Reinventing Tennessee's System of Regional Libraries

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Tennessee's system of regional library centers is among the oldest model (if not the oldest) of its type in the nation. The idea of fostering public library development through regionally-based offices grew out of the work of Mary Utopia Rothrock for the Tennessee Valley Authority in the mid 1930s. Although many changes have taken place in Tennessee's regional library structure through the decades, ensuring public access to quality library services has remained a high priority.

As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, libraries and regional library systems and cooperatives throughout the nation are facing several significant challenges. First, like nearly all publicly-funded services, they are under extreme financial pressure. Second, the growing importance of technology in delivering information content is transforming how libraries operate and how they serve the public. Even without the impetus of budgetary reductions, the time is right for the reinvention of Tennessee's system of regional library centers.

The challenge facing the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA) is to design a new regional library system model that is both effective and sustainable. The new system must provide services that continue to help local libraries serve their users while, at the same time, reducing costs by more than $ 1.6 million dollars ($1,636,900).

The Process

In order to address this challenge, TSLA has been working with Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants, to develop a new plan of service. Over the past several months, the consultants have gathered information from a wide variety of sources. They have interacted with more than 800 Tennessee residents to discuss the future needs of the State's public libraries and how the system of regional libraries can most effectively help local libraries fulfill their mission of serving the public.

Focus groups attended by local library directors and library trustees from all twelve regions were held in conjunction with the four tri-regional meetings across the State. Five separate web-based surveys were conducted to collect input from local library directors, local library staff, local library trustees and members of "Library Friends" organizations, regional library staff and regional library directors. Multiple personal interviews were conducted with each of the

regional library directors. Additional personal interviews were held with elected officials and other influential State residents with a knowledge of and interest in public library services.

The various groups of stakeholders were remarkably similar in the priorities for the regional libraries that they expressed. For example, it was very clear that libraries need and want assistance with technology. There was also a high degree of agreement that the consulting/professional assistance offered by regional library directors was essential to the improvement of libraries. Other priorities differed more based on the stakeholder group involved and by the size of library represented. For example, small libraries generally placed a higher priority on cataloging and processing while library staff in medium and larger libraries valued continuing education and training to a higher degree. The provision of direct outreach services, while almost universally seen as a valuable and admirable, was clearly lower in importance to a majority of stakeholders.

The Mission of Regional Libraries

The TSLA website identifies the existing mission of the regional library system. It says that the system's mission is:

- *To provide supplementary library materials to member public libraries*
- *To assist local governments in public library development and expansion*
- *To provide continuing education to local library staff and trustees*
- *To assist in the selection and maintenance of library technology*
- *To provide direct outreach library services to the disadvantaged who have difficulty using local public libraries*

During the focus groups with local library directors and trustees, the consultants introduced a mission statement that was recently chosen by a Michigan Library Cooperative (The Suburban Library Cooperative [SLC] in Sterling Heights, MI) that was facing a financial challenge even greater than that confronting Tennessee's regional libraries. When the SLC cut to the core, it decided that its mission was "We make libraries better." When this mission was presented to focus group participants, there was a high degree of agreement that this was an appropriate mission statement for Tennessee's regional library system. Outreach services, while acknowledged as being highly valuable to the recipients of the services, were seen as secondary to the mission of the regions to improve libraries. Outreach services to daycares, senior housing and other sites continues to be important; however, local libraries rather than regional library centers were seen as the entities that should be providing the service(s).

A reinvention of the existing mission statement for Tennessee's regional library system would remove the fifth bullet point (provide direct outreach library services to the disadvantaged who have difficulty using local public libraries) and would re-order the other four as follows:

- To assist in the selection and maintenance of library technology
- To assist local governments in public library development and expansion
- To provide supplementary library materials to member public libraries
- To provide continuing education to local library staff and trustees

The Recommended Model

The recommended model for Tennessee's regional libraries involves the consolidation of twelve regions into nine regional offices. A greater emphasis is placed on technology support for libraries and the priority of the role that the regions play in providing professional advice and assistance is affirmed and underscored. The provision of supplementary library materials to member public libraries is continued (in fact the allocation for materials is increased); however, a new, more efficient model is introduced for acquiring, cataloging and processing materials. Finally, the continuing education role, especially in the area of technology training, is enhanced.

The new model also seeks to coordinate the work of the regions even more closely with the four federally-funded network services coordinators (NSCs). Coordination between the NSCs and the regions is already very good. The new model enhances the level of technology support available to libraries even more.

