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Southern Systems Group

Comments from CooperationToday regarding merger planning process (as of 2.7.11)

Topic: Your Input Needed

January 27, 20110, at 17:28, Elaine Foster writes: *Many small libraries in Southern Illinois do not have Librarians with degrees. Many of us can not possibly pay the salary of a Bachelor or MS degree. What do you say to those of us who have been members of Shawnee for years, some of us from the beginning of Systems? I have been here for over 45 years, and am ready to retire. My Assistant has been here for 25 years, and has been trained to take my place. Neither of us have degrees except in the hard years of experience.*

January 28, 2011, at 11:51, Bev Obert responds: *Elaine, I understand your concern. These membership criteria are the minimum that a library should have. This is a difficult and stressful time for libraries. That is why we have inserted the full conditional membership level for the new system. This will allow all current members to stay members and give all of us five years to work toward meeting or revising the standards. Much can change in the next five years and this provision gives us the breathing room to thoughtful study the membership criteria if changes are needed.*

Topic: Draft Membership Standards

January 31, 2011, at 15:59, Elaine Foster writes: *I left a comment a few days ago about small libraries that cannot afford to pay someone with a degree. I am going to retire later this year after working as Library Director here for 46 years. I do not have a degree but have taken correspondence classes, 1 year college and some continuing education along the way. I also attended SMPLI a few years back. My intended successor has been with me for 25 years and has attended continuing education credits. I plan for her to attend Small Public Library Institute this year. She also plans to sign up for online classes to work toward her LTA. Do these things count? Hopefully you will consider all of these options in your membership criteria. Thanks so much. Elaine Foster, Library Director Carmi Public Library*

January 31, 2011, at 19:55, Bev Obert responds: *Elaine, All of these things that you mention are important and are the way many who staff our smaller libraries gain education. The draft criteria that we have now are what we feel is the minimum requirement for libraries. We are not looking to remove members from the system but to have a criteria that encourages the best qualified staff possible so that the residents will have the best service possible.*

We are using the term full conditional for all members that are current full system members but that would not meet the new criteria. There will be a number of years that libraries will have to meet the new criteria. It will take a while to get all the kinks worked out. Please bear with us as we move forward.

February 1, 2011, at 14:54, Juliette Douglas writes: *My decision to work for a System comes from my personal commitment to libraries and all they can offer to the communities they serve. I have always felt that the role of a System is to support libraries in helping them bring the best possible service to the*

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communities they serve. I am firmly committed to the concept that each community has the right to determine (through a defined process) whether they want to have a library and to what degree they can financially support it.

While I agree that Systems should encourage library directors and staff to pursue a MLS, it is not always possible for a variety of reasons. Additionally, the quality of service provided through a library is not always based on the degree of its staff. There are other ways to continue to learn and stay informed. In our System (and I am sure in other Systems as well) there are many libraries who are headed by committed, well informed individuals who do not have MLS degreed librarians and provide a variety of wonderful services to the people in their communities.

As the Planning Panel debates the topic of system standards, I hope there is a healthy discussion on the role of the new System and agree that that State library standards are sufficient. An unintended outcome of having more strict education requirements could be to support those more financially strong libraries. Communities and schools with less financial resources could eventually be denied resource sharing and delivery for the populations they serve; opportunities to have access to other financial resources available through federal and state supported grants; and opportunities for their staff to have access to learning opportunities offered through Systems and the State.

Quality Information is one thing that should be available to ALL people in Illinois." Hopefully, working together, we will expand those opportunities, not restrict it."

February 2, 2011, at 08:10, Leslie Bednar responds: Hi, Elaine, Thanks very much for your response, and for continuing the discussion regarding membership standards. Your concerns regarding membership requirements are clear and may likely be echoed by other members of the four southern library Systems.

It is important to keep in mind that the proposed standards are only that—proposed. The Legal, Governance and Membership sub-committee of the southern Systems planning panel has requested all members review the proposal and provide feedback. At some point in the near future, the entire planning panel will vote on the proposed standards.

We have an incredible opportunity in our state to combine the collections of library System member libraries through enhanced resource sharing projects. Within the four southern library Systems, that opportunity will be a positive one for patrons if we can look toward membership standards that fully include all current full-level members.

Topic: Proposed Membership Criteria

December 30, 2010, at 12:19, Susan McKinney writes: It looks like the committee has really worked to cover all the bases as far as public libraries are concerned. I appreciate the fact that you are giving current members an amount of time to meet the new requirements of the new combined system. However should you really mention disbanding a library? That comes under the home law provisions and is the decision of the library's governing body.

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December 31, 2010, at 19:30, Bev Obert responds: *Susan, Thank you for your comments. You wondered if we should mention disbanding a library? I feel that it is an option that a library board should not overlook or feel should never be done. If a library can not meet the membership criteria they have a few options, such as raising taxes, joining another library, etc. If everything else fails the one option left would be to disband. It is not something a library board would do lightly but it is something that may have to be discussed and looked at. It would be the local libraries decision. I have served as the librarian and as a board member of my home town library. I know the difficulties that small libraries face and the difficult decisions the Board is often faced with.*

January 12, 2011, at 10:34, Jan Prough writes: *I feel the committee has done an excellent job, but I have one small reservation. In terms of school libraries, no matter what the librarian wishes, the school board has the final say concerning hours at a building. If my district wants me at the elementary school 3 days, and the high school 2 days, that does not qualify under these guidelines. Does the library, and therefore, the student body suffer, if our membership is terminated for this reason?*

January 14, 2011, at 15:17, Bev Obert responds: *Jan, You make a good point. This is one of those things that is so difficult about membership standards especially for the school members. There are so many different arrangements of student population by grade level in the districts buildings. We shall look at this language and see if we can word it so as to provide some latitude in the number of days in a library would be 1/2 time. Would it be better to say one librarian for every 2 schools but not specifying the amount of time in each?? This will be looked at carefully.*

January 12, 2011, at 13:34, Chris Dawdy writes: *Reading through the proposed membership standards, I noticed the following requirement:*

“Employs a director or head librarian working a minimum of 20 hours/week (Public, Special and Academic): Schools employ a certified librarian working a minimum of the equivalent of ½ the regular average school week.”

I believe most public libraries work under IMRF, right? Under IMRF, part-time employees can only work 1000 per year, which translates to 19.2 hours a week. Maintaining the current wording on the proposal will certainly create a hardship for some libraries.

January 14, 2011, at 15:25, Bev Obert responds: *Chris, You are correct that many Public Libraries are under IMRF, However many are not. The 1,000 hours is not how much they can work but the threshold at which the employee becomes eligible for IMRF coverage. Under your example a staffer working 19.2 hours a week would not be eligible for IMRF coverage if the library has chosen the 1,000 hour limit.*

Please note, we are looking at the Head librarian, Director’s position. At 20 hours a week they would be eligible for retirement IMRF coverage. If a library is willing to pay for IMRF (and there is a separate tax levy that can be used for this) it seems that they would want to have the person running the library to have this benefit.

Also note the 20 hours is the minimum number of hours to work and the minimum number of hours a library must be open.