A NOTE TO READERS

This report is composed of two sections. Part I provides “Background” information and useful data regarding Georgia’s residents with special needs. It also provides background information about some of the library services that have been provided to library users with special needs in the past. Part II contains “Findings” based on the work conducted during this study.

While you will find that there are some recommendations in both sections of the report, most are contained in the Findings section. Furthermore, the recommendations are outlined in an executive summary at the beginning of the Findings section. Nevertheless, a thorough understanding of the study, its findings, and its recommendations, is best gained by reading both sections of the report sequentially.
# FINDINGS DOCUMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Credible estimates of the number of Georgians with disabilities are complex to calculate. Using various sources the consultants estimate that there are 392,138 people aged 65 and older, 140,412 children aged 19 and younger, and 473,240 Georgians aged 15 – 64 who have disabilities. Based on the National Library Service (NLS) estimate of 1.4% of the total population, there are 107,777 Georgians who are eligible to receive the services of the Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. This study was conducted to examine how well Georgians with disabilities are served by the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, by the subregional libraries, and by the public libraries of the state.

Users of the NLS service who participated in focus groups were very satisfied with the NLS service they received; they were especially pleased with the personal attention and assistance they received from the staff members at the subregional libraries. While there are notable exceptions, it would appear that the residents of the counties hosting the 13 subregional and the one regional library are more likely to be participants in the NLS program than residents in non-host counties. A combination of history and the structure of subregionals in Georgia has resulted in a rather unique framework for service. Whereas subregionals are envisioned nationally as local supplements to regional library service, in Georgia, subregionals are essentially mini-regional libraries with large collections of holdings. At the same time the subregionals are generally understaffed for the work that they are doing and the Regional Library is understaffed for the work it should be doing, that is, the work of statewide leadership and coordination.

Technology has influenced, and will continue to influence library services to individuals with disabilities. Many Georgia library directors question the current talking book technology being used by the Library of Congress. However, NLS must, by law, protect authors and publishers by employing specialized formats. Furthermore, a change from talking books to commercial books-on-tape, a more readily available format, would negate the free mailing postal regulations used for talking books and would greatly increase the cost of providing the service. Other important
issues related to a change in technology include cost, the
time and personal retraining involved in migrating from
one format to another, and the desire for unabridged
materials (which means a longer playing time than is
available from CDs). NLS is, however, moving toward the
use of new technologies. The consultants believe the
wholesale replacement of the talking book cassette format
and machines is at least a decade into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The State of Georgia, through the Office of Public
   Library Services (OPLS) and the Regional Library
   for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (Regional
   Library), needs to undertake a comprehensive
   program of training, consulting assistance, and
targeted program support that will result in an
improved level of library service to Georgia
residents with disabling conditions.

2. Georgia should reorganize its Regional Library over
   the next five years to separate it into seven distinct
   functional areas. They are:
   
   1. Statewide coordination of library
      services to people with disabilities
   2. Special needs consulting and training
   3. Readers' advisory service
   4. Special services (local recording,
      Braille-on-demand, etc.) and volunteer
      services
   5. Machine lending and repair
   6. Talking Book fulfillment service
   7. Braille fulfillment service

3. Georgia should move toward outsourcing several of
   the functions listed above. The essence of this
   recommendation is that functions one, two, and
   three should be performed by permanent
   employees. Function four should be performed
   primarily by volunteers under the coordination of
   and with the technical support of permanent
   employees. Function five has some potential for
   outsourcing, although it is likely that volunteers
   would be involved in performing much of the work.
Finally, functions six and seven have a high level of potential for outsourcing.

4. The Georgia Regional Library should work with NLS to develop a web-accessible version of the READS II software that would allow consumers and library staff in any library in Georgia to place requests for talking book materials from any location in the state.

5. OPLS should seek new quarters to house the Regional Library for the next five to seven years. Such facilities should meet NLS standards and should be more accessible and hospitable for walk-in use than the current facility.

6. The 13 Georgia subregional libraries should work with OPLS and with the Regional Library to transition over a five year period into entities that provide outreach services, training and assistance to public libraries in providing all types of library services to individuals with disabling conditions. While readers’ advisory service related to the NLS program can continue to be provided through subregionals, most circulation of NLS formats should be centralized. Planning for this transition should fully involve consumer groups representing a large variety of disability advocacy and service organizations.

7. The maintenance of high quality NLS service should be a guiding principle in the transition of subregionals from direct service providers into outreach/support organizations. Talking book center managers should be involved in the development of requests for proposals for contracted services and in the development of training to prepare library staff members to use the online request system.

8. The State of Georgia should develop two Requests for Proposals aimed at outsourcing specific statewide functions; one for Braille fulfillment service and one for talking book fulfillment service.
9. OPLS, the Regional Library, and the subregional libraries should jointly work toward a system in which some consumers place their own requests for talking books and others place requests through their local libraries. This will require the development of specialized software and extensive training.

10. Staff in subregional libraries should be regional experts in services to all disability communities, including but not limited to the visually and hearing impaired, individuals with developmental and learning disabilities, and people with mobility limitations. They should act as a regional resource to all public libraries in their service areas.

11. Outreach workers should be required to provide training and consulting services to all public libraries within the area currently served by their subregional library as a condition of receiving State funding.

12. The OPLS, in cooperation with Galileo, should work toward the development of a coordinated point of entry to the Galileo information system designed specifically with special needs users in mind. OPLS should develop and offer a training program in accessible web-design for public libraries in the state.

13. The OPLS should invite representatives of LC/NLS to make a formal presentation at a library director's meeting in order to provide a better understanding of the NLS program. The directors should be encouraged to submit questions to NLS in advance of the program so that all areas of interest/concern can be addressed in the presentation.

14. Coordination of the development of a public relations campaign concerning library services to special needs populations, consulting assistance on local staff training and on up-to-date assistive devices and technology, and increased networking and outreach with state level organizations should all be carried out and funded at the state level.
15. Funding should be provided on a two-tier system with the first tier compensating the Regional Library for direct services provided to the residents in the counties it serves as a subregional. The second tier should consist of funding to enable the Regional to carry out its statewide leadership and coordination responsibilities. The first tier amount for both the Regional and subregional libraries should be based on the total number of active registered users of NLS services in the State of Georgia. The consultants recommend that a multiple-part formula be adopted. The formula should provide a base administration/program administration grant, adjusted annually for inflation, of an equal amount to each subregional. The amount of the grant should be large enough to cover the salary and fringe benefits for a full-time professional librarian. The balance of the formula should be based on an estimated number of potential users in the territory covered by a subregional, on the percentage of active users compared to the estimated number of potential users, and on the actual circulation of NLS materials. The circulation/distribution of large print materials and newsletters should not be counted in calculating a reimbursement formula. The consultants further recommend that the State consider specific add-on incentive programs to encourage subregionals to offer rotating collections of large print and descriptive videos to all public libraries in their service areas.

16. The Regional Library needs at least one additional full-time professional librarian and at least one additional professional/paraprofessional position. The Regional Library should be staffed to enable it to take a leadership role in advocacy for services to people with special needs in the library community, with other organizations serving people with disabilities, and with the general public. The inadequate staffing at the Regional Library should be outlined to the Board of Regents when the transfer of OPLS occurs in July of 2000.

17. The network libraries in Georgia need to build an active listserv and collect and share some basic
information within the subregions that can be aggregated to create a clear picture of statewide demographics and service needs.

18. The Regional Library and the subregional libraries should work together to develop a shared web-page with extensive links to national, regional, state, and local organizations. The Regional Library should take the lead in developing a web-site that would provide links to agencies and organizations providing services to people with disabilities.

19. The Regional Library needs to play a key role in offering continuing education opportunities for directors, librarians, and other library staff members. This will require additional staffing at the Regional Library.

20. The Regional Library and subregionals should all continue to develop (or begin) formal “Friends” organizations.

21. The Regional Library should develop a Consumer (User) Advisory Committee.

22. The OPLS should also be proactive in seeking out individuals with disabilities as possible appointees to steering committees, advisory committees, and task forces on general library services.

23. The Director of the Regional Library should play a greater role in budget development, justification, and monitoring so that the OPLS and the Board of Regents have a better understanding of the Regional Library’s needs.

24. The Regional Library should develop a comprehensive long-range plan. In order to build upon the current study, the Regional Library should form the Consumer Advisory Committee mentioned above and should ask its members to review and react to the study’s recommendations and to work toward the development of a long-range plan for improved services.
25. The Regional Library should work with the subregionals and with the public library directors to determine what information would be most useful for local planning for library services to people with disabilities. Each public library director in the state should receive a monthly report outlining at minimum, the number of registered borrowers by county and the circulation of NLS materials by county.

26. If Georgia chooses to maintain subregional service, minimum staffing levels for subregional libraries should be based on the ASCLA/NLS guidelines and should be a requirement for State funding. This requirement should be contained in the contract between the libraries that host subregionals and OPLS. Libraries hosting subregionals should be afforded flexibility in structuring their talking book center operations within the staffing guidelines set by the ASCLA/NLS.

27. The Regional Library and the Subregionals should be working together to develop a seamless public information plan to ensure that all eligible residents of Georgia have equal access to the NLS program.

28. The Regional Library should offer an annual orientation session for support staff at the Regional and subregionals with the State assuming any necessary travel costs.

29. Training for staff of Georgia’s public libraries should be incorporated into the OPLS continuing education efforts. An introduction to the NLS service and to working with people with disabilities should be part of every new staff member’s orientation. Annual updates and sensitivity/awareness programs should be part of every library’s annual staff development day. OPLS should provide primary funding for the staff training aspects of raising public awareness. Local library budgets should provide for library staff time to devote to special needs populations, to attend continuing education, and to partner with local social service agencies. State funds should also be used to provide a statewide public information
effort about library services for special needs populations, to collect necessary demographic information, and to provide statewide consulting services. The Regional Library and OPLS should partner with other state agencies and with non-profit entities to produce and disseminate information about services and programs.

