

**REGENTS ADVISORY COUNCIL ON LIBRARIES
REPORT TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS
May 2008**

The members of the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries appreciate this opportunity to meet with the Regents and discuss the key issues that are critical to all types of libraries in New York State. We are also grateful to the Regents, particularly Regent Dawson, and to Commissioner Mills for your stepped-up advocacy on behalf of libraries during the past year. Your energetic support for the restoration of library system aid and the establishment of funding for the Statewide Internet Library was outstanding. We were pleased to hear from our friends in the legislature that, had the budget situation been less severe, legislative members would have assumed leadership in providing state support for the Internet Library this year.

The past two fiscal years (2006–2007 and 2007–2008) brought long-awaited and welcome increases in state funding for libraries, including \$28 million in capital funds for public library construction grants, \$11 million in new one-time library aid for systems, and an increase in School Library Materials Aid from \$6 to \$6.25 per pupil.

The good news for 2008–2009 is that even in the face of fiscal difficulties, the state is once again providing \$14 million in capital funds for public library construction grants. Also, the legislators kept their promise to restore the \$5 million in library system aid that the Executive had excluded from the proposed state budget.

The bad news is that once again there is a continuing lack of state funding for your priority initiative, the Statewide Internet Library. The NOVELNY pilot project is still supported solely by federal Library Services and Technology Act funds. As New York's share of federal funds for libraries continues to decrease, state investment in a permanent and cost-effective Statewide Internet Library is essential. **New York currently ranks 41st in per-capita spending on electronic resources, trailing states like Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and New Jersey.**

Also, the \$5 million for library system aid is still not permanent. In addition, we face a 2-percent across-the-board cut to the Library Aid Program. This cut, which amounts to approximately \$1.9 million of the \$94 million ongoing Library Aid Program, will affect all libraries and library systems in New York State. The impact of inflation, coupled with the 2-percent cut in state aid, will mean fewer books, fewer programs, and shortened hours of service for those who depend on libraries for access to reliable, high-quality information resources.

We congratulate all the Regents for the leadership that resulted in the funding increases of recent years. But we cannot afford to relax our efforts now, even as New York confronts serious economic challenges. With the cut to the Library Aid Program and strained local budgets, libraries find it increasingly difficult to sustain staff, collections, hours of service, and successful programs that improve and enrich the lives of participants.

The Regents Advisory Council now seeks support from the Regents in advancing the New York Library Initiative for 2009–2010, which includes the following proposals:

- \$5 million in state funding for the **New York Digital Collection Initiative**
- \$20 million for the **Public Library Construction Grant Program**
- \$10 million in **Aid to Library Systems**
- An increase to \$10 per pupil in **School Library Materials Aid**
- State funding for the **Statewide Summer Reading Program, Early Literacy Programs, and English as a Second Language Programs**—\$7 million

- State funding for **Library Book Aid, Statewide Trustee Training and Support, Library Services for the Disabled, and Saturday hours for the State Library and State Archives**—\$12.05 million

We are especially enthusiastic about the New York Digital Collection Initiative, a new collaborative project involving libraries, archives, historical records repositories, museums, public broadcasting, and other partners. It will incorporate the NOVELNY pilot project/Statewide Internet Library.

The Digital Collection Initiative is a multi-phase project that includes all institutions within the Office of Cultural Education and will ultimately involve all interested New York State cultural education institutions, including those located in K–12 schools, colleges, and universities. State investment in such an initiative will transform education and research for all New Yorkers, enhancing the state’s economic competitiveness and advancing the Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 16 education reform initiative.

The goal of the Digital Collection Initiative is to promote the use of digital technologies to broaden and enhance access to information available from local, regional, and New York State cultural education institutions. The initiative will build on successful local and regional digitization work, pulling together diverse collections for easy access through a user-friendly web portal.

The New York Digital Collection Initiative will be implemented in multiple phases. Phase One, “A Sustainable Digital Collection Model for New York State,” will include the following actions:

- Meetings of project partners and key stakeholders with national experts to obtain guidance, stimulate innovation, and identify models for the initiative.
- Designing and implementing a flexible and collaborative framework that can incorporate and interconnect a variety of different platforms, commercial digital resources, and existing local and regional digital resources and collections.
- Development of statewide standards, sharing of best practices, and training.

Subsequent phases will include grants to local and regional entities to add new digital content and conduct training, the purchase of additional statewide licenses for authoritative content and video materials, development of online teaching tools tied to the state learning standards, and web archiving.

We are very gratified that the Regents continue to engage in enthusiastic advocacy for library legislation. We pledge to continue in our role of calling attention to the needs of New Yorkers for top-quality 21st century library services, and to work in partnership with the Regents in 2009 to advance priority proposals for New York’s libraries.

Regents Advisory Council on Libraries

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