

Nebraska State Advisory Council on Libraries

Friday, November 18, 2022 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM (CST)

MINUTES

State Advisory Council members present: Jessica Chamberlain (Chair), Michael Straatmann, Lisa Olivigni, Scott Childers, Laura England-Biggs, Sky Seery, Joy Harvey; Via GoToWebinar: Gail Irwin, Emily Nimsakont, Lisa Irwin, Allison Reisig, Cali Biaggi, Lori Long, David Graber, Rachel Steiner. Commission Staff members present Rod Wagner, Mary Geibel. Christa Porter (via GoToWebinar).

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Jessica Chamberlain 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 March 18, 2022 minutes. Motion approved.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

Reports

Nebraska School Librarians Association

Joy Harvey

Joy reported that Nebraska School Librarians Day was held at Lincoln's North Star High School on October 15. Carolyn Foote, Co-Founder of the Freedom Fighters, was keynote speaker. Carolyn spoke about Working Together: Defending the Right to Read. The Nebraska School Librarian of the Year was awarded to Doug Keel from R.M. Marrs Middle School, one of three middle schools in the Omaha Public Schools District offering a dual language program. Tucker Tejkl was awarded the Distinguished Administrator award.

Nebraska Library Association

Emily Nimsakont

NLA held its Annual Conference on October 5 & 6 in Kearney with over 200 attendees, and which exceeded expectations. At the conference, the NLA board announced that for a trial period the NLA conference will be held every other year. There will be other continuing education activities on the off years. The 2024 conference will be in Kearney and in 2026 NLA will hold a joint conference with the Mountain Plains Library Association. At the beginning of November, the NLA membership voted to approve bylaws changes – the Golden Sower Award committee will be moved to the NLA Level, rather than being in the School, Children and Young People's Section. The Para, Special and Institutional Sections are dissolved, making that official. The Diversity Committee is changed to an interest group. NLA elections are currently underway and voting is open until the end of November.

NLA recently received two awards – The Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska (AFCON) gave its annual Academic Freedom Award jointly to the Nebraska Library Association and the Nebraska School Librarians Association. The NLA also received a commendation from the American Association of School Libraries. Both of these awards were in recognition of NLA's efforts in the most recent state legislative sessions.

Nebraska Library Commission

Rod Wagner

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding allocated to the Nebraska Library Commission through the Institute of Museum and Library Services totaled \$2.4 million. The ARPA funding was budgeted and allocated for a number of projects. Much time and effort were devoted to developing processes and procedures for administration of these funds. Commission staff members are in the final stages of collecting project information and reporting results. The past year also included an evaluation of Nebraska's LSTA Five-Year Plan, an activity that happens every five years. Sally Reed served as program evaluator. The evaluation report was submitted to the Institute of Museum and Library Services by the March 30 due date. Following that, the Commission prepared a new five-year plan for LSTA funding. In addition, the Commission's 2023-2025 state biennium budget request was submitted to the governor and legislature in September.

Christa Porter

Reporting is being completed for the ARPA funding. Some libraries needed extensions for getting invoices submitted or getting their completion reports, or finishing their purchases due to supply chain and various other issues. The IMLS approved an extension for spending ARPA funds to December 31. Today is the deadline for libraries to submit applications for all Library Commission grants. All four of NLC grants are available – CE & Training, Internships, Library Improvement, and Youth Grants for Excellence.

Public Library accreditation was reopened this year following a pause for the past two years due to the pandemic. There were 36 libraries up for reaccreditation and almost all of them are completed. One new library is up for accreditation for the first time, Logan County Library, Stapleton. Christa will hold E-rate workshops for the upcoming year. Big Talk From Small Libraries – the annual conference where all the presenters are from libraries where population served is 10,000 or less – is coming up at the end of February 2023. The conference speakers are open right now. The deadline to submit proposals is December 16. The NLC is the sponsor and host. The online conference is co-sponsored by the Association of Rural and Small Libraries. The conference is a national event with attendees from most states. Christa said that there are also attendees and presenters from outside the US, Canada in particular.

