

# Changes in Media Services of Selected Public Libraries from 1978-1983

George T. Yeamans  
Professor

Department of Library and Information Science  
Ball State University

Public libraries, in addition to providing traditional library materials such as books and magazines for public use, also provide in some instances a variety of audiovisual media. In the spring of 1978, a survey was made of 102 selected public libraries by Mridula R. Jarial under the direction of this writer to ascertain the extent of their involvement in audiovisual programs.

In the fall of 1983, this investigator sent questionnaires to the same 102 public libraries to determine the extent to which audiovisual media and services are provided now as compared to six years ago. In this latest survey an attempt was made to ascertain the extent to which public libraries are making available new media such as videodiscs and microcomputer programs. Information on the amount of audiovisual equipment owned and made available to the public was solicited in the latest survey, but had not been requested in the earlier one.

The survey included two public libraries in all fifty states with the exception of Indiana. Four libraries in Indiana were selected for the study. Of the 102 survey forms sent out, 84 usable questionnaires were returned in time for the responses to be tabulated. The 82.35 percent return of usable questionnaires compares to a return of 75.49 percent in the 1978 survey. Three of the four Indiana public libraries included in the investigation responded to the questionnaires sent to them. It was not implied in the 1978 study that the public

libraries surveyed were representative or typical of all public libraries, nor is that implied in regard to this latest survey.

The first question in the survey asked if the library had a separate department for audiovisual media. Thirty-six respondents (42.86 percent) answered the question affirmatively in the recent study compared to 38.96 percent in 1978. All three of the Indiana libraries responding to the questionnaire reported having a separate audiovisual department.

Forty-three libraries (51.19 percent) replied that they have one or more full-time staff members assigned to the audiovisual department or to audiovisual activities. The same number reported that they have one or more part-time staff members assigned to that department or to audiovisual activities. The range of full-time audiovisual personnel is from 1 to 12; the average is 3 per library. This is the same range reported in the 1978 survey, but the average number of staff workers per library was not calculated previously. The three Indiana libraries participating in the study also averaged 3 full-time audiovisual staff workers per library. The range of part-time audiovisual staff members is from 1 to 7, with an average of 2.33 per library. The average for the three Indiana libraries is 3.3 part-time audiovisual staff workers.

How much money are the public libraries in this study spending on audiovisual materials today? It was difficult to get a complete and accurate answer to this question, because some libraries refused to report specific dollar amounts for a variety of reasons. Several pointed out that they lease motion pictures or belong to co-ops. However, 63 libraries did report specific amounts for the purchase of audiovisual materials. The range of amounts reported was from \$600 to \$250,000, compared to a range of from \$600 to \$100,000 in 1978. The average amount allocated to the current audiovisual materials budget is \$25,752 per library reporting dollar amounts. The current audiovisual materials budgets for the three Indiana libraries averages \$34,033 per library. Indeed, one of the Indiana public libraries has the highest current materials budget of all the libraries reporting dollar amounts in the study.

### Software

Phonograph recordings are the most popular audiovisual medium in terms of ownership, just as they were in 1978. Seventy-four libraries (88.10 percent) reported owning from 200 to 36,000 recordings, and the average number of phonograph recordings is 7,047 per library. One Indiana public library owns 36,000 phonograph recordings, the highest total. The other two Indiana public libraries in the survey own 11,191 and 3,700 recordings.

Cassette tape recordings are the next most popular format in terms of the percentage of libraries owning them. This is the same

position they held in the 1978 study. Sixty-seven libraries (79.76 percent) own from 6 to 8,752 cassette recordings; the average is 1,370 per library. The three Indiana libraries average 1,169 cassette tapes per library, although one of the libraries reported owning 2,400 cassette tapes.

Only three libraries (3.57 percent) reported owning reel-to-reel tape recordings. The range is from 30 reels to 361 reels, and the average is 230 per library. Several libraries indicated that they had phased out this format. In the 1978 survey, 13 libraries (16.88 percent) reported owning reel-to-reel tapes. None of the three Indiana libraries owns this audio format.

Four libraries (4.76 percent) indicated ownership of from 30 to 200 8-track cartridges; the average is 124 per library. This format was not included in the 1978 investigation and no Indiana library reported owning 8-track cartridges in the recent survey.

Fifty-four libraries (64.29 percent) indicated that they own 16mm motion pictures, and several libraries lease motion pictures or belong to co-ops. This is approximately the same percentage of libraries that reported owning motion pictures in 1978. The range in the number of motion pictures owned is from 1 to 3,452; the average per library is 747. The three Indiana libraries in the survey average 1,089 motion pictures per library.

