**Nebraska State Advisory Council on Libraries**
Friday, November 17, 2024 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM (CST)

**MINUTES**

State Advisory Council members present via GoToWebinar: Gail Irwin, Allison Reisig, Mandy Peterson, Lisa Irwin

In-Person: Michael Straatmann (Chair), Michael Sauers, Holli Duggan, Tammi Thiem, Laura England-Biggs, Calli Biaggi, Celine Swan, Shanna Crosby-Wilson, Joy Harvey, 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 made and seconded to approve the July 2023 minutes. Motion approved.

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

**Reports:**

Nebraska School Librarians Association

**Joy Harvey** reported that NSLA will begin sending regular communications to members via Facebook and email. Weekly posts will share ideas and helpful information about events hosted by other organizations. NSLA has experienced low participation and attendance at conferences, but times have changed since COVID. Teachers highly value their time off and are reluctant to spend Saturdays at conferences. As a result, some professional learning will be delivered through alternative methods rather than the traditional conference model. Additionally, Joy noted that the advocacy committee is preparing for another eventful year. They will closely monitor any developments at the State Board of Education regarding rule changes, hoping that no new changes will be proposed this year.

Nebraska Library Association

**Holli Duggan** reported that NLA held its annual conference in October, and it was a great success. Nancy Novotny, the NLA Treasurer, still has a few remaining conference bills to pay, but the organization is expected to make a decent profit this year. Since Ginger, the former Executive Director, departed, her responsibilities have been distributed among NLA board

members. To help manage the workload, NLA has decided to hire a part-time administrative assistant, and interviews for the position have been completed. Holli said that the new position, along with the division of responsibilities and the implementation of the new strategic plan, will be a learning opportunity for everyone. Additionally, the newly elected board members will take office in January and will be invited to attend the December meeting.

Nebraska Library Commission

**Rod Wagner** said that he had heard many positive things about the NLA conference. In July, he discussed the Library Commission's biennium budget request, as this is the year state agencies submit their budget proposals for the next biennium, which begins on July 1, 2025. The request includes a 5% increase in state funding for state aid to public libraries, along with an additional 5% increase for regional library systems. Additionally, the budget request includes a 15% increase in funding for the OverDrive Libraries Consortium, which now includes 194 libraries. The Lincoln, Omaha, and Ralston libraries are not part of the consortium but receive an allocation in proportion to service area populations. The 15% increase accounts for the annual rise in usage—both in the number of participants and the circulation of e-books, audiobooks, and magazines—which has grown by approximately 12% per year over the past few years.

On the federal side, Congress has yet to enact appropriations for the full federal fiscal year. Instead, they passed a continuing resolution that provides funding for a limited period. By December 20, Congress must either extend this funding further or finalize appropriations for the remainder of the federal fiscal year. There is growing uncertainty regarding how the outcome of the upcoming election may impact the appropriations.

The federal library funding program, part of the Museum and Library Services Act, is nearing the end of its current five-year authorization and requires reauthorization for another five years. The program has received strong bipartisan support. Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, who has led efforts to authorize this legislation for several years, has agreed to do so again.

Reflecting on 2024, there was legislation introduced earlier this year that would have significantly impacted public and school libraries, but it ultimately did not pass. One bill intended to remove protections shielding school and library employees from prosecution for making obscene materials available to children—something that isn't done anyway, though the concern remains that someone could face such accusations. While there was a possibility of prosecution, it was unlikely to hold up in court. Another bill focused on access to electronic educational databases. This bill also failed to advance, partly because the legislature ran out of time due to the short session. These bills could resurface in the future.

Wagner said that the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska and the Nebraska chapter of the American Association of University Professors recently held a joint meeting. One highlight was a panel discussion that included Chris Haeffner (Nebraska School Librarians Association) and Wyatt Packard (AFCON president), who did an outstanding job addressing issues related to intellectual freedom and efforts at censorship.

**Christa Porter** – The Nebraska Library Commission began accepting applications for all four of its grant categories s for 2025 on September 20: CE/Training, Internships, Library Improvement, and Youth Grants for Excellence. The Library Improvement grant is funded with federal LSTA funds, while the other grants are supported by state funds. An NCompass Live session on these grants was held in September. The recording is available. Grant review teams will consist of commission staff and system directors.

*E-Rate Funding* – As of August 8, all E-rate applications submitted by Nebraska public libraries for Funding Year 2024 have been approved. A total of 74 libraries received funding, amounting to $303,436 in discounts. This funding includes monthly internet costs and necessary equipment purchases. Additionally, two fiber special construction applications—for Hildreth and Exeter—were approved. These projects will be funded through E-rate funding and the Public Service Commission. A full list of funding recipients is available on the E-rate webpage.

