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Congress, 2d Session

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MULTIPLE LETTER CENTER

A REPORT

FROM

THE CHAIRMAN, HOUSE COMMISSION ON INFORMATION AND FACILITIES

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U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

75-721 WASHINGTON : 1976

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

THE HOUSE COMMISSION ON INFORMATION AND FACILITIES,
Washington, D.C., October —, 1976

The HONORABLE CARL ALBERT,
Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives,
The Capitol, Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: A report of the House Commission on Information and Facilities on the Multiple Letter Center is hereto attached.

This project was completed in compliance with the provisions of House Resolution 988 of the 93d Congress, which also provided that the Commission report its findings to the Speaker no later than January 2, 1977.

All Members of the Commission present at the meeting on September 30, 1976, voted unanimously to approve this report and the recommendations it contains.

Sincerely,

JACK BROOKS, *Chairman.*

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A REPORT OF THE HOUSE COMMISSION ON INFORMATION AND FACILITIES—MULTIPLE LETTER CENTER

Summary

Production of identical letters mailed to more than one addressee within an individual House office is less than fully efficient in terms of personnel and office allowance usage. In addition, such production is noisy and distracting to personnel not engaged in the project. The Commission chose to test a method of producing such multiple letters for a number of offices to learn whether this would free office personnel for more productive endeavors and whether such shared facilities could be cost effective.

A Multiple Letter Center was established in the Cannon Building and, on an experimental basis, was operated for a 6-month period, serving 18 Members whose offices were in close proximity to the facility.

The 6-month study revealed the value of such operations in freeing Members' staffs for more professional work and in reducing noise levels.

Participating Members' evaluations were uniformly positive. In addition a majority indicated a willingness to support such operations through contributions from their office allowances.

Analysis of operational factors, costs, and participating Members' evaluations indicate that Multiple Letter Centers could be operated without additional funding by serving those Members in fairly close proximity to the facility who are willing to contribute $3,000 per annum from their office allowances.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that the Clerk of the House consider the provisions of one or more Multiple Letter Centers in each of the House Office Buildings.

The Commission recommends that the Clerk solicit participation from individual Members willing to support such Centers through a contribution of $3,000 per annum from their office allowances.

The Commission further recommends that, upon the receipt of evidence of such intent from any 30 Members in any one House Office Building, the Clerk proceed to provide space, staffing, and equipment for the establishment of such a facility along the lines indicated in this report.

Introduction

When identical letters, individually typed, are required for several addressees, high-speed automatic typewriters are employed. Unless utilized on a full-time basis, these machines are expensive to lease and are not cost effective within the office of an individual Member of Congress. In addition, they are quite noisy in operation and distracting to personnel engaged in other activities.

Furthermore, multiple letters are merely production work and make minimum use of the generally high capabilities of the limited staff of an individual office. Equally important is the fact that this kind of production work does not need to be done within an individual office since personnel so involved do not require immediate access to office files or reference material. Finally, the existence of facilities for such production work outside of individual Members' offices could be expected to relieve some of the mounting pressure for additional personnel within the Members' offices.

Under the authority of H. Res. 988, the Commission on Information and Facilities conducted a 6-month demonstration study of the potential value of Multiple Letter Centers located in close proximity to individual Members' offices.

In this pilot project, one such Center was established in room 421 of the Cannon Building and served 18 Members' offices close to that location.

Background

The pilot project was designed to test the utility and convenience of a Multiple Letter Center to participating Members and also to develop guidelines covering operations and staffing of such a facility.

The study did not attempt to discover the optimum equipment for a Multiple Letter Center, nor did it test various machine systems. Instead, the project merely attempted to determine whether a Multiple Letter Center would be helpful to numbers of congressional offices. The operating authority in charge of such Centers, if and when they are established, would have the responsibility of determining the specific staffing and equipment needs of each such Center.

Initial staffing began in early November 1975. November and December 1975, served as a training period for the staff and a shakedown for the new-model equipment (Xerox 800 ETS typewriters).

As of January 1, 1976, with the equipment proven reliable and the staff well-trained, servicing of the 18 participating offices began. Work produced by the Center was performed under a specific set of guidelines (appendix I). Under the guidelines, quantities were limited to 5 to 500 pages per order; copy was required to be in the exact form needed; carbon copies would not be provided; stationery was to be furnished by each participating office; and each office was to deliver and pick up its orders. (The initial guidelines were supplemented during the project by the additional restriction that the Center would not produce "Dear Colleague" letters. During the course of the pilot project, it was decided to set aside one machine for "express" work, that is, at least 5, but fewer than 20 letters from a given original, to be completed within the same day.)

STAFF

The Multiple Letter Center was staffed by one supervisor at $12,000 per annum, three typists at $8,500, and two at $8,000 per annum each, and two part-time typists at approximately $5,000 per annum each, for a total personnel cost of $65,000 per annum (appendixes II and III).

