System Directors, information for the weekly state/system directors virtual meeting is found at the end of this message as usual, but we have some important details about next week’s meeting, so please read on:

At the September 21 State-System Director meeting, we would like System Directors to invite their CE Coordinators to also attend. One item we want to discuss with Directors and CE Coordinators is a non-competitive ARPA subaward grant project category we have to developed based input we’ve heard and know about capacity and stress issues in the field among library staff. Prior to the meeting, we ask that Directors and CE Coordinators review the following information regarding the grant category we are considering. During our discussion with you, we’d like to hear your feedback, thoughts about feasibility, and/or other ideas about how to address this need among systems and libraries.

**Collaborative Support Model for Library Management and Staff**

Over the last 15 years, as libraries have faced the challenge of decreasing budgets or budgets not keeping up with operating cost increases, one way budget shortfalls have been addressed is by transitioning full-time benefited positions into part-time positions with no benefits. This transition of the composition of staff positions has created a vulnerability for libraries that has been exposed by the pandemic and impacted their ability to serve their communities at a time of ever-increasing need. There is real burnout happening in the field and libraries are seeing staff leave. Libraries are facing decisions to reduce hours and/or services as they scramble to retain staff and recruit applicants in an ever more competitive labor market. A few libraries have closed as a result of the impacts from the pandemic on their local labor market and community funding. Related to this, a significant amount of library director turnover continues to happen each year and systems are having a difficult time finding more veteran directors among their members that have the time and capacity to mentor new directors in their systems.

The purpose of this grant is to support a collaborative effort of the 16 Wisconsin Public Library Systems to create a sustainable model to address and support the following needs of libraries:

* Mentorship for new public library directors
* Public library staff shortages
* Public library staff work/life balance needs
* Public library staff need for time for professional learning

***Allocations and Eligibility***

Eligible entities are public library systems. One System shall apply for this grant on behalf of all 16 Wisconsin Public Library Systems.

***General stipulations we are proposing for this project***

* The result of the project should include the development of pilot models for the creation of a pool of library experts and substitute staff that could be paid through a stipend program to explore options to do the following:
  + Provide mentorship to new library directors
  + Fill emergency staffing needs at libraries
  + Provide substitute staff coverage to allow library staff time for professional learning and potentially develop some kind of PTO program to help with staff stress and mental health
* The project would be supported by $150,000 in ARPA funds to cover Jan. - June 2022 and a matching $150,000 in cooperative funding from systems to cover July - Dec. 2022. The funds could be used to hire a project coordinator(s) that could lead the collaborative effort to develop innovative pilot models and identify, if successful, how such a program could be sustained into the future.