


## 2011 Annual Member Survey of System Services

Quick reminder that the deadline to respond to this year's annual member survey is October 7. As you know, member library directors and board presidents are asked to annually evaluate system services through the Member Library Feedback Form.

You can find a link to the online survey at <http://www.midhudson.org/review> and a downloadable copy, which can be mailed directly to John Bickford, chair of the MHLS Board Planning and Personnel Committee. His address is on the downloadable form.



**52nd Annual Meeting**  
Mid-Hudson Library System  
**October 28, 2011**  
Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center  
Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum  
4079 Albany Post Road | Hyde Park, NY 12538  
Begin at 8:30 - Hot Buffet Breakfast  
**Keynote? Guess Who**  
Register and RSVP by October 14, 2011

## MHLS Plan of Service, 2012-2016

As expected, the Mid-Hudson Board of Trustees approved the Plan of Service for 2012-2016 on September 14, which the DA approved on September 8. As I write this, submission of the plan to the state is just about ready, so by the time we meet, we will have met the state's October 1 deadline for the plan's submission. AND WHAT A GREAT JOB WAS DONE BY ALL PARTICIPANTS AND SYSTEM STAFF! So as we move forward, we should pause just a moment to congratulate ourselves for a great job accomplished!

## MHLS 2012 Budget and Beyond

I expect to have our final proposed numbers for Mid-Hudson's 2012 budget when the DA meets on November 9. Although, the budget will not go to the MHLS Board of Trustees until December 10, and the DA meets on December 2, I expect that the Mid-Hudson Finance Committee will meet before the DA meets in December so that the final proposed numbers will come to the DA as an informational document with the committee's recommendation. I also expect to have near-final numbers by the DA's meeting in November.

We are not anticipating any changes to the rates for members fees for 2012 or 2013. We also have not changed our projections for revenue in 2012, but we continue to fine tune our expenditures for the year. However, the economic news continues to be dismal. From the possibility of bank failure in Europe to the fiscal struggles in our nation's capitol to the continuing high levels of unemployment, the future seems less than bright. So we may be considering an adjustment to revenue as well.

Tom Lawrence is projecting lower revenue in state central library aid than even the governor's 10% cut. At present we are using the governor's numbers for 2012. Maybe Tom is on to

something. There are other library systems projecting cuts greater than what the governor proposed as well.

In 2012, however, the state's fiscal house seems to be in good order. The state's *Financial Plan for Fiscal Year 2012 First Quarterly Update* of August 2, 2011, indicates a positive balance of \$1.7 billion in 2012. But shortfalls of \$2.4, \$2.8 billion, and \$4.6 billion are forecast for 2013, 2014, and 2015. So clearly, the bad news for the state is not over.

I think our challenges will come in 2013 and 2014, so it's a good thing that we have unrestricted funds in excess of the \$150,000, which we agreed would be the system's maximum unrestricted balance.

Falling into the category of the unexpected is the possibility that Innovative may begin billing us for the full amount of Millennium maintenance for 2013. We have been paying this quarterly. This year, however, with the maintenance period September 1, 2012, to August 31, 2013, the billing was for the entire year. We asked that we continue to pay this quarterly and Innovative answered yes, "but that this is a one-time arrangement."

Even with some of the uncertainties, I think we could consider the use of some of Mid-Hudson's unrestricted balance to supplement purchases of ebooks this year and help accelerate the development of this collection. I hope to discuss this with the Central Library and Collection Development Committee when it meets this Wednesday, September 28. If they agree, we'd fold the number into our projections with an eye to keep rates constant for members fees in 2013. These numbers would be included in the financial information we present to the DA in November.

### **Preparing for Budget Public Hearings**

Having delivered dozens of school district, town and municipal public hearings, and managed a few of my own, I learned that one can never be too prepared. The topic of preparing for budget hearings was discussed at the Marking Advisory Committee on September 22, a great topic for the committee to consider!

Carefully prepared talking points and answers to tough questions about costs and spending are essential. Transparency and honesty, staying positive about the contributions your library makes to the community, and avoiding becoming defensive, go a long way to achieving a successful public hearing. But I've also learned that you need messages that both mobilize your supporters, persuade those who may be undecided, and neutralize opponents. Of course, these messages are not at all the same.

