Nebraska State Advisory Council on Libraries
Monday, March 16, 2026 1:00 pm-2:30 pm (CST)

MINUTES

State Advisory Council members present via GoToWebinar: Laura England-Biggs, Lisa Irwin, Jennifer Norton, Sharon Schluterbusch, Shanna Crosby-Wilson, Joanne Neemann, Tammi Thiem

In-Person: Cali Biaggi (Chair), Amber Sweetland, Joy Harvey, Tammi Thiem, Mandy Peterson, Celine Swan, Michael Straatmann

Commission staff members present: Rod Wagner, Mary Geibel, Christa Porter

Welcome and Introductions:

Chair Cali Biaggi 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 made and seconded to approve the minutes.

Public Comment:
There were no public comments.

Reports:

Nebraska School Librarians Association

Joy Harvey reported that elections will be held in April. Three library awards will also be presented in April: the Nebraska School Librarian of the Year Award, the NSLA Administrator of the Year Award, and the NSLA Distinguished Service Award. Follow NSLA on social media for updates. Two at-large board members, a secretary, and a president-elect will be elected.

NSLA is partnering with the Future Ready Nebraska Conference, a free conference held in June. The conference organizers have partnered with NSLA to bring in two speakers: one focused specifically on libraries and another whose work is highly relevant to libraries, Kristin Mattson and Jennifer Lagarde. The conference is free and available both virtually and in person.

UNL and UNK are bringing back School Librarians Day. On October 17, a special conference for school librarians will be held at both locations.

Nebraska Library Commission

Rod Wagner reported that the primary state legislative issue for the Commission is the state budget. The Governor presented his budget recommendations in January. Following that, the Legislature's Appropriations Committee conducted agency budget hearings. After the hearings concluded, the committee developed its budget recommendations, which were presented to the Legislature on March 6. Debate on the budget bills has recently begun, and the Legislature must deliver the budget bills to the Governor by March 25.

Several amendments have been proposed to the budget bills. For the Library Commission, the Governor proposed a $36,000 reduction in state funding for the agency's operating budget. No reductions were proposed for the state aid to libraries program. The Governor also proposed transferring approximately $578,000 from the Commission's Distributive Fund to the state General Fund. This is one of many transfers from special funds administered by state agencies that have been proposed to address the state budget gap.

The issue involving the Library Commission largely stems from a misunderstanding of the nature of the NLC's Distributive Fund. The fund is used to receive payments from public, school, college, and university libraries and then make payments on behalf of those libraries for group purchases of online databases and other services. Vendors generally prefer working with a single entity rather than hundreds of individual libraries, allowing Nebraska libraries to receive favorable pricing through cooperative purchasing arrangements.

The fund also supports the OverDrive Libraries Group. Participating libraries contribute funds for the purchase of e-books, audiobooks, and other digital resources. The Commission collects and administers payments from more than 200 libraries to support these and other library services.

In addition, the fund earns interest while monies are temporarily held in short-term state investments before expenditures are made. That interest is used to support the same types of services, including online databases and digital content. The fund has existed for decades and has been administered successfully throughout that time. The only previous concern raised by state auditors was that accumulated interest should be spent rather than allowed to grow indefinitely.

Commission staff reviewed all transactions associated with the fund and determined that, even if the proposed transfer were eliminated, there would actually be a shortfall that would need to be addressed because current obligations exceed available interest earnings. This information has been shared with both legislative staff and the Governor's budget staff, who now understand the situation and have been supportive. However, there may not be sufficient time to remove the transfer language from the appropriations bills currently under consideration.

The Appropriations Committee reduced the Governor's proposed transfer from approximately $578,000 to $250,000.

Another issue is that the Appropriations Committee's overall budget recommendations were approximately $140 million short of balancing the state budget. As a result, the full Legislature must identify additional reductions. It is possible that an amendment could be introduced that would impose a 10 percent reduction in state funding across state agencies.

A question was raised regarding how much state funding supports OverDrive purchases beyond what participating libraries contribute. Wagner said that approximately $235,000 in state appropriations supports the program. A follow-up question asked whether that amount covers the difference between library contributions and actual OverDrive costs. Wagner said that all funds are pooled and used collectively to purchase digital content, with expenditures determined by the total funds available.

