# INVESTIGATION OF POTENTIAL FOR CONTRACTING OF DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION BRANCH SERVICES IN OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION AND UTILIZATION, AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINAL REPORT

King Research, Inc.

6000 Executive Boulevard, Rockville, Maryland 20852 (301) 881-6766

# INVESTIGATION OF POTENTIAL FOR CONTRACTING OF DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION BRANCH SERVICES IN OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION AND UTILIZATION, AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINAL REPORT

Prepared for:

Federal Library Committee
Library of Congress

Prepared by:

Douglas L. Zweizig, Ph.D.
Vernon E. Palmour

King Research, Inc.
6000 Executive Boulevard
Rockville, Maryland 20852

December 1980

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| Section | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Executive Summary | 1 |
| 2 | Background and Statement of the Problem | 5 |
| 3 | Procedure | 11 |
| 4 | Results | 14 |
| | 4.1 Interviews with AID/DIU Personnel | 14 |
| | 4.2 Interviews with AID Users of DIC | 19 |
| | 4.3 Interviews with Other Federal Libraries | 21 |
| | 4.4 Interview with a Contractor Providing Library Service | 26 |
| 5 | Contracting Considerations | 28 |
| 6 | Summary Observations | 31 |
| 7 | Recommendations | 33 |

## SECTION 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Statement of the Problem:

The task of this investigation was to identify the consequences of contracting out the reference function of AID/DIU/DI versus continuing with direct-hire staff. The key criterion for analyzing these consequences was to be quality of service.

Procedure:

Information was gathered from documents relevant to AID/DIU, personal interviews with fifteen of the AID/DIU staff, telephone interviews with seven AID/W users of DIC, interview/visits with four federal libraries with experience in contracting for library service, and a personal interview with a contractor for library service.

Results:

1. Interviews with AID/DIU personnel
   a. Requirements for service which may be lost through contracting
      - DIC staff need to know AID policy and program.
      - DIC staff need a historical sence of agency development.
      - AID personnel need to know DIC staff.
      - DIC staff need relationships with small, specialized information centers that contain much unpublished material.
      - DIC staff need to be able to go beyond the literal request.
      - DIC staff need to build on previous responses to queries.
      - DIC staff need to be able to provide technical assistance to mission libraries.
      - DIC staff need to be able to develop improved services.

b. Experienced difficulties with present AID/DIU contracts relevant to contracting for reference.

- Separation of a professional function from the library will result in discontinuities of service.
- Contractors may not be permitted access to certain kinds of information.
- Turnover of contract staff requires extensive and frequent re-training.
- Coordinating several small contractors requires considerable effort and involves overall system delays and inefficiencies.

c. Issues related to importance of staff continuity.

- Corporate memory.
- On-going relationship with AID staff.
- Identification with AID interests.
- Knowledge of AID.

2. Interviews with AID/W users of DIC.

- These users averaged use of the DIC about once a month and used the full range of services.
- Users generally felt that continuity of staff was a definite benefit.
- Though there was some disagreement, most users judged that familiarity with the agency was important for good reference service.
- Users were overall supportive and favorable about DIC.

3. Interviews with other federal libraries. Federal library experience with contracting for services is presented in terms of a library schematic.

a. Advantages of contracting cited by other federal libraries were:

1) very useful for one-time projects such as moving a collection or weeding out less used or out-dated materials;

2) service delivery can be faster;
3) direct-hire personnel can concentrate on monitoring quality and quantity of output, and do not need to be concerned with the supervision of personnel performing routine tasks;
4) contract staffing is more flexible -- staff can be added or reduced as called for by demand;
5) contracting may result in cost savings as contractor pay scales are lower than comparable federal pay scales;
6) even if contracting does not result in cost savings, budget administration is more flexible.

b. Disadvantages cited by other federal libraries were:
1) turnover of contractors and of contract personnel requires continual readjustment by the library, delays, and continual retraining of contract staff;
2) some contractors have behaved unethically;
3) contractors do not want to sub-contract with competitive contractors, so writing a single prime contract may not be feasible;
4) contracting is limited to functions for which workload and performance levels can be specified;
5) direct-hire staff are required to monitor contracts.

4. Interview with a contractor providing library service.
- The contractor observed that the heavy dependence on internal AID documents and databases would make AID reference services a poor candidate for contracting.

Summary Observations:

- If library functions were placed on a continuum of complexity, reference services would fall at the high complexity end. Contracting arrangements are more feasible with less complex functions.

- There was general agreement among all parties consulted that continuity of staffing was critical to success in reference in AID and that outside contracting would lack continuity of staffing.
- Since no federal libraries located had experience in providing reference service through contract, the consequences of such contracting must be extrapolated from related experiences.

Recommendations:

- Based on our discussions and observations, we would recommend against contracting for reference or materials selection functions in AID/DIU.

- The functions that are presently contracted for in DIU -- acquisition, processing and cataloging, dissemination -- are appropriate for contracting. We would recommend when possible that the contracts be handled by a single prime contractor to improve coordination of the functions.

