

# **SRLAAW Retreat Discussion Paper:**

## **Developing a Unifying Vision for Library Services in Wisconsin**

### ***What and Why***

The System & Resource Library Administrators Association of Wisconsin (SRLAAW) held a two-day planning retreat on March 2-3, 2000, in Wausau, for the purpose of identifying and agreeing on priorities for use of state monies for improved library services to Wisconsin residents. Approximately 38 people attended this retreat, representing the public library systems, the resource libraries, the Wisconsin Library Association, the Wisconsin Association of Public Libraries, and the Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning (DLTCL) of the Department of Public Instruction. Five of the DLTCL staff facilitated the five table discussion groups. Jeff and Linda Russell, of Russell Consulting, Inc., facilitated the overall planning retreat.

Why did SRLAAW decide to schedule this retreat? There are a number of reasons. One is a concern over our inability to obtain funding to address some major library service issues such as crossover borrowing, or even to maintain existing services in some parts of the state. Another is a concern that the current system model may not be sufficiently flexible to meet the range of library needs that exist in Wisconsin today. SRLAAW is concerned that, after 25 years of operation, systems may have somehow become less crucial to member libraries. Library development generally in Wisconsin requires a commitment from the state; if the library community cannot unite behind a common vision it will have a difficult time convincing the Governor and the Legislature to support that commitment. Our inability to speak with a single voice has undermined our ability to obtain adequate funding to assure strong and uniform library service for Wisconsin residents, as demonstrated by the decrease in system aids to just 10% of previous year's local expenditure, far below the 13% index mandated by Act 150 or the high of 12% in 1992. The retreat was an attempt to begin a discussion of what was needed to unify the public library forces.

### ***Your Role***

With the changes that have taken place within and without the library community since the mid-1970s, perhaps it is time to reflect on whether systems need to change. Is a new model needed to begin the new century? With your participation, that is what the retreat and this summary of its proceedings hopes to begin to determine. This discussion paper is not meant as a proposed solution; rather it is meant as a catalyst to excite more ideas and a refinement of an approach that can lead to better library service, more effective use of limited resources, and a stronger voice with our state leaders. Within each system area, there will be opportunities for you to share your concerns and desires relating to these very crucial issues. Discussions should take place among library staff, trustees, county librarians groups, system advisory committees - whatever structures are currently in place or need to be created in order to insure that the issues in this report are thoroughly discussed. All regional discussions should be completed by the end

of July 2000. Ideas shared at these regional sessions will then be compiled and presented at a later statewide session. The expectation is that these discussions can proceed in a fashion that will result in a unified vision by the time that planning begins for the state biennial budget that will affect libraries in 2004-2005.

### ***The Retreat Process***

Prior to the retreat, SRLAAW members had been invited to write up their views on the following two issues:

- In general, the future of libraries, library service, and systems.
- More specifically, how future services or a different system model would affect the current system service requirements.

Seven papers were submitted for distribution to participants prior to the retreat. As a way to consider and evaluate the models that would be presented at the retreat, each participant was asked to identify a list of possible guiding principles for statewide library service. These principles were discussed at each of the five discussions tables. A total of fourteen principles were reported out to the large group. Each table group was then asked to pick the four most important principles from this list and to prioritize them. As a result of this exercise, the group determined that there were four required and three desired guiding principles. These principles are listed in priority order, highest to lowest, as determined by the votes of all five table groups.

### ***Guiding Principles for Statewide Library Service (Required)***

The four required guiding principles include the following:

- **Statewide access.** Every Wisconsin resident should have access to all library materials throughout the state, on an equal basis. This includes walk-in service, use of print and electronic resources, and borrowing materials through inter-library loan. This would be facilitated through the use of BadgerCard, a card free to all Wisconsin residents that provides the user access to all library resources.
- **Quality library service.** Every Wisconsin resident should have convenient access to quality library services. Convenient is defined by distance from the user, hours of service, and accessible facility. Quality library service will be determined by the Standards for Public Libraries, which will measure a library's value to the community and include items such as innovation, experimentation and flexibility in meeting public demands; up-to-date products and services; and knowledgeable, trained staff. All public libraries should be required to meet minimum standards in order to qualify for state funding.

- **No cost to the user.** Every Wisconsin resident should be guaranteed free library service. Library services without cost to the users are a top priority of the Governor, Senate and Assembly of the State of Wisconsin. Libraries may still impose fines for overdue materials, and fees for copier and fax services, etc.
- **Dynamic leadership and vision.** Every Wisconsin resident should be entitled to library services that meet the changing landscape of their needs and demands. The State of Wisconsin should meet this challenge with dynamic leadership and vision, collaborating with library systems and public libraries to plan how to meet long term goals. On a regional level, library systems should provide leadership and assistance directly to libraries in the development and implementation of long range plans and the delivery of services. Research and development is dedicated to removing technological barriers to library service and responding to community needs.