When asked whether the potential budget reductions would affect the approximately $235,000 state contribution, Wagner said that the Commission receives a lump-sum appropriation and would determine how any reductions are allocated. The Commission receives approximately $1.4 to $1.5 million in state funding for the state aid to libraries program, which supports state aid to public libraries, regional library systems, database licensing, interlibrary loan compensation, and a variety of grant programs administered by the library development staff, including library improvement grants, internships, and children's services grants, and E-rate support.

Wagner also said that Lincoln, Omaha, and Ralston public libraries receive a portion of the state funding for OverDrive participation. These libraries are not part of the OverDrive libraries consortium. If a 10 percent reduction in state funding were enacted, the Commission would need to absorb approximately $150,000 in reductions across all state-funded programs.

At the federal level, the Commission began the year concerned about federal library funding as Congress continued to rely on short-term appropriations decisions. However, Congress ultimately completed appropriations for the remainder of the federal fiscal year through September 30. Federal library funding was maintained at approximately the same level as the previous year. Congress will soon begin discussions on the next federal budget, and there is hope that appropriations will be completed by October 1. For now, federal library funding appears stable.

Christa Porter reported on the annual Big Talk From Small Libraries conference, which is held each year at the end of February. This year, the conference received 473 preregistrations from 43 states and three Canadian provinces. On the day of the conference, there were 285 individual logins representing 40 states and two Canadian provinces. Christa noted that actual attendance was likely higher because many participants attended as groups at a single location. Conference recordings were posted the following Friday and are available on the conference website. Each session is available as an individual recording, allowing participants to watch selected sessions rather than viewing the entire conference. This year's conference featured seven 50-minute sessions and four 10-minute lightning-round presentations. Presenters represented Nebraska as well as libraries and organizations from across the country. The next Big Talk From Small Libraries conference will be held on February 26, 2027. Planning will begin in September with the release of the call for proposals. Christa noted that this year marked the conference's 15th anniversary, making next year the "Sweet 16" conference.

Commission Grants – Christa reported that internship grants and Youth Grants for Excellence have been awarded. The Commission allocated $20,000 for internship grants, which were awarded to 18 public libraries to support the hiring of interns. The Commission also allocated

$30,000 for Youth Grants for Excellence. A total of 32 grants were awarded to 31 libraries, including two grants awarded to different branches of Lincoln City Libraries. Library Improvement Grants remain on hold because of budget uncertainties. The Commission has a $60,000 budget for those grants and has completed preliminary review and funding recommendations. However, if budget reductions occur, the Library Improvement Grant program could be affected. Christa noted that demand for the grants continues to exceed available funding.

Council Discussion Topics

Advocacy Debriefing – Participants reported that Advocacy Day was successful. Christa Porter asked whether there would be interest in presenting an NCompass Live session about the event. Michael Strattmann said that several outstanding volunteers were recognized. A number of attendees were able to meet with senators' staff members. Most senators were unavailable because the Legislature was in session.

Joy Harvey said that one of her coworkers had the opportunity to speak with Governor Pillen's scheduling secretary, who had previously served as principal at Lincoln's Kooser elementary school where Joy's coworker was employed. Joy said that it was valuable to have her involved because she is someone who speaks candidly and can be an effective advocate when discussing issues, especially those related to libraries.

Amber Sweetland said that Governor Pillen is scheduled to attend her organization's 100th Founder's Day celebration this year. She noted that the organization still has the original printed program from the first Founder's Day celebration.

Topics for 2026 Council Agendas – Cali Biaggi said that budget challenges are likely to remain an ongoing discussion topic. Cali also suggested exploring collaboration among different types of libraries, including academic, school, and public libraries.

Amber Sweetland asked whether Commission staff could help identify libraries affected by recent fires and determine whether any are experiencing losses. She suggested coordinating donations of materials or equipment from other libraries to assist affected libraries until insurance proceeds are available. Christa Porter said that the Commission coordinated a similar effort following the 2019 floods. Rod Wagner added that, at that time, the Commission was contacted by federal agencies because it was in a position to help coordinate assistance.