No differences in productivity as among male and female workers, experienced and inexperienced workers, high school graduates and college graduates, or full-time and part-time workers were noted.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to how long any such workers would remain on this type of job on a permament basis or how long their productivity would remain high.

PROCEDURE

Form letters, typewritten lists of names and addresses, stationery supplies, and a completed job order form were submitted to the Multiple Letter Center by the participating office. After clarifying any obscure data, the supervisor accepted the material, logged in the job order by date and time, and assigned the work to a typist.

One of the six work stations was set aside for express work (5 to 20 letters), typed on a first-come-first-served basis. An exception was made where work had already been accomplished for one office; all other offices were serviced before returning to work for the first office.

The same rotating system was utilized for the remaining five work stations. Offices were serviced on a first-come-first-served basis; job orders of 5 to 500 sheets were accepted at any one time; but several job orders submitted at differing times by one office could not be consolidated. Each station was operated separately from the others; when work was submitted by six or more offices, six different offices were serviced at one time. At no time was more than one typewriter assigned to one office while others were waiting.

The supervisor, responsible for quality control, proofread all work after it was recorded. Additionally, the supervisor proofread final copy before advising an office by telephone that the work had been completed.

EQUIPMENT

Six machines, designated as Xerox 800 ETS, were used in the project. Specifications include:

Typewriter:	
Speed	Approximately 30 characters per second.
Writing line	13 inches.
Platen	15 inches.
Ribbon cartridges	Interchangeable film and fabric.
Size and weight:	
Typewriter	Height, 8½″; width, 24″; Depth, 20″; weight, 55 lbs.
Console	Height, 30½″; width, 12″; depth, 23″; weight, 140 lbs.
Electrical requirements:	
Voltage	105–120 VAC, single phase (two wires plus grounds), 15 amperes, 60 Hz.

The cost of the equipment, on a leased basis, was $1,820 per month for a total of $10,920 for the 6 months of the actual test.

The intent of the pilot project was not to test or compare equipment but only to probe the feasibility of the concept. If, and when, such multiple letter centers are created on a permanent basis this or other equipment might be employed.

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COST

Adding together the personnel cost of $65,000 and the equipment cost of $10,920 for the 6-month trial, the total per annum cost of the maintenance of the Center, at the time of the study, was $87,340. Dividing this cost on a per Member basis (apart from the varying levels of use from one office to another), the average per annum cost was $4,852.

Given the staffing and equipment of the Multiple Letter Center and operating under the same guidelines, the Center could have handled the work of perhaps 20 offices rather than 18. At this level, the average cost per participating office would be $4,375.

However, with a change in guidelines restricting letter length to no more than two pages, eliminating letters going to fewer than 20 recipients and requiring each participating office to channel its work to the Center from only one employee, it would be feasible for such a Center to service 30 offices. At that extent, cost of the Center could be covered by a contribution of $3,000 per office.

UTILIZATION

Average per Member utilization of the facility during the trial period, January 1, 1976, to June 30, 1976, was 4,209 letters. The smallest use, by one office, was for 386 letters; the largest use was for 10,245.

Participating offices soon learned that efficiency was increased by designating one staff person as coordinator of materials to be delivered to the Multiple Letter Center. It quickly became apparent that problems occur with offices who allowed any or all staff members to deliver work to the Center—priorities were not set, conflicts developed, and efficiency declined in the participating offices as well as in the Center.

EVALUATION

In May 1976, participating Members were queried about their use of the Multiple Letter Center and their suggestions for changes. Of the participating offices, 16 of the 18 responded. The responses were favorable although a few suggested changes were recommended (appendix IV).

In June 1976, participating Members were asked for their evaluation of the Multiple Letter Center by means of a one-page questionnaire. Again, 16 of the 18 participating offices responded (appendix V).

These responses were uniformly favorable, with all participating Members responding indicating their desire to have such Centers available in the future and most expressing willingness to support such Centers by means of a portion of their office allowance.

Only two offices indicated a willingness to accept a cut in staff allowances of one person to support such a Center. However, 10 of the 16 offices responding indicated a willingness to accept a cut in dollar allowances ranging from $1,000 per annum to $5,000 per annum with the median response at $3,000 and the average response at $2,650.

Conclusion

Multiple Letter Centers located within House Office Buildings, each for the use of approximately 30 Members' offices, appear to be highly useful adjuncts to current congressional office procedures.

Such Centers could be operated without additional funding by serving those Members in fairly close proximity to the facility who are willing to contribute $3,000 per annum from their office allowances.

APPENDIX I

Guidelines—Multiple Letter Center

Quantity

Five to 500 pages per job order.

If submitted at one time, will accept separate batches totaling 500.

