# Nebraska State Advisory Council on Libraries

Wednesday, March 20, 2024 1:30 PM – 3:30 PM (CST)

## MINUTES

State Advisory Council members present via GoToWebinar: Laura England-Biggs, Jennifer Norton, Allison Reisig, Mandy Peterson, David Graber; In-person: Michael Straatmann (Chair), Michael Sauers, Michael Burris, Holli Duggan, Cali Biaggi, Celine Swan, Shanna Crosby-Wilson, Joy Harvey, Gail Irwin, Joanne Neemann, Jennifer Norton, Rachel Steiner, Amber Sweetland; Commission Staff members present Rod Wagner, Mary Geibel, Christa Porter.

**Welcome and Introductions**
Chair Michael Straatmann welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Approval of the Agenda: A motion was made and seconded to approve the agenda. Motion approved.

Approval of Minutes: A motion was then made and seconded to approve the November 17, 2023 minutes. Motion approved.

**Public Comment:**
There were no public comments.

**Reports**

Nebraska School Librarians Association
**Joy Harvey** – The NSLA is keeping on top of state legislation and communicating with membership about how to reach out to senators and advocate for libraries. The NSLA has been active in responding to proposed changes in Nebraska Department of Education's Rule 10 requirements. The State Board of Education did not approve changes, but rule changes may be taken up again at a future meeting. NSLA board elections are coming up soon.

Nebraska Library Association
**Holli Duggan** commented on today's Library Advocacy Day activities – morning and the luncheon with senators. Holli said that afternoon activities include a story time at the Capitol with Jenny White, and a networking event at Saro Cider. The morning schedule changed due to the scheduled debate on LB441 during the legislature's morning session. Advocacy Day participants were encouraged to be at the Capitol for debate on the obscenity bill. Holli said that the NLA's contract with Creative Association Management is ending with the owner's retirement. The NLA will, at least for the next year, take over management responsibilities and determine what is needed going forward. Work is underway with planning and arrangements for the NLA's October conference in Kearney. The association plans to hold a conference in 2025.

Holli said that skipping a year didn't work out. Holli mentioned the upcoming section spring meetings.

Nebraska Library Commission

**Rod Wagner** – Rod mentioned his recollection of the NLA's long ago advocacy days, then called legislative day. The event has a long history and is worthwhile in bringing library workers and supporters to Lincoln to meet with state senators. Rod recognized the good turnout and participation for Advocacy Day. Rod said that another bill that may still come up during the remainder of the session is LB635. The bill pertains to online educational database subscriptions provided statewide by the Library Commission and locally by school districts. The bill was introduced by Senator Albrecht last year and carried over to this year's session. The bill does not have priority designation and may not come up due to limited time and the many other bills under consideration.

Wagner mentioned advocacy for federal library related legislation. The American Library Association has, over many years, held an annual library legislative day. In recent years the ALA has changed the format to invite participants to Washington to meet with senators and members of Congress that have close connection to library related legislation and funding. The ALA covers travel expenses for their invited participants. Others can participate but at their or their organizations expense. This year's library advocacy day was held earlier this month. The ALA invited Matt Kovar, Papillion library director, and Courtney Pentland, Lincoln's North Star High School media specialist and current president of the American Association of School Librarians. Rod was also in Washington for another meeting and joined Matt and Courtney for visits to the offices of Senator Deb Fischer and Congressman Don Bacon. Deb Fischer serves on the Senate Appropriations and Commerce Committees, and is on the joint House-Senate committee overseeing the Library of Congress. Congressman Bacon is from Papillion and has been a good library supporter. Bacon's legislative director is Jeff Kratz, a former member of the ALA Washington Office staff. The visits included requests for support for Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding at the full authorization level of $232 million and reauthorization of the LSTA. The LSTA's current authorization ends in 2025.

Rod said that a meeting last fall with a representative of the Medica insurance company resulted in funding from that company for use toward library broadband service improvements. Medica has provided $63,500 for the project. Rural libraries lacking fiber connections and with inadequate connection speeds will be targeted. Andrew Sherman on the NLC staff has been working with libraries needing broadband upgrades. Funds can be used for purchasing and installing networking equipment (switches, routers, software).

**Christa Porter** – Christa said that for updating network equipment libraries were instructed to do Category 2 E-rate applications, but it's not the easiest thing to apply for. With the Medica funds, libraries are being referred to those funds because they cover the entire cost and is much easier to receive as they only need to speak to Sherm for a tech review and help with installing the equipment.