## SECTION 2

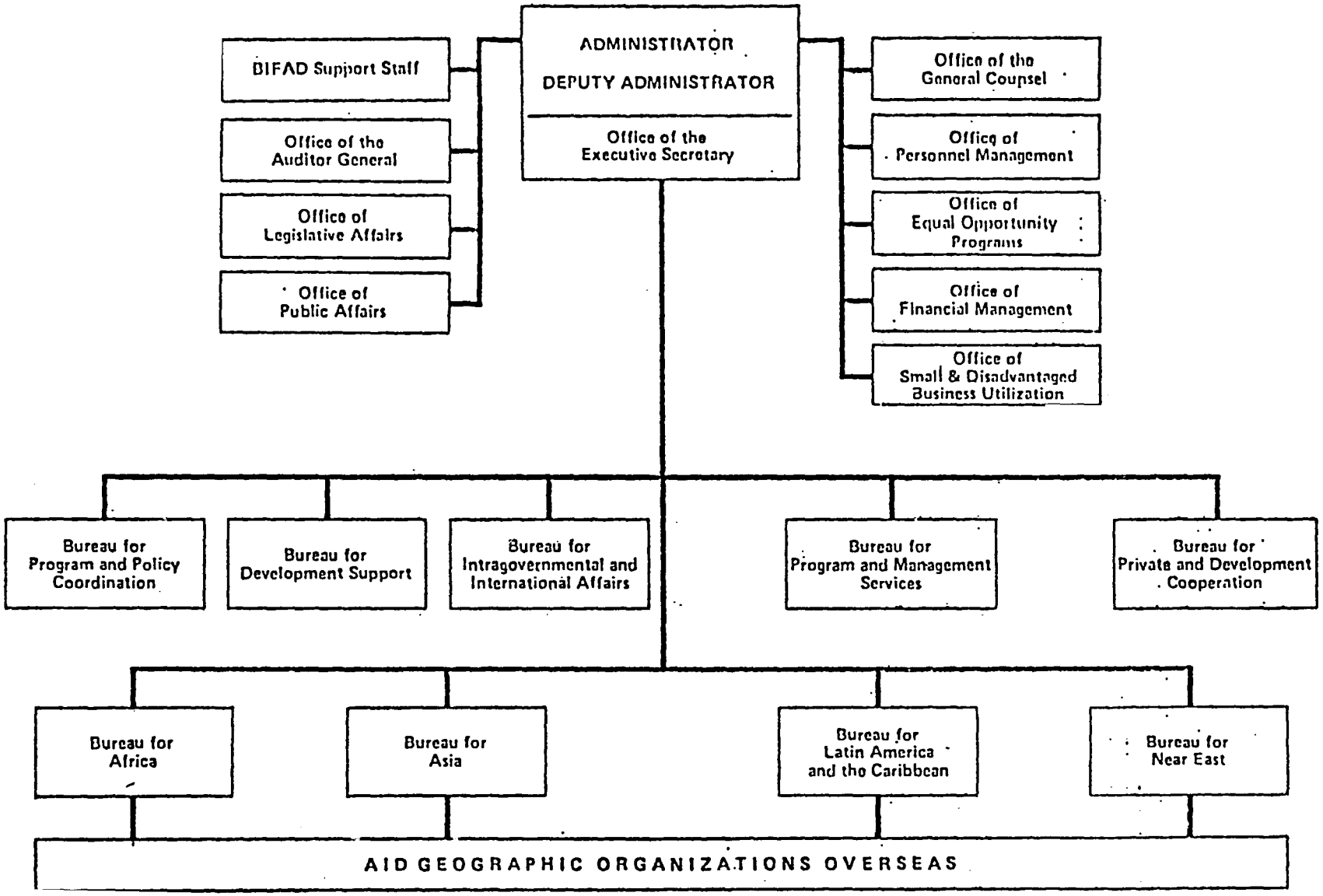
## BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Office of Development Information and Utilization (DIU) is located in the Bureau for Development Support (DS) in the Agency for International Development (AID). DS is directed by an Assistant Administrator and is composed of Offices which provide technical support in such areas as Engineering, Nutrition, Agriculture, Housing, Population, and Health. (See the organization charts below.)

The overall objective of DIU is "to provide AID and the development community a source of efficient access to, and stimulate the utilization of, the broadest possible base of experiential and research generated development information and data." The development community consists of institutions in less developed countries, AID missions abroad, AID personnel in the U.S., AID contractors, researchers and scholars in development-related areas, and the general public with development interests. The experiential development information consists of documents generated by AID Missions and contractors that record the planning, experience, and evaluation of AID activities worldwide. Because much of this experiential information arises from innovations or adaptations of existing technologies to local conditions, this information constitutes a unique resource whose utilization results in efficiencies of application in other sites and avoidance of re-invention or repetition of mistakes. The research information is both AID-supported and related development research from a wide range of sources.

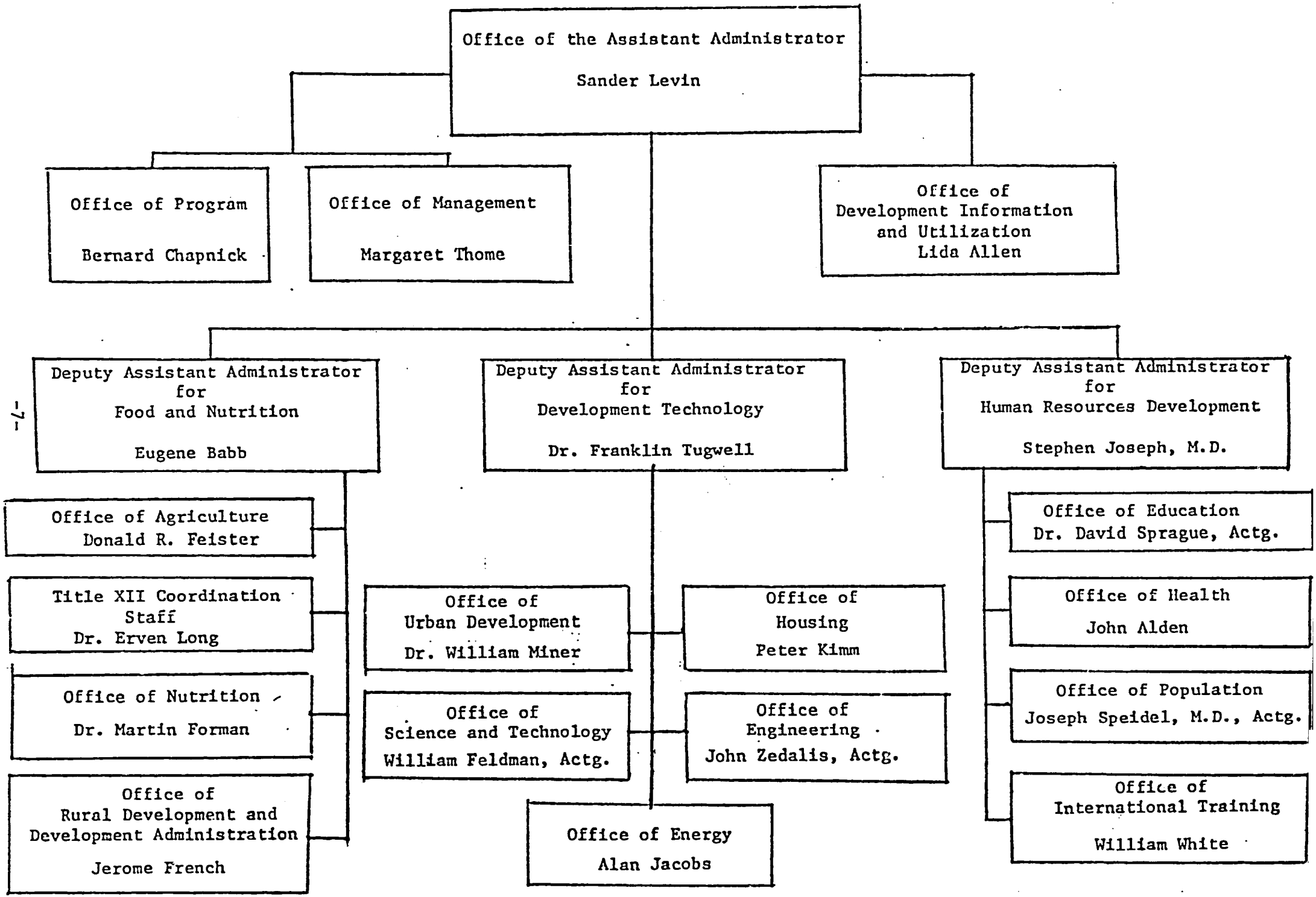
Much of the activity in AID that deals with the acquisition, processing, retrieval, and dissemination of AID's information is conducted in the Documentation and Information Division (DI). The acquisitions, processing and dissemination functions are located in the Acquisition and Processing Branch. The direct-hire staff of this branch is small because these functions have been almost entirely contracted out; the direct-hire staff are concerned primarily with the administration of the various contracts. The Development Information Center Branch is responsible for the retrieval of information from both internal and external sources. Although