Christa's E-rate training workshops begin next week. All sessions will be held online, and a recorded version will be available for those unable to attend live. To include more participation, the same workshop will be offered on multiple days. Last week, Christa attended the COSLA ALA State E-rate Coordinators Forum in Nashville. This new event was established with support from an IMLS grant, specifically to assist state E-rate coordinators. USAC provides E-rate training year-round, including both workshops and in-person sessions for library and school applicants. This year, Christa attended the in-person training and was also invited to join the ALA E-rate Task Force. This group, consisting of 5–10 state E-rate coordinators, meets monthly to discuss E-rate-related issues and reports findings to ALA.

*Public Library Accreditation* – The 2024 Public Library Accreditation process closed on October 1. Emails were sent to 39 libraries up for re-accreditation and 45 unaccredited libraries eligible to apply. So far, 33 libraries have been re-accredited. Due to extenuating circumstances, the remaining libraries have been granted extensions until later this year or 2025. For more details, visit the Accreditation Status page: http://nlc.nebraska.gov/LibAccred/Standings.asp.

*Big Talk from Small Libraries* is approaching! The call for speakers opened on September 4, with a proposal deadline of December 13th. The conference will take place on February 28, 2025: http://nlcblogs.nebraska.gov/bigtalk/.

Christa said we aim to feature speakers from libraries serving populations of 10,000 or fewer. Attendance remains steady at around 400 participants. Each year, Christa said she invites the winner of *Library Journal's* Best Small Library in America award, and we're pleased to confirm that this year's winner will once again present at the conference.

*Nebraska Open Meetings Act:* The Commission receives updated Open Meetings Act posters from the League of Nebraska Municipalities whenever changes occur. These posters are distributed to all public libraries and branches across the state. Last year, the NLC ordered and mailed out 300 posters, though some libraries indicated they did not need one this year. The Open Meetings Act continues to be a challenging topic for many city boards and library directors. To support them, Christa and Scott Childers host an annual webinar with updates. The

latest recording was uploaded yesterday and offers continuing education (CE) credit—an added benefit for library boards working toward their CE requirements.

Michael Straatmann asked about a security test that Christa had mentioned in July. Christa clarified that it was the Cybersecurity Pilot Program. The deadline to apply for participation in the program was November 1. Christa said that approximately $200 million had been allocated for the program, but the number of applications far exceeded the available slots.

Additionally, Christa discussed a new development in the E-rate program regarding hotspots. Previously, hotspots were permitted under the Emergency Connectivity Fund, when COVID started. As of this year, they are now a regular part of the application process. The Emergency Connectivity Fund has been completed, meaning that libraries already using these services can now apply for a different E-rate category if needed. The E-rate deadline falls sometime in February and varies each year. The process involves multiple forms:

- On the first form, applicants request the services they need.
- On the second form, they confirm the service they will receive and submit it within a designated window, typically between January and March. However, the exact submission window is not announced until mid-December.

There is a mandatory 28-day waiting period between submitting the first and second forms before a funding commitment is made. Christa mentioned that the deadline for hotspots should align with this timeline.

**Council Discussion Topics**

ADA Title II Changes/Updates

Michael Straatmann introduced the discussion topic on changes and updates to ADA Title II. In April of this year, the Department of Justice published a revision to the ADA Title II Regulation, which applies to all municipal and state-funded agencies, as well as the web content provided by public entities. Some key points include the requirement for web content and mobile apps to be developed in accordance with accessibility standards. Guideline 2.1 Section AA emphasizes usability for people with disabilities, rather than mere conformance. The updated regulation incorporates more user-centric language than previous versions and sets a compliance deadline of one year—April 24. Larger organizations and libraries are struggling to meet this deadline, while smaller libraries have until April 2027.

The revision covers all websites, documents, media, text, and applications, including content provided by vendors. Libraries are responsible for ensuring vendor compliance; if a vendor is non-compliant, continuing to do business with them is not acceptable. Libraries must either cease working with these vendors or push for their compliance with the new rules.

Archived materials—those not actively in use—are not immediately subject to the new requirements. However, once they are accessed or modified, they must be brought into compliance. The regulation defines covered content broadly, including information, code,

markup, content structure, presentations, interactions, text, images, sounds, videos, controls, animations, and conventional electronic documents.

Michael said that many PDFs currently do not meet compliance standards. There is some debate—likely to be clarified through future legal cases—about whether the regulation applies to materials requiring user authentication. This raises questions about interlibrary loan systems, firewalls, and internal documentation for an organization's employees. Libraries must ensure that anything available electronically is accessible by April. Michael introduced the topic to gauge how others were responding and thinking about these changes.

