DEFINITION OF A LIBRARY SYSTEM

The State Code and Regulations contain the following information regarding the definition of a library system:

- **22 PA Code §141.24(b)(1**): The term library system shall apply to an organization of two or more independent libraries serving not less than a total of 25,000 people which have voluntarily agree to participate and have delegated the policy making functions to a system board of directors.
- **22 PA Code §141.26(a**): A local library member of a library system is a local library, as defined in §141.25(a) (relating to basic standards for local libraries) which has agreed to participate in a county, township or school district public library system from which some or most of its financial support is derived in the form of money, library materials, personnel or services.
- **22 PA Code §141.24(d)(1):** Each unit within the system shall provide free access including free lending and reference services to all residents of the system's total service area.
- **22 PA Code §141.24(c)(6)**: The library system shall be an agency of local governments (as acknowledged by municipal ordinance or resolution, or system resolution.
- **22 PA Code §141.24(c)(9)**: The board shall develop criteria for membership in the system and adopt policies that will be applicable throughout the system.
- **22 PA Code §141.24(c)(3)**: The system shall have written agreements of participation between the system board and each local library which is a member of the system, in which the obligations, services, and contributions of each party shall be stated.
- **22 PA Code §141.24(c)(4)**: The system board shall have and shall file with its local agencies and the State Library of Pennsylvania a written plan for system-wide service and development. The plan shall be reviewed annually and amended as necessary and shall include in its overall objectives specifications for programming and services to increasingly meet the needs of the public. Each resident of the system service area must be provided with direct and convenient access to library service.

Re. the definition within the Code:
1. This language sets minimum requirements.
2. It allows some discretion to the system in terms of plans, policies, programs and services.
3. It does not address quality of governance or impact of programs and services.

In 2008 APPLS looked to address some of the limitations of the language in the Code by creating its **Standards for Excellence & Evaluation.** Included in that document was the following justification for Systems:

"The Association of Pennsylvania Public Library Systems (APPLS) endorses county-based public library systems as the best mechanism for providing equitable quality library services for all Pennsylvanians:

1. All Pennsylvanians reside within a county. County-based systems are most closely aligned with a uniform area of local government. Therefore, counties are a logical unit for planning library service delivery.

2. When library services are provided at the county level, all county residents have access to library services. Thus, a higher level of equitable library service throughout the county's geographic area can be achieved.

3. Library systems can consolidate resources, thereby minimizing duplication of effort by two or more libraries.

4. Library systems can achieve economies of scale that a single institution cannot such as sharing an automated system or forming a regional buying consortium. In addition, customers with special needs can be more easily served because they are more readily recognized as a target population at the county level."

Included was the rationale for the Standards: "to help library system boards and administrators with:

1. Promoting county-based library system development and improvement;

2. Evaluating local library system services.

3. Developing a vision and plan for growth and improvement of local library system services."

The Standards themselves acknowledged the diversity of library systems and system resources by establishing three levels of library system service.

1. Basic System Level (which are based on current Pennsylvania Library Code system standards)

2. Quality System Level; and

3. Excellence System Level.

Substantive work went into developing these Standards, and APPLS should review them for possible current application. Some systems have in fact incorporated them into planning for system improvement.

In addition to these resources, there may be value in considering some models external to the library field. There are several areas that are not fully addressed either by the State Code or by APPLS' own standards. Among these are best governance practices for Boards, risk management, human resource practices, assessing mission and program impact. Many library systems are looking for help in these areas.

One potential source is the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organization's Standards of Excellence. Adapted from a national model first introduced in Maryland, these Standards *"are intended to describe how the most well-managed and responsibly governed organizations should, and do operate. They provide benchmarks to determine how well an organization is fulfilling its obligations to those who benefit from its programs, to contributors and to the public."*   The Standards are based on an Ethics and Accountability Code the *"helps organizations strengthen boards, manage risk, realize new efficiencies, fulfill legal and regulatory requirements or otherwise build capacity to advance their missions".* As a PANO member, APPLS has full access to all of the various checklists, policy templates, and other resources that address the following areas of practice:

1. Mission and Program
2. Governing Body
3. Conflict of Interest
4. Human Resources
5. Financial and Legal
6. Openness
7. Fundraising
8. Public Affairs and Public Policy

Guidestar is a 501(c)(3) organization that collects, organizes, and presents information on nonprofits in a neutral forum. Its emphasis is on transparency on the part of nonprofit reporting in order to increase confidence in charitable giving. It recognizes various levels of transparency. In addition, in collaboration with Independent Sector, Guidestar has recently begun "charting impact" of nonprofits through five basic questions:

1. What is your organization aiming to accomplish?
2. What are your strategies for making this happen?
3. What are your organization's capabilities for doing this?
4. How will your organization know if you are making progress?
5. What have and haven't you accomplished so far?

More complete information is available at:

The Public Library Association has also announced: "Project Outcome". This program *"will help libraries better measure the outcomes of the services they offer to patrons and provide the resources and support to effectively communicate and implement their findings for advocacy, partnership, and planning activities."*   Having access to library-specific survey and assessment tools will greatly assist library systems in coordinating impact assessment system-wide. The areas of concentration include:

1. Summer Reading Program
2. Early Childhood Literacy
3. Economic Development
4. Education and Life Long Learning
5. Job Skills
6. Digital Inclusion
7. Civic/Community Engagement

Other members of APPLS are currently involved in this initiative and will have more to share.
http://www.ala.org/pla/performancemeasurement

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Review existing APPLS Standards for Excellence for current relevance and application. Consider developing guidelines for how systems might apply them.
2. Develop a governance checklist to assist in best practices for boards. Consider providing resources available in an online format (e.g., sample policies, templates, etc.). These could be accessed directly or adapted from resources some systems may already provide.
3. Assist libraries in applying outcomes assessment tools that are under development, including training for local libraries within systems.