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December 13, 2006

Richard Hugo House Member Library Service Proposal

The Richard Hugo House (RHH), described as “a place for people who love writing and reading”, is currently celebrating its 10th anniversary. One of the founders has stepped down from her position as director, a new “Executive Director” position has been created and filled, and the entire staff structure has been reorganized. New roles have been filled by previous staff as old roles are filled with new hires, including the role of library manager, in something of a rebirth for the House. The library has been confirmed as an integral part of the organization before, after, and despite this shift, but there is a vagueness to its purposes and mission. One of the goals of the Hugo House administration for the next year is to help shape the current library into a more focused and community-aligned resource. This proposal will outline an information service to accomplish this task.

Background Information

Three Seattle-based writers established the Richard Hugo House in 1996 as a place for writers and readers to congregate. They set out "to use business-like practices to build a strong institution that would remain flexible and risk-taking in its programming" (Hugo House website). There are currently around 18 staff (a combination of full- and part-time), 3 “writers in residence”, and a number of volunteers. A grey Victorian house located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle, close to Seattle Central Community College and Cal Anderson Park, Richard Hugo House serves a diverse population: its “members”, the immediate Capitol Hill community, and the Seattle population at large.

About four years ago, *The Stranger* published an article stating that RHH “appeals to middle-aged, middle-class white women” (Frizzelle, 2003). Although this perception may not be completely eradicated, things have changed. A better spin on programming for pre-teens and teens, a more diverse and gender-balanced staff, and free or low-cost events have helped, and it is certainly fair to say that RHH users (including some outside its walls, such as prisoners) have very different backgrounds and come from a wide spectrum of ages, gender, socio-economic status, races, etc. However, because of its specific mission to support, promote, and educate writers specifically and those interested in writers and writing more generally, its users tend to have similar reasons for using the House’s resources, if different ideas of “successful writing”.

The organizational culture at RHH is a result of its history and purpose. Despite controlling a budget of one million dollars annually, it is very laid back. Many of the staff members have come up through the ranks, and a few began their interactions with the House through the programs and workshops for teenagers. The “regulars” and the staff know each other. Events such as “Wine and Poetry” nights are not uncommon, and although the planning of these events is controlled by staff, anyone can suggest

programming ideas. This atmosphere, to some extent, has created a place where people feel comfortable sharing ideas and carrying them out, even if they are somewhat unconventional.

The Library

The library is located on the second floor of the building. Its non-circulating collection consists of 1300 books (on the shelves), 25 serial subscriptions, an (as of yet) unprocessed collection of screenplays, and around 300 individual donated and unprocessed materials including monographs, sound and video recordings, Richard Hugo-related documents, and some book art. The room housing the library also contains three computers and some large tables. It is often used as class space for the various programs offered. There are three regular staff members: the Library Manager and two volunteers (including the author, a student in the UW iSchool's MLIS program). These three come in for a total of eight hours a week. Two other volunteers come in occasionally to work on specific projects such as journal check-ins. The regular staff are currently working on several additional projects, including creating a kind of Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) using the web-based service LibraryThing, cataloging and classifying the many donations, creating a collection development policy, designing a user needs survey, and organizing a library panel to direct the library towards finding its place within Hugo House.

The purposes of the library, as mentioned earlier, are somewhat vague. The current website states that its mission is to "collect resources for writers to help them write and publish". However, these resources are only available to members, and, according to several people within the organization, there is little to no knowledge that these resources are available, even within the member community (no quantitative data is currently available). This is presumably in part due to the fact that new members are simply told of the existence of the library, and its use is a membership benefit listed on the RHH website. The library has no other marketing strategy.

The vast majority of staff-observed library user behavior involves computer use. While the computers are serving a role in the writing process (although they have also been casually observed to be used for e-mail and to surf the web) and therefore are actually written into the library's mission statement, the seeming lack of knowledge about, and use of, the library's other resources is indication that something is lacking. However, it should be noted that some primitive circulation data are now being collected (by counting and tracking the books placed in a "to be shelved" box), and it appears that some sources are being minimally used when the staff is not on site. The library staff have also discussed placing a guestbook or sign-in sheet in library to help track use when the staff is not on site, but the manager does not want the library to feel like a space that "is being watched". Going back to the circulation data, there is not yet enough to analyze, and especially in a small setting such as RHH, they could be somewhat meaningless as people re-shelve themselves or place the books in the box without ever actually using them. Despite this, it is hoped that eventually this data, perhaps used in

conjunction with the results of the survey, may shed some light on what information the library users want, use, and need.

