

STLS Fund-Raising Advisory Committee  
Southeast Steuben County Library, Corning  
Thursday, August 24, 2006

Present: Chairperson Dale Wexell, Southeast Steuben County (SSCL) Library. Carol Berry, Bath; Jim Sleeth, Elmira; Cindy Schamel, Savona; Sherry Collins, Claudia Radin, STLS Trustees; Ristiina Wigg, STLS.

Dale Wexell, Director of Development, Southeast Steuben County Library, reviewed committee objectives:

- Determine feasibility of an STLS fundraising program to supplement existing revenues and to benefit all member libraries;
- Make report and recommendations to STLS board for review and action

Committee members responded to information presented at the July 25 meeting. Carol Berry thought that it would be difficult to sell fundraising for STLS to the general public, it would be a one-shot deal, and would have to focus on a specific result. It would be up to member libraries to let the public know why System services are valuable.

Why does STLS need funds?

- static funding since 1998
- rising costs/ changing services
- salary and benefits alone projected to increase \$30,000 in 2007, another \$30,000 in 2008

The group discussed the value as well as the difficulties in raising funds for an endowment for an organization such as STLS that does not have its own public constituency.

Participants also talked about an event, large scale needed, and necessary appeal so attendees would not necessarily need to know about STLS in order to want to attend. Lots of preparation time would be needed for an event – where would the person power come from? The Friends of the Horseheads Library was the group sponsoring a very popular wine and cheese fundraiser, food donated. It started small, grew over time and became a community social event. STLS does not have users that have the sense of community that could attract participants to an event. The event would have to depend on volunteers from the member libraries of the STLS system.

Dale Wexell said that any event can be successful and sustainable over time with commitment and good planning. For example, the Corning Scorch Fest, a music event held annually on a July Friday from 5 – 11 pm to benefit the United Way of the Southern

Tier, will clear about \$42,000 this year. However, such an event is a year in planning and has scores of volunteers before and during the event to ensure success. Sponsors also provide most the funds for expenses.

Any dollar raised for STLS would have to be targeted to benefit for member libraries from a marketing point of view.

There was extensive discussion of the possibility of “cosers” for public libraries.

Cosers (cooperative services) are a state-funded process used by BOCES to pay for services to members. Several school districts join together to purchase a specific service from BOCES. The first year the districts split the cost of the services. In succeeding years, the districts receive state aid reimbursements for the costs of the service, based on their property tax rate. State law would need to be changed in order for public library system members to benefit from cosers.

Rusty will talk to members of the Public Library System Director’s Organization (PULISDO) about working for state legislation that would enable “cosers” for libraries.

Other suggestions

- raffles. Sherry Collins said that raffles can be very popular; gun raffles, while not appropriate for our purpose, are an example of raffling something that would appeal to a lot of people who are not necessarily library oriented people
- cruises. Sell spaces on an already organized cruise. Typically a sponsoring organization gets about 10 – 15% of the cost of the cruise, and a free room for every 10 to 12 tickets sold. Free rooms can be used to obtain extra funds via a raffle.

Fundraising is a way to sustain growth for the Library System. A goal would be to raise a percentage of the total budget each year. For example 3% of the STLS budget is \$41,000. Raising \$41,000 annually would support services that would benefit all libraries.

Dale Wexell said part of marketing an event or campaign would be explaining that without an increase STLS would have to reduce services to each individual library in the system. The event or other fundraising activity is being held to ensure that services for member libraries are not reduced.

An event would not be successful unless a significant number of libraries contributed one or two people to work on the project. It might take a year to develop; fall 2007 would be the earliest that an event could be held. There should be a plan to hold the event annually for at least three years; at least 10 – 15 people would need to be on the committee; 50 - 100 people would need to give their time for a successful event. Half of the total effort is getting business sponsors; sponsors should fund the event so that the library system does not need to put money upfront.

**Grants:** Dale Wexell suggested that applying for large grants might be the most important and successful approach. Properly selected grants can be used to upgrade system services and help members upgrade services. Occasionally some money for grants can be used for some operating expenses when they are related to implementing a new program during the grant period.

Action Steps for an STLS Granting Program:

- System develops a strategic plan and prioritizes needs for grant-seeking;
- Grants committee, including representatives from major libraries, smaller libraries and STLS to advise on grant activities, identify potential grantors, select matches for best chances of success;
- Hire an experienced grant writer as needed to use the “right” words and format for a given grantor

Estimated cost \$10,000 for a \$1-2 million grant;

\$5,000 for grant less than \$250,000 but costs are often negotiable and depend on the complexity of the program.

Many grants are available; a regional library system serving economically-disadvantaged rural communities is attractive to funders. Over three to five years, a significant amount of funding could be obtained.

