

MHLS Plan of Service Development

Challenges / Issues - Central Themes

1. Funding

- a. Sustainable funding; seeking a variety of funding sources.
- b. Budgets have not kept up with demand; need realistic, appropriate budgeting to meet community needs.
- c. Budget decisions by board based are often based on caution/fear and not community needs/demand;
- d. Multiple target groups report a disconnect between the library's plan of service and the budget.
- e. Trustees are spending more time discussing the library's finances at meetings and seeking to develop more financial "know how" on the board; in particular: budgeting, oversight and planning.
- f. Need confidence to move forward and strategies to develop stable funding.
- g. Relying on System to help plan vote strategy.
- h. More conscious of "unserved" areas and holding them financially accountable.
- i. Balancing how to provide equity of access and not cut off access to community members who have less.
- j. Looking to develop clear fundraising goals/development plans; diversify fundraising efforts; and broaden their donor base.
- k. Need to solidify support of the whole community as well as patrons; continued need to demonstrate impact on the community; collect and report success stories.
- l. Trustees and Friends need to be advocates regarding the value of the library.
- m. Libraries need strong neighbor libraries for success.

2. Space

- a. Many libraries are still working with a lack of adequate space for collections, programs, technology, staff, storage and patron zones (quiet, teens, children's).
- b. Looking to optimize existing space; create efficiencies; updated layouts; aesthetic improvements to make the space more appealing to the community.
- c. Would like space that is manageable and flexible for whatever the future may bring.
- d. Seeking support to develop comprehensive facility plans; planning for and managing capital expenditures.
- e. In general, need support for planned renovations, expansions and new buildings.

3. Services

- a. Desire to match what is offered with what the community values most.
- b. How to recognize and respond to changing needs of the community; how to be open and welcoming to potential patrons?
- c. Developing relevant collections that satisfy patrons needs for content and format.
- d. Responding to increased demands for programming for all ages.
- e. Patrons have higher expectations for technology support; Patron expectation of staff assistance with technology is higher than the library can currently meet.
- f. How can neighboring libraries work together more / share services?
- g. How to adjust the focus of program design/management with existing staff structure as target groups/ demographics/expectations change.
- h. Concerned about collection development and format expansion; how to keep patrons engaged if we can't "keep up" with materials purchasing; how to meet the demands for DVDs; how to diversify collections.
- i. Looking to increase usage of the library by Spanish-speaking population.
- j. How to evaluate success.
- k. Staff needs to be able to focus on services to people.

4. Management

- a. Directors expressed desire to be more effective in managing multiple projects, prioritization and focusing on administrative and leadership tasks. Would like to be better at tapping into the abilities of others to expand what can be offered.

- b. Need for strong hierarchical administration structure.
- c. Need to develop infrastructure to keep up with rate of growth: "Our growth/success is out of control."
- d. Need for baseline competencies for all staff functions.
- e. Staff being asked to do more without compensation; need to manage impact of increased use on staff; need appropriate staffing levels to meet community demand.
- f. Would like more processes in the library to be standardized.
- g. Need quick access to the right bits of knowledge to operate effectively, keep up with standards, trends and best practices.
- h. External and in-house training needs for staff are growing. Working in a fast changing environment; need for the board to understand how important training is.
- i. Trustee education is a critical System service. Support for boards to move together cohesively. Libraries specifically interested in board development and evaluation; trustee recruitment and succession; and advocacy skills.
- j. Seeking support for Friends Groups.
- k. Making effective and appropriate use of volunteers; traditional volunteer base not being replaced; battling the misconception that volunteers are "free labor".
- l. Trustees see a need to professionalize the library and its functions.
- m. Staff unclear about long range plan, how budgeting decisions are made.

5. Marketing

- a. Recognition of the need to get the word out to more people; seeking ways to communicate with all residents, not just patrons.
- b. Raise awareness in the community that the library is essential.
- c. Clear need to improve internal communications to help get the word out externally.
- d. Staff are asking how they can become advocates; looking for ways to fine tune their willingness to talk to patrons.
- e. Challenge of getting the word out about basic services; combating misunderstandings about the library; struggling with having a clear message.
- f. How to prevent the library from becoming obsolete.
- g. Poor economic times for the community are an opportunity for the library.
- h. Technology is a real draw.
- i. Internal point-of-service demands infringe on ability to do outreach to the community; fighting the perception that community outreach is "extra" rather than essential.
- j. Looking to become more effective and professional with marketing; strategic PR plans and staff devoted to PR.
- k. Increased focus on relationship with town leadership; how to improve this?
- l. Need to increase positive interactions with the community, outside of the library.
- m. How to reach people where they already are: online and out in the community.

6. Planning

- a. No master plan for the library; need to develop appropriate long-range plans and use them; some libraries reporting that their boards are "too busy to plan."
- b. How to assess community needs and reallocate resources accordingly; some libraries reporting a disconnect between what the board thinks and what the community wants.
- c. Recognition of the need to adjust service priorities based on data rather than assumptions.
- d. Trustees reporting they feel their library has "reached capacity" (staff levels, facility, budgets) and they are not sure what happens next.
- e. Take a harder look at the spectrum of consolidation options - from sharing staff and services all the way up to full mergers.
- f. Developing shared internal priorities so board, committees, staff, and Friends can discuss at the macro level.
- g. Recognizing change in the community, diversity and attracting target populations.
- h. New opportunities to integrate with community organizations, agencies and libraries; how to initiate and manage these relationships.
- i. How to keep the library relevant.