The library is currently serving two archiving functions for Richard Hugo House, although these are not yet articulated as such in its mission. First, the library is maintaining a Richard Hugo archive of the poet's works and related documents. The extent of this part of the collection is not known, and a volunteer working on a documentation project left before much was accomplished. As the house was named in honor of the local poet, collecting the items has been something of a priority, but organizing them and figuring out a way to make them available to researchers, staff, and/or other potential users has not been a focus, due mostly to the lack of staff time and pressure to do so. The second archive-type function of the library is to collect the works of the visiting writers and teachers (mostly writers themselves) who come to Richard Hugo House and to get them to autograph the works if possible. This is currently something of a retrospective project as these writers have been coming through the House for 10 years and there is no single record of who came when. Again, this collection is being maintained as part of the history of the House. However, it is also being done to provide more tangible examples of the works of successful writers who are connected with Hugo House for those who are working towards success themselves. It is important to note that this success does not mean commercial success (although there are commercially successful authors represented). Unfortunately, the resources being maintained through these functions are not well known, which is something the proposed service might be able to change.

The third, and mostly unarticulated, function of the library is as a space for classes. Currently, the library has almost no say in their planning, although in the past there has been a library talk series called "InPrint" that attempted to connect Richard Hugo House aspiring writers with publishers and other people in the writing industry. Again, this is an area that the staff are looking at to promote library use, but because of the limited staff time and the seeming overlap with other talk series and classes that are planned by a separate coordinator outside of the library, it is also an area that seems rather stagnate. Using the library space to better support users will be a part of the service.

Users of the library are a sub-section of all RHH users. Members, or "Upstairs Pass Holders", of the Richard Hugo House are users who have paid an annual \$50 fee (\$25 for students/seniors). They enjoy special privileges, including reduced fees for RHH classes, a subscription to the quarterly newsletter, discounts at the Elliott Bay Book Company, and access to the library (officially titled the Richard Hugo House Member Library). RHH staff and volunteers are also able to access the library, and occasionally non-members are exposed to the library by attending classes held in the library space. However, the library's first priority is to serve the members; this is the group that the service will focus on. It is a little harder to describe the members as opposed to RHH users as a whole because little information besides name and address is kept for most of them. Generally, when compared to all RHH users, members tend to be slightly more affluent as well as older (although there are a number of student members), and may be

more geographically diverse as people leaving the area are philanthropically inclined to remain members. However, it is still useful to think of library users as a subset of RHH members who are a subset of all RHH users.

Relevant Literature

Searches of multi-disciplinary databases as well as library and information science specific databases yielded no results on the specific information needs of writers. Some papers on solo librarian settings and small libraries were found, though. Donna Fisher discusses the importance of getting patrons involved with the library and vice versa. S.P. Walton goes over several different library programming tracks (such as adult, children, and literacy programs). Although the programs themselves may not be the best for RHH users, Walton's conclusion that "attractive though many of these programs must be, small and rural libraries cannot have them all. Rather, they must chose where they are going to focus their programming and stick to that focus. They cannot be all things to all patrons" is good advice, as is his emphasis on knowing the library's users.

One paper was found that is particularly relevant to the setting. Kevin Simons, James Young and Craig Gibson describe a partnership between a university library and a campus writing center. Much of the paper is about using the library to bridge the gap between "formal education and informal research needs", which is a stretch to apply to the library at RHH, but there are some take-aways. According to the authors, there are four keys, based on the theories of Lev Vygotsky and Jean Lave, that define a learning library: "active programmatic partnerships; curricular integration; sustained interactions among students, faculty, and librarians; and extension of influence into a 'multiplier effect'".

