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OFFICE OF
MEDIA RELATIONS
703.413.1100 x5117
and 310.451.6913

media@rand.org
www.rand.org

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CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF PITTSBURGH SHOULD EXPLORE OTHER FUNDING SOURCES, RIGHT-SIZE PROGRAMS, RAND STUDY SAYS

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh needs to explore new ways to secure adequate and stable funding, engage patrons and other stakeholders, and evaluate what services it offers, according to a study issued today by the RAND Corporation.

“Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh has proven itself to be an extremely valuable community institution, offering literacy resources and cultural enrichment to the community while providing millions of dollars of direct and indirect economic benefits,” said Sally Sleeper, a management scientist with RAND, a nonprofit research organization.

“But in order to continue to provide those benefits – and perhaps even enhance them – it will need to seriously explore other funding sources, right-sizing its programs and offerings, and engaging library patrons and other stakeholders to help it chart a new course for the future.”

Facing serious funding challenges, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh asked RAND to identify critical factors affecting the Library’s ability to obtain stable and adequate funding to meet its mission in the future.

“RAND’s study is a critical information tool for the entire community,” said Barbara K. Mistick, president and director of Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. “Over the coming months, we want to create a community dialogue about the importance of libraries. We want to engage library customers, foundations, elected officials, civic leaders and the community at large. We need them to be our partners in determining the future of Library services and funding and how we can serve our community best.”

Currently, about 70 percent of the Library’s operating funds come from local sales tax revenues administered by the Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD), for which numerous organizations compete. Although annual funding from RAD has increased since 2000, when adjusted for inflation RAD funding in 2007 was about 20 percent lower than it was in 2000. The current economic climate emphasizes how dangerous it is for the Library to be dependent on any single source of revenue.

A decrease in state funding caused library hours to be cut in 2002, and the Library continues to balance days and times of operations at its 19 locations even though circulation, visits and

program attendance have increased 29 percent, 27 percent and 107 percent, respectively, from 2000 to 2007.

A study by the Center for Economic Development at Carnegie Mellon University found that Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh generates more than \$132 million in combined economic return and estimated value to the community in Allegheny County, sustains more than 700 jobs, and provides an economic benefit of \$3 for every \$1 it spends. For every dollar provided by the City of Pittsburgh and the Regional and the Regional Asset District, the Library provides more than \$6 worth of direct and indirect benefits to the communities served.

Sleeper and coauthor Rena Rudavsky say the study outlines nine opportunities for the Library and regional leaders, foundations and elected officials to pursue that may help the Library increase operating revenue, decrease expenses and improve efficiency:

- Identify service demand and find ways to increase innovative activities to engage library users. Engaged users are more likely to support the library and become advocates for it.
- Conduct a rigorous right-sizing assessment for the number and size of services and programs offered by the library.
- Evaluate ways to leverage more benefits from existing resources, including technology, volunteers and strategic partners.
- Identify, develop and use performance measures to provide signs of progress, demonstrate the library's value and uncover areas of unmet need.
- Assess how to involve library staff as part of institutional changes, including getting them involved in outreach efforts.
- Evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of formalizing "Library Friends" of the library. Assess the effectiveness of the board as advocates for and as partners with the library.
- Evaluate the costs, benefits and long-term financial stability of new organizational models, such as a public library district, including an assessment of the costs of a media campaign to garner public support.
- Conduct a right-sizing assessment for the number and size of facilities, staffing and holdings.
- Evaluate the service and resource efficiencies and tradeoffs for a countywide merger of Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and the 44 independent libraries in Allegheny County.

"The challenges facing Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh are not unique," Sleeper said. "We hope our report also could serve as a framework for other library systems as they look for ways to stabilize funding sources, improve outreach and bring value to their patrons in these tough economic times."

The study, “Assessing the Future of Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh: Pathways to Sustainability,” can be found at www.rand.org. Research for the study was funded through a grant from the Eden Hall Foundation and conducted within RAND Education, a unit of RAND.

RAND Education conducts research and analysis on a variety of topics, including school reform, educational assessment and accountability, and trends among teachers and teacher training.

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