In the OCLC report *From Awareness to Funding: A Study of Library Support in America*, which was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, released in 2008 and available on the OCLC website, percentages of voters who were likely to support increases in library funding, and what motivated them, were identified.

It's a bit distressing to learn at first that libraries start out with a majority of registered voters *unlikely* to support increases in their funding. The good news/bad news is that nearly 27% of these registered voters are non-voters. But the 34% of registered voters who actually vote and are unlikely to favor increases are the voters you need to address with a message.

For the naysayers, I was always ready to share how we developed our budgets in response to our community-driven plan; that members of our finance committee were from the local banking and financial planning community and were conservative by profession; that we were always working to reduce or eliminate costs and I had examples; and that we were always seeking volunteers to help behind the scenes, but that the level of required training and skills for staff at our desks required paid staff.

On the positive side of the OCLC study, 32% of regular voters were identified as "probable supporters," a group that could be persuaded to support increased funding. And at the top of the voters roll were 7% of the study's respondents, identified as "super supporters." These are the voters most likely to support your funding increases.

So what motivates the super and probable supporters? They're motivated by stories of how libraries change lives. They believe in and support the transformative roles of libraries.

One final point to share about the OCLC study: there is a weak relationship between the frequency or level of use by patrons and the likelihood of their supporting increases in library funding. A disappointing finding to be sure, but a cautionary note and food for thought.

## **The Ebook Challenge**

As everyone knows, Amazon fired up its links to Overdrive and the Kindle is now a player with access to the library ebooks. No matter how positive this seems, (and I do believe it's positive), it remains to be seen what balance will emerge between the commercial ebook market and public libraries.

Publishers recognize that libraries connect readers to authors. It's likely that Amazon recognizes this as well. And as we've read, Overdrive explicitly recognizes the value libraries have in ginning up sales for publishers in its white paper, *How eBook Catalogs at Public Libraries Drive Publishers' Book Sales and Profits*, (May 2010). "According to the 2010 State of America's Libraries report, more than 1.4 billion visits were made to US public libraries in 2008... With such high traffic volume, public libraries hold sizable marketing potential for publishers and authors." So it's no accident that Kindle-packing library patrons end up on the Amazon site for their ebooks.

But the point I want to make is a somewhat scary one. I've always thought that the public good served by public libraries--providing access to content no matter the ability of people to pay for the access--would serve to justify continued public support. But when I landed on Amazon, I

wondered what if content was priced so low as to support the argument that no one could be so poor that they couldn't access the content they wanted? What if used books and short-term loans of e-content were in low single digits? What then?

Although all choices involve risk, how aggressive should we be in our investment of our hard won dollars in ebooks? To what extent are the future of public libraries dependent on meeting the growing public expectation for immediate access to downloadable content? It's a curse of human genius that questions come easier than answers. But there's no question we have some tough decisions ahead.

### **An Ulster County Library Association Annual Dinner Moment**

I attended the Ulster County Library Association Annual Dinner on September 19. Frank Guido's Little Italy in Kingston served up some great food and I sat with Laura Petit, Ulster County legislator, and the Esopus Board President Jane Minor and Treasurer Mary Beth Rogers, who were accompanied by their significant others--Mike Minor, MHLS Board member, and Eli Rogers. So the company was great as well.

But the moment of the evening that I won't forget came towards the end of publisher Bruce McPherson's remarks, who was the evening's guest speaker.

Mr. McPherson is publisher of the small literary press McPherson & Company of Kingston. Much of his talk focused on the surprising and gratifying award that one of his authors, Jaimy Gordon, received for her novel *Lord of Misrule*, the much prized and prestigious National Book Award for fiction in 2010.

But it was Mr. McPherson's characterization of what the "Free Public Library" meant to him that I found striking. "Free" to him meant that people were free to explore the world and free to become who they wanted to be. "Free Libraries" allowed people to transform their lives, overcome isolation, and connect to places and ideas that otherwise lay beyond their time and place. Libraries were about becoming free.

Very, very nice.