Nebraska Libraries and the Impact of Book and Content Challenges

Jessica Chamberlain introduced the council discussion topic, a topic continued from the previous council meeting. Rod Wagner mentioned the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom's Intellectual Freedom News, a compilation of intellectual freedom and academic freedom related news items and a source for current information. Wagner said the topic is on the agenda to learn from council members what issues and challenges libraries are dealing with and asking how we can be best prepared to respond to those situations as they come up. Wagner mentioned Scott Childer's article in the recent Southeast Library System newsletter that addressed book challenge and censorship issues and incidents.

Laura England-Biggs said that she has that page of the SELS newsletter on her desk. She has received her second challenge in two years. The first concerned a book “My Mom’s Having a Baby”. Laura said the book is a valuable resource for some families and it is not for everyone, but it will stay on the shelf. After more discussion, the individual accepted Laura’s decision. Laura said the second challenge concerned a book that the patron said made her daughter feel uncomfortable. Laura said we don’t segregate books based on content in the fiction section.

Jessica Chamberlain said the Norfolk public library hasn’t had any complaints for over eighteen months. Sky Seery mentioned the North Platte public library hasn’t had any challenges recently, but the newspaper reported that one of the school libraries had “dirty books” and they were removed.

Joy Harvey commented regarding graphic novels that Lincoln Public Schools has developed guidelines that address age appropriate choices. Joy said it is important that the community knows we think about these things and the tools we use.

Laura England-Biggs said that the Fremont library is updating its consideration policy. As written today, a form is filled out then given to the library director and it falls into the abyss. There isn’t a requirement to respond by a certain deadline. There is no redress if the decision is disagreed with. With the new policy, to be presented to the board at the next meeting, the director has fifteen business days to respond. If the decision isn’t accepted, the challenger has ten business days to submit a request to the board.

Scott Childers said that in his view the American Library Association’s position on challenges is outdated. Scott said that someone challenging an item should make a coherent defense of their position on their own without a represented organization because organizations are not who libraries serve. Libraries serve people. Challenges should be treated as a legal defense. Libraries are on the side of the readers. Scott said things have changed in recent years. Political discourse has changed. The response to challenges needs to change. Joy Harvey commented that reconsideration not be brought up by a group. It must be an individual.

Lisa Olivigni said that if certain information is provided, you know what we are up against. A challenger should have to read the book and not be able to cut and paste. If an organization is putting them up to it, we should know about it. Jessica Chamberlain said that is helpful as well. We (Norfolk PL) have left it on our form, not that we are encouraging them to bring it as part of an organization, but if there is backing from certain groups or a national organization, it is helpful to know if the challenge is from a single person or from a group.

Jessica Chamberlain asked if in submitting a challenge the challenge must be from a patron of that library. Do you have to have a library card or have residency in the service area? The Norfolk library doesn’t have that on its form.

Lisa Olivigni said that if you are supporting the library and paying taxes, you should have the right to say something, not if you are someone from outside the library’s service area. Lisa gave an example from Lincoln City Libraries. LCL has a committee that includes supervises and staff. There was a recent internal challenge by a staff member. The committee wanted to be sure procedures were followed since it was an internal challenge. The challenge involved a book about transgender issues. Discussion

considered other books about gender. Some wanted to place the book in a different section. A concern was finding the book if that were done. Lisa said that moving the book would be self-censoring. Parents have the right to choose what their kids read.

Jessica Chamberlain asked if it would be helpful to have an intellectual freedom statement from the advisory council. Joy Harvey said the council should make its stance clear. Jessica suggested a statement supporting the Library Bill of Rights and a statement endorsing other statements that have been written in response to content challenges. Scott Childers said that if the Library Bill of Rights is evoked, he would like to evoke the First Amendment directly because some of the challengers likely don't trust librarians. We need to evoke resources outside librarianship as well.

