

NN/LM Greater Midwest Region (GMR) Site Visit Report

University of Illinois at Chicago

Chicago, Illinois

August 12, 2008

1) What are the strengths of the RML?

- The greatest strength of the RML is clearly its dedicated, hard working and enthusiastic staff. Associate Director Ruth Holst is a very gifted librarian and experienced leader. Along with her seasoned staff, together they have created a formidable team to take on a large and diverse region.
- There is a nice blend of new and fresh ideas as was evidenced in the staff presentations. As the relatively new Director, Kate Carpenter, becomes more immersed in the RML activities she should further strengthen the program. The GMR team should be strong enough to weather some possible turbulence that might occur should Ruth Holst be elected MLA President and those duties begin to press upon her time.
- Although some of the staff presentations overlapped in places, their presentations were excellent covering network services, consumer health, outreach, evaluation and technology support. The efforts of the new Technology Coordinator, Max Anderson was deemed particularly important as technology is continually changing and the Region will need that expertise to continue its outreach and meet its mission. The staff as a whole complements one another nicely and they seem well aware of their many challenges and have plans to address them. Feedback reports expressed well the expertise, flexibility and responsiveness of the staff and one stated “they exemplify the best in customer service.”
- The site team was very impressed by the university leadership and their apparent concerns for the RML, the Library, and library and information services in general. Mary Case, the University Librarian, has a strong background coming recently from ARL and therefore blends nicely with the dynamic Provost Dr. Michael Tanner. Dr. Tanner has been a major force on the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), a collaboration of some 12 Midwestern universities. His perspective on scholarly publishing, open access and author rights is not only important to education and research but to the Library in particular.
- There is always the concern as to whether the health sciences library should report through the medical school or the university library structure. Although the former structure is usually the preferred mode, in this case the arrangement seems

quite favorable. Dr. Tanner expressed his concern about the predatory practices of some publishers. In that regard he has been diligent in negotiating some very good agreements that have protected author rights and have saved substantial dollars in journal purchases. The university leadership clearly seemed tuned into the needs and challenges of running the GMR. It will be important for the GMR to continue to work with the university librarian in assisting researchers to conform to the goals and requirements of public access.

- The training and professional development program is solid, with excellent updates on technology and NLM products and services; the advocacy efforts are good, which includes the development of supportive promotional materials; and the assignment of specific liaisons to each state is commendable. The expanded grant program is an enviable one and the dispersion of monies across the region also builds commitment to the GMR initiatives.
- The GMR has well established programs and relationships upon which to build its programs. The staff is aware of the needs of hospital librarians and the current dynamics of hospitals and offers support to assist them.
- The GMR is beginning to make progress on a major initiative of the NLM, namely the development of a national emergency preparedness plan. Working with the RAC and an emergency preparedness working group representing all states in the region this effort is off to a good beginning.
- The physical plant of the GMR is quite pleasant, provides functional workspace and is located in the heart of the health sciences library.
- The structure of the GMR is successfully designed to address the multiple audiences of a large geographical area that encompasses many dense urban populations as well as vast rural spaces. There is concern about serving the many diverse populations in the region including Native Americans. It was noted specifically that the work being conducted with CBO's in Wisconsin with Hmong people and outreach programs for immigrants and refugees is commendable. The state coordinators are key players in the RML's continued efforts to reach out to the underserved populations.
- The goals established by the GMR for the 2006-2011 timeframe seems attainable and consistent with the priorities contained in the contract.
- Feedback indicated appreciation for ILL support, Docline assistance, the very good electronic mailing lists, the Cornflower blog and the general sincere effort by the GMR staff to foster networking within the region.

2) What are the challenges and what recommendations or suggestions would you offer the RML for dealing with the challenges to improve/enhance the program?

- A big challenge the GMR faces is the breadth and scope of activities they are charged to administer over a large geographic area and with a relatively modest staff complement. There may be a need for a more focused attempt to prioritize

- program initiatives in the region and track this through a set of systematic outcome measures. These priorities need to be vetted through the various established contacts in the region and shared throughout the region. This coordination can reduce actions being taken based on anecdotal information and at the same time improve overall communications within the region.
- The RML program has changed over the years from one geared to direct service to that of a more distributed mode. In this role it encourages, enables, trains and supplies seed funds for both traditional and new innovative services and backs up the entire region with its own resources and advisory services. A reasonable, but not excessive, amount of standardized and systematized data would be useful to adequately monitor developments within the region. This for example can be helpful in ascertaining whether the size of individual awards and the scope of the grant program are optimal.
 - It is commendable that the GMR has focused on minorities and underserved populations in its outreach program but some of the more rural areas like North and South Dakota appear to be in need of greater support. The organization of the outreach effort could stand some reassessment---Is the distribution of funds equitable throughout the region? Is the size of the stipends for outreach efforts sufficient? Are 16 outreach liaisons too many or not enough? Should outreach ties be developed to other formidable institutions in the region to complement resource and outreach libraries? Does the region need more face to face meetings or should it rely more heavily on electronic communications, what is the right balance? Could further efforts be made in partnering with CBOs in inner cities and rural underserved areas? Can more services be provided to certain populations with particular needs such as Native Americans? In other words a closer linkage of activities to “underserved” needs would be helpful and the mapping of regional demographics might be a good starting point to accomplish this goal.
 - It would be advisable if greater communication with resource library directors could be facilitated, perhaps by conducting bi-monthly or quarterly sessions. Technology may hold the answer as it appears there are only 2 face to face meeting supported through the RML contract.
 - Communication in general should always be subject to scrutiny as new modes provide new opportunities. The Web is obviously a mode to constantly be expanded and where new features can be added to communicate the latest accomplishments, new initiatives and proposed projects to regional members.
 - The RAC is a major component of the regional advisory and monitoring structure. While little insight was provided as to their activities during the actual site visit, a perusal of the RAC minutes shows that breakout sessions have occurred to deal with important topics such as the public health workforce, community-based organizations, electronic licensing, communications technologies and national emergency preparedness. The team felt that while the RAC is being used as a good sounding board perhaps more could be done to use their knowledge and understanding to assist in developing new or improving existing programs. In addition, in some instances proposals could be provided for the RAC’s reaction rather than simply presenting a subject for general discussion. This would require

