Nebraska State Advisory Council on Libraries
Monday, March 17, 2025 1:30-3:30 PM (CST)

MINUTES

State Advisory Council members present via GoToWebinar: Laura England-Biggs, Sharon Schluterbusch, Rachel Steiner

In-Person: Amber Sweetland (Chair), Tammi Thiem, Lisa Irwin, Cali Biaggi, Christine Fullerton, Joy Harvey, Shannon McDonald, Joanne Neemann, Jennifer Norton, Celine Swan

Commission staff members present: Rod Wagner, Mary Geibel, Holli Duggan, Christa Porter. Library Commissioner: Tom Rolfes.

Welcome and Introductions:
Chair Amber Sweetland welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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

Approval of Minutes: There was a correction on page fourteen, fourth paragraph, Library Friends Group started a book nook, not club. A motion was made and seconded to approve the November 2024 minutes. Motion approved.

Public Comment:
There were no public comments.

Reports:

Nebraska School Librarians Association

Joy Harvey reported that the Nebraska School Librarians Association (NSLA) presented its annual awards, with Mandy Peterson recognized as School Librarian of the Year. Congratulations to Mandy! The Administrator of the Year award was presented to Dr. Maggie Mintken, Principal of West Lawn Elementary School in Grand Island. The NSLA is preparing for its upcoming board elections, which will take place in April. Nominations for the next round of awards have now closed. The NSLA has been monitoring Legislative Bill 390 (LB390), which requires each school board to adopt a policy allowing parents, guardians, or educational decision-makers to access certain school library information. One provision allows parents to opt in for notifications when their student checks out a book. While NSLA does not have major concerns about the bill, it may pose challenges for smaller school districts, particularly due to technology concerns with catalog systems to support notifications. NSLA will continue to keep members informed and monitor developments as they occur.

Nebraska Library Association

Holli Duggan reported that Lane Gibson has stepped down as President of the Nebraska Library Association (NLA). Holli has been reappointed to serve as President, effective February 1. Sherrie Dux-Ideus is President-Elect. Brianna Weichel began her role as NLA Administrative Assistant in

December. The association's new volunteer webmaster is Todd Jensen from the University of Nebraska Kearney. NLA is seeking candidates for two key volunteer roles: Communications Chair and Diversity Chair.

The Long-Term Conference Planning Committee has begun preparations for the 2025 NLA Annual Conference, scheduled for October 22–24 in York. Program proposal and exhibitor/vendor applications are currently open. Keynote speaker options are being reviewed.

Advocacy Day took place today, with 37 people registered and 11 additional attendees joining the event this morning. NLA recognized three Outstanding Volunteers this year:

- Lisa Matheson, a volunteer with the Talking Book and Braille Service
- Fiona Bryant, a teen volunteer at Omaha Public Library and Girl Scout project leader
- Elizabeth Miller, volunteer from Columbus

Today's program also includes two speakers at Bennett Martin Public Library: a professor from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln and a librarian/professor from the Schmid Law Library, speaking on Intellectual Freedom and Book Bans.

Upcoming Spring Meetings include: Public Library & Trustee Section (April 23 in Kearney) and May 9 in Seward (in partnership with the Southeast Library System's "Training Extravaganza"), College and University Section: May 9 at Bellevue University.

Nebraska Library Commission

Rod Wagner thanked Holli Duggan, Deb Robertson, and others who organized Advocacy Day. It was a nice opening event with good attendance. Wagner reported on budget issues – state and federal. The state is in the middle of the legislative session. Last week, the Library Commission had its budget hearing before the Appropriations Committee. After budget hearings are finished, the appropriations committee will make budget recommendations to the full legislature by the end of April. The state had a good report several weeks ago from the State Economic Forecasting Board that increased state tax revenue estimates. Then the state got news from the federal government that federal funds for the federal share of Medicaid payments would be substantially reduced. That offset the earlier rosier outlook for the state tax revenues.