Jessica said that one of the things we are standing behind and that we endorse is the First Amendment right as explained in the Freedom to Read statement and the Library Bill of Rights, that the libraries are here to present that constitutional right. Jessica said that it would be good to have, as the Nebraska State Advisory Council, a statement like that, coming from the council as an entity, where we stand on that issue.

Jessica suggested creation of a sub-committee to develop a statement. Jessica asked if anyone would be interested in serving on a sub-committee. In response, Allison Reisig, Scott Childers, Laura England-Biggs, and Jessica Chamberlain will work on a council statement between now and January.

Library Staffing Shortages

Rachel Steiner said that turnover was crazy last year. Rachel mentioned all the time taken to train new staff, get them up to speed, and then a few months later they are gone. Rachel said she has hired more librarians in the last two years than in the prior eight.

Michael Straatmann said UNL has the same problem in national level searches for doctoral positions, where the pools are smaller. It is a tough labor market right now, for many reasons.

Laura England-Biggs commented that she has had five part-time vacancies for over a year and half. Laura has filled one and another is on the way. Part-time staff recently received a pay increase to \$13 per hour in the latest budget.

Sky Seery said that the North Platte public library is considering how they advertise positions. Sky is dropping the newspaper for job searching and going other routes.

Lisa Olivigni said Lincoln City libraries is not having much turnover, but when they do, HR decides when positions are filled. One of the things all Lincoln branches do is have everyone work one night a week and weekends.

Allison Reisig asked if some of the libraries get pay differential if staff work evenings and weekends. Some said they do and some do not.

2023 Preview for Libraries and Library Services

Rod Wagner said there will be sixteen new state senators out of forty-nine this coming year, and a new governor. There will be changes in the legislature's leadership and committee membership.

The Library Commission's biennium budget request includes a funding increase for OverDrive libraries, since that service continues to grow. The consortium now includes 190 libraries and borrowing activity has significantly increased. State funds are currently allocated to the OverDrive libraries consortium and the Lincoln, Omaha, and Ralston public libraries. Funds are allocated based on library service area populations. A request for increased funding for regional library systems, state aid to public libraries, and NebraskAccess subscription databases are also included.

Wagner said that federal funding through the Library Services and Technology Act Grants to States Program has been flat for the past several years. The federal fiscal year began on October 1 without appropriations made for the full fiscal year. A continuing budget resolution funds federal agencies and programs through December 16. By then, congress will either need to enact appropriations bills to fund through the remainder of the federal fiscal year, or further extend temporary funding.

Council Round Table – Successes and Challenges

Jessica Chamberlain read **Stephanie O'Connor's** report that Stephanie sent from Alliance – In 2023, the Alliance public library plans to increase the library's funding for Overdrive advantage titles. The library has active partnerships with local health care agencies to further assist patrons in terms of health information. Library successes include a new skylight and an HVAC replacement project that has begun. The Alliance library foundation is having a successful fund raising season. Challenges include finding support to finish the library's 12,000 sq. ft. basement for use as a children's library. Stephanie said that the city has three newly elected council members who she believes will be supportive. Stephanie hopes there will be an opportunity to bring back a live version of the Basic Skills courses for Nebraska's panhandle librarians. Stephanie said she was able to do her initial certification with this option and felt like she learned much from the courses. She said she would be willing to help teach courses in Alliance when she finishes her MLS degree.

Scott Childers – There are some personnel changes in the southeast region – Dvoracek Memorial Library in Wilbur. Gerry Powers is retiring in December. Holly Baber has been hired as Gerry's replacement. Librarians are looking into policies, not just books, but other types of challenges. More and more libraries are having frank discussions with their cities about how things work, as far as state laws and the cities responsibilities and who is in charge of what. Scott commented concerning the return of the live basic skills courses. He said he has heard comments from some of librarians that they would appreciate some live networking. Scott said it is a big undertaking to develop basic skills over two weekends, but there is much more interest because people are tired of Zoom.

