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STATE COMPTROLLER



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STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

November 28, 2000

Mr. Albert C. Wiltshire
President
Brooklyn Borough Public Library
Grand Army Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11238

Re: Report 2000-F-19

Dear Mr. Wiltshire:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article X, Section 5, of the State Constitution, and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law, we have reviewed the actions taken by officials of the Brooklyn Borough Public Library (BPL) as of October 4, 2000, to implement the recommendations contained in our audit report, *The Brooklyn Borough Public Library Delivery of Services and Selected Financial Management Practices*, (Report 97-N-12). Our report, which was issued on May 10, 1999, examined whether BPL was delivering services to Brooklyn residents according to its mission statement, as well as guidelines established by the New York State Education Department (Department). We also sought to determine whether BPL had implemented controls and procedures that provided adequate protection of its assets.

Background

The Brooklyn Borough Public Library system was founded in 1896 and includes a Central Library, a Business Library and 58 branch libraries. It is a not-for-profit corporation supported by Federal, State and New York City appropriations, as well as funds from private sources. BPL serves the 2.5 million residents of the Borough of Brooklyn, and has about 10 million visitors a year. For fiscal year 2000, BPL received \$63 million in funding from New York City, \$7 million from New York State, and \$3 million from private contributions.

State Education Law authorizes the Department to incorporate any library whose purposes are of educational or cultural value, and authorizes the Department to visit, examine or inspect any institution under its educational supervision. The Department's Division of Library Development is responsible for administering State programs for the public libraries. BPL is registered with the Department as a not-for-profit organization and must abide by the Department's rules, regulations,

and fiscal guidelines. Our prior report contained fourteen recommendations addressed to BPL and three recommendations addressed to the Department. This report reviews the actions taken by BPL to implement the fourteen recommendations addressed to it. A separate report (Report 2000-F-29) was issued on October 18, 2000 to the Department concerning the three recommendations it was responsible for addressing.

Summary Conclusions

Our prior audit found that BPL could deliver library services more effectively if changes were made in branch operating hours. We also found that the Connecting Libraries and School project, a program that encourages children to read, served fewer children than intended. We further determined that books and other materials are not adequately protected against theft and loss, and according to industry standards, many of the Library's books were outdated. Our follow-up review found that BPL has generally taken steps to implement most of the fourteen recommendations contained in our prior report.

Summary of Status of Prior Audit Recommendations

Of the fourteen prior audit report recommendations, BPL officials have implemented 11 and have partially implemented one. One recommendation was not implemented and one recommendation was not applicable at the present time.

Follow-up Observations

Recommendation 1

Consider usage indicators when scheduling hours branch libraries will be open.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - Modifications to branch hours at individual locations are continuously being made, based on factors such as circulation, attendance, size of building and program and service offerings. In addition, since our audit, BPL has added 100 additional service hours throughout the system.

Recommendation 2

Identify the branch libraries that are underutilized, and consider ways to increase their usage by the communities they serve.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - As part of a pilot project, BPL identified three branches that were underutilized and took actions that led to significant increases in usage indicators such as circulation. In addition, the innovations used at these three branches will be replicated at an additional nine branches with funding that is pending. BPL has also seen increased usage throughout the

system by setting and exceeding its usage targets.

Recommendation 3

Consider polling Brooklyn users about their library service preferences, and take the results of these polls into consideration when evaluating possible revisions in the hours branch libraries are open.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - As part of a strategic planning process in fiscal year 2000, ten user/non-user focus group sessions were held with individuals representing the communities throughout the Borough to assess their service preferences. In addition, a random telephone survey was conducted in June 2000 to assess residents' opinions about library service priorities and to understand why people use or do not use the library. The findings from both activities were to be incorporated into BPL's planning process for determining the future direction of service delivery.

Recommendation 4

Evaluate the benefits of having neighboring libraries open late on different evenings.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - BPL officials stated that BPL continues to monitor the distribution of evening hours at branches. BPL recognizes that there is duplication, and it is working with its regional administrative teams to continue to make adjustments.

Recommendation 5

Amend the weeding policy to include specific guidelines that library branch managers should follow when deciding whether to keep outdated books on the shelves.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - BPL has not completed amending its weeding policy (revisions are in process). However, BPL officials believe that sufficient steps have been taken to improve the weeding of materials. For example, training is provided to all core level staff in weeding guidelines. In addition, the number of items being weeded has increased significantly since our prior audit, and performance measurement for weeding has been set.