As is often the case, the Legislature has a challenge in finalizing the state biennium budget. The Library Commission submitted several requests for increased funding to support libraries and statewide services. The Commission's budget requests included:

- 5% annual increase in state aid to libraries
- 12% increase in state funding for the Nebraska OverDrive Libraries consortium, and the Omaha, Lincoln, and Ralston public libraries
- 5% annual increase for the regional library systems
- Database licensing subscription increases**:** 3.4% in the first year and 3.0% in the second year

The Governor's budget recommendations, issued in January, did not support the requested increases for state aid to libraries, regional library systems, or database licensing. However, the Governor did support the increased funding for ebooks, audiobooks, etc. for the OverDrive consortium and the

Lincoln, Omaha, and Ralston libraries. However, to offset that support, the governor proposed a reduction in the Library Commission's operating budget.

The Appropriations Committee has the authority to revise budget recommendations before submitting its final version to the full Legislature by the end of April.

In May, the legislature will debate the budget alongside other bills. The final appropriations bill must be balanced before being submitted to the Governor, who then has a set period to approve or veto specific provisions. The biennium budget is expected to be finalized by mid-June.

On the federal side, Congressional action on the FY2025 federal budget is being monitored. Federal funds are appropriated for only part of the fiscal year. Funding to date has been provided through a series of continuing resolutions (CRs). The most recent CR expired last Friday. On Friday, Congress passed a budget extension through the end of September, which continues funding for federal agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Also on Friday, the President issued an executive order that impacts IMLS and six other federal agencies. The order instructs these entities to significantly reduce staffing and scale down operations to essential functions only. This development has raised concerns about how it may affect funding and operations at IMLS. Some public statements and media reports have inaccurately claimed that the executive order eliminates IMLS. The executive order does not abolish IMLS, but it does require the agency to respond and report its plans for compliance to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

LSTA funding accounts for just under 30% of the Nebraska Library Commission's budget. The remaining budget consists primarily of state funding and some cash funds. Of all the federal actions currently taking place, this development is the one with the most direct impact on the Library Commission and its services.

The Nebraska Center for the Book's "Letters about Literature" contest seeks participation from Nebraska schools. The program includes elementary, middle school, and high school levels. Students write a letter to an author that has inspired them or prompted personal reflection. This year's recognition event will be on April 10 at the State Capitol. Following the ceremony, winners are invited to attend a luncheon and are also given the opportunity to read their letters aloud**,** which many choose to do. Each letter will be added to the Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors at the Bennett Martin Public Library.

The annual Celebration of Nebraska Books will take place on November 15 at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln City Campus Union. The event will feature a full day of activities, including author presentations, panel discussions, and book-related exhibitors. Vendors will be on site to promote their organizations and offer books and other items for sale. Tosca Lee, author of the current One Book One Nebraska selection, has been asked to speak at the event. The afternoon will include presentation of literary awards, recognizing authors and books selected for the Nebraska Book Awards, as well as announcement of the 2026 One Book One Nebraska selection.

Christa Porter – The annual *Big Talk from Small Libraries* event was held on the last Friday in February, as it is every year. This year's conference had 779 individuals pre-registered and 480 attending live. This is a strong turnout for an online event, especially considering all sessions are recorded and made available afterward. Many participants register specifically to access the recordings. There were attendees from forty-four states and four Canadian provinces. All of the

recordings were posted as of last Friday, and are up on the "Big Talk" website. It is not one big eight-hour recording. The recording is split into individual sessions. Christa said that she always receives more presentation proposals than can be presented on the one day of the conference. If any of those that are submitted but don't get selected for that day, Christa offers to schedule an NCompass Live session, the weekly show.

E-Rate – Tom Rolfes said that he has followed federal developments related to the Universal Service Fund (USF). A case challenging the constitutionality of the USF is scheduled to go before the U.S. Supreme Court on March 26. This follows a decision from the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in Texas, where the court held that the USF functions as a tax, and therefore may be unconstitutional if not enacted by Congress. If the Supreme Court upholds the Fifth Circuit's decision, it could dismantle the USF. This would jeopardize more than $12 billion in annual telecommunications subsidies, including over $4 billion for the E-Rate program alone. This would have a significant impact on public and non-public schools across the country. In Nebraska, 100% of public school districts, all Educational Service Units (ESUs), the majority of non-public schools, and 27% of public libraries currently benefit from E-Rate. Unless Congress steps in to fund these programs through direct appropriations, this essential support could be eliminated. Tom said that he currently oversees $400 million in broadband deployment funds designated for Nebraska, targeted for implementation between 2025 and 2029. There are 29,597 unserved or underserved addresses in the state (primarily in rural areas) where reliable internet is often lacking. These funds aim to close that gap.

