Future of the Regional Library Systems: Recommendations

Case for Change
There are several reasons why it is necessary for Regional Library Systems to adopt a new plan for delivering services to the library community of Ohio.   The reasons include:

- Funding for the Regional Library Systems has declined 44% over the past 3 biennia.
- The current funding of $1,010,000.00 will not support 7 Regional Library Systems.
- The Regional Library System plan as it currently exists does not include every part of the state. It is difficult to justify state funding for a service which leaves pockets of Ohio unserved.
- The Regional Library Systems do not have a shared set of services which are delivered to all libraries.

At the Regional Library Planning Meeting, held on April 4th, 2005, the following question was posed: "*In an ideal world, what would regional library systems look like?*" In order to address this question, the State Library, under my direction as State Librarian, created two Task Forces – Services and Funding.

The charge of each Task Force was to provide recommendations for the State Library to consider as they looked at and addressed the future of Regional Library Systems in the current funding climate and in response to the planning committee's request.

Each task force produced a final report, which was submitted to the State Librarian and distributed to task force members and Regional Library System directors.

State Library Powers
Upon careful review of the law (R.C. **3375.90)**, the Attorney General's office informed us that the State Library has the responsibility to approve requests for regional library system creation and requests for boundary or charter revisions.

With that in mind, and using the findings of the task forces, the following recommendations are submitted regarding the creation of a statewide system of regional library service outlets (Regionals).

Recommendation #1 - Regional Service Areas
It is the recommendation of the State Library that there be created four (4) regional library service areas (Regionals): Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest. These areas are divided along county lines as pictured on the map below.

Recommendation #2 - Funding

Given the State Library's responsibility to effectively distribute a very limited, $1,010,000.00, the following is being recommended:

- Split the state money evenly among 4 Regional library service centers. This would be approximately $250,000.00 each.

- These state dollars would be used to fund the basics: provide a director, clerk treasurer, CE coordinator, facility rent and utilities. Please note: This funding could also be used to provide technical support to libraries through the Regional.

Recommendation #3 - Services
Both the State Library and the task forces perceive that the primary function of the regional service outlets is to provide and/or host library continuing education.

Technical support was another recommended service from the Services Task Force. While this is recognized to be a need of libraries across Ohio, it does not seem feasible to include this as a core service because of the limited GRF funding available at this time.

Core library skill continuing education would be coordinated by the State Library, utilizing the regional library service centers for planning and delivery. Participants would be subjected to the same fees, when assessed, regardless of location and/or affiliation with any given regional service outlet.

We recognize that special services and products have been developed by individual organizations and Regional Library Systems. We encourage the Regionals to discuss how we might be able to offer these across Regional lines. We encourage the development of new models for sharing those services and products which might be of interest to libraries across the state.

Recommendation #4 - Membership
The State Library recommends that all libraries, of all types, be considered "associate" or "core" members of the Regional Library System service area within which it falls geographically. These libraries will have access to core services provided by the State Library and delivered through the Regional library service outlets. Any additional library services would be available through membership in the regional service outlet.

When offering CE programs, it is the recommendation of the State Library that the same rate be honored for all four Regionals. For example, a program offered in Southwest Regional may be attended by members of the Northwest, Southeast and Northeast Regionals at the Southwest Regional fee.

Next Steps

The State Library is committed to providing an opportunity for feedback regarding this or any other plan. Given the timeliness of the issue, State Library staff recommends that the Regional Library System Planning Group re-convene to discuss this recommendation. That meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 19, 2005. This meeting will be held in Meeting Room A at the Westerville Public Library at 10:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

It is also recommended that this group include any interested member of either the Services or Funding Task Force that is not represented on the Planning Group. Jay Burton will contact those individuals to inform them of this meeting.

This meeting is intended to process feedback and work towards an implementation plan that has July 1, 2006 as its target completion date.

It was the intention that the process by which we come to these recommendations be as inclusive as possible. We deliberately included members of Regionals as well as those who are not members of Regionals. We wish to continue to include interested members of the library community in this plan and therefore we welcome comments, questions, concerns and ideas from meeting participants and members of the Ohio library community. Jay Burton will collect and organize these comments. These will form the basis for beginning our discussion on September 19th. Please direct your remarks to Jay at jburton@sloma.state.oh.us

Thank you for your time and energy in this process. This has not been easy but it is important that we address the multitude of issues surrounding the Regional Library System because if we do not, we risk losing the system itself and the valuable services that come to libraries through their Regional Library System.