30. The State of Georgia should consider a program of providing high-quality compact shelving to subregional libraries to enable them to maintain their collections in a space-effective manner. The replacement of the shelving at the Regional Library should be a budget priority even if a move to a new facility is delayed.

31. Georgia needs to move toward a consolidated/shared automation system, like the Keystone system in Florida, for all NLS transactions.

32. The Regional Library needs to be active with the subregionals and with the public libraries of the State in an effort to develop a model public relations program, including a marketing plan, that is directed toward raising the visibility of library services to people with disabilities and to support and advocacy organizations.

Finally, it should be noted that of the various structures for providing NLS services to Georgia residents, the consultants believe that the "centralized fulfillment/decentralized readers' advisory and outreach" model would be the most effective in providing high-quality service to the largest number of qualified individuals.
INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS

The Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Study of Library Services to Georgia Residents with Special Needs raises a series of questions and asks for specific information regarding current and future services offered by Georgia's public libraries, by the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, by the Subregional Libraries or "Talking Book Centers," and by the Georgia Office of Public Library Services. Following are responses to these questions and requests for information arranged in the order in which they were raised in the RFP. Some questions are answered by reference to information contained in the main portion of the report text, referred to as the "BACKGROUND REPORT." In other instances, answers along with supporting data are presented in this, the "FINDINGS" section of the final report.

REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL LIBRARIES

1. Review the establishment, history, and current operations of the Georgia Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (LBPH) in Atlanta.

   a) How effective is the current funding method? Recommend an equitable funding method that addresses identified concerns.

   Georgia's current method for funding the Regional Library leaves it without adequate resources to carry out its statewide leadership and coordination roles.

   Georgia's current funding method for library services to the Blind and Physically Handicapped treats the Regional Library and subregional libraries in two entirely different ways. While this is not unusual (few states provide any direct funding to subregionals at all), the current funding for the Regional Library fails to recognize its statewide responsibilities. The Regional Library is funded directly as an operation of the Office of Public Library Services rather than, as subregionals are funded, by the application of a formula. Funding for the Regional Library reflects little
more than the service it provides to users in the greater Atlanta metro area and funding to meet its responsibility as a Regional Library to house an extensive collection.

The following chart shows OPLS proposed FY 2001 grant calculations for subregional libraries and then calculates the Atlanta Regional Library on the same basis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregional</th>
<th>Active Readers</th>
<th>Readers X $32</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
<th>Circulation X $.63</th>
<th>Base Grant</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>1,161</td>
<td>$37,152</td>
<td>53,190</td>
<td>$33,510</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$80,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athens</td>
<td>1,098</td>
<td>$35,136</td>
<td>48,711</td>
<td>$30,726</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$75,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>1,445</td>
<td>$46,240</td>
<td>57,458</td>
<td>$36,199</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$92,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bainbridge</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>$63,776</td>
<td>37,340</td>
<td>$23,524</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$97,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunswick</td>
<td>1,422</td>
<td>$45,504</td>
<td>119,583</td>
<td>$75,337</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$130,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>$21,792</td>
<td>31,448</td>
<td>$19,812</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$51,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>1,536</td>
<td>$49,152</td>
<td>62,164</td>
<td>$39,163</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$98,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gainesville</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>$29,760</td>
<td>39,137</td>
<td>$24,656</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$64,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaFayette</td>
<td>1,261</td>
<td>$40,352</td>
<td>45,758</td>
<td>$28,828</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$79,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macon</td>
<td>2,135</td>
<td>$68,320</td>
<td>84,377</td>
<td>$53,158</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$131,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>1,044</td>
<td>$33,408</td>
<td>59,068</td>
<td>$37,213</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$80,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>1,154</td>
<td>$36,928</td>
<td>28,445</td>
<td>$17,920</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$64,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdosta</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td>$35,168</td>
<td>33,715</td>
<td>$21,240</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$66,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>3,946</td>
<td>$126,272</td>
<td>141,894</td>
<td>$89,393</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$225,665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The actual funding for the Regional library is $ 313,450, which is $ 87,785 more than it would garner if it were funded on the same basis as the subregional libraries. However, $ 74,700 of the Regional Library's budget is allocated to rental of the real estate in which the Regional Library is located, much of which is used to house a collection of statewide proportions. When the rental is removed, direct state funding for the Regional library totals $ 238,750, barely more than it would receive as a subregional library.

A comparison of funding for regional libraries in other states with populations similar to Georgia is also instructive. The three states most comparable to Georgia in population are New Jersey, North Carolina, and Virginia. New Jersey and North Carolina have a single regional library and no subregional service. Virginia has a regional library and nine subregionals; however, the subregionals in Virginia are funded entirely with local funds. The following chart provides a summary of funding in each of the four states.

You will note that Georgia's support for the Regional Library is less than one-third of the support for any of the
other regionals; however, two regionals (New Jersey and North Carolina) provide basic services for residents in all areas of their respective states. The other regional (Virginia) serves only a portion of its state (there are nine locally funded subregionals) but has rehabilitation duties that extend beyond NLS services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>North Carolina</th>
<th>Virginia*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Est. Population</td>
<td>7,698,381</td>
<td>8,115,524</td>
<td>7,590,605</td>
<td>6,884,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Subregionals</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State expenditure for Regional Library</td>
<td>$313,450</td>
<td>$1,610,000</td>
<td>$1,318,000</td>
<td>$1,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State expenditure for subregional libraries</td>
<td>$1,113,974</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total State expenditures for NLS service</td>
<td>$1,427,424</td>
<td>$1,610,000</td>
<td>$1,318,000</td>
<td>$1,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State expenditure per capita for NLS services</td>
<td>$0.19</td>
<td>$0.20</td>
<td>$0.17</td>
<td>$0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of users registered for BPH services</td>
<td>15,446</td>
<td>11,710</td>
<td>11,517</td>
<td>9,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State expenditure per registered user</td>
<td>$92.39</td>
<td>$137.49</td>
<td>$114.44</td>
<td>$112.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Virginia's Regional Library is in the Department of the Visually Handicapped and has duties that extend beyond providing NLS services.

As you can see, the overall State expenditures per capita to provide NLS service is somewhat similar, ranging from $0.16 per capita to $0.20 per capita. Virginia's is the lowest, but total expenditures do not reflect the considerable local dollars that support the nine subregional libraries.

Compared with other states, it does not appear that Georgia significantly under-funds or over-funds services to the blind and physically handicapped. However, it is also
apparent that the funding available to Georgia's Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped severely restricts what it is able to do beyond providing basic services to the thirteen counties it serves directly.

If Georgia continues to have thirteen State-funded subregional libraries, equitable funding for the Regional Library could be accomplished by using a two-tiered funding method. The first tier would compensate the Regional Library for direct services provided to the residents in the counties it serves as a subregional. The second tier would consist of funding to enable the library to carry out its statewide leadership and coordination responsibilities. The first tier amount would be based on the number of active registered users of NLS services in the counties served directly by Regional Library. The second tier amount would be based on the total number of active registered users of NLS services in the State of Georgia.

Funding for subregional libraries could be awarded on the same basis as the first tier funds for the Regional Library. This would provide a clear mechanism for the shifting of funds from a subregional to the Regional Library in the event that a subregional library is closed. Under these circumstances, the user base and the funding that goes with it would simply shift to the Regional Library.

b) **Analyze the staffing levels of the Regional Library and make recommendations as to the number of staff needed as well as an organizational function.**

Following is a summary of the ASCLA/NLS guidelines for staffing of regional and subregional libraries. All staffing levels are expressed in terms of FTEs per a specified number of NLS patrons/users.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staffing Category</th>
<th>Regionals</th>
<th>Subregionals</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>1 FTE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 FTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>1 FTE/2500</td>
<td>1 FTE/2500</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers' Advisor</td>
<td>1 FTE/1500</td>
<td>1 FTE/1500</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Professional/Paraprofessional</td>
<td>.4 FTE/1000</td>
<td>.333 FTE/1000</td>
<td>.067 FTE/1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/Support Staff</td>
<td>3 FTE/2500</td>
<td>2.5 FTE/2500</td>
<td>.5 FTE/2500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When the Regional Library's current staffing level of five full-time equivalents (FTEs) is compared to the ASCLA/NLS Guidelines for subregionals based on the number of users it serves, the library falls short by over 3 (3.1) FTEs. If the Atlanta operation were a consolidated Regional Library (serving the entire state directly), guidelines would dictate staffing of over 43 FTEs. At the present time, total staffing for the Regional Library and all thirteen subregionals together comes to 37.64 FTEs.

Georgia appears to be understaffed in regard to providing NLS services. However, calculating the appropriate staffing level for the Regional Library is not as easy as simply subtracting the number derived by applying the standard to a consolidated Regional and subtracting the total staff currently in place. It should be expected that a distributed organizational structure would bring with it some duplication of effort, and, therefore, the need for some additional staff and funding. Following is the consultants' attempt to determine the appropriate level of staffing for the Regional Library.