Rolfes said that the Nebraska Broadband Office is preparing to release a map of eligible addresses for competitive application. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) will be invited to apply for project areas, with successful applicants receiving 75% of the funding required to complete the buildout. Providers must supply the remaining 25% as a match. The application window is expected to open in late March and close in late April. At the end of that period, there will be a a clearer understanding of which providers responded, how far the funds will reach, and which technologies will be used. How does this tie back to libraries? Historically, public libraries have been the only source of internet access for some rural patrons. While future broadband buildouts may change that, affordability will still be a concern.

Rolfes said that, in Nebraska, the E-Rate program brings in roughly $10 million annually. If all libraries participated fully, that number could exceed $11 million. Every school district in the state currently receives some level of discount through E-Rate, with an average discount rate of 70%. For example, a $1,000 internet service bill would typically be discounted by $700, with the district paying the remaining $300. All of that support could disappear as a result of this court decision. As Christa mentioned, conflicting lower court decisions led to the Supreme Court taking the case. The difference between a surcharge and a tax may seem minor to consumers, but it has serious legal implications. In Nebraska, a similar case was adjudicated by the Nebraska Supreme Court in the early 2000s, where the state's Universal Service Fund surcharge was upheld as permissible. Whether that precedent will have national relevance remains to be seen. Ultimately, this case could profoundly impact funding for schools and libraries across the country.

Council Discussion Topics – Advocacy Debriefing – Topics for 2025 Council Agendas

During this morning's Advocacy Day activities, participants shared the following updates:

- Holli Duggan noted that no state senators attended the morning session. That was likely due to the event being held in a different building across the street from the Capitol.
- Rod Wagner asked about ideas and input on how libraries are celebrating National Library Week in April.
- Joanne Neeman said that a library patron from Beatrice donated a Willa Cather statuette to the library. Representatives from the Willa Cather Foundation and the artist are expected to visit during National Library Week. The library will also host a *Wizard of Oz*-themed escape room to mark the 85th anniversary of the film and the 100th anniversary of the book.
- Jennifer Norton said that Lexington Public Library will screen the independent film *Free For All* on the Thursday of National Library Week. Additional smaller events are planned, though final details are still pending. On April 5, the library will host its first-ever puzzle competition.
- Future Council Meeting Topics – No suggestions or requests for future Council meeting topics were submitted at this time.

Council Round Table – Successes and Challenges

Amber Sweetland – Our community is currently facing a significant increase in electric utility costs. The library's electric bill for January to February last year was $444. This year, for the same period, it rose to $867. The city office wasn't able to provide an explanation for the cost increase. Amber said that she has been searching for grants to fund a transition to LED lighting in hopes of reducing energy costs. Unfortunately, because this involves construction, it has been difficult to secure funding. Most grantors are not interested in covering those types of expenses. This remains one of the biggest challenges we're currently facing.

On a positive note, we recently launched a book club at the local retirement community, and it has been a great success. Fifteen residents are participating and more than expected for the first meeting. Additionally, the adult book club has partnered with a *fourth-grade class at the local elementary school. Both groups read Because of Winn-Dixie.* A joint book club event was held where we recreated the foods featured in the book. More than 30 people attended, which is a great turnout for a community of our size. The event included nine adult participants, a few parents, and many students. The kids were fully engaged and enthusiastic, and they're already looking forward to the next one.

