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Registration for the 13th PLA National Conference opens in early September.

Join PLA in Portland, Oregon, a city that continually tops travel destination lists, for the 13th PLA National Conference, March 23-27, 2010. The biennial National Conference is the premier event for the public library world, drawing librarians, library support staff, trustees, Friends, and library vendors from across the country and around the world.

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- More than a hundred high-quality educational programs, preconferences, talk tables, and special events
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Visit www.placonference.org for information about registration, conference programming, special events, travel, and insider tips on everything the Conference and Portland have to offer.

Join PLA!
Registration opens in early September. Only PLA and Oregon Library Association members can take advantage of our lowest registration fee – $195, compared to ALA members who pay $275 and non-members who pay $330. For more information about all of the benefits of PLA membership, visit www.pla.org or call 800.545.2433, ext. 5PLA.

www.placonference.org
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Editorial Note

Dear readers:

Welcome to “The Economy Issue.” All of the articles and columns in this issue focus on today’s libraries coping with our current economic situation. “No Easy Targets” examines how libraries across the country have been affected, “Tightrope Walk” shows how to carefully and zealously advocate for funding, and “Public Libraries and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act” details how your library can gain access to funding that will become available through this program. We hope you will find some helpful information to guide you and your library through these turbulent times.

In other news, we are looking for a new “By the Book” editor—check out page 52 for details.

As always, please let us know your thoughts, comments, questions, etc.

Kathleen M. Hughes, Editor, khughes@ala.org

Kathleen is reading A Cat Among the Pigeons by Agatha Christie.

New PLA Products for Your Library’s Youngest Patrons

“100 Picture Books to Read in Kindergarten” and “75 of the Best Books for the Very Young” are two new poster kits available from PLA. Created by the West Bloomfield Township (Mich.) Public Library, the posters are available in packs of 25 for you to share with your young readers.

“100 Picture Books” lists some of the very best picture books to read aloud to kindergarten-age children. The list includes well-loved classics as well as quality contemporary books. It is designed so books can be checked off as they are read. Includes parent guide and bookmarks. Product number 2009-0001; list price $75 (per pack of 25).

“75 of the Best Books” lists some of the very best board books and picture books to read to children from birth through preschool. The list includes classics, books that teach important concepts, stories to sing, books with rhyme and rhythm, and books for bedtime. Includes poster-use guidelines and stickers to add as books are read. Product number 2009-0002; list price $55 (per pack of 25).

Both are available from the ALA Store (www.alastore.ala.org).
News from PLA

Join PLA in Portland!
The PLA National Conference is the premier professional development event for public librarians, public library staff, trustees, Friends, library vendors, and others with an interest in public libraries. PLA 2010 will provide opportunities to learn new ideas, share success stories, hear best practices, and meet colleagues from across the county and around the world.

Mark Your Calendar
PLA’s 13th National Conference will be held March 23–27, 2010, in Portland, Oregon. Registration opens in early September 2009. Registration rates are as follows:

Early Bird Rates (deadline December 18)
PLA and Oregon Library Association (OLA) Members—$195

Advance Rates
PLA/OLA Personal Member—$225
ALA Personal Member—$275
Nonmember—$330
Student—$90

Visit www.placonference.org for updates and more information.

New PLA Publications

2009 PLDS Report
The Public Library Data Service Statistical Report 2009 is now available in either print format (List price: $120; ISBN-10: 0-8389-8508-4; ISBN-13: 978-0-8389-8508-3) or as a subscription database ($250 for a year-long subscription). This year’s report contains a special survey on facilities. For more information visit www.pla.org. The print version is available from the ALA Store (www.alastore.ala.org); the database must be ordered from PLA (www.pla.org).

