

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
DIVISION OF LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT
SPONSORED MEETING OF THE CENTRAL LIBRARY DIRECTORS/STAFF

March 12, 2008 9:00 AM – 2:30 AM
Empire State Plaza Concourse Meeting Room 3

REPORT OF THE MEETING

(submitted by Bruce O'Connell, Meeting Facilitator)

The following report is a compilation of the facilitated discussions that took place at the New York State Library sponsored Central Library Directors meeting on March 12, 2008. The meeting was convened by the NYSED Division of Library Development for, and at the request of, the Central Library Directors group. The purpose of the session was to begin to cull from the participants' perceptions of the current state of Central Library services in New York State, what the future of those services might be, and how the Central Libraries might appropriately serve their constituencies in the future.

Twenty-three directors, staff and administrators of NYS Central Libraries attended the session, representing the wide geographic diversity of the state. As a group, they have amassed a total of 265 years of NYS Central Library experience, yet individually ranged from less than one year to thirty-five years of experience.

The meeting commenced with a welcome from Carol A. Desch, Coordinator of Statewide Library Services, New York State Library, a short overview of the NYS Central Library Directors Association presented by Jim Sleeth, Director of the Chemung County Library District, Southern Tier Library System, and an historical perspective on NYS Central Libraries provided by Janet Steiner, Director of the Tompkins County Public Library, Finger Lakes Library System.

Following these presentations the group was randomly divided into four working groups for two 90 minute sessions.

The issues deliberated were:

Session I:

- Identify key target audiences of Central Library Program today
- Identify successes and failures
- What services/audiences are no longer relevant?
- In your opinion, what critical services is the New York State Central Library Program providing today (and to whom?), that are relevant in today's networked environment?

Session II:

- Given current funding levels, what services/audiences will be achievable in 5 years? 10 years?
- With increased State support, what new services could Central Libraries deliver and to whom? Identify possible new services, audiences and strategies for reaching those audiences
- What is the relevance of the Central Library Program in today's networked environment?

The final activity for the day was a brainstorming session focusing on the group's suggestions and recommendations for utilizing the information gathered during the day.

RESULTS OF LARGE GROUP REPORT OUT BY ISSUE

Session I:

- **Identify key target audiences of Central Library Program today**

Researchers; businesses, capitalists; readers, viewers; new Americans; Niche users (special interests); remote users; member libraries; local community colleges; school librarians; "deep" collections; teens; people in need of social services.

- **Identify successes and failures**

Successes: ILL; piloting formats; special services (eg medical); \$ for collections; research-based answers; 24/7 reference; personal assistance; shared network technology; e-branch services; sharing materials; unique resources; the structure for service delivery; commitment to resource sharing; space and destination; mentoring; open longer hours.

Failures: system-wide database; skills needed to make web links available; marketing; shrinking funds; communication between central and system; lack of our own advocacy for improving funding; awareness of services; staffing; CBA \$ for youth services; pooling resources for database \$

- **What services/audiences are no longer relevant?**

Patrons not understanding the system structure in relation to their geography; 'traditional' reference; civil service, unions; school age and college researchers; business researchers; print periodicals.

- **In your opinion, what critical services is the New York State Central Library Program providing today (and to whom?), that are relevant in today's networked environment?**

Expertise; access – vetted information services; promoting literacy; comprehensive non-fiction collections; providing appropriate/proportional resources in the lower demand areas (Long Tail); hours; development of special (niche) collections; non-English languages and services; 24/7 reference – electronic, etc.; training and consultation; ILL; index and finding aids; commitment to service to member libraries and patrons statewide

Session II:

- **Given current funding levels, what services/audiences will be achievable?**

Fewer/shrinking programs (could be more creative); can't meet new needs without giving up old; options reduced to highest priorities; do less, with less, for less; shorten the "long tail"; increase local share to make up; when state support decreases, we must focus more on local priorities; smaller Central Libraries have less flexibility; change services and use collaboration; "super centers" for research; utilize new technologies; priority would be in construction funds.

- **With increased State support, what new services could Central Libraries deliver and to whom? Identify possible new services, audiences and strategies for reaching those audiences**

More coordinated statewide projects; niche projects, collections; partnerships with non-library organizations (community based); statewide 24/7; outreach; more programming; marketing – w/ member libraries, new Americans, etc. (important to minimize competition); focus on non-users; provide technology training; promote reading; staying ahead with technology; support niche collections; digital collections; children; clarification of roles between System and Central Library; recruit, train and retain high quality staff; (there needs to be much more flexibility in spending guidelines for libraries to be able to meet new needs)

- **What is the relevance of the Central Library Program in today's networked environment?**

Value in space and longer hours; impact on economic issues (workforce development); downtown anchor; community centers; large local employers; local program collaboration; front line institution; aggregator of services and collections; link between local and state; laboratories for new services; training and consultation with member libraries; support for local libraries so they can focus on local needs; help local libraries by providing concentrated expertise; services and support for remote users.