A question was asked about the target date being April 2026. Straatmann said that there's a rolling series of dates, with some of the larger institutions having earlier deadlines. The library's web developers are working to tag everything, addressing one of the main issues with PDFs, which often aren't computer-compliant. Ensuring basic accessibility involves things like adding appropriate headers and making the content usable by technology. The process can vary, especially for images, tags, and sketches, particularly in image databases. For example, there are thousands of slide images that may have been included in the UNL Digital Commons and institutional repositories.

Someone mentioned that their web developers are focusing on materials that are part of their library services content. They also shared that, as they develop materials, they write alt text for every image. They found ChatGPT to be particularly helpful in generating alt text and recommended it as a go-to tool. They are currently working on creating a checklist to guide the process.

Michael Sauers asked if there has been a noticeable response to this. Most centers are already compliant or making quick progress, especially once the language requirements were clarified. However, there are a few outliers, including some large institutions. Christa Porter mentioned that during an NLC steering team meeting, they are reviewing all NLC resources and running a compliance checker twice a week. NebraskAccess and other related pages are performing well. Christa also said that they are examining WordPress sites used by libraries through the NLC, offering assistance to guide libraries through the process of checking their pages. Someone else suggested AccessibilityChecker.org as another useful resource.

State Tax Legislation and Implications for Public Services (local and state)

Rod Wagner said that this topic takes into account the tax legislation enacted during the special session. Governor Pillen has made it clear that reducing property taxes is a priority for him. The legislation addressing this issue was introduced in the 2024 session earlier this year, but it didn't advance. After much discussion and debate, the governor called for a special session. Although the legislation that passed was far from what the governor initially sought, it still introduced significant changes to state law regarding revenue from property and other taxes. Wagner asked what council members have been hearing in their communities, school districts, and other areas, as well as any concerns about current and future budgets.

The discussion covered the challenges of rising operating costs, staff reductions, and sometimes difficult communication between city administrations and the public. Across the state, more budget meetings and discussions are taking place to address increasing expenses without cutting or reducing services. The cost of library collections was also a key topic. While libraries may claim they are maintaining current funding levels, expenses such as subscription fees continue to rise each year. These financial challenges need to be analyzed and communicated with data.

Wagner asked the council, looking beyond budgets, what initiatives or programs they envision for the coming year—things they would like to implement or expand that are not currently being done.

Cali Biaggi mentioned the topic of AI at Doane, which remains somewhat unclear. However, some faculty members are working on a proposal that emphasizes transformative technologies, human-centered approaches, responsibility, inter-disciplinarity, vision, and ethics. While the University aims to innovate in this area, specific plans are still in development.

Joy Harvey shared that Lincoln Public Schools have established an AI career group, which was recently presented to community leadership. The goal is to provide teachers with basic AI training before eventually making the tool accessible to students. She acknowledged that discussions around AI have been challenging. However, she feels that her department, along with the social studies department, has done an exceptional job teaching information literacy, which will be beneficial when working with AI-generated content.

Michael Straatmann said that significant investment is being made in a salary staff survey to better understand how to fairly compensate office service staff, particularly at the entry and intermediate levels. The goal is to gather more accurate data to determine appropriate salary adjustments based on market comparisons.

Laura England-Biggs said that Fremont's HR department is conducting a similar study for all bargaining units across the city. Although the library is part of a bargaining unit, it currently has no members. As part of the process, Laura had to review all position descriptions. She hopes the study will reveal that their compensation is not where it should be and is optimistic that some changes will take place in the coming months.

Rachel Steiner said that 2025 will be a year of transition and adjustment for Omaha Public Library as they work toward opening the new central library in 2026. They are assessing what software upgrades or changes may be needed. The new central library will have nineteen meeting rooms, so they are exploring software solutions for managing reservations and room access. Additionally, they are considering upgrading or migrating to a new, more mobile-friendly Integrated Library System (ILS) and investing in new gate counters.

In 2025, OPL plans to add more staff in preparation for expansion. As they prepare for the move, they have realized the limitations of their automated storage system—it cannot accommodate all their materials, particularly many archival items that do not fit within the designated bins. They need to establish a permanent storage solution. Additionally, much of the artwork from the main library will not fit in the new space, requiring further investigation and planning.

Joy Harvey shared an update on a project involving the archiving and online publication of LPS yearbooks through Issuu.

Laura England-Biggs said that her staff is eager to expand programming, inspired by their new building and its resources. However, they face challenges due to budget constraints and limited staff, making it difficult to increase programming while maintaining regular library services without risking burnout. Currently, they have only one bilingual staff member. A brief discussion took place on the potential use of AI translation tools to assist with tasks such as social media posts and event promotion.

Additionally, there was discussion about procurement and contracts related to eBooks, including sourcing bids, collaborating with the city, pricing considerations, and gathering community feedback on checkouts and access.