The PLA Reader for Public Library Directors and Managers

The first in a new series that is designed specifically for busy public library professionals. PLA staff and PLA committee members worked together to choose key articles, culled from the pages of Public Libraries and from chapters of bestselling PLA books. Each chapter tackles one of the prevalent topics faced by today’s public libraries. They address issues such as advocacy basics, tips for retaining and motivating high-performing employees, learning more about library communications, a discussion of intellectual freedom matters, the latest topics in reference, brief entries on technology, and more.

To order call (866) NS-BOOKS, fax (866) 209-7932, or purchase online at www.neal-schuman.com/plar.

Libraries Prosper: A Guide to Using the PLA Advocacy Toolkit

The first in PLA’s new Train the Trainer series, this electronic publication (available from the ALA Store, www.alastore.ala.org) supports the PLA publication “Libraries Prosper with Passion, Purpose, and Persuasion: A PLA Toolkit for Success.” This guide will enable library trainers to:

- create a sample advocacy plan for a library;
- adapt the general training agenda and materials to support the learning objectives for specific target audiences;
- explain each of the sections of the toolkit to learners from a variety of target audiences;
- answer questions relating to the materials from training participants;
- provide concrete local examples of how each of the resources in the toolkit might be used;
- lead general discussions and manage group interactions;
- organize and manage effective small-group discussion and reporting processes; and
- evaluate the effectiveness of training programs they present.
Libraries Key to Economic Recovery

Not long ago, there were predictions that libraries would become unnecessary. The Internet, television, mega-chain bookstores, and the Starbucks phenomenon were supposed to make libraries irrelevant and render librarians extinct. It was also thought that libraries could never be destinations for anyone hip or interesting. But the reality is that today, public libraries are catalysts for building social capital and cornerstones of community sustainability. We are active and responsive agents for social and economic change. In the future, we will play an important role in community reinvestment and recovery as well.

Our ability to adapt to meet the needs of our communities has made us more relevant than ever. Homework centers, afterschool programs, computer instruction, developmental education programs to prepare adults for formal learning, and small-business training have all become standard components of the community-based education service provided by today's public libraries. We have been early adopters of critical childhood education programs. For instance, Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) @ your library—a collaboration between PLA and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC)—has developed and trained librarians across the country to partner with parents and prepare children for success in the classroom. Through programs like ECRR, public libraries help establish the building blocks for twenty-first-century learning.

Workforce programs have become a cornerstone of our community service efforts. Job seekers are turning to us for help with their résumés and cover letters, to find work, open e-mail accounts, take advantage of our free computer access, and apply for jobs online (currently, less than 44 percent of the top 100 U.S. retailers accept in-store paper applications).1 By offering career counseling, assessment tests, résumé writing, job search support, and computer training we are helping put them back to work. For cities and counties to rebound from this recession, they will need to have economic growth and job opportunities. They will also need an educated workforce equipped to use today's technologies and solve problems through creative and innovative ideas.

In 2008, our nation's public libraries reported double-digit increases in computer use.2 This upward trend will only continue. It is for this reason that broadband, a component of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009,3 is a critical commodity for public libraries. High bandwidth is a must. Our customers need speedy Internet connections to access online education and training; download materials, applications, and forms; and use social
networking tools and streaming media. In addition, we must leverage our broadband and wireless capacity to attract businesses to our communities.

Public libraries are also playing an important role as our nation recovers from the current economic downturn. Across the country, many libraries have launched economic literacy programs to inform consumers and help protect them from financial disaster. Others are offering free investor education, seminars for individuals facing foreclosure, and counseling for those living on fixed incomes.

As we adapt our services to meet customers' needs we must not lose track of our core value—to ensure the future of a literate society. Public libraries must continue to nurture and sustain the reading public amidst a growing multitude of new technologies and media that are vying for the public's time. We must continue to encourage people to—in the words of President Obama—"turn off the television and read."4

In the New York Times, venture capitalist Michael Moritz said, "I rarely read business books. I try to vary my reading diet and ensure that I read more fiction than nonfiction."5 In the same article, Shelly Lazarus, the chair and chief executive of Ogilvy & Mather said, "As head of a global company, everything attracts me as a reader, books about different cultures, countries, and problems. I read for pleasure and to find other perspectives on how to think or solve a problem."6 These admissions by top executives illustrate a fundamental truth—that the pleasures and benefits of reading are universal and immense. In our roles as reading advocates, we must work to build a good feeling about reading within our communities and remove artificial barriers in order to engage our customers and connect them with books.