# Agency for International Development




October 1979

BUREAU FOR DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT




AA/DS, 10/1/80

OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION AND UTILIZATION
BUREAU FOR DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT/AID

OCTOBER 16, 1980

ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS

**TOTAL DIU NO. OF POSITIONS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Full Time | 30* |
| Part Time | 15 |

**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR**

Policy, planning, direction and overall management of information supply, demand, utilization, synthesis, analysis, dissemination and communication; representing Office, Bureau or Agency, and liaison with national, international, private organizations concerning tech.-information activities.

| | Full Time | Part Time |
|---|---|---|
| Director | 1 | 0 |
| Dep. Director | 1 | 0 |
| Sys. Analyst | 1 | 0 |
| Secretary | 1 | 0 |
| Opera. Asst. | 1 | 0 |
| | 5 | 0 |

**ECONOMIC & SOCIAL DATA SERVICE DIV.**

,C data acquisition, computerized ıta bank access (MESIA); statistical lsplay, reporting, dissemination, ɔdeling, quantitative analysis; inentory of micro-data sets; tech. asst. n data collection and survey, managng projects ($3m.): AID's BUCEN/RSSA, ID.

| | Full Time | Part Time |
|---|---|---|
| hief | 1 | 0 |
| sst. Chief | 1 | 0 |
| cc. Sci. Analyst | 1 | 0 |
| ys. Analyst | 1 | 0 |
| tat. Info. Analyst | 3 | 0 |
| ecretary | 1 | 0 |
| lerk-typist | 0 | 1 |
| | 8 | 1 |

**DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION DIVISION**

Development information/documents acquisition, process, announcement, computer storage and retrival; access to worldwide bibliographic information data banks, operating information centers, providing library services to and, assisting Mission and counterpart institutions on developing library and information facilities; managing projects ($1.4m).

| | Full Time | Part Time |
|---|---|---|
| Chief | 1 | 0 |
| Special Asst. (Acq.) | 1 | 0 |
| Clerk-typist | 0 | 1 |
| | 2 | 1 |

**ACQUISITION & PROCESSING BRANCH**

| | Full Time | Part Time |
|---|---|---|
| Head | 1 | 0 |
| Editor (ARDA) | 1 | 0 |
| Lib. Asst. | 1 | 0 |
| Clerk-Typist | 0 | 1 |
| | 3 | 1 |

**DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION CENTER BRANCH**

| | Full Time | Part Time |
|---|---|---|
| Head | 1 | 0 |
| Asst. Head | 1 | 0 |
| Tech. Info. Spec. | 3 | 7 |
| Lib. Asst. | 0 | 2 |
| Clerk-typist | 0 | 2 |
| | 5 | 11 |

**UTILIZATION DIVISION**

To move information into the development decision making process; through technical guidance, and the selection, analysis, synthesis targetting and tailoring of information causes better information utilization in the development process; manages projects ($1.8m): Field Publication, Knowledge Synthesis, USDA & NTIS/RSSA & Implementor Network.

| | Full Time | Part Time |
|---|---|---|
| Chief | 1 | 0 |
| Tech. Info. Spec. | 2 | 0 |
| Gen. Devl. Officer | 3 | 0 |
| Secretary | 1 | 0 |
| Opera. Asst. | 0 | 1 |
| | 7* | 1 |

*Includes three positions that have subsequently been cut, effective 9/30/80.

agricultural information is retrieved largely through a contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the internal AID staffing of reference services is through direct-hire government employees. Service is provided at two service locations: a library at 1656 New State Department Building and a library at the AID Rosslyn Center. The 1656 State Department collection emphasizes the AID experiential information, and the Rosslyn Center collection emphasizes technical and research literature, including approximately 200 periodical subscriptions and access to external and internal databases.

Reference staff in the two information centers respond to individual queries from users, compile bibliographies on topics of current interest, provide selective dissemination of information, advise AID Mission personnel in the provision of information services, and assist AID personnel in the conduct of research. In recent years, the demands for reference service have been increasing both in quantity and in the sophistication of the queries as AID staff learn what services the libraries provide.

As a result of analyses of functions performed in several units in DS, the reference services of DIU were identified as a candidate function to be contracted out. Part of the rationale for this recommendation was the previous experience with contracting out of other functional library services such as acquisition, processing, and dissemination. An agency study of DIU recommended that reference services be added to the overall contract package for Information as a Tool in Development.

The administration in DIU responded to this proposal with concerns about the service implications of providing reference service through contract. Since the recommendation to move reference services under the contract had been based largely on administrative considerations, a review of the service implications was seen as appropriate at this time, and DS administration sought an "outside view" on the possible consequences of the proposed charge.

