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FOLLOW-UP REVIEW

Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

Board of Regents of the
University System of Georgia

Performance Audit Operations Division
Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts

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Report 04-17

This is a Follow-Up Review of the Performance Audit of the **Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped** released by the Department of Audits in June 2002. (It should be noted that the preferred name of the Program is now **Library Services for the Blind and Physically Disabled**.) This Review was conducted to determine the extent to which the Board of Regents has addressed the recommendations presented in the 2002 Performance Audit. A copy of the original report can be obtained through the contact information on the back.

Background

The overall purpose of the Library Services for the Blind and Physically Disabled, administered by the Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS), is to provide library services to blind and physically disabled citizens of Georgia. The services are provided by the Georgia Library for Accessible Services (formerly called the Georgia Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped) and 13 sub-regional libraries located throughout the state. Through these libraries, eligible persons have access to books-on-tape (talking books) and special playback equipment, Braille materials, and reader advisory services. The books-on-tape, the playback equipment, and the Braille materials are provided by the National Library Service (NLS) at no cost to the state or eligible users.

The Georgia Library for Accessible Services (GLASS) serves patrons in a 16-county area in metropolitan Atlanta and functions as the statewide coordinator of the library services. The 13 sub-regional libraries, housed in local public libraries, are located in Albany, Athens, Augusta, Bainbridge, Brunswick, Columbus, Dublin, Gainesville, LaFayette, Macon, Rome, Savannah, and Valdosta.

GLASS is funded with federal funds received by GPLS for general administrative expenses. The sub-regional libraries (other than the Gainesville sub-regional) receive state grants composed of a \$10,000 base amount, plus \$32 per registered reader and \$0.63 per circulation. The Gainesville sub-regional library does not receive state funds since it serves only Hall County.

Status of Audit Recommendations

Library Management

Recommendation No. 1 (As reported in 2002): The sub-regional libraries should be subject to additional oversight and accountability.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, the sub-regional libraries were not subject to the state's direction or control, either organizationally or contractually, even though all of them (other than the Gainesville sub-regional) were funded by the state. The sub-regional libraries reported to the director of the public library system in which they were located, not to GPLS.

Current Status

In consultation with the National Library Service, GPLS is drafting a contractual agreement between the Regional Library (GLASS) and the sub-regional libraries to help ensure that they provide a basic and consistent level of service. According to GPLS personnel, the agreement will include a provision specifying that the libraries' continued receipt of state funds will be contingent on their meeting the standards of service specified in the agreement. GPLS personnel have indicated that the agreements will be signed and in place by July 1, 2004.

Recommendation No. 2 (As reported in 2002): Action should be taken to enable the Regional Library to fulfill its responsibilities as the statewide coordinator of Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, the Regional Library served as the sub-regional library for a 16-county service area as well as the statewide coordinator of library services. The Regional Library, however, did not have the staff and resources necessary to fulfill both responsibilities.

Current Status

The Regional Library (GLASS) still functions as a sub-regional library and is still responsible for statewide coordination of library services. Additional personnel positions for the Regional Library were requested by GPLS in fiscal years 2003 and 2004 but were not funded due to budget constraints.

Recommendation No. 3 (As reported in 2002): Consideration should be given to developing a long-range plan for providing library services for the blind and physically handicapped.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, GPLS did not have a long-range plan with goals and measurable objectives for delivering library services to the blind and physically disabled.

Current Status

GPLS has created a draft outline of a long-range plan for the sub-regional libraries to be implemented over a 30-month period, with a completion date of June 30, 2006. The plan provides for consolidating the storage and shipping of books from a centralized warehouse, with the sub-regional libraries responsible for outreach activities. Action has also been taken to develop specific goals and objectives.

Library Operations

Recommendation No. 1 (As reported in 2002): The Board of Regents should reevaluate the current service delivery structure for providing library services to blind and physically handicapped citizens of Georgia.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, the Regional Library and each of the 13 sub-regional libraries maintained collections of books-on-tape and filled patrons' requests to have specific titles mailed to them. This decentralized system was inefficient and resulted in each of the 13 sub-regional libraries functioning like a mini-regional library.

Current Status

As discussed in the Current Status segment of the following Recommendation, GPLS has implemented a new service delivery structure that enables patrons to search for and order books through the Internet. Although the long-range plan includes discontinuing the storing and shipping of materials by seven of the 13 sub-regional libraries by June 30, 2004, this goal is dependent on the establishment of a centralized warehouse for consolidated shipping and receiving. At least seven of the 13 sub-regionals will reduce the storing and shipping of materials by June 30, 2004; a complete consolidation of the system is scheduled for completion by June 30, 2006.