- more preparation and structure but might be more productive given the limited time available at meetings and the infrequency that they occur.
- Work performed by librarians directly or indirectly for health professionals needs to be better understood and appreciated by them. The document delivery network is extremely powerful and the work now being done by libraries to foster public access and show authors how they can protect their copyrights is significant. Use of branding was also suggested so that key constituents, like health professionals, could see the connection with the RML and the NLM.
 - The GMR should continue and expand its efforts to partner wherever possible with health professional and health advocacy organizations. It should go beyond funding booths at such meetings and become proactive in facilitating involvement in the society program itself. This could be a more effective means of educating health professionals as to all the supportive work being done for them and their patients by health sciences librarians.
 - Partnering with other regions through consortia arrangements should be encouraged. For example a buying consortium with a nearby region could result in less expensive licensing fees. In this regard it also would be effective to assist smaller network members with licensing of electronic content. The Associate Director indicated the Bibliographic Center for Research has been contacted and this could be a helpful potential solution.
 - A considerable discussion with network representatives focused around advocacy both locally and regionally and it was clear more could be done if materials were provided to assist folks around the region. There was some confusion as to what members could and couldn't do in their local settings. This should be clarified as clearly individuals can normally act on their own outside their official duties. Another facet of advocacy is that which is done with hospital administrators on behalf of libraries. There were questions raised as to whether merely blanketing hospital administrators with letters of support for medical libraries was sufficient to change behavior. Follow up strategies need to be developed and pursued in this regard.
 - As mentioned earlier education programs are important and are currently quite successful. However, the challenge the GMR faces is how to deliver an education program to a large geographic area and as mentioned before a significant diverse population. Face-to-face sessions are important but since they don't meet all needs distant education modules and archiving presentations and other important sessions for subsequent viewing are methods that should be considered.

3) What recommendations do you have for NLM?

- Continue to provide support for promotional and educational activities which need to be carried out in all regions allowing for local adaptations and branding where appropriate. Support the development of tools and techniques that can be

- shared. In this regard developing public service announcements that can be tailored by each region would be effective for local promotional efforts.
- The NN/LM is an excellent service provided to the country that needs to enjoy a high priority within NLM in order to sustain an efficient and effective operation. A challenge for NLM is to find areas within the program where sharing can be accomplished across regions and redundancy held to a minimum.
 - Minorities especially Native Americans and African Americans suffer disproportionately from certain diseases. Every effort should be made to address this health problem through effective outreach efforts in order to reduce health disparities.
 - Communication is always important and often forgotten in the press of business. Notifying regions of NLM priorities provides valuable direction for the network, avoids needless duplication of effort where centralized services are produced and builds an important esprit de corps of a network of dedicated health science librarians.
 - Outcome measures have been emphasized in this report but a caution is also necessary to NLM and the NN/LM to be sure that one is cognizant not to over evaluate as it can, taken to extreme, simply impede getting the job done.
 - Several other specific suggestions to NLM were elicited from feedback reports and the meetings with network participants. Of note were:
 1. Improve information on collection development issues as it relates to PMC--sustainability, archiving etc.
 2. Respond to PubMed and LinkOut problems in a more timely fashion.
 3. Offer the Woods Hole informatics training program in other parts of the country.
 4. Provide additional support for Go Local.
 5. Address training needs of new health sciences librarians; keep training modules short.
 6. Listen more carefully to network members concerns when initiating changes in PubMed, Docline, and other databases and services.

4) Other observations, comments or recommendations

- GMR has solicited feedback from its network members in a variety of effective ways. Responses to the Network Membership Feedback Report indicate that it is solicited through e-mail lists, meetings, telephone calls, evaluation forms from training courses, and the feedback link on the GMR website menu bar.

Methodologies mentioned include surveys and one-on-one or group discussions. It is important that the staff continue to solicit and respond to this feedback when it establishes program priorities for the remainder of the contract.

- With respect to the visit itself, there was some concern that some site visit members were not as familiar with the programs and priorities of the NLM and the NN/LM. Additional summary information in advance would have been helpful such as regional quarterly and annual reports, highlights of important projects in the region etc. In other words some lack of total information could result in gaps in visualizing the total picture. Despite this the reports submitted by site visitors were quite useful and did seem in the end to gain comprehension of the program initiatives.
- Overall it is fair to say the site team believes the GMR is in good shape, with a competent and dedicated staff and the suggestions rendered here are merely to provide yet further avenues of opportunity that the GMR should consider and adopt only if it fits their unique situation.