

Charting a Future Course for Nebraska Library Services

Focus Groups Summary



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Background

In 1991 the Nebraska Library Commission sponsored *Nebraska Information Partnerships*, a statewide conference involving nearly one hundred people, who were brought together to envision goals and directions for Nebraska library services. A Nebraska Library Futures conference with over 100 invited participants will be held in June 2008 with the intention of bringing fresh perspective to Nebraska library service needs and fostering direction, partnerships and collaboration. Prior to the conference numerous focus groups were held across the state.

Goals of the Conference and Focus Groups

- Develop a shared vision for library and information services in Nebraska.
- Design a blueprint for seamless, customer-centered, life-long access to library and information services in Nebraska.
- Explore how all types of libraries can work together to provide library and information services more efficiently and effectively.
- Educate library staff and boards, public officials, customers, and other stakeholders about library and information services in Nebraska.
- Engage Librarians from all types and sizes of libraries to unite and speak with one voice.
- Foster collaboration among library and information professional organizations, library advocates, including the Nebraska Library Commission and the Nebraska Regional Library Systems, and library resources, in order to improve library and information services for Nebraskans.

The following Focus groups involving library staff and board members, library users, library non-users, and community members were held in these libraries and communities:

- Norfolk Public Library
- Columbus Library Board
- Broadwater Public Library
- Lodgepole - Nancy Fawcett Memorial Library
- Waterloo Public Library
- Eastern Library System DIRECT Meeting - Hooper
- Southeast Library System/CASTL -(Conversation Among Small Town Librarians), Tecumseh
- Burkley Library & Resource Center/DeWitt
- Hebron Secrest Public Library
- Northeast Library System Board
- McCook (primarily media specialists)
- Ainsworth Public Library
- Gibbon Public Library

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- Meridian Library System Board
- Ord Public Library Board & Staff
- Seward Focus Group/Seward Memorial Library Staff
- Holdrege Staff & Board
- North Platte Public Library Employees & School Media Center Employees
- North Platte Media Specialists
- Rushville & Gordon Public Libraries
- Ogallala, Goodall City Library
- Nebraska Library Association Paraprofessional Section Spring Meeting

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP INPUT

Themes: The following general themes emerged from individual responses to the seven focus group questions:

ACCESSIBILITY

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

COLLECTIONS

COMMUNITY VALUES

CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

FUNDING

INFRASTRUCTURE (Buildings, bookmobiles, etc..)

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM & CENSORSHIP

LIBRARY AS PLACE (safe, community hub, social network, etc.)

MARKETING

PARTNERSHIPS/COLLABORATION

PRIVACY & SECURITY (of computer systems and patron information)

PROGRAMMING

STAFFING (recruitment and retention, education, pay, etc.)

SUSTAINABILITY (long term viability of library as institution)

TECHNOLOGY

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SELECTED RESPONSES TO FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. As a customer, staff person, and/or library user what are your expectations of the library?
 - Meet consumer demands
 - Ensure confidentiality
 - Provide competent staff
 - Develop critical thinking skills
 - Provide guidance for information strategies
 - Digital citizenship
 - Develop and maintain community archives
 - Provide remote access/distant learning
 - Serve as a referral agency
 - Provide a place for provocative discussions, challenges

Clean restroom and library, clean and safe environment, people expect safety though it is unrealistic - they see it like a Second Life environment where nothing bad can happen. [The library is] a leveling agent - provides goods and services to those who can't afford to access it on their own - an equalizer - has always been the expectation and it needs to remain - keeping people in the loop.

2. How are the roles of libraries changing?
 - Librarian assumes bigger leadership role in community
 - Distant education role - equipment, facilitator, access to online classes
 - Multi generational expectations
 - Crossing digital divide/balancing
 - Youth services
 - Mentoring programs
 - Customers expect and demand up to date, immediate response
 - Structure of the library itself - can we remain non-profits or do we need to identify other revenue streams? Rent out space? What do we do when the city budgets fall short?
 - New ways to provide service - part of a mall, supermarket, etc. Think of kiosk uses, be part of a community center, doctor's office, etc. Put the library more in the path of people's everyday lives
 - Privatization? Partnering? Private managing?
 - Demand for 24/7 access (drive-up windows, call in for information, web-based services)

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- Personalized training on demand - they want their individual questions and schedules accommodated - creates staffing issues (based on staff knowledge and library finances)
 - Different competition now (large bookstores, Amazon, technology, Google)
3. What are the key trends and issues affecting libraries?
- Population shift from rural to city, bedroom communities
 - Economic development
 - School consolidation
 - Fewer school media specialists
 - Cultural diversity/immigration (attitudes, resources)
 - Home schooling
 - Money (budget and personal spending) going to larger towns
 - Mobility of population
 - No child left behind
 - Return on investment, outcome-based performance
 - Local businesses are being bought out by big corporations - learning to deal with them instead of local folks
 - Café in library
 - Types of Libraries are combining
 - Buildings need to be replaced/reconfigured to accommodate new technologies.
 - Book clubs, community reads, etc. (reading is a more social event than before)

School library media centers do not just provide books and AV equipment anymore. Our schools have added Smart boards, clickers, iPods, document readers, digital cameras and camcorders plus card readers, etc. While maintaining the traditional roles they have played, libraries must also meet the digital needs of their customers. They must provide computers and computer expertise, as well as books and other resources in digital format.