Recommendation 6

Direct all branch libraries in the BPL system to comply with the weeding policy.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - As previously discussed, BPL has increased significantly the number of items

being weeded, and its efforts to keep materials up to date have been a part of its ongoing inventory of all branches and the Central Library. The number of items weeded has increased from 262,000 in fiscal year 1998 to 400,000 in fiscal year 1999, an increase of 53 percent. In addition, weeding procedures are now included in the core level training provided to all librarians, and the procedures are stressed to the staff as being a part of their daily activities.

Recommendation 7

Conduct an up-front survey of Library sites in conjunction with representatives of the service provider when further installations of computers and related equipment are planned.

Status - Not Applicable

Agency Action - The BPL has no current plans for any new major system installations. This recommendation should be considered the next time BPL plans on installing a new computer system.

Recommendation 8

Develop a formal means of distributing, monitoring, and tracking the deployment of field staff assigned to perform CLASP-related duties.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - Beginning in July 1999, BPL changed the manner for assigning staff of the Connecting Libraries and School Project (CLASP). BPL assigns staff to those branch libraries that serve neighborhoods with high concentrations of school age children. The branches were given lists of schools to serve and numeric targets for the number of students that should participate in the program. In addition, CLASP activities are now documented on monthly reports by branch showing the names of the CLASP staff assigned, the schools visited and the students served.

Recommendation 9

Direct all branches, including the Central Library, to begin tattle-taping all new books and popular items as well as all existing hardbound books in their collections.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - BPL now pays an additional dollar for each item it receives to have them pre tattle-taped.

Recommendation 10

Arrange for periodic testing and maintenance of the security systems at all branches.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - BPL officials indicated that on each public service day, Special Officers assigned safety and security duties conduct inspections of branch and Central Library theft detection devices. Any problems found with the equipment are noted in a log. BPL has a maintenance contract with Knogo, which manufactures the theft detection devices in use at 57 of the branches and the Central Library so that when theft detection or other loss prevention devices malfunction or need repair, a technical service company is available to respond.

Recommendation 11

Increase staff awareness about the need to secure the Library's property.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - BPL officials indicated that additional loss prevention security measures have been taken including securing access to videotapes at all branches and the Central Library. Regional Security Supervisors and Regional Librarians conduct training to increase staff awareness about the need to secure library property.

Recommendation 12

Take periodic inventories. These might be done by category of materials, or in staggered periods of years.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - Inventory of all collections of the library is continuing, with branch libraries having 90 percent of their collections inventoried to date. Completion of the inventory for all circulating collections is scheduled to be completed by the end of fiscal year 2001. BPL officials indicated that the taking of inventory has become part of the routine of being a librarian, and is an on-going activity.

Recommendation 13

Identify and investigate differences found between the perpetual inventory records and the physical counts.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - While performing the inventory, differences between what is on the shelf and what is on the inventory are investigated, and the appropriate status is determined. If an item not on the shelf is overdue for more than 75 days and has an outstanding value of \$25 or more, it is referred to a private company for collection. If still not returned for a period of time, it is removed from the collection. BPL officials believe that taking inventory has resulted in a much more accurate database of materials on hand, has been a great vehicle for keeping their collection up-to-date and provided for a constant means of weeding.

Recommendation 14

Establish an acceptable rate of loss over a specific period and, when this rate is exceeded, review controls to ascertain the cause of the losses.

Status - Not Implemented

Agency Action - BPL officials do not agree with the practicality of establishing a system-wide acceptable rate of loss. They indicated that there are no industry standards for expected loss rates. In the absence of such industry standards, BPL officials conclude that individual branch rates would have to be established, a task complex to implement given the variation in BPL branches. BPL officials also believe that its control processes and improvements in materials security have reduced loss due to non-return.

The major contributor to this report was Michael Solomon.

We would appreciate your response to this report within 30 days, indicating any actions planned or taken to address the one unresolved matter discussed in this report. We also thank Brooklyn Public Library management and staff for the courtesies they extended to us during this review.

Very truly yours,

Jerry Barber
Audit Director

cc: Chancellor Hayden, University of the State of New York
Commissioner Mills, State Education Department
M. Gomez, Brooklyn Public Library
Charles Conaway, Division of the Budget