MHLS 2006-2011 Plan of Service
Focus Group Summary

19 sessions (1/25 – 3/23/06)
Total attendance 216, representing 56 libraries in 5 counties.
Participants included:
- Directors
- Assistant Directors
- Youth Services staff
- Circulation, Technical Services & ILL staff
- Reference / Adult Services staff
- Outreach / Literacy staff
- Trustees
- Friends

Challenges / Issues

Central themes:

1. **Marketing**
   - Making the case for support; demonstrating value
   - Public doesn't know what is available
   - Community doesn't know there are programs for all ages
   - Marketing to virtual users, using electronic communications
   - Voting publicity a challenge
   - Combat the perception that the library is an intimidating place
   - Common services are offered at every library

2. **Training**
   - Ongoing need for educational opportunities for directors, staff, trustees including: basics for staff, basics for trustees, raising / broadening staff comfort level w/ technology, opportunities to network with others who do the same things, technology is continually being updated and new things added
   - Continued need to teach patrons the basics; Increasing need to help patrons one-on-one w/ electronic resources; Many job seekers are computer novices
   - More interdependence among member libraries to satisfy patron needs = high need for standardization and enforcement of resource sharing policies and procedures

Common themes:

- **Space**: need space for technology, materials, programming; planning; bonds
- **Funding**: dominate trustees concerns for planning; balancing demands for services with decreased funding; control; how to budget for change; need broader base of funding
- **Patrons**: higher expectations for service, how to deal with them
- **Technology**: implementation of new initiatives; increasing demand for Internet access; new technologies keep coming
- **Youth Services**: attracting teens; after-school crowd; lots of young families – increasing demand for baby & toddler programming, more developmental levels. Need more links with schools, more assistance with promotion.
- **Community**: staying current and relevant to the community; demographic changes resulting in higher expectations; knowing what users & non-users want to see the

library providing; increasing number of foreign language speakers; differences in funding increase diversity among member libraries

- **Programming**: increasingly important; increasing amount offered; seeking affordable options. Increased need to offer a variety of computer classes; adult programming (a public library niche); readers' advisory
- **Collection development**: remote use vs. physical browsing; foreign languages; readers' advisory; new formats
- **Genealogy**: questions for unique info are labor / time intensive to answer and higher demand
- **Legal**: better understanding of legal responsibilities; more legal issues
- **Management**: keeping up with what is new; balancing 'all other duties as assigned'; overwhelmed/inundated; motivate/encourage

System Services

Central themes:

1. Delivery and automation are essential services that enhance the ability of each library to serve their community
2. Central services save time / effort of staff at local level and keep costs down

Common themes:

- Important to continue to offer knowledgeable staff that are available via phone/e-mail
- Consultations are timely and readily available – continue individual contact with boards and staff
- Continue basic and targeted continuing education for directors, staff, trustees
- Continue to investigate new ideas and programs that libraries can be part of
- Libraries are struggling to develop organizational structure to insure consistency – System should keep looking for ways for libraries to work "smarter"
- Need to cater to differing needs in smaller vs. larger libraries
- Web site a valuable resource
- Samples / templates of all kinds are welcomed and appreciated
- Libraries will pay more for design services
- Centralized Marketing
- More support for Friends including better communication, regular meetings and sharing of successes

Defining Quality Service

Central theme:

Customer Service: 78% of the responses directly targeted personal interaction / customer service skills

Common themes:

- Responsiveness to community needs / understanding community trends
- Good reputation throughout town (even to those who don't use the library)

Other Ideas

- Bookkeeping or accounting services from the system
- System grant writer
- Local lobbying (county level)