4. What library service needs and wants will you and your community have within the next five years?
- Community / social spaces and the technology that patrons want to be social
 - West Coast population is moving to Midwest and they have different needs.
 - Homeless using library as a base
 - Inability of small towns to maintain library - important in rural state to keep these locations - especially as travel becomes more and more expensive.
 - Haves and Have Nots more obvious - and the Have Nots are more aware of what they don't have!

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- Harder to be active in society - it is more complex, wider gaps exist.
- Youth are used to technology - melt down when there are problems, it is necessary for them to be connected - harder to go back to old methods of finding information (can't tell time on an analog clock or make change themselves).
- Diverse cultures, languages, depending on community jobs - backgrounds are retained plus they are learning about a new culture - we help them to not be marginalized, provide chances to interact with society, their expectation is of being served in their own language and having access to materials in their own language.
- Newest technology
- Education center
- Social networking
- Facility demands
- More money
- Connected with global community
- ADA accessible
- Classes, meetings, web simulcast
- We will be greener
- More emphasis on mobile technology
- Broadcast/pod cast story times
- Self checkout
- Reliable website
- Renew and pay fines online
- Younger librarians
- Homebound service

We need new methods of organizing information/libraries - less of what we have done before, more based on observing their use of materials, looking at things from the customer's points of view - if they "refuse" our way, our training, etc., do we change? How flexible do we need to be?

5. What knowledge, skills and abilities do you and your community need to be successful?
 - Leadership
 - Fundraising
 - Business management/fiscal responsibility
 - Entrepreneurial skills to start and sustain businesses
 - Life skills
 - Keeping up with technology
 - More time for community visibility/teach to stepping out of comfort zone

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- Easy availability for professional advancement
- Schmoozer-salesman, spin doctors, selling the library
- Learning center to teach people worldwide marketing skills
- Strategies for discerning quality information
- More effective marketing on a personal level for rural libraries
- Political savvy ; political advocate
- Hats are: mental health counselor; career counselor; day care provider; interpreter; plumber; computer technician; cleaning personnel; educator, maintenance crew; social service agency; friend, community bulletin board; entertainer
- Copyright issues regarding all the new technology
- Virtual world may be a way to bridge gap with patrons who don't speak English, etc. - more customer-friendly
- How to create viable businesses - new ideas, change with times, marketed well, how to be vital and relevant
- Making the community a place for youth - desirable place to live, good jobs
- State-wide business reference - marketing communities
- Tolerance of diversity. Not just racial or cultural, but even tolerance of "new" people, different ways of doing things. This is an interesting contrast with the acknowledged need for population growth
- Multicultural, bilingual staff, interpreters, translators. ELL classes, multilingual websites, signage, and story times. In-house web administration. Technically smart staff. People skills, conflict resolution, and negotiation. Marketing skills. Evaluation and assessment skills.
- Learn how to read to at least a sixth grade level.
- How to find information on card catalogs, in reference books, from newspapers, at online databases and educated searches on the Internet
- Career and workplace skills information and workshops
- Civil responsibility skills
- Community caring, charity and volunteerism skills
- Health, legal and tax preparation information
- Programs for children, shut-ins, handicapped and the elderly
- A Library director must have good business management and fiscal skills along with knowledge of library materials.

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Librarians need to be knowledgeable not only in the latest technologies and their use, but in most instances must have some basic knowledge of how to keep these technologies running. To do this successfully, librarians must have the ability to partner with each other to share information and expertise and the ability to reach out to other experts in the community to learn and grow.

6. Beyond your community whom do you want or need to partner with to be successful?
 - Local, county, state, federal agencies
 - Private funders, endowments
 - Collaborative efforts with other libraries such as resource sharing
 - Colleges
 - Library associations: NRLS, NLS, NLA, NEMA, MPLA, ALA, OCLC
 - Economic development
 - Museums, historical society
 - Local schools, businesses
 - Area media
 - Home schoolers
 - Law enforcement
 - Regional economic development
 - Virtual partnerships - consortiums for digital rights, etc., shared reference desks so all hours of the day staffed
 - More awareness of health resources like Medline and WebMD
 - Senior groups, AARP, Senior Centers
 - Warren Buffet
 - The library should be promoted and marketed as resource and community partner
 - Continue to be a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Organization. Promoting the library as part of the business community and as a vital business to the success of economic development efforts." (small public library)

In rural areas all communities on a countywide basis need to work together for better library services, including the public school systems and their libraries. I find it amazing that more city/village libraries don't work more closely with the public schools. There seems to be many duplication of services in time of less population and less money available.

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7. Other comments:

- Libraries level the playing field
- Libraries need to be more self-sufficient and not so dependent on government, or at least not dependent on only one agency. Libraries should not lose autonomy - we need to protect this - no strings attached!
- Better service to young adults - a strong need, losing support base when they grow up to be tax-paying, voting adults - easier to focus on the youngest - perhaps younger professionals coming into the field of libraries can relate to them better - older workers have different views of what the library space should be like
- As a profession, we have an incessant need to over-categorize and label everything and everyone - and we assign our expectations to groups of citizens - we need to address patrons as individuals

For more information about the Nebraska Libraries Future Search please visit the Wiki at <http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/wikis/fs/mainpage.ashx>.



Focus group in action at Goodall City Library in Ogallala