Sherm was hired at the NLC in January 2023 to work with Holly Woldt for library broadband activities. Holly retired in December 2023. Sherm was promoted into Holly's position in January 2024, and the position was moved to the Library Development unit. Sherm is also helping with E-rate technical questions, installing DNS filtering in libraries for cybersecurity, and doing tech reviews for any libraries that request it.

NLC Grants for 2024 have been awarded; all paperwork has been sent out, press releases coming out soon:

- CE/Training – 5 applications for $5,000
- Youth – 39 applications for $30,000
- Internship – 18 applications for $21,000
- Library Improvement – 28 applications for $60,000

Christa said that Round 2 of the CE/Training Grants will be opening soon. This is for courses, events, and projects that start after July 1.

Big Talk From Small Libraries was held on February 23 and was a huge success. There were 426 pre-registrations: from 44 states, with 4 registrations from 3 Canadian provinces. On the day of the conference, there were 301 individual logins, from 40 states, and 4 logins from 2 Canadian provinces. The recordings are available on the conference website. The next conference will be on February 28, 2025. The presenter for one Big Talk session was ill the day of the conference, so that session was rescheduled as an NCompass Live show. It was held this morning 'No More Summertime Blues: Shaking Up SRP to Make It Work for YOU!'

**Council Discussion Topics**

Holli Duggan – Holli said the NLA website includes library advocacy information. Deb Robertson leads the NLA's advocacy committee. The committee has done an excellent job of posting timely legislative information and status of bills. Information includes a watch list of different bills and what the NLA is supporting. Color coding indicates the association's position on legislative bills. Holli said that committee member Matt Kovar did great work in setting up the legislative information web pages. Legislative actions can happen more quickly to contact people and ask them to contact their senators. Holli mentioned that during this morning's legislative session some senators read letters that they received. The contacts make a difference.

Joy Harvey **–** Joy commented about time spent following legislative activities this session and State Board of Education actions related to Rule 10 change proposals, and reading comments submitted regarding the proposals. Joy said that the NSLA website includes a lot of legislative and other timely information.

Michael Straatmann said that a change has been to pivot advocacy to a year round activity with focus on different levels. It's not just talking to state senators in March, it's about organizing your community, whether it's your board or community at large – activating board members and advocates in your community, not just you being the advocate. This is how to create and motivate advocates.

Rod Wagner credited the NLA for the timely and helpful information available on the association's website. The advocacy committee is on top of the legislative process posting the status of and information about each bill. The NSLA has done excellent work in analyzing the implications of the legislative bills and communicating with its members.

Amber Sweetland said that Brian Weaver gave the first presentation and one thing that stood out was the importance of making sure that we're available to help other people with efforts. As public servants, we're constantly asking everybody to be present, volunteer and help. If we do that, then they'll do that for us.

Rachel Steiner said she appreciated that some senators focused on not just the direct ramifications of legislation but the indirects as well. They are seeing the bigger picture and it's not just black and white for them. Nobody here may have ever been taken to court regarding pornographic or obscene materials. Rachel said she was amazed by the conversations that happen on the legislative floor – what some Senators are saying and those not listening at all.

Michael Straatmann addressed creating advocates in our own communities. How are we creating advocates? What's our plan for next year?

Holli Duggan mentioned Nebraska Library Week. At the council's November 2023 meeting, there was conversation about having advocacy opportunities year-round. The NLA advocacy committee meets every Wednesday at 4:00 PM online. Anybody is welcome to participate. Holli said that for Nebraska Library Week, we want it to be smart and positive with opportunities for highlighting libraries throughout the state in what we do and getting more advocates and community support.

Michael Straatmann asked everyone, what would you like to see over the next four council meetings?

Mandy Peterson said she would like to see if we can coordinate a hashtag or some sort of a movement to share those positive stories about libraries knowing that we just took a beating. Nebraska Library Week was powerful. Mandy said she hoped that Nebraska Library Week will be held every year. Mandy said it is good to front load all the positive things that are going on before the legislative session starts. Mandy said she would also like to see an effort to get more stories out in a positive way after the legislative session is over.

Rod Wagner said the Library Commission will prepare its 2025-2027 biennium budget request this summer. This would be a discussion item for the council's July meeting.

