

# Focus Group Final Report

For

Southern Tier Library System

March 13, 2006

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## Introduction

The Southern Tier Library System located at 9424 Scott Road, Painted Post, NY 14870, is a nonprofit cooperative library system serving libraries and reading centers in Allegany, Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Yates Counties. The system has 39 chartered libraries, 3 branches, and 6 reading centers with a total of 48 library buildings. Geographically STLS is one of the largest public library systems in New York State in terms of land area served at 3498 square miles, ranking fifth among the 23 Public Library Systems. STLS ranks 21<sup>st</sup> in terms of population served with only Clinton-Essex-Franklin Library System and Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library Systems serving fewer people. Southern Tier Library System is required to submit a Five Year System Plan of Service (POS) to the New York State Library/Division of Library Development in Albany, NY. The POS is due October 2, 2006 with an effective date of January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2011.

As described on the New York State Library/Division of Library Development web site <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/pos/indes.html>, the System Plan of Service should be regarded as a planning document, which identifies, organizes, and provides an overview of the service program including intended changes in services or priorities. It should show how the system anticipates it will fulfill the major roles expected of library systems.

A library system's role considers the major functions and services of a library system. It emphasizes what the system is trying to do, whom the system is trying to serve, and what resources the system needs to achieve these ends. Roles help the system define its priorities and focus its purpose.

The major recommended roles for systems are:

- Support and strengthen member libraries
- Facilitate equitable access to library services and resources directly to patrons/customers
- Facilitate resource sharing among libraries
- Provide leadership for improving library services for all

The purpose of the Plan of Service for all types of library systems is to:

- Articulate the basic agreement between the State and the governing board of the system which makes possible the payment of state aid to the system
- Enumerate the mutual commitments, responsibilities and obligations of the system and its members
- Share the system's mission, goals, intended results and evaluation methods with its members
- Determine how the system meets the service needs of its community, region, and the state

The System Plan of Service integrates current ongoing services and plans for the next five years. It should provide a picture of the intended results of its services for both libraries and individual users. The Plan of Service includes:

- System mission (purpose of the organization)
- Goals
- Intended results
- Evaluation methods

Southern Tier Library System initiated the process of writing a new System Plan of Service in early February 2006 by conducting focus groups of member library decision makers, for the most part library directors. A library consultant facilitated the focus groups, and evaluated the data collected. 62% (or 28) member libraries and/or reading centers participated in the focus groups representing 88% of the total population served by the Southern Tier Library System

Southern Tier Library System professional and support staff were also queried in a focus group setting.

## Focus Group Summaries

### **Dormann Focus Group Dormann Library, Bath February 7, 2006, 10 am - Noon**

#### Summary

A group of twelve people representing ten member libraries met at the Dormann Library on February 7, 2006. Written answers were also provided by two member library directors unable to attend the focus group for a total of twelve libraries replying to the questions. Eleven libraries are automated and one is not. Seven are Association libraries, four are municipal public libraries and one is a special district (county) library. Each participant was asked to respond to a series of eleven questions and a lively discussion occurred over the course of the next two hours. Responding to question one, over half of the participants cited funding as their single biggest challenge. Space issues (building maintenance and improvements as well as lack of space), acquiring new technology and/or equipment, collection development, board education and transitioning from a county department to an independent library district were also mentioned as primary challenges. The libraries identified a number of areas where they would like to introduce or expand services. Programming for teens and adults was high on the list; after school programming and help for college students; new/more space in which to do more programming, and having a coffee house in the library were also brought up. Restoration of previous services was also a key issue for several directors.

The top four system services most **valued** in this focus group were Delivery and/or Interlibrary Loan (12), Information Technology or IT (11), STLS Consultant and Support Staff Services (10), and Rotating Collections (7).

The top four system services **used** most by this focus group were Delivery and/or Interlibrary Loan (14), Information Technology (9), Rotating Collections (9) and Consultant and Support Staff Services (10).