A contract was entered into with the Federal Library Committee to conduct the investigation. The Federal Library Committee's role was to oversee the investigation, to provide the overall perspective of federal library experience, and to identify and subcontract with the appropriate persons to

conduct the study. King Research, Inc. was selected to conduct the investigation and to communicate this report of its findings and recommendations to the Federal Library Committee.

In brief, the task of the investigation can be stated as: to identify the consequences of contracting out the reference function versus continuing with direct-hire staff. The key criterion for analyzing these consequences was to be quality of service. This summary statement of the task was checked for appropriateness with all interested parties in this investigation.

The Statement of Work for this investigation was:

> Implementation of the decision to contract out the work currently performed by the Division of Documentation and Information, has raised questions about the need to retain as a direct-hire function particularly the reference and library services portion of the Division's responsibilities. The contractor will analyze the functions of the Division, compare them with similar functions in other U.S. Government agencies, and advise AID on the feasibility and advisability of contracting out the entire function of the Division or any recommended split between direct-hire and contract functions. Other U.S. Government agencies to be analyzed include NASA, National Bureau of Standards, the Department of Commerce and up to three other Federal agencies which have placed library and information services under contract or who have considered doing so.

## SECTION 3

## PROCEDURE

In order to gain background on AID/DIU and to become aware of plans for future development, a number of relevant documents were reviewed. These included:

Birch & Davis Associates, Inc. "AID Information Documentation Documentation Management System Study: Interim Report." November 1977.

Birch & Davis Associates, Inc. "Report on AID Procedures for Responding to Selected Public Information Requests." June 1979.

Cresap, McCormick and Paget Inc. "Agency for International Development. A Management Appraisal of the Office of Development Information and Utilization. Final Report." January 1980

DS/DIU. "Project Paper: Information as a Tool in Development." October 1980.

DS/DIU. Monthly Reports to AA/DS.

Relevant sections of the AID Handbook (1976) and proposed revisions (1980).

To gather data for this study, four separate investigations were conducted involving the following groups:

1. AID/DIU staff.

   The following staff were interviewed:

   Director, Office of Development Information and Utilization
   Deputy Director, Office of Development Information and Utilization
   System Analyst, Office of Development Information and Utilization
   Chief, Documentation and Information Division
   Head, Aquisition and Processing Branch
   Editor, ARDA
   Head, Development Information Center Branch
   Assistant Head, Development Information Center Branch
   Two Technical Information Specialists at 1656 State Department Building
   Four Technical Information Specialists at Rosslyn Center
   One Library Assistant at Rosslyn Center

AID/DIU personnel were asked such questions as:

Please describe the work now done in your unit.

Can you supply estimates of workload?

How is the quality of service assessed?

What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of providing service through contract or direct-hire?

What questions regarding contracting of services should we ask at other federal libraries?

2. AID staff outside of DIU were interviewed by telephone to get the perspective of some users of AID/DIU reference services on the question of contracting out versus direct-hire. Specifically, the questions asked of these persons were:

How do you use the library/information center in AID?

What are the benefits you derive from that use?

What is your frequency of use?

What is the importance to you
as a user of: staff continuity?
confidentiality?
staff familiarity with the agency?

These interviews were designed to be brief, to elicit reactions on the aspects that had emerged as central to this investigation, and to be open-ended so that the issues important to the users could be expressed. Seven users of DIU reference services were identified by DIC as suitable as respondents. Five of the seven were able to be interviewed. In addition, two users were suggested by one of the respondents, and they were also interviewed. The means of identifying the sample will not allow generalization to the population of AID/W users and certainly excludes large classes of users, such as AID Missions and LDC institutions. The purpose of this brief investigation was to allow for nomination of concerns by users with most ready access to DIU reference services.

3. The work statement explicitly called for the investigation of contracting for library services in other federal libraries. The Federal Library Committee assisted in the identification of the libraries to be studied. Those selected were ones with experience in contracting. This criterion resulted in a set of libraries larger than AID/DI, as smaller federal

libraries are less likely to contract for services. The libraries visited were:

The Department of State Library

The Department of Energy Library

The National Bureau of Standards Library

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Headquarters Library

The following are the questions used as an interview guide for the visits to federal libraries. The questions were generated in part from suggestions made by AID/DIU personnel. We had hoped to find a federal library that did contract out reference service; however, we were not successful in this effort.

What aspects of the library are now being contracted out?

How do you assess quality of service provided by contract?

What are advantages of contract versus direct-hire?

If reference service is contracted out, are requests being answered satisfactorily, as quickly as direct hire, as easily?

What considerations led to the decision?

What consequences have been observed in terms of quality of service, amount of service demand, other evaluations of service?

What is the effect of change in service staff?

Is rapport being established between contract staff and clientele?

Has client attitude toward information facility changed?

Are client expectations as high?

Does contract staff work on-site or off-site?

What time was required for training staff?

Do you expect contractors to provide innovations or growth in type of services offered?

Do direct-hire staff work with contract staff? Does it work? Is a mix better than all contract?

If reference service is not contracted out, why not?

Are you aware of other federal libraries with contracting experience that we should visit?

4. A contractor experienced in providing library services and knowledgeable about AID was interviewed on the feasibility of providing reference service for AID by contract.

## SECTION 4

## RESULTS

### 4.1 Interviews with AID/DIU personnel

The points listed below that bear on the issue of contracting for reference services have all resulted from comments made by AID/DIU staff. The reporter has selected those which were relevant to the inquiry and which had credibility, and has organized them for this report, but has not invented points that were not made by the staff.

a. In interviewing AID/DIU personnel about the information services now performed, a number of service aspects were identified for which contracting would be expected to result in some diminution of service:

- DIC staff need to know AID policy and program. The agency takes positions on a number of development-related issues; queries come in from Afghanistan, Iran, or Vietnam; contract numbers charge for continuations of the same project. DIC staff must be able to provide service that is consonant with agency policy and must be familiar with agency programs so that they can locate project-related materials when the finding tools are inadequate. Knowledge of the agency allows staff to perform in an anticipatory mode, rather than only a reactive mode.

- DIC staff need a historical sense of agency development. DIC staff estimate that 85% of the queries they receive ask in one form or another "What has AID's experience been?" Often a routine search of the database will be sufficient to develop a response. But equally often the search is not routine. The database has evolved over a period of time, and skillful use of the Thesaurus requires

knowledge of its evolution and experience in searching with it. A significant amount of the agency memory has never been sent to the library for inclusion in the database. Knowledge of the history of the agency (particularly prior to 1974) allows DIC staff to know whom to call for difficult-to-find information and sometimes requires calling retired AID personnel for information on earlier projects. DIC staff meetings involve the sharing of "intelligence" about agency programs so that staff can respond more effectively.

