

NN/LM Mid-Continental Region (MCR) Site Visit Report
University of Utah, Salt Lake City
November 19, 2008

1) What are the strengths of the RML?

- The greatest strength of the RML is its dedicated, committed and talented staff. The Eccles Health Sciences Library has a great tradition of attracting superior leaders including Priscilla Maiden [Mayden], Wayne Peay and now recently recruited Director, Jean Shipman. It was clear Ms. Shipman and the Library, itself, had the full support from Dr. A Lorris Betz, Executive Dean, University of Utah School of Medicine.
- The RML Associate Director, Ms. Clair[e] Hamasu, is a talented, experienced and respected administrator who has been instrumental in the implementation of the distributed model present in this geographically dispersed region. It is clear that the decentralized approach has improved the effectiveness of the MCR program and the deployment of liaisons within the states has been critical in understanding the culture of the various states and has fostered thereby deeper relationships with the different health and library related groups.
- The diversified model has enhanced interaction with network members at all levels creating a true sense of ownership by the participants. Major contributors here have been the liaisons who are creative, dedicated, collegial and clearly respected by their resource library colleagues. State-based liaisons personalize the regional program at the local level greatly enhancing the outreach efforts of the RML and the resource libraries.
- The innovative use of technology in the distributed model has also fostered communication with members of the network. Noteworthy is the monthly videoconferencing sessions, “Breezing Along with the RML”, which provide an opportunity for member libraries to stay abreast of RML activities, learn about new technologies, and study new DOCLINE enhancements. Such sessions also provide the RML with an important feedback mechanism to improve their program.
- Communication between the RML staff and its membership is both frequent and appropriate providing an impressive array of vehicles for imparting critical information on a variety of topics of interest. The RML Website serves not only as a current awareness tool but as a central repository for continuing education courses and professional development opportunities.

- A multiplier effect of the RML staff's technological expertise and support has been the enhancement of the technological knowledge and skill of IT staff in the resource libraries.
- The RML included a clear plan to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of their activities generating data that can be used to guide their ongoing activities. Other RMLs could and should benefit from these impressive monitoring and assessment methodologies. Specifically, the model is designed to create and maintain a common language and reference point so outcomes and indicators can easily be determined and assessed.
- The advocacy efforts of the MCR are excellent offering network members tools such as the "communicating library value" calculator, online training courses and materials for distribution to clients. Such tools help increase awareness of the value of libraries and librarians to hospital administrators and healthcare professionals.
- One particular advocacy effort of note is the MCR sponsored research study conducted in Missouri and Colorado to assess how information provided by the librarian to the physician impacts diagnosis and treatment. Demonstrating how medical libraries make a real difference in the healthcare system is an important effort and one that has applicability nationwide.

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?**

- The outcome logic model seems to be a useful system of evaluation for the MCR. However, data emanating from the model was somewhat confusing to the site visit team. During the presentation for example it was mentioned that there were 21 access outcomes and 20 access indicators. It was difficult to determine what was being measured since the number of outcomes and indicators were different and seemingly in some cases unrelated. Simply put, at least to an outside review panel, this sophisticated model was not fully understandable and defensible. It also raises the question as to whether the PALs and even the Resource Libraries are fully aware of the importance of this system for tracking their network activities. It is recommended that a brief simplified guidance piece be developed that can stand the test of being fully comprehensible to both internal network users and external sources.
- There has been considerable activity and planning by the MCR within the region to address the hospital library issue, focusing on convincing administrators of the value of the library to the mission of the hospital. Physicians who are library users

can be powerful and influential advocates. Health professionals in AHEC programs, faculty who direct off-campus student clinical rotations and community doctors who serve as clinical mentors could be additional sources of library support.

Perhaps Resource Libraries could have an even greater role here as they expressed a desire to take advantage of special aspects of the MCR program by reaching out to practitioners in rural areas and to the allied and public health workforce.

- A more concerted effort to involve physicians as members of the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) is needed. This is imperative as physicians may be able to have a bigger impact talking to other physicians concerning the value of medical librarians in healthcare. A specific practical suggestion is to ask Dean Betz to designate a practicing physician to the RAC. [*RAC refers to the MCR Regional Advisory Board (RAB)*]
- A challenge for RMLs is balancing the initiatives set forth in the NN/LM contract with the resources and manpower needed to best serve the diverse requirements of network members. For example hospital libraries tend to need tools for solutions to common everyday requests while more stable health sciences libraries are interested more in how to advance their services with new advanced technologies. Setting priorities for the region is difficult but the downward trend in both full and affiliate members as well as services to unaffiliated users and the general public needs some careful examination.
- The non-renewal of membership in the network by public libraries is puzzling. The requirements for membership are not burdensome and the benefits, including funding, is substantial. One comment that resonated with the review team was the statement that “public libraries were not renewing because they saw no added value in it---they could get the same services without joining.” Since the MCR administrators indicated public libraries were particularly useful in reaching unaffiliated health professionals in remote areas and because public libraries are on the front lines with the general public, this deficiency needs to be addressed.
- There was considerable discussion about the establishment and sustainability of Go Local programs within the region. This is an issue that needs to be addressed on the national level as well for insufficient funding by NLM may be a part of the problem. This may be a good idea that just isn’t reasonable to sustain.
- Grant sustainability is clearly also an issue that needs clarification by the MCR. In the April 2008 Annual Report it mentions that the MCR promoted extramural funding for network libraries through their various communication tools but very few proposals were submitted. Where grants do exist, clarity concerning future funding appears to not be clear to potential grantees. It may simply be that the MCR needs to revise the information on their website and in packets to further emphasize the terms and limitations of the extramural funding.

3) What recommendations do you have for NLM?

- Judging by the comments from the written membership feedback reports and public discussions during the site visit, there is a fairly significant concern by some network libraries that grant amounts are insufficient and upon completion of projects funding is inadequate for sustainability. While this is not a unique situation with any grant, there may be a need to modify these support mechanisms at least in the next RFP to create a more sustainable situation.
- A similar situation, as previously mentioned, exists with respect to the GoLocal initiative. Some sites have been reasonably successful across the country while some have abandoned their efforts, as has been the case in Missouri. An assessment of resources needed for success should be examined and also the priority NLM wishes to assign to this outreach effort.
- Aligning promotional materials for better branding was a theme mentioned by not only the site reviewers but also the MCR staff. Different logos tend to diminish consumer health campaigns and confuse users.
- It would be helpful to increase the sharing of “best practices” across all RMLs. These shared best practices prevent reinventing the wheel and enhancing the program efforts for each RML.
- There was general feeling that there should be a critical examination of the National Network and its program priorities in developing the next RFP, a goal shared by the NN/LM staff. This is particularly critical as the nation attempts to examine its healthcare delivery system. Any examination should include a select group of innovative leaders from the RMLs, resource libraries, hospital libraries, the health professional community and other external groups.

4) Other observations, comments or recommendations

- Overall the team believes this is a very innovative RML staff that has created and developed new information resources that benefit health researchers, practitioners, educators and the general public. They have successfully targeted public health schools and departments, worked well with many public librarians, and developed significant ways to promote library services for the benefit of the public health. The decentralized system clearly has worked well integrating nicely the library resources in the region.