

Regent's Public Library Advisory Committee (RPLAC)
Minutes from the retreat to The Inn at the Blueberry Plantation - Alma, GA
August 17th - 19th, 2010
[ABRIDGED]

Present at all meetings were:

Jan Ison (JI) - *Facilitator*

GPLS Staff/Administration:

Christopher Evans (CE) - GPLS (Business Manager)
Lamar Veatch (LV) - GPLS (State Library Director)
Julie Walker (JW) - GPLS (Deputy State Library Director)

Library Directors:

Patricia Edwards (PE) - Jefferson County Library (Rural Single County)
Lecia Eubanks (LE) - Cherokee Regional Library (Rural Multi-County)
Joe Forsee (JF) - Northwest Georgia Regional Library (Urban/Rural Multi-County)
Dusty Gres (DG) - Ohoopsee Regional Library System (Rural Multi-County)
Alan Harkness (AH) - Piedmont Regional Library System (Urban/Rural Multi-County) - *Chairman*
Greg Heid (GH) - Newton County Library System (Urban Single County)
Anne Isbell (AI) - Lake Blackshear Regional Library System (Rural Multi-County)
Jon McDaniel (JM) - Forsyth County Public Library (Urban Single County)
Adrian Mixson (AM) - Hall County Library System (Urban Single County)
Richard Sanders (RS) - Hart County Library (Rural Single County) - *Secretary*
Leigh Wiley (LW) - Worth County Library System (Rural Single County)
Carrie Zeiger (CZ) - Flint River Regional Library System (Urban/Rural Multi-County)

Participants will be referred to in the minutes by their initials.

DAY ONE:

There were opening remarks and "thank you" from AH. A message of unity, that we need to be thinking of what will be best for everyone. Stressed the need for following procedure and for civility.

Welcomed JI as our facilitator.

LV dialed in Rob Watts (Chief Operating Officer for the Board of Regents) on speakerphone. Message of support, but admitted that he cannot remember an economic situation this bad.

BOR is already operating under a 4% budget cut - we should plan for a MINIMUM 4% budget cut.

State revenues have been up slightly for two months in a row. We may be able to hold at a 4% reduction, but we have to be prepared for 6% or 8%.

The bad news is that next fiscal year, the Federal incentive money goes away, so we'll be looking at 6%, 8% and 10% cuts in FY 2012. So, at least two challenging years, and the economic prediction is that the real turnaround won't come until 2015. The University System is going through similar problems to libraries, looking at personnel cuts.

After the gubernatorial elections, the current governor will present budget recommendations to the new governor, but the new governor may have his own priorities.

Introductions of participants, including facilitator and GPLS staff.

Discussion of agenda.

Think about things in broad terms and phased-in approaches, as well as procedures that will have both immediate and long-term effects.

Our objective is a recommendation to GPLS, BOR and to our colleagues.

State funding allocations will be discussed.

We'll be looking to understand and evaluate funding formulae.

We'll evaluate and recommend staff allocations for FY 2011.

We'll create a prioritized list of state services, including on-behalf funding and services.

Prioritized list of system services.

We'll be skipping the discussion of LSTA dollars for the moment.

Discussion of process - suggestion from JM to address immediate 4% cut and carry it over into a long-term plan or change it.

AH said that the fundamental questions are the purpose of state dollars and how best to distribute them. (This was added to "desired outcomes" list.)

Terms of discussion: Is this something to do for FY 2011 and what does it mean for the long term?

LV wants basic philosophical question addressed: What is Georgia public library service (the actual service, not GPLS) all about?

GH expressed the opinion that FY 2011 is the immediate barrier, and that we need to evaluate, prioritize, and re-examine regional incentives.

Setting the stage (LV and JW)

Reduction requirements with dollar amounts: SEE HANDOUT #1

OPB began withholding with their August grant to GPLS.

Reduction will need to begin with the second quarter, but should cover all of FY 2011.

GPLS should consider cuts to be permanent, and furloughs are not to be a component.

For FY 2012, GPLS has to submit a plan for reductions of 6%, 8%, and 10%.

Big cuts began at the end of FY 2008.

Questions arose related to LSTA expenditures. The statement was made that there is a minimum \$4,371,057.00 maintenance of effort match required for FY2011.

JW - New instructions from OPB that cuts that are applied for FY 2011 will be applied to FY 2012.

Discussion of the purpose of state money. Including:

PE - Intent is to assure quality library service throughout the state.

LE - Asked that "equitable" be added.

JF - According to OPB, library service should be maintained at a minimum level with enhancements to come from local money.

JW - State funding is to provide enhancement and fund economy-of-scale projects (a quote from the GPLS statement of purpose).

LE - State funding should be used for consortial services.

JF - Shared tech support.

AM - Would like to see challenge grants or other incentives.

PE - Would like to see incentives/accountability to enforce standards.

Discussion of minimum services and local control of services.

Discussion and explanation of the state's excellent standards document and its enforceability, or lack thereof.

Assessment of discussion topics.

Discussion of the criteria for state dollars.

Discussion of what constitutes a reasonable expectation of equitable service.

Discussion of the 50% local funding requirement.