The library at RHH, although not explicitly defined as a learning library, is closely related in that it provides program support through its collection of RHH teacher/writer materials and with its physical space. This could be extended to "curricular integration" easily, if classes in the library made more use of library materials. Also, although interactions between library users and library staff are infrequent, the staff (from here on in, library staff will include the volunteers) have attempted to set up a regular (although poorly advertised) schedule so that they are visible and available to users. Sustaining and improving these interactions and establishing a range of communication channels between library staff and users could lead to information exchanges that help the library better serve its users and give the users the opportunity to get the most out of all the library's resources, including its staff.

The "multiplier effect", or the growth of the sphere of influence from the library to other parts of a large organization such as administration, is a little more difficult to map to the RHH library. However, on a small scale one can see how a successful information service might lead to more and more opportunities to help contribute to RHH as a whole. And, from a slightly different direction suggested by the example in the paper of a bibliographic/course-related instruction class that lead to the partnership

between library and writing center, the library can look to build the new service into an already existing program.

Identification of User Needs

Plans to implement a RHH user survey have not yet been carried out, and the survey will not be considered a part of this proposal (however, it is possible the survey will be completed relatively soon and that the results could be used to improve/change the proposal). However, despite this and the fact that there was little found in the literature, defining some basic user needs will help dictate the direction of a workable service. Given the nature of the community that Richard Hugo House serves, it is possible to make a few inferences about the library users.

Generally, one may assume that the library users are aspiring writers. Some of them may be more hands-on, or, in other words, they would rather be working on their own writing than reading about how others do it. This user may need dictionaries or grammar references, however. Some users may be just the opposite, needing to peruse a variety of materials to get a taste of the many directions they could go and to improve their style. In fact, according to the Frizzelle article, “Hugo House's programs and education manager Trisha Ready (also a journalist), Sherman Alexie (the local novelist), and Skye Moody (a thriller writer) all said they learned to write by reading”. All the users will also be at different stages of the writing process, as well. None of this means, however, that a given user will know what is available to her/him, what types of materials he/she wants, or where to find the appropriate resources in the library. So, perhaps the underlying need for many of the library’s users is simply knowing about the existence of the library—until this need is met, it will be difficult to determine definitively what other needs are out there.

This list of “needs”, again, is very short and, unfortunately, unsubstantiated and based on intuition. Yet, to a certain extent it is possible to make some educated guesses as to what kinds of information services may be helpful, especially given the current status of the library. In a sense, because the library has low use and a poorly defined purpose, a service based on the knowledge of setting and the community may be better than no service at all. The library has been providing little in the past, and has been content with just existing within RHH. This is now changing. Drawing from the need to introduce the library and its resources to users, as well as the literature that supports focusing on one basic service and growing out, a specific service plan can be developed.

Service Proposal

Given the above considerations, this proposal will focus on bringing members into the Richard Hugo House Member Library (it also has the potential to indirectly bring in new membership). It will target new members and introduce them to the library in an effort to promote the use of its resources. As the author of this paper, and as a library staff volunteer, I am proposing that the Library host an annual “party” to welcome new members to the organization. New members will be defined as every individual who has

obtained RHH membership for the first time in the year preceding the party. However, all members will be invited—extra effort in the form of personal invitations will simply be extended to new members. The purpose of this service proposal is to make sure new members are aware of the library’s resources from early on, and to show both new members and those who have held membership for some time the value the library adds to their membership. This “type” of service will also fit well into the organizational culture. Food will be provided, it should last no more than an hour and half, and the atmosphere will be modeled after an open house or a similar, casual information-sharing place with people coming in and out.

In order to maximize attendance, I would like to try to coincide this party with another major RHH event, such as an open mike night or a play opening. I believe that it should be held about two hours before the other event begins, as a time for people to mingle, snack, and learn. It may also be a good idea to hold the event in January, at the beginning of the year, because no other major RHH events (such as the Annual Inquiry) are happening at that time, and the weather may be pushing people towards indoor spaces.

In addition to members, we should also anticipate that non-members might arrive, even if we market the party mostly through the member newsletter and personal invitations. There will be some additional exposure through the website, where all events are advertised, which could bring some people in. Therefore, I propose that we greet people at the front door and identify whether they are members or not. If not, we should send them up to the library for a taste of membership benefits, and be prepared to sign on members that night. . I would also like to have an additional person besides the greeter downstairs, to help answer questions as people work their way back down, and to help talk about how the library can serve members who are unable to get up the stairs (for more information on RHH’s accessibility, please refer to <http://www.hugohouse.org/accessibility.html>).