Rod Wagner asked whether anyone had activities planned for the USA 250th anniversary. Celine Swan said that the Grand Island Public Library, the Hall County Historical Society, and the Stuhr Museum have partnered to promote and celebrate the anniversary. Activities are planned throughout the day, highlighting the diverse cultures that have shaped Grand Island and Hall County. The celebration will conclude with a fireworks display. Admission will be $2.50, making it an affordable family event. The library is also sponsoring programs and partnerships with Hall County organizations. A full schedule is available on Hall County's Facebook page. Amber Sweetland said that 2026 will also mark the 50th anniversary of the Western Library System and the 125th anniversary of the Nebraska Library Commission.

Jennifer Norton said that the Lexington Public Library is partnering with its local DAR chapter to offer anniversary programming in June. Planned activities include Jeopardy-style games focused on the Declaration of Independence as well as panel discussions. Cali Biaggi also asked whether any libraries had received grant funding associated with Carnegie libraries that had been discussed at a previous meeting. Celine Swan reported that the Beatrice Public Library received funding. Rod Wagner added that Lincoln had also received funding, receiving $30,000 for three Carnegie libraries. There was additional discussion regarding potential locations for future annual meetings.

Council Round Table – Successes and Challenges

Laura England-Biggs reported that one of the library's biggest successes was participating in the 50th anniversary commemoration of the Pathfinder Hotel explosion. On January 10, 1976, at approximately 9:32 a.m., the hotel in Fremont exploded, resulting in the deaths of six or eight individuals and injuries to many others. The event significantly changed the downtown landscape. Two library staff members played an instrumental role in researching the event and preparing a PowerPoint presentation for the commemorative program, which was hosted at the library. Laura said that it was the library's largest program since reopening following its expansion project, with more than 125 people attending in the community meeting room.

Laura also highlighted the library's "Plant It Forward" Seed Library. The program allows community members to check out seeds for fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers, plant them, and share what they grow. There is no charge to participate, and library cardholders in good standing may receive up to five seed packets per month. The program generated significant interest, with more than 71 seed packets distributed on the first day, March 9. By the following Friday, distributions had exceeded 130 packets.

Regarding challenges, Laura noted that weather and staffing have been ongoing concerns. Illnesses circulating in the community have affected staff availability, and some employees with chronic health conditions have been affected by significant changes in temperature and weather conditions. Another challenge has been emphasizing the importance of shelving materials. Laura said that staff are often eager to focus on programs and special projects, but timely shelving remains essential to public service. She said that if shelving falls behind in March, the situation becomes even more difficult during the summer reading season, when daily check-ins increase from approximately 175–180 items per day to more than 250 items per day. Laura stressed the importance of maintaining core library operations: providing customer service, keeping materials shelved and accessible, and then pursuing additional programming and projects.

Shauna Crosby-Wilson – Boys Town Library Services has seen a huge increase in participation in both the middle school book club and the manga club. The book club grew from 5 students to 15, and our manga club has grown to 30 students. That has been a real joy for us. One of our biggest struggles is getting books returned. Students move, transfer, or are discharged, and we end up losing a lot of books. Right now, we have about 275 overdue books. Our population is only around 300, so while that may not seem significant compared to a larger library, it is a big deal for a small library like ours.

Sharon Schluterbusch – We started a book club in the Bayard high school during intervention time. Students who did not need to attend an intervention were invited to participate, and they have really enjoyed it.

At the elementary school, we have been doing more with dynamic shelving by placing books in baskets, displaying them with pictures, and creating different arrangements on top of the shelves. These changes make the books more visible and accessible, encouraging students to pick them up and explore them.

One challenge is that our school has been affected by state funding shortages. Sharon said she lost one paraprofessional position, and does not know what next year will look like. At one point, there was discussion of moving the elementary library into the high school library across the street to create one larger library. Ultimately, it was decided to keep the elementary library where it is because elementary students use the library more frequently than high school students. We want to keep it easily accessible for them.