The top four **essential** system services identified by this focus group were Information Technology (15), Delivery and/or Interlibrary Loan (14), STLS Consultant and Support Staff Services (11), and Technical Services (7).

### **Belmont Focus Group Belmont Literary and Historical Society Free Library, Belmont February 8, 2006, 9:30 am – 11:30 am**

#### Summary

A group of ten people representing nine member libraries met at the Dormann Library on February 8, 2006. Five libraries are automated and four are not. Eight are Association libraries and one is a public library. Each participant was asked to respond to a series of eleven questions and for the next two hours participants provided a great deal of information. Space and funding issues topped the list of greatest challenges that these member libraries face. Finding, retaining and paying for qualified staff was

also a concern for several. The libraries identified a number of areas where they would like to introduce or expand services. Programming, handicap accessibility, attracting teens, books on CD, money for technology/computers/equipment was also on their wish list.

The top four system services most **valued** in this focus group were Consultant and Support Staff services (12), Information Technology (7), Delivery and/or Interlibrary Loan (7) and Technical Services (4).

The top four system services **used** most by this focus group were Delivery and/or Interlibrary Loan (10), Information Technology (9) and Consultant and Support Staff services, Rotating Collections and Technical Services all received (5) votes.

The top four **essential** system services identified by this focus group were Information Technology (12), Delivery and/or Interlibrary Loan (10), Rotating Collections (6) and Consultant and Support Staff services (5).

### **Watkins Glen Focus Group**

**Watkins Glen Central School District Free Public Library, Watkins Glen**

**February 9, 2006, 10:30 am – 12:30 am**

#### Summary

A group of seven librarians representing six member libraries met at the Watkins Glen Library on February 9, 2006. All of the libraries are automated (or “almost” automated) and two identified their libraries as school district public libraries, two as members of a special district (county) library, two are association libraries and one is a municipal town public library. Each participant was asked to respond to a series of eleven questions and all were enthusiastic contributors to the lively discussion. As in the two previous focus groups the top challenges faced by these libraries were in the areas of funding and space. Mention was also made of a brain drain with the loss of key staff due to retirement identified as a concern. Another director indicated the need for more committed board members. The libraries identified a number of areas where they would like to introduce or expand services such as the need for additional space, programming, increasing the number of hours open, wireless connectivity and hiring a children’s librarian.

The top four system services most **valued** in this focus group were Delivery (7), Information Technology (6), Interlibrary Loan (5) *the group was adamant that Delivery and Interlibrary Loan not be combined*, and Technical Services (5).

The top four system services **used** most by this focus group were Delivery (7), Information Technology (7), Interlibrary Loan (6) and Technical Processing (5).

The top four **essential** system services identified by this focus group were Information Technology (7), Delivery (7), Interlibrary Loan (7) and Technical Services (4).

**STLS Professional Staff Focus Group**  
**STLS Offices, Painted Post**  
**February 10, 2006, 9:30 am – 11:00 am**

Summary

Eight members of the STLS Professional staff met for an hour and a half to respond to a series of eight questions. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis was also conducted. Two concerns were cited again and again – stagnant funding and the related loss of staff and inability to afford to hire new, qualified staff. One participant mentioned that lack of funds has resulted in a drop in staff morale. Many indicated that preparing a monthly report is too time consuming and that because of reductions in staff remaining staff have too many responsibilities. Others noted that there are too many meetings.

Response to the question “what one or two services currently offered by STLS could be eliminated?” there were mainly two answers: rethinking the way services are provided (outsourcing, increasing effectiveness of current services etc.) and indicating that there are no services that can be eliminated because there is no fluff.

During the SWOT analysis it was clear that participants regard the current/remaining staff as caring, hardworking and knowledgeable but there was a general sense of ennui among some of the staff and concern was expressed by some that staff is not respected, appreciated or trusted.