**Council Round Tale – Successes and Challenges**

**Allison Reisig** – My challenges align with what we've been discussing all morning—changes to the property tax structure and budget constraints. Here at the college, we've been having some difficult conversations. For the past few years, we've been relying on our reserves, but enrollment is declining. Additionally, our high school dual-enrollment classes are expected to decrease. Over the next ten years, we anticipate losing more high school seniors simply because the population in the Panhandle is shrinking.

At the college level, discussions are underway about hiring freezes and potential program cuts as we work to get our spending under control. We need to cut approximately $900,000 from the budget over the next few years just to break even.

On a more positive note, I've had some successes. I created public dashboards using LibInsight, one of SpringShare's statistical modules, to demonstrate the library's value. My goal is to make it clear to students, the Board of Governors, and the public that we are not wasting money—we are investing in student support and ensuring our services are being utilized.

Another success was the college-wide salary study conducted over the summer. While faculty salaries remained unchanged due to the negotiated agreement, most hourly, part-time, and full-time staff received raises to better align with their actual responsibilities. However, there were no changes for administrators.

**Mandy Peterson** – I've been fortunate to have a supportive rural community for my school library. Just as a reminder, I'm in Shelby. We've been able to develop some great community collaborations. One of them is with a local coffee shop that opened just before summer. I started an activity with middle and high school students and teachers where I hide a tiny boba somewhere in the library. If they find it, they receive a certificate for a free drink at the coffee shop. This has been a great way to build engagement with the library. What's especially interesting is that we're now seeing an increase in students and teachers from that age group visiting the library outside of the game. They seem to have a more positive attitude about being in the library and interacting with the staff, which has been wonderful to see.

Another success came from an elementary student's feedback. He told me that the library was now his least favorite class. When I asked why, he said, "Because it's too short! There's never enough time!" Currently, our library class periods are 30 minutes long for students through fifth grade. Using that feedback, along with other data and curriculum analysis, I was able to advocate for a schedule change. Starting next school year, third through fifth graders will have an hour-long library class instead of just 30 minutes. That student's comment helped push the change forward, allowing us to increase library instruction.

As for challenges, I serve as Nebraska's NSLA delegate to the national organization, AASL. We recently had an incredible delegate meeting filled with great ideas from different states' school library organizations. One challenge I'm facing, which I haven't yet discussed in depth with NSLA leadership (though I've sent an email about it), involves recent legislation out of Rhode Island. They've proposed a bill that would make it illegal to ban books in school libraries. The legislation is available online, and I believe it has been formally introduced since they've already launched a letter-writing campaign in support of it.

I hadn't realized that school librarians could draft legislation and work to get it passed, so I'm now exploring that possibility. I'm trying to determine who I would need to partner with to pursue something similar in Nebraska. I believe organizations like AFCON, NLA, NSLA, the NLC, and the national AASL could form a powerful coalition in advocating for students' intellectual rights and freedom. My challenge is figuring out what already exists in this space and how to build relationships that could lead to meaningful action.

While challenge procedures exist for a reason, school librarians and districts are not required to have a formal challenge process in place—though I believe it is needed. I want to monitor how things unfold in Rhode Island and explore ways we can protect students' intellectual rights here. If we can cultivate strong partnerships to support students' access to information, I don't think we can go wrong.

**Gail Irwin –** My success this period is that the budget we presented to the city council was approved without any issues, which is great news. This summer, we completed our accreditation and achieved a silver-level status. While we have traditionally been at the gold level, I anticipated the change due to decreased circulation and programming, largely caused by ongoing road construction in our town. On a positive note, the highway detour was removed this week. We also conducted a community survey. One of the key requests was for more morning hours. In response, we have extended our morning hours by opening a half-hour earlier. Since I usually work mornings alone, I manage this change unless I am out of the library.

Another success is our book club. For years, we had about eight readers, with five or six attending discussions. This year, participation has grown—we now have 15 or 16 readers, with around 13 attending our discussions. One ongoing challenge is filling a vacancy on the library board. A board member resigned in July, and I spoke with the mayor to encourage the appointment of a replacement at the August city council meeting. I provided a list of potential candidates suggested by the library board, though we did not reach out to them directly, as that is the mayor's responsibility. Unfortunately, despite multiple city council meetings—including one this past Wednesday—the position remains unfilled. By December, it will have been five

months. I have spoken to the mayor multiple times, and a board member has also reached out, but since appointments are made by the mayor and city council, the situation is largely out of my hands.

**Celine Swan -** Some successes: We've been actively building partnerships with our community healthcare group, which has been a great initiative. We also celebrated our 140th anniversary, which was a significant milestone. In October, we hosted a harvest event. We also held a Cookie Monster Storytime, which attracted a diverse group of attendees.