Shannon McDonald – Our biggest challenge so far has been increasing student engagement with the library at Central Community College. Many students hold the misconception that "I'm not a reader, so I don't need the library." However, as we often remind them – there's more to the library than just books. We've started to see gradual improvement. By visiting classrooms, building personal relationships with students, and actively partnering with Student Services, we've noticed a positive trend: more students are now using the library as a space to relax between classes. That shift in perception feels like a big win. An unexpected but welcome outcome is that I'm getting to know more students and faculty across campus. More instructors are now reaching out with resource requests, such as help locating textbooks. Our interlibrary loan activity has significantly increased, and I've become quite proficient with OCLC systems. Shannon said that she is new to the library world, having joined in June 2024, and while there's still a lot to learn, she is enjoying the journey and the growing sense of connection within the college community.

Tammi Thiem – One of my ongoing challenges has been director turnover. With new library directors coming on board, it can be difficult to connect with them early and make sure they're aware of the support I can offer. Reaching out and arranging meetings takes time and coordination, but it's

important to build those relationships and ensure they know I'm here to help. On a positive note, I've recently held a couple of summer reading workshops, with a total of 65 attendees between the two sessions. It's always rewarding when you feel like you've provided just the right resources or ideas that attendees truly need.

Celine Swan – We've made several improvements recently, including the replacement of our camera system and phone system. Additionally, our police chief will be participating in a promotional video at the library. He's been doing a series of community videos – bringing coffee, visiting local spots. I encouraged our staff to brainstorm ideas for the library segment. He was a bit hesitant at first, but I reassured him it would be a great opportunity to showcase our services. We also held another all-staff in-service this year, which continues to be a valuable way for staff to connect and collaborate. This year's event was conducted in partnership with Central Community College and focused on team building and customer service. Thanks to our Library Improvement Funds, we've installed a new help desk in a more efficient location for staff use. I'm also considering a community engagement project for National Library Week, where patrons can share what they love about the library – either by submitting comments in person or online. We know there's strong community support, and this would be a great way to highlight it.

Our makerspace has been very active, particularly with new programming for individuals with special needs, which has really taken off. One of our most popular offerings is *Crafter News*, a group-based creative program that utilizes the makerspace to produce a shared project. One ongoing challenge is identifying suitable locations for library kiosks. Grand Island continues to grow, which presents many opportunities, but also the difficulty of finding ideal spots that effectively serve underserved populations who may not otherwise make it into the library.

Holli Duggan – One of the ongoing challenges for NLA is filling the communications chair position and rebuilding the communications committee. This has contributed to a slower-than-usual start to the year. Advocacy Day was a success and well-received. Additionally, we've gotten an early start on planning for the annual conference, which puts us in a strong position moving forward.

Lisa Irwin – One of the successes I'm most proud of is our participation in the annual Kearney Area Storytelling Festival, which features world-renowned storytellers. Each year, the organizers reach out and ask if we'd like to host a storyteller. At YRTC-Kearney, our students are divided into separate groups and typically do not intermingle, which presents a logistical challenge for group events. For this event, we worked closely with upper administration to adjust our usual procedures. They were fully supportive and provided additional staff and security, allowing us to bring all 75 students together in the gym for the storytelling session. The teamwork that made it happen was truly inspiring. It showed us that we can do more events like this in the future. This year's featured storyteller was Geraldine Buckley, who has worked in correctional facilities and previously served as a prison chaplain. Her stories, drawn from real-life experiences in corrections, deeply resonated with our young men.

Another success is the addition of more Chromebooks to support our technology needs. While we currently operate six desktop computer labs, we've identified additional rooms that require access to technology, and Chromebooks have helped meet that demand. Managing and monitoring Chromebooks has proven more difficult than expected. Our current monitoring system (Imperio) and gate firewall respond well on desktops using Microsoft Edge, but on Chromebooks, there is a

noticeable two-second delay, which can affect oversight. I am currently working with our IT department to explore solutions for this issue.

Another significant challenge relates to facility constraints at YRTC-Hastings. When YRTC-Geneva closed, the girls were first relocated to Kearney and later moved to Hastings. Unfortunately, the building they now occupy in Hastings was not originally designed to function as a school, which has created ongoing logistical and educational challenges.