DG remembered that the original RPLAC idea was that if 50% wasn't possible, GPLS dollars would be reduced to match local funds.

PE wants enforcement of state standards.

LE doesn't feel that MOE encourages local enhancement.

Other opinions were stated that the MOE requirement has kept local support from shrinking on many occasions.

Jl asked if ability to pay is included in the funding formula? LV: Not that's built into state law - currently we can only use geography and population in calculations.

DG - Interjection about the "Kinchafoonee Anomaly".

JM - 48 out of 159 counties represent 4.2% of the state population and use up 20% of the state aid money.

Discussion of the value of a professional librarian within a county and the variety of possible functions they can fulfill. Value of professionals vs. paraprofessionals.

Discussion of directors and how they are distributed.

JM's proposal to downgrade some MLS positions to state-paid non-MLS positions. SEE HANDOUT #7.

Much discussion, with AM saying we should pick one of JM's plans and go with it, with discussion and tweaking.

Discussion in small groups: Discussing formulas for positions, and thinking about FY 2011 and beyond.

Formulas:

JF's plan - return to "pre-Sapelo" formula.

JM's plan - modification of his previously presented formula, raising non-MLS state-paid positions to \$55K per year, so that the option to change back to an MLS position exists.

After reconvening, bleak attitude prevailing.

AH mentions lack of progress. Describes thresholds as "arbitrary" and says they should be based on defensible numbers.

Much discussion about the use of saved dollars.

Modification of JM's plan with more reductions to SSG.

GH - Noted that there would be permanent loss of positions for some systems.

LE - Suggested that size of service area might be considered.

LV - Colleagues at ACCG say that regionalization is on its way and that there needs to be discussion of incentives.

AH - Stated that losing multiple positions would encourage him to seek alliance with another system.

Discussion of advantages/disadvantages of regional system.

Discussion of the day's progress, including an assertion that we all have similar goals - customer service for Georgia.

DAY TWO:

Discussion of agenda items.

Other proposals with CE crunching numbers.

Much discussion of options - attempting to avoid cutting personnel in FY 2011.

GH - asked about "sacred cows". JW asserted that there were none, but since TBC/GLASS has been undergoing renovation for a year, it is at least "semi-sacred".

Discussion of the need for GPLS to convey to directors that they're feeling the pain, as well, for reasons of director morale.

JW said to keep in mind that we might want to think in terms of a 5% cut, rather than 4%.

LE expressed a preference for local control of a percentage cut.

JL listed GPLS grants by categories with dollar amounts. Discussions of the various items and implications, real and political, of cuts.

Included political question - how can you cut materials and not cut salaries. Salaries have been cut four times - step increases delayed twice, years added to steps, furlough days.

Preliminary consensus to combine materials and SSG grants and cut the combined grant to give flexibility.

Discussion of FY 2012 - many opinions expressed. JW said that the presentation to OPB had to be made by Monday with minimal articulation of funds to be removed and the impact this will have.

Discussion of possible inequities with input from AI and JM and discussion of balance and quality of service.

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Articulations of present formula and regionalization by LV and JF and current lack of incentives.

Reminder from DG that regional incentives being built into Sapelo 10 document but were never funded.

JM - mentioned that his model was written of necessity but his ultimate vision is of super-regionals governed by a board of directors, each of which would be responsible for individual systems. JF pointed out that super-regional idea is similar to the BOE's RESA program.

Discussion/articulation of GPLS on-behalf expenses and their status as sacred or semi-sacred cows.

Discussion of inequities from rural and metro points of view.

MUCH discussion of qualifications for non-MLS personnel with anecdotal discussions about the likelihood of hiring qualified personnel without the offer of an MLS-level salary. Philosophical discussion/disagreement/digression about value of an MLS degree.

Discussion of JF's formula-presentation. MUCH discussion including equitability of rural single-county systems losing one out of two MLS positions.

MUCH debate about the version of the plan that would eliminate over half of the MLS positions in the state. No one feels that they can sell it - we'd be opening ourselves up to much additional gutting by unsympathetic legislators and bureaucrats.

Discussion of system services grant and materials grant formulas are as fair and equitable as possible. Interjection of opinions that SSG is more valuable than the staff position that some are losing. Much discussion. SSG is defensible to the legislature, so it is palatable for loss for more people, but everyone has opinions. In the end, materials and SSG are being - by apparent consensus - held harmless with cuts being kept to staffing.

DAY THREE:

Discussion of what small, rural single-county systems would do in an ideal world in terms of replacing personnel.

Agreed-upon statement: "The purpose of Georgia Public Library Service state funds is to support library service to the people of Georgia through county and regional libraries, providing equitable access to information; to encourage local support of libraries; and to assist libraries in efforts to achieve economics of scale through cooperative and consolidated services."

Motion on the floor from AI - A recommendation to GPLS that step raises for those who qualify be included in the FY 2011 budget. The motion was seconded by JF.

Discussion and clarification about the issue. JF called the question.

PE asked for a point of clarification and the motion was re-read.

Votes in favor = 3

Votes against = 7

Abstained = 2

Followed by agreement on criteria to be discussed further by RPLAC.

Listing of items for future discussion and re-examination of agenda items.