Never before has the public library been so critical to the health and vitality of our nation. Never before have the media, government, and our customers held such high esteem for the services we provide. Yet, never before have we had more difficulty balancing our spending. We must find ways to meet the needs of our users and keep books as our brand, while allowing for the cost of new technologies and interior spaces capable of accommodating the full spectrum of our customers' needs. We must also be prepared to respond to increased social networking, to build more robust virtual libraries, and to create digital information and collections rather than just storing and providing access. The physical library and the virtual library must remain at the center of the community and create an equally vibrant environment.

Together we must leverage our new notoriety and use it in our advocacy efforts. We must remind our government officials and customers that free access is not free and that public libraries provide a great return on their investment. PLA has recognized the value of advocacy and government relations through its Turning the Page training programs and the toolkit, “Libraries Prosper with Passion, Power, and Persuasion,” both of which provide new value to our members. In addition, PLA Communities of Practice offer new opportunities to connect with colleagues nationally to share best practices including advocacy efforts.

I hope you will reach out to me as your president and your colleague. I encourage you to contact me through Facebook—where I intend to become the public librarian with the most friends in the world—and also through Twitter. Keep in touch.

References and Notes


3. According to the Federal Communications Commission, the Broadband Initiatives funded in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 are intended to accelerate broadband deployment in unserved, underserved, and rural areas and to strategic institutions that are likely to create jobs or provide significant public benefits. See www.fcc.gov/recovery/broadband for more information (accessed May 22, 2009).


6. Ibid.
“Tales from the Front” is a collection of news items and innovative ideas from libraries nationwide. Send submissions to the contributing editor.

Contributing Editor

JENNIFER T. RIES-TAGGART is Executive Director, Brighton Memorial Library, 2300 Elmwood Ave., Rochester, NY 14618; jtaggart@libraryweb.org.

Jennifer is reading Sepulchre by Kate Mosse, Swine Not? A Novel Pig Tale by Jimmy Buffet, and Drood: A Novel by Dan Simmons.

Libraries Lend Free Hand to Those Struggling in Bad Economy

It’s a familiar story: When times are tough, library use goes up. The media has been full of variations on this theme for the past year.

Libraries of the North Suburban Library System (NSLS) in Illinois are reaching out in these tough economic times. NSLS is a consortium of more than 650 academic, public, school, and special libraries in north suburban Cook, Kane, Lake, and McHenry counties. It is one of nine multi-type Illinois library systems funded by yearly grants from the Illinois General Assembly and the office of Jesse White, the secretary of state and state librarian.

Paula Moore, executive director of the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, reported:

Our focus has been on people who have lost their jobs. We created a “Start Your Job Search Here” service with several components. The first is staffing a separate jobs desk in the middle of the library on weekday afternoons. A reference librarian suggests job websites and other career information and talks about the classes and programs we are offering. In the first week, with no advertising, we served over eighty people. Several had tears in their eyes. The second component is a checklist for people who have lost their jobs, created by business specialist Barb Vlk. It outlines six positive actions for job seekers, including how to apply for unemployment, which is a first-time experience for many people in this economic climate. The third component is an array of special programs and computer classes. These include support groups, networking opportunities, and computer instruction on how to set up a free e-mail account. To make the library more accessible, staff members have volunteered to park in a nearby church parking lot to free up spaces for our customers. Making it a library-wide effort helps both our staff and public see the value of their public library in action.

