

THE A.I.D. REFERENCE CENTER

A SURVEY

by

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## Introduction

As a result of the July 1971 manpower review of the Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination, the Office of Management Planning was requested by the Assistant Administrators for Administration and for Program and Policy Coordination to survey the AID Reference Center (ARC), Programming System Division, Office of Resources and Systems, PPC. A Scope of Work for this survey, forwarded the following September, called for focus on the functions, organization, staffing, and workload distribution of the Reference Center, including an examination of its relationship to all other Agency reference centers and to the mission and other functions of PPC. Accordingly this survey report discusses present Agency reference facilities and their coordination, relevant ARC internal management issues, and criteria for a new organizational location for the ARC.

I. The Need for and Role of a Central Reference Facility

The need for a central reference facility in the Agency is well established. The present ARC was created in 1967 in response to suggestions from Congressional critics, the Bureau of the Budget, a private consulting firm, as well as by AID personnel. They agreed that Agency planning, operations, and evaluation of programs and projects would benefit from central storage and Agency-wide shared use of significant records and evaluations of past experiences. We share this view.

Most evaluative information about the Agency's past experiences with projects and programs is located in mission or scattered A.I.D./Washington files and is available to a narrow range of users in the originating office only. Such storage does not facilitate ready reference by, for example, project planners in Indonesia to Peruvian road building experience. Only a central Agency reference source can insure such Agency-wide access to a broad range of experience on a practical basis. Furthermore, the Agency has over twenty years of specialized overseas experience and should be able to recapture without much difficulty the most significant aspects of its experiences, an especially important task as many of our experienced technicians retire and the Agency loses their expertise.

An alternative approach would be to continue to store all information, both general reference materials and unique AID-produced evaluative materials, on a decentralized basis and merely centrally catalog its availability and location. Such a system might be cheaper, but it would not provide for an increased exchange within the Agency of evaluative information which is the primary objective of the collection. Under such a system, the seeker of

Agency experience in, for example, the Peruvian Mission -- rather than being sent the pertinent documents by a central reference facility -- would be told that the required information is available in the Peruvian Mission and in a particular AID/Washington office.. He would then have to further contact the referenced offices. Access would depend upon the quality of cataloging in a central location and in the dispersed sites, as well as the quality of filing and service attitude in the latter. It is felt that the process would be sufficiently complex to either discourage an individual to seek the information or the material would be too delayed to be of value. Moreover, it would be very difficult to assure adequate controls over the dispersed collections to prevent loss without providing adequately trained personnel at many or all of the various locations.

In our view, central cataloging alone is not a practical response to the need to accumulate, systematically manage, and encourage the use of these unique AID-produced materials if we are to seriously build future projects and management determinations on the hard experience of the past. Only a central repository of carefully selected documents with a trained staff and positive service outlook can fulfill that need.

#### The Present Reference System

The present reference system in the Agency at least partially reflects the somewhat disparate and decentralized nature of present Agency organization and operations. In addition to the central ARC in PPC, there are at least 27 other decentralized reference facilities in AID/Washington. These other reference facilities are frequently referred to as "information resource units", or "IRU's."

Inspection of Attachment A, AID/Washington Reference Facilities, shows that there are seven such facilities in PPC, eight in the Technical Assistance Bureau, and thirteen in various other offices.

These scattered reference facilities generally collect and store documents peculiar to the technical specialty or regional focus of their parent office. They are convenient for daily use by the people assigned to an office. There is, however, little exchange of such information between offices.

Each office also maintains records designated as "official files". They are periodically retired to the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland. The official files are comprehensive in character, but recovery is sometimes slow and inconvenient.

AID field missions maintain files and record storage facilities which are used by mission personnel for planning and evaluation of programs and projects. The information stored in mission reference facilities is likely to be comprehensive and to reflect close and detailed familiarity with the subject. It is not, however, readily available for use in AID/Washington or by other missions. Current trends toward more centralized Agency operations, and overseas personnel reductions cast doubt upon the efficacy of future dependence upon libraries located in missions.

The A.I.D. Reference Center (ARC) is intended to be a central facility which can provide rapid access to the significant Agency program and project experience acquired during the last two decades - access shared and exchanged by all missions, regions and offices.