Cali Biaggi – I am no longer at Doane College after six and a half years. I recently transitioned to a new role at the Bryan College of Health Sciences Library in Lincoln, where I've been for about a month. While I'm still getting up to speed, I can say that the library is highly valued by the campus community and consistently receives excellent ratings in satisfaction surveys. One potential challenge on the horizon involves upcoming curriculum changes. I don't yet know the full scope or how they may impact the library, but it's something we're monitoring closely.

Joy Harvey – The past school year was a challenging one for the Nebraska School Library Association. Following the resignation of our former president, Rob Starkey, I stepped into the role. One of our key successes has been maintaining stability and getting back on track. We've made significant progress in several areas, including membership management, awards coordination, and preparing the upcoming election ballot. We also revamped the ballot to meet current digital accessibility standards. Our primary ongoing challenge is growing our membership and helping school library professionals see the value of NSLA, particularly in areas like advocacy. Membership is relatively affordable, and we continue to emphasize how our work supports and strengthens school libraries across Nebraska.

This year, we were proud to present the Distinguished Administrator Award to Dr. Maggie Mintken, principal at West Lawn Elementary School.

At Lincoln Public Schools (LPS), much of our current focus aligns with the district's work on artificial intelligence. We're learning about AI and collaborating with district leaders to develop guidelines and expectations for its use. Within our library services, we are also prioritizing digital content accessibility. Last week's presentation on digital assessment and accessibility was especially valuable. In February, we held a professional learning day for all LPS librarians, which included sharing instructional strategies and lesson plans. One simple but effective example was adjusting the timing of book checkouts to the end of the library period, which has helped streamline student transitions.

Joanne Neemann – At our last council meeting, I mentioned the success of our community bike rally. I'm pleased to share that it went so well the police department approached us last week to propose a continued partnership. They've asked to collaborate again for an event in May, and they've also added us to their "School Night Out" event in August. What started as a one-time event has now evolved into a strong and growing community partnership.

One of our ongoing challenges is retaining technology staff due to low wages. Currently, our tech staff earn between $12.50 and $13.00 per hour, which makes it difficult to maintain consistent staffing. Although we've made some progress by increasing the pay slightly, we remain about a year behind in keeping up with competitive wages, which contributes to high turnover.

Jennifer Norton – A recent success in Lexington was our effective response to an unexpected facilities issue. On February 21, an overhead sprinkler in the southeast corner of the library froze and burst. Fortunately, this area does not contain any books or critical resources. Thankfully, staff were on-site and able to respond quickly. Had the incident happened during a weekend or while the library was closed, the flooding could have affected the entire building. ServiceMaster was brought in immediately, and for just over $5,000, they were able to clean and dry the affected area. In the end, the damage was minimal, and we gained valuable knowledge for future emergency response.

A current challenge, a positive one, is the high demand for our meeting rooms. Our spaces are in such frequent use that we occasionally have to turn groups away or find alternative locations. Whether it's for library programs or community group meetings, our facilities are consistently busy, which reflects strong community engagement but also highlights the need for additional flexible space.

One recent success stems from an idea proposed by one of our library assistants late last year. She approached me with a concept for a language conversation program—pairing individuals who want to learn a new language for informal conversation practice. I encouraged her to give it a try. Now, two and a half months in, the program has been a tremendous success. Bilingual participants are paired with those seeking to improve their skills in either Spanish or English. The first session drew over 30 participants, and the program continues to grow.

What's especially rewarding is that the program is not only supporting language learning but also fostering intergenerational and cross-cultural connections. We've seen teens working alongside adults, and even a retired gentleman from Colombia—fluent in English—has taken on the role of mentor, helping others improve their language skills. Beyond the learning, the sense of community and connection that has emerged is truly inspiring.

Rocio Casanova, our bilingual children's and family services librarian, approached me with a heartfelt idea. She wanted to assist community members preparing for their U.S. citizenship exams. I immediately supported the idea, and she has been leading citizenship preparation sessions at the library during off-hours, specifically on Sunday afternoons. I had the privilege of helping a few times, serving as a mock interviewer for Spanish-speaking participants. It was an incredibly moving experience. Working with individuals who are so committed to becoming U.S. citizens is humbling and inspiring. It's worth noting that many average Americans would likely struggle with the civics test, yet these individuals are studying diligently and succeeding. I commend Rocio for dedicating her personal time to make this program possible. It's a powerful example of service and dedication.