Lisa Olivigni – A success for Lincoln is the start of construction of the new Williams branch facility in Airpark. The branch is scheduled to open in the spring of 2023. Effort is continuing to increase branch library hours for the new facility, currently limited to 28 hours per week. Lisa said that with the new facility, it is possible to be open different hours. Currently, as part of the school, the library is limited to evenings and weekends. Another success is getting closer to having two new bookmobiles. The city administration is on board to downsize from one huge vehicle, which requires a CDL and limits the

number of staff that can operate it, to two smaller vehicles. One will be electric and will be used in town and the other one with regular fuel will be used in the county. Lisa said that staffing challenges include having positions open for extended periods of time. While those hours can be used for other staff, not everyone wants to work extra hours. Lisa said that a new director will begin in December.

Michael Straatmann. – The new architecture library opened a day ago. It is a much smaller space than the previous one, downsized to 3 floors and 10,000 volumes. The music library will start renovation in December. In the interim, most of the collection will be moved, except for a small collection that will stay and the rest placed in storage. Work is underway for a new capital campaign. We're looking at different options for the program statements and archiving special collections, plans for storage and more direct support for research areas. A lot of that is a result of strategic organization. UNL transitioned from an incremental budget model to a responsibility center. Therefore, you would have to potentially show that you definitely need the money, as opposed to the 2% more than last year. That was supposed to happen right before the pandemic, so we've been moving our way to it, we've been getting grace periods about fully transitioning this year. We are going to be all in as the unit that does not produce revenue, only consumes revenue.

Lisa Irwin – One success is that our kids entered a national song-writing contest. Using sound software, they had to write, produce and perform their song. We had a local contest, submitted our top three, and were excited that one of our songwriters got a perfect score from one of the national judges. We didn't end up in the top three of the national contest, but we were excited because our kids really put in a lot of effort stepping out of their boxes and writing songs. We had kids writing raps that were performed and had kids singing and being recorded. All our kids are adjudicated youth, so this was a great opportunity for them to try out technology and put themselves out there for people to hear. This is both a success and a challenge – we have a 3D printer now and it will be our next big project. Getting all our kids using the printer with Tinkercad software will be similar to the Boy Scout wooden car races. The kids will be making 3D balloon driven racecars and have a contest for that next.

Joy Harvey – if you really want to know what's going on with Lincoln Public Schools library media services, you can follow us on Twitter or Facebook; we have both. Joy said it is fun and LPS has two guys who make incredible videos highlighting what's happening in the district's schools. Joy said a video was needed about citizenship for the Educational Service Unit. Lincoln has a new high school opening. LPS library services is in the process of hiring a librarian for the Standing Bear High school. The school will look very much like the Northwest High School building. It will have an extremely open library space. This is just a fun fact, that by the end of the year, we should have one million in OverDrive checkouts.

Jessica Chamberlain – An important challenge is Karen Drevo, our youth services supervisor is retiring and has been with the library for 35 years. We are recruiting for this position now. Our success is, we are starting a Community History Archive with our local museum and adding historical documents to our archive in partnership with the museum. The museum received grant funding, so they will be adding some historical maps and other items. The library foundation contributed funds to add some “razzle dazzle” to our kids' area. We have some new fun things coming in for that including a kid's play car that they can sit in. We are getting a puppet theatre and a marble sensory panel for the wall.

Sky Seery – The North Platte library is moving forward with facilities management. Sky said the city administrator arranged for a new roof for the library. The city council also approved the elevator and library automation project. The challenge is that there is a lot remaining to be done with the building. Sky said the city has good leadership and a good vision.