Once people have been greeted and directed upstairs to the library space, I would like to have staff ready to informally “teach” about certain aspects of the library. Specifically, I would like to see three general areas led by our staff. First, I would like to see someone demonstrating the use of our LibraryThing catalog. This catalog is a way for users to see the materials that the RHH Library owns without physically being in the library—the demonstration would include showing users how to get to the catalog, what our unique tags mean (they are based on our classification system), and answering questions. The LibraryThing catalog is a project the library staff has been working on for some time and, in addition to its potential use as a finding tool, may help users realize that the library is attempting to meet their needs.

The second station will involve someone explaining and giving a little tour of the actual collection (in the small room with barely 2 ranges, this will mostly involve pointing out the important sections, including the Richard Hugo section and the Pacific Northwest writers) and explaining how our classification system works. Finally, there will be someone to promote contacting the library staff through e-mail

(library@hugohouse.org or library2@hugohouse.org) and during regularly staffed hours. This person will also answer questions and hand out the fliers with contact, LibraryThing, and other important information. I am also hoping to bring in a few of those members who do currently use the library. These members will be identifiable, and will ideally be outgoing in sharing their personal experiences and reasons for using the library to those passing through the space. More detail on these aspects of the party can be found below.

Service Points and Timeline

The service points of this proposal can be divided up into three parts: before, during, and after the party. The most well-defined points will be during the event, but these rely on the others providing foundation and support and the periodic nature of the service will certainly depend on all three.

Pre-Party (including publicizing):

- Promotion of the party will be done through the newsletter, through the invitations, and through the Hugo House website. This will be accomplished by library staff as well as the Hugo House program staff and webmaster. Information about the library (including contact information) should be included in all three publications.
- The library staff will need to be prepared to answer any questions from other staff, members, and the general public on the event resulting from the promotion of contact information. Interactions with staff will most likely be on site and in person, while those with members and the public may come in the form of e-mail. It is not anticipated that this will result in a lot of extra work for the library staff, but it is important to be prepared for this service to take away some time from other projects.
- The design of the party flier/handout with information about the library, including websites (the RHH library site and the LibraryThing catalog), e-mail addresses, hours the library is open with anticipated staffed hours, etc., will need to be done during this time.
- Recruitment of members who use the library as volunteers for the party will also need to be initiated early on in order to ensure their presence (or to give time for the creation of contingency plan, such as collecting testimonials for the handout if no members want to participate in the actual event).

The pre-party period will theoretically begin around six months before the actual event. The first time it is implemented, however, it could begin as soon as 3 months, depending on when the newsletter is scheduled to go out. Recruitment of members who use the library should begin at three months regardless; not so early that people will put off signing up, but early enough to give people time to plan and to give the library staff time to create a back-up. The newsletter should be the first indication to all other members that there will be a party, sent out 3-6 months beforehand. This will be followed in 2-4 weeks by the invitations to the new members. The website info can go up when the information for the other event (open mike night, play opening) goes up; this may be before the newsletter, but it probably will not be seen until the event works its way up the

page (the events are arranged chronologically with the soonest date at the top). New members will continue to be tracked after the initial batch of invitations--as more people join, invitations will be sent to them up to 1 week before the party. Following the first time the service is offered, the six-month pre-party period will be used to start planning changes and to get possible user (including the member volunteers') feedback.

Party (these service points will be occurring simultaneously, and unless stated otherwise, will take up most of the staff person's commitment; all of them are flexible to some degree for unanticipated needs):

- Front-door greeter (asks and collects data about membership status, points people upstairs, answers basic questions)
- Downstairs staff member (provides more information than greeter, is mobile, makes sure everyone, especially those unable to go upstairs, has had a chance to see the flier and get library information)
- LibraryThing demonstrator (less mobile, needs a computer; gives brief explanations and demonstrations of the interface, our tags, why we chose to use it, promotes its off-site capabilities, points out the website on the flier)
- Collection "tour guide" (more mobile; physically points out important parts of the collection, explains classification system)
- Library "promoter" (very visible; promotes the "use" of library staff through e-mail and scheduled hours [40% of time], hands out fliers [40%], answers questions [15-20%], takes donations [0-5%])
- Membership coordinator (mobile, used as needed, also visible)
- Additionally, the active participation of those members who have used the library in the past will be promoted. These members will be the most informal of the service points, and we will encourage them to talk about their experiences and why they have used the library.

