

## **Winnefox Library System**

### **Major Strategic Planning Issues: 2006-2007**

The purpose of this document is to organize and enumerate many of the challenges and opportunities that face the library system. This is to ensure that our strategic planning process will consider as many of them as possible during the coming months.

This enumeration is preliminary. Its sources are the comments gathered during the 2005 Director search and screen process, member library director comments on the 2007 Annual System Plan, and ideas of system staff. It must be noted that this document is heavily weighted toward topics that might be viewed as problems or challenges rather than strengths or opportunities. It is my hope that the many areas in which this library system achieves excellence will also be recognized in the course of the strategic planning process.

An examination of these views of system challenges and opportunities reveals that they tend to fall into three broad areas: Relationships, Vision, and Funding.

**Relationships:** A common theme in the comment sources is a need to improve the ways in which the system staff, its board and member libraries interact with one another. There is also a perceived need for the library system to assist member libraries in heightening their visibility in their own communities. What follows are some of the most prominent issues that came to light from the sources mentioned above:

1. Resource library – Oshkosh Public Library:
  - a. Clarify relationships between OPL and Winnefox, especially the relative benefits to the two organizations derive from shared staff; and compensation between them as embodied in the contractual services agreement.
  - b. Provide for backup reference, information and ILL services as required by statute and spelled out in the annual Resource Library Agreement.
2. Governance:
  - a. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current Winnefox Automated Library Services (WALS) governance structure and contractual arrangements; compare with other library systems.
3. Participation / Decision-making:
  - a. Explore how to ensure that staffs from member libraries of all sizes feel confident that their voices are heard in the shaping of system services; compare with other library system.
4. Conflict resolution:
  - a. Provide for mediation and/or resolution of conflicts between member libraries or between the system and a member library.

5. Community ties:
  - a. Assist member libraries in promoting themselves, in communicating stories of their value (and the ways in which they embody their communities' values) to decision-makers, and in building strong local networks of willing advocates on behalf of libraries.
  - b. Marketing: The role of assisting member libraries in strengthening ties to their own communities through more effective communications strategies may be viewed as a marketing role. Assessment of the Blue Door Consulting Marketing Study and disposition of the long-vacant system Marketing Coordinator position are outstanding issues to be dealt with in the planning process.
  - c. Provide support and education for library trustees as required by statute.
6. State-required relationships:
  - a. Maintain agreements for open access throughout system.
  - b. Make agreements with adjacent library systems.

**Vision:** Another common theme in the comment sources has to do with how the system and its member libraries decide together to meet the forces of social, economic, political and technological change that are transforming all social institutions, including the public library.

1. Strategic planning: The determination to carry out a mindful strategic planning process is the first step toward articulating our shared picture of the trends that will affect us. The plan that emerges will say how we as a system of libraries may together respond to those trends and anticipate how we may be of value to our communities in the future.

Wisconsin Statutes section 43.24(2)(i) requires library systems to provide other service programs as need is determined by the board and member libraries. What follows are either areas where some have suggested a need for service programs, trends that may give rise to service programs, or dimensions of system activities that ought to be considered as we formulate our plans:

- a. Youth services support:
  - i. Explore where primary responsibility for coordinating youth services support programs should lie (i.e., system staff or contractor?).
  - ii. Look for ways to involve member library youth services staff in youth services planning and to provide opportunities for them to share information with one another.
- b. Diversity of needs: Explore how the library system may better provide services that assist the diversity of libraries in its membership. This issue is frequently framed in terms of large versus small libraries. It is important to remember the differing needs of member libraries as the planning process goes forward. It is equally important to craft action plans that recognize the differing capabilities of member libraries.

- c. Future staffing of libraries: Formulate strategies for making sure that member libraries will be staffed with trained, motivated people in the coming years (recruitment, training, salaries, certification).
  - d. Changing population demographics: Assist member libraries in developing strategies for serving an aging and increasingly ethnically diverse population.
2. State-required planning: State law requires library systems to engage in several kinds of planning activities. A strategic plan should take note of these processes and address outstanding issues as follows:
- a. Annual plan: Make sure that the annual plan required by the state flows naturally from the system's long-range strategic plan, and that procedures for updating the annual plan are sufficiently deliberative and inclusive.
    - i. Explore whether to establish a standing "public library advisory committee" as provided for in s. 43.17(2m) Wisconsin Statutes. One possible function of such a committee might be advising the system in ongoing planning efforts.
  - b. Technology plan:
    - i. Clarify areas of responsibility for technology support among WALIS staff, Winnefox staff, and the staff of individual member libraries.
    - ii. Clarify areas of authority and responsibility for initiating, testing, and implementing technological innovations; explore ways of assessing and dealing with spillover effects when one member library's initiative affects other member libraries.
  - c. Resource sharing plan
  - d. Multi-type library cooperation plan
3. State-required activities: a strategic plan and subsequent annual system plans must state how the library system intends to pursue the following activities:
- a. Assure routing of reference questions and ILL requests.
  - b. Provide for training of member library staff.
  - c. Electronically deliver information and physically deliver materials to member libraries.
  - d. Provide consultant support to member libraries.
  - e. Help people with special needs to know about and use library services.

**Funding:** At the same time that the system and its member libraries are faced with increased use and demands for expanded services, they are under increasing budgetary constraints at the state, county, and municipal levels.

- 1. Advocacy: How do we better communicate the value of public libraries in a competitive local fiscal environment?
- 2. Alternate funding: Assist member libraries to develop additional sources of funding.