

ACLA Presentation to the Regional Asset District Board

August 27, 2008

Slide 1

Thank you for the opportunity to present today. ACLA is proud of our successful partnership with RAD and the wide-reaching community service we deliver through your support.

Slide 2

Tonight we will take you through a quick overview of what makes ACLA such a unique asset to our region. Next, we'll share some of the key metrics that show the results of your investment in us. And finally, we'll discuss key challenges our organization is facing and how your support can help us transform these challenges into successes.

Slide 3

ACLA is truly a county-wide asset like no other...

Slide 4

We represent the interests of 45 libraries...

Slide 5

...Serving residents at more than 190 locations in 115 municipalities across the county — through our library members, branches, Knowledge Connections, and Mobile Library stops.

Slide 6

Unlike many of the funded assets, ACLA libraries continue to serve the public even after hours — providing access to on-line resources 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Slide 7

Best of all, services at ACLA libraries are available to every county resident at absolutely no charge. Enjoying some of the RAD assets can be a financial challenge for many of our residents. But ACLA is one RAD asset that every family and individual can enjoy *free* — every time they visit.

Slide 8

And there are as many reasons to visit our libraries as there are people. Libraries are about much more than books these days. You can borrow music and videos, use a computer and access the internet. You can take classes, learn to read, and improve your life in countless ways. Our libraries are community centers, places to network, socialize, or just spend quiet time, no matter your age and no matter where you live.

Slide 9

The RAD's investment in ACLA helps not only our member libraries, but each of the communities our members serve...

Slide 10

And each individual who lives there — whether a Somali immigrant in Whitehall, a senior citizen in Tarentum, a job seeker in McKeesport, a home-bound resident in Wilkinsburg, or one of the 28,000 children participating in the summer reading program.

Slide 11

And we have used the RAD's investment in libraries with strong results, as the public is demonstrating.

Slide 12

In the years since our original contract was renewed, ACLA has made progress on every key metric by which our success can be measured.

Slide 13

Circulation at our member libraries has increased 30% since 2004.

Slide 14

Library visits have increased 30%.

Slide 15

This increased use may be surprising. After all, some experts predicted that the internet would lead to the obsolescence of the library. But, in fact, the opposite has happened. With the quantum increase in the amount of information available, libraries are now more relevant than ever. Through county-wide cooperation, our community libraries have been able to turn the internet into an asset instead of a competitor. Indeed, our online resources increase the availability and distribution of information and knowledge to every person in the county.

Slide 16

Residents can search the resources of the entire library consortium from the web and have materials delivered from any library to the outlet nearest them. They can download resources directly to their own devices and use on-line informational tools available county-wide. Better access leads to higher use. In fact, in a recent ACLA survey, library patrons indicated that greater and easier access to resources was the key reason for using the library more often. And this easier access is a direct result of system-wide collaboration.

Slide 17

To give you some perspective, non-resident use of libraries — use by residents outside of a library's designated service area — averages 28% system-wide. And at some libraries non-resident use accounts for half of all circulation. This truly bears out that libraries are a shared, county-wide resource with impact that extends beyond municipal borders.

Slide 18

Improved access to materials and improved materials management are 2 vital factors driving increased use. But RAD funding plays a direct role in another key factor. Your funding has enabled our librarians to focus on community needs like never before and create new programs to meet them. We're not only talking about traditional reading programs and book clubs. Today, our librarians are actively engaging the community's interests, offering a wealth of opportunities for socialization and enrichment. These programs are as diverse as the communities they serve: conversation salons, knitting and quilting clubs, digital imaging classes, career discovery sessions, Sunday concerts (featuring other RAD-funded assets), inter-generational art instruction, and one of the most popular offerings of all, computer classes for seniors (which always have a lengthy waiting list).

Slide 19

Of course, children have always been a major emphasis for ACLA libraries. And today, children's materials account for over 31% of circulation system-wide.

Slide 20

Participation in children's programs has also reached new heights. In fact, over 28,000 children participated in the Summer Reading Club this year. To help parents and kids easily find our offerings, we have instituted a system-wide calendar of events and activities. It lists a wide range of after-school and special programming — including "Science Travelers" clubs for preschoolers, chess camp for all ages, animé clubs to reach out to teens, Wii gaming contests, and much, much more.