**STLS Support Staff Focus Group**  
**STLS Offices, Painted Post**  
**February 10, 2006, 11:30 am – 1:00 pm**

Summary

Seven members of the STLS support staff met for an hour and a half to respond to a series of nine questions. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis was also conducted. Several mentioned that they were pleased to be asked to participate in the focus group and to be asked for their opinions.

Many expressed concern about their jobs and whether or not they would even have jobs because of continued stagnant system funding. Several mentioned that communication is an ongoing problem, both internal communication at STLS and communication with members. A few cited a lack of opportunity for training to enable staff to do their jobs better as a challenge. Many feel a sense of pride in their own flexibility and ability to adjust to changes in their jobs with one participant summing it up by saying “I’ve been asked to do more and more on my job and I’ve been able to come up to speed.”

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis revealed that support staff believe that STLS staff, for the most part, are kind, considerate, experienced and caring. Others mentioned the comfortable work environment is a strength. Lack of opportunity for advancement, poor communication and funding were most mentioned as weaknesses.

For the most part the support staff seemed generally less worn down and discouraged than the professional staff.

## Question One: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**What is the single biggest challenge your library will face in the next 2 to 3 years?**

**Rationale:** This question was designed to determine what member libraries consider the most pressing issue facing their library. Each participant was asked to respond to the question as it relates to their library and their community.

**Evaluation:** Responses to this question revealed four major areas of concern:

1. The most widespread response to this question was **funding**, with nearly half of the participants selecting this as their first major area of concern. Funding issues ran the gamut from fundraising for a building project, to maintaining and/or expanding current levels of service, to paying for technology – i.e. new computers and software, to paying for and retaining qualified staff, to securing adequate/additional funding.
2. **Space** issues were the primary concern of many libraries. Aging buildings, expensive repairs, not enough space or inadequate use of current space, fundraising to pay for expansion/renovation/new construction were mentioned as challenges faced by a significant number of participants.
3. **Staffing issues** were also of concern to several participants. Directly related to funding, many cited finding and retaining qualified staff as of great concern. Lack of benefits to attract qualified staff and the expected retirement of experienced staff was also mentioned.
4. **Other** topics mentioned included the desire for engaged, supportive board members, transitioning from a county department to an independent library district and the implications it has on the board, the staff and services, and meeting the expected growth needs of a new facility.

## Question Two: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**What is the second biggest challenge your library will face in the next 2 to 3 years?**

**Rationale:** This question was designed to determine what member libraries consider the next most pressing issue facing their library. Each participant was asked to answer the question as it related to their library and their community.

**Evaluation:** Responses to question two had a number of similarities with question one, with funding identified by most who had not named it as their number one challenge.

1. **Funding** and maintaining or increasing (but not losing) funding was again identified as a major challenge. Within this area, several libraries mentioned that they are actively pursuing grant opportunities, although one noted that they don't have the staff to implement the grants as needed. Others cited the need for funding for additional library staff, other than volunteers, who would receive benefits.
2. A variety of **staffing** issues were mentioned by many of the participants as their second biggest challenges. The issues include: difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified staff at all levels, inability to offer staff benefits because of lack of funding, changes in the job requirements, staff being overextended and not prepared to offer modern library services, i.e. assistance with computers.
3. **Space** was also on many directors' minds. Several libraries mentioned the lack of or inadequacy of meeting room space - both for library programming and for community use. Ongoing maintenance and improvements are proving challenging for some. ADA issues, such as providing handicap accessibility were also mentioned. Finding enough space within an existing facility for new materials and equipment can be problematic with one participant remarking that she "doesn't have innovative ideas to use what we have."
4. Keeping up with **technology**: finding time for it, funding new equipment and learning about new formats was mentioned by some as a big challenge. A number indicated that they feel overwhelmed by the constant changes involved with technology.
5. **Other** topics mentioned by several included the possibility of re-chartering. Others want to involve the teen population more. Still others long for more active, involved, and educated trustees. Branding and/or marketing to get the public to understand what the new library district is all about was a concern expressed by representatives from the newly formed county library district.

