

Report of the NN/LM
Contract Site visit SEA (Southeast/Atlantic) Region
University of Maryland, Baltimore
Health Sciences and Human Services Library
December 2, 2008

The observations in this report are based on reading the contract and comments from the interim contract supplied prior to the visit, from the readings and material supplied to the reviewers during the visit, and from the presentations and discussions with the leadership of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, SEA staff and representatives of the Network Members who were present for the site visit. A few questions came up from the visit that were discussed with the Director of the SEA NN/NLM and Executive Director of the Project.

The views expressed are those of the four reviewers.

What are the strengths of the SEA RML?

- **Institutional Commitment:** The University of Maryland – Baltimore (UMB) has made a strong institutional commitment to the library and its outreach function through the NN/NLM project over a long period of time. The nature of the professional campus of UMB and its proximity to the central city needs of a complex urban community have put a special focus on issues of cultural diversity and training a more diverse workforce. The plans for the new School of Public Health will continue the strong relationship with the Library as a key component on continuing those focuses.
- **Institutional Mission Consistent with RML Mission and Goals:** As one of the largest health sciences libraries in the Eastern United States, the mission of the Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HS/HSL) UMB is 4-pronged: education, research, service and outreach. A very capable, dynamic director, M.J. Tooley's leadership within the university is evident. She is an active participant in a consultative role for UMB's community-participatory approach to outreach, collaboration and service. While building an impressive staff and remarkable physical facility, UMB has maintained a sense of responsibility, led by the SEA RML program, to partner with both the local community and the region and their diverse challenges.
- **Creative and Committed Staff:** The SEA staff has wide support from both within the HS/HSL and the UMB and function with enthusiasm and expertise, which is acknowledged from around the region and within the UMB. They are talented and energetic and creative professionals who are both responsive to the requests and needs of their members and proactive in creating programs and curriculum that will enhance the success of the region.

- **An Outreach Tradition:** The UMB HS/HSL has demonstrated its ability to build capacity within the state of Maryland. The HS/HSL commitment to local and statewide outreach helps to model and complement the SEA outreach mission for the entire region. For example, in the year preceding the current contract, the HS/HSL embarked on 4 statewide summits to assess health information needs in Maryland. This impressive effort was critical to promoting engagement and planning for Maryland Health Go Local, the 4th most used Go Local site in the country despite a relatively small statewide population. This is just one example of the SEA commitment to building capacity at all levels.
- **A National and Regional Presence:** The staff have made a commitment to be both a national and regional presence, sharing ideas, curriculum and programs with other RML's and state and regional partners. The SE/A Region's educational offerings are extensive, covering a variety of target audiences and using multiple methods and media. Network members mentioned time and again their appreciation of the broad and diverse set of educational programs, including those offered via web conferencing as well as in-person classes and online tutorials. The staff offers programs and exhibits at national meetings of health professionals, state library associations, and many other organizations attended by those who seek health information. They use creative approaches and catchy program titles to make the classes as appealing and interesting as possible.
- **Community and Network Partnership:** The SEA has built very productive relationships in the Network. Network members are highly engaged in advancing the mission of the NN/LM via the many awards made for resource sharing, training, exhibiting, and outreach programs. The use of the Regional Advisory Committees (RAC) to help the SEA develop new funding initiatives appears to be quite helpful. Several network members commented on the expert assistance and consultation by Janice Kelly in vetting possible ideas for funding support. The funding page provides succinct descriptions of awards made that creatively address a diversity of population groups and local needs. The level of technical assistance to libraries and communities that may lack experience in writing grants was mentioned frequently as a very positive example of a service that benefits hospital and community librarians. They were especially appreciative of the funding, training, and exhibit support.
- **Work with Community Organizations:** The SEA Region is especially strong in its work with community-based organizations. The number of affiliate members, most of which are not traditional library organizations, have increased 20% since 2005, greatly exceeding the region's expectations as outlined in their proposal. The HUD Neighborhood Networks Partnership has proved to be a fruitful collaboration, both within the SEA Region and in other NN/LM regions. And the "Wishing Well" tutorial series provides a new approach to educating staff at faith-based and community-based organizations about the potential benefits of network membership and partnerships.

