

TO: ALA Council
FROM: ALA Executive Board
DATE: June 15, 2001
SUBJ: Recommendation on Privatization of Publicly Funded Libraries

- 1) **Introduction and Background:** At the 2001 midwinter conference of the American Library Association, Liz Bishoff and Sally Reed brought forward a proposal to establish one common working definition of "privatization" as it relates to publicly funded libraries, and a recommendation to generate an association-wide dialogue on the issue of privatization with the goal of bringing back a proposal for ALA to take a stand opposing the shifting of policy making and management of library services from the public to the private sector. See attachment.

In the ensuing time period, various units and divisions of ALA have engaged in this discussion including, but not limited to, PLA, REFORMA, IFC, APALA, AFAS, BCALA, ACRL, and FLRT.

Findings: The feedback ranged from a few members who expressed belief that privatization is a reasonable alternative for service delivery, to those who feel ALA should also oppose the outsourcing of key functions and all library staff. The majority of responses, however, indicated support for opposing the privatization of management and policy-making in publicly funded libraries.

Based on the work done to date on the issue of outsourcing and privatization by various units and task forces of the Association; and based on the feedback that we have received over the past six months, the Executive Board believes that there is general consensus that:

- It is difficult or impossible to define "core services" for any single library.
- There is strong support for the notion that "libraries are an essential public good" and that responsibility for policy making and implementation of policy should not be shifted to the private sector in publicly funded libraries.

Therefore, we propose the following:

Recommendation: That ALA adopt the following policy: "ALA affirms that publicly funded libraries should remain directly accountable to the publics they serve. Therefore, the American Library Association opposes the shifting of policy development and management oversight of library services from the public to the private, for-profit, sector."

TO: ALA Executive Board
FROM: Liz Bishoff and Sally G. Reed
DATE: January 12, 2001
SUBJ: Privatization: A Report Back to Council with Recommendations

Introduction and Background: Over the course of the past three years, the Association has been paying particular attention to the practice of outsourcing library functions as well as the shifting of management to the private sector in publicly funded libraries, particularly public libraries. This issue became of significant interest when the State Library of Hawaii decided to outsource all aspects of collection selection, acquisitions, processing and cataloguing for the Hawaii Public Library System to Baker and Taylor, a for-profit company.

Due to increasing interest and concern among members, the ALA Council directed then ALA President Barbara Ford to appoint an Outsourcing Task Force (OTF) in 1997 to study the issue, make recommendations and report back. The OTF held membership hearings at both ALA Midwinter Meeting and ALA Annual Conference in 1998. They reported back to Council with recommendations in 1999.

Though the Council supported the OTF premise that "libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in a democratic society," they did not agree that ALA should adopt the policy statement, "ALA opposes privatizing core library **services** [emphasis added] to for-profit companies."

Several OTF proposals were referred to ALA divisions or ALA management for further study through research. Additionally, divisions and units were asked to report back with checklists, guidelines, and other recommendations developed under their area of expertise. Specifically, Council directed that, "The Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) be directed to review the Library Bill of Rights as it relates to outsourcing and privatization." The IFC did so and presented a checklist to Council at the 2000 Annual Conference.

In response to the Council motion to analyze the impact of outsourcing on the operation of libraries, ALA contracted with Texas Woman's University (TWU) to study the practice of outsourcing in libraries and elsewhere and report back their findings. A report was presented to ALA Council at the 2000 Annual Conference. After extensive discussion, Council moved to "accept" the report and asked the President to establish a small task force to continue the discussion and help frame the issues involved in outsourcing and privatization.

Analysis: In both the OTF report and the TWU report, discussion and debate centered around two areas primarily:

- 1) What constitutes "core services" in a library
- 2) Clear definition of outsourcing v. privatization.

A review of Council discussion and debate for the OTF report and for the TWU report reveals that there are widely varying beliefs about what services are core to libraries. Because of this dispute, it was impossible to reach consensus on what or whether any **service** should be considered inappropriate for outsourcing.

The review of Council discussion also revealed confusion regarding what is meant by the term "outsourcing" and what is meant by the term "privatization." These terms were often used inter-changeably in the discussions and debates making it more difficult for the Council to come to an agreement or to take a stand supporting or opposing "outsourcing" or "privatization."

Definitions offered by the OTF:

Outsourcing is the contracting to external companies or organizations, functions that would otherwise be performed by library employees.

Privatization is the shifting of policy making and the management of library services or the responsibility for the performance of core library services in their entirety, from the public to the private sector.

Definition of "Privatization" offered by the TWU report:

Privatization is contracting out for services in a way that shifts control over policies for library collections and services from the public to the private sector."

In both definitions for "privatization" there is emphasis on "services" or "core services." In fact, the TWU study reported that "there appears to be a complete lack of consensus about what constitutes a 'core service' – and what is core in one institutional context may well be considered to be peripheral in another."

What appeared to have consensus in the discussions, debates and reports is that "libraries are an essential public good" and that responsibility for policies should not be shifted to the private sector in publicly funded libraries.

Findings and Recommendations: We believe that there is general consensus that:

- It is difficult or impossible to define "core services" for any single library
- The responsibility for policy development and management should not be shifted to the private sector in a publicly funded library.

Therefore, we propose the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1) Accept the OTF definition of privatization with an important modification as follows:

***Privatization** is the shifting of policy making and the management of library services ~~or the responsibility for the performance of core library services in their entirety,~~ from the public to the private sector.*

Recommendation 2) Generate Association-wide discussion on this definition with a view to ALA eventually taking a stand against the "shifting of policy making and management of library services from the public to the private sector."

It is our belief that a more narrow definition of "privatization" will enable the Association to take a stand in support of keeping publicly supported libraries safe from full privatization. We believe this stand and approach are consistent with the will of the membership.

Next Steps: We ask that the Executive Board of the American Library Association endorse this report along with Recommendations 1 and 2 above and that this report be forwarded to Council for further discussion. We further recommend that this report be placed on the agenda of Council at the 2001 Annual Meeting for action as indicated in Recommendation 2.

Supporting documentation may be found at the following website addresses:

www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/outsourcing.html (IFC report / checklist)

www.ala.org/alaorg/ors/reports.html (TWU report)

www.ala.org/outsourc/index.html (OTF Report)

www.ala.org/alcts/publications/release.html (ALCTS report / checklist)

www.pla.org/outsourc.pdf (PLA report / checklist)

*Adopted by Council at the 2001 AC.
Codified by Council at the 2002 Midwinter Mtg.*

2001-02 (B#17)

Item 2. Based on CD#57.1 submitted by the ALA Executive Board, approved by the consent of Council, the PMC recommends Policy 52.7 (Privatization of Publicly Funded Libraries) :

ALA affirms that publicly funded libraries should remain directly accountable to the publics they serve. Therefore, the American Library Association opposes the shifting of policy making and management oversight of library services from the public to the private for-profit sector.

INFORMATION ITEM:

Item 1. In regard to CD#50.3 , Item #1, submitted by the ALA Committee on Education, approved by the consent of Council:

Toward fulfillment of its declared mission to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of the profession of librarianship, The American Library Association will establish an allied professional association to certify individual librarians in areas of specialization beyond the ALA-recognized masters degree.

The Policy Monitoring Committee advises Council that this motion seems to be a statement of intent, not of policy. We expect that this allied professional association, once established, will present policy for Council's consideration through normal channels.

*This is from the 2002 Midwinter Mtg
PMC Report to the ALA Council*