The assignment of counties among the nine regions is designed to ensure that regional directors continue to be able to interact regularly with their member libraries and member library boards. A majority of libraries fall within a 60 minute drive time of their regional office. A relatively small number are between 60 and 75 minutes from their regional office and only a handful are more than 90 minutes from a regional center. Furthermore, these drive-times could be improved by the eventual relocation of a few of the regional offices. Under the recommended plan, almost three-quarters (73.6% - 67 of the 91 counties served by regional centers) of the counties in the State would continue to be served by their current regional offices.

With the exception of the elimination of the direct "outreach" function, arguably the greatest change would occur in the way that acquisitions/cataloging/processing is handled. The existing model for providing these services is outdated in most of the regions. In some instances, libraries are still submitting paper cards to order materials. In a majority of regions, physical items (books and non-print materials) are being moved repeatedly between the libraries and

the regional center. When examined on a statewide basis, costs for these services are exceptionally high. The reinvention of the regional services calls for the issuance of a Request for Quotation (RFQ) for the provision of pre-processing of all materials purchased using State, Non-Recurring, and Federal funds.

All libraries would adopt the model already used by a few of the regions in which libraries initiate orders electronically that are checked/confirmed by the regional office before being sent to the vendor. Each of the nine new regions would have an "acquisitions assistant" who would coordinate ordering act as the liaison with libraries on any problems/issues that arise with the centralized processing program or questions related to cataloging of local materials. A statewide acquisitions coordinator would oversee the acquisitions program and would handle vendor relationships and issues related to the establishment and adjustment of cataloging/processing profiles. The amount of State money allocated for the purchase of library materials by member libraries would actually increase as dollars now expended for outreach collections are reallocated to assist libraries directly.

Recommended staffing levels vary slightly between and among regional offices. Each of the nine offices would be headed by a regional director. In two regions (Regions 7 and 8) that have a greater number of library governance units, an associate director position is recommended to ensure a high level of interaction between the region and its member libraries. An Associate is also recommended for Region 9 (an extension of the existing Watauga Region) that reflects the role that region plays in providing an integrated automated library system to its members.

Each of the regions would have an administrative assistant/secretary, a technology specialist an acquisitions assistant and a clerical/delivery person. In addition to day-to-day office management duties, the administrative assistant would handle the collection and verification of statistics submitted by member libraries and would work with the technology specialist on securing e-rate discounts for member libraries.

The regional library technology assistants would provide direct technology support to libraries both over the phone and on-site in member libraries. They would continue to work very closely with the network services coordinator providing a two-tiered system of technology support. The regional library technology specialist would also be involved in technology training for member library staff.

Costs

Costs associated with providing regional library services are reduced by the required amount under the recommended plan. Salaries and benefits account for approximately one-half of the total allocation available for providing services. One and one-half million dollars is allocated for the purchase of new materials (books, non-print materials and downloadable content) by

libraries. This represents a considerable increase in buying power for local libraries. A total of $175,000 (approximately $2.00 per volume purchased using State, Non-Recurring and Federal funds) is allocated to support the pre-processing program.

