lack of funding and facilities issues were the problems for them. A number of remarks mentioned upgrading on an "as-needed" basis without having a formal plan.

   Computer services of some kind seem to be nearly universal in all types of libraries, in spite of the number of libraries that reported no electronic services in the FSCS survey for 2001 (over two years ago). As shown in Table 11, a few libraries reported that they don't offer online databases or online catalogs, but since both these are increasingly made available through statewide contracts or consortial agreements, rather than by individual library organizations, this may be a deceptive response. Computer classes appear to be the service with the most variation among library groups, though they are reported in most libraries, and most frequently in both sizes of library districts. The difference between small libraries in offering databases is significant, with a higher percentage of dependent libraries reporting this service (p=.036) Another significant difference is in the availability of an online catalog in large libraries, with large dependent libraries scoring higher (p=.033).

Table 11: Computer Services						
		Office Functions	Internet	Databases	Classes	Online Catalog
Large Libraries	*n*					

District	*49*	93.9%	98%	89.8%	77.6%	81.6%
Dependent	*46*	97.8%	97.8%	95.7%	67.4%	95.7%
		p=.338	p=.964	p=.275	p=.267	p=.033
Small Libraries						
District	*39*	92.3%	97.4%	79.5%	69.2%	64.1%
Dependent	*30*	96.7%	100%	96.7%	50%	56.7%
		p=.442	p=.377	p=.036	p=.105	p=.530

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

Other available computer services that libraries noted include educational games, a

library web site, on-line reference, free individual Internet accounts, one-on-one computer

instruction, e-books, literacy support, foreign language learning, and scanning.

Table 12 summarizes and scores these technology measures, indicating the high scorer in

each size group of libraries. Three measures (marked with asterisks) show statistically

significant differences between groups. Small dependent libraries are more likely to provide

databases than small library districts. Large dependent libraries outscore large districts in

providing online library catalogs. Large library districts follow their technology plan more often

than large dependent libraries.

Table 12: Summary of Technology Measures					
	Large Libraries			Small Libraries	
One small and one large library are marked as the high scorer in each measure.	District	Dependent		District	Dependent
Office functions		1			1
Internet access		1			1
Databases		1			1*
Classes	1			1	
Online Catalog		1*		1	
Planning		1		1	
Following plan	1*			1	
Total	2	5		4	3

*p=.10 or less.

In this group of measures, large dependent libraries and small districts are the high

scorers, opposite to the pattern shown in the group of service measures, in which the large

districts and small dependent libraries scored higher.   The fact that these particular groups of

libraries show a better ability to provide technology correlates with their higher scores in

providing public computers in the group of service measures.

Funding

Public libraries have a reputation of always being under-funded, which they perpetuate in

order to justify soliciting donations, grant funds, and other supplemental revenue.   However, as

Table 13 illustrates, in survey responses, libraries' opinions of their funding tend to be positive in

most cases, somewhat surprisingly. A few libraries in all groups consider their funding

excellent. The most common response was that funding is "good," except in the group of small

library districts, for which the most common response is "adequate."   The small dependent

libraries that responded are most likely to consider their funding good or excellent. Also, more

large districts displayed a positive view of their funding than large dependent libraries.   Small

districts and large dependent libraries were alike in that over a quarter of both groups feel that

their funding is poor. Again, differences between groups were not statistically significant.

Table 13: Libraries' Opinions of Their Own Funding						
	n	Very Poor	Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent
		Negative		Positive		
Large Libraries						
District	*46*	4.3%	13%	34.8%	41.3%	6.5%
		17.3%		82.6%		
Dependent	*45*	4.4%	28.9%	26.7%	33.3%	6.7%
		33.3%		66.7%		
p=.461						
Small Libraries						
District	*29*	0	25.6%	35.9%	20.5%	17.9%
		25.6%		74.3%		

Dependent	39	0	6.9%	31%	37.9%	24.1%
		6.9%		93%		
p=.136						

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

As shown in Table 14, the majority of libraries surveyed report no funding losses in the last five years, with the high scores for large library districts and small dependent libraries. More small districts had losses than small dependents, but large dependents had more than large districts.   Generally, losses seem to occur occasionally rather than on a regular basis. Differences between groups are not significant.

Table 14: Funding Reductions Over Previous Five Years				
	Yrs.	0	1 - 2	3 – 5
Large Libraries	*n*			
District	*49*	69.4%	14.3%	16.3%
Dependent	*44*	54.3%	30.4%	10.8%
p=.114				
Small Libraries				
District	*38*	53.8%	33.3%	10.3%
Dependent	*28*	73.3%	13.3%	6.7%
p=.398				

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

Table 15 shows that almost two thirds of small dependent libraries report no funding increases in the last five years. In contrast, nearly two thirds of large districts report increases in most (three to five) years. Almost half of large dependent libraries report either no increases or three to five annual increases. District library respondents of both sizes report increases more often than dependent libraries, with large districts receiving the most regular increases. However, differences between groups are not significant.

