

COVID-19 Response & Recovery Working Group Meeting Notes

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The COVID-19 Response & Recovery Working Group is a sub-group of the MHLS Finance Committee charged with the purpose to explore and recommend new options and resource opportunities to support MHLS during financially challenging times. The working group has met three times.

The working group has drafted a statement of purpose:

The “Support Our Library System” (SOLS) Fund

Full Version:

The Mid-Hudson Library System (MHLS) is an essential partner to the region’s libraries to ensure the public’s right to free access information and education through economical resource sharing and professional library services. Our leadership and facilitation enable every library in the region to meet the needs of its community, providing economies of scale and professional guidance that ensures affordable access to vital and viable library services for all residents of the Hudson Valley.

The MHLS Board of Trustees, elected by the libraries of the region, is responsible for the System’s financial stability, in good times and in bad. Our charge is to ensure continuity of service and avoid disruption to our member libraries who are critical to the life and health of our communities.

MHLS faces an existential threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The board is acting to address that threat with: “Support Our Library System,” a fund development initiative to create a financial safety net to manage MHLS’ operational obligations and programmatic responses during unexpected financial shortfalls due to an external crisis that threatens member libraries’ capacity to respond and serve the unique needs of their communities in times of economic, environmental, or social challenges.

We plan to responsibly develop this fund with our stakeholders. “Support Our Library System” is not meant to replace obligations of government or interfere with individual member libraries’ fund development. Nor is it intended to replace MHLS’ collaborative agreements with our library partners. Rather, its purpose is to guarantee stability and sustainability during any crisis that threatens the continuity of the cooperative library.

Summary Version:

To raise funds to address gaps in MHLS operational and programmatic funding caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a way that respects existing funding commitments from our primary funders and does not interfere with local fundraising efforts of member libraries So that MHLS services are maintained to ensure member library services are not compromised due to economic, environmental or societal disruption.

At the last meeting (August 26,2020) the committee discussed the following issues to discuss with the full board:

1. MHLS expects to require between \$100,000 and \$240,000 to meet the needs of the 2021 proposed budget should cuts at the level we are experiencing in 2020 are repeated.
2. The MHLS staff are projecting that they have trimmed the budgeted expenses and negotiated additional support sufficiently to manage the current obligations through the remainder of the year.
3. If we do not receive sufficient NYS funding or find additional resources, MHLS may be facing the necessity to develop a plan for staff layoffs which will significantly impact the supports provided to our member libraries.

It is the obligation of the board to provide the necessary guidance and financial support to meet the mission of MHLS. In doing so, we must find new ways to attract new resources. This is an effort which has not been attempted to this degree in the past nor part of the routine work of the staff or board.

The working group recommends the following:

1. The working group views this as an immediate need that is required to secure and sustain the stability of the MHLS mission and obligations to the member libraries and entire system.
2. It is important that all board members see this effort as a critical part of our governance responsibilities.
3. The board needs to discuss and support efforts to attract new, private sources of funding including corporate and foundation grants as well as private and corporate donors.
4. The board needs to accept the responsibility to participate actively in securing these resources through personal contacts and sources knowledgeable to the members.
5. The sources we solicit should not negatively impact access to private resources which are currently available and necessary to support local libraries in the MHLS region

The working group will discuss these issues at the September 2020 board meeting.