For challenges, we are still working on increasing our FTE (full-time equivalent) staffing. My main concern right now is that Grand Island is experiencing significant growth, with new construction projects, a new mall, a sports facility near the regional hospital, and numerous coffee shops and other businesses. We're not reaching everyone in the community, especially families with children who could benefit from our services. Since we don't currently have a bookmobile or an outreach program, I'd like to find a way to implement something. I spoke with a city grant writer, and she suggested looking into hybrid outreach shuttle vans, which could be a possibility. I feel fortunate for the opportunities we do have, and there are definitely things I'd like to accomplish before I retire.

**Shanna Crosby-Wilson –** Our population at Boys Town includes many children who either struggle with reading or haven't had much exposure to it. Despite this, we have a high school book club, a middle school book club, and a larger club, with 20 to 25 kids participating each week. Through these programs, we're able to provide books for them to keep, which is a wonderful opportunity. One of my biggest challenges is working with our population. While it's not exactly transient, many of the children face difficulties, and as a result, I'm losing a lot of books. It's becoming increasingly difficult to continuously request replacements. We really need a better system for managing this issue.

**Amber Sweetland** – We recently completed our accreditation. When I took over as director in 2020, I had no prior experience with the process, so I had to learn everything from scratch—including new training and understanding the previous director's community needs assessment. At first, it was overwhelming, especially having to compile a 40-page report. However, after attending several trainings and reviewing the examples Christa Porter provided, I was able to navigate the process.

Every year, we hold a major fundraising event, which is the biggest one of the year for us. In addition to that, I'm also on the Farmer's Day Committee for the entire town, where I help organize various activities. This year, for our silent auction, I created book baskets using books I had set aside—especially the popular romance books. We have a local editor who receives a large number of books, many of which end up in book sale rooms. I pulled some of those, added Hot Tamales and other spicy treats, and put together themed baskets. The response was incredible—people were fighting over them, hovering over the auction sheets and anxiously checking how much time was left.

In addition to the book baskets, we received a donation of an under-the-bed gun safe from Ace Hardware, which was another big auction item. Altogether, we raised enough money to purchase a new 3D printer for the library.

A new nonprofit in town, Weeshire Mains, focuses on sensory-friendly and neurodivergent activities involving animals. As part of their efforts, they are working on a U-pick blueberry farm and other projects. Through this partnership, we were able to bring in miniature painting goats to the library, which was an amazing experience.

On the programming side, my adult services assistant director is launching a new book club at the nursing home. The goal is to create a relaxed, engaging space where residents can come in and discuss whatever books they want. It's a simple but meaningful outreach effort, and we're hopeful it will be successful.

On the administrative side, my budget was approved without any issues. However, I did lose one part-time staff member. Interestingly, the rest of my staff asked me not to hire a replacement, assuring me that they would take on the extra workload themselves.

**Rachel Steiner –** At OPL, we are fortunate to have a strong library friends group and a foundation that support us. While we are already well-funded, their additional support allows us to do even more for the community. Recently, OPL received funding from the foundation to enhance the children's areas with new play spaces. Last month, three new play spaces were delivered. Now, both our Millard and Abrahams branches have expanded play areas with functional elements that encourage interactive play. These have been fantastic additions, and the community response has been overwhelmingly positive. At the Florence branch, which is a bit smaller, we installed a train table, which opened this week. We're eager to see how the kids engage with it. Last summer, we surveyed the community to understand what they wanted in these spaces. However, the manufacturing and delivery process was slow, which presented some challenges.

One ongoing challenge is staff retention. Open positions generally get filled, but the issue is that employees don't stay long. I've been conducting a retention study for the past eight months, and we've noticed a pattern: by the time new hires are fully trained and comfortable in their roles, many of them move on. When we're able to have conversations about why they leave, the most common reason is the lack of full-time opportunities. We have significantly more part-time positions than full-time ones, and unfortunately, it's not feasible for every part-time employee to transition to full-time. With the rising cost of living and the need for benefits, this challenge is unlikely to change anytime soon.

I've been studying potential workflow adjustments that might be implement in 2025 to better support staff. While we may not be able to change the part-time/full-time structure, we can explore ways to improve onboarding and training **processes** to help teams feel more supported.

**Michael Sauers** –Do Space has two notable successes to share, both following up on topics mentioned back in July. First, our Memory Lab has been up and running for a few months now, and it's getting far more use than originally expected. We've also been receiving some media attention for it. This morning and again this afternoon, I was featured on Live & Local on Omaha Public Radio discussing the lab. Last week, one of our local TV stations visited, and we're hoping that segment airs soon. The feature included one of our members working on a digitization project, and it was great to hear his story highlighted. Second, our Sustainability Summit is happening next Wednesday. All the details are available on the Do Space website. The event is modeled after Big Talk for Small Libraries, following a successful format: a full day of sessions, with a new speaker every hour. We have speakers from various levels of government and organizations, including the City of Lincoln's Chief Sustainability Officer, Henry Doorly Zoo, Nebraska schools, and more. The final session will feature HDR, discussing library building projects and sustainability efforts.