We are currently in the second year of our One Book, One Lexington program. This year, the committee selected *Maya and Tania.* We're fortunate to be partnering again with the National Willa Cather Foundation. Last year, the Foundation was involved in the Big Read program featuring *My Ántonia*, and they've continued their support by donating 50 copies of this year's selection. In addition to the book distribution, we will host a series of exhibits and events throughout the year. This includes the Willa Cather traveling exhibit (one of three) and a lineup of speakers coordinated in partnership with the National School of Counseling Center, running through the end of the year.

Christine Fullerton – Our current primary challenge is managing part-time student worker staffing in light of budget constraints. With a relatively stagnant budget and recent increases in the minimum wage, it has become increasingly difficult to sustain the same level of part-time staffing. We're

actively rethinking our workflows and exploring new approaches to ensure continued support while adapting to these financial pressures. On a more positive note, we're excited about several recent improvements to our library spaces. Over the past year, we've been working on a major project to reorganize our bound periodicals room. The goal was to make the space more accessible and user-friendly, and we completed the bulk of that work during spring break. In addition, we've introduced two new specialized spaces:

- The "Office Space" (faculty workroom): Launched last week, this new area is designed for faculty who may be transitioning between the east and west ends of campus. Located in the center of campus, it provides a convenient workspace equipped with desks and technology for short-term use.
- Zen Room**:** Introduced in January, this space was created from an underutilized room on our upper floor. It includes a massage chair, bean bags, calming water features, and an affirmation wall. The Zen Room offers a quiet place for students to relax, reflect, or engage in quiet activities such as prayer or meditation. It has quickly become a popular destination among our student community.

Sharon Schluterbusch – I'm new to Bayard this year and currently serving in a dual role – half-time K-12 Librarian and half-time Technology Coordinator for the district. The biggest challenge so far has been finding the right balance between the two positions. At one point, the substitute assigned to support the library was reassigned to another role, leaving the library to be managed by teachers on an as-needed basis, which created some logistical difficulties. A key success this year was the complete revamp of the library over the summer. The updated space has been well received, and students are more engaged and enthusiastic about using the library.

Laura England-Biggs – We've experienced great success with our STEM programming for tweens. With the help of a grant from the Library Commission, we were able to select a variety of STEM kits. We restock the consumable components as needed, and the kits have been a hit with our young patrons. We're also hosting free ESL classes for the public, led by a local minister who provides instruction as part of his outreach ministry. The classes are held on Wednesday evenings when the library is closed, which makes for a long day, but attendance has been strong ranging from 15 to 50 participants, depending on the weather. Due to growing interest, we plan to add a Tuesday evening session, which aligns with the library's regular open hours, reducing the burden on staff.

While our programming continues to expand, this growth presents sustainability concerns. The preparation required, particularly for hands-on and educational activities, is becoming time-intensive and may increase operating costs over time. We're assessing how to balance demand with long-term feasibility.

We recently received 50 interlibrary loan requests for Jim Murphy's *Inner Excellence*, following interest generated by a popular easel game activity. While we do not lend new books through ILL, the volume of requests reflects strong engagement.

Building Issues**:** Although our facility is relatively new, we've begun to experience structural problems, including ceiling leaks that weren't previously present. We've identified water pooling both above and below one of the floors, which is now under evaluation. Additionally, we've noticed continuous vibrations or "rumbles" in the wall—resembling the sensation of a semi-truck driving by, which remain unexplained and are being investigated. After transitioning to an all-electric system,

we've seen high winter energy costs. During the cold snap in February 2024, our electric bill exceeded $11,000. This past February, the bill was slightly lower, approximately $9,600, but still presents a significant budget concern.

New Business

State Advisory Council on Libraries Vice-Chair Election – Cali Biaggi, volunteered. Motion made to appoint, seconded, and approved.

Recommendations and Resolutions – There were none.

Next meetings: July 25, November 21

Adjournment: 2:56pm