Jennifer Norton – A success is that the library was recognized by the Chamber of Commerce through community nominations. On February 27, we received the Friends of Tourism Award at the Chamber banquet. The award recognizes the work we do to promote Lexington while serving both community residents and visitors through our programs. It was quite an honor.

Another success is tied to one of the library's biggest challenges. Jennifer said that, as many know, the Tyson plant closed, and the community has been dealing with the fallout. Some people have left the area to find employment elsewhere. One success has been the way the library has stepped up to serve as a community resource. People who have lost their jobs have come to the library to access resources and attend classes hosted at the library. UNMC has offered classes on mental health, chronic health conditions, and other topics. Employers also reached out early on to hold job fairs at the library. In many ways, the library has become a place where people can find support, hope, and new opportunities.

That success is closely connected to the challenge our community continues to face. The closure of a major employer left approximately 3,200 people without jobs in a community of just over 11,000 residents.

Tammi Thiem – A success for the Three Rivers Library System (TRLS) is that it is workshop season. Spring and fall are typically our busiest times for workshops since winter weather can be unpredictable and summer schedules are often full. TRLS held three summer reading workshops that provided a great deal of information and created opportunities for participants to share ideas and learn from one another.

TRLS also has several upcoming events, including screenings of *The Librarians* documentary in Norfolk, a Cricut workshop, and a Canva workshop. In addition, the NLA Public Library and Trustee Section (PLTS) is partnering with the regional library systems to offer workshops in April. It is always rewarding to see people learning new things. Tammi said that she learns a lot from these events as well.

One challenge is getting information out to people. Tammi said we work hard to produce a newsletter filled with useful information, but everyone is so busy. It can be difficult to find time to sit down and read it, or sometimes even just to skim through it.

Joanne Neemann – Joanne said that she had talked at the last council meeting about our silent reading group, and it is still going strong. One of the activities we started is a cookbook club, thanks to Sean Klee. We had talked about his cookbook club in Grand Island, and he helped me think through how to get one started here. I adopted some of his ideas and added a few of our own, and it has been a lot of fun. We had one participant who wanted to make homemade mayonnaise. For February, our theme was chocolate lovers, and this month we are featuring community cookbooks. We have many community cookbooks available at the library that participants can check out, or they can use their own. The club has generated a lot of interest and conversation.

Joanne said that an ongoing challenge is shelving. Staff enjoy shelving books, but sometimes they do it quickly rather than as accurately as they should. We have also been hit hard by illnesses. We are now in our fourth week without being fully staffed.

Lisa Irwin – One of the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) library's recent successes involves the accreditation process. The accrediting body for the YRTCs is the American Correctional Association. Every three years, the library is audited along with every other department. Preparing for the audit is a continuous process that involves maintaining documentation throughout the three-year cycle so that everything is ready when the audit occurs. The process includes compiling a file of artifacts that demonstrate compliance with the association's criteria for libraries in institutional settings. Lisa reported that she recently completed the file and submitted it for pre-audit review.

Lisa also reported that she has been experimenting with the 3D printer. Staff have been creating some interesting projects, and students are beginning to design their own items using Tinkercad. She noted that more advanced design software, such as CAD programs, could allow students to create even more sophisticated projects, although she would first need to learn how to use the software herself.

The library has also been compiling periodical and book orders for the Kearney and Hastings facilities. Staff use a Google survey that allows youth to suggest books and magazines they would like the library to purchase. Lisa said that they expect to be able to purchase all of the requested items.

Lisa said the library's biggest challenge is the uncertainty surrounding a proposal from DHHS to reorganize youth placements among four facilities. Many people may be aware of the legislation currently under consideration. Under current law, YRTC Kearney houses only males. If the bill passes, the language would be

revised to allow facilities to house youth of any gender, although each facility would continue to house only one gender at a time.

If the proposal moves forward, youth could be reassigned across Nebraska. Under the plan currently being discussed, all boys would be moved to Omaha, all girls currently housed in Hastings would be moved to

Kearney, and youth from the Whitehall facility in Lincoln would be moved to Hastings. Such changes would have significant implications for education, employment, and facility operations. As a result, many people are feeling anxious about the potential impact of the proposed reorganization.