### A Future Reference System

It seems clear that as the Agency moves toward more streamlined and centralized organization and management it should strengthen and expand the capability of the ARC to provide a central source of pertinent reference material.

Adoption of this course would provide for inclusion in the ARC of some AID material now available only in missions or in the scattered Washington reference units, central cataloging by the ARC of all relevant and appropriate material stored in the scattered reference facilities, and gradual consolidation into the ARC of some small and duplicating collections. Certain specialized reference units, such as those maintained by the General Counsel or the Auditor General, would, however, remain as separately maintained, although centrally cataloged, collections.

Such a system would require the ARC to establish uniform and worldwide instructions embracing such matters as collection criteria, cataloging and storing systems, retirement and disposal criteria, and standards for forwarding to, and central retention by, the ARC.

Recommendation 1: That the Agency fully support, strengthen, and expand the capability of the ARC to provide a central source of qualitative documents containing analysis and evaluation of significant Agency experience.

Recommendation 2: That the Agency maintain the many scattered technical reference units but provide for ARC central cataloging and coordination of their collections.

Recommendation 3: That the parent office of the ARC promulgate instructions for ARC central cataloging of material in the scattered Washington technical reference units and in mission reference facilities after implementation of recommendations 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11 below.

## II. Collection Criteria

The ARC does not now have definitive guidance concerning which documents should be collected, cataloged, and stored, and which will not be accepted. Nor has any such guidance been promulgated to field units sending material to the ARC. This has resulted in indiscriminate receipts, a cataloging backlog, inefficient operations, and excessive pressure on existing space.

Appropriate collection and storage criteria for the ARC should be established. When established, the existing collection should be purged of all material not meeting the criteria. The criteria should be promulgated world-wide to curtail receipts of unwanted documents.

Appropriate collection criteria should be based upon four fundamental principles: (1) non-duplication of storage of project documentation and similar material in scattered A.I.D./Washington reference units; (2) prohibition of all non-A.I.D. material; (3) concentration upon significant analysis and evaluation of AID operations; (4) non-duplication of storage of its own (ARC) collection.

Most technical reference material of a general (non-AID) nature will continue to be stored in the approximately 27 reference units scattered throughout A.I.D./Washington. The ARC should not attempt to duplicate such collections.

The Agency can obtain rapid reference support from other and much more comprehensive libraries for all non-AID material - the State Department Library, the Foreign Service Institute Library, the Library of Congress, and many other U.S. Government and multilateral institution libraries in the Washington area. There is no need to duplicate any part of such back-up libraries.

The ARC should concentrate its attention on materials which are internally generated by A.I.D. and which provide analysis and evaluation of Agency experiences with past programs and projects. The vast amount of specialized documentation required to plan and program an AID project is not evaluative of past operations and should not be stored. Quantitative data such as that recorded by the Controller and the Office of Data Systems also should not be duplicated in the ARC.

Retention by the ARC of duplicate paper copies of its own collection should be eliminated except for those few documents for which a very high level of repetitive customer demand justifies it.

Recommendation 4: That the parent office of the ARC promulgate collection criteria to prohibit storage or collection by the ARC of:

- a. technical reference material already available in one or more of the scattered Washington reference units;
- b. all non-A.I.D.-generated material;
- c. A.I.D. specialized planning and programming documentation which is not evaluative of significant past operations;

- d. A.I.D. quantitative data recorded by the Controller and the Office of Data Systems;
- e. duplicate copies of its own collection

Recommendation 5: That the parent office of the ARC promulgate collection criteria to permit and encourage storage by the ARC of qualitative A.I.D.-generated documents containing analysis and evaluation of significant Agency experience only.

Recommendation 6: That the ARC purge the present ARC collection of all documents not consistent with the collection criteria established pursuant to 4 and 5 above.

### III. Retirement Criteria

The ARC is not now in receipt of definitive guidance for the periodic retirement of stored material. This inevitably guarantees a continuing space and storage problem. While maintenance of a historical "memory" is one of the principal functions of the ARC, a time criterion such as five years should be established as the maximum period for retention of paper documents unless frequent customer need justifies selective exception. Upon expiration of that period, a document should be screened and a decision made either to retain it on microfilm, retire it or destroy it.