## Question Three: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**If the opportunity came your way to offer one or two new services, what would they be?**

**Rationale:** This question was designed to encourage participants to envisage possibilities for their libraries, to dream, as it were, of what might be if money were no object.

**Evaluation:** A large number of participants expressed the desire to maintain or restore services that have had to be cut because of funding difficulties. For example, at least one director would restore old services in neighborhoods that previously had libraries. Another would restore what had previously been done when the library had a Parent/child grant.

Many, many had new/expanded programming on their wish list – a wide variety of programming for all ages and most especially for teens. Others want more children’s programs and the funds to hire outside performers, rather than having to rely on who ever would do a program for free. One director wants to create a more child-friendly environment at the library, and another would hire a full time children’s librarian. Coordinated after school programming and help for local college students were also offered as possibilities.

Several directors want the ability to offer downloadable audio books to their patrons, as well as beef up their collection of audio books on CD. A few mentioned the need for more public access computers, one library would like a PowerPoint projector and another would hire a “techie” to help teach computer skills.

More meeting room space, more comfy space, a community room, a new building, handicap accessibility and a “massive remodel of the library” were suggestions offered by a number of participants.

For the most part there was not a lot of “pie in the sky” dreaming going on with most focus group members. Traditional library services that libraries are currently unable to offer mostly due to financial constraints, were what was mentioned most often as the one or two services they would most like to offer.

## Question Four: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**What is the most difficult decision that you have had to make regarding your library last year?**

**Rationale:** This question was designed to provide Southern Tier Library System staff with insight into what member libraries found to be the most demanding issue that they had faced during the last year.

**Evaluation:** Many difficult decisions were related to challenges that had been expressed in questions one and two.

1. Issues with **boards of trustees** were mentioned fairly frequently. Disagreements with board decisions and opinions; recruiting new, active board members; getting boards to do what is expected of them; getting boards to “move forward”; and more involvement of board members other than just attending board meetings are of concern to many directors.
2. **Staff** issues were also mentioned as areas that involved difficult decisions. These issues included hiring and firing staff; losing staff because of low salaries and related to that, not replacing staff to save money; not being able to offer benefits; difficulties finding qualified people to fill support positions and cutting back on staff hours. One director indicated that she had to cut two full-time positions from 40 hours per week to 30 hours per week.
3. **Funding** continues to be a primary issue that affects libraries. Library votes and the stress involved with those votes were mentioned by several directors. Putting the library’s future to a vote and getting the board to agree to ask for more funding on the school ballot were raised by several participants as was determining how much of a tax increase the community would support to fund the library. Finding the money for essential building repairs and to pay for more staff were also concerns.
4. **Other.** A few participants have had to cut or drop children’s programming because of low attendance. Another director cited establishing and enforcing policies as a challenge. Still others mentioned automating their libraries with the need to weed, barcode materials and issue new patron cards as some of their difficult decisions.

By and large, most of the difficult decisions noted were seen as negatives and a hindrance to providing good library service, although it was agreed that the difficult decisions surrounding automating would have positive results.

## Question Five: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**What have you accomplished in your library in the last year that you are most proud of?**

**Rationale:** This question was designed to give member libraries an opportunity to share with their colleagues something that their library achieved that provided a sense of satisfaction to them. It also gave participants a chance to hear about ideas that they might consider implementing in their own libraries.