All party service points will be clearly marked, preferably on the person (through the use of "Ask Me About..." pins/tags, e.g.). Also, because the bulleted list of service points may seem overly formal for this organization, I would like to emphasize that no "station" will have any form of script; the interactions will all be customized for our audience.

Post-Party:

This part of the service proposal is the most flexible. The service points should begin the week following the party and continue through the next year, but the components are subject to change based on information gathered at the party, data collected from the previously mentioned user survey, and through actual library use. In a sense, this is the step that may help lead us to new services that go beyond our original goal of getting more users into the library.

- Staff time will need to be spent on-site during regular and publicly posted hours. These hours can be based on informal questioning during the party as to when people are mostly likely to use the library, as well as on when the staff is available. Ideally, there will be shifts three times a week for two hours each

- during those times of the day identified through the informal inquiry as the most useful. Given that the current level of interaction between staff and users at the library is at 0%, it seems a safe assumption that no more than 50% of this time will be spent helping users with finding and using library resources after the party.
- Part of the time on-site will be spent checking and responding to e-mail inquiries (an estimated 20% of the time, or 25 minutes out of 2 hours might be spent on e-mail).
 - The remainder of the time (~30-80%) will be spent on other projects, ranging from shelving to developing new services to planning the next year's party.

Eventually, it may become apparent that more hours are needed to adequately cover these tasks and to transition into the next pre-party stage. New demands might also surface, such as the need for computer sign-up sheets, if library use increases dramatically (something we certainly hope for). The library staff should be prepared to recruit additional volunteers from the UW iSchool or elsewhere to meet these demands. Another option might be to increase the manager's pay and therefore her hours, or to provide a monthly stipend to a "library assistant" who could then be available for more hours than a typical volunteer.

Staffing and Training Needs

To some extent, the staffing needs of this service are minimal, assuming that we are able to include the three regular library staff, the occasional volunteers, and as many previous library users as possible. At least for the moment, this is a safe assumption, given that the core staff has pledged to serve the library through the summer of 2007. Even if the first party happens after that time, we should have had time to recruit and train new people. Therefore, given the above service points, we will need a minimum of six library and 2-4+ member volunteers during a given party, and 3-5 before and after. Before the party we may also require the help of people outside of the library to create the newsletter notice, the invitations, the website, and the fliers (although the current Library Manager is a visual arts person; using our own strengths will help keep staffing costs low). People will also be needed to send out the invitations and newsletters. However, the newsletters are a regular part of RHH volunteer duties and would be done regardless of whether or not the library contributed material. Normally, the envelopes are stuffed and addressed during "mini-parties". The library volunteers should help with these. The library staff should also take full responsibility for sending out the invitations, but three people should be plenty, judging from prior newsletter experience. Flexibility as we learn from every time we provide this service will be key, so the numbers may change. If more people are needed, it will be possible to recruit from other areas of the House (everyone is extraordinarily willing to help each other out) or from the University of Washington iSchool from the pool of those looking for service projects.

Training will consist of holding a meeting of all the library staff as the project progresses. Here we can make sure everyone is able to carry out his/her role as well as answer basic questions (such as where the library is in the building, its hours, and how to become a member). The three most intensive positions are the three upstairs positions

(catalog demonstrator, tour guide, and library promoter), which will be filled by the people most familiar with the library. During the all-staff meeting, they should be able to bounce ideas off each other and do a practice run. Flexibility and an emphasis on customizing the “talk” based on the audience should be a focus of training. If replacements for the current staff are needed, the person most familiar with that aspect should provide some basic training (for example, Betsey, the volunteer most familiar with the catalog, would have a one-on-one session with her replacement). If that is not possible, there should (given that the current way the volunteers rotate through) be at least one other person who is comfortable with that particular area who can provide the basic training necessary.