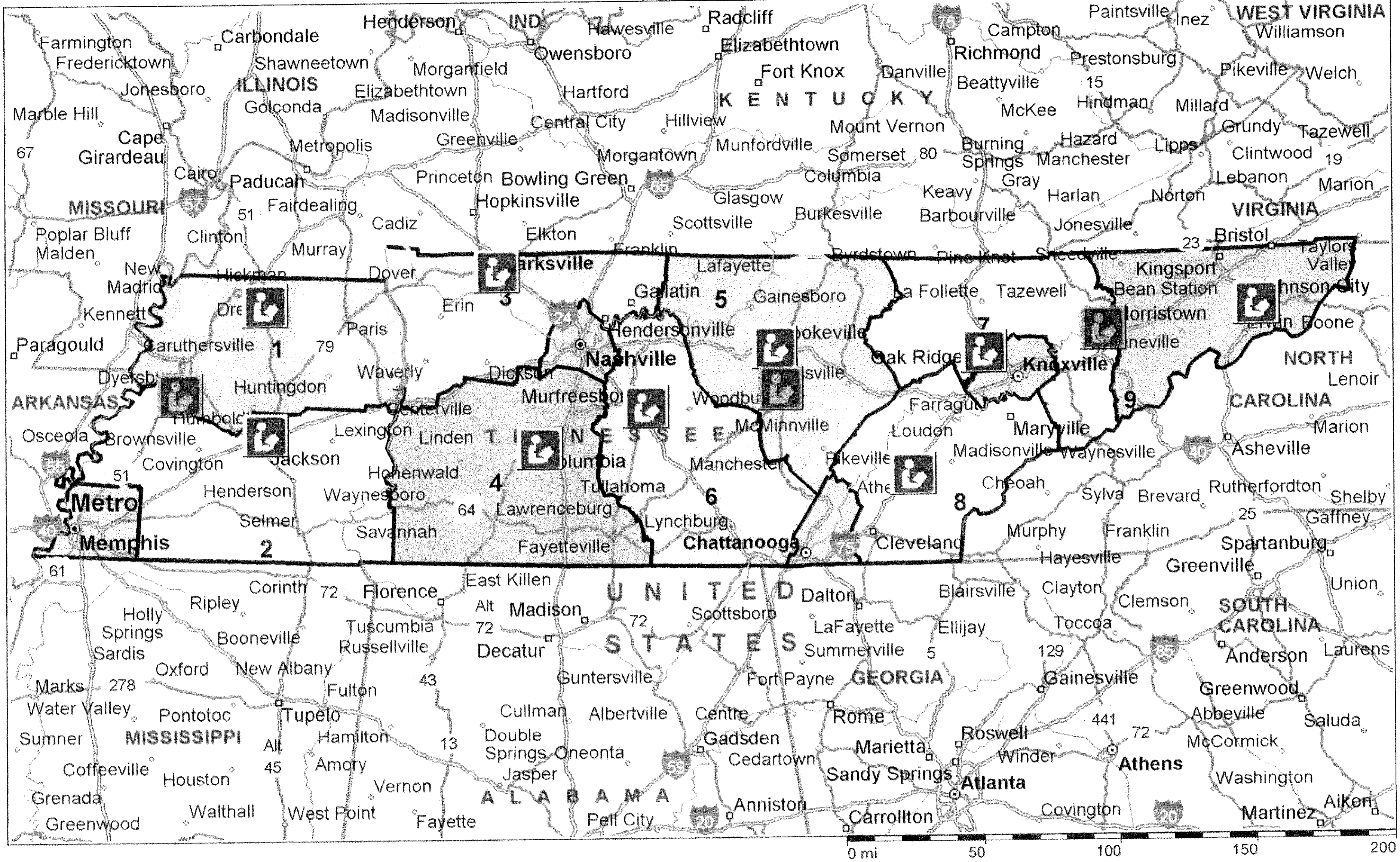
The allocation for facilities is set to cover the existing cost of operating twelve regional centers due to the fact that some leases will continue beyond the implementation of the new model. In fact, facility costs in the future should decrease. The lease for at least one "surplus" regional facility will expire at the end of 2010. Efforts should be made to extend this lease on a month-to-month basis until the end of a transitional period and to eventually eliminate this cost. While most other regional library center facilities are reasonably well located, several, if not most, are larger than they need to be once outreach collections are distributed among member libraries and cataloging and processing is moved off-site. Downsizing opportunities should be sought as leases expire.

County	Governance Units	Bldgs	Current Region	New Region	# of Counties	# of Governance Units
Davidson	1	22	Metro	0	1	1
Hamilton	3	7	Metro	0	1	3
Knox	1	20	Metro	0	1	1
Shelby	5	23	Metro	0	1	5
Benton	1	2	Reelfoot	1	9	19
Carroll	2	2	Reelfoot	1		
Crockett	1	1	Forked Deer	1		
Dyer	3	3	Forked Deer	1		
Gibson	3	3	Reelfoot	1		
Henry	1	1	Reelfoot	1		
Lake	2	2	Forked Deer	1		
Obion	1	1	Reelfoot	1		
Weakley	5	5	Reelfoot	1		
Chester	1	1	Shiloh	2	11	18
Decatur	2	2	Shiloh	2		
Fayette	1	1	Forked Deer	2		
Hardeman	4	4	Shiloh	2		
Hardin	1	1	Shiloh	2		
Haywood	1	1	Forked Deer	2		
Henderson	1	1	Shiloh	2		
Lauderdale	2	2	Forked Deer	2		
Madison	1	2	Shiloh	2		
McNairy	2	2	Shiloh	2		
Tipton	2	2	Forked Deer	2		
Cheatham	2	2	Warioto	3	8	13
Dickson	1	1	Warioto	3		
Houston	1	1	Warioto	3		
Humphreys	1	1	Warioto	3		
Montgomery	1	1	Warioto	3		
Robertson	2	2	Warioto	3		
Stewart	1	1	Warioto	3		
Sumner	4	4	Warioto	3		
Giles	3	5	Blue Grass	4	10	14
Hickman	1	2	Blue Grass	4		
Lawrence	1	2	Blue Grass	4		
Lewis	1	1	Blue Grass	4		
Lincoln	1	1	Highland Rim	4		
Marshall	1	1	Blue Grass	4		
Maury	2	3	Blue Grass	4		
Perry	1	2	Blue Grass	4		
Wayne	1	3	Blue Grass	4		
Williamson	2	7	Blue Grass	4		
Bledsoe	1	1	Caney Fork	5	14	14
Clay	1	1	Upper Cumberland	5		