**Evaluation:** Focus group participants had little trouble with this question and were genuinely proud of their accomplishments. Responses generally were grouped in the following areas:

- 1. Programming and Other New or Improved Services.** New adult programming, a summer concert series, holiday parties for kids, and successful outreach programs involving Americore volunteers were reported. One director mentioned that library staff has made a concerted effort to improve customer service while another was pleased to finally meet grant parameters and as a result obtained a Xerox color printer. Another reported that a massive weeding in non-fiction and replacement of the discarded volumes with new titles has resulted in soaring circulation figures. Collection development, rearranging the collection to make it more “user” friendly, opening the library to more community groups and creating a quarterly town newsletter with library news occupying the first three or four pages, while the town pays for the postage, were also accomplishments cited.
- 2. Building improvements.** Many discussed improvements such as a new roof, getting air conditioning, having new front doors installed, painting, new carpeting, replacing all of the lighting (with funds from a matching construction grant) and a remodeled children’s room. Another participant was delighted that a new library is about to open in their community.
- 3. Creation of a New Library District** was an accomplishment mentioned by three participants. This involved coordinating the process so that everyone agreed that an independent library district was a good idea. The resultant passage of the vote to create a new district was described as exciting.
- 4. Miscellaneous.** Two participants mentioned becoming automated, another talked about writing and carrying out a new strategic plan, one library replaced old staff computer monitors with flat screens while another changed hours so that the library is now open all day and throughout the dinner hour into the evening.

## Question Six: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**What four system services do you value the most?**

**Rationale:** This question was designed to elicit responses that would identify what system services are of most importance or significance to member libraries.

**Evaluation:** Each focus group member was supplied with a packet of post-it notes. They were instructed to list each of the four system services they value most on four separate post-its and then place them on the wall where they were grouped into categories. The responses were tallied and are listed below in order of greatest number of responses to least number of responses.

1. **ILL/Delivery** received 31 “votes”. Two of the focus groups combined Interlibrary Loan and Delivery as one service while the third focus group identified them as two separate services. Either way, the services were described as very important. Having access to hundreds of thousands of items for patrons plus the ability to share and transport those materials is greatly appreciated by member libraries.
2. **Consultant Services and STLS Staff Support and IT.** These two services were found to be the second most valued services by focus group participants receiving 24 “votes” apiece. Having knowledgeable, responsive, helpful Southern Tier Library staff is very important and appreciated by most. Support in terms of administrative support, legal information, collection development, weeding, grant writing, adult, youth and outreach services, program support and assistance with advice/help with charter issues were all part of the value provided by STLS staff that were mentioned. IT provides member libraries with support, advice, database management, access to the online system, email hosting, and assistance regarding technology in general.
3. **Tech Services.** A little further behind was tech services receiving a total of 16 “votes”. Participants included cataloging, processing, and the creation of bib records. One director noted that having processing available to member libraries saves them time and money.
4. **Rotating Collections** received 11 “votes” as the fourth or fifth most valued system service. None of the participants elaborated on this service other than including it on the stickies that were counted.
5. **Additional “valued” services.** Continuing education received six “votes”, funding and the ability to obtain Steuben county aid received four “votes”, and advocacy received one vote.

## Question Seven: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**What system services do you use the most?**

**Rationale:** This question was designed to determine what system services are most used by member libraries.

**Evaluation:** Each focus group member was asked to provide the facilitator with a list of the four system services they use most, in the order of most importance to their library. This was done orally. The responses were tallied and are listed below in order of greatest number of responses to the fewest number of responses.

1. **Delivery and Interlibrary Loan** ranked #1 as the most used service with 37 “votes”.

Two of the focus groups combined Interlibrary Loan and Delivery as one service while the third focus group identified them as two separate services with 13 ranking Delivery # one, 1 ranking ILL/Delivery combined # one; 5 ranking Delivery # two, 2 ranking ILL # two and 5 ranking ILL/Delivery # two; 3 ranking Delivery # three and 4 ranking ILL # 3; 1 Delivery # four and 3 ranking ILL # four.

2. This was followed by **IT** with 28 “votes”.

Ranking is as follows: 9 ranked IT # one, 12 ranked IT # two, 2 ranked IT # three and 5 ranked IT # four.

3. **Tech Services** followed with 19 “votes”.

Ranking is as follows: 5 ranked Tech Services # one, 2 ranked Tech Services # 2, 5 ranked Tech Services as # three and 7 ranked Tech Services as # 4.

