

Public Library System Redesign (PLSR) Project Update November 2017

Library systems in Wisconsin date to 1971, when the system law was passed. Each system has grown and developed differently in response to the needs of its members. Library services and technology have both changed considerably in the past 46 years.

A feeling has grown over the past few years that there needs to be a comprehensive look at how support services are provided to libraries. Levels of service vary considerably around the state and services may not be provided in the most cost-efficient manner. The PLSR project was begun in early 2016 to review system services and suggest changes. A Steering Committee and nine subject area workgroups were appointed.

All the PLSR workgroups gave presentations at the WLA Conference this year. This report summarizes the progress so far and the next steps. You can see the presentations and other materials at <http://www.plsr.info/resources/workgroupswla2017/>.

A persistent theme of the presentations was *equity*. All libraries should receive a similar level of service so that all library users receive great service no matter where they live. There is considerable variation in system services, and the goal is to bring lower-quality services up to the higher standards.

Delivery

Currently, each library system runs its own delivery service. Some own vans and hire drivers while others contract with outside vendors. There is a statewide delivery, headquartered in Madison, which connects the 16 systems and also provides delivery to UW System and Technical College libraries, private college & university libraries, correctional institutions, some K-12 schools, and other state government offices.

The proposed model would replace this with 7 regional “hubs” around the state. They would be located so all libraries in the region would be within about a 100-mile radius of the hub and delivery would be done within an 8 or 9-hour day. Each library would receive delivery 5 days per week.

These hubs would provide delivery to all the libraries in that area, not just the public libraries. Items would be transferred between hubs daily, possibly overnight, with the goal of items reaching their destination the next day.

ILL/ILS

Currently there are over 40 separate ILS systems in Wisconsin. Some are operated by library systems for their members, some are shared between systems (e.g.: OWLS & Nicolet). Twenty-seven are single libraries. Each has a different interface and patrons can't easily search for items in other systems. Patrons near borders must register for and use different library cards.

The workgroup envisions some ILS mergers to create larger service areas. They are not envisioning the same ILS for all public libraries. Instead, the proposed plan would put a “discovery layer” in place that would allow library users to search multiple ILS's and to place holds on items. A Montello patron, for example, could locate an item owned by LaCrosse library, place a hold on it, and have it sent to Montello

where it would be checked out just as an item from a neighboring library would be. A single library card would also be valid in every library in the state.

Interlibrary loan (ILL)—borrowing from and lending to libraries outside the system—is handled differently in different systems. Some, like Winnefox, have a staff person who handles this for member libraries. Others leave it to the libraries to do it themselves.

The proposed model would set up regional ILL centers that would coordinate ILL for all libraries in its area. The service would be very similar to the way Winnefox provides ILL service for its libraries.

CE/Consulting

Traditionally each system planned its own continuing education programs. Over the past few years there has been an increasing amount of cooperation and sharing.

Consulting is another service that has been and continues to be done on a system-by-system basis. Many system staff members have duties in addition to consulting and they may not have had special training in their consulting areas.

The proposed model would set up regional teams to provide CE and consulting on specific topics (administration, HR, building issues, etc). There would also be a statewide portal for library staff to find CE opportunities statewide and for CE and consulting resources to be posted. The portal would also allow directors to track and record CE activities online.

Technology

Currently there is wide variation in how libraries receive technology services and in the quality and cost of those services. Some systems provide technology support while other libraries receive them from the municipality, a staff member, a private computer company, or a volunteer.

The proposed model would set up multiple regional field offices to provide direct technology support for libraries. A statewide office would provide backup for the regional offices. Libraries and front-line support staff would know each other and there would be backup for high-level problems.

Collections

This workgroup has been examining the best way to manage online resources and digital collections in libraries. Online resources include access to magazines, newspapers, music, video, ebooks, learning tools such as Mango Languages, or Gale Courses, and specialized resources, such as Auto Repair and Heritage Quest. Digital collections are locally-produced collections of scanned documents.

These resources are managed differently around the state. Some are purchased and managed by libraries individually while others are managed by systems, the state, or other organizations. Management includes purchasing or licensing, authentication so patrons can access these resources from outside the library, and statistical reporting so libraries know how much these resources are used.

The proposed electronic resources model would centralize purchasing to take advantage of group rates, set up trials and evaluation, promotional materials, and training for library staff and patrons. There would be one portal for users to access both statewide and local resources.

The proposed digital collections model would provide assistance with creating and hosting content, regional scanning centers, and circulating digitization kits for libraries to use.

Resource Libraries

Currently, statute requires that each system have a resource library (usually the largest library in the system). When the system law was written in 1971 resource libraries were necessary because of their large collections, more highly-trained staff, and reference resources. Both library services and technology have changed significantly since then.

This workgroup is developing recommendations for what future roles, if any, the resource libraries will play. There are no definite recommendations at this time because these depend, in part, on recommendations from the other workgroups.

Chapter 43

This workgroup is charged with reviewing statutes relating to system services, funding, and governance. They have not only examined systems in Wisconsin but also how support services are provided to libraries in other states. As the Steering Committee writes their final report this workgroup will develop proposed statutory changes to support the report.

Where do we go from here?

The proposals are just that: the workgroups' ideas of what the best service would look like. Over the next few months they will be collecting comments and writing their final reports. Your comments on these proposals are welcome. There is contact information on the PLSR site <http://www.plsr.info/>.

The final proposals will be sent to the Steering Committee in February, where the Committee will reconcile them. The Committee has also contracted with Russell Consulting to convene three focus groups of about 40 people each to discuss the proposals. The Committee hopes to submit a final PLSR report and recommendations to the Division by May.

The recommendations in the report will not be implemented immediately, and some may never be. It is expected that they will be phased in piecemeal over the next several years.