The ASCLA/NLS staffing guidelines recognize that staff time is needed by regional libraries to carry out a statewide leadership and coordination role. The recognition of this fact is built into the guidelines in two ways. First, the guidelines call for an administrative position that is not included in the guidelines for subregional libraries. Secondly, the ASCLA/NLS guidelines use different staff to patron ratios for regional libraries and for subregional libraries. We would suggest that the appropriate staffing for the Georgia Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped can be determined by using the ASCLA/NLS guidelines and by breaking out the service the Regional Library provides acting as a subregional serving a specific area and the service it should provide as the lead organization for the State network of NLS affiliate libraries.
We contend that the appropriate staffing level based on the ASCLA/NLS guidelines can be arrived at by adding together the following:

* 1 FTE Administrator
* 1 FTE Librarian /2,500 users served directly by the Regional Library (in the 13 counties it serves)
* 1 FTE Readers' Advisor /1,500 users served directly by the Regional Library
* 1 FTE Other Professional/Paraprofessional /3,000 users served directly by the Regional Library
* 1 FTE Technical/Support Staff /1,000 users served directly by the Regional Library
* .067 FTE Other Professional/Paraprofessional /1000 users in the entire state
* .5 Technical/Support staff for every 2,500 users in the entire state

* Positions related to statewide service role

Based on a total of 3,376 users served directly by the Regional Library (3,186 individuals + 190 deposits) and 15,777 users statewide (14,162 individuals + 1,615 deposits), we suggest that the Regional Library's staff should consist of a total of 13.31 FTE staff broken down as follows:

1 FTE Administrator
1.35 FTE Librarians
2.25 FTE Readers' Advisors
2.18 FTE Other Professional/Paraprofessionals
6.53 FTE Technical/Support Staff

13.31 FTE TOTAL

A total of 8.1 of the 13.3 FTE positions are related to service provided by the Regional Library fulfilling its role as a subregional. The remaining 5.2 positions relate to the Regional Library's statewide role. Statewide positions are:

1 FTE Administrator
1.05 FTE Other Professional/Paraprofessional
3.15 FTE Technical/Support

In summary, the consultants conclude that the Georgia Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is short-handed by slightly more than 3 (3.1) FTE positions to fulfill its role in offering subregional service.
Furthermore, it is short-handed by over 8 (8.31) FTE positions to fulfill its statewide leadership and coordination role as the Regional Library.

The consultants believe that several routine functions of the Regional Library (and the subregionals) could be outsourced. An organizational structure that allows for this eventuality without disrupting other core functions is recommended.

An organization of Regional Library operations into the following seven functional areas would lend itself to either the stand-alone operation of the Regional Library or to an arrangement in which some functions are performed by an outside contractor or contractors. The functional areas are:

1. Statewide coordination of library services to people with disabilities
2. Special needs consulting and training
3. Readers' advisory service
4. Special services (local recording, Braille-on-demand, etc.) and volunteer services
5. Machine lending and repair
6. Talking Book fulfillment service
7. Braille fulfillment service

Section 11 of the portion of the report specifically describes what the consultants believe is a logical approach to outsourcing. The essence of this recommendation is that functions one, two, and three should be performed by permanent employees. Function four should be performed primarily by volunteers under the coordination of and with the technical support of permanent employees. Function five has some potential for outsourcing, although it is likely that volunteers would be involved in performing much of the work. Finally, functions six and seven have a high level of potential for outsourcing.

c) List the NLS standards that the Regional Library meets and does not meet. Identify areas of deficiency and recommend corrective actions.

The ASCLA/NLS Standards can be found on pages 16 - 26 of a publication entitled Revised Standards and Guidelines of Service for the Library of Congress Network of
Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped 1995, published by the American Library Association. In an effort to shorten an already lengthy document, we have chosen to "list" the standards that the Regional Library already meets only by reference to the document. Page numbers listed below show where various categories of standards can be found in the source document. What follows are the standards that the consultants believe are areas of concern that require attention and action.

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped has several field consultants who visit and evaluate Regional Libraries using the ASCLA/NLS Standards. The last full evaluation of this type was conducted in November 1997. A copy of the report from this evaluation visit is attached, as is the formal response to the evaluation report.

The majority of the deficiencies noted in the NLS report are related to two factors; an inadequate Regional Library facility and a lack of an adequate number of staff members. While some progress has been made by the Regional Library since the NLS evaluation visit, certain deficiencies are likely to continue until staffing is increased and a better facility is provided. Therefore, the reader of this report will discover that the consultants cite many of the same deficiencies reported over two years ago.

ASCLA/NLS Standards:

1. Core Services (pages 16 - 17 of the standards document)

The consultants find no evidence that the Regional Library does not routinely meet any of the "Core Service" Standards. The Regional Library's weak points in regard to core services are the following standards:

1.5 Network libraries shall process patron requests for materials and information by the next business day.

1.6 Network libraries shall process all materials received on a daily basis by the next business day.

1.7 Network libraries shall respond to patron requests for contact by the next business day.
Staffing shortages at the Regional Library make meeting these standards difficult, and occasionally impossible. However, the consultants' observation and discussions with staff lead us to believe that the Regional Library abides by the spirit, if not by the letter, of these standards.

The only remedies for occasional turnaround time problems are more staff and greater staff stability. As was noted above, the Regional Library operates at staffing levels far below the NLS guidelines. Furthermore, the Regional Library has experienced significant staff turnover and has often been forced to operate with temporary staff.

1.9 Network libraries shall provide newsletters at least quarterly in appropriate formats on library and related services for their patrons.

The Regional Library's issuance of newsletters has been sporadic and, when it has been issued, it has not been provided in multiple formats. Staff issues such as high staff turnover and the use of temporary rather than permanent staff has impeded the Regional Library's ability to meet this standard. Stable staffing at a considerably higher level than is now provided is necessary if a regular quality newsletter in multiple formats is to be produced without negatively impacting core circulation functions.

2. Resource Development and Management (pages 17 - 20)

While the Regional Library meets most of the ASCLA/NLS Standards in this area, there are several areas of concern in regard to resource development and management. Several relate to the acquisition and production of materials to supplement those provided by NLS.

2.6 Regional and subregional libraries shall acquire or produce reading materials to supplement the national collection.

2.7 Regional and subregional libraries shall produce reading materials emphasizing patron demand and titles of regional and local importance.
The Regional Library is not currently producing any materials locally. Unlike other Regional Libraries the consultants have visited, the Georgia Regional Library lacks the staff, facilities, and the volunteers necessary to produce supplemental materials. While a few of the subregional libraries, most notably the subregions at Macon and Rome, do produce some materials of local interest, the Regional Library itself has been unable to focus on this avenue of service.

The NLS evaluation specifically mentions the lack of recording and/or Braille transcription programs. The report also notes a deficiency in the size of the Braille collection at the Regional Library due to over-weeding under a previous administration. This is an area that the Regional Library is committed to working on by utilizing the NLS "XESS" cycles.

The primary remedy for the shortcomings mentioned above is additional staff. Local production of materials is very labor intensive and requires identifying and obtaining permission to record materials, finding and scheduling quality readers, the availability of technical equipment and the expertise to operate it, and the time to coordinate recording and/or reproduction activity. The consultants believe that these kinds of activities are unlikely to develop without a significant increase in staffing levels at the Regional Library.

The Regional Library also lacks recording booths and equipment to produce quality locally produced audio materials. At the time of the NLS evaluation, the Regional Library Director believed that the Regional Library would be moving into the former Georgia Public TV facilities and that some facilities would be available to meet this need. Since that move did not take place, the Regional Library still lacks appropriate facilities/equipment to launch a local recording effort.

While the Regional Library technically meets standards 2.21, and 2.22, the consultants believe that it is very weak in both areas.

2.21 Network libraries shall maintain or have access to professional materials and resources that support the development and provision of library services.
2.22 Network libraries shall maintain information about national, state and local organizations and programs concerned with services to eligible users.

The regional library does have a small professional collection and does collect and maintain some information about national, state, and local organizations concerned with services to eligible users. However, the professional collection is dated, lacks focus, and consists mainly of free or inexpensive materials acquired from other organizations. Little effort is made to share these materials with subregional libraries or with the public libraries of the State.

The World-Wide-Web has provided the regional library with a new resource, and some information about web-based sources has been shared by the Regional Library Director via e-mail and by establishing links on the Regional Library's web site. However, the links on the Regional Library web-site are indicative of the nature of the problem. Currently included are slightly over a dozen links, most of which are to national organizations. While several are meta-sites and can provide access to a wealth of information, few of the over 100 sites about Georgia-based organizations or disabilities issues that the consultants discovered in the course of conducting this study are linked.

Interviews with many organizations serving individuals with disabilities in Georgia lead the consultants to believe that the Regional Library has an important role to play in being a common source of information both for people with disabilities throughout the State of Georgia and for professionals who work with the disabled. One remedy for this situation would be a special project to locate, evaluate, organize and provide access to web-sites of interest to Georgia's diverse disabilities populations. The project could be funded with LSTA dollars or other funds available to the Office of Public Library Services. The resulting web-site would be a valuable tool for all types of libraries in the State and would be a step in making every public library an access point to NLS services. However, it must be noted that such a web page would need constant maintenance. At present, the Regional Library does not
have the staff to undertake even the maintenance of such a site.

3. Public Education (page 20)

3.1 Each network library shall develop and implement a coordinated public awareness program for use in its service area.

While some public information activity is undertaken by the Regional Library, it falls short of the spirit of section 3 of the ASCLA/NLS Standards. While the Regional Librarian makes some presentations to community groups and while NLS posters and flyers are occasionally distributed to libraries and other organizations, the Regional Library (and the vast majority of the subregionals) lacks a coordinated public awareness program.

Once again, the remedy to this shortcoming lies in the availability of staff to develop and carry out the program covered by the standard. Regional Library staff has been focused, and rightly so, on the Core Services standards. Our understanding is that there have been periods in recent years when the Director of the Regional Library has devoted the bulk of her time to routine clerical functions in an attempt to keep materials flowing to patrons. Furthermore, staff turnover, the extensive use of temporary workers, and facilities problems have required her to expend countless hours in processes related to hiring, training, and trouble-shooting.

The Regional Library needs at least one additional full-time professional librarian and at least one additional professional/paraprofessional position if it is going to carry out functions such as this one at a reasonably high level.

3.3 Each network library shall perform activities that promote a climate of public opinion and awareness favorable to the development, expansion and improvement of library services.

As was mentioned above, the Director does occasionally speak to civic organizations and does participate in some meetings and organizations with other professionals serving
Georgia's disabilities communities; however, the consultants found only a general understanding and awareness of the NLS program in our contacts with statewide organizations. Public awareness of the program is largely dependent on word of mouth, promotional activities undertaken by a few of the subregionals, and through the posters advertising the program which can be found in many, if not most, public libraries in the State.