Michael Burris asked about the council's purpose. What does the Library Commission want from council members? Rod said the Library Commission values the ideas and information that members contribute. It is helpful to learn what members are experiencing in their libraries and communities. Council members represent all types of Nebraska libraries and from different parts of the state. What are the issues and challenges that libraries are dealing with? And it's encouraging to hear about successes and the good work that libraries are doing. We benefit from hearing about actions that are needed, broader topics that affect Nebraska communities, and how libraries can contribute. We hope it is helpful to council members to hear about the experiences of other members and to contribute to strategies and actions for statewide library development.

Michael Straatmann – We have an opportunity to have our own community that helps across the normal divisions. How do we build those communities and contacts that we might not otherwise do? That's why the successes and challenges part is important. We do look at how things are different.

Gail Irwin expressed interest in AI as a topic and said a library board member is interested in AI applications for libraries. The library board had a good discussion of the topic.

Michael Sauers – Do Space hosted a couple of classes on AI. Michael said that the attendees skewed significantly older than he would have expected.

Rachel Steiner asked how others assess patron or user needs. Rachel said Omaha library patrons are surveyed out. She is interested in a conversation on this topic since council members come from such different library settings. There are students from universities that never set foot in the library. In schools, there are set times to use the library. Public libraries will have kids who come in before or after school hours. What works or doesn't work?

## Council Round Table: Successes and Challenges

Allison Reisig – A success is hiring a part- staff member. Allie said it is always a struggle to fill evening and weekend hours. Training is going well. The college is at the beginning of budget season and the never ending "you need to cut by 4%" even though your biggest budget lines – software, databases are going up by at least 6%. Where do you find the cuts in order to be able to afford the resources needed for students? That is the perennial challenge – money!

Mandy Peterson commented on the LB441 debate during the legislature's morning session. State legislation and Nebraska Department of Education rule change proposals have taken up a lot of time. Mandy said that something she is excited about is that, without her prompting, the school superintendent has talked with teachers about LB 441 and the potential effects on schools and how important it was for them. Mandy's challenges, other than the typical end of the school year,

are money, time, and inventory. Significant is finding a way to be accountable to consistently sharing the story of our school library, what we do for students, and getting that story out.

Laura England-Biggs commented on several successes including the newly expanded and renovated library being open for almost two months. Laura said that 552 new library cards were issued last year. This year, with four months being open, between auditorium closing and moving back and opening, the library has issued 564 library cards. The library is recruiting an adult services librarian. Laura said the most significant challenge is twofold. There is $800 thousand left to raise to finish financing the library expansion project, and the grant writer/board president is stepping down.

David Graber said successes and challenges are inter-related. For those that work at colleges and universities, or those that have high school age kids, or work in a high school, there is awareness of an explosion of dual credit being offered to high school students. Dave said it is truly an explosion in terms of the number of credit hours that students have already completed by the time they enter college as a new first year student. There are new students, age 18, who already have completed the equivalent of their college first year. That has caused rethinking many campus practices. For the library, what has really changed is user education. For all practical purposes, Dave said that instruction given to new students does not exist anymore. This year, WSC implemented a certification model where professors will require students to attend library workshops, not during class time, but outside of class. Library staff offer three, forty-five minute workshops that professors are either asking their students to attend, or to produce a certificate that they attended a previous semester. Dave said this will allow library staff to continue to get in front of new students on campus. Staff prefer this approach because they're not getting some students multiple times. This will also allow staff to continue to reach students that otherwise would be missed. Dave said this is may be a success, but it was unquestionably a challenge.

Michael Burris said the Holdrege library's current and on-going challenge is staffing. The library is implementing cross training and documentation to improve coverage. Michael gave an example that when the library's interlibrary loan specialist is away from work, the library will have a manual with documentation to guide routines and procedures. Patrons will still get the items that they have requested. Michael said he was inspired by the Advocacy Day discussion. The community's need is a new library. Advocates need to be engaged to address this need. That is a challenge to move energy toward the work needed for a new library.

Cali Biaggi said Doane University has two faculty librarians. This summer they are participating in a curriculum workshop on faculty to align library learning outcomes with general education. A challenge is the lack of a library director – now going on for a few years. Positions are not being eliminated. Positions are just not being filled.

Michael Straatmann echoed the staffing, hiring and budget issues expressed by others. Michael said UNL library staff members are reviewing and updating remote work policies. The task is more complicated given some University rules.

Holli Duggan observed that Library Advocacy Day went well and especially considering the number present for the LB441 debate during the morning legislative session. Holli said there were over 100 participants registered for Advocacy Day. The NLA's biggest challenge is the NLA executive director's leaving and not having a replacement.