Mandy Peterson – Mandy reported several successes during the year. A primary goal was to increase engagement among students in grades 6 through 12 and encourage greater use of the library. Staff gathered feedback through surveys to identify programs and activities that would appeal to students. Many of the initiatives implemented during the year were supported through fundraising efforts. Mandy said that the school board was sufficiently impressed with the results to include funding for the successful initiatives in the school's operating budget for the coming year. This will eliminate the need for ongoing fundraising and allow library staff to focus more fully on program implementation and service delivery.

Looking ahead, Mandy said that increased support also brings higher expectations for program performance. As a small school serving approximately 450 students from preschool through grade 12, the library is exploring the possibility of offering a summer camp or club-style program. Because the school and public library share the same space, collection, and many operating hours, Mandy emphasized the importance of coordinating plans with the public library to ensure that any new programming complements rather than duplicates existing services. Discussions are ongoing to refine the concept.

Celine Swan – Celine reported that the library recently completed its third annual staff in-service day. Celine said she was pleased with the planning efforts and positive outcomes of the event.

As part of preparations for the library's next strategic plan, staff conducted a survey to evaluate library services. The library is concluding its current five-year strategic plan and beginning work on a new plan. Celine highlighted the library's annual plant-and-seed exchange program, noting that participants grew more than 1,000 plants during the past year. Celine said the program helps address food insecurity and is well received by the community.

The library is also exploring the acquisition of a bookmobile. Celine said that discussions have taken place with city officials, including the city council and mayor. Most of the funding would come from grants, but additional efforts are needed to secure ongoing operational support, including additional staff positions. Celine identified the bookmobile project as both a significant opportunity and a challenge. She also said that the ongoing challenge of reaching more residents in a growing community where transportation barriers exist. Recent growth has included additional apartments, healthcare facilities, and retail development.

Among the library's successes, Celine reported the addition of five part-time staff positions, equivalent to approximately two full-time positions plus additional staffing hours. She also mentioned challenges related to partnerships with local nonprofit organizations, as multiple

community institutions, including museums and historical organizations, are competing for limited funding resources.

Michael Straatmann – Michael reported that the library is concluding its year-long *Pages to Paths* initiative, which highlighted the evolving role of the library in supporting research, teaching, and student success.

Michael announced the hiring of a new Associate Dean for Research and Teaching, Thomas Padilla, who previously served at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and as a director at the Internet Archive.

Michael highlighted the library's Course and Reserve Access initiative, which provides students with free access to required course materials and books. He said that the program has generated more than $3 million in estimated student cost savings and has supported approximately 48,000 students enrolled in courses with librarian involvement. The initiative has had a significant positive impact on both students and faculty.

Among the library's current challenges is compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) requirements, with a major compliance deadline approaching. Staff have been reviewing and updating tens of thousands of documents to meet accessibility standards.

Michael reported concerns related to anticipated budget reductions and the rising costs of scholarly publishing. He explained that the library previously withdrew from a Big Ten consortium agreement for Springer publications and instead utilized Article Galaxy Scholar to provide access to needed materials. Springer, a major publisher of scientific, technical, and medical research, has increased prices substantially in recent years and has taken steps to limit alternative access models used by libraries. Michael noted that escalating publication and subscription costs continue to present challenges for academic libraries.

Michael mentioned administrative changes at the university, including the appointment of an interim chancellor. In addition, discussions regarding budget reductions have contributed to governance concerns, including a faculty vote of confidence involving senior administrators.

Looking ahead, the library will continue addressing accessibility compliance requirements, managing budget pressures, and evaluating sustainable approaches to providing access to scholarly resources while supporting the university's teaching and research mission.

Amber Sweetland – Amber reported receiving a $10,000 Community Conversation grant to support the installation of automatic door openers at the library. She said that a significant challenge was obtaining contractor bids in a rural area. Despite beginning the process months before the grant deadline, she encountered difficulty finding vendors willing to provide estimates. After the grant was approved, the only contractor who had responded submitted a bid that exceeded the total grant amount by approximately $1,000. Amber indicated that identifying a way to complete the project within available funding remains a challenge.

