

## **Regional Library Systems Collaboration Meeting**

17 March 2010

Metropolitan Library System

125 Tower Drive

Burr Ridge IL 60527-5783

### **Minutes**

At 7 PM on Wednesday, 17 March 2010, representatives from five Illinois regional library systems met at the Metropolitan Library System to discuss possible future collaborations. Attendees included board representatives and executive directors from the **Alliance Library System** (East Peoria), **DuPage Library System** (Geneva), the **Metropolitan Library System**, the **North Suburban Library System** (Wheeling), and the **Prairie Area Library System** (Coal Valley).

#### **Welcome and introductions**

Su Erickson, President, DuPage Library System (DLS) Board, chaired the meeting. Ms. Erickson welcomed everyone and invited participants to introduce themselves.

#### **Systems fiscal and operational status**

Following introductions, Ms. Erickson outlined developments that led up to the meeting. In early February 2010, representatives from the DuPage and North Suburban Library System Boards met to explore collaborative opportunities, including a possible merger. During that discussion, DLS and NSLS agreed to continue those explorations, and to invite other contiguous systems into the conversation.

Ms. Erickson then invited Sarah Long, Director of the North Suburban Library System (NSLS), to provide historical background on the current fiscal and operational status of systems, and on the need for cooperation among systems.

Since their launch in 1967, Illinois systems have established themselves as a “critical piece,” a difference-maker, helping all types of libraries become better, said Ms. Long. Illinois library systems are national leaders despite recurring budget reductions and no new funding since 1989.

Most recently, systems weathered a 16.5 percent budget reduction in 2010. That cut, along with 5-month state payment delays, have “put a pall on systems work,” Ms. Long asserted. At the same time diminished state payments are delayed, state rules and standards related to systems are becoming more stringent. Thus, systems find themselves in difficult circumstances, “swimming against the tide.”

“The handwriting is on the wall,” Ms. Long stated. “Systems are under fire. The old days are gone, and the current model is unsustainable. Systems need to create a new model, in concert with their members.”

Advising that we should “never let a crisis go to waste,” Ms. Long urged systems to create a different model, something new, relevant, sustainable and appropriate for the twenty-first century.

### **Benefits, opportunities and barriers for possible system mergers**

Next, Tom Sloan, DLS Executive Director, led the group in identifying concerns, worries, benefits, opportunities, obstacles and barriers to restructuring Illinois library systems.

#### ***Concerns/worries***

- Will staff have a job?
- Will delivery go away?
- What will happen to smaller libraries?
- Will we lose the personal touch and trusted relationships we're accustomed to?
- Will systems continue to provide technical support?
- Systems bring together libraries of all types/sizes. Will we lose the connections we've established to our colleagues?
- Will we lose the peer-to-peer support we rely on?
- If systems are gone, we will lose opportunities for librarians to grow
- A top priority for systems: keeping librarians in the know about trends
- Will we lose the affordable service model in place?
- Systems have their own unique cultures. We want to keep the best of the cultures to which are accustomed
- Fear of change
- Loss of resource sharing
- Funding

#### ***Benefits/opportunities***

- System mergers could strengthen existing relationships
- Could eliminate artificial boundaries
- Keep Illinois as a library leader
- Might enable us to reduce costs while expanding services
- Strengthen statewide library development efforts
- In unity there is strength. As a group, we are powerful
- Sustainability

#### ***Obstacles/barriers***

- Lack of information and direction from the Illinois State Library
- Size. Larger territory would complicate service delivery
- Fear of change
- Delicate. Any reconfiguration will necessitate time and finesse
- Need to have strong communications, to include everyone in the conversation

- Public mindset: what value do systems add? Skepticism about government  
**Obstacles/barriers** (continued)

- Systems' lack of visibility to the general public
- Different technology platforms
- Politics, funding and time
- Turf. Divisions are starting to appear among state-level leadership groups
- Cultural differences, in terms of system staffs and memberships
- Focus on commonalities

### **Looking at alternatives**

When DLS and NSLS began talking, Ms. Long said they quickly concluded that mergers are hard work -- "mergers are not do-it-yourself projects." Since systems lack the staff to do merger work on their own, hiring a consultant offers the practical advantage of enlisting an expert who can share the load, and who can help systems address the right questions to fully understand all of the available options.

If systems decide to retain a consultant, it will be at their own expense, as state dollars for this task are unlikely. DLS and NSLS have identified several consultants with non-profit merger experience, and are continuing to investigate prospective consultants.

As the meeting continued, the group discussed various options, ranging from starting fresh and re-drawing system maps to re-structuring existing systems via mergers. No consensus emerged. Some systems are ready to begin merger talks immediately, while others want to assess the full range of alternatives.

### **Next steps**

In closing the meeting, Su Erickson thanked participants for their enthusiasm, positive support, and openness to charting a new course for multi-type library cooperation in Illinois. Next, Tom Sloan will plan a meeting for those interested in continuing to explore strategic restructuring. That meeting will occur on 31 March 2010, at a time and location to be determined.

### **Meeting attendees**

#### *Regional library system delegations*

Kitty Pope – Executive Director, Alliance Library System  
John Richmond – Board President, Alliance Library System

Su Erickson – Board President, DuPage Library System  
Joyce Fedeczko – DuPage Library System  
Tom Sloan, Executive Director, DuPage Library System

Alice Calabrese, Executive Director, Metropolitan Library System  
Crystal Megaridis – Board Vice President, Metropolitan Library System  
Milfred Moore – Board President, Metropolitan Library System

Betsy Bartholomew –Board Trustee, North Suburban Library System  
Kathy Caudill – Board President, North Suburban Library System  
Sarah Long – Executive Director, North Suburban Library System

Dave Hargett – Board Trustee, Prairie Area Library System  
Charlet Key – Board President, Prairie Area Library System  
Michael Piper – Executive Director, Prairie Area Library System

*Guests*

Dianne Harmon – Joliet Public Library (Prairie Area Library System member library)  
Kathy Parker – Glenwood-Lynwood Public Library District (Metropolitan Library System)  
Kathy Roegge – Metropolitan Library System staff  
Brian Smith – Prairie Area Library System staff  
Debbie Somchay – Lemont Public Library District (Prairie Area Library System)  
John Spears – Joliet Public Library (Prairie Area Library System)  
Christi Stoll – Metropolitan Library System staff  
Denise Zielinski – DuPage Library System staff

*Meeting minutes submitted by Michael Piper on 18 March 2010*