Public Library System Services/Configuration Discussion Process
December 2012

At the August 2012 SRLAAW meeting, WiLS was asked to, "develop a proposal for a summit on system size and structure. " After discussion with the SRLAAW chair and others, WiLS is recommending that this summit, or retreat, be part of a larger process that will lead to recommendations and action steps to address concerns about and barriers to system reconfigurations, along with addressing how systems remain effective in meeting member library needs into the future.

The original proposal was presented to SRLAAW in October 2012, and garnered much discussion. Two major concerns were raised during the discussion:

1. The proposal did not include input from other libraries early in the process, which could make the results too insular to be useful.

2. The proposal did not go far enough in exploring coordinated ways for systems to provide services.

The revised recommended process is:

1. *Appoint a formal subcommittee of SRLAAW.*
    This subcommittee would further refine the proposed process and work with the output from the retreat to develop formal recommendations and action steps.

2. *Identify specific services and other areas of concern to be addressed through this process.*
    Broadening the process to include feedback from libraries and exploration of coordinated service provision means that, ideally, the scope of the process should be narrowed to 5-6 specific services or areas of concern to be addressed. Narrowing the scope will allow for more complete discussion during the retreat and more targeted surveying of the libraries.

3. *Survey Wisconsin libraries about areas identified in step 2.*
    A set of surveys would be developed to determine value of and satisfaction with system-provided service areas identified in Step 2. The surveys would also include questions related to other areas of concern identified in Step 2. A more complete plan for the survey will be developed after the areas of concern/services are identified.

4. *Hold 2-3 Q&A webinars with states that have undergone system consolidation.*
    In the original proposal, this background information was to be provided as part of the retreat. Having these webinars ahead of time would provide more time during the day of the retreat for discussion and would also give participants a chance to digest information provided through these webinars. Based on

these webinars, a document with information from all states that have gone through consolidation/reconfiguration would be distributed prior to the retreat. The webinars will be open to anyone who wanted to attend and will be archived if possible.

5. *Hold a SRLAAW retreat*.
    The goals of this retreat would include:
    a. To determine the characteristics of a strong public library system and how to measure these characteristics. This work would be the basis of a list of questions and considerations for systems to use as they investigate possible mergers or other reconfigurations.

    b. To identify barriers to reconfigurations.

    c. To explore how systems remain effective in meeting member library needs into the future, including the role of resource libraries and coordinated/consolidated service provision.

    More details about the retreat can be found below.

6. *Prepare a list of recommendations and action steps based on the output from the retreat.*
    Members from the SRLAAW subcommittee, along with others who expressed interest during the retreat, would prepare this list, with possible administrative support from WiLS (see below).

7. *Get feedback on the list of recommendations from focus groups of supporters, critics, and others.*
    Adding a wider perspective to this process will provide a reality check for our recommendations and help garner support from those outside of the library community. In this step, focus groups of individuals outside of the library community will review the recommendations and offer feedback to incorporate this larger perspective.

8. *Revise recommendations and action steps based on feedback received in Step 7.*

9. *Present the recommendations and action steps for comment and further discussion to SRLAAW.*

10. *Present the recommendations and action steps for comment and further discussion to the wider library community.*

    The SRLAAW subcommittee would present the recommendations, with possible administrative support from WiLS (see below).

The retreat

Below is a proposed draft agenda for the retreat. Each system will have three representatives at the retreat: a system representative, a resource library representative, and a third representative of their choice. The third representative could be a library staff member or a trustee or a Friend, but should be carefully selected to have enough background and information to be a full participant in the discussion.

1. **Presentations for the full group**: There will be two presentations:
    a. A presentation to provide context for the current library system/resource library configuration in the state. The presentation will include an overview of the history and purpose of systems and resource libraries in Wisconsin.

    b. A presentation summarizing the results of the surveys and the Q&A webinars to provide structure for the small group discussions.

2. **Small group discussion**: **what makes a strong public library system?:** Participants would be assigned to a small group focusing on one of the areas of concern/service areas. Using survey results and other information, each group would create a list of characteristics of a strong public library system, along with ways to measure these characteristics.

3. **Large group discussion**: **what makes a strong public library system?:** Groups will report out their recommended lists and the group will come to some conclusions on the characteristics that are most critical to consider.

4. **Small group discussion**:   The same small groups will discuss three topics as they relate to their service or area of concern:
    a. Barriers to system reconfigurations and potential solutions to barriers.
    b. Ideal role of the resource libraries.
    c. Potential coordination among systems (beyond individual system consolidation).

5. **Large group discussion:** Reporting out and discussion of small group discussions.

6. **Group discussion of planned next steps:**   The subcommittee will present the planned next steps for group reaction and discussion. The group will review some of the conclusions revealed in Steps 3 and 5 and determine the priorities, actions, and appropriate organizations to carry out the action steps. This discussion should also provide attendees with the opportunity to sign up to remain involved and connected.

Timeline

October 2012: Discussion of proposal, appointment of subcommittee

November 2012: Discussion of revised proposal

December 2012: Location is determined; Invitations are sent to systems; survey is created with feedback from committee and systems; Webinars are scheduled.

January 2013: Webinars are held; Survey is sent to libraries for response; Materials are created/distributed for pre-retreat review.

February 2013: Retreat is held in conjunction with Library Legislative Day

March 2013: Recommendations and action steps are finalized; Focus groups of individuals outside of the library community are conducted.

April 2013: Recommendations are modified based on focus group feedback; SRLAAW meets to discuss recommendations and action steps

May 2013: Recommendations and action steps are presented to library community at WAPL and through webinars, etc.