

Regents Advisory Council on Libraries Report to the Board of Regents

May 16, 2011

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going directly to Heaven, we were all going the other way."

This timeless quote from Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* sums up the state of New York's libraries in 2011. Libraries are experiencing unprecedented use and yet are facing the most severe financial crisis in history. At a time when libraries provide an even wider window to the world's collected knowledge, librarians are facing layoffs, libraries are closing doors or limiting hours, and budgets for materials and online resources are being slashed. Libraries experience first-hand the public's hunger for information, education and learning. What a wonderful thing for New York; an informed, literate population is the key to our future success. Libraries can and do provide the sustenance that can nourish that hunger, but we are forced to turn away those seeking knowledge as our operations cannot be properly supported.

Students, families and adults need free access to libraries and all that libraries have to offer, whether in a physical space or virtually. Librarians and the key stakeholders that support libraries – the Board of Regents, elected officials, customers, trustees, donors, community activists, and volunteers – are experiencing the most dramatic changes in the delivery of information and use of libraries that have ever been encountered. Librarians are rising to the occasion and redefining what library service means in the digital age. We're changing lives, educating New Yorkers and improving the quality of life in our state.

Technology has fundamentally changed the way libraries operate. User expectations have changed. Many libraries need assistance in maintaining excellent quality of service, and in developing the framework from which to base the new service model.

But what is that model? How do libraries get there? The Regents Advisory Council approached the Board of Regents last year with a request: to support the RAC and New York's libraries by authorizing a new Commission on Libraries. Faced with the reality of no available funding for the study, the Board of Regents instead challenged the RAC to take on this project. The RAC embraced this call to action and has been working for the past year on engaging the library community in a discussion about the future of New York's libraries. We can and will develop a progressive long-term vision and implementation plan that will ensure that New Yorkers have access to the resources they need to help them succeed, enrich their lives and become engaged citizens.

2020 Vision: Developing New York's Ten Year Plan for Library Services

The Regents Advisory Council is proceeding with a multi-phase process for developing a statewide vision and plan for library and educational services in New York State. A subcommittee of RAC, the **2020 Vision Planning Taskforce** was established in 2010 and has developed a process and timeline to develop the plan. The process is managed solely by the volunteers on the RAC, with the assistance of the State Library staff.

The 2020 Vision Planning Taskforce's timetable for development of the new statewide plan is:

2011

- March - RAC calls for Initial Input from Library and Education Communities
- April - RAC Taskforce prepares summary of responses
- May - RAC presents summary highlights to the Board of Regents
- June - RAC initiates second call for Input
- August - RAC Taskforce prepares first draft of statewide plan
- September - RAC approves first draft of statewide plan for dissemination
- October - RAC Call for comments on draft statewide plan
- November - RAC Program on Statewide Plan at NYLA Conference, Saratoga
- December - RAC Taskforce prepares second draft of statewide plan

2012

- January - RAC approves second draft statewide plan for dissemination
- February - Call for comments on second draft
- March - RAC approves final statewide plan
- April - RAC presents statewide plan to Regents for discussion
- May - Regents approve statewide plan

Progress to Date

The Task Force has completed the initial call for input from the Library community. The Task Force developed ten critical questions regarding the opportunities and challenges facing libraries in New York. The call for participation was disseminated broadly across the library community, with some RAC members making calls to key stakeholders to encourage submissions. The response exceeded expectations. To date, 59 individual responses and 36 group responses have been received. The group responses represent a broad section of the library community, including K-12 school libraries, academic libraries, special libraries and public libraries. A sampling of the groups that have responded include:

NYS Comprehensive Research Libraries, NYS Program for the Conservation and Preservation of Library Research Materials (Big 11 Research Libraries)
Board of Cooperative Educational Services/Regional Information Centers (BOCES RICS)
City University at New York (CUNY)
Friends of the New York State Library
Library Trustees Association
Literacy New York
New York Three R's Directors Organization (NY3Rs)
New York Library Association (NYLA)
New York State Council of Educational Associations (NYSCEA)
New York State Higher Education Initiative (NYSHEI)
New York State Historical Records Advisory Board (NYSHRAB)
Palmer School-Long Island University (LIU)
Public Library System Youth Services Consultants
School Library Media Section/New York Library Association (SLMS)
School Library Systems Association, Inc. (SLSA)
Suffolk Library Directors
SUNY Council
SUNY Librarians Association (SUNYLA)
University at Buffalo

The Library community is eager to plan for the future, and needs the support the Board of Regents. There is also a role for the Regents in the process, to help frame the discussion, encourage participation and ensure that RAC is creating the best road map for the future of libraries in New York State. Thank you for your time, we look forward to discussing our work with you and continuing to serve the Regents as advisors on library issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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