County	Governance Units	Bldgs	Current Region	New Region	# of Counties	# of Governance Units
Cumberland	1	1	Caney Fork	5		
Dekalb	1	3	Upper Cumberland	5		
Fentress	1	1	Upper Cumberland	5		
Jackson	1	1	Upper Cumberland	5		
Macon	1	2	Upper Cumberland	5		
Overton	1	1	Upper Cumberland	5		
Pickett	1	1	Upper Cumberland	5		
Putnam	1	4	Upper Cumberland	5		
Smith	1	2	Upper Cumberland	5		
Trousdale	1	1	Highland Rim	5		
Van Buren	1	1	Caney Fork	5		
White	1	1	Caney Fork	5		
Bedford	1	1	Highland Rim	6	11	21
Cannon	1	2	Highland Rim	6		
Coffee	2	2	Highland Rim	6		
Franklin	1	1	Highland Rim	6		
Grundy	6	6	Caney Fork	6		
Marion	3	3	Caney Fork	6		
Moore	1	1	Highland Rim	6		
Rutherford	2	5	Highland Rim	6		
Sequatchie	1	1	Caney Fork	6		
Warren	1	1	Caney Fork	6		
Wilson	2	3	Highland Rim	6		
Anderson*	5	5	Clinch-Powell	7	9	32
Campbell	4	4	Clinch-Powell	7		
Claiborne	1	1	Clinch-Powell	7		
Grainger	4	4	Nolichucky	7		
Jefferson	4	4	Nolichucky	7		
Morgan	6	6	Clinch-Powell	7		
Scott	3	3	Clinch-Powell	7		
Sevier	3	6	Nolichucky	7		
Union	2	2	Clinch-Powell	7		
Blount*	2	2	Fort Loudoun	8	9	27
Bradley	1	2	Fort Loudoun	8		
Loudon	5	5	Fort Loudoun	8		
McMinn	5	5	Fort Loudoun	8		
Meigs	1	1	Fort Loudoun	8		
Monroe	4	4	Fort Loudoun	8		
Polk	2	2	Fort Loudoun	8		
Rhea	3	3	Fort Loudoun	8		
Roane	4	4	Fort Loudoun	8		
Carter	1	1	Watauga	9	10	17
Cocke	4	4	Nolichucky	9		
Greene	2	3	Watauga	9		

County	Governance Units	Bldgs	Current Region	New Region	# of Counties	# of Governance Units
Hamblen	1	2	Nolichucky	9		
Hancock	1	1	Nolichucky	9		
Hawkins*	2	4	Nolichucky	9		
Johnson	1	1	Watauga	9		
Sullivan	2	7	Watauga	9		
Unicoi	1	1	Watauga	9		
Washington	2	3	Watauga	9		
	185	288			95	185

Tennessee Libraries Map - Master REVISED REGION Map



Copyright © and (P) 1988–2008 Microsoft Corporation and/or its suppliers. All rights reserved. http://www.microsoft.com/mappoint/
Certain mapping and direction data © 2008 NAVTEQ. All rights reserved. The Data for areas of Canada includes information taken with permission from Canadian authorities, including: © Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, © Queen's Printer for Ontario. NAVTEQ and NAVTEQ ON BOARD are trademarks of NAVTEQ. © 2008 Tele Atlas North America, Inc. All rights reserved. Tele Atlas and Tele Atlas North America are trademarks of Tele Atlas, Inc. © 2008 by Applied Geographic Systems. All rights reserved.