Table 15: Funding Increases Over Previous Five Years				
	Yrs.	**0**	**1 - 2**	**3 – 5**
Large Libraries	*n*			
District	*49*	24.5%	10.2%	63.2%
Dependent	*46*	43.5%	8.7%	47.9%
p=.216				
Small Libraries				
District	*39*	30.8%	23%	46.2%
Dependent	*30*	63.3%	13.4%	23.4%
p=.099				

Pearson Chi-Square   Source: Author's survey

Most respondents failed to explain increases or reductions in revenue. A few indicated that the economy, good or bad, was responsible, or that changes were due to local government decisions. Some respondents made spontaneous remarks in this part of the questionnaire. Pertaining to revenue reductions, remarks mentioned a plant closing, decline in the timber industry, tax caps, lower property taxes, and the unpredictability of penal fines that contribute to revenue. Pertaining to revenue increases, remarks mentioned population growth, property tax increases, growth in assessed valuation, and new industry in the area. It was also mentioned that some district library boards have a legislated power to raise their tax levy by a certain amount (3

or 4%) each year, which they did.   Responses tend to indicate that library funding is a very

localized issue.

Table 16 shows that both groups of district libraries appear to be higher in income

measures than both dependent groups.   These income measures seem to be the area where

library districts have the advantage over other libraries. Even the group of small districts have

higher statistics than the group of large dependent libraries. Differences between groups are

significant for large libraries in total operating income per capita (p=.001) and local income per

capita (p=.001), with district libraries leading in both measures. Significant differences for small

libraries were in local income per capita (p=.006) and percentage of total operating income from

local government (p=.030), again with district libraries in the lead.

Table 16: Income						
	Total Operating Income Per Capita		Local Income Per Capita		% of Total Operating Income from Local Government	
	n	*Mean (SD)*	*n*	*Mean (SD)*	*n*	*Mean (SD)*
Large Libraries						
District	100	$41.07 (29.70)	100	$34.32 ($23.73)	100	83.15% (12.84%)
Dependent	100	$28.88 ($19.32)	97	$24.18 ($17.60)	100	79.22% (21.26%)
	t=3.442		t=3.415		t=1.581	
Small Libraries						
District	100	$33.42 ($26.22)	100	$25.59 ($19.72)	100	78.04% (14.61%)
Dependent	100	$27.65 ($29.06)	100	$18.14 ($18.22)	100	70.94% (28.89%)
	t=-1.472		t=-2.776		t=-2.193	

Source: 2001 FSCS Survey

In the expenditure measures shown in Table 17, the two groups of smaller libraries have a

considerable amount of missing data, especially the small dependent libraries.   The library

districts spend more on the collection than large dependent libraries, but less than the small

dependent libraries. Dependent libraries make higher expenditures on staff. The two sizes of

library districts are very similar to one another, tending to be higher in collection expenditures,

and lower in staff expenditures than large dependent libraries. Small dependent libraries seem

to spend more on both their collection and staff than the others. These results corroborate

Songmin Ahn's 1995 study of Illinois libraries that showed that library districts tended to spend

more on the collection and less on staff, with similar operating expenditures overall, compared to

other types of libraries. (Ahn, 1995) Differences between groups are insignificant for the small

libraries, but significant for larger libraries in the percentage of operating expenditures on staff

(p=-.004), and collection expenditures per capita (p=.013). The lower percentage spent on staff

is considered the more successful measure, again making district libraries the leaders in both

measures.

Table 17: Expenditures						
	% of Operating Expenditures on Collection		% of Operating Expenditures on Staff		Collection Expenditures per Capita	
	n	Mean (SD)	n	Mean (SD)	n	Mean (SD)
Large Libraries						
District	100	14.39% (4.36%)	100	57.71% (7.92%)	100	$5.01 ($3.74)
Dependent	98	13.74% (5.03%)	98	61,44% (9.80%)	100	$3.84 ($2.78)
	t=.972		t=-2.952		t=2.518	
Small Libraries						
District	66	14.45% (4.58%)	66	53.45% (8.11%)	100	$4.09 ($3.62)
Dependent	41	16.24% (7.39%)	41	56.97% (15.51%)	100	$4.33 ($4.10)
	t=1.394		t=1.346		t=.442	

Source: 2001 FSCS Survey

It is arguable whether it is better to spend more or less on these aspects of service provision. Less expenditure on the collection may mean inadequate collection resources. Less expenditure on staff may mean inadequate hours, poor customer service, or lack of programming and other staff-intensive services. Higher expenditures in these areas mean reduced resources for necessary facilities and equipment. Percentages for dependent libraries may be skewed if their parent organizations take responsibility for expenditures on facilities, equipment, or other needs that independent districts include in their own budgets.

A core component of library service is to provide as many and varied collection materials as possible, as well as technology-based resources, and facilities for programs and community use. Therefore, the premise for evaluating this section of the study shall be that higher collection expenditures and lower staff expenditures are desirable conditions.