The Director of the Regional Library does attend and does interact with the directors of Georgia's public libraries at their regular meetings; however, the Regional Library currently has little to offer public libraries wanting to improve their services to special needs populations. An extensive program aimed at training public library staff in offering services to people with disabilities is needed. The Regional Library should be staffed to enable it to take a leadership role in advocacy for services to people with special needs in the library community, with other organizations serving people with disabilities, and with the general public.

These services require professional and/or high level paraprofessional staff that is not now available at the Regional Library. The Director of the Regional Library needs to be able to delegate the responsibility for the daily operation of core services to another professional and to devote significant time to working with the subregionals and with public libraries at their sites.

3.5 Network libraries shall conduct a community analysis based on the LC/NLS model.

Some attempts have been made to gather feedback from the users of the Regional Library that are served directly from Atlanta; however, little had been done before this study was undertaken to analyze statewide needs. Furthermore, there is little sharing of information from the subregionals to the Regional Library in regard to changing demographics and service needs.

A partial remedy for this problem that could be accomplished without adding additional permanent staff would be the provision of funding for a needs assessment or statewide disabilities community analysis every few years. However, the routine gathering and sharing of
information between and among Georgia’s network libraries needs to become routine.

It is apparent that the wide availability of e-mail has improved communication between the Regional Library and the subregional libraries to a certain extent. The network libraries in Georgia need to build on this success by building an active listserv and by agreeing to collect and share some basic information within the subregions that can be aggregated to create a clearer picture of the statewide situation.

4. Consulting Services (Pages 20 - 21)

The Regional Library makes a valiant attempt to maintain communication with the subregional libraries and to offer helpful advice to them; however, staffing shortages and dealing with direct service responsibilities prevent the Regional Library Director from fully meeting the following standards.

4.2 Regional libraries shall advise and assist subregional libraries as well as other libraries and agencies in the development of services in their geographic areas.

The consultants visited every public library system headquarters in the course of conducting this study. While there were some libraries that were offering exemplary programs of service to people with disabilities, most directors reported little use of their facilities by people with disabilities. Furthermore, we found very few programs that were designed to encourage library use by individuals with special needs. Most libraries had some adaptive technologies available; however, for the most part, this consisted of devices purchased under special grants that were sitting unused.

Local libraries need both information and encouragement if they are to become proficient in serving people with disabilities. While this study identified the fact that significant numbers of individuals with a variety of disabilities exist in virtually every area of the State, providing services that will meet the special needs of such individuals requires the development of specific skills and strategies. The Regional Library needs to play a key role in
offering continuing education opportunities for directors, librarians, and other library staff members. Needed training ranges from sensitivity training to training in the use of very specific software such as "JAWS."

The Regional Library would need additional staff to carry out this responsibility. It would require some of the Director's time and the availability of a high level paraprofessional that could travel to individual library sites to provide workshops and training sessions. While some training could be outsourced and/or offered through the OPLS offices, it must be recognized that the training needs are ongoing. For example, sensitivity training for public library professionals in the state should be offered at least annually as should sessions on new adaptive equipment and devices.

4.4 Regional Libraries shall conduct annual consulting visits to each subregional library.

The Regional Library Director has, at some time in the last few years, visited each subregional library. In fact, the Regional Library was in compliance with this standard at the time of the NLS evaluation visit. However, more recently, annual visits to all subregionals have not been conducted. Again, the culprit preventing regular visits to the subregionals is staff time. It should also be noted that this standard is more difficult for the Georgia Regional Library to meet because of the fact that the state has more subregional libraries than any other.

The consultants also wish to point out that the ASCLA/NLS Standards assume that the Regional Library is the leader in providing service and is, therefore, able to offer advice and counsel on best practices. In fact, in Georgia, subregional libraries can be identified that offer a higher level of service than the Regional Library in virtually every category. For example, the Bainbridge and Brunswick subregionals do a far superior job to the Regional Library in outreach; the Macon and Athens subregionals have more developed connections with disabilities organizations in their areas than does the Regional Library; Macon and Rome do more local production of content than the Regional Library. This is not meant to demean the dedication or the ability of the Regional Library staff. The Regional Library is simply too
short-handed to carry out anything but its core responsibilities.

In short, while it is important for the Regional Library Director to visit subregionals, she would be in a far better position to offer advice and counsel if the Regional Library was funded to enable it to provide an exemplary model of programs and services. Additional quality staff is again the remedy.

5. Volunteers (Page 21)

5.1 A network library shall utilize volunteers to assist in the performance of activities that supplement its basic program of services.

Most regional libraries in the nation make some use of volunteers as a part of their program of service. In some states, the contribution of volunteer staff is considerable. For example, the Florida Regional Library reported that over 86,000 hours of volunteer time was provided in 1998-99. It is interesting to note that over half of the "volunteer" hours provided are the result of a program with the inmates of the Tomoka Correctional Institution. Other Regional and subregional libraries have attempted programs with correctional facilities in the past with mixed success. The long-term success of the Tokoma program will be watched by many with great interest.

Common areas in which volunteers are used include machine maintenance and repair as well as the production of content (recordings and Braille materials) of local interest.

The Georgia Regional Library's volunteer program is next to non-existent. The library has a few volunteers who answer phones and some community service volunteers who repair tapes. The Library also sends about 15 talking book machines a month to the Telephone Pioneers organization for repair. However, total volunteer time amounts to about 10 hours per week.

Obviously, a fully developed volunteer program is lacking. While adequate paid staff to recruit, train, and coordinate volunteers is one of the reasons for this, the Regional
Library's location and facility are also significant factors. The Regional Library, while accessible by public transportation, is located in an area where even a short walk can be dangerous. In addition to being located in a relatively high crime area, the presence of heavy trucks, broken or non-existent sidewalks, confusing streets, and a network of railroad tracks are hazardous to anyone who might venture into the area.

Reports of stolen and/or vandalized vehicles, bullet holes in windows, and spent ammunition found on the roof of the building do little to enhance the facility's image. The Regional Library is simply not a place that most volunteers would want to be.

Remedies for this situation include a new facility for the Regional Library in a safe, accessible area and staff to recruit and train volunteers and to coordinate a volunteer program. There is certainly no lack of useful work in which volunteers might engage. However, it should be noted that one of the ASCLA/NLS standards is that volunteers shall not be used in place of paid employees. Volunteers should be looked upon as workers that might enable the Regional Library to enhance services. They should not be seen as the staff needed to perform core service functions.

6. Administration/Organization (Pages 21 - 22)

For the most part, the Regional Library does well in meeting the numerous ASCLA/NLS Administration/Organization Standards. There are, however, a few areas in which the Regional Library is weak.

Standard 6.9 encourages regional and subregional libraries to establish deposit and demonstration collections in order to extend its services. The Regional library has, in fact, done this. The area of weakness relates to the next, related standard.

6.10 Regional and subregional libraries shall monitor and evaluate deposit collection and demonstration collection operation and service.
It appears that many deposit collections receive minimal monitoring and contact with the Regional Library. This is also a weakness for a number of the subregional library operations. Effective deposit and demonstration collections require regular attention and maintenance. Regional Library staffing does not allow enough time to take full advantage of the potential that deposit and demonstration collections present. To a large extent, the effectiveness of current deposit collections maintained by the Regional Library depends on the degree to which the contact person at the host agency or library is interested in the NLS program.

6.14 Network libraries shall encourage advice and input from a full spectrum of patrons and patron constituency groups through mechanisms including, but not limited to, advisory committees, focus groups and patron forums.

In a way, the Regional Library’s active involvement in this study means that it complies with standard 6.14; however, few opportunities for patron input have been available. While patron comments are always welcomed, formal structures, such as advisory committees, are not currently in place.

The consultants believe that the involvement of consumers of NLS services and other representative from the various disabilities communities will be critical in efforts to improve services to Georgia residents with special needs. While the consultants spoke to approximately two hundred talking book users and representatives of agencies serving people with disabilities in the course of conducting the study, these single contacts should be seen as only a starting point in involving users.

Many innovative methods could be used to engage users. For example, the consultants found a considerable number of talking book users who were quite sophisticated in their technological expertise and use of computers. A listserv could be established for Georgia’s technologically inclined NLS users to share their experiences and thoughts on accessibility of all types of library services.

Georgia should also be proactive in seeking out individuals with disabilities as possible appointees to steering committees, advisory committees, and task forces on
general library services. The addition of this valuable perspective holds the promise of making all library services friendlier to people with disabilities.

Several of the subregional libraries have recently conducted surveys of their users. The development of a statewide survey of NLS users would be efficient and would provide valuable information for statewide planning.

The Regional Library has done some planning toward the establishment of an advisory committee; however, the committee has not been established to date.

6.15 Network libraries should establish friends groups to support and promote library services.

The Director of the Regional Library had indicated that the possibility of establishing a friends' organization would be investigated after the library was moved to a new facility. No friends' organization has been formed to date.

Like volunteer programs and advisory committees, the establishment and maintenance of an effective friends organization requires considerable staff attention. The Regional Library currently lacks adequate staff to devote an appropriate amount of time to making a friends group a reality.

7. Budget and Funding (Pages 22 - 23)

7.3 The head of each network library shall have primary responsibility for the planning and administration of the budget as well as the presentation or justification of the budget to appropriate groups and individuals.

Although the Director of the Regional Library does have the opportunity to offer input about staffing, facility, and other operational concerns, she has little direct knowledge or involvement in planning or monitoring the Regional Library's budget. The consultants believe that if the Director was allowed to play a greater role in budget development, justification, and monitoring, that the Office of Public Library Services (OPLS) and its parent organization (soon to be the Board of Regents) would have a better understanding of the Regional Library's needs.
8. Planning and Evaluation (Page 23)

8.1 Each network library shall develop a comprehensive long-range plan designed to develop, coordinate, maintain and improve services and programs and to make optimum use of resources.