***Fundraising Mailing:*** the easiest approach with the least financial investment.

Dale Wexell outlined how a mailing might proceed. The objective would be to strike a cord with the person being solicited, to market services the System provides individual libraries. Local libraries would have to encourage contributions or buying onto the mail raffle – “it would benefit us in this specific way...” Carol said that the Dormann Library is engaging in a campaign for a \$2 million expansion. Doubtful whether the Board would want to share the library’s mailing list.

Again, a committee would decide on the details, however if the mailing took place from January – April, 2007, it might lessen conflict with member library fundraising schedules. STLS may purchase a mailing list, making sure that it was not more than 3 months old or secure regional mailing lists on line using postal zip codes.

***Fundraising Event:*** Dale would recommend postponing consideration of an event.

If the Board is interested, a committee would be appointed to look at possibilities – what would the event look like, where would it be held, when (a week-end, a week-day?) how to involve a significant number of libraries, what would have regional interest. If the commitment is there and the right people are involved, there is an excellent probability of success. If properly done events are sustainable over 5 years; after 5 years the event needs to be reevaluated and modified if necessary.

***Foundation/Endowment:*** conceptually feasible; contributions would come from all the local areas. It would cost approximately \$100,000 - \$ 150,000 for a professional to oversee a standard campaign for the STLS. The professional usually conducts a feasibility study of the entire region first. It is important to know what the potential is for getting the targeting endowment and who will be the givers in the major categories. If feasible, the professional then facilitates the forming of committees and the running of the campaign.

Southeast Steuben County Library raised approximately 85% of its endowment from initial contributors, approximately 150 people and organizations. This is typical of most endowment or capital campaigns.

Jim Sleeth suggested that STLS encourage libraries to start local endowments or foundations. Jim also suggested that STLS do more to educate members and encourage them to become Public Library Districts. Ristiina Wigg agreed, saying that about 75% of members obtain at least some of their budget through public vote. Jim cited the new Chemung County Library District which will be asking voters for a 3% increase this year, with a good chance of success.

Bottom Line: STLS cannot be successful in any fundraising unless it is tied to local libraries.

There was a *sidebar discussion* about the need for individual libraries to be more knowledgeable about increasing their own funds; for example, services for which they could charge. There was also discussion of the importance of patrons carrying the library funding message to state legislators.

**How to proceed:** Dale Wexell suggested that applying for medium to large grants is a must to maximize impact on all the libraries in the system. Grants could expand the service level (example: all libraries receive circulating laptops). The region has significant poverty levels that make it attractive to granting agencies. Technology is the ripest granting area, examples – Gates Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, IMLS, etc.

Claudia Radin said that the first step would be explaining to members the need for fundraising so they would support this effort.

Also, a mailing and raffle combination could be the most effective strategy for mail fundraising. There could be a daily drawing or other. It would need to be marketed by member libraries and patrons could purchase the tickets in the respective libraries also. In 2004 the Southeast Steuben County Library raised \$ 4,000 from 190 participants through a mail raffle which provided a daily drawing of up to \$ 100 over a four month period. About ½ monies collected can be retained as profit.

There was more discussion of member support for System fundraising. Sherry Collins said that if more money cannot be raised, the last resort would be to cut STLS services to members. “We have to promote the support of members.”

## **STLS Fundraising Advisory Committee**

### **Recommendations to the STLS Board September 19, 2006**

A strategic issue for the Southern Tier Library System is likelihood of limited growth in state funding for libraries and Systems. The current level of System services cannot be maintained indefinitely without increased funding. Southern Tier will continue to stretch funds through cost-effective services and careful use of grants, work with members on shared financial support of services, and investigate additional sources of funding.

The Southern Tier Library System Fundraising Advisory Committee met July 25 and August 24 to investigate additional sources of funding. The Committee's objectives were to:

- Determine the feasibility of an STLS fund-raising program or strategy to supplement existing revenues to benefit all members
- Report recommendations to the STLS Board for review and action decision

The committee recommends over the next three to five years:

1. Communicate with members about the need and plan for external fundraising. "We can all join together to share resources to make more resources for libraries and library users." If STLS doesn't receive increased revenues we can't do everything we are doing now; we can't keep services current.
  - a. Appoint a committee to work with libraries to help them recognize their ability and need to raise money locally
  - b. Discuss with members the importance of obtaining outside funding for STLS in order to maintain System services
2. Develop an STLS strategy for obtaining major grants to enhance services to members. The strategy will include service priorities and a timeline. Once the strategy is adopted, a committee of staff, trustees, and members would be appointed to develop an implementation plan – which grants, when, how members would be involved. Once a grant opportunity that meets the needs of the System and members, with a high probability that funding would be awarded to STLS, is identified, a professional would be hired to write the application.
3. Conduct an annual mail solicitation in a way that would work for member libraries. Appoint a committee of staff, trustees, and members to develop and carry out a plan.