- **Leadership in Emergency Preparedness:** SEA has been a leader amongst the RMLs re: emergency preparedness. Beth Wescott has made impressive progress on regional goals to promote disaster preparedness and service continuity planning by network libraries. Dan Wilson from the University of Virginia has become the NN/LM expert in emergency preparedness and response for libraries. He began his work within the SEA Region, but is now the Coordinator of the NN/LM National Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan. Dan's national role highlights the region's involvement in this important NN/LM initiative.

What are the challenges to overcome and suggestions for improvement?

- **Geographic, Racial and Ethnic Diversity:** The most obvious challenge, well known and well described in presentations and documents, is the scale of the region. The SEA not only includes the largest number of states and territories of regional libraries but also has increasing ethnic and racial and geographic diversity. While working over many years to secure regional library and community library and community group involvement, there are still some areas that are underdeveloped and underrepresented throughout the RLM program. The sheer size of the region and number of network members makes it difficult to manage the wide range of contract priorities. SEA is doing a very good job, in the face of this challenge. SEA should continue to encourage and support statewide collaboration and planning, and/or cooperative crossing of service lines. The state of Mississippi is one example where lack of resources has created hardships in responding to a high level of need. The Delta Information Access Awards was a good effort! The program should continue efforts to support the state, perhaps addressing cooperation and sharing issues, via planning efforts and funding incentives.
- **Unaffiliated Health Professionals:** The growing number of unaffiliated health professionals is a rapidly increasing problem as the workforce in medicine begins to disconnect with the hospital libraries that have historically supported them. With already stretched staff, hospital libraries are unable to provide services to the large number of health professionals whose affiliations may be to a clinic or an integrated health system rather than community or regional hospital. This is particularly a problem in primary care and more rural areas, which may lead to professional and information isolation just at the time when there will undoubtedly be an increase in demand for primary care and public health services.

The staff has said they will query their Health Professional Outreach RAC, and continue to fund exhibit and training awards and outreach projects aimed at providing services and building capacity in the unaffiliated. Some of the efforts to work with medical societies and other professional groups have had some return but needs to grow to meet this growing problem. Identifying a liaison within each local or state professional society and medical group who would serve to connect non-hospital affiliated colleagues with RML resources would be an important way

- to grow the relationship with unaffiliated professionals. Providing more planning awards specifically targeted at various categories of unaffiliated health professionals – nurses, or dentists, for instance – would also be a good idea. These planning awards could identify barriers for these groups to using health information and could lead to developing programs and services to remove those barriers.
- **Loss of Hospital Library Base:** Hospital libraries around the country are being downsized or closed, as is true in this region. Hospital library closure is greatest threat to health information access by healthcare professionals and to quality of health care. As libraries close, their users become marooned, losing the access to information and expertise provided by the library. Participation and leadership by the SEA director on the MLA Vital Pathways project has provided deep insight into the issues facing hospital libraries. The question asked of network members on the site visit survey about advocacy strategies to employ will be useful for future planning by the RML and NLM in promoting the value of libraries and supporting new roles for hospital librarians. Another direction might be to encourage public libraries and health science libraries to link with each other around the issues of unaffiliated health professionals, not to bypass hospitals but to offer multiple venues for education.
 - **Engaging Local Libraries:** Communication between SEA RML staff and regional libraries, public libraries and community groups would benefit from systematic improvement. The tremendous good will that has been engendered by the hard work of the SEA staff over the years would be only enhanced if staff would do even more to work with regional, hospital and public libraries. There are likely to be methods for communicating that use new technologies such as social networking but personal contact is always the most constructive.
 - **Administrative Restructuring:** New for this contract, SEA has decentralized the regional advisory committees (5 with specific charges and one oversight committee), to broaden the base of ideas and involvement. An assessment of this new process will help determine how effective it is. It would be interesting to know if a defined purpose for each group (via their charge) helps build a sense of efficacy and commitment by the advisors, and whether/how this decentralized approach benefits the SEA program, as compared to the previous structure.
 - **Ongoing Assessment of Goals and Outcome measures:** The site visit team asked the SEA staff to develop a fuller picture of their strengths and weaknesses as measured by progress toward their projected outcome measures. Periodic measuring of progress toward stated outcome measures and reassessment of timelines which might change outcome measures would help the staff and Network Members of the SEA have a better sense of where to put energy and limited resources. If a proposal has as many outcome measures as that of the SEA, it would be important to develop tracking measures for every objective to report progress toward those specific goals.

