RAILS
REACHING ACROSS ILLINOIS LIBRARY SYSTEM

16 May 2019

TO: **RAILS Board of Directors**

FROM: **Deirdre Brennan**

SUBJECT: **System standards next steps**

As you may remember, last June the RAILS board approved the release of the draft system membership standards for data collection. Also part of the motion to approve the release was a direction to me to report back to the board no later than May, 2019 on progress and next steps. Accordingly, here is my report.

Data collection
RAILS staff worked for several months to create a web based form for collection of data about core standards only. Data collection began on December 4, 2018 and ended on March 31, 2019. A total of 774 libraries completed the form.

What did we learn? A great deal, and not just facts and figures.

- Data input errors make it difficult to be sure about the results. Grant Halter has spent time cleaning up the data.

- School libraries had difficulty obtaining budget information from their administrations, which indicates they are not part of a budgeting process.

- Some special libraries could not complete the budget questions because the information is proprietary.

- Many of the questions, despite our best efforts, were not answerable. For example, asking whether a building is "convenient" is subjective and not appropriate for this type of form or for standards in general.

- Related to the above point, we need to pare down the number and type of questions asked.

Facts and figures

- 774 libraries completed data collection. (11% academic, 36% public, 41% school, 12% special)
- 181 (65%) public libraries report having a library administrator who has an MLS degree
- Number of libraries who spend at least 8% of their operating budget on collections.
    - 74 (84%) academic
    - 245 (88%) public
    - 210 (67%) school
    - 64 (67%) special
- 759 out of 774 libraries said they are open the appropriate number of hours according to their service population standard. Of the 15 who did not meet the hour mark, nine were public, while the other types had two each.
- All but one public library said they are open the appropriate number of days per week according to their service population standard.

Next steps

I have had some excellent conversations with Greg McCormick about the standards and how to move forward. As you probably remember, the State Library has been concerned about the possible effects of the standards, particularly for small or underfunded libraries of any type, and fears that they would make bad situations worse by potentially denying libraries access to grants and system services.

At this point, we have reached substantive agreement on a number of major points, as well as on a general approach to the issue of standards.

1. We will take a future oriented not retrospective approach. Standards will, when implemented, confirm that all current system members are in compliance with core standards.
2. The framework for the standards will be developmental.   We want to encourage libraries to do better, to enhance their services. Development, or a pathway to excellence, is inherent in the three levels of standards – core, accomplished and exemplary.
3. Best practice documents are necessary to assist libraries in explaining the reasons and benefits of development and the standards.
4. The administrative code already has a requirement that libraries must have an online catalog/provide access to resources through a shared bibliographic database by 2022. Other requirements that we (ILS/RAILS) establish could be conveniently tied to this date for other compliance.

5. The current standards document needs to be revised. Core questions, to be agreed upon by ISL and RAILS, will be added to existing data collection activities, probably certification.
6. The relationship between ILA standards, RAILS standards and ISL requirements will be examined to ensure alignment and eliminate duplication.

I will be working on a new version and propose to delete many of the standards that do not have yes or no answers and are difficult for libraries to interpret or answer. It is essential that we focus on core issues such as:

*   Hours open
*   Education and training (including continuing education)
*   Collection expenditures
*   Online catalog

I look forward to discussing the standards at the meeting. Greg McCormick is planning to attend at Burr Ridge also to answer any questions.