

**Recommendations of the  
Long Range Planning Committee  
Of the Fox Valley Library Council  
As Revised by the Board of Directors  
Approved February 8, 2002  
Revisions approved April 12, 2002**

Introduction:

The Fox Valley Library Council (FVLC) Long Range Planning Committee was charged with reviewing the existing programs and structure of the organization. The undertaking was intended to ensure that the organization would provide services and programs affording members maximum opportunity for professional growth, networking opportunities, and support for library services to their various publics within the Fox Valley.

The impetus for this review was based on several factors. First, a belief held by many Board members that interest in meetings and the activities of the organization might be waning among the membership. Second, changes in library technology within the first twenty years of the organization have had a profound effect on current services making some of these services obsolete. Finally, a belief that though the fundamental purpose of the organization remains relevant to the membership, there may be new ways for the organization to fulfill its basic mission.

Methodology:

The FVLC President appointed an eight-member committee consisting of four members of the board of directors, plus four members at large. Two members of the committee came from public library systems, two came from public libraries, two came from academic libraries, one came from a school library, and one came from a corporate library.

Council members that attended a June, 2001 meeting were treated as a focus group led by the chair of the planning committee. Some of the questions discussed by the group included:

1. What interests you most about FVLC? Why do you belong?
2. What has FVLC done to make your lives better?
3. What kinds of information do you go out to find outside your library? What don't you have for your patrons?
4. What do you value most about FVLC?
5. What impediments do you have in attending FVLC meetings?
6. Does your organization support your need for continuing education with release time, funds, or other means?
7. What types of programs would you like to see at FVLC? Do you want to come to a program, or just lunch?

The notes from this discussion were provided to the planning committee without prior interpretation by the committee chair. Committee members were also given copies of all available documents describing FVLC including the bylaws and the current long-

range plan. Two meetings were then held to consider the ideas expressed by the membership, as well as issues related to the structure of the organization itself.

### Findings:

FVLC continues to play a significant role in the structure of library services in the region, though the impact on services has changed considerably since the founding of the group. Current members value:

- Networking opportunities (both formal and informal)
- Programs presented at meetings, especially those that are inspirational rather than strictly educational
- Facilitated resource sharing
- Being informed of issues affecting libraries

Though resource sharing was probably the single most important motive for forming FVLC in 1977, technology has greatly improved resource-sharing capabilities in the area. Most members first search their local public library shared catalog, then WISCAT when looking for material outside of their libraries. Still, the formal and informal connections made through FVLC membership help to facilitate the filling of special requests. Several members felt that being part of the FVLC gave them the ability to make phone calls for information outside of the formal hierarchy for placing requests.

Courtesy cards (CC) were discussed at length both with the focus group and the planning committee. Though most felt the importance of CC had been greatly diminished by technology and other formal lending agreements, the program still serves a small group of library users. That said, there seemed little reason to change the program since it is basically a low maintenance service.

FVLC has long coordinated the inclusion of member library periodical holdings in the Wisconsin Union List of Serials (WULS). Because BadgerLink and the availability of full text periodicals online have greatly facilitated the ability of patrons to obtain information from periodicals without librarian intervention, the committee discussed whether or not this service should be continued. In the end, the consensus was that this practice is still valuable to members, especially those in special libraries.

A great deal of discussion with the focus group and the planning committee dealt with meetings and programs. There is a perception among long time participants in the FVLC that programs are less well attended than in the past. Conventional wisdom holds that the membership of the organization is graying, a problem shared by many organizations. The lack of new faces at meetings is certainly not unique to FVLC.

Unfortunately, our current bylaws require that the business of the organization be carried out at meetings of the members. Most members indicate that the real draw for attending meetings is the programs. Most are far less interested in the business aspects of the meetings. This lack of interest in structure is held by some as at least partially responsible for a paucity of volunteers to serve on the Board or on committees. The fact that Board members are also committee chairs was viewed by members of the planning committee as a barrier to finding people to serve. Some may be willing to serve on

committees but have no interest in Board membership. Others may have the time to serve on the Board, but have no time to serve on committees. Many committees, such as the Constitution and Bylaws committee, are actually committees of one with little purpose other than interpreting bylaws at meetings.

The planning committee devoted much discussion to what constituted membership in the organization. Are institutions the members, or are the individuals representing the institutions the actual members? This discussion often turned into a circular argument. Finally the committee reached a consensus that for the purposes of charging dues and voting, institutions are members. One library, one vote, one dues. However the primary benefactors from membership in FVLC are the people that work for the organization and its constituents.