Recommendation 7: That the parent office of the ARC establish a fixed time criterion such as five years as the maximum period for ARC retention of paper documents.

Recommendation 8: That the ARC microfilm for customer use all ARC paper documents older than the retirement criterion established pursuant to 7 above.

The ARC is burdened with a large backlog, perhaps as high as 40,000 documents, which has not been screened, cataloged and shelved.

Because the present rate of receipts exceeds the present rate of cataloging, the backlog of uncataloged material is constantly increasing.

This problem should be addressed on a short-term basis by curtailing all but emergency customer service for an adequate period, perhaps one month, and by screening, classifying, and cataloging existing receipts -- using all personnel including the supervisor and the bibliographer. All requests for service during this period should be referred to the next supervisory level above the ARC for evaluation and determination of the "emergency" character of the request. On a long-term basis, promulgation of proper collection criteria as suggested above should reduce the volume of receipts to a level that can be cataloged concurrently with full service to customers.

Recommendation 9: That the ARC halt all but emergency customer service for a period adequate to screen and catalog, or destroy, the existing ARC backlog of documentary receipts.

#### IV. Space

The A.I.D. Reference Center (ARC) is located in Room 1656 of the New State Department Building. Approximately 85,000 documents are now stored there in 1738 square feet of space. It is crowded and staff working area is totally inadequate and inefficient. An additional 805 square feet of space has been allocated, but is in Room 568, State Annex 6 (Pomponio Plaza), which is now used to store ARC crated documents which are primarily duplicates of those in primary storage at 1686 NS. Initially these crated

documents should be screened and purged as appropriate. Then, to create adequate working space in the ARC, a portion of the main collection, should be shifted to the storage area in Pomponio Plaza to await future screening, purging, and cataloging. This move, which would cost about \$1000, should be made as soon as the present freeze on moves is lifted.

Recommendation 10: That the ARC move part of the ARC collection to the assigned space in Room 568, State Annex 6 (Pomponio Plaza) after purging that space of all documents not meeting the collection criteria established pursuant to 4 and 5 above.

#### V. Functional Statement

Despite its present size and cost, and despite its potential importance to Agency operations, the ARC has never been separately and functionally described in the AID Manual Orders. M.O. 204.1 of September 22, 1971, the PPC functional statement, says only that the Programming System Division "...maintains a reference center of documents pertaining to Agency programs." Supplement II to Manual Circular 1026.1 provides a brief summary of the ARC's contents and their use.

The functional statement of PPC -- or any other future parent organization -- should include a specific statement of functions in appropriate detail for the ARC. In addition, a separate instruction is required describing the purposes, services, collection criteria, and modus operandi of the ARC. The latter is particularly important as a means of publicizing to Agency personnel the varieties of services they may obtain from the ARC and the means to obtain those services.

Recommendation 11: That the parent office of the ARC include a comprehensive statement of ARC functions in its functional statement and prepare for issuance an instruction to the Agency on ARC services.

VI. Division of Labor

Future management of the ARC should be based upon a four-fold division of labor: (1) screening and cataloging incoming material; (2) screening and photographing or disposing of "retired" material; (3) general customer service; and (4) preparation of bibliographies. Responsibility for each of these functions should be established within the ARC, although the present staffing level suggests that a high degree of interchangeability of performance of functions should be developed. Cataloging of material in scattered technical reference units should be undertaken when present management problems are under control.

Recommendation 12: That the ARC establish a four-point ARC internal division of responsibility:

- a. screening and cataloging receipts;
- b. screening, microfilming, or destroying  
"retired" material;
- c. general customer service;
- d. preparation of bibliographies.

VII. Staff

The ARC is presently staffed by five people with annual salary and benefits of approximately \$70,000. Seven positions, four permanent and three temporary, are allocated (although, technically, the temporary positions have lapsed):

Permanent	
Technical Information Officer	GS-13
Technical Information Specialist (cataloger)	GS-11
Librarian	GS-9
*Clerk-typist	GS-4-5
Temporary (NTE 12/71)	
Librarian	GS-9
*Librarian	GS-7
Clerk-typist	GS-4

An additional full-time Technical Information Officer, GS-13, is assigned to the Programming System Division to prepare comprehensive bibliographies on selected technical and development related subjects. This is an obvious library function. It should be incorporated into the ARC. These six persons now on board should then be fully capable of efficient conduct of the function, although further review of this judgment should be made after the management improvements suggested below have been made.