Looking ahead to this weekend, I'll be heading to Lincoln on Saturday afternoon for an event with Global Ties Nebraska, an organization that works with the State Department on international tours and soft diplomacy initiatives. We're welcoming a group of educators from Burma, Greenland, Israel, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Ukraine, and Spain who are visiting to learn about our educational systems.

One of our biggest changes this year came in September, when our director left. With only about a year and a half left in Do Space's current form, we decided not to fill the position. That means from the CEO down, we are now a nine-person team running Do Space. Myself and one other manager are now overseeing everything, with all staff reporting to the two of us. As part of this transition, we took the opportunity to restructure our staffing model. Previously, we had two departments—Programs and Technology—with separate reporting lines. We've now merged these roles, so that every staff member works across both programs and technology. This redistribution of workloads has been in place for two months now, and it's working out quite well.

Finally, with the upcoming merger, we also reviewed our pay structure. We realized we were slightly under OPL's (Omaha Public Library) pay scale, so we adjusted salaries to match. This not only provided **raises** for the staff but also serves as an incentive for employees to transition into the new organization.

**Joy Harvey –** Things have been going well at LPS. Over the past couple of years, we have successfully rolled out a library curriculum, particularly at the elementary level, and it has been incredibly beneficial. Many other districts across the country have also had access to this curriculum. At the secondary level, we have developed a curriculum that focuses more on collaboration. This has led to an increase in knowledge sharing among secondary classes, allowing them to exchange ideas and programming strategies more than ever before.

We have also introduced broadcasting spaces, and several of our high schools have found great success with them—especially Southeast High School, where students are now engaging in live broadcasting. This has fostered an excellent collaboration between the school library and classroom teachers, enabling students to create projects that tie into their traditional coursework.

We are now expanding this program to Northeast High School and Lincoln High, and we're excited to see how it develops in those locations. Additionally, our Mosaic multicultural book collection, which was first introduced in 2001, had another successful run. The display remained up until the end of October and was well received. We also hosted an all-in class on bookmaking, which, as always, was a great experience for students.

One of the things I'm especially proud of at LPS is our commitment to strong policies. We have well-defined reconsideration and selection policies, ensuring that our collection remains well-curated. Additionally, we provide parents with full **access** to their child's library records, allowing them the option to restrict materials if they choose. This balance of accessibility and parental choice has been a key part of our approach.

**Holli Duggan –** The NLA conference went well, and between that and Ginger Jelinek's departure as executive director, the NLA budget outlook has significantly improved. The association is now in a much better financial position heading into next year. As part of our strategic planning, we have been reviewing next year's budget, and the addition of an administrative assistant will be a great help.

Several new officers will begin their roles in January, and we plan to invite them to our December meeting so they can get a smooth start. Deb Robertson, who leads the Advocacy Committee, is eager to begin planning Advocacy Day. Their meetings continue to take place **every** Wednesday at 4:00 PM, and they are open to anyone who wants to listen in or participate, even if they're not on the committee.

Another exciting development is that **we** now have a volunteer webmaster, which will allow us to update and improve the NLA website. This is a big project, but it has the potential to make communication within NLA much more effective. In the coming weeks, we will be sending out the proposed bylaw changes for voting and will move forward based on the results.

**Cali Biaggi –** Over the summer, I created a library module for our management system**,** Canvas, which was integrated into every section of LAR Lab—a required first-year course for all incoming students. I believe the module was quite successful. As part of the final step, students were required to visit the library and take a selfie, which helped break the ice and made them more comfortable approaching us with questions. It also reinforced the idea that we're approachable and here to help. Another success is that we were included in a proposal I mentioned previously. However, this also presents a challenge, as we are still severely understaffed. Some aspects of the proposal would require additional training and more staff, but with ongoing funding and enrollment concerns, it's uncertain whether the proposal will be approved. This situation can be frustrating because we're constantly encouraged to innovate**,** expand, and take on more responsibilities, yet we're also expected to do so without additional resources or budget.

Additionally, our mail operations are now permanently housed in the library, meaning all students receive their mail here. This has turned into a large-scale campus operation and has resulted in significant space loss within the library. On top of that, the university's call center is

also located in the library, and there are upcoming construction projects that will further impact our space and operations.