The staff's response to this question (post site visit) was well done, but tracking should be maintained with a regularly updated database of outcome measures, by goal and objective, with notes explaining progress or lack thereof. A quick snapshot of the SEA's performance would then be readily available.

Suggestions and recommendations for the NLM:

- **Improved progress reports:** Encourage regular reporting by all RLMs of progress toward goals and outcome measures so that there are definable indicators of progress, in particular for mid-contract site visits. The goal would be to improve the understanding of successes and problems without adding administrative burdens to staff. A mutually developed, simple and straightforward, web based method for assessing progress by all RML centers might make for better communication between the NLM and RMLs and among RMLs themselves.
- **Decrease IRB complexity:** The NLM should explore a way to include language in the contracts to help SEA (and other institutions) convince their contracts offices that human subjects divisions do not usually become involved with program evaluation (QA/QI) for assessments not defined as research—i.e. that do not have a defined research hypothesis and the intention to generalize the data. The site visit team understood the burdensome demands of the UMB contracts office IRB in conducting regular assessments but perhaps using the approach of quality improvement rather than research might help the process be less onerous.
- **New funding directions:** In the next five-year contract cycle, NLM may want to include **network goals related to the Clinical Translational Science Award (CTSA)**, data curation (e-science), and training in molecular biology information resources. Though this is a limited group of network members, the world of science and publishing is changing and new paradigms and models need to be developed. The NLM should also work with the (CTSA) program to develop pilot funding that would incentivize collaborations between health science libraries and funded CSTA's. In particular, the RML link with all types of libraries would be of particular benefit for the dissemination component of CTSA grants into practice and consumer education. NLM may also want to explore, with CTSA leaders and with Collexis, how that vendor's products could work together with PubMed to help identify potential CTSA collaborators on a national level. PubMed's enhancement of data with the Collexis "fingerprinting" algorithm is a robust collaboration tool that is now only available to the "richest" of research institutions.

NLM might consider funding pilot "return on investment" studies to measure the return on '**outreach investment**'. For example, how does outreach benefit the community as well as the host organization? **Federally Qualified Community Health Centers** are another growing group of health professionals that would

benefit from connections with RML Centers. The NLM should communicate with the Bureau of Primary Health Care at HRSA to suggest pilot program funding for RML Centers to work with FQHCs.

- **Get the word out:** The ability of RMLs to share accomplishments, innovations, and lessons learned is essential to getting the most from the RML system. In particular, as the nation's health system addresses health literacy and diversity, positive experiences in curriculum or health outcomes should be communicated internally as quickly as possible. The traditional literature is often years behind in dissemination of information and innovation. The NLM can become a leader in using Web 2.0 technologies to create methods for publicizing exhibits from RML activities to the wider library community. Finally, the NLM should consider creating templates for promotional material for printing and distribution by RMLs and network members. Libraries and community organizations could add tailored messages targeted to local needs thereby promoting their services effectively.

What other observations and comments came from the visit?

All of the site visitors came away impressed with the enormous commitment of the staff of the SEA RML to constantly look for new ways and new ideas for education and service while remaining true to the idea of being responsive to regional needs at all levels. This commitment, over a long period of time, has created a remarkably loyal group of libraries and librarians throughout the region and has contributed to the remarkable successes of the SEA. Members were in wide agreement that the SEA staff and funding awards contributed to their local successes and their ability to remain creative in their work, despite difficult financial pressures.