Laura England-Biggs – With compilation of the 2021-22 fiscal year end statistics being compiled for the Public Library Statistical Report, Laura looked back to the 2018-19 statistics (pre-pandemic) to compare numbers. The library had a 17% increase in circulation and a 200% increase in OverDrive loans. The library had a 57% increase in Wi-Fi use, a 200% increase in outreach, a 2,000% increase in web visits. OverDrive is now linked within the catalog. Laura calculated the library's return on investment in 2018-19 at \$2.6 million. This year it is \$2.4 million on a slightly larger budget. In 2018-19, searches, not sessions, were counted for database use. The library's construction project is moving forward. A temporary location was opened six days earlier than planned. In regard to challenges, Laura said that the construction project is a challenge but is moving forward. There were some issues moving to a new phone system and getting wireless phones. Hiring challenges and fundraising – Laura said that \$7,581,259 of the needed \$9,403,224 in funding for the project has been raised. An additional \$1.5 million on top of that is expected based on construction cost increases. Over 200 fundraising letters were recently sent to previous donors and others.

Rachel Steiner – successes for Omaha – a contract was approved for a new mobile library, expected to be available by the new year. The departure from the downtown library presents a number of challenges. Other places and spaces are needed. The library holds a Jane Austin Tea every December. The library provides the place and refreshments. A new location is needed for that event. The library also has a storybook land every year with costume characters with 3-4 sessions. Another success is moving the entire main library to an old shopping center. The library's downtown branch is being renovated. It's a 1900-1920s building and library staff members have a lengthy checklist of work to be performed. Omaha library will be opening a new downtown branch in the spring of 2024. The downtown main library is completely disassembled. Rachel said the library's budget needs funding for thirteen branches and possibly fourteen, adding that one closer to the southwest part of the city is needed.

Gail Irwin – A success is getting a fiber connection installed this fall. The city has an arrangement with the cable company that they give right-of-way for their cable and then the city departments get free service. The other city departments were installed in June and the library went all summer without fiber installation. Gail said there were a few problems that took six weeks to get resolved. Gail is working on getting the digitized newspapers back up online. Another success is a book basket fundraiser. The library is working in conjunction with the hospital's chili cook-off event. The library and foundation board will be providing finger food. The library will auction off 40 donated baskets by patrons and businesses. The proceeds will be used for updating outside lightning around the library. A significant challenge has been the highway 20 construction project. Business has been slower at the library because of lengthy detouring to get to the library. Parents are rightly concerned about their children crossing the highway. In 2024, construction work will be done on highway 7, the city's main street and again affecting traffic to the library.

Allison Reisig – It has been a busy semester. Allison said the library has been able to re-implement some evening and weekend hours, so the library was able to hire a part-time staff member. Now the library has 2.5 FTE on staff. Weekend hours will be reassessed because the library is currently open

10am to 2pm. Most of the traffic has been in the afternoon. One challenge is a perennial one. Allison said that, as a two-year college, they have a quick turnover in students, and also turnover of staff. The library is working hard to market the library's services to students and employees making sure they understand what is available and what they can use. Allison said she has been meeting with the college's PR marketing department and they have many competing priorities. The library tends to fall low on that list, which is frustrating but also understandable in that marketing the college's programs to new students is more important than marketing library services to current students. Enrollment has been a struggle for all colleges at this moment. A continuing challenge is being pressured to do more with less – more services with fewer staff, and with budget staying flat.

New Business

Recommendations and Resolutions

There were no recommendations or resolutions brought before the Council.

Special Recognition

Rod Wagner recognized and thanked council members completing their 2nd terms – Scott Childers, Lori Long, Dana Morgan, Lisa Olivigni and Sky Seery. Each were presented a certificate of appreciation and an Admiralship in the Great Navy of the State of Nebraska.

Upcoming Meeting

Jessica Chamberlain said the next meeting will be in March, date to be determined. Rod Wagner said that the meeting date might be set to be held with the Nebraska Library Association's Library Advocacy Day.

Adjournment was at 12:44 pm.