### **Recommendations:**

1. *Jettison the current committee, board and meeting structure. Create a seven-member board empowered to carry out the business of the organization. The new board should consist of a president, vice-president/president elect, secretary, treasurer, plus three directors serving at large. The only votes required of the members should be for an annual slate of officers, changes in the dues structure, and changes in bylaws. Votes of the members would be based on one vote per library regardless of the number attending from any given library.*

FVLC has long demonstrated that it is highly valued by its members, yet it is an organization on the verge of becoming moribund with an inability to change. An outdated committee structure and a constitutionally imposed requirement that all of the business of the organization be carried out at general membership meetings left the Board with no real authority or ability to act quickly. The role of the board is currently advisory in nature and to supply or recruit the workers to carry out the business of the organization.

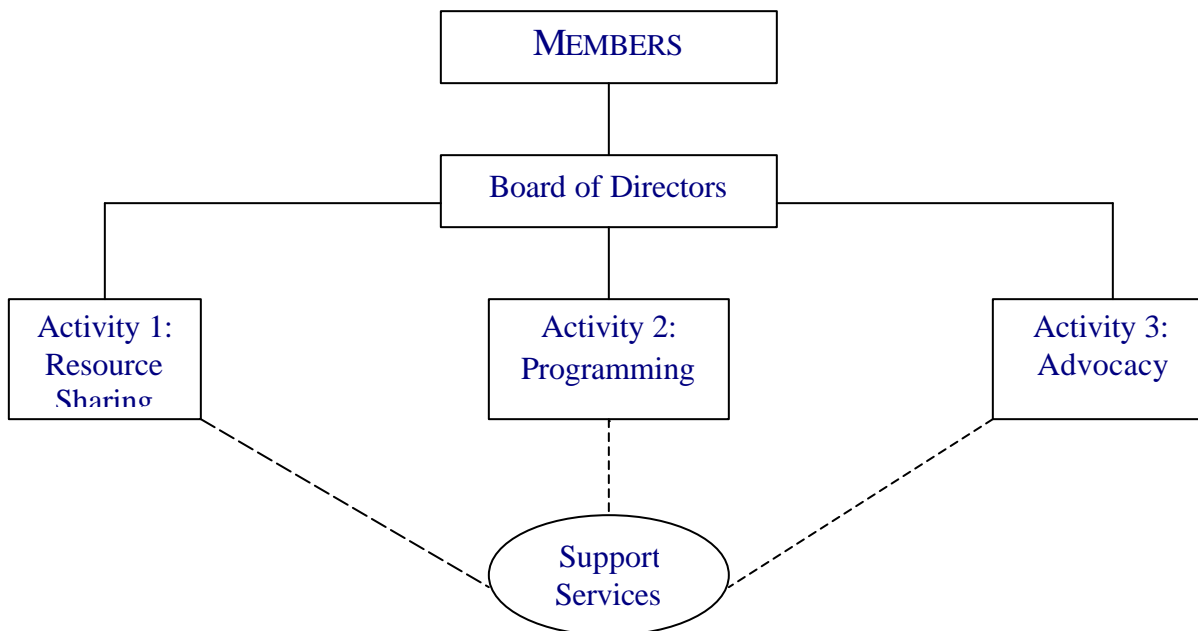
The proposed board structure should provide for an agile organization with the ability to anticipate and react to change. Under the new structure, the Board will make all operating decisions. An attempt should be made to represent different types of libraries when recruiting new Board members. The work of the organization will be carried out either by the Board, volunteers from among the members, or, failing the ability to find volunteers, recruits from the two public library systems.

2. *Organize FVLC programs around three core activities that have been considered valuable by members (See next page).*

The core activities of the organization are resource sharing, education, and advocacy. There is no longer a need for separate standing committees for constitution and bylaws, planning, education, public relations, or membership. The board may either carry out the work of the core activities such as with planning, or by short term committees or volunteers coordinated by the Board.

Support services, such as acting as fiscal agent, managing membership lists, or maintaining electronic communications, are now done by volunteers and/or library system employees. There is no need to change this practice.

**Figure 1: FVLC Organizational Structure:**



Members:  
 Public libraries  
 Public library Systems  
 School libraries  
 Special libraries  
 Academic libraries

Board of Directors  
 President  
 Vice President/President Elect  
 Secretary  
 Treasurer  
 3 Directors at Large

Core Activities:

*Resource Sharing:* Involves the maintenance of the courtesy card system, maintenance of the serial holdings list, organization of a “share table” for each meeting. The courtesy card system is low maintenance; however, use of it may be monitored.