8.2 Long-range plans shall be developed in cooperation with appropriate constituencies, especially patrons, administering funding agencies, and associated network libraries.

As is noted in the NLS evaluation report, the Regional Library lacks a long-range plan of its own but is included in the Department of Technical and Adult Education/Office of Public Library Services strategic plan. This study of library service to Georgia residents with special needs provides considerable information that could be used by the DTAE/OPLS and by the Regional Library in the development of a comprehensive long-range plan.

However, the consultants believe that neither of these documents is a suitable substitute for continuous, focused planning by the Regional Library. This is especially true now in light of the pending shift of the Office of Public Library Services from DTAE to the Board of Regents. A logical next step beyond this study would be the formation of a consumer advisory committee to review and react to the study's recommendations and to work toward the development of a long-range plan for improved services.


The Regional Library has a coherent set of policies in place and has done a reasonably good job of maintaining and following them. The Regional Library has been working diligently to upgrade, update and document its internal procedures. However, there are several standards that are of some concern.

The ASCLA/NLS Standards envision the development of policies as involving a broad array of stakeholders. NLS, regional libraries, subregional libraries, and consumers are all expected to contribute input into policy decisions.
Furthermore, policies are to be reviewed and revised on an annual basis. While the process as described is a good one, it is also very time consuming and sets a standard that very few organizations could meet. The consultants believe that the Regional Library does an admirable job of working with NLS and with the subregionals in policy development even if it may not fully meet the standards. However, the Regional Library's performance could be improved in regard to involving consumers in policy decisions.

10. Reports, Statistical and Narrative (Page 25)

10.1 Each network library shall maintain current and accurate statistical records to document use, services and acquisitions; to meet the requirements of the administering agency, the funding agency and LC/NLS; and to generate information for planning purposes.

In the consultants' opinion, the Regional Library does an adequate job of meeting the formal statistical and reporting requirements; however, neither the Regional Library nor most of the subregionals do a very good job of making useful information available to local public libraries for their planning purposes.

The consultants believe that the Regional Library needs to work with the subregionals and with the public library directors to determine what information would be most useful for local planning for library services to people with disabilities. Each public library director in the state should receive a monthly report outlining at minimum, the number of registered borrowers by county and the circulation of NLS materials by county. This report could be used by the subregionals to provide additional important information to library directors regarding library services to people with disabilities. Information could include new organizations in the area that serve individuals with disabilities, meetings of interest such as patron advisory committee meetings, and so forth.

10.3 Each network library shall prepare an annual narrative and statistical report and shall make it available in appropriate formats to the administering agency, the funding agency, patrons and other cooperating units.
Although the Regional Library meets the letter of the law in satisfying NLS and OPLS, much more could be done to make the report available to subregionals, public libraries, and the disabilities community in formats that would encourage these groups to read and use the information in their own planning.

11. Personnel (Pages 25-26)

11.1 Network libraries shall operate under a written affirmative action plan.

The Regional Library operates under the written affirmative action plan of the Department of Technical and Adult Education. On July 1, 2000 when OPLS is transferred to the University System of Georgia Board of Regents, it will operate under the plan of that organization.

11.2 Network libraries shall exhibit a commitment to cultural diversity.

Regional Library staff includes African-American and Caucasian workers. The Regional Library has one visually impaired employee and utilizes volunteers who have disabilities. If the Regional Library staff is expanded, as the consultants believe it should, special attention should be given to ensuring that candidates with disabilities are aware of these employment opportunities.

11.3 Each network library shall prepare an organizational chart describing clear lines of authority.

Given the small staff at the Regional Library, the lines of authority, while not currently committed to paper, are extremely clear. All of the staff and volunteers report for daily direction to the Office Manager who in turn reports to the Regional Librarian. The larger organizational chart placing the Regional Library within the OPLS was drawn when it became a part of the Department of Technical and Adult Education. The consultants assume a similar formalizing of organizational relationships will occur when OPLS becomes a part of the University System of Georgia Board of Regents.
If the Regional Library staff is expanded as the consultants have recommended in section 1.b, an internal organization chart, consistent with the functional areas described, should be developed.

11.5 The network library and its administrative agency shall, on an annual basis, jointly review and determine staffing patterns and requirements based on, but not limited to, the following: long-range plans; demographics of service population; geography; services provided; service patterns; physical facility; use of technologies; support provided by administrative agency; and the guidelines included in these standards.

As noted in the November 1997 report from the head of the Network Services Section of NLS and detailed elsewhere in this report, staffing at the Regional Library is inadequate. The consultants recommend this problem be outlined to the Board of Regents when the transfer of OPLS occurs in July of 2000.

11.9 Network libraries shall send appropriate staff members, who have completed at least six months on the job, to the LC/NLS orientation program.

Meeting this standard is somewhat dependent upon the scheduling of these programs by the LC/NLS; however, the Regional Library makes an active attempt to meet this standard. The Office Manager will be attending this program in June of this year.

11.10 The regional library shall provide training and orientation for appropriate subregional library employees within the first three months of employment.

The Regional Librarian actively attempts to comply with this standard. A training and orientation session is being scheduled for new staff at the Columbus Subregional Library later this spring.

11.11 Network libraries shall encourage and support relevant continuing education activities for staff at all levels of the organization.

Regional Library staff is encouraged to attend appropriate workshops. A staff member recently attended a workshop
on managing volunteers. While not all requests for continuing education workshops and programs can be satisfied, the OPLS has consistently supported attendance at local programs that meet Regional Library needs.

11.13 Appropriate staff of the network library shall participate in meetings of patron organizations.

Two staff members recently attended meetings of patron organizations. Their response was enthusiastic and the Regional Librarian expects to “spread” these responsibilities to other staff as well.

11.14 Appropriate staff of the network library shall participate in network conferences.

Participation in the upcoming network conference is planned. Unlike some of the more localized programs and continuing education experiences, educational experiences outside the State of Georgia are somewhat more limited because of the financial and time expenses involved.

11.15 Appropriate staff of the network library shall participate in meetings of professional associations.

Membership in the Georgia Library Association’s paraprofessional organization is being considered for some Regional Library staff.

12 Research and Development (Page 26)

12.2 Network libraries shall evaluate and use equipment and materials reflecting technological advances to improve access to information and library services as well as to improve library services and operations.

The hiring of a visually impaired worker has brought this standard to the forefront of priorities for the Regional Library. Consumer groups are also asking that the Regional Library have new equipment available for their examination and use. These factors have made achieving this standard a high priority for the Regional Library.
d) What is the level of patron satisfaction with the current service of the Regional Library?

The responsibilities of the Regional Library include serving thirteen counties in the Atlanta metro area as a direct service provider as well as serving in a statewide leadership and coordination role. The support of the subregionals and, indirectly, support of users of the subregionals are part of the Regional Library's responsibility. Consequently, there are multiple stakeholders or “patrons” to be satisfied by the Regional Library. The Regional Library has emphasized direct service to the NLS qualified users in the Atlanta metro area. Not doing so would have meant these users would have had no NLS service at all.

The consultants found that patron satisfaction with the current services provided by both the Regional Library and by the subregional libraries is very high. As is noted elsewhere in this report, the consultants believe that inadequacies of service have more to do with efforts to find and encourage new customers than it has to do with satisfying new users.

Comments from public library directors served by the Regional in its capacity as the fourteenth subregional ranged from one who said they regularly referred people to Atlanta to another who said they received no services from the Regional at all. Another said the only communication happened when they ran out of application forms. The one who said they made regular referrals to Atlanta also said the Regional Librarian had occasionally visited the library and had conducted a staff continuing education program. Several directors commented on the deplorable facility and its location in Atlanta.

e) How effective is the Regional Library's support of and service to the subregional libraries?

As was noted earlier, Georgia's Regional Library has largely been reduced to acting as the fourteenth subregional library. To its credit, the Regional Library consistently makes valiant attempts to fulfill its statewide coordination role.
However, Regional Library support of and service to the subregional libraries can best be characterized as sporadic and limited. Staff in the subregional libraries and participants in focus groups said the Regional Library had suspended interlibrary loan services due to staff shortages and had encouraged them to go directly to the multi-state center in Cincinnati.

They had mixed feelings about what services the Regional should provide. Subregional managers reported that the Regional Librarian responded to their questions, as she was able, but that she seldom initiated contacts to find out what the Regional could be doing to support and guide the subregionals. The recent migration to the READS II system has increased the interaction between the Regional Library and the subregionals, but there were also comments that the process could have been smoother if more information had been shared earlier in the process.

The Regional Librarian does meet with the talking book center managers/subregional librarians several times each year. She initially visited each of the subregionals but has not been able to make routine visits to subregionals since due to lack of time and support staff. As is stated elsewhere in this report, the weak condition of the Regional Library makes it difficult for the Regional Library to take a leadership role and makes it difficult for the subregionals to accept the Regional Library as a leader/coordinator.

2. **Review the establishment, history, and current operations of the subregional library program in Georgia**

A great deal of background information regarding the subregional program can be found on pages 62 - 117 of the "Background" document. However, the RFP also raises specific questions regarding the operation of subregionals. What follows is based on the continuation of the practice of offering a significant level of direct NLS services through subregionals rather than through a consolidated Regional Library or a model, recommended later in this report by the consultants, which calls for subregionals to act in an outreach readers' advisory role with fulfillment of requests from a centralized point.
a) What are the direct and indirect costs associated with the operation of the subregional libraries?

The cost for the operation of subregional libraries in Georgia is spread across several levels of government. The NLS program in its current form could not exist without the substantial Federal subsidy represented by the provision of recordings, machines, and "free-matter-for-the-blind" mailing privileges. The following summary presumes the continuation of Federal subsidies for these purposes and focuses on costs currently borne by the State of Georgia and by local public libraries.

