



New York Alliance of Library Systems

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Sustaining and improving library services in New York State in light of changing technologies and economic conditions, 2010-2020

QUALITY library services are essential for New York residents; it is vital that the Board of Regents, the New York State Library and New York State government support library systems. Library systems provide the leadership and infrastructure that enables local libraries to succeed and support the needs of all New Yorkers.

Since the release of the *Final Report of the Regents Commission on Library Services* on July 14, 2000, public, school, and 3R library systems that provide services to public, school, academic, and special libraries have undergone significant changes. Issues that affect libraries and library systems in 2010 include state and local funding, user expectations and delivery of services, increases in new technologies and their use in libraries, and continued challenges in garnering meaningful support from elected officials, administrators, and influential state leaders to sustain and promote the key role libraries and library systems play in lives of all New Yorkers.

Funding:

A repressed economy increases the use of the library (See http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries/ALA_Report_2010-ATI001-NEW1.pdf) and places increased demand on services library systems provide their members. With dim prospects for new funding in the short term and midterm at the state level, and revenue and cash flow issues plaguing school districts, local governments and universities at the local level, the future of library systems as well as individual libraries is threatened:

- Open positions due to retirements or reorganization go unfilled in academic libraries due to hiring freezes
- Public libraries are laying off staff to meet budget shortfalls
- Books go unpurchased in school libraries due to the exceedingly low per student allotment of \$6.25 – well under the average cost of a book (http://www.nyla.org/content/user_4/Average%20Cost%20PEr%20Book.pdf)
- Hours are reduced in many public branches with some buildings open such few hours that it is endangering their charter
- Library systems are reducing, scaling back, or eliminating services such as system-wide delivery, grant programs to members, processing materials centrally, and professional development opportunities.

- Certified school librarian positions are being eliminated at an alarming rate particularly in elementary schools where they are not mandated.

The current economic crisis has impeded growth and tax revenues but in some ways has strengthened the role libraries play in society. While state aid to library systems and their member libraries has been reduced 19%, use of public library services has increased substantially (See http://www.nyla.org/content/user_1/AT10_PL_Visits_98-08.pdf.) Reductions in state aid, while significant, have not caused any New York library systems to close their doors – yet. However, unlike individual libraries, most library systems are greatly dependent upon state aid to continue operations. By law, school library systems are unable to carry a fund balance and are providing services – albeit at a reduced level to its members - depending on the current level of state funding. Public library systems are coping with the economic crisis by borrowing from fund balances – clearly an unsustainable accounting practice. However, despite this challenging fiscal environment, most libraries retain the support and good will of their users, with high approval ratings and documented increases in usage. Public votes on library funding still continue to pass more than 95% of the time (See <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/libs/pldtools/guide/bdqtvtte.htm>).

New Technologies, User Expectations and Library Services:

Even while book circulation continues to grow, user technology has focused on open content, web-based services and resources, 24x7 access, and handheld devices, increasing expectations for what good library service is to the end user. Libraries acknowledge the economic benefits of group purchasing and shared resources and have developed many collaborative relationships with other organizations. Evidence shows that collaboration among libraries and library systems is critical for sustained viability. Libraries are often the pioneers in using and adopting new web tools and software to improve and an end-user's library experience while also providing an economy of scale that provides a greater return on investment for every dollar funded (See <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/stackup.htm>).

- Over the course of a few years, grassroots collaboratives such as IDS (Information Delivery Services – a resource sharing cooperative developed at SUNY Geneseo) and ConnectNY (a consortium of libraries within New York State whose members have created a combined catalog of their collections) are creating a very different landscape for end users searching for materials and providing new models of resource sharing.
- Information services, such as Ask Us 24/7, began with six libraries at the 3Rs Council in Buffalo in 2003 and since then, the service has spread throughout much of New York with over 38 public, school, and academic libraries as well as other library systems participating in providing help services to New York residents, students, and researchers.
- School library systems have pooled their resources and developed a system, School Library Systems Consortium for Online Resources for Education (SCORE), which ensures consistent pricing and licensing agreements of databases across the state influencing business practices of database vendors.