During the coming months while the present collection is being purged and cataloged, new management procedures implemented, and the various dispersed reference collections centrally cataloged, additional part-time help might be obtained on a short term basis.

At any rate, management should make a firm determination to operate this central reference facility within this allocation of five full-time positions, one temporary position and an annual personnel cost ceiling of about \$100,000. Management should then curtail the scope of collection and storage criteria as recommended above sufficiently to permit efficient customer

\*Vacancies

service within that limitation. Provision of space and data processing support should also be made on the basis of similar firm ceilings.

During this survey, it was noted that there are few management data with indices of such ARC activity as the volume of cataloged materials, receipts, discards, and customer usage. While we would not propose an elaborate statistical system which would be of significant workload cost, we feel that some basic operational data should be maintained. Without such data, for instance, precise staffing or space assessments are difficult. As a minimum, a better means of keeping track of customer usage than the present log (which may be signed or not) and statistics on the cataloged collection should be maintained.

Recommendation 13: That the PPC, Management Office assign the GS-13, Technical Information Officer, now performing bibliographic functions in the Programming System/Division, to the ARC, bringing the total to five FTEPP positions.

Recommendation 14: That A/MP authorize one time limited position not to exceed June 1972 to facilitate the purging of documents as recommended.

Recommendation 15: That A/MP conduct a further review of ARC workload and staffing requirements after the ARC has carried out the internal management improvements recommended in this report.

Recommendation 16: That the ARC establish and maintain records systems adequate to provide management data concerning document storage, collection, cataloging, retirement and use to facilitate such further reviews.

## VII. Announcement Service

The ARC does not now have an announcement system, that is, a periodically issued bulletin describing its cataloged material to potential customers. Speaking to this need, the Agency Reports and Documents Task Force recommended, and the Agency's Information Systems and Requirements Committee (ISREC) approved, initiation of an automated announcement system for the ARC.

This would require the ARC manually to prepare each month 2500 keypunch input forms. The National Technical Information Service would then process these forms and machine-prepare an announcement list consisting of 7500 documents every three months.

ARC workload would be increased somewhat by the effort required to prepare keypunch input forms. The ARC is not now coping adequately with its present cataloging workload. To cope with this new announcement effort additional staff may be required. The true cost of the new announcement system would thus include: (1) any additional personnel costs in the ARC generated by it; (2) the cost of work performed by the NTIS, now expected to be \$60, 000 per year. Furthermore, institution of an announcement bulletin<sup>a</sup> at this time would inevitably involve a wasteful listing of many documents which will be purged from the collection by implementation of Recommendations 4, 5, and 6 above.

Recommendation 17: That the parent office of the ARC suspend implementation of an automated or manual announcement service pending completion of Recommendations 4, 5, and 6 above, reassessing the need for such a service at that time.

### IX. Organization Location

The ARC was placed in the Office of Administrative Services when it was created in 1967. It was shifted to PPC in 1969 based upon a desire to associate it with the then new project documentation system. It was also desired to locate the ARC in the organization which was responsible for program evaluation, and which now provides about one-fourth of its users. The following criteria apply to consideration of an appropriate organizational location for the ARC: (1) user association; (2) source of collection input; and (3) grouping with other similar central service-support functions.

If the primary criterion is to be the pattern of customer usage, PPC, TAB, and the Evaluation Staff in A/AID are logical candidates. About 25 percent of the present users are associated with PPC, and the other two organizations contribute large proportions. Significant in this equation, however, is that this pattern of usage is not what it should be if the collection were fully used. If the objective of the ARC -- providing the means by which AID project and program experience is used in planning and programming new activities -- is to be achieved, project planners and monitors, technical personnel, and other operationally oriented individuals in the regional bureaus and missions should become significant users of the material. A primary effort of the ARC in the future should be to achieve such patterns of utilization.