- AID personnel need to know DIC staff. As AID personnel gain experience in working with individual DIC staff and become aware of the services DIC provides, a relationship of trust develops which contributes to DIC's effectiveness for AID. Instead of each AID unit attempting to provide its own information services, this activity is increasingly being entrusted to DIC. AID staff feel confident in referring field inquiries to DIC for response; AID units are turning over materials to DIC for their collection rather than maintaining a separate office collection; AID units are increasingly sending documents to DIC and depositing materials when a mission closes.

- DIC staff need relationships with small, specialized information centers that contain much unpublished material. DIC staff are continually maintaining relationships with the staffs of the many development-related information sources in the area. The collections of these sources contain much unpublished information that is not indexed in conventional databases. This information would not be accessible through the Library of Congress or other of the more obvious information centers. Relationships with these staffs not only allows the information to be identified but also obtains information through ad hoc arrangements that would not be obtainable through conventional channels.

- DIC staff need to be able to go beyond the literal request. Much of DIC's work involves responding to queries from missions or LDCs. The particular communication environment of responding to requests from abroad requires that DIC staff exercise a high degree of professional judgement in forming a response. The query usually arrives in a terse form via cable, letter, sometimes a telephone call, often an intermediary. Except for the telephone queries, these requests from the field are one-way communications. Even when possible, dialogue to clarify the question is costly and involves delay for the inquirer. Because DIC staff have knowledge of mission and LDC conditions and resources, they can usually respond to a request that most librarians would find incomprehensible. For example, a recent request was for working papers and an annotated bibliography on livestock production and marketing. The request contained no other identificaiton of the projects of interest (and, in particular, no contract number). DIC staff were able to locate the specific materials being requested by following a chain of personal contacts in the agency.

- DIC staff need to build on previous responses to queries. Reference interactions are not always one-time communications. The same inquirer may ask a year later for an update on a previous response. And because interest in development topics has trends and cycles, the same inquiry may come at different times from different users. The staff needs to be aware of the previous inquiries and responses in order to be able to efficiently build on past work and avoid re-creating the same response.

DIC staff need to be able to provide technical assistance to mission libraries. Periodically, requests come from missions for a DIC staff member to travel to the mission to provide assistance in the formation of a collection, the cataloging of mission materials, or other forms of technical assistance.

Staff experience in AID enables them to know what AID resources can be drawn upon for the mission and how to design mission services appropriately.

b. Compared to other federal libraries, AID/DIU has extensive experience in contracting for library services in a number of modes: single prime contractors versus multiple contractors, Resource Support Services Agreement (RSSA) contracts, contracting a variety of functions. This experience has identified some difficulties with contracting which bear on the decision to contract for reference services.

- Although most aspects of cataloging materials by contract are satisfactory, reference staff have observed that the separation of the cataloging staff from the agency has had an effect on the quality of cataloging. Indications of the effect of this separation are failures to relate new documents with previous, related documents; to keep up with changes in vocabulary; and to assign similar classification numbers to related materials to that they shelve together. One of the functions of reference personnel has been to provide a quality control on contracted cataloging.

- Under present policy, some kinds of information are not given to AID contractors, in particular, funding information. Procurement regulations prohibit giving contractors pricing information.

- The turnover of contracts and of contracting personnel has resulted in serious inefficiencies and deterioration of services. The experience has been that it takes six months for a contractor to learn the system at AID. The difficulties in introducing a new contractor are compounded by turnover of contract personnel, a particular problem with smaller contracting companies. The staffs of all four contracting companies now used have turned

over approximately three times in the last two years -- making re-education a major task. The training of abstractors to write in the required way is most difficult, suggesting that training contractors to provide appropriate reference services would require considerable AID/DIU effort.

- Several AID/DIU personnel noted that contracting for library services was more efficient and effective when handled through a single prime contractor. Contracting with a number of smaller contractors has the disadvantages of working with relatively inexperienced contractors and of overall system delays when one contractor fails to perform on time. In addition, the retraining effort is compounded.

c. The points made by AID/DIU staff about the advantages/disadvantages of contracting for reference service largely related to a single issue: the importance of continuity in staffing. Of the nine persons in DIC at the Technical Information Specialist level or higher, years of experience in DIU or predecessor agency range from two to ten, with an average experience of almost four and a half years. In addition, three of the staff have AID experience outside of DIU. The combined AID experience of the nine staff members is fifty-eight years. Issues that relate to continuity of service in the agency are:

- Corporate Memory. Because DIU services have undergone a number of reorganizations, knowledge of that history is valuable in understanding the formation of collections, the nature of the databases, the evolving patterns of service. Knowledge that pre-dates 1974 is particularly important since abstracting begins at that date. In addition, knowledge of the trends and changes in AID is necessary for understanding the character of documents in the collection and for locating information that is not available in the center collections.

- On-going relationship with AID staff. This relationship was cited frequently as valuable in knowing what information staff needed as well as where difficult-to-locate information could be found.

- Identification with AID interests. Current DIC staff exhibit considerable commitment to the agency. Consequences of this are the willingness to work extended hours when necessary and the desire to know and to carry out agency policy. There was some concern that a staff recruited by a contractor and having high turnover would not develop the same sense of loyalty.

- Knowledge of AID. Much of the work of the DIC is not routine. It requires creating new responses that will be appropriate for the inquirer, locating experiential information that has never entered the database, and identifying agency expertise to supplement published information. Frequently knowledge of how AID works is critical to a successful response. And this knowledge is not easily obtained -- the Handbook is not helpful in describing how the agency functions in fact. It is only through accumulated experience in DIC that staff can successfully handle non-routine information requests.

## 4.2 Interviews with AID users of DIC.

Users of DIC who are interviewed came from:

Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination/Division of Evaluation

DS/Agriculture

Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean/Office of Development Programs

Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean/Technical Division

Office of Public Affairs/Division of Public Inquiry

Bureau for Africa/Office of Development Programs

- Frequency of Use of DIC. Users reported a range of frequency of use from "seldom" to "more than once a week," with an average use rate of approximately once a month.