- Digital collections of historical significance from across the state are available through a single portal called New York Heritage – a collaboration of the nine NY 3Rs to bring digital content to all NY residents.
- Public library systems are providing mobile access to library resources including audio books, e-books, videos, and music.

It is very difficult for libraries to convince the legislators and administrators of the importance of strong libraries and library systems and their impact on education and society in general. Studies prove that educational achievements of K-12 students are dependent upon a strong information literacy program spearheaded by a certified school librarian. (See http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf and http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/slmrcontents/volume13/small_phase3.cfm). Academic libraries support the educational and research needs of students and faculty but also provide information and services that support small business incubators, scientific research, and medical discoveries. Public and special libraries also support the needs of businesses and cultural organizations as well as the citizen-researchers, genealogists, early literacy, and unaffiliated scholars. All types of libraries can influence the breadth and depth of available content. However, it is through the library systems that all types of libraries are given the opportunity to collaborate in providing more, better, and faster library services to New York State residents. Library systems should be viewed as a model of shared services and collaboration in which every dollar funded through New York State to support libraries has an estimated return of investment of at least \$3.93. (See <http://scls.suffolk.lib.ny.us/pdf/librarystudy.pdf>) and could be as high as \$13 (<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/stackup.htm>).

Therefore, in this time of change and in light of the beginning of the New Century's second decade, the New York Alliance of Library Systems offers these recommendations:

Libraries and Library Systems

1. Library systems should assist their members in adapting to current expectations more quickly. For example, people use online services such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing to search the internet, quite reasonably expect that they will be able to identify library holdings in the same manner. Users have also become comfortable with streaming video, audio and video podcasts, digital books that can be read on iPads or Kindles, and, also quite reasonably, anticipate that library holdings will be delivered to them in the same fashion. No matter what new technologies become available, the development of innovative services that meet the needs of information seekers should be a high priority. Library systems can provide the leadership and the expertise in developing these initiatives. Ongoing training, with an emphasis on technology, should be required for all librarians.

2. Libraries and library systems should encourage their staff to be at the forefront of innovation – developing new technologies that enhance end users' experiences and not simply adopting or massaging already developed ones. Emphasis should be placed on creating applications that enhance information seekers' ability to understand content as well as creating

incubators that allow librarians to work with experts in other fields to improve information retrieval and delivery.

3. Library systems should consider restructuring governance and initiating partnerships for greater collaboration at the regional and state level, and even consolidating if appropriate.

4. Library systems should build on their strengths and assist their members in building on theirs. Libraries of all types need to have staff expertise in using new technologies to deliver information and services, and need to provide materials in a variety of formats that are available all the time. Library systems are key in assisting their members in building on their individual strengths, resources, collections, and personnel. Library systems should anticipate and develop innovative services, adapt to changing climates, and be willing to cease out-of-date services when they no longer provide benefit to their members or the end-users.

5. Library systems should consider fees for special services and/or assist their members in developing or taking advantage of revenue generating opportunities. Systems should proactively encourage and assist their member libraries that are eligible for publicly-voted funding to get on the ballot and win the vote.

State Library

6. The State Library should engage stakeholders as partners, be flexible in the application of regulation, and provide leadership in the development of shared or cross-contracted services.

7. The State Library should continuously review and update outdated standards, guidelines, and regulations. Legal assistance should be provided for public libraries seeking district library status. Incentives for collaboration, innovation, and shared services among systems should be offered, and best practices should be encouraged and rewarded.

8. The State Library should develop training that is required for all boards and advisory councils to improve governance of libraries and library systems. Advocacy and development should be necessary components of the training to assist the library system and their members in improving funding and recognition.

9. The State Library should be recognized and funded for its critical role in the education and development of the state and its citizens.

Board of Regents

10. The Board of Regents should focus attention on its role of library advocacy, and avoid seeing library services only through the prism of K-12 education. Education can take on many facets, and libraries and library systems of all types contribute to meeting the educational needs of NYS residents from “cradle to grave.”

-Endorsed by the NYS Board of Regents Advisory Council on Libraries, 12/2010

-Endorsed by the New York Library Association, 2/2011