**Tammi Thiem –** A challenge I face is effectively getting information out. You post updates on the website, include them in the newsletter, send them through listservs, bring them to meetings, and share them on Facebook, yet inevitably, someone still asks for a workshop or information that has already been provided. When that happens, I often just resend the newsletter or direct them to the existing resources. It's frustrating and repetitive, especially for those who are actively engaged and already aware of the information. Unfortunately, I don't know how to fully solve this issue—you just keep spreading the word and hope it reaches as many people as possible.

On the positive side, one success related to this challenge happens every year—the University of Nebraska Kearney's library endorsement class. As part of an assignment, students are required to contact the regional director to ask about available resources. One of these students, a new library director at Central Community College in Columbus, also serves on my board. I sent her a thank-you card for helping to share information and provide a platform for discussion. Additionally, I was invited to teach again for the University of Nebraska Omaha's Introduction to Library Science class. I always aim to share valuable information there, though many of the students are from out of state, making some aspects less relevant. However, I still encourage them to connect with their own state library systems.

Lastly, one of our community partnerships involves family and community programming, where we actively collaborate with local organizations to enhance outreach and engagement.

**Jennifer Norton –** Our community partnerships are essential to family and community programming. One example is the Fall Festival, which we hosted in partnership with Keep Lexington Beautiful. This event also serves as a fundraiser, where we divide topics between different groups and community members around the library. It included a bake sale, a climate auction, and a free chili meal provided by the Friends of the Library and the Long Beach Club. The bake sale was a huge success, but the climate auction didn't perform as well, so we're re-evaluating that type of fundraiser.

The library also hosts a monthly Family Night throughout the school year, which consistently draws a strong turnout. Last month, we held a Feature Neighbor Family Night, where different community members shared aspects of their home culture, including traditional foods and a performance by the Lord Dance Company. The event brought in 150 attendees, further proving the importance of community partnerships.

In August, Rocio Casanova (our children's and family services librarian) and I presented at the Youth Services Retreat. We also submitted a proposal for Big Talk From Small Libraries, so we're waiting to hear back on that.

Another exciting success is that, thanks to Jessica Chamberlain helping get my name out there, I was elected as the PLTS Section Chair-Elect, and I'm looking forward to stepping into that role.

Staffing: We recently lost a part-time staff member who moved to a different community. However, the upside is that I was able to hire a fantastic new employee—she's bilingual, young, and very enthusiastic about getting involved with children's and family programming.

Story Walk Project: A few years ago, I wrote an LSTA grant for a Story Walk, and although I didn't receive that funding, I've continued fundraising and promoting the project. Unfortunately, I recently learned that the city administrator doesn't think the project is necessary. It seems his main concern is the installation near a sidewalk that already has irrigation lines. This means I'll need to continue advocating and proving its value to the community. On the bright side, two years ago, the assistant city manager gave me the green light, so I'm hoping to make progress next year.

**Laura England-Biggs –** Since July, the library has hosted City Council meetings while their space undergoes renovations. Originally, the renovation was set to last until December 29, but I got some great news yesterday—they may be finished by November 20! That means I might finally get my full meeting room back, which is especially exciting because we've seen an increase in programming despite having one-third of the space permanently set up for the City Council.

Last time I shared an update, I mentioned that my senior office associate left in May. Six weeks ago, I filled the position with one of the most positive, outgoing people you could hope for. She's already digitized and shredded eight file cabinets worth of materials that I've been wanting to tackle for three years—a task I was repeatedly told there was "no time for."

We can't shout it from the rooftops yet, but I can share with this group that we were selected as part of the Public Library Association Digital Literacy Workshop Incentive Grant cohort! This means we'll be offering computer classes, hopefully in both English and Spanish. Plus, we'll be able to give away thumb drives, hold prize drawings, and provide snacks to participants.

About eight years ago, our Library Friends Group started a book club at Dave's Drive-In Liquor Store—a truly innovative idea. The north side of the drive-in is a liquor store, while the south side is the book club space. However, the owner recently decided to cut hours from 72 hours a week to 30, which has led to start charging the Friends Group for half of the internet, credit card fees, and utilities—but not "rent" due to tax implications.

The Friends Group has agreed to cover the costs for a quarter to see how it goes, as they rely on the $1,000 monthly income. If this doesn't work out, the book club may end. Meanwhile, their book nook inside the library brings in only $85 per month, which means we may need to rethink how we request programming support funds (typically $800–$1,000 per year).

This situation has also sparked questions among the staff about whether the Friends Group could extend its hours, especially on Monday mornings when we see higher foot traffic. However, they're proposing hours that may not be effective—Tuesday through Friday, 1:00–4:00 PM, and

Saturday, 10:00 AM–1:00 PM, which tend to be low-traffic times. Additionally, the Friends Group asked what would happen if they dissolved, and I reminded them that, per their bylaws, any remaining funds would go to the library, not to an external community foundation.