Recommendation No. 2 (As reported in 2002): The Board of Regents should take steps to make library services more accessible to the blind and physically handicapped.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, patrons were not able to obtain books-on-tape from most public libraries even though public libraries are located in every county. Similarly, staff at the public libraries could not process requests for books-on-tape using the libraries' computer systems.

Current Status

GPLS has implemented the Keystone Library Automation System (KLAS) that enables patrons to search for and order books-on-tape using any computer that has Internet access. Patrons can also search for and order Braille materials through the Regional Library (GLASS) website.

Recommendation No. 3 (As reported in 2002): Additional action should be taken to promote awareness of library services that are available to blind and physically handicapped citizens on a statewide basis.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, only limited outreach activities were being performed by the sub-regional libraries. In fiscal year 2001, for example, there were no reported outreach programs in 98 (62%) of the state's counties.

Current Status

GPLS personnel have indicated that outreach efforts will increase once the centralized service delivery structure is fully implemented by June 30, 2006. Personnel at the sub-regional libraries will have more time to devote to promoting awareness of the available services. In cooperation with the National Library Service, a statewide public awareness campaign is tentatively scheduled for Fall 2004.

Recommendation No. 4 (As reported in 2002): Consideration should be given to finding a new location for the Regional Library.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, the Regional Library was located in a

metropolitan Atlanta warehouse that did not have adequate climate control, proper lighting, or security. There were leaks in the ceiling, rat droppings on the floors, and bullet holes in the windows.

Current Status

Although a study was completed in 2003 that outlined several options for a new facility, the Regional Library is still located in the same warehouse. Funding for a new facility (estimated to cost from \$4 million to \$6 million) was requested for fiscal year 2005 but the request was not included on the Board of Regents' priority list of capital improvement projects.

Library Funding

Recommendation No. 1 (As reported in 2002): Action should be taken by the Board of Regents to ensure that the grant funds provided the sub-regional libraries are sufficient to meet the library needs of the state's blind and handicapped citizens.

As noted in the 2002 Audit, the amount of grant funds provided the sub-regional libraries was not based on the actual costs incurred by the sub-regional libraries to provide a basic level of service. The funding formula had not been updated in at least 12 years, with the result that the amount of funds received by the sub-regional libraries had not kept pace with the increased cost of goods and services. Many of the sub-regional libraries depended on voluntary financial support from their host library systems.

Current Status

No action has been taken to determine the amount of funds each sub-regional library actually needs to provide a basic level of service. GPLS personnel indicated that the planned contractual agreements with the sub-regional libraries need to be in place, and the basic level of services agreed upon, before the actual cost of providing the service can be determined. The state's budget constraints prevented GPLS from receiving the additional funding that it requested for the sub-regional libraries in fiscal year 2004.

Recommendation No. 2 (As reported in 2002): Action should be

taken to ensure that the activity data reported by the sub-regional libraries is accurate.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, there was no mechanism in place to provide assurance that the circulation and readership data reported by the sub-regional libraries was accurate. Since almost 90% of the grant funds received by each sub-regional library was based on the number of registered readers and circulations, the lack of internal controls over the reported data could potentially result in libraries manipulating their reported activity data in order to increase their funding.

Current Status

Implementation of the automated on-line ordering system (KLAS) has resulted in GPLS having accurate data regarding the sub-regional libraries' number of readers and circulation. The system tracks the number of registered readers and circulation data for each sub-regional library. Statewide policies and procedures have been adopted by all sub-regionals to ensure uniform service standards and greatly increased accuracy in data reporting.

Recommendation No. 3 (As reported in 2002): Consideration should be given to adequately funding and staffing the Regional Library.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, the Regional Library did not have its own operating budget and was not funded or staffed to carry out its dual role as a 14th sub-regional library and as the statewide coordinator of library services.

Current Status

A separate budget that includes the Regional Library and the sub-regional libraries was created in fiscal year 2003. In fiscal year 2004, GPLS requested an additional \$373,228 to include the Regional Library in the state funding formula as the 14th sub-regional library. Due to budget constraints, the requested funds were not provided.

Recommendation No. 4 (As reported in 2002): Steps should be taken to utilize the charitable donations made to the Library for

the Blind and Physically Handicapped Trust Fund.

At the time of the 2002 Audit, the balance of the Trust Fund was approximately \$11,800 and funds had not been expended from the Trust Fund for several years.

Current Status

As of January 2004, no expenditures had been made from the Fund and the balance had increased to approximately \$18,832. GPLS personnel have indicated, however, that they plan to expend approximately \$3,000 of the Fund on storage equipment and materials. A committee of the GLASS Library Consumers Advisory Council has been charged with developing recommendations for future use of the Trust Fund.

For additional information, please contact Paul E. Bernard, Director,
Performance Audit Operations Division, at 404-657-5220.

Copies of Performance Audit can be obtained by calling the number above or on our website:
http://www.audits.state.ga.us/internet/pao/rpt_main.html