

# The Management Challenge

## *in the Federal Judiciary's Library Systems*

*Professional Perspectives — Tools and Techniques of the Trade. The Professional Development Committee encourages members to continue to explore topics after presentations at the local, regional and national levels. We welcome your comments and article suggestions. Please contact Lori Hedstrom at 651/687-5891 or lori.hedstrom@westgroup.com.*

The libraries of the 13 federal circuits are multilocation libraries that must serve users of various kinds, spread out over several states. What are the challenges to circuit librarians and their library staffs in managing their library systems? Are they similar to managing other multilocation libraries? The federal circuit library system creates some unique circumstances, but overall provides an informative model for multilocation libraries.

The federal judiciary's library systems are the means by which library service is provided to the third branch of the federal government. As there are 13 Federal Circuits, so there are 13 circuit library systems. Each serves more than one federal court. The library for the Federal Circuit serves two courts, the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and the United States Court of Federal Claims. The library for the District of Columbia Circuit serves three courts: the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and the district and bankruptcy courts of the district. The remaining 11 numbered circuits have multilocation libraries and provide services to their own courts of appeals, five to 15 district courts and five to 13 bankruptcy courts.

In the 1970s, after a study by the Federal Judicial Center of the existing chambers and library collections in the federal courthouses nationwide, the federal circuit library system was modeled after the 3rd Circuit. In the 3rd Circuit, the circuit headquarters library was in Philadelphia, Pa., and satellite libraries were located throughout the circuit, which encompasses the states of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey and the territory of the Virgin Islands.

Under this model, each existing court of appeals library located at its court's headquarters became the main library for the circuit. The process transformed existing libraries in other locations within a circuit, which may or may not have previously been under the supervision of

a circuit headquarters library, into satellite libraries. This included libraries providing service to courts of appeals judges located outside the administrative center of their courts and those serving district courts. The director of each circuit library system is called the circuit librarian, a term that can cause confusion outside the federal judiciary, with correspondence sometimes sent to the circulation librarian by mistake. However, it fits perfectly into a court structure where there are circuit executives, circuit clerks of court and circuit judges, who in earlier times rode the circuit by horseback or horse-drawn carriage. Today, circuit librarians ride the circuit to visit their satellite libraries and other court locations.

The plan also anticipated that additional satellite libraries would be created if approved by the circuit and if certain basic guidelines authorized by the Judicial Conference were met. At the establishment of the circuit library systems in the late 1970s and early '80s, 11 of the current circuits existed. The 11th Circuit was introduced when the old 5th Circuit, covering six states, split into 2 three-state circuits in 1981. Existing libraries in those states formed the core of the 11th Circuit's new library system. The Federal Circuit was created in 1982 from the United States Court of Claims and the United States Court of Customs and Patent Appeals. At least two circuits — the 7th and the 10th — had only one formal library prior to the Federal Judicial Center study. Currently, the number of libraries in the multilocation circuit library systems ranges from four in the 1st circuit (headquartered in Boston, with satellites in Concord, N.H., Hato Rey, Puerto Rico, and Providence, R.I.) to 22 in the 9th Circuit (headquartered in San Francisco, with satellites over the vast geographic expanse from Anchorage, Alaska, to Tucson, Ariz., to Agana, Guam). The median is nine libraries per circuit. Some circuit library histories have been published. A history of the 7th Circuit library system, which grew from one to its

current seven libraries in the 1980s, will appear in a forthcoming issue of the Chicago Association of Law Libraries' *CALL Bulletin*.

Circuit librarians and their library staffs face many challenges in managing their library systems. Those challenges are both similar to and different from managing other types of multilocation law libraries. Mark Estes' September 2000 article in *AALL Spectrum*, "Managing Multilocation Libraries," identified communication as a key issue. While he focused on law firm libraries, his advice is applicable to all types of multilocation libraries. Like some law firm library directors, the circuit librarians must manage a system spread out over great distances. Communication over such distances is no less important for being technologically easier than in the past.