- Uses of DIC. The set of person interviewed cited the full range of uses of DIC: to locate specific AID documents, to send materials to DIC to add to the collection, to obtain print-outs of relevant projects, to obtain abstracts and publications, to refer requests for information, to learn where information is located, to obtain documents from the Library of Congress via DIC, to learn backgrounds of projects, to retrieve data on relevant projects categorized other than by country. Users interviewed expressed general satisfaction with the services received.

- Effect on the User of Staff Continuity. Most users felt that continuity of staff was a definite benefit. Specific factors cited were the value of the user knowing whom to ask for a particular service, the importance of rapport, the contribution of DIC staff knowledge of project procedures, and the knowledge DIC staff have accumulated about user needs. Several of the respondents commented on their on-going working relationships with individual staff members and how this continuity contributes to their effectiveness in getting needed information. One user commented that who the staff person was was not important so long as the staff person were competent.

- Need of the User for Confidentiality. Confidentiality of the information or of the transaction was not an important issue for users. One noted that since 10-15 percent of the collection was classified, contracting for service of the collection might present difficulties.

- Importance for the User of DIC Staff Familiarity with AID. Responses to this question varied. The most frequent response was that familiarity with the agency was very important. (For

example: "They need to know administrative changes in the agency and the ramifications for location of information." "[Knowledge of the agency] helps to understand what a person is trying to get and how to find it.") Others thought that AID idiosyncracies could be learned and that expertise in library organization was the key requirement.

General Comments about AID/DIU. The overall response of these users regarding DIC services was positive. Some users volunteered comments about dissatisfactions with the services available, but these related to system delays or incompleteness of the database, not to the quality of the reference service. A number of users exhibited a protective attitude toward the DIC and were concerned about any reduction in service from it.

## 4.3 Interviews with Other Federal Libraries.

Interviews were conducted with four federal libraries with experience with contracting. Two of the libraries contract extensively, excluding only the functions of book selection and reference; two of the libraries contract for special projects, but do not contract for functional library services. Observations collected from these interviews will be reported by types of library operations and summarized by the reported advantages and disadvantages of contracting for services.

Before discussing contracting for library services by function, it will be helpful to define those functions through the use of a schematic of the library (Figure 1).

The library can be viewed as an intermediary agency between users and the world of information. Users may interact with the world of information directly, without the mediation of the library, but they are likely to find the amount of information overwhelming, to encounter much information that is not relevant to their concerns, to find that the information is not organized for their interests, to experience delays in obtaining information, or to lack the ability to interpret the complexity encountered. The function of the library is to make the interaction