The 8mm motion picture format is not owned by as many libraries today as in 1978. Fifty-one libraries (66.23 percent) circulated 8mm motion pictures in 1978 compared to 40 libraries (47.62 percent) circulating them today. The average number of 8mm motion pictures owned is 354. Each of the three Indiana libraries in the study owns some 8mm motion pictures, averaging 267 per library.

In the 1978 study only 22.08 percent of the libraries surveyed had video cassettes, and no differentiation was made as to the type of cassette owned (VHS, Betamax, etc.). In the recent study, 32 libraries (38.10 percent) indicated ownership of VHS video cassettes. All three of the Indiana libraries own VHS video cassettes with the average amounting to 180 per library. The next most popular video format is the  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch video cassette. Nineteen libraries (22.62 percent) reported ownership of from 5 to 300 of this format, with an average of 115 per library. No Indiana library in the survey indicated that it owns  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch video cassettes for public use. Thirteen libraries (15.48 percent) in the survey own the Betamax format of video cassette recording. The range reported was from 4 to 100 with an average of 42 per library. One of the three Indiana libraries reported ownership of 50 Betamax video cassettes. Only 5.19 percent of the libraries in the 1978 survey owned reel-to-reel video recordings. In the recent study, only 2 libraries (2.38 percent) indicated that they own this format. Neither was an Indiana library.

The latest video format, the videodisc, was so new in 1978 that it was not included in that investigation. Today, there is evidence that libraries are beginning to acquire this medium. The RCA/stylus type videodisc format (CED) is owned by 5 libraries (5.95 percent). The range of ownership reported was from 4 to 207, with an average of 76 per library. The laser type videodisc is owned by 4 libraries (4.76 percent). The range in the number of laser videodiscs owned was from 7 to 146, with an average ownership of 59. None of the three Indiana libraries owns this video format.

Filmstrips are still a popular medium, although not quite as many libraries in the study group own them today as in 1978, when 71.43 percent of the libraries reported owning filmstrips compared to 64.29 percent in this recent survey. The range in the number of filmstrips owned by libraries in this study was from 35 to 4,621, with an average of 505 per library. The data were not reported in the 1978 survey in such a manner as to make a comparison of the range and average number owned. All three of the Indiana libraries participating in the study reported owning filmstrips, averaging 181 per library.

In the 1978 survey, 46.75 percent of the libraries reported owning slides, and in the recent study, 38.10 percent of the libraries indicated that they made slides available to the public. The largest number of slides reported in this survey was 25,000. An Indiana public library owns 21,288 slides which was the third largest number enumerated in the investigation.

Microcomputer software was too new to be included in the 1978 study, but was included in the recent survey. Ten libraries (11.90 percent) reported owning floppy disks, ranging in number from 8 to 95 with an average of 37 per library. Microcomputer programs on cassette tape were reported as library holdings by six libraries (7.14 percent), with a range from 1 to 53. The average number of cassette tapes per library is 20. One library indicated that it owns 3 ROM cartridges, and one reported ownership of 20 hard disks. None of the three Indiana libraries reported that it makes computer programs available to the public.

In the 1983 study, 67.86 percent of the libraries circulated framed prints. The number of prints ranged from 6 to 4,100. All three Indiana libraries indicated ownership of framed prints. One Indiana public library owned the greatest number (4,100) of framed prints. This library also reported having 150,000 mounted prints in its collection but this category was not included in this survey. In the 1978 study, 71.43 percent of the libraries circulated art prints.

Posters were circulated by 19.48 percent of the libraries in 1978 compared to 14.29 percent of the libraries in the recent survey. The smallest number of posters reported was 12 and the largest

number was 1,875, compared to a range of from 1 to 1,025 in the 1978 investigation. One of the three Indiana libraries indicated it makes available 340 posters.

Sculptures are circulated by fewer of the public libraries now than in 1978 but are owned in larger numbers. In 1978, 32.47 percent of the libraries circulated from 2 to 50 pieces of sculpture compared to 23.81 percent of the libraries in the recent survey that loan from 6 to 165 units of sculpture. One of the three Indiana libraries owns sculptures, and this library owns the largest number of sculpture pieces of any library in the study.

### Equipment

Data on the ownership of audiovisual equipment were not solicited in the 1978 study but were in the recent one. The most popular item in terms of the number of libraries indicating ownership is the 16mm motion picture projector. Sixty libraries in the survey (71.43 percent) own from 1 to 31 projectors. This also represents the most popular unit of equipment in terms of the average number owned, since the average of 5.37 projectors per library reporting ownership exceed the averages for other types of audiovisual equipment.

Cassette tape recorders are next in popularity both in terms of the number of libraries in the survey owning them and in terms of the average number owned per library. Fifty-six libraries (66.67 percent) own from 1 to 36 cassette tape recorders with an average of 5.00 per library. Two of the three Indiana libraries responding to the questionnaire own cassette tape recorders, averaging 2.66 per library.