Subregional libraries, like most library operations, are labor intensive. Far and away, the primary cost associated with subregional operations is related to staffing. While only a few of the subregionals have formalized program budgets, staffing costs (salaries and fringes) for those that do are in the 75% - 85% range of the subregionals' budgets. The prorated value of space and utilities accounts for another significant portion of subregional operations costs.

Several approaches to funding are taken by the libraries that host subregionals. While most host library directors are of the opinion that the State should provide full or nearly full reimbursement of all costs related to subregional activities, only a few actually attempt to operate their subregionals exclusively with the State funds that are available. Ten of the thirteen directors of libraries hosting subregional libraries responded to a survey that requested, among other things, information on the degree to which their libraries subsidized their subregional activities.

All ten respondents indicated that they believed that they are providing some local staffing subsidy. Nine indicated administrative subsidies, 8 reported facilities subsidies, and 7 reported subsidizing utilities. The mean total subsidy reported was $34,875. If this average subsidy is added to the average State support per subregional of $85,690, a total operational average of $120,565 emerges. The average subsidy of $34,875 amounts to approximately 29% (28.9%) of the total.

Directors of host libraries reported staffing and administrative subsidies that averaged $25,000, or 71.7% of the $34,875 total. Facility subsidies that averaged
$8,750 accounted for another 25.1%, with utility subsidies accounting for the remaining three percent.

It should be noted that the practice of using "state-paid" positions in subregionals, which is done in several instances, is included as a local subsidy since host libraries are under no obligation to do so and would have these positions to use for local or regional purposes if they chose not to use them for subregional library purposes.

It should also be noted that most of the States that have subregional libraries do not provide direct financial support. Most often, subregionals are seen as a locally funded option for those libraries that desire to enhance the NLS services offered by the regional library by providing a higher level of outreach to the residents of a specific area.

However, the consultants view the Georgia situation in a different light. Most states that view subregional libraries as an option also fund their regional libraries at far higher levels than is the case in Georgia. For example, Virginia's total population is slightly less than Georgia's, and while Virginia has nine subregional libraries, it nevertheless supports its Regional Library at a level more than three times higher than Georgia ($1,100,000 compared to $313,450). Georgia has essentially distributed its dollars in support of the NLS program fourteen ways. The consultants would suggest that it is appropriate for the State of Georgia to provide full support for subregional libraries unless it is willing to support the Regional Library at a level adequate to provide adequate services on a statewide basis.

b) How effective is the current funding method in addressing these costs?

The current formula does not do an effective job of addressing the costs of compensating for NLS services because these services are not clearly delineated for subregional libraries and because the formula for providing compensation includes components that go beyond the scope of NLS services.

As was pointed out earlier, the current State-funding formula is inadequate to completely pay for the operational
costs of thirteen subregional operations. There is, of course, a question as to whether it is the State's responsibility to pay for all of these costs. The consultants believe that, unless the State of Georgia is willing to fund a statewide program from the Regional Library at a level that ensures that those eligible for NLS service continue to receive high quality service, the State should bear the responsibility for paying for the total cost of providing NLS services through subregional libraries.

However, the consultants do not believe that the State is responsible for paying whatever it costs to run thirteen subregional libraries regardless of the scope of their services or their performance. Formal contracts spelling out the scope of service to be offered and minimum performance standards need to be in place between the Office of Public Library Services (OPLS) and the thirteen hosts of subregional libraries.

It should be clear in the contracts that OPLS encourages subregionals to offer services beyond the scope of NLS services. However, if the State of Georgia wants to ensure equitable access to NLS services in all areas of the State, contracts that specify the services that are required and compensate subregionals specifically for fulfilling NLS responsibilities are necessary.

This is not to say that the State of Georgia could not or should not provide other funding incentives to subregionals willing to extend library services to other special needs populations within their service areas. In fact, the consultants encourage the State to do so. However, these incentives should be add-ons rather than part of the core contract.

If Georgia chooses to continue its practice of service through a large number of state-funded subregionals, the consultants recommend that a multiple-part funding formula be adopted. The formula would provide a base administration/program administration grant (that would be adjusted each year for inflation) of an equal amount to each subregional. This grant should be in an amount large enough to cover the salary and fringe benefits for a full-time professional librarian.
The balance of the formula should be based on an estimated number of potential users in the territory covered by a subregional, on the percentage of active users compared to the estimated number of potential users, and on the actual circulation of NLS materials (including both NLS and locally produced recordings and NLS and locally produced Braille). The circulation/distribution of large print materials and newsletters should not be counted in calculating a reimbursement formula.

The consultants further recommend that the State consider specific add-on incentive programs to encourage subregionals to offer rotating collections of large print and descriptive videos to all public libraries in their service areas.

c) Analyze the staffing levels of the subregional libraries and make recommendations as to the numbers of staff needed and the structure of the organization.

If Georgia chooses to maintain subregional service, minimum staffing levels for subregional libraries should be based on the ASCLA/NLS guidelines and should be a requirement for State funding. This requirement should be contained in the contract between the libraries that host subregionals and OPLS.

The standards call for the following:

1 FTE professional librarian for each 2,500 active patrons
1 FTE readers' advisor for each 1,500 active patrons
1 FTE other professional/paraprofessional for each 3,000 patrons
1 FTE Technical/Support staff for each 1,000 active patrons

Libraries hosting subregionals should be afforded flexibility in structuring their talking book center operations within the staffing guidelines. This flexibility should include the decision to delegate the day-to-day
management of the subregional to a person without a master's degree in library science as long the library director or another professional librarian (to the degree suggested by the FTE level described in the ASCLA/NLS Standards) is provided.

d) List the standards that each subregional meets and does not meet. Identify areas of deficiency and recommend corrective actions.

As was outlined earlier, the ASCLA/NLS Standards can be found on pages 16 - 26 of a publication entitled *Revised Standards and Guidelines of Service for the Library of Congress Network of Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped 1995*, published by the American Library Association. Again, we have chosen to "list" the standards that the subregionals already meet only by reference to the document. The page numbers listed below show where various categories of standards can be found in the source document. What follows are the standards that the consultants believe are areas of concern that require attention and action on the part of subregionals.

**ASCLA/NLS Standards:**

1. **Core Services (Pages 16 -17 of the standards document)**

   For the most part, subregionals, like the Regional Library, do comply with the spirit, if not with the letter, of the core services standards. Registration of patrons and the filling of requests are generally handled in a timely fashion and in the manner prescribed by the standards. However, there are a number of areas where improvements are needed in some subregionals.

   1.8. Network libraries shall provide access to materials and services on-line.

   Not all subregionals currently have a web-site or a mechanism through which patrons can place requests on-line. The consultants believe that a statewide system that would allow patrons anywhere in the State to place an on-line request for materials 24 hours per day should be a priority.
1.9 Network libraries shall provide newsletters at least quarterly in appropriate formats on library and related services for their patrons.

Overall, the subregional libraries have done as good or better a job than the Regional Library in meeting this standard. However, several of the subregionals do not issue newsletters and several others do not on a regular schedule. Furthermore, many do not provide their newsletters in alternative formats.

1.10 Network libraries shall provide patrons with information and referral (I & R) to the services of other related agencies.

Some subregionals are well connected to other advocacy and service agencies in their service areas and are actively involved in information and referral. Others do a very marginal job of providing this service. While the consultants are not suggesting that any subregional library ignores requests for this kind of service, only a few actively promote their role as I & R providers and maintain the current information on other agencies necessary to be effective in this role.

2. Resource Development and Management (Pages 17 - 20)

Most of Georgia's subregional libraries have extremely large collections of NLS provided materials. In fact, the consultants believe that most of the collections are larger than necessary to meet the needs of their patrons if the Regional Library was functioning appropriately in its interlibrary loan back-up role.

Another weakness of both the Regional Library and of most subregionals is the production of titles and materials of regional and local importance. Finally, collection maintenance, especially the weeding of little used materials is a weak point for a number of subregionals.

2.6 Regional and subregional libraries shall acquire or produce materials to supplement the local collection.
A few of the subregional libraries actively produce recordings of local interest. These are primarily recordings of excerpts from local weekly newspapers. The Dublin, Macon, and Rome subregionals are particularly active in this regard. Athens is also active in this regard and records a quarterly diabetes newsletter that it shares with other subregionals.

Several other subregionals supplement their NLS collections with recorded materials available from non-NLS sources. Many subregionals offer their patrons recorded magazines and religious materials from alternative sources.

2.7 Regional and subregional libraries shall produce reading materials emphasizing patron demand and titles of regional and local importance.

   a. Regional and subregional libraries shall obtain permission to produce copyrighted materials in non-print formats.
   b. Regional and subregional libraries shall share locally produced materials with other network libraries.

With the exceptions noted above, the output of local and regional materials by the subregionals is very limited. Furthermore, the sharing of these materials between and among other subregionals and with the Regional Library is nearly non-existent. The rationale for not sharing the local newspapers is compelling; the materials are relevant for only a short time and are not generally of interest to people beyond the area served by the subregional that produced them. The Athens subregional does share the quarterly diabetes recording with others. However, on a statewide basis, recording of materials of local and regional interest can be seen as a major weakness. Many users would enjoy listening to books written by the many fine southern and Georgia authors who are not included in NLS’s limited production of talking books.

2.8 Regional and subregional libraries shall submit cataloging on locally produced materials to LC/NLS for inclusion in the LC/NLS union catalog.

Because the subregionals are not producing these kinds of materials, no cataloging is being submitted to LC/NLS.
2.11 Regional and subregional libraries shall meet LC/NLS quality control standards in producing accessible format materials to be added to the local collection.

None of the local recording currently being done by the subregionals meets the somewhat rigorous LC/NLS quality control standards.

2.13 Network libraries shall maintain non-circulating masters of locally produced materials.

Since most of the materials produced are highly time-sensitive (mostly newspapers), little, if any, archiving of masters is done.