Linda Weiss, executive director of the Niles Public Library, said:

In March, we began a series of fourteen workshops and programs called “How to Survive a Troubled Economy.” This series includes programs and seminars on a variety of topics, including help with finding a job, money saving, and financial issues. We have partnered with community businesses, agencies, and organizations, and most of this series is being provided at no charge. The response has been very good and we have had a number of calls from other agencies and organizations who would like to present something as part of the series. We will continue this effort through this year.
Several libraries in the system have had a Food for Fines program, donating collected food to local food pantries. The Algonquin Area Public Library had a fines amnesty. “The amnesty allowed individuals and families that have incurred fines to clear their records and once again have access to our great collection of books and audio/visual products,” Executive Director Randall Vlcek said.

For more information, contact Judy Hoffman, NSLS marketing/communications specialist, at (847) 353–7137.

**San Diego County Library Launches Live Online Job Assistance during Tough Economic Times**

Brainfuse.com, one of the nation’s leading providers of online tutoring to schools and libraries, announced the national launch of JobNow at the San Diego County Library (SDCL). This breakthrough online service gives job seekers on-demand access to trained career coaches and job resources. JobNow’s free professional services are available through SDCL’s website (www.sdcl.org); just click on the JobNow banner. Job seekers simply need a free SDCL card to enter the site.

JobNow is the first service of its kind to provide live career coaching from any computer with Internet access. Services available through JobNow are live interview coaching, with interview tips and resources; a résumé lab with sample templates, along with résumé analysis within twenty-four hours by a JobNow expert; assistance with writing cover letters; and a career resource library that includes links to current job openings locally and nationally, as well as career and personality assessment instruments. For more information, contact Nancy Saint John at (858) 694–3833.

**Southern Nevada Library District Opens Branch in Mall**

When most think of a trip to the mall, all the new things they might spend money on come to mind—clothes, housewares, and maybe having lunch with friends. In Henderson, Nevada, however, locals are now thinking about what library book they might check out next.

Henderson District Public Libraries (HDPL) recently celebrated the grand opening of its newest branch, the Galleria Library—located within the Galleria at Sunset Mall.

The joint project between the Galleria and HDPL is a one-of-a-kind in Southern Nevada and a rare concept throughout the country—usually because mall retail locations are too expensive for libraries. However, the Galleria offered HDPL the 1,300-square-foot space at a rate it could afford.

“Although rare, mall library locations are a proven model that works,” said HDPL Executive Director Tom Fay. “They are known best for attracting an entirely different demographic than that of traditional libraries, and we are looking forward to introducing the library to those who might not otherwise have set foot in one.”

The district issued 80 new library cards, checked out 180 items, and set aside 19 items on reserve for patrons during its first 15 hours of operation.

The branch is used for checking out popular bestsellers and high interest books. It also has space for family literacy programming that focuses on pre-K literacy skills. There are a small number of computers reserved for accessing the online catalog, but no public-access computers due to limited space. Instead, wireless Internet access is provided within the branch and can also be accessed in the mall within a range of approximately three hundred feet.

For more information on HDPL, visit www.mypubliclibrary.com or call (702) 492–7252.

**Libraries Now Have Laptops for Student Use**

Children and teens ages eight to seventeen can now check out laptop computers to do their homework at Grissom, Main Street, and Pearl Bailey libraries in Newport News, Virginia. The new program, Learning on Laptops (LOL), was funded by a $143,450 congressionally directed grant awarded to the Newport News Public Library System (NNPLS).

Each library has twenty laptops for students to check out during specified time periods and for use only inside the library. The program also includes technology classes and assistance for students. Grant money also was used to purchase technology equipment for library use.

In order to use the laptops, students need a permission form signed by a parent, proper identification, and a library card in good standing. Laptops may be used inside the library for up to two hours.

For more information, contact Community Relations and Programs Coordinator Karen L. Gill at (757) 926–1357 or e-mail kgill@nngov.com.
Three Views

During difficult economic times, public libraries often see an increase in circulation and use. According to *Library Journal*, circulation