Table 18 summarizes the funding measures and notes the leading scorers for both small

and large libraries.   This group of measures displays more statistically significant differences

between groups (marked with asterisks) than the service or technology areas studied.   The

district libraries, as a group, exhibit statistically significant scores in all income measures. Also,

large district libraries outscored large dependent libraries in making lower expenditures on staff,

and higher per capita expenditures on the collection. As data was available for 97% to 100% of

the full sample, this information can be considered valid.

Table 18: Summary of Funding Measures				
	Large Libraries		Small Libraries	
One small and one large library are marked as the high scorer in each measure.	District	Dependent	District	Dependent
***Funding* - Library Districts**				
Opinion of Funding	1			1
Losses, Least	1			1
Increases, Most	1		1	
***Income* - Library Districts**				
Operating income per capita	1*		1	
Local income per capita	1*		1*	
% of operating income from local govt.	1		1*	
***Expenditures* – Library Districts**				
% of Operating Expenditures on Collection	1			1
% of operating expenditures on staff (lower=better)	1*		1	
Collection Expenditures per Capita	1*			1
Total	8	0	5	4

*p=.10 or less.

Surprisingly, the large dependent libraries failed to be the high scorer in any of these

measures.   Though the district libraries scored higher overall, the small dependent libraries are

not far behind the small districts.   According to these data, it seems clear that district libraries

have an advantage over other libraries in their financial position.

Conclusion

This comparison of district and non-district libraries provides more opportunities for conjecture than conclusions. The clearest observation that can be made is that library districts have an advantage in the financial measures, especially in receiving higher per capita income than other types of libraries. This perception might be positive for the library administration, but possibly less so for its constituency, who are paying the taxes that support libraries.

Though library districts scored well in the financial and service measures, the large dependent libraries performed slightly better in the technology measures. In the service measures, there is a distinct pattern of the large districts and the small dependent libraries reporting higher scores, while the small districts and the large dependent libraries have similar lower scores. In the technology measures, the one area in which large dependent libraries scored highest, they were also accompanied by the small districts with a similar score. Why does this occur in spite of the size disparity? In actuality, there is often not a large difference between so-called high and low scores, which is shown in the tables of the individual measures, and many differences between groups are not statistically significant using a standard 95 % confidence interval.

Why do the small non-district libraries appear to perform better than small district libraries, and sometimes better than larger libraries? One rationale could be that they are responsive to their users, and in their small communities, they don't have to compete with other organizations and businesses to attract users and supporters. Since they have parent organizations in their cities or counties, etc., to take care of facilities and administrative needs, they can use their small resources to the best advantage for the public. With small populations to serve, they can easily achieve good per capita measures. Their apparent effectiveness supports the opinion that many users of Las Vegas valley libraries have expressed, that they prefer

convenient, small libraries located in their neighborhoods.   This pattern also corroborates

Rhodes' conclusion that small libraries are just as effective as larger entities.

Small library districts might be at some disadvantage for the opposite reasons.

Responsibility for their own facilities and administrative needs may absorb resources, including

staff time, that small non-district libraries can devote to service-related activities.   A resulting

theory might be that the formation of a library district should encompass a certain level of

population size (along with revenue rate) to be as effective as their non-district counterparts. A

subject that merits further study is a comparison of the laws that govern the formation and

finance of library districts in the states where they are allowed.   The remarks of libraries

responding to the survey indicate that there are wide differences in powers allowed to library

districts that contribute to their operational and financial success.

What conditions can explain the apparent differences between the two groups of large

libraries? Large non-district libraries appear to be weaker than all others in the financial

measures, and also in services, though they are stronger in technology areas. This representation

could well be due to sampling error, but it is a pattern that perhaps should be further explored.

The limited data from the author's survey shows differences between groups that could

simply be the result of the low and highly subjective response. Upon working with the survey, it

soon became very clear that it was too complicated to elicit uniform responses from participants.

Though respondents were generally very cooperative, and sent many good wishes, many of them

omitted some questions, or answered in other terms than what the questions called for.   A more

concise and focused survey would probably have a higher response and more accurate data.

Along with this problem, the FSCS data has problems of its own. While the FSCS is a mine of

valuable information, in this climate of rapid change, it is always outdated. For this research to

be valuable, the data needs to be made available sooner than two years after the survey. However, these two data sources did not appear to contradict each other, or previous studies cited.

According to this study, the primary advantage of special tax districts for providing library services is that funding is both more dependable and higher per capita for the service population, providing a strong basis for a viable and active organization. This study seems to indicate that, while library districts as a group did not score as high on some measures as dependent libraries, they are still at least as effective in providing services as other types of libraries. It appears that independent library districts may be more effective in the form of larger entities, while smaller libraries may perform better as part of a parent government. Any political promotion of library district formation should perhaps be based on the premise that the service population must be a sufficient size to fund a viable and effective entity. The definition of that size threshold has yet to be determined, and would certainly vary under varying local economic and legal conditions. Given the higher local funding percentages for library districts, district formation is an option for communities that place a high value on library services and want stable libraries that are unthreatened by other local government priorities.