2.18 Network libraries shall, within their collections maintenance policies, systematically review and weed their collections and dispose of excess copies in accordance with LC/NLS procedures.

Because the Georgia Regional Library was not a reliable source of support and interlibrary loan for a number of years, and because no electronic system exists for placing a request to the Regional Library to directly fill a subregional patron's request in a single day, the subregional libraries have seen fit to develop much larger collections than are typically held by subregional libraries in other parts of the country.

Although most subregionals do follow specific collection development practices, these practices are based on maintaining large backfiles of talking books. It is the consultants' opinion that all but a few of the subregionals need to weed their collections extensively. However, such weeding should follow the development and implementation of a process to ensure one-day turnaround (with direct mailing from the Regional Library to the subregional patron) on subregional requests that are referred to the Regional Library.
2.21 Network libraries shall maintain or have access to professional materials and resources that support the development and provision of library services.
   a. Network libraries shall maintain or have access to a collection of standard reference works and of readers' advisory reference materials.
   b. Network libraries shall maintain or have access to a collection of standard works in available formats pertaining to physical conditions described in the LC/NLS eligibility requirements.

Because the subregionals are, for the most part, located in regional public library system headquarters facilities, most subregionals have access to at least basic reference and readers' advisory tools. While most subregionals report getting occasional reference questions from NLS patrons, very few encourage patrons to think of the subregional as a source of reference information.

The consultants believe that subregional libraries should encourage patrons to use reference services available from local libraries whenever possible. This encouragement should take the form of a formal procedure for connecting patrons to local library reference desks and the ability to follow-up to ensure that the patron's information needs were met. Establishing this kind of process would require consultation with public libraries and the training of local reference librarians in the procedure that is established.

Most of the subregionals maintain basic collections of materials on disabling conditions; however, only a few have adequate resources of this type. In general, those subregional libraries that are highly visible and accessible and consequently have more walk-in traffic, (Rome, Dublin, and Athens for example), have better collections of materials of this type. However, even in these libraries, many of the materials are difficult for people with disabilities to access. The practice of the Athens Subregional of regularly recording a diabetes newsletter and Rome's extensive collection of adaptive technologies are models that other subregionals should consider emulating.

2.22 Network libraries shall maintain information about national, state, and local organizations and programs concerned with services to eligible users.
Most subregionals maintain a small shelf or a file of materials on advocacy and service organizations related to conditions that qualify individuals for the NLS program. The consultants believe that the Regional Library and the subregional libraries should be working together to improve access to this type of information.

A shared web-page with extensive links to national, regional, state, and local organizations should be developed by the Regional Library in cooperation with the subregionals. Each of the subregionals could then link their web-sites to this resource. A specific plan should be developed that assigns subregional libraries the responsibility of maintaining regular contact with specific organizations in their areas. Subregionals would then have the duty of sharing updated information about existing and new organizations in their area with the Regional Library for inclusion on the master web-site.

3. **Public Education (Page 20)**

3.1 Each network library shall develop and implement a coordinated public awareness program for use in its service area.

A few of the subregionals do an excellent job of educating the public about the NLS program and about other library services available to people with disabilities. The Bainbridge, Brunswick, and Macon subregionals all do an exceptional job of making potential users aware of NLS services. However, the consultants were not presented with any formal public education plans during our visits to subregionals. It appears that a few of the subregionals wait for users to come to them rather than actively pursuing new patrons.

The consultants believe that the Regional Library also has a major role to play in public awareness. Ideally, the Regional Library and the subregionals should be working together to develop a seamless public information plan to ensure that all eligible residents of Georgia have equal access to the NLS program.
3.5 Network libraries shall conduct a community analysis based on the LC/NLS model.

While a few subregionals presented some basic demographic information to the consultants, there was no evidence that a formal community analysis had been conducted in any area. However, several of the subregionals do make a practice of conducting regular surveys of users, which does provide some useful information about the demographics of disabilities in their service areas.

4. Consulting Services (Pages 20 - 21)

The majority of consulting service standards apply either to NLS itself or to Regional Libraries. The roles of subregional libraries in this regard fall into two categories. The first is responding to the findings of the Regional Librarian in annual evaluation visits. The second role is as a consultant to public libraries in the subregional's service area.

Because the Regional Library does not currently have a formal evaluation tool and because the Regional Librarian has not been able to conduct annual reviews, the subregionals have not had the occasion to respond to the findings of evaluation visits.

The second standard in the consulting area is as follows:

4.7. Subregional libraries shall advise and assist local libraries and related agencies in their geographic areas.

While many of the subregionals maintain deposit collections in public libraries and occasionally visit them, only a few subregionals are regularly involved with the public libraries in their area. A few subregionals, Lafayette is an example, have recently increased their efforts to work with local public libraries.

This is an area of great need and an area that often receives less attention than it should because talking book center managers are so heavily involved in day-to-day operational matters. Tending to the "core services" functions generally precludes extensive outreach and consulting efforts.
5. Volunteers (Pages 21)

5.1 A network library shall utilize volunteers to assist in the performance of activities that supplement its basic program of service.

Most of the subregional libraries have done a better job than the Regional Library is using volunteers to enrich and extend their services. The Albany, Brunswick, Dublin, and Rome subregionals each benefit from over 100 hours per month of volunteer assistance. Several others get 60 - 80 hours of volunteer help each month. At the other end of the scale, three of the subregionals do not use volunteers at all or only use them occasionally for special projects.

5.3 A network library shall develop and implement an organizational structure for its volunteer program.

Several of the volunteer programs are quite informal.

5.4 Volunteers shall not be used in place of paid employees.

While most of the work performed by volunteers clearly falls into the "supplementary" category described in standard 5.1, in a few instances, volunteers are performing tasks that might be considered core functions (such as retrieving materials for shipment and reshelving returns).

6. Administration/Organization (Pages 21 - 22)

Subregional libraries meet most of the administration/organization standards; however, there are a few standards on which there is room for improvement.

6.10 Regional and subregional libraries shall monitor and evaluate deposit collections and demonstration collection operation and service.

The consultants encountered a number of deposit collections in public libraries that had received little or no attention from the subregionals that had established them. It is recommended that each subregional make a special
effort to re-evaluate each of its deposit collections and renew or reestablish relationships with the agencies that host the collections.

6.14 Network libraries shall encourage advice and input from a full spectrum of patrons and patron constituency groups through mechanisms including, but not limited to, advisory committees, focus groups and patron forums.

Very few of the subregionals have formal advisory committees although several others do occasionally have meetings that would qualify as patron forums. Several of the subregionals have conducted formal surveys of their users in recent years.

However, several of the subregionals have no formal mechanism in place for patron feedback and would benefit from the establishment of an advisory committee of their patrons.

7. **Budget and Funding (Pages 22 - 23)**

The libraries that host subregionals are not profiting from their role as a network library. Although it could be argued that one or two of the subregionals are breaking even, the majority of host libraries subsidize NLS operations. While the consultants heard many complaints from the directors of libraries hosting subregionals about the degree to which they were subsidizing talking book center operations, virtually all of the host libraries do so in spite of their protests. A number of the host libraries demonstrate extraordinary commitment to the NLS program through their decision to use a state-paid position or a portion of a state-paid position for this purpose.

As was stated earlier, the consultants believe that the State of Georgia has an obligation to fund subregionals at a substantial level unless it commits to a considerably higher level of support of Regional Library operations.
8. Planning and Evaluation (Page 23)

8.1 Each network library shall develop a comprehensive long-range plan designed to develop, coordinate, maintain and improve services and programs and to make optimum use of resources.

8.2 Long-range plans shall be developed in cooperation with appropriate constituencies, especially patrons, administering and funding agencies, and associated network libraries.

8.3 The long-range plan shall include measurable objectives and a timetable for accomplishment. Progress toward meeting objectives shall be reviewed regularly and the plan shall be revised at least annually.

8.5 The long-range plan shall be produced in appropriate formats and shall be made available to patrons.

The planning and evaluation standard calls for each network library, including subregionals, to develop and implement a formal long-range plan including measurable objectives and a timetable for accomplishment. While it is clear that some planning takes place, only a handful of the subregionals had any documents that could even nominally be considered as a long-range plan. In the instances where a long-range plan of sorts exists, it is usually part of a larger plan developed by the host library and rarely is distributed to talking book center patrons in any form.

The Regional Library bears part of the responsibility for the lack of long-range planning on the part of subregionals. The coordination and facilitation of planning efforts on a statewide basis is a legitimate role of the Regional Library. Unfortunately, the skeletal staffing at the Regional Library has made involvement with the subregionals to this degree impossible.

8.9 Network libraries shall adapt and implement methods for evaluating patron satisfaction.

8.10 When patron satisfaction is evaluated, the results shall be used to improve services.
The planning and evaluation standards also call for the implementation of methods for the evaluation of patron satisfaction. As was stated above, several of the subregionals do conduct periodic surveys to this end and a few have patron advisory committees or hold occasional meetings of users. In most cases, however, the primary measures of patron satisfaction are continued use of the service and unsolicited comments and notes from patrons.

The focus groups conducted with NLS patrons across the State as a part of this study do constitute an evaluation of patron satisfaction; however, the study is a one-time effort. Subregional libraries that lack an ongoing formal mechanism for patron feedback should work with the Regional Library and with other subregionals to develop a coordinated effort to assess user satisfaction on a statewide basis.

Since this study found a high level of patron satisfaction with the services provided by subregionals, it could be argued that all is well and that this kind of ongoing evaluation is not necessary. However, this study reveals that there are many individuals who are qualified for NLS services and who would benefit from the services who simply are not aware of the program. A method of assessing the penetration of each subregional into its "market area" should be included in any assessment tool that is developed.


The development of a coherent set of policies and procedures for a program that is not administered centrally is a difficult, if not impossible, task. The consultants believe that both the Regional and the subregional libraries do an admirable job of trying to maintain a level of consistency across the State in regard to core services. There is evidence that the Regional Library and the subregionals do communicate about policy and procedural issues and that subregionals have input into changes.