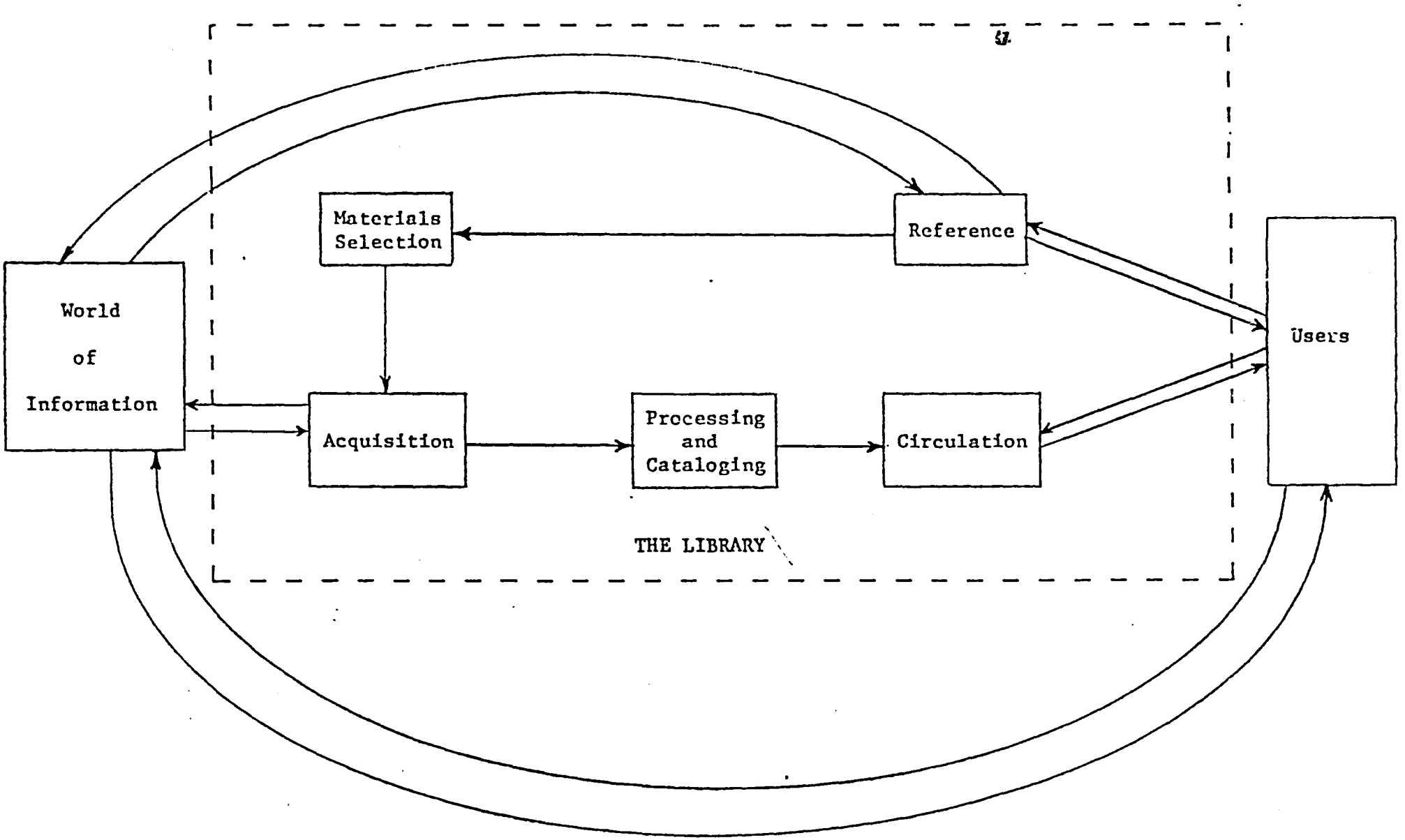



Figure 1. Schematic of AID Library Functions

with the world of information more efficient and effective for the user.*
The library interacts with the world of information on behalf of the user -- both to collect pieces of information for storage in the library so that the library collection represents a more highly relevant sub-set of information for its users and to obtain specific items of information on demand for individual users. The user can retrieve information from the library either by searching the collection directly (browsing the shelves or using the library catalog) or by communicating the inquiry to a reference librarian. The reference librarian is the flexible interface of the library with the user. The functions of this librarian include clarification of the user's query, interpretation of the world of information to the user, searching the library collection (formed in anticipation of user queries) and external information sources in order to respond to queries, communicating the response to the user so that it is helpful, scanning the world of information for relevant items to add to the collection, and alerting users to items of interest. Of particular importance in a special library, is the role of the reference librarian as a catalyst in the process by which research in progress absorbs research accomplished. Materials selection is the process of determining which items out of the world of information should be added to the collection. This process is done through the identification of specific items for inclusion and through policy decisions (i.e., to collect all works published by a given agency). The decision made in the materials selection process are communicated to the acquisiton function. Acquisition involves receiving requests, searching bibliographically to verify the description of the requested item and to ensure non-duplication, preparation of an order to a vendor, monitoring progress on the order, receiving ordered items, and sending received items for processing and cataloging. The processing and cataloging involves those operations which will make newly acquired materials retrievable items in the collection: assigning an appropriate classification, formulating surrogate records with

---

*It should be noted that the absence of an organized library does not mean that library functions are not performed in an organization. The experienced trade-off is that either library functions are performed efficiently and effectively in a formal library organization or they are performed with relative inefficiency and ineffectiveness in units throughout the organization. Most organizations have a mixture of the two patterns. In AID, the movement has been away from dispersed library functions toward an organized library with increasing recognition and use.

bibliographic descriptions of the item and subject headings, labeling, entering records in the catalog, database, or circulation system. In the majority of cases, these functions are routine; although they may require a high level of professional skill, they involve carrying out of policy decisions previously made. Circulation is the process for monitoring the location of the items in the collection. Again, once the policies are established, the operations of circulation are largely routine: retrieval of specifically identified items, recording of transactions as materials are loaned and returned, maintaining and searching a circulation file, and returning items to their storage locations in the collection.

- Experience with Contracting for Acquisition. Contracting for acquisition of library materials has taken a variety of forms. Periodical subscription and newspaper subscription agents have been used by libraries conventionally to obtain those materials and to handle the problems of renewals and missing issues. Often these agents can offer a discount in addition to supplying a service. However, the agents make their profit from placing large orders for popular titles and may not offer many of the items needed by a federal library. Three of the libraries have written individual contracts with contractors other than periodical agents and generally have good success in obtaining the needed range of materials. One library, however, is terminating this contract because of unethical contractor behavior. The acquisition of monograph (non-periodical) materials is also done through contract with success. The library supplies the contractor with orders for materials, and the contractor takes responsibility, through a cost plus fixed fee contract, for obtaining the material and delivering it to the library. A considerable advantage of contracting for acquisition is that the federal procurement system is too slow for the vendors (and some vendors will not deliver materials before receiving payment). Since time is critical when information is needed, a contractor's ability to deliver ordered materials in less than a week is a significant benefit.

- Experience with Contracting for Processing and Cataloging. When the basic policy decisions have been made and the processing and cataloging procedures have been stipulated, these procedures can be contracted out successfully. The cataloging may be done by using existing cataloging copy or may have to be done specifically for acquired items. In the latter case, contractor personnel will need to have professional library skills. As mentioned before, contracted cataloging may not be as "customized" as cataloging by personnel with knowledge of the agency. In general, however, the processing and cataloging procedures can be specified sufficiently for outside personnel to execute them.

- Experience with Contracting for Circulation. The operations involved in circulation, routing of materials, or other forms of dissemination are largely routine and are well handled through contracts in two of the libraries. Policy decisions are required for designing the systems and determining who the recipients should be.

- Contracting for materials selection and reference services. No federal library was identified with experience in contracting for material selection or reference service. A number of the librarians commented that contracting was more suitable for the "behind-the-scenes," technical functions of the library and that the public services should be performed by agency employees. Reasons given for this were the frequent occasion for reference personnel to be familiar with the agency and its evolution (the "corporate memory" issue), the need for rapport with users, and the general need for continuity. Materials selection is best done by those with direct knowledge of user interests and requests. Two considerations in contracting for reference services were: 1) since it is not possible to specify performance for reference service, the contract would have to stipulate input criteria (e.g., required education and experience of contract personnel); 2) if

reference service were to be done by contract, it should probably be done through a professional information service such as Information Please. Such a service would do well with general information requests but could not serve for inquiries requiring agency documents for response.

- Cited Advantages of Contracting. Advantages cited by other federal libraries were: 1) Very useful for one-time projects such as moving a collection or weeding out less used or out-dated materials; 2) Service delivery can be faster; 3) Direct-hire personnel can concentrate on monitoring quality and quantity of output and do not need to be concerned with the supervision of personnel performing routine tasks; 4) Contract staffing is more flexible -- staff can be added or reduced as called for by demand; 5) Contracting may result in cost savings as contractor pay scales are lower than comparable federal pay scales; 6) Even if contracting does not result in cost savings, budget administration is more flexible.

- Cited Disadvantages of Contracting. Disadvantages cited by other federal libraries were: 1) Turnover of contractors and of contract personnel requires continual readjustment by the library, delays, and continual retraining of contract staff; 2) Some contractors have behaved unethically; 3) Contractors do not want to sub-contract with competitive contractors, so writing a single prime contract may not be feasible; 4) Contracting is limited to functions for which workload and performance levels can be specified; 5) Direct-hire staff are required to monitor contracts.

## 4.4 Interview with a Contractor Providing Library Service

Finally, a contractor who provides library services and who is familiar with AID's library was asked about the feasibility of contracting for reference services. The contractor doubted whether he would bid to provide such a service because of the corporate memory aspect. If the bulk of information requests

could be answered from conventional databases, contracting would not be a problem. However, AID's information requests center around AID's experience and require knowledge of AID documents, the internal database, and the agency for servicing. The contractor would not be able to supply personnel with the required knowledge.