Phonographs also are owned by many libraries, reflecting the continuing popularity of phonograph recordings as an audio medium. Of the 84 libraries answering the questionnaire, 53 (63.10 percent) own from 1 to 44 phonographs, an average of 4.74 per library. Two of the three Indiana libraries included in the study own 6 phonographs apiece.

Filmstrip and slide projectors are very close in terms of ownership, as 52 libraries (61.90 percent) own filmstrip projectors compared to 51 libraries (60.71 percent) owning slide projectors. However, the range of filmstrip projectors owned (1 to 40) is considerably larger than the range in the number of slide projectors (1 to 10). The average number of filmstrip projectors per library is 3.98 compared to 2.12 slide projectors. Two of the three Indiana libraries included in the survey reported owning slide projectors, averaging 1.33 per library, and all three report owning filmstrips projectors, averaging 1.00 per library.

Of the video machines, the video cassette recorder (VCR) is much more popular than the other types. Thirty-four libraries (40.48

percent) own from 1 to 10 video cassette recorders, an average of 2.35 per library. Five libraries (5.95 percent) in the survey reported ownership of videodisc machines, averaging 1.60 per library; only three libraries indicated that they own the older reel-to-reel video tape recorders, averaging 1.00 per library. Two of the three Indiana libraries reported ownership of from 1 to 5 video cassette recorders, and none reported ownership of videodisc or reel-to-reel machines.

Thirty-four libraries (40.48 percent) reported ownership of from 1 to 10 TV monitors, with an average of 2.44 per library. Two of the three Indiana libraries in the study owned TV monitors at the time of the survey.

Seven libraries (8.33 percent) indicated that they have TV projection systems, ranging from 1 to 3 per library system. One of the Indiana libraries states that a TV projection system is owned by the telecommunications department and is used occasionally.

Perhaps the newest type of equipment to be owned by public libraries is the microcomputer. Twenty-five libraries (29.76 percent) stated that they own microcomputers, ranging in number from 1 to 64 per library. Microcomputer ownership among the 25 libraries averages 5.45 per library. A variety of microcomputer brands are represented, but the most popular are Apple, Radio Shack TRS-80, and Commodore Vic 20. At the time of the survey, none of the three Indiana libraries had microcomputers.

### Services

Film forums are sponsored by 36 libraries (42.86 percent). In 1978, 49.35 percent held film forums. Several libraries indicated that film forums include video presentations. The film forums are sponsored as often as twice weekly by three of the reporting libraries. Nine of the 36 libraries state that they have film showings quarterly or several times per year. Two of the libraries offer them only once a year. Several libraries answered in terms of the number of film forums that are held per year such as 10, 12, or 30 times. One of the Indiana libraries reported that it sponsors film forums.

To what extent did public libraries in the survey participate in the production of radio programs, television programs, video tapes, etc.? Twenty-three libraries (27.38 percent) reported that they participate in the production of these media. Seven of the 23 libraries were involved in programming activities for radio, and 15 indicated they were participating in television programs, 11 of which involve cable TV. Four of the 23 libraries indicated only that they participate in some type of production but did not specify what type. Several libraries were involved in more than one type of program medium. Not all of the 23 libraries specified the type of programming with which they were involved, but the most frequently mentioned types included storytelling for children and library

publicity programs. Five of the 23 libraries, including one Indiana library, reported that they provide equipment and studio facilities for public access television. In addition to broadcast media, five libraries indicated that they produce videotape programs for non-broadcast purposes. These programs are on state and local subjects, training modules, interviews, and documentaries.

Fifteen libraries reported that they provide other types of equipment, materials, and services besides those already identified. The items of equipment most frequently mentioned were opaque and overhead projectors; other types of materials included sheet music, puppets, toys, games, story boxes, book/cassette combinations, stereoptican slides, map collections, microforms, and water color and oil paintings by local artists. One library reported that two staff members provide outreach film/story programs to area hospitals, nursing homes, day-care centers, and other public libraries. Each of these full-time positions provides 75 programs monthly.

### Survey Summary

This study attempted to ascertain changes in audiovisual programs in 102 selected public libraries between 1978 and 1983. Eighty-four usable questionnaires were returned, including three from Indiana libraries. More of the libraries in the group surveyed reported separate audiovisual departments in 1983 compared to 1978. The range of full-time audiovisual personnel was from 1 to 12 in both surveys, and the range in amounts spent for audiovisual materials was from \$600 to \$250,000 in the 1983 survey compared to a range of \$600 to \$100,000 in 1978. One of the Indiana libraries reported the largest budget for audiovisual materials.