Required Resources (finances, space, etc.):

The financial resources we require should be minimal. To begin, there is negligible cost associated with promotion in the newsletter and the website, because these will be maintained regardless. The library may consider contributing \$20 towards pizza for the volunteers who stuff the newsletter envelopes, though. The library should also expect to pay for the entire cost of sending out the invitations. Because the organization is a non-profit, postage may be lower, but given an estimated 50 new members in a year, with fifteen cents materials cost per invitation and 39 cents for regular postage, the library can expect to pay around \$32 to cover invitation costs. Getting fliers made will also have some cost, but should be easily done within Hugo House using the in-house printer/copier. We can estimate 10 cents per copy, and I would like to have 200 copies, including extras that we could keep on hand after the event, which comes to another \$20. We can keep food costs to a minimum by asking the staff to make cookies, bring snacks, etc., and then fill in any gaps such as beverages with the library budget. Another \$28 could probably cover these costs, bringing the total to \$100.

The library space will need to be available, so we will have to make sure no one plans any other programs that night. This could be an issue as the space is often scheduled without the library staff’s knowledge, but we will schedule it as far in advance as possible, and it is rare that classes or other programming are scheduled on nights with major events. Finally, we will need very few tools: the library already has computers upstairs that can be used for the catalog demonstration, and there is one desktop at the front desk downstairs that could possibly be used for demonstrations as well, if needed. A laptop downstairs might be an option, and is something that we can think about.

Policy Issues

Because of the laid-back organizational culture, RHH has very little structured policy that this service will need to work around. Accessibility for those who are unable to get up the stairs to the library is one major concern that I have attempted to address by providing service points downstairs. Eventually, more might need to be done with this aspect, such as document delivery for disabled members, which could bring copyright issues into play. Collecting data during the party and through a follow-up survey raises

human subject issues. We will be sure to comply with existing laws and make sure that everyone we talk to or survey is treated with respect.

There could also be some issue in maintaining the member-only access to the library policy once some of the non-members have accessed it once. With the library staffed only a percentage of the time that it is actually open, non-members accessing the collection could raise the chances that materials are taken or damaged. The fact that the library party is a one-time privilege for non-members to see the library and that to gain regular access it is necessary to pay for membership will need to be stressed.

As the result of this service, there is the potential for new policy to be developed. As of now, there is only one master calendar that contains the information on when the library space is scheduled for classes or workshops, and the library staff has no true veto power over how or when it is used. If use of the library goes up, or if programming begins to interfere with regular library staff hours, this may need to change. There has also been some discussion on changing the circulation policy if the demand arises. Computer use is another area that may be open to policy change, especially if it gets to the point where people are waiting in line for an open machine. Other issues may crop up as well; again, it will be extremely important to be flexible and to recognize when and how policy may need to change or be implemented.

Evaluation

In order to evaluate this service effectively, it is necessary to go back to its original goals. The overarching issue providing the motivation is the lack of library use by members of Richard Hugo House. Because members are technically the only users of the library, this can be simplified to a goal of more library use overall. This specific service targets new members because we feel that establishing a significant relationship between the library and these members will be easier. Older members may have already placed the library at the back of their mind and give its use a low score compared to other aspects of membership. However, we are not excluding either old member or non-members from this particular service, and evaluation will be performed accordingly.

The first area of analysis will be the party itself. Although the focus is on increased use of the library throughout the year following the party, attendance data will be the first indicator of how many people we are reaching, and may be used to prove some correlation between the party and increased library use. First, we should note the number of current members and the number of new members who joined in the past year before the party (this can be done together with sending out the newsletters and the invitations). Then, using the counts collected by the greeter on members, new members, and non-members, we can determine the percentage of new members who attended and the percent of total members who attended. From the first year to the next, I will be looking for an increase in these percentages. If the party is indeed having a positive influence on library use, an increase in attendance could lead to increase in library use as more members become aware of what the library has to offer. Also, if a high percentage of longer term members come to the event, I might consider putting more effort into promoting the library to all users rather than just new members. Moreover, the

comparison of these party data, while not reflective of increased library use, can at least give an idea of how many people felt that the event was worth coming to.