### ***Guiding Principles for Statewide Library Service (Desired)***

The three desired guiding principles include the following:

- **Systems facilitate access to resources.** Every library system in Wisconsin should facilitate statewide access to all library resources throughout the state according to consistent guidelines.
- **Customer Service.** Wisconsin library customers should be entitled to get whatever library resources they require, whenever they require it, and for as long as they need those resources.
- **Attractive library facilities.** Wisconsin public libraries are a valued and treasured place in each community. Each public library should be attractive, with reading, viewing, and meeting areas available to the public. Users should be entitled to free public libraries within a reasonable distance.

### ***Consistent Themes for Statewide Library Service***

After all of the models were presented and discussed, participants were asked to identify any consistent themes that had surfaced. The following "model themes & improvements" were identified.

- **Minimum standards.** Libraries would be required to meet minimum standards in order to participate in any model of service.
- **BadgerCard.** BadgerCard addresses the concept of a statewide library card, a program that would be established under statutory authority. Since the state's library systems aren't ready for a shared patron database, we are not suggesting

the use of a physical card in the initial stages of this program, but rather a mechanism to compensate individual libraries for nonresident use that is not already provided in the law.

- ***Rethinking system structure.*** The implementation of a new system model might require a re-evaluation in how systems are organized, resulting in changes in boundaries, size, and governance, for example.
- ***Market-driven approach.*** In a new model of system organization, the services provided would better reflect what libraries want and need, as determined by the members, perhaps in some sort of free enterprise system.
- ***Research & development.*** The creation of a state level research & development program would provide funding for projects that help bring the best solutions and approaches to technology, library practices, marketing, and other areas of interest and need. Utilization of relevant expertise outside of the library community would expand and deepen our ability to improve services. The purpose of this program is to better capitalize needed improvements and enhancements and bring them to fruition much quicker than we can each do working independently. Governance of a board or commission created to select projects and distribute funds would depend upon a specific model chosen.
- ***24/7 reference service.*** A 7-day-a-week, 24-hour-a-day reference service would be available through a local library's web site or telephone number. If no assistance were available at the local level, the caller would be referred (switched over) to the state reference service. This referral would be transparent to the user.
- ***Access to electronic resources.*** The goal here is to provide expanded access to electronic resources through BadgerLink.
- ***Reducing system mandates and focusing activities.*** The general goal here is to better respond to the needs of libraries and to the residents of Wisconsin by allowing library systems greater flexibility to establish service programs that directly address member needs.
- ***Re-examination of resource library role.*** This theme is closely related to previously stated theme of "rethinking system structure". The implementation of a new system model might require a re-evaluation of the need for and role of resource libraries, and, if necessary, how they are to be selected.
- ***Reaffirm role of the Division - leadership, vision, funding.*** In order to fully achieve the goals of statewide public library cooperation, no matter what the model, there needs to be a collaborative relationship among all public libraries, library systems, and the state library agency. A state agency advocating for libraries is critical.

## ***Sample Models***

Below are three models offered to demonstrate ways in which things could change in the future. The attempt, here, is to provide a context in which the guiding principles and themes result in new structures that can more effectively serve the needs of library users and practitioners. These models are consciously presented as "samples"; they are not final, they are not comprehensive. They are open to revision and addition.

### **SAMPLE MODEL A:**

***The New, Improved Current Model:*** with seventeen (17) systems and future changes in system numbers or composition coming from existing enabling legislation; a state agency similar to the current agency; counties still the building blocks and one of the primary funding sources. System requirements would remain fundamentally the same though some mandates might be reduced or eliminated.

**Badgercard:** this would require new, separate funding from the state. The state's role (and funding) would be one component of a formalized, ongoing partnership that would also include municipal (traditional) and county (Act 150) library funding. A statutory structure or formula would specify each partner's proportion of responsibility.

**Required standards/certification for libraries:** minimum standards would be developed and mandated for membership in library systems.

**Intensified research and development structure:** LSTA, WATF, and system & local library contract funds would be provided to a unit of the state library agency where an integrated, formalized effort (perhaps using contract researchers) would study issues and capabilities for the benefit of all libraries in the state. While technology would be a key area for research, it would not be the exclusive area.

**24/7 reference service:** systems, using their aids, would contract for this service, on behalf of their constituents, either within the region or statewide, or perhaps a combination of both.

**Statewide delivery:** this program would be coordinated centrally and paid for through system aids. Systems would also continue to have responsibility for regional delivery.

**Free library service at the time of usage:** this would be addressed and assured by Badgercard.

**Statewide on-line catalog:** this is not a specified component of this model.

**Market driven services:** contracts for services from other agencies would continue to be authorized by statute. No concerted effort would be made to make systems more entrepreneurial nor to direct libraries to seek services beyond their regions.

**State aid grants directly to libraries:** Badgercard payments would be the likely extent of state funding directly to libraries.

**Role of the resource library:** resource libraries would still be mandated but the requirements might be different and the criteria for qualifying as a resource library would allow more flexibility in selection of a resource library.

**Funding:** system funded by 13% system aids from state.

**Governance:** system boards composed as now; counties retain appointment power; local library boards as now.

### **SAMPLE MODEL B:**

***The Middle Ground Model:*** with a reduced number of systems (e.g., 6 to 12) and an expected change in mandates and service structure from the current model; changes in system numbers and boundaries would come about through a conscious restructuring to attain greater efficiency and effectiveness.