The library's meeting room use has skyrocketed, and if anyone is looking for a room reservation solution, I highly recommend WHOFI. It's not on Omaha's scale, but it does a fantastic job of tracking Wi-Fi use and meeting room bookings. WHOFI also offers a statistics tracking platform that directly integrates with the Public Library Survey, so you don't have to manually transfer data from spreadsheets. It costs me less than $175 a year, and they developed these tools in response to library requests.

Finally, I'm incredibly grateful that all my staff now have access to benefits, whether they work 30 or 40 hours per week. This was a huge victory that I fought for last year, and I'm realizing more and more how lucky we are to have secured it.

**Michael Straatmann –** At UNL, distinguishing between successes and challenges can sometimes be difficult, as they often overlap. Right now, we are preparing for our academic program review, which serves as a form of accreditation. This includes a self-study and an external review team from peer institutions. It has been a great opportunity to reflect on the past seven years, which have been quite eventful—between COVID, reorganization, and state budget changes, we've had to navigate significant shifts. This review process has allowed us to evaluate where we are, where we're headed, and what insights we can gain from our peers. However, compiling everything for this review has been a huge undertaking over the past few months.

UNL Libraries is still in the midst of renovations and staff relocations, Things should be in place by mid-spring, creating new opportunities for improved spaces. One major development is the new music library, which is set to open in February. While the collection has been significantly reduced, the new space is beautiful. However, with the retirement of our longtime music librarian, the space will likely function as an unmediated collection area for now. On the other hand, we have no immediate plans to reopen the engineering library. We're exploring alternative approaches to meeting those needs.

Another significant challenge is the impact of recent changes to the *Fair Labor Standards Act* regarding exempt **vs.** non-exempt employees. As a result, we are having to reclassify many staff members**,** shifting them from exempt to non-exempt status. While this change itself isn't overly complicated, the payroll implications have been challenging. Employees who were previously paid 12 times a year are now on a biweekly schedule (26 times a year)**.** Managing this transition and ensuring everyone is paid correctly and on time has been **a** major adjustment. Overall, while these challenges require significant effort, they also present opportunities for growth and improvement.

**Creative Aging Arts Program** – Rod Wagner asked Jennifer Norton to share her experience with the Creative Aging Arts Program, and invited others who have participated to contribute as well. Jennifer said that the program is sponsored by the Nebraska Arts Council through a grant that allows libraries and community spaces to bring in trained artists. These artists can offer

various art-based programs, ranging from theater and music performances to visual arts workshops.

Jennifer's library received grant support this year and implemented the program during the summer reading program in June. The goal of the program is to engage older adults, particularly those who may be isolated, by encouraging social interaction and creative expression. The program helps keep their minds active through artistic activities. For Lexington's program, a visual artist was brought in from Kearney who taught mandala art. While the recommended structure is an eight-week program, they condensed it into five teaching weeks, concluding with a showcase or gallery event, which is a required component of the program. The showcase allowed participants to display their artwork, celebrating their creativity.

Although participation numbers were not high, those who attended enjoyed the experience. Jennifer worked closely with Josh Brown from the Nebraska Arts Council and the artist to shape the program. The grant covered all costs, including the artist's payment and art supplies, making the program completely free for participants and the library. Looking ahead, Jennifer hopes to apply for the grant again, either this year or in the future, and possibly bring in a different artist. She mentioned an artist near Cozad who specializes in barn quilts. Cozad has a notable barn quilt trail, and this artist has previously conducted a program at Lexington Public Library.

Amber Sweetland said that the Kimball Public Library participated in the Creative Aging Arts Program about two or three years ago. Initially, the program reached full capacity, requiring them to cut off registration at 20 participants, the maximum they could accommodate. However, by the end of the program, only nine participants attended consistently for all eight classes. Those who stayed with the program enjoyed it and have already asked her to offer it again. Throughout the course, participants explored three different painting techniques: acrylics, tempera, and watercolors. Amber personally learned a lot from the sessions, even though she already had some art experience. Unfortunately, the closest available artist on the program's list is over two hours away, making it impractical to run the program again at this time. Amber said that when she inquired about the program two years ago, she learned that artists must apply and complete training to become resident artists for the program. However, many artists are reluctant to go through the lengthy application process, which limits the number of available instructors. Additionally, Amber said that she serves as the Community Coordinator for WNPC, where she organizes paid art classes hosted at the library. However, instructors for those classes are not required to go through the same process as those in the Creative Aging Arts Program. While some instructors are willing to work with her, others are simply looking to increase their income, which doesn't always align with the library's needs.

**New Business**

Recommendations and Resolutions – There were none.

Next meetings (2025) – March 17 (Nebraska Library Advocacy Day, July 18, November 21

Adjournment – 1:07 p.m.