If the subject content of the collection is to be the primary rationale for placing the function, TAB and the Program Evaluation Staff are primary contenders in that the collection is roughly divided -- both now and under improved retention criteria -- between technical assistance and program evaluation documents.

In our judgment, however, both of these criteria miss altogether the basic need of the ARC and its main characteristic. The ARC should be a program support service to the entire agency - to all of the organizations mentioned above and others. Both the pattern of customer usage -- especially when no single organization is predominant -- and the particular content of the collection are largely irrelevant to the basic requirement for proper placement - good management of a support service associated with other pertinent activities. Both PPC and TAB are highly professional and technical organizations with basic responsibilities and primary interests not in consonance with the administration of an Agency-wide support activity.

Leaving aside the question of professional librarian capacities -- which do not reside elsewhere in the Agency -- some of the key aspects of the ARC mission which must involve the parent organization include:

- systematically capturing appropriate documents from overseas as missions are cut back or closed;
- developing criteria for collection acquisition;
- developing and carrying out retirement schedules and disposal programs;
- encouraging utilization of the collection;
- devising appropriate records management techniques such as microfilming, retrieval, automated indexes, and the like;
- developing a systematic approach to the near 30 various reference collections throughout the Agency as well as expeditious means of tapping other record and library collections in Washington.

These activities would not be at home in PPC, TAB, or Program Evaluation in our judgment, and would not likely receive the management support -- either in interest or in technical capability -- which the ARC requires.

Examining these and other similar criteria, we conclude that the ARC would be most appropriately placed in the Records Management Branch, Office of Data Systems. There are several advantages which support this conclusion.

First, the Records Management Branch is responsible for the entire Agency's program of managing our records - working with Mission and AID/W organizations in controlling and retiring such materials. The same channel would provide a full screening of Mission records to assure that valuable and appropriate ones are captured for the ARC collection. Developing collection criteria - in concert with the present and potential users of the ARC - is an appropriate activity for the Branch. Developing and maintaining retirement schedules is similarly an appropriate activity.

The Agency Records Management Program is based on a decentralized approach, with Records Management Liaison Officers being used in all organizations. This same pattern of operation - in many cases using the same personnel - would be a very feasible pattern for developing a central cataloging system for the many dispersed technical reference collections, leaving the collections themselves with the immediate users.

Moreover, the Records Management Branch has been intimately involved for many months with the ARC in connection with studies of automated techniques, customer services, and other problems. There resides within the Branch the professional capability to redirect the ARC's activities toward a role of efficiency, economy of operation and greater service to the entire Agency.

Recommendation 18: That AA/PPC and AA/A transfer the ARC to the Records Management Branch, Office of Data Systems.

## A.I.D. Washington Reference Facilities

## Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination

1. A.I.D. Reference Center, Programming System Division, Office of Resources and Systems
2. International Financial Policy Division, Office of Development Finance
3. Loan Review Division, Office of Development Finance
4. Economic Data Division, Office of Statistics and Reports
5. Program Reports Division, Office of Statistics and Reports
6. Economic Research Support Staff, Office of Management
7. Office of International Assistance Coordination

## Technical Assistance Bureau

8. Office of Agriculture and Fisheries
9. Office of Development Administration
10. Office of Education and Human Resources
11. Office of Health
12. Office of Nutrition
13. Office of Population
14. Office of A.I.D. Research and University Relations
15. Urban Development Staff

## Office for Private Overseas Programs

16. Cooperative Development Service, Technical Programs Division
17. Voluntary Agencies Division

## Office of Administrative Services

18. Distribution Branch, Printing, Distribution, and Visual Presentation Division
19. Film Loan Library, Space and Property Management Division

## Other Offices

20. Files Section, Office of Audit, Auditor General
21. GC Files, Office of the General Counsel
22. Office of Labor Affairs
23. Office of Public Safety
24. Accounting Division, Office of the Controller
25. Congressional Documents, Congressional Liaison Staff, Office of Legislative Affairs
26. Public Services Division, Office of Public Affairs
27. Vietnam Reference Center, Public Affairs Staff, Associate Assistant Administrator for Administration, Bureau for Supporting Assistance
28. Technical Reference Materials, Resources Support Staff, Office of Procurement