Copy

To be submitted to the Center in the exact form required by the participating office. The Center will not be responsible for spelling, grammar, form, et cetera, other than in the form submitted.

Copy will be submitted with typewritten lists of addresses to be used. The Center will not accept original incoming correspondence.

Zip codes must be inserted by the participating office.

Carbon Copies

Will not be typed. The Center will return two photo copies of the sample letter with each completed batch. The Center will not add file designations or other notations to the photo copies.

Supplies

Stationery, envelopes, et cetera, must be furnished by each participating office with each job order.

The Center will not maintain a stock of each individual office's stationery supplies.

Delivery

Each office will deliver the material to the Multiple Letter Center.

When the work is completed, the participating office will be telephoned. The participating office will pick up the completed work from the Multiple Letter Center.

Unless otherwise specifically instructed by the participating office, the following procedures apply:

1. The date will be centered in the middle of the page under the last line of the letterhead.

1a. The letter will be approximately centered on the page.

2. The first line of the inside address will be the name of the person writing. The name will always start with a title (Mr., Mrs., Dr., etc.) *or* will end with a title (John Doe, M.D., etc.).

3. Words in the inside address will *not* be abbreviated.

4. The salutation will include the title and the last name, followed by a colon (Dear Mrs. Doe:).

5. Paragraphs will be indented five (5) spaces.

6. The complimentary closing will be offcentered 2 spaces to the right of the page.

7. The Member's name will not be typed under the complimentary closing.

8. The enclosure line will not be abbreviated.

9. On two-page, three-page, et cetera letters, the page always begins with a heading at the lefthand margin at the top of the page including the full name of the party addressed (in identical form as on the first line of the inside address), the page number, and the date, as follows:

Name
Date
Page ___

APPENDIX II

Job Description—Supervisor—Multiple Letter Center

1. Receives material from participating office.
2. Logs in material.
3. Writes up job order for each batch submitted by participating office.
4. Attaches time log to each batch.
5. Assigns work to individual.
6. Proofs recorded material.
7. Proofs first printout.
8. Receives material for final approval.
9. Calls participating office.

APPENDIX III

Job Description—Xerox 800 Operator—Multiple Letter Center

1. Receives logged-in material from supervisor.
2. Maintains time log of work in progress.
3. Submits copy of recorded material to supervisor for proofing.
4. Submits first copy of printout to supervisor for proofing.
5. Submits finished material to supervisor for final approval.

APPENDIX IV

Compiled From 16 Replies

1. Is the Multiple Letter Center proving beneficial in freeing your current personnel for more productive endeavors? Yes, 16; No, 0.

2. Do you coordinate use of the Multiple Letter Center through one person in your office who sets priorities, and so forth? Yes, 15; No, 1.

3. Does your use of the Multiple Letter Center include:

2 response to casework mail;
15 response to individual legislative mail;
15 responses to petitions;
13 responses to opinion ballots;
1 self-initiated newsletters;
13 self-initiated "for your information" letters;
12 self-initiated updates to past legislative mail.

Please list other categories of multiple mail for which the office has been used.

OTHER CATEGORIES OF MULTIPLE MAIL SUGGESTED

Notices of town meetings or seminars, 2; and thank-you notes, 1.

4. Are the minimum/maximum limits (i.e. 5–500) satisfactory? Yes, 14; minimum too low, 1 (25–500); maximum too low, 1 (5–750); minimum too high, ____; maximum too high, ____; suggested minimum/maximum, ____.

5. Have the attached guidelines proved workable in your office? Yes, 16. What would be your suggested changes? ____.

6. What would be your overall reaction to the Multiple Letter Center? Good, 16; fair, ____; poor, ____.

7. How can the Multiple Letter Center be improved for use by your office? ----------

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If you have further comments, please feel free to attach additional sheets as necessary.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS IN MULTIPLE LETTER CENTER

Keep supply of individual Member's stationery and envelopes; take addresses off actual letters; extend time; make project permanent; run projects exceeding 500 words together; produce carbon copies for files; use inside mail: 1 each.

APPENDIX V

Responses from Questionnaire—16 Offices—Multiple Letter Center

1. Did use of the Multiple Letter Center free your own personnel for more productive work? Yes, 16; No, 0.

2. Was proximity of the Center to your office a valuable attribute? (As opposed to some central, more remote location.) Yes, 14; No, 2.

3. Did your staff's familiarity with the Center's staff enhance the value of the Center? Yes, 15; No, 1.

4. To have such a Center available in the future, would you:

A. Accept a decrease of one employee in your total staff allowance? Yes, 2; No, 14.

B. Accept a decrease in your total office dollar allowance of: $1,000? 4; $3,000? 5; $5,000? 1; $7,000? ____.

C. Accept a decrease as indicated above in both allowances? Yes, 1; No, 15.

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