RESULTS OF INDIVIDUAL WORK GROUPS BY ISSUE

Session I:

- **Identify key target audiences of Central Library Program today**

Group 1: Researchers, readers, viewers, member libraries, job seekers, new Americans, niche users, remote users

Group 2: member libraries, patrons/staff, patrons wanting broad/deep collections, local colleges (community), assistance to school libraries

Group 3: all residents in service area, member libraries, job seekers, teens, people in need of social services, immigrants in transition to citizenship, other librarians/staff members, users of special collections (ie genealogy, law, etc)

Group 4: Immigrants, pc-users, member libraries, students, researchers, business community

- **Identify successes and failures**

Successes:

Group 1: resource rich collections, central service hours, staff expertise

Group 2: \$ for collections, ILL, pilots of new services, 24/7 reference, special reference services ie medical, tougher questions, personal assistance

Group 3: sharing of network technology, e-branch services, good structure for research sharing, ILL, home grown indices, resources sharing

Group 4: ILL, unique collections, mentoring, professional development, space, destination

Failures:

Group 1: children, inability to increase local funding, lack of database usage, have not maximized our \$ in terms of e-resource purchases

Group 2: system-wide data bases, web links not easy to use, marketing

Group 3: Communication, money

Group 4: Marketing (awareness, grant opportunities), children's materials, staffing

- **What services/audiences are no longer relevant?**

Group 1: school age researchers, college/academic users, in-person information seekers, business researchers, ready reference

Group 2: non-electronic periodicals, some print references

Group 3: political boundaries, “traditional” reference, civil service, unions

Group 4: print reference, geographical location

- **In your opinion, what critical services is the New York State Central Library Program providing today (and to whom?), that are relevant in today’s networked environment?**

Group 1: comprehensive non-fiction collections, open hours (3rd place), electronic databases, support for experienced and trained staff

Group 2: non-English languages and services, phone, text, email, chat – 24/7, training/consultation, ILL, indexes, finding aids, “Long Tail”

Group 3: training, physical delivery among central libraries (timely), collection assessments/evaluations, special collections

Group 4: Expertise, Access (print/electronic vetted, hours, people, destination, promoting literacy)

Session II:

- **Given current funding levels, what services/audiences will be achievable?**

Group A: do less to fewer with fewer, forced to adopt limits of service, priorities will be determined

Group B: diminished services, forced choices, increase local share if possible, local priorities versus central priorities, shorten the “Long Tail”, smaller Central Libraries have less flexibility

Group C: Specialized collections and robust print collections, ILL, training member library staff, reference delivery using all models (text, phone, email, chat), “super centers” for questions, creative collaborations with Centrals in NYS, use “world is flat” model to serve greater numbers of remote users, Central Libraries – is there any priority for NYS construction funds?

Group D: fewer programs, shrinking programs, can’t meet a new need w/o giving up an old one, options reduced to highest priorities (scrutinize “sacred cows”), could be more creative with this if there was more flexibility with funding guidelines

- **With increased State support, what new services could Central Libraries deliver and to whom? Identify possible new services, audiences and strategies for reaching those audiences**

Group A: statewide library card/ universal access, service extension to new audiences (children, youth, teens, parents), clarify System/Central Library roles through goal setting, more outreach to community organizations to support common goals (Job Information Centers = Work Force development, Small Business Administration/SCOPE/Chamber of Commerce – business info), improved collection development to niche markets (indexes, finding aids), more hours, recruit, replace, retain highest quality staff

Group B: coordinated central library statewide projects, statewide 24/7, more niche “boutique” services, push-out instead of pull-in (outreach), more programming, more partnerships with non-library organizations

Group C: Marketing (to member libraries, electronic resources, e-collections, non-users), services to new Americans/immigrants, issue of non-users, competition out there, teaching technology literacy, promote reading (community reads, book clubs), focus on more than “information”, community building

Group D: electronic delivery of training and support, support for special collections of regional relevance, more online content and digital initiatives, more training and evaluating, children and YA reference and resources, R&D, keep ahead of new formats/technologies, advanced/personalized customer service

- **What is the relevance of the Central Library Program in today’s networked environment?**

Group A: reliance on CL collections to support local needs, member libraries can request/inform CL of local needs; training and consultation, coordinated collection development and analysis, support for smaller, poorly funded libraries, concentrated expertise provided by CL

Group B: wisdom of staff because they are practitioners, economic development engine, testing – implementing – experimenting with new ideas, remote user service and support

Group C: Value of Centrals – physical space, longer hours, staff (some specialized), Economics workforce development/skills, employ people, downtown “anchors”), Physical (social networking, cultural destination, community center, depth of program, local program collaborations)

Group D: as an aggregator of services and materials with regional/local connections, we are still front line institutions – people to people, represent local users to state, laboratories for new services

RESULTS OF LARGE GROUP BRAINSTORMING OF NEXT STEPS

- Follow-up meetings suggested by group included:
 - * Central Libraries and Public Library Systems would come together for additional meeting
- Accountability needs to be addressed (to users; to systems)
- Need to know funding – in line with budgets; future?
- Central Library group must be more proactive
- What is the process for using the information generated from this meeting?
 - * this is the first step
 - * Central Library internal group to analyze information, make recommendations and develop summary
 - * post to NYLINE-C as part of communication plan
 - * Jim Sleeth to schedule July meeting of Central Library Directors to review summary document which will be sent to all Directors prior to the meeting via NYLINE-C
 - * send out “raw” notes and Central Library Directors Directory from this meeting to others
- Investigate flexibility in Central Library guidelines and update
- Keep NYSL involved – tell SED what you want
- Need to view ourselves as partners with the Systems
- July meeting can also be for discussing ways to work with Public Library Systems
- Everyone call their System Director to tell them what was discussed today

PARKING LOT ISSUES

(those not directly related to the agenda issues)

1. Restore Central Library eligibility for LSTA funding
2. The process for changing a Central Library