**Badgercard:** state aid funds freed up through the changes in system structure and mandates, could be used to help fund this program, though some new, separate state funding would likely be necessary. The state's role (and funding) would be one component of a formalized, ongoing partnership that would also include municipal (traditional) and county (Act 150) library funding. A statutory structure or formula would specify each partner's proportion of responsibility.

**Required standards/certification for libraries:** minimum standards would be developed and mandated for membership in library systems.

**Intensified research and development structure:** could be a melding of models A and C, i.e.: LSTA, WATF, and system & local library contract funds would be provided to a unit of the state library agency where an integrated, formalized effort (perhaps using contract researchers) would study issues and capabilities for the benefit of all libraries in the state. While technology would be a key area for research, it would not be the exclusive area. Or, independent, technology focused research and product development structure created using private as well as public expertise. There would be designated state funding, some of it possibly new, as well as contract funding from interested libraries. State would retain rights to products for resale to other states, with revenues being returned to R&D. This effort would be overseen by a separate board.

**24/7 reference service:** systems, using their aids, would contract for this service, on behalf of their constituents, either within the region or statewide, or perhaps a combination of both.

**Statewide delivery:** this program would be coordinated centrally and paid for through system aids. Systems would also continue to have responsibility for regional delivery.

**Free library service at the time of usage:** this would be addressed and assured by Badgercard.

**Statewide on-line catalog:** a significant statewide financial incentive will be provided to libraries to phase in a centralized automation system, or at least a uniform platform, to facilitate full-featured statewide resource sharing and universal registration of library users. Local and federal funds will also be utilized to develop and maintain the statewide catalog.

**Market driven services:** contracts for services from other agencies would continue to be authorized by statute. No concerted effort would be made to make systems more entrepreneurial nor to direct libraries to seek services beyond their regions.

**State aid grants directly to libraries:** Badgercard payments would be the likely extent of state funding directly to libraries.

**Role of the resource library:** resource libraries will become optional; library systems can contract with whatever libraries they feel can best provide needed services.

**Funding:** state system aids are still provided but a different formula is used for distribution. Local effort would be one condition of receiving state support.

**Governance:** system boards composed as now; counties retain appointment power; local library boards as now. System compositions would be determined by a new set of factors which might include such things as: square miles, number of libraries, population, ability to generate support (assessed value). There would be no single county systems.

### **SAMPLE MODEL C:**

***Library Service Corporation (LSC) Model:*** while there would still be some regional orientation to LSCs relating to core services, there would no longer be systems as now. LSCs might resemble CESAs in some aspects but would most certainly specialize their service offerings and market statewide. There might be 10 - 12 LSCs. While some state funding would go to LSCs, the majority of it would go to either statewide services (such as delivery) or directly to libraries, which would in turn buy specific services from one or more LSCs.

**Badgercard:** state funding will support the program; depending on the cost of other library programs under this model, additional state funds might be needed to cover all services.

**Required standards/certification for libraries:** minimum standards would be developed and mandated; libraries would need to meet these standards to receive state grant.

**Intensified research and development structure:** independent, technology focused research and product development structure created using private as well as public expertise. There would be designated state funding, some of it possibly new, as well as contract funding

from interested libraries. State would retain rights to products for resale to other states, with revenues being returned to R&D. This effort would be overseen by a separate board.

**24/7 reference service:** LSC specializing in reference services will provide statewide service in conjunction with regional LSCs and local libraries. State funds and contract payments will support the service.

**Statewide delivery:** provided by regional LSCs from designated state funds.

**Free library service at the time of usage:** this would be addressed and assured by Badgercard.

**Statewide on-line catalog:** this is not a specified component of this model.

**Market driven services:** the Library Service Corporations are based on agencies developing and marketing specialized capabilities and services to libraries throughout a region and the state. Funding going directly to libraries places the opportunity and responsibility upon the library to select among the market choices without restrictions or mandates.

**State aid grants directly to libraries:** a fundamental component of this model is that significant state grants will be provided directly to libraries to maximize the library's ability to obtain the most appropriate services for its customers. In this model, in addition to having to meet minimum standards to receive state aid grants, libraries might also be required to participate in Badgercard to be eligible. There would be a provision in the law, such as maintenance of effort, to prevent municipalities from reducing local library funding when direct state aid grants are given. It would need to be determined whether direct grants to libraries could be considered part of the operating budget of a library for purposes of establishing the county reimbursement for non-resident use.

**Role of the resource library:** the concept of resource libraries is not relevant to this model.

**Funding:** State aid funds now used for systems would fund this model. Thirteen percent funding level assumed.

**Governance:** LSC boards with lay and professional representatives will oversee the operation of the LSCs. Library practitioners could be elected by the library community; lay members could be appointed by county boards (to retain some role for counties) or brought to the governing board by another agency or method. LSC boundaries would follow county lines, and their creation would factor in the efficient delivery of core services each LSC would provide, such as delivery.