However, there are several areas that could use further attention. For example, while there is broad agreement on core services, the previously raised issues of the inclusion
of large print circulation and newsletters in the calculation of state funding points out the need for further clarification.

Again, the weakness of the Regional Library has limited its role in coordinating and facilitating the development and formal adoption of these kinds of policies and procedures. Furthermore, this work is the foundation on which formal contracts between the hosts of the subregions and the Office of Public Library Services should be based. Work in this area is a critical need.

9.14 Each regional library should work with its subregional libraries to develop strategies that contribute to a consistent range and quality of service in the geographic area served.

While there is no indication that subregional libraries are unwilling to participate in this kind of coordinated effort to improve service, the Regional Library has been unable to carry out its statewide coordination and planning responsibilities at an adequate level. The disparity in market penetration by the various subregionals identified in the Background Report point out the need for this kind of statewide effort.

10. Reports, Statistical and Narrative (Page 25)

10.1 Each network library shall maintain current and accurate statistical records to document use, services and acquisitions; to meet the requirements of the administering agency, the funding agency and LC/NLS; and to generate information for planning purposes.

10.3 Each network library shall prepare an annual narrative and statistical report and shall make it available in appropriate formats to the administering agency, the funding agency, patrons and other cooperating units.

The consultants believe that the statistical reporting that is done by the subregionals is current, accurate and conforms to the ASCLA/NLS Standards. However, very little information is provided by the majority of the subregionals that helps other public libraries in their planning efforts. Considerable improvement is needed in the content and frequency of reports from subregionals to the public.
libraries that are considered to be "cooperating units" under the ASCLA/NLS Standards.

11. Personnel (Pages 25 - 26)

Staff members of subregional libraries are employees of the libraries that host the subregional operations and are, therefore, governed by the personnel policies of the host. While the consultants did not analyze the racial characteristics or the number of employees with disabling conditions in the subregional libraries' labor force, we did observe some diversity on both counts. While we cannot state categorically that all subregionals exhibit a commitment to equal opportunity, we saw no evidence of discrimination and we did see signs of open hiring practices.

The place of subregional operations within the organizational structure of host libraries varies widely. Most subregionals are stand-alone operations with the talking book manager reporting directly to the director of the host institution. However, in a few instances, talking book center managers have duties in addition to their NLS responsibilities, (e.g., the Augusta manager is also the head of audio-visual services), or report to professional staff other than the host library director.

The ASCLA/NLS Standards call for the head of a network library to possess a master's degree in library science (MLS) from an ALA accredited program. Eight of the thirteen subregionals are directly managed by individuals with an MLS. In the five remaining subregionals, another individual with an MLS, usually the director of the host library, is designated as the administrative head. The consultants found that the directors that serve in this capacity do take their NLS responsibilities seriously and devote a significant amount of time to the management of subregional affairs.

11.7 Staff performing readers' advisory service shall possess at minimum a bachelor's degree.

While most readers' advisory service is being provided by individuals with a bachelor's or master's degree, some subregionals are using individuals without these credentials.
for at least some reader's advisory service. This is particularly true in subregionals that have very limited staff.

Several other personnel standards relate to the training and continuing education opportunities that are afforded to subregional staff. While training at the subregionals is usually of the "on-the-job" variety and may be less formal than what is envisioned in the standards, the consultants were generally well impressed by the sensitivity and professionalism of subregional support staff.

However, the Regional Library should probably be playing a larger role in offering formal training experiences for subregional support staff. The Regional Library is attempting to provide a formal orientation for new talking book center managers; however, the consultants believe that the Regional Library should be offering an annual orientation session for support staff with the State assuming any necessary travel costs.

11.13 Appropriate staff of the network library shall participate in meetings of patron organizations.

Adherence to this standard is very uneven among the subregionals. Some subregionals are highly involved with support and advocacy organizations in their areas (Athens, Bainbridge, Brunswick, LaFayette, Macon, and Rome). Most other talking book managers evidence some involvement of this type and place a particular emphasis on contacts with nursing homes and other care facilities. A few subregionals have very limited contact with outside agencies and limit their community contacts primarily to service clubs and general community organizations.

12. **Research and Development (Page 26)**

Most of these standards apply to the Regional Library and to NLS itself. The subregionals are doing a relatively good job of meeting the standards that do apply, which relate primarily to the use of appropriate new technologies in offering core services.

It should, however, be noted that none of the subregionals, with the possible exception of Rome, have access to the
high-end recording facilities that would enable them to produce local recordings that meet NLS standards. The consultants believe that this makes the fact that the Regional Library lacks these facilities all the more critical.

Finally, the availability and accessibility of adaptive and assistive technologies in the subregionals varies tremendously. The Rome subregional offers the widest array of such equipment in an environment that encourages use by individuals who are able to go to the library. At the other end of the scale, the Savannah facility offers very little in the way of assistive devices from a facility that is difficult to get to for individuals with disabilities.

e) What is the level of patron satisfaction with the current services being provided by each of the subregional libraries?

As was mentioned in the section on the Regional Library, the consultants found almost universal praise for the service received through subregionals. Focus groups with users in each of the areas served by the subregionals revealed a very high level of satisfaction.

Furthermore, a number of focus group participants who indicated that they had received NLS services in other states in the past indicated that they were more satisfied with the service they receive in Georgia than they were with services provided in other places. The close bond between patrons and their readers' advisors was also evident. In several locations, patrons met their readers' advisor in person for the first time. It was clear that many patrons had developed valued relationships with the readers' advisors over the phone and through other correspondence.

f) Describe how the subregionals are financially accountable to their funding agency?

Subregionals are supported with local, State, and Federal funds. Federal support is indirect and consists of things such as talking book recordings, machines, and the free-matter-for-the-blind postal subsidy. Accountability to the Federal government is primarily through the reporting of
statistical data to the Regional Library and through their adherence to the ASCLA/NLS Standards.

The consultants believe that financial accountability of the subregionals to the State of Georgia is currently quite weak. While the subregionals do regularly report on their activities, no contract that outlines activities to be performed or performance standards is in place. This issue was raised above and the consultants believe that it is a matter that requires immediate attention.

As was previously pointed out, virtually all of the libraries hosting subregionals believe that they subsidize NLS operations. While subregionals are generally very accountable to their host libraries by virtue of the fact that they are employees of the host library and supervised by either the host library director or his or her designee, subregionals are far less accountable to other public libraries in their service areas.

It is true that these other public libraries do not directly support subregional operations; however, many directors of libraries that do not host subregionals feel that the State dollars expended on the NLS program brings with it an obligation for the subregionals to share information with other public libraries. The consultants agree with this assessment and would urge the subregionals to work together with the Regional Library to develop standardized methods for reporting to public libraries.

g) How might the Atlanta Regional Library (acting as a subregional) be included in the funding formula?

Pages 4 - 7 of this section of the report lays out details of how the Regional Library in Atlanta could be compensated for its activities as a subregional library. The process would involve breaking out the functions (with particular attention to the staffing required to carry out the functions) performed by the Regional Library acting as the fourteenth subregional from its statewide responsibilities. Funding for subregional activities could then be provided using the method described on pages 29 and 30.
h) Identify and analyze the methods subregional libraries use to support the circulation and patron statistics they supply to the Regional Library.

Although the method of reporting subregional library statistics is a controversial topic among many library directors in Georgia, the consultants found no evidence of improprieties or padding of statistics. In fact, we found every indication that subregionals take great care in reporting circulation. Furthermore, the recent migration of most of the subregional libraries to the READS II software should lead to even greater accuracy in the reporting of statistics.

While accuracy does not appear to be a problem, the significant differences in the services offered by the subregionals create real questions about the State's funding formula. For reimbursement purposes, "circulations/distributions" of newsletters, which are not published by all subregionals, enter into the calculation. Some subregionals count large print deposits in their circulation while others either do not circulate large print or restrict the reporting of large print circulation to use by NLS qualified individuals. Although the reporting of all of these circulations appears to be accurate, the differences in approaches raise questions in regard to the validity of the funding formula.

Another area of circulation statistics that raises questions is the degree to which various subregionals use the "automatic" selection feature. While it is clear from the focus groups with patrons that some people truly appreciate receiving materials without having to make a specific request, it seems likely that unsolicited selections are somewhat less likely to be read than those that have been specifically requested.

The consultants believe that it would be grossly unfair to characterize any of the circulation practices of the subregionals as being improper. Subregionals are counting transactions that are worthwhile and that have value to end-users. Nevertheless, the consultants believe that some of the transactions that are included are poor measures of the degree to which subregionals are carrying out their responsibilities as NLS network libraries. For this reason, we are recommending a funding formula for subregionals.
that includes a substantial base grant and additional funding based on NLS usership and circulation only of talking books, recorded magazines, and Braille materials.

3. Review the current service offered by the Regional Library and by the subregional libraries.

a) What are the currently defined services and how do the Regional and subregional libraries offer those services?

The Georgia Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped offers the most basic level of service of any of the many Regional Libraries we have observed. The Regional Library concentrates on the circulation of talking books in the cassette book format.

The Braille service is anemic and the recording and Brailling of items of regional and local interest is nonexistent. The Regional Library does a commendable job of getting materials to its base of users but has little time to develop outreach programs or to work with the subregional libraries.

Services offered by subregional libraries differ greatly. Like the Regional Library, they all concentrate on the circulation of cassette talking books; however, several also offer recordings of local interest (mostly excerpts from local newspapers). Many offer large print materials, and some have attractive and welcoming sites that include the latest in adaptive technologies.

The facilities offered by the subregionals also vary from small out-of-the-way locations (Savannah) to attractive facilities designed specifically as a center for library users with special needs (Athens, Dublin, Rome). Staffing in the subregionals also varies.

As is noted elsewhere in this report, several subregionals are actively involved in outreach to consumers, to other disabilities organizations, and to service organizations.