## SECTION 5

## CONTRACTING CONSIDERATIONS

Although the use of service contracts in libraries is not new (libraries have routinely used subscription services and other materials purchasing services), the use of contracts for functional library services is a relatively recent phenomenon. Since libraries are still learning how to contract for services and which services are candidates for contracting, we must look to experience with contracting for other government-supported services for guidance.

The relevant considerations are discussed by Barbara J. Nelson in "Purchase of Services" (in George J. Washnis, ed., Productivity Improvement Handbook for State and Local Government, Wiley, 1980). Considerations that relate to suppliers indicate that contracting is appropriate when there are existing or easily established suppliers, when one supplier can easily be substituted for another, and when suppliers are able to post performance bonds. In considering whether to contract for reference services at AID, the relative lack of contractors able to provide adequate service is a serious deterrent. The lack of appropriate contractors arises both from the rarity of contracting for reference services and from the complexity of AID information sources. As pointed out earlier, even a contractor familiar with the nature of AID materials would be hesitant to bid to perform AID reference service.

The service considerations in contracting indicate that contracting is more feasible when the service consists of routine procedures requiring limited independent decision making, where the controversial nature or personal character of the service suggest that it not be too closely identified with the established institution, where the service population is new for the established agency or so variable in size that the agency does not want to take on permanent staff, or where the funding is uncertain or variable. These conditions are not found in the AID situation. The provision of reference service in AID is rarely routine. A relatively high level of decision-making on the part of reference staff is required: in the interpretation or

negotiation of the query, in the design of the literature search, in interaction with AID agencies to locate internal information items not in the library collection or to obtain professional advice for a mission, and in the presentation of the findings so that they are useful to the inquirer. Contrary to a situation in which an institution desires to disassociate itself from a service, it is in AID's interest to be recognized as having an efficient and responsive internal information service. It is also important that this service has stable support so that acquisition programs are not interrupted and so that users can depend on high quality service. (User expectation is a strong determinant of use. AID has made a considerable effort to increase user expectations for information service, and this has produced the desired increased demand and use.)

The government considerations for contracting are whether the government has difficulty acquiring capital, has established contract administration units, or specifically knows what services it wants and how to measure them. Capital does not seem to be at issue for the AID library. The basic investment for facilities, collection, and equipment have been made, and the only capital expense is for annual additions. On the other hand, the contract administration unit is well established and probably could incorporate additional contracts readily. The difficulty in contracting for reference service comes in specifying what is to be done and in measuring what is performed. The difficulty in specifying reference performance is not unique to AID; the library profession has struggled with the definition of a reference transaction. Even if it were possible to identify a useful service unit, the evaluation of the service would remain a difficulty in administering the contract. These difficulties arise because the product of a reference transaction is not simply the provision of documents -- it is an informed client. Informing the client requires the provision of documents that are appropriate to the client's level of understanding as well as the topic of the client's question and may require several iterations for success. Relatively difficult-to-specify qualities such as rapport with the client, knowledge of the client's situation, and flexibility in the selection of information sources are required for the communication of information to the client to succeed.

A final contracting consideration not addressed by Nelson is the legality of this contracting situation. Current regulations prohibit direct-hire staff from exercising an employer-employee relationship with contract staff. If direct-hire staff supervise the day-to-day work of contract staff, then the contract is deemed to be a personal services contract, one that substitutes contract staff for government employees, and is not allowed. It is probable that AID reference services could not be provided entirely by contract staff. Questions will arise that require the knowledge of agency information sources that only an experienced AID employee could provide. The AID employee would have to work alongside the contract staff in order to be available to handle those questions requiring such knowledge. It will probably be the case that only persons with knowledge of the agency will be aware when questions are best answered by such internal sources. That is, the contract personnel, lacking the knowledge of what internal information exists, will not know when it is required. Therefore, the AID employee will have to make the determination of which queries are routine (and can therefore be handled by contract staff) and which are not routine (and must be handled by the AID employee). According to an AID contract administrator, this working relationship is so close to a supervisory one that the legality of such an arrangement is in question.

## SECTION 6

## SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

Library functions can be seen as falling along a continuum of complexity which involves intellectual difficulty, professional discretion required, and importance of personal contact with users. Functions which place at the less complex end of the continuum, such as the ordering and checking in of materials, tend to be routine operations and to have easily specified procedures and products. Functions at the complex end of the continuum require high amounts of professional discretion and involve the carrying out and making of policy. Procedures and outcomes are difficult to specify in advance, and therefore writing performance contracts for them is difficult. The library operations described above would be ordered along the continuum as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| circulation | less complex |
| acquisition | ↓ |
| processing | |
| cataloging | |
| materials selection | |
| reference | more complex |

The general finding of this investigation is that agencies and contractors would agree that contracting would be more successful for functions at the less complex end of the continuum and that, at some point on the continuum, contracting the function will result in a serious deterioration of service. There was universal agreement that reference services were beyond that point.

There was also agreement that the greatest problem with contract staff was that they would lack experience with the agency and that, because of turnovers of contracts and contract staff, this deficiency would not be made up over time. The Resources Support Services Agreements with the U.S. Department of Agriculture are exceptions which demonstrate the principle. These are reference services provided through a contract, but they are provided by two carefully selected direct-hire USDA personnel who have extensive (over six years each) experience with AID inquiries. If there were more frequent changes in personnel, such an arrangement would not be feasible.

The need for experienced reference personnel is particularly acute in AID where approximately 20 percent of the primary target transactions come from AID missions or LDCs and require skilled interpretation on the part of the reference staff.

Since no federal library with experience in contracting for reference service could be located, the consequences of such contracting must be extrapolated from related experiences. We would expect that contracted service would be inferior to the extent that knowledge of the agency were needed in order to interpret the query, to locate documents not in the AID collection, to understand the sequence of project documents, or to locate appropriate technical personnel. The quality of materials selection would probably also decline under contracted arrangements for many of the same reasons. Results of interviews indicate that the effective use of DIC would probably decline as AID personnel in Washington and in Missions would lose their familiarity and rapport with the personnel.

## SECTION 7

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Based on our discussions and observations, we would recommend against contracting for reference or materials selection functions in AID/DIU.

- The functions that are presently contracted for -- acquisition, processing and cataloging, dissemination -- are appropriate for contracting. We would recommend when possible that the contracts be handled by a single prime contractor to improve coordination of the functions.