The percentage of non-members in attendance who then signed up to become members with the membership coordinator will provide indication that the party's indirect function of increasing membership is or is not working. A high percentage of non-members who become members, or a large number of new members (as compared to the average number of members who join per year) overall will indicate that this function is successful and might be reason enough to continue having the party, although perhaps with driving membership as a goal rather than driving library use. Asking people why they chose or did not choose to sign up will provide the qualitative data necessary to design and implement any changes related to this function.

Qualitative data will be collected at all three stages of the service. The first pre-party portion may not yield much, but the library staff should make note of any inquiries received as the result of publicizing the event and see if there are any common themes. After the first year, I would like to include an appeal for informal information on members' impressions of the previous year's party in the newsletter and website announcements during the pre-party period. Again, the library staff will make note of any themes or interesting comments. Information at this stage can be used to tweak the specific service points of the party and to see if any drastic changes are necessary. At the party itself, informal observation and querying of the party attendees by the volunteers (including our member volunteers) will be encouraged. A debriefing session with the volunteers (perhaps with another \$20 worth of pizza for incentive) soon after the party will be held to collect any impressions, and channels such as e-mail opened, in case the volunteers remember more later.

These data will be used to improve the service for the next year and in the interim to promote more library use. During the post-party period every year, I would also like to send out a formal survey, within four weeks of the party and before the next planning/pre-party stage begins, to all members asking for feedback on the library and for impressions of the party. Again, this data would be used to improve the service as a whole with the idea always being to increase library use and to better serve our users. I would also like to see all the data, both quantitative and qualitative collected together around the six-month mark for organizational purposes, and to better track trends that cross both types of data collection. This may make it easier in the long run to track what changes or aspects of the service have the most impact.

Increased library use, however, remains the focus of this proposal. Purely quantitative data, especially the first year, will be considered appropriate for measuring use. For the moment, it is not as important how much each user is getting out of every interaction with library simply because there are not enough of these interactions to make their measurement worthwhile (if the library focused on the few interactions done now, services would be specific to a very small number of people). So, I suggest first that some data can be collected by placing a guestbook at the entrance of the library and

asking people to sign in with comments (so that there is some form of qualitative data that can be tracked) and membership status (“member since...”). Although this idea has been dismissed by the library before, I hope that by clearly articulating that the guestbook is not a sign-in sheet and that its purpose is to better serve library users, there will be no feeling that the library is “watching” users. Because the information in the guestbook is self-reported, we may miss a large percentage of users, but we will have a minimum number for a given period (a month, a year) that can be compared over time.

From these sets of data, we can begin to map out trends every year and see if there is actual growth in library use, party attendance, and number of new members per year. Because of the minimum financial commitment, the importance of comparing quantitative data over time, and the integration of the party with an existing RHH event, I propose that we can hold this event every year for 2-4 years before completely reevaluating it. I anticipate small numbers, so it might be hard to detect trends in a shorter period, and a longer period could simply be a waste of time and effort better spent elsewhere if the service is not working. However, if, after even one year, the party is poorly attended, there is no feedback, and/or the library staff and stakeholders see absolutely no change in library use or new memberships, I would certainly consider looking in a new direction. On the other hand, I would consider the service a success if, after the first year, the library staff notice any positive change in library use. This includes more users observed as coming in during the library’s hours, entries in the guestbook, use of the library’s e-mail address for communication, and so on. Success could also mean receiving positive feedback and/or suggestions on how to make next year’s party more effective. Following the first year, numbers that are more concrete can be used to determine whether the party was a success, such as a 50% increase in use (counting entries in the guestbook, number of e-mails, circulation statistics).

Because the library exists, as explained in its mission, to provide resources on writing and publishing to writers, having people use its resources to a greater extent will help it prove its worth and help it find its place within the organization as a whole. More use will also hopefully lead to information that will help the library provide more services. This circle of continual improvement in meeting user needs, which is perhaps one of the marks of a “learning library” that serves its community well, should be the ultimate goal of the Richard Hugo House Member Library.

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