An annually-appointed committee would do the work of maintaining FVLC participation in the serial holdings list. Their first task is to gather information regarding annual changes and, secondly, to make the necessary changes on OCLC/WISCAT

*A Share Table* is simply a table put out at each meeting and program where member libraries can share recently produced PR material, pathfinders, guides, etc.

Membership in FVLC also provides an opportunity for members to facilitate ILL by communicating needs directly to other members outside of normal ILL protocols.

*Education:* An education committee has two primary functions. The first is to provide a series of motivational or informational programs for FVLC members throughout the year. The number may be determined annually by mutual agreement of the committee and the Board. Secondly, a designated member of the committee should forward announcements of continuing education opportunities being given by library systems, universities, or others to the FVLC membership. In addition, the committee may carry out other duties, such as administering the FVLC study grant program.

Programs presented by the Education Committee give members the opportunity to network with one another. Ample time will be provided at each program to give members a chance to mingle.

*Advocacy:* Advocacy is the practice of keeping the membership apprised of issues and legislation that affect them professionally. FVLC-L will be the main tool used by a volunteer solicited by the Board to keep members apprised of issues. The Board itself or other FVLC members may also post information. The FVLC Board may write legislators on behalf of the organization, providing an FVLC perspective on an issue or legislation.

Standing committee chairs – Resource Sharing and Education – will be reappointed annually by the President with the consent of the Board. The President with the consent of the Board will convene special committees as necessary. Special committees will be created for a specific purpose and time period.

Long range planning will be conducted by the Board with the participation of members as needed. Volunteers recruited by the president from within member institutions carry out activities and support services. If volunteers cannot be obtained, for any committee or volunteer position, they will be assigned by one of two public library systems from among their employees.

### *3. Retain membership dues*

Membership dues received considerable discussion by the planning committee. The two library systems fund most FVLC operations since the systems pay the dues on behalf of their member libraries. Some consideration was given to recommending lower dues or doing away with dues all together. In the end, the committee recommended keeping the dues structures the same. The consensus was that paying dues provides a sense of ownership in the organization, and that the amount was not a hindrance to joining.

Subsequent discussion by the Board underscored the need to define membership and the dues structure. Until now, it has been unclear if an organization with more than one library, such as a school district, can pay one membership that includes all district libraries and librarians. Some school districts have pursued this “one payment for all” ap-

proach while library systems have paid individual memberships for all members. For the sake of clarity, the following policy is proposed:

1. Membership in FVLC will be offered to individual institutions, not individual librarians.
  2. When a vote of the membership is needed, one vote will be assigned to each institution. Prior to voting, a poll of those present will ascertain who is representing the institutions present.
  3. When an organization has more than one library, be it a school system, corporation (special library) or library system, each physical location will qualify for membership. That is, if a corporation has more than one library at different addresses, each shall be eligible for membership; each school within a school district will be eligible for membership; and each library in a library system will be eligible for membership. If a library system or school district joins FVLC, this will not confer blanket membership on all schools or individual libraries within the system.
  4. Dues will be collected annually for each member at an amount to be set by the membership.
4. *Revamp meetings to concentrate on interesting programs and networking opportunities. Try meetings in various venues and at different times. Don't concentrate on library education, but rather use the education committee to keep members informed of workshop and course opportunities available throughout the two public library systems and the state.*

As we have previously discussed, there is no longer interest on the part of most members in having business conducted at meetings. Communications from the Board can be made through the discussion list, or with short reports at meetings if there is a real need. The bulk of meetings can be devoted to topics that are interesting, that may only be tangentially related to libraries, that are primarily an enticement for people to attend. The main value to these meetings would be the opportunity for people to network with one another. Having the Council continue to fund lunch (or breakfast) at these meetings was viewed as helpful for attendance.

## **Conclusion**

Both the Planning Committee and the Board of Directors believe that the structure outlined here will provide for an agile organization that is able to deal more readily with change. We also believe that by following the recommendations contained in this document, the organization will continue to do what it has done best: provide an opportunity for fellowship and networking among area librarians.

The steps that still need to be taken are:

1. Distribution of the plan to the membership.
2. Approval of this plan and proposed bylaws changes (separate document) by the membership.
3. Drafting a new plan of service for the 2002 – 2003 fiscal year and beyond.

4. Conducting and evaluating the changes instituted through adoption of this plan early in the 2003 – 2004 fiscal year.

**Committee Members:**

Ken Hall, Winnefox Library System  
Craig Lahm, Kaukauna Public Library  
Michelle Reid, Ripon College  
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Cheryl Gage, Fond du Lac Public Library  
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System