4. **Rotating Collections** rounded out the group of top four with 14 “votes”.

Ranking is as follows: 1 ranked Rotating as # one, 2 ranked Rotating as # 2, 10 ranked Rotating as # 3 and 1 ranked Rotating as # four.

5. Other services that received mention are **Consultant and Support Staff services** with thirteen “votes”, and **continuing education** two “votes”.

Ranking for Consultant and Support Staff services is as follows: 2 ranked C&SSS as # one, 1 ranked C&SSS as # two, 5 ranked C&SSS as # three and 6 ranked it as # four.

## Question Eight: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

Please identify the 3 – 5 most essential system services

**Rationale:** This question was designed to obtain information from member libraries about what they perceive to be the **3 to 5 most essential system services**.

**Evaluation:** Each focus group member was supplied with a packet of post-it notes. They were instructed to list each of the three to five system services they consider most essential on separate post-its and then place them on the wall where they were grouped into categories. Some participants used all five post-its while others used either three or four. The responses were tallied and are listed below in order of greatest number of responses to least number of responses.

- **ILL and /or Delivery** received 38 “votes”.
- Followed closely by **IT** receiving a total of 35 “votes”.
- There were 19 “votes” for **Consultant Services**.
- **Technical Services** received 15 “votes”.
- **Rotating Collections** received 13 “votes”.
- And **Continuing Education** received 3 “votes”.

## Question Nine: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**If you could suggest one change that could be realistically implemented at the system, what would it be?**

**Rationale:** This question was included to give participants a chance to voice their opinion about ways to alter or modify a service or program that is currently offered by the Southern Tier Library System.

**Evaluation:** Participants made a genuine effort to provide realistic answers to the question. Their response centered on two main areas.

- **Setting Priorities.** Many indicated that STLS has a responsibility to decide what they will focus on, even if it means offering few services and then provide the best possible service on the priorities that are selected.
  - Reallocate** funding. Need greater IT support. STLS must look at setting priorities.
  - Convince** the system to focus on four things – Automation, Delivery/ILL, Technical Services and Rotating Collections. And nothing else and don't charge for anything.
  - Retrain** staff.
  - The** board and the administration must provide leadership.
  - Reduce** outreach services to what the system gets from the state.
  - STLS** needs to set priorities. And give us back free processing.
- **IT Topics** included:
  - Develop** a better and more consistent interface plan (especially on the weekends) for handling the automation downtime/crashes.
  - Better** communication with the IT department. Acknowledge that we've asked a question and then respond. Improved customer service by the IT department. Need greater IT support.
  - Better** response from IT. A quicker response to both email and voice mail messages.
  - IT** needs to have a list of what each library owns in terms of technology so that when upgrades are sent they know what we have and what we are capable of implementing.
  - STLS** needs to put some consistent effort into working with our library to make the two automation systems work together to encourage resource sharing for the benefit of all.

**Miscellaneous.** Other suggestions about changes that could be implemented at the system included: catalog cleanup to reduce duplicate records, keep the member library directory up to date, return phone calls by all STLS staff when the library is open, find a convenient way to handle interloan pink slips, develop a more cooperative process between STLS and members in terms of grant writing in all areas – programming, materials etc. – have someone on staff who focuses on grant writing.

In addition several expressed concern for the system. “I know how much struggling they are doing. There isn't a whole lot that I want that I can't get right now.” And another mentioned that “if there were more funding there would be no problems”.

## Question Ten: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

**If more system aid becomes available, how would you like to see that money allocated?**

**Rationale:** This question was designed to give member library directors the opportunity to express their opinions as to where additional system aid (if it becomes available) might be allocated.

