System Membership Standards update

Background

The Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) System Membership Standards Committee was formed on December 5, 2014 and charged with the creation of standards for system membership in Illinois. The RAILS Board of Directors approved draft membership standards on June 16, 2017 with full implementation scheduled to begin on July 1, 2018.

The time between these two dates will be used for testing and data analysis. Data and relevant feedback will be reviewed by the RAILS board no later than May 2018 for any necessary revisions and additions to these membership standards.

The ultimate goal is that these standards, with possible revisions or additions that result from the test, will be implemented statewide for all system member libraries. We are working with the Illinois State Library and the Illinois Heartland Library System to ensure that standards are achievable but still also aspirational for all libraries. Additionally, we are working with the Illinois Library Association which currently has a committee revising the *Serving Our Public* guidelines for public library service. We expect *Serving our Public* and the system membership standards will be aligned.

System membership standards are designed to ensure the best possible library services to users of all system member libraries. Libraries will be required to meet core standards in order to be system members. Accomplished and exemplary standards provide a pathway to excellence for libraries that seek to expand or enhance their services.

Testing

In November, we worked with 55 libraries of all types across Illinois to test the standards. Staff developed a survey that each library completed. They also had the ability to provide comments and suggestions, which they did! We received excellent suggestions many of which we will incorporate into a revised version which we will present to the board at the April meeting.

The test itself was somewhat challenging. An Adobe fillable form was not the best vehicle for this type of complex project, but it was the best option for a short term test. Long term, we will develop a web form that will greatly simplify the completion process.

To make the test form workable, we did modify some of the standards wording so that they differed in some ways from the standards approved by the board. We also added supplementary questions designed to flesh out issues related to collection expenditures.

General observations

Standards related to policies were difficult for testers to answer. For example, one core standard called for a specific customer service policy. Many testers responded that they had

policies that covered customer service, but not a separate policy.   We plan to reword the standard so it does not require a specific customer service policy, rather that policies in place generally speak to the importance of customer service excellence.

The standard that calls for regularly gathering input from the community was too vague. The question was what type of input – a formal survey, a suggestion box, and how often.

A definition of self service is needed. Many libraries interpreted self-service as only self-check units.

For the facilities standards, we received many comments because building issues are so difficult to solve. Funding limits a library's ability to make building improvements. The age and design of a building impacts what services can be offered. We plan to refocus these standards on compliance with laws and efforts by the library to make the most of existing buildings as well as plan for updates and replacements when possible.

For funding, the core standard that calls for libraries to contact surrounding communities or residents in order to expand service to the unserved was very controversial. Comments were about vagueness of how to meet it, too specific to public libraries, not appropriate for core and that it does not even apply to all public library situations.

We asked supplementary questions about collection expenditures not included in the Illinois Public Library Annual Report, such as membership in a shared catalog, ebook consortia, OCLC and resource sharing utilities such as LinkIn and Find More Illinois because these services increase access to resources. Analysis of test data indicates adding this data will enable many more libraries to meet the 8% minimum collection expenditure requirement.

Preliminary Implementation recommendations

We will continue to closely analyze the data and possible revisions. Here are some possible implementation recommendations:

1. Implement standards as of July 1, 2018 for data collection only for all Illinois libraries
2. Grandfather all library directors as of July 1, 2018 as in compliance with professional leadership standard
3. Collect data in year 1 for core standards only. Accomplished and exemplary standards will be available for individual libraries to self-test.
4. All libraries will have 5 years to meet all core standards. (July 1, 2023).
5. A system membership standards committee should be established to oversee testing, data collection and compliance for all system members in Illinois. Committee members should include member libraries and system and ISL staff.
6. System membership standards should be aligned with ILA and other professional association standards or guidelines.