The most popular materials in terms of ownership in the 1978 and recent surveys were phonograph recordings and cassette tape recordings respectively. 16mm motion pictures are still among the most popular media, with approximately the same percentage of libraries owning them now as in 1978, but fewer libraries reported ownership of 8mm motion pictures. More Libraries own video cassettes today than in 1978, with the VHS format being the most popular, followed by the ¾-inch cartridge and Betamax formats. The reel-to-reel videotape has been phased out by most of the libraries. The newest video medium, the videodisc, was not reported on in the 1978 survey, but only a small percentage of libraries had acquired this format by the time the present study was made. Libraries are beginning to include microcomputer hardware and software for patron use. The percentage of libraries owning posters and sculptures had declined slightly compared to the 1978 survey.

The 1978 survey did not solicit information about equipment ownership, but the latest study revealed that 16mm projectors,

cassette tape recorders, and phonographs are the most popular items owned by libraries.

Thirty-six libraries (42.86 percent) in the current survey reported sponsoring film forums which include video presentations. Twenty-three libraries (27.38 percent) participate in the production of radio and television programs and video tapes. The most frequently mentioned types of programs produced were children's and library publicity programs.

### Conclusion

Conclusions based on the data ascertained in this study apply only to the public libraries included in the investigation. However, in order for one to consider these conclusions from a somewhat broader perspective, this writer will make brief references to several other studies or books.

Emanuel T. Prozano in *Audiovisual Media and Libraries* pointed out that audiovisual media have long been a part of library collections and that some AV media, such as record and film collections, have been relatively commonplace in public libraries.<sup>1</sup> One may conclude that record and film collections are still the most commonplace AV media in the public libraries surveyed by this writer.

In *Video in Libraries: A Status Report, 1977-78* Seth Goldstein concluded that video still held promise for librarians as a means for disseminating information and attracting and holding patrons but was disappointing in terms of its accomplishments. However, he stated his belief that video collections would grow in importance provided librarians lay the proper groundwork.<sup>2</sup>

One may conclude from the data gathered in this current study that video cassette collections have grown in the public libraries since they were surveyed by Jarial in 1978, but reel-to-reel tape collections have been phased out by almost all of the libraries. Jarial did not solicit data on videodiscs in her study, but one may conclude from the data obtained in the latest survey that both the RCA/stylus and laser videodisc formats have not gained widespread acceptance by public libraries. No attempt was made in this study to ascertain reasons for the lack of popularity of this medium. Efrem Sigel, Mark Schubin, and Paul F. Merrill in their conclusions in *Video Discs - The Technology, the Applications and the Future* point out that economic issues, lack of standardization, and competition from different technologies are factors affecting the future of the videodisc medium. They suggest that the popularity of the videodisc will increase as the unique features that appeal to the most users are uncovered and made available at affordable prices.<sup>3</sup>

In *New Media in Public Libraries*, James W. Brown reported on a study conducted during 1975-1976. Although many public libraries



at that time did not provide a full range of media services, Brown pointed out the signs of considerable change in that direction.<sup>4</sup>

The data provided by the libraries surveyed in 1978 by Jarial and more recently by this author seem to substantiate the positive changes to which Brown alluded. Ownership of a wide range of media was reported by the libraries and included such formats as audio and video recordings, motion pictures, filmstrips, slides, framed prints, posters, and sculptures. Some also circulate sheet music, toys, games, puppets, etc. Microcomputer software and hardware are made available to patrons by some libraries. Many libraries provide AV equipment for patron use, and there seems to be a positive relationship between the amount of equipment owned and the popularity of the format used with the equipment. Participation in the production of videotapes and radio and television programs is a commonplace activity in some of the libraries, as are film and video forums.

Although some libraries reported that negative economic conditions had adversely affected their audiovisual programs, most seem to be maintaining the quality of their programs, and there is evidence that some libraries have improved the quality of their media services since the 1978 study.

All in all, there were no dramatic or unexpected changes in the audiovisual programs in the libraries studied in 1978 and again in 1983. The most popular media then are still the most popular now, and the phase-out of obsolete formats has been accompanied by the addition of newer ones. The fact that almost 30 percent of the libraries surveyed in 1983 have purchased microcomputers for patron use may be indicative of the start of a trend that will continue. This will probably be the case only if there is proven patron demand for this service, for it appears that most library directors invest their funds very wisely.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Emanuel T. Prostano, *Audiovisual Media and Libraries* (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1972), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Seth Goldstein, *Video in Libraries: A Status Report, 1977-78* (White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry Publications, 1977), pp. 57, 62.

<sup>3</sup> Efreem Sigel, Mark Schubin, and Paul F. Merrill, *Video Discs - The Technology, the Applications and the Future* (White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry Publications, 1980), p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> James W. Brown, *New Media in Public Libraries*, (Syracuse, N.Y.: Jeffrey Norton Publishers, 1976), p. 2.