However, there are determinative differences between circuit and law firm libraries. One is the structure within which the federal judiciary and how its libraries operate. Many elements of that structure, not surprisingly, come out of Washington, D.C. These include:

- Congress, which makes appropriations and passes legislation affecting the operations of the federal courts;
- The Judicial Conference of the United States, which makes policy for the administration of the U.S. courts and, in particular, its Committee on Automation and Technology's Subcommittee on Libraries [see *The Judicial Conference of the United States and its Committees* (1998)];
- The Administrative Office of the United States, which is the central administrative arm of the federal judiciary and carries out the policies established by the Judicial Conference, and, in particular, the Appellate Court and Circuit Administration Division, which supports the library program,

# A Desktop Learning Opportunity

along with the various advisory and working groups in the administrative office made up of judges and court administrators, including librarians [see *The History of the Administrative Office of the United States: Sixty Years of Service to the Judiciary* (2000)];

- The Federal Judicial Center, which is the research and education agency of the federal judiciary (see its Web site at [www.fjc.gov](http://www.fjc.gov)); and
- Various federal agencies, including the judiciary's landlord, the General Services Administration.

This structure, along with the realities of managing a multilocation library, leads to several tips that circuit librarians should consider when carrying out the mission of the library:

**Tip 1:** An in-depth understanding of the structure governing and influencing the Federal Judiciary is elemental in managing a circuit library system. The circuit librarian and the library staff must know the key players and maintain excellent communication with them. Circuit librarians should ask themselves a number of questions:

- Is a member of the Committee on Automation and Technology a judge on one of my courts?
- Is the judge located in a courthouse with one of our libraries?
- Is he or she a heavy user of the library or our library services?
- Is he or she a user of WESTLAW or the Internet?
- Have I made him or her aware of library projects, issues or concerns?
- Has he or she made me aware of issues the committee is working on that may influence library operations?

**Tip 2:** Participating in the advisory and working groups is essential. Doing so leads to understanding the structure of the system and becoming aware of new plans and the status of ongoing projects.

It creates the opportunity for input and to affect the outcome on the libraries. Participation also helps establish valuable contacts across managerial lines with judges and court administrators in other circuits. Because there are only 13 circuit librarians, everyone has the opportunity to participate and to become a point person for their own circuits and their librarian colleagues. Other library staff are also encouraged to participate in these groups.

Estes' article also discussed the law firm culture. Similarly, each court has its own court culture. Each court has been affected by history, politics and geography. For example, colonial history is important in the 2nd Circuit states. The Civil War era has left its mark in the 4th. And in the 8th Circuit the range of territory, from Arkansas to North Dakota, has a large effect on court operations.

In addition to being affected by history and geography, each court has its own administrative style. The judges in each court have different career backgrounds, as practitioners, legislators, law professors, or state or local judges.

Most satellite libraries are in buildings that are primarily district courthouses. Even where circuit judges are resident, the local district court culture and operation will likely dominate. Each new staff person in a satellite library quickly learns this. In turn, the circuit librarians become as familiar with local factors affecting each satellite library within their circuits as with the interplay of the various court cultures at the circuit level.

**Tip 3:** While riding the circuit to meet with the satellite library staff, circuit librarians should take the opportunity to visit the local resident circuit judges, as well as district and bankruptcy judges. They should make a particular effort to meet with chief judges. Circuit librarians should also meet with district and bankruptcy clerks of court, chief probation and pretrial service officers, and other court personnel. If possible, they should meet with local GSA building managers. In these meetings national, circuit-wide and local projects, issues, and concerns can be discussed, including

those affecting the circuit library system and the local satellite library. Follow-up is important. The benefits to the circuit library program are tremendous, and not only because a local judge or court official may someday be on a critical committee.

Estes' article stated that "the linchpin for ... providing outstanding library service is the library staff." The managers of multilocation libraries may find it easy to concern themselves primarily with functions performed only at the headquarters library. But the manager's talent, interests and available time are spread among the entire library staff, and circuit-wide library programs benefit by taking advantage of this. Managers must use the abilities present throughout the circuit to provide service. For example, in the 6th Circuit, all library staff contribute articles to an online newsletter. In the 7th Circuit, the South Bend, Ind., satellite librarian manages the 7th Circuit library system's intranet and Internet links pages.

**Tip 4:** The talents and interests of the entire library staff should be used to pursue team and individual projects that benefit the entire circuit court family. The interplay between the courts at the circuit level creates a circuit culture and operation that differs significantly among the 13 circuits, but there are plenty of experiences to be shared throughout the circuit library system.

**Tip 5:** Circuit librarians shouldn't reinvent the wheel. They should communicate with their 12 colleagues on a regular basis and share information and ideas.

Managing a circuit library is a challenging task. The realities of multiple locations spread over a large distance, combined with issues of culture and the realities of the court structure make relationships and careful communication very important. Success results from working well with everyone involved, from judges and court clerks to library staff.

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