Amber reported that makerspace usage has more than doubled over the past year. She attributed much of this growth to monthly workshops led by the library's technical services staff member, which have helped patrons become more comfortable using makerspace equipment and resources. The increase in participation was well received by the city council and was highlighted in the library's annual report.

Amber reported strong participation in two book clubs. The Manor Book Club, held in partnership with a local nursing home, continues to perform well. In addition, a youth book club for upper elementary students, developed in collaboration with local teachers, has experienced strong participation. Activities include themed food items connected to the books being read. Plans are underway for a joint session involving participants from both book clubs, with youth visiting residents at the manor.

Amber reported that, as President of the Western Library System, she is assisting with plans to hold the system's annual meeting in Kimball. To support the event, the community will host a screening of a public library documentary at a local nonprofit theater. In addition, a presenter she connected with through the Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) conference is expected to speak about book challenges, censorship issues, and her personal experiences related to those topics.

Amber said budget reductions as the library's most significant challenge. She reported that changes related to the Governor's business tax reduction initiative are expected to reduce the library's budget by approximately $24,000 in the coming year.

Joy Harvey – Joy reported that Lincoln Public Schools continues to make progress in supporting ADA compliance across the district. She also noted that the district's library curriculum continues to be well received both within Nebraska and nationally. Joy said that ongoing accessibility compliance efforts are a primary challenge, particularly ensuring that library materials and resources meet accessibility guidelines. Joy also said that the growing role of artificial intelligence in schools is an area requiring continued attention and consideration.

Shannon McDonald *(report read by Cali Biaggi)* – Shannon reported that Central Community College (CCC), in partnership with Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, hosted a Career Opportunity Fair on March 10. Approximately 300 area high school students attended the event. Shannon staffed a table to promote careers in libraries and to raise awareness of CCC's Library and Information Science Certificate program. Shannon also reported a steady increase in in-person use of the library. Increased usage has been driven in part by athletic study halls being held in the library, resulting in students continuing to use the space even when attendance is not required.

Looking ahead, Shannon reported plans to attend the Teaching and Learning with AI Conference hosted by the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. She hopes to gain insights that will help strengthen CCC's AI information literacy modules in Canvas and support the ethical and effective use of artificial intelligence by students, faculty, and staff. Shannon identified compliance with the U.S. Department of Justice's new digital accessibility requirements as a significant challenge. CCC Columbus continues to work toward meeting the new standards, and

questions remain regarding implementation, oversight, and responsibility for monitoring accessibility compliance among state and local government entities.

Shannon reported that CCC's athletic facilities will undergo construction for approximately one year beginning after spring commencement. During that time, many athletics staff members are expected to relocate to the library's upper-level study area. While this will increase activity within the library, staff view it as an opportunity to showcase library services and resources to a broader group of employees and faculty.

Cali Biaggi – Cali reported that Bryan College of Health Sciences recently implemented LibSites, a Springshare product, to support a redesign of the library website. Staff are currently developing the new site with the goal of launching it before the upcoming accessibility compliance deadlines. Cali said that the current website has accessibility limitations and that the redesign will improve compliance with accessibility standards. While the platform has presented some challenges and complexities during implementation, she expressed confidence that the final product will be beneficial.

Cali provided an update on recent U.S. Department of Education changes affecting the classification of professional degree programs. She reported that the changes affect Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) students, who may now face limits on the amount they can borrow through federal student aid programs. In response, Bryan College of Health Sciences is moving away from requiring students to purchase most individual textbooks and is instead planning to implement a bundled course materials model beginning next spring. The change is being coordinated with a significant curriculum revision and is expected to reduce student costs by approximately $1,000 per student.

Cali said that some faculty members are interested in supplementing bundled course materials with open educational resources and library course reserves. As a result, the library anticipates an expanded role in supporting access to instructional materials and assisting faculty with resource development and course support.

New Business

Recommendations and Resolutions**:** None.

Next Meetings: July 17, November 20

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:42 p.m.