

Operational Plan For Consulting Services

Definition of the service

System consulting staff provides professional advice on matters relating to administration, operation and creation of libraries.

Introduction

The development of libraries, whether public, school, special, or academic is paramount to improvement of library service for residents of Illinois. The System role in improving libraries hinges on a quality-consulting program with staff that is able to provide professional advice on a wide range of topics that affect the day-to-day and long-term operation of libraries. The advising role of the System is designed not to provide answers to libraries' problems or perceived problems but to work with local agencies to identify problems and assist in developing solutions that are appropriate for the situation. Certainly there are times that the role of the consultant can be compared to that of a reference librarian: utilizing professional publications to answer questions identified by the member libraries.

The key to consulting services is to have available professional staff to work with the issues that arise from day to day.

A final consulting role is the specialized area of expanding tax-supported library service by encouraging larger units of service or working with individual citizens who are interested in establishing a library. Overall, consulting offers systems a choice of methods of delivering the service and much opportunity for creativity and intersystem cooperation.

Consulting Services Offered

- ***Building***
Illinois libraries continue to improve through remodeling or building a new facility. A library is usually involved in a major project such as this only once in a long span of years. Librarians, boards, and administrators are looking for guidance where decisions will have a long-term effect. RPLS provides consulting to librarians, boards, and administrators concerning the needs for a facility based on the library's service population and the financial support available including grants.
- ***Collection Management***
Librarians are aware of the need to be vigilant in the development of their libraries' collections in this technological age. No collection fulfills all the needs of the patrons, so it is important to know what strengths exist in each collection in order to be prepared to

participate in statewide sharing. RPLS works with all our libraries to provide assistance in collection management either as a group or on an individual basis.

- ***Establishment, Expansion, and Development of Library Service***

Establishment of public libraries is an ongoing discussion area with communities within RPLS boundaries who do not at the present time have access to a public library. The establishment of a library requires the support of the community and that support develops gradually. Communities must decide if it is in their best interest to establish an independent library or to be a part of the expansion of another library district.

Over one-half of the public libraries within RPLS have become district libraries with the potential of adding unserved territory to their boundaries. The continued expansion of libraries within RPLS is certain, and we constantly work with librarians, boards and other community members to encourage that establishment or expansion to eliminate unserved areas.

- ***Grants Development***

The philosophy of RPLS continues to be one of facilitating, enabling and encouraging individual libraries or groups of libraries to apply for grants. Librarians gain experience and confidence through administering their own grants. Over the years, the System has applied for grants to improve the System for all member libraries and will continue to do so in the future. Every opportunity for statewide grants, which affect individual libraries is publicized and encouraged so libraries within RPLS can take advantage of grants, which may be a one-time opportunity.

- ***Interlibrary Cooperation Activities***

In RPLS there are many libraries located in small communities and many solo librarians serving patrons. RPLS provides opportunities for sharing of ideas and forums where librarians can develop their own alliances and friendships. The System by its very nature is a cooperative operation, and libraries expect to be a part of that activity.

- ***Legislation/Law***

The System is the conduit for information regarding the legislative process in the State of Illinois. RPLS provides opportunities for librarians to interact with legislators. Notices of Federal and State legislation that impact libraries are distributed to member libraries. Librarians are encouraged to express their opinions regarding library legislation.

RPLS offers interpretation and assistance in understanding library and other laws, which pertain to the legality of library service. See the section on Legal Opinions under Administration for additional information on this topic.

- ***Library and Personnel Administration***

RPLS is charged with some reporting responsibilities in regard to library administration, and considerable time is spent with librarians helping them complete forms for State requirements. As new librarians are hired, the need is always there to orient new people to

the process. RPLS provides librarians and boards with opportunities to better understand their roles within the library and the community.

Personnel becomes a sticky problem for every library at some time, and it is an area where librarians and board members feel a need for consultation. RPLS provides group opportunities to discuss the issues involved, but confidential discussions are held with individual libraries to provide a sounding board when problems arise.

- ***Marketing of Library Service***

Each library has its own style of making its patrons and community aware of its services. RPLS takes every opportunity to encourage libraries to publicize library services available by recognizing libraries that provide good materials or activities. RPLS sets an example by producing materials which create awareness of system and statewide activities.

- ***Planning and Budgeting***

Planning and budgeting take considerable time for administrators and boards. Planning is an area that has been required of public libraries for statewide grants. However, all types of libraries benefit from the creation of a long-range plan. RPLS works with its member libraries to continue the process of planning.

Budgeting in today's changing libraries is a daunting task. Librarians are sometimes uncomfortable when the responsibility for tight budgets falls into their hands, so consulting in these areas consists of reassurance as well as practical suggestions regarding expenditures. Assistance given to libraries in the budget process does not replace the responsibility of the library for determining the specific monetary needs of their library nor the fulfilling of legal filing requirements.

Consulting Services Providers

Consulting services to RPLS librarians are provided by librarians employed by RPLS, other employees of RPLS who have technical training in specialized areas such as automation or interlibrary loan, and RPLS member librarians who have expertise in a variety of areas such as library expansion, Friends groups, and preservation. The names of individual system staff designated as the provider of consulting in each of the core and general areas of consulting are available in the Whom to Ask For What section of the system Web page.

RPLS keeps abreast of state and national issues and initiates consulting services on those topics, which are emerging as emphasis areas. RPLS librarians respond to consulting calls concerning all the areas mentioned in the standards in a timely manner. Some consultants tend to be specialists in areas such as school libraries, automation and reference, but all the consultants take questions from librarians or refer them to the person with the most knowledge in the area.

Delivery of Consulting Services

RPLS has always adhered to the standards in regard to the delivery of consulting services, i.e., acknowledging requests within two working days, satisfying 90 percent of the consulting requests, and satisfying the consulting requests in five working days or negotiating a different time line. Consulting requests are a paramount concern of the System and will continue to be so. RPLS answers all consulting questions and requests or contacts individuals within the system, state, or nation that have the needed facts. Also, a network of consulting exists within the RPLS area as a result of contacts made and knowledge developed over time. Member librarians have come to expect and do receive quality consulting service from RPLS.

Level of Consulting Assistance

The level of consulting assistance varies from library to library and from person to person. If a question can be answered by a phone call or email, that is the extent of the assistance. However, if a librarian requires long-term help on a project, we will provide our expertise. A consideration is the level of training of the librarian or the extent of the problem. RPLS offers help and will continue to work with the librarian for as long as the librarian wants advice. In general, the consulting advice we offer does not include actual hands-on activity in the library except for demonstration purposes or to get a project started.