Joy Harvey said that for Lincoln Public Schools two years of effort have gone into developing objectives for library programs. Much work has also been given to creating lessons and an entire library curriculum for elementary. Joy said LPS Library Media had an incredible opportunity to present at the AASL conference. LPS Media has resources that are open and available to all libraries. Joy said LPS will support smaller libraries and schools that don't have the library services that LPS has. Joy referred to the LPS website at LPS Library Services | Home (find under resources). Joy mentioned good support from LPS administrators and their pride in the work done by LPS media staff. A continuing challenge and concern is librarians being moved to half-time. Hiring is a concern.

Joanne Neeman said her success is her challenge. In February, the library's children's librarian thought it would be a wonderful thing to post about a new book every day. After several days, one of the staff selected *Gender Queer* as the choice, a frequently challenged book. Joanne didn't know. While the choice sparked controversy, the outcome was a success. The Beatrice community responded with strong support. While there were those opposed to the book, there was strong encouragement from others. Joanne's communications with the city administrator and officials were supportive but with some advice and agreements over future communications within the library and with the community.

Celine Swan said a success for the Grand Island public library is working with board policies and strategic plans with more information available in different languages. The library also has a new app. As with others, staffing is a challenge. There is also the need to provide performance data for the city council. An outreach van is among successes in reaching people that can't get to or use the library. Celine expressed concern for the library budget for later on with the new fiscal year.

Michael Sauers –Do Space purchased new equipment for the 3D lab. One of the "coolist" items is a fiber laser. The podcast studio is doing well, Michael said Do Space gets 30 to 40 hours per week booked for the studio. Do Space and Omaha Public Library are collaborating on programming with a couple dozen co-events. The new library project is progressing. Michael said fundraising for the new central library has reached $158 million. Fundraising continues. Included is $20 million from the city. Challenges – two organizations to merge. Regarding Do Space specifically, with co-location and building closings, details need to be worked out since Do Space has services to offer even when the building is closed.

Gail Irwin – staffing is a challenge. Gail said the library lost two employees, one with 25 years at the library and the other over 10 years. The Ainsworth library purchased a statue with memorial funds. Some exterior work is being done to create space for the statue. Gail said the Ainsworth

library, while not fancy, is comfortable and has a fireplace. A community member is going to buy art from a local artist to display and purchase some seasonal items for decoration. Donations are used for these purchases. Staff absences are a challenge for service coverage. Another challenge is continuing road construction near the library. Gail said this is the third year and work will reach the point where the library will have no parking available. Despite the disruption, the result will be improved traffic flow.

Amber Sweetland – a significant challenge is a proposed half-cent sales tax increase that voters did not approve. The library receives a portion of sales tax revenues. As a result, the library's $200,000 budget would have been reduced by $30,000. However, the city council worked out financing to maintain the library's budget. The alternative would have been loss of a staff position. Amber took the initiative to communicate library funding needs and undertook fundraising activities. For one, the community's Founders Day event was an opportunity that brought in $7,000. These efforts have created community awareness and support for the library. There is discussion of placing the sales tax proposal on the ballot again.

Shanna Crosby-Wilson – a Boys Town success is the opening of a brand new school building last fall. Shanna said they are now out of their temporary space that they've been in for two years. The elementary and high school libraries were separated and are now one. A challenge this year is understaffing. Shanna is hopeful full staffing will come within the next year.

Rachel Steiner – a significant challenge for the Omaha Public Library is its 13 locations. The OPL will open its new central library in 2026. Consideration has been given to OPL's staffing with a decision to restructure programming. All of OPL's librarians at each location have done their own programming, from start to finish. A change will be programming done at the system level. Library goals are being adjusted. There will be a design team for programming that will work for the system. Programming at the system level will free up time at the branch level. Implementation will still happen at the branch. Librarians will still get a menu to choose from. OPL has advocated an Omaha southwest branch location. Rachel said she hopes the city council will approve the new branch at their meeting next week.

**New Business**

State Advisory Council on Libraries Vice-Chair Election - Michael Burris nominated Amber Sweetland and Gail Irwin seconded. Motion approved.

Recommendations and Resolutions – expressed appreciation to the Nebraska Library Association and Nebraska School Association for their excellent leadership and advocacy efforts in support of libraries and intellectual freedom. Approved with applause.

Next meetings (2024) – July 19, and November 15.