**Evaluation:** Many topics were brought up during the discussion of this question with reducing and/or eliminating cost sharing leading the list. Responses included:

- **Cost Sharing:** Don't charge for processing. reduce costs to individual member libraries. Reduce/eliminate/lower cost share expenses, cut automation cost share.
- **Hire additional STLS staff.** Expand automation (IT) services, have more coordinated services, provide onsite training, address the need for more grant writing, hire staff to coordinate big picture library issues. Members need to get together to talk about issues. There is absolutely none of that.
- **Give it to Member Libraries.** An idea supported by four participants. Also provide libraries with new computers.
- **Update rotating collections** including audio rotating collection.
- Make additional **construction money** available.
- Provide broader **bandwidth**.
- Buy a new **van**.
- Make available a "Resident" **performer** (Someone who comes for 2 weeks (?) and is available at little cost to as many libraries as can be scheduled during that time.

## Question Eleven: Rationale and Evaluation of Responses Of Member Library Directors

If you had one message to relay to system about future system service priorities, what would it be?

**Rationale:** This question was included to give member library directors the opportunity to express their opinion about the priorities of future system services that they see of greatest significance.

**Evaluation:** Focusing on the services that only a system can provide and keeping current with technology were the messages most often mentioned by directors in response to question eleven.

- **Technology.** Many expressed the need to keep priorities in the realm of technology to help everyone work better together. Keep in mind future tech upgrades. Communicate clearly about what is happening. Give more advanced notice and allow more involvement by members in major decisions especially in the area of technology. Provide support helping members cope with adjusting to technology changes. Provide member libraries with onsite technology help, or a traveling tech person who visits libraries on a regular basis. Find dollars for more tech support and tech staff. Increase broadband especially for libraries with connectivity problems. If the system makes a technology move, it needs to be to cutting edge technology, i.e. wireless. STLS needs to do fewer things in the area of technology and IT services, but do them better.
- **Focus, focus, focus.** When decisions are made about where to put money, prioritize services that only a system can provide and then focus on these. Concentrate on connectivity, delivery and consultant services. Provide those services that connect and benefit all. Run the system as a business. Deal in a business like way to solve problems. If something doesn't work, get rid of it. Find creative ways for funding to bring more money into the system. Think more out of the box and seek more flexibility in approaches to problems. There is not enough money to run the system for the benefit of members.
- **Be Realistic.** Have a more realistic approach to what is asked for from the libraries. There is not enough STLS staff to help libraries that struggle with keeping current, especially in the area of technology.

## Additional Comments and Conclusions

- A significant number of individuals participated in the focus groups and/or responded to questionnaires. 62% (or 28) member libraries and/or reading centers participated in the focus groups representing 88% of the total population served by the Southern Tier Library System. In addition STLS professional and support staff also provided input into the data gathering phase of the long range planning process.
- Member library director questions six “What four system services do you value the most?” seven “What four system services do you use the most?” and eight “Please identify the 3 – 5 most needed system services” yielded similar responses with Delivery and Interlibrary Loan identified as the number one service in terms of value, use and need. IT followed closely behind as the second most valued, used and needed service. Consultant services were second in terms of value, fifth in terms of use and third in terms of most essential. Technical Services came in third in terms of value and use and four in terms of need. Rotating collections were fourth in terms of value and use and fifth in terms of need.
- STLS professional staff expressed concern that continued depressed state funding has significantly affected not only the services offered by the system, but employee morale as well. It is clear current long-range planning efforts will require that tough decisions be made, priorities set and adhered to, and more efficient, streamlined, cost-effective system services be provided.
- Setting priorities was a theme that appeared in responses by member libraries during their focus groups. Some actually spelled out what they believed those priorities should be and suggested that the system consider a business model that would eliminate services that aren’t working or are not cost effective. Many believe that current services should be meticulously examined, clarified and reduced to only those services that a library system can provide that no one else can. This is signaled by the their choices of Delivery, Interlibrary Loan, IT and Consultant Services as the most valued, the most used and the most essential STLS services. The groups recognized that until or unless more funding becomes available doing “business as usual” is not a viable choice.