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### What Is a State Library?

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What is a state library? What purpose does it serve? And should state libraries continue to exist? This last unthinkable question has unfortunately been asked in several places this past year as states have grappled with multi-million and even billion dollar deficits. State libraries are as different as the states in which they reside, but the services of each are critical to those who are served. Many state libraries are libraries with circulating collections and patrons who frequent their buildings. Some are state document depositories and distributors of state aid. Some include services to the people who are blind, physically handicapped, or institutionalized, and members of the legislature and state government. A number of state libraries include law libraries, data coordination centers, and consultants for everything from youth services to buildings. Many state libraries administer statewide information networks and interlibrary loan systems. All administer the LSTA federal funds program for their state.

Whether state libraries offer one or all of these services, all have one thing in common: a mission, stated or unstated, to take the leadership in enhancing library service for all the residents of the state. State associations have the important role of advocating for their member libraries. Networks focus on technology tools for libraries. Cooperatives work to aggregate needed services for their participants. But state library agencies are unique in their relationships with state and federal government and state and national organizations. Only the state library exists to take on the vital role of enhancing library service statewide. A good example is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grants for computer hardware, software and connections for public libraries. These grants have been administered with outstanding results by state library agencies. What other agency could and would have advocated, organized and administered this program as effectively and successfully as state library agencies?

State libraries are vital and are needed because they enhance library service in our states; and they should continue to exist!

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