Slide 21

What all these numbers mean is that more residents are realizing more value from libraries all the time. If the average library patron were to purchase the services he/she uses every year at a library (and this is by no means a comprehensive list of all the services available), the cost would exceed \$461 a year. Multiply that by the number of registered card-holders at county libraries, and the total value is nearly \$155 million a year. Library users are the type of patrons most organizations dream about. They are engaged users — who visit repeatedly, use our resources intensively, and take advantage of a wide range of our services.

Slide 22

All these efforts pay dividends not only in terms of increased use, but also in terms of increased support from local governments. In fact, we have seen increases both in actual operating dollars as well as in-kind services provided by municipal government.

Slide 23

And that municipal support, like yours, is an excellent investment. A study commissioned by the state of Pennsylvania showed a return of \$5.50 in benefits for every dollar of tax money invested in public libraries.

Slide 24

But, even in the midst of these successes, challenges remain.

Slide 25

As state librarian Claire Zales noted, “ACLA was formed at the intersection of crisis and opportunity.” And once again, we stand at a crossroads.

Slide 26

As the economy heads into a downturn, there are some trends we can expect from past experience.

Slide 27

On the one hand, the economic environment threatens library funding. Indeed, State funding will be flat in 2009. The RAD itself is experiencing reduced revenues. There is increased pressure on municipal funding. And foundations have reduced grant-making as their own investment portfolios have been hit by the down-turn in the market. At the same time, this

kind of environment makes residents even more dependent on the resources and services of their local libraries.

Slide 28

In tough times, families naturally turn to the library, where they can not only find free access to books and other materials, but free access to the Internet for searching job listings, career and educational information, entertainment, and much more.

Slide 29

This increased demand could stretch some key resources to the breaking point. For example, while demand for library services continues to increase, library hours of operation across the county have barely budged — increasing less than 2% since 2004. Extending hours — especially evening and weekend hours — is a priority if our libraries are to meet the growing community demand we're experiencing.

Slide 30

In a similar vein, staffing also has not kept pace with increased use. And neither have staff benefits. 16% of libraries surveyed offer no healthcare benefits. And of those libraries that do offer benefits, 40% do not extend coverage to the families of staff members.

Slide 31

As I'm sure is obvious to you, these issues are directly related to available funds.

Slide 32

Another key challenge is reaching out to those who do not have ready access to libraries, whether because they are physically challenged, geographically or economically isolated, or because there is limited public transportation.

Slide 33

We have several priorities in the next few years: First and foremost we must create sustainable models for serving distressed communities such as McKees Rocks and Braddock. These communities remain in a state of Quiet Crisis even today. We invite you to go out and see these facilities. There's simply no better way to understand the real needs of the communities that ACLA member libraries serve. In McKees Rocks there are lines of people waiting to use the public computers, a vivid reminder of the digital divide. Personal computers may be on the increase, but we forget that too many still can't afford a PC or Internet access. There are public housing communities where neither you nor I as parents would consider having our children

walk the few blocks to the nearest library out of sheer concern for their safety. Allegheny County is also populated by many homeschoolers who use public library resources to meet their curriculum needs. New immigrant and refugee populations also have unique needs, language and cultural barriers that keep them from becoming fully integrated, engaged members of the community. Often it is libraries that help them build those vital connections.

Slide 34

Part of our mission has always been to bring resources to all the people of Allegheny County, regardless of where they live, and especially to those least able to afford access to knowledge and information. Historically, our libraries have been pioneers in these initiatives. And today we're continuing to find new ways to take libraries out into the community. We need to expand outreach to Headstart sites where preschoolers do not have families that take them to the local library and to seniors with limited mobility or means to visit libraries. Working with the Homeless Children's Education Fund we are finding new ways to bring library resources to the homeless. We are launching a new generation of Knowledge Connection, with mobile labs that bring computer access, instruction and library resources to at-risk communities. We need to extend wireless access to all libraries. And we are working with new service models, whether a branch of the McKeesport Library in Duquesne or the new library temporarily managed by the system in Robinson Township. And we must find new ways to assist communities like Braddock and McKees Rocks.

Slide 35

But we cannot leave today's presentation without discussing perhaps the most imminent challenge that faces us — technology services.

Slide 36

In a survey ACLA recently conducted, the public overwhelmingly observed that "up-to-date" technology was the #1 strength of library service in Allegheny County. Technology has leveled the playing-field in so many ways between the "haves" and the "have-nots." We must ensure that we sustain equitable access. Our libraries serve an enormous diversity of local community needs that must be represented in the design of technology services going forward.

Slide 37

We all have the same goal - to keep this technology current, responsive to changing needs, and on the leading edge. But accomplishing this is a complex issue, and it involves more factors than simply technology alone. So what is the bottom line? We know that the public perceives the up-to-date technology infrastructure as the leading asset of the library consortium. This was

what we learned from a survey commissioned by ACLA and performed by an outside firm specializing in conducting public surveys. We know that eiNetwork has been operating efficiently under the current model. This is the assessment of Solutions4Networks, the technology consultants commissioned to evaluate operational capacity. We know that all things change or fade away – the technology environment is no exception to that rule. Solutions4Networks rightfully observed that without change, eiNetwork will become obsolete. But we also know, based on the same Technology Assessment report, that eiNetwork is fully capable of making necessary change. That will require a customer-driven approach, responsiveness to diverse community needs, nimble but representative decision-making. The technology consultants themselves concluded that a shared service model is the best choice.

Slide 38

But change must be managed wisely and with sound planning. ACLA has responded to the Technology Assessment report with a specific plan, supported by a detailed budget, and with the endorsement of more than 70% of our members. Our plan requires first that each library know and understand the cost of technology services delivered on its behalf. We believe that libraries, like individuals, value what they know and understand. They are also better equipped to make sound decisions armed with that knowledge. We believe that there are operational cost savings to be realized in targeted outsourcing, not in a wholesale approach, but in a well-researched and selective plan. This is not new to eiNetwork; it has already outsourced numerous functions and has identified additional opportunities as well. We propose to leverage the technical expertise within the County by forming a Technology Council. In fact, ACLA is already convening preliminary conversation on membership and charge for the Council based on the Technology Assessment report. And we have launched a proactive model of decision-making, a SWAT team approach that allows representative decision-making in a compressed time-line. This was the model used to respond to the Technology Assessment report, develop the ACLA plan and budget, and gain endorsement of a super-majority of our members within a month's time.

Slide 39

ACLA will be actively engaged in numerous initiatives in the months ahead. The Technology Council will be charged with identifying and prioritizing new technology applications. It will also assist eiNetwork in defining service metrics and opportunities for additional operational efficiencies. ACLA will be hosting two leaders in the technology field at forums this fall – a Library 2.0 “guru”, Michael Stephens, as well as the well-known futurist Thomas Frey of the DaVinci Institute. We take seriously our leadership role, seeking to provide opportunities for our members to engage in visioning our future together. We also believe that our members should invest in that future. Libraries will be empowered to pilot new technology applications in

collaboration with eiNetwork, using local funding as well as grants solicited by ACLA. All libraries will benefit from these projects – just as libraries can currently benefit from the application of RFID technology at the Northland Public Library. In addition, we have proposed a reasonable model for all libraries to invest in the cost of new technology. That model leverages dollars across the consortium on a sliding scale based on ability to invest. In an environment of economic constraint, libraries can help shape the future by continuing to work together.

Slide 40

It has been observed that “democracy is messy” — and our non-hierarchical structure does present challenges. But ACLA is committed to building a more responsive organization while, at the same time, preserving the great strengths of our democratic structure. We are not an organization accountable to a single board. We are a federated system where every library has a right to be heard. This structure helps our members stay in touch with their communities’ needs and gives our organization an incredible ability to serve diverse interests across the county.

Slide 41

ACLA has accomplished much in its short history. And those accomplishments convince us that we can do even more. The future holds possibilities, and we will meet those in the same way that ACLA itself was formed... by working together. Together we have accomplished and will accomplish so much more for our communities than each could ever have accomplished alone. We thank RAD for making it possible for us to serve our communities so well. You have helped us to stabilize many libraries — community institutions who would literally not be here today without your support. You have helped us to continue to grow and serve the people of Allegheny County — and keep our region at the forefront in terms of digital access to information. Together we have built a model of the great benefits that can be obtained from county-wide cooperation — a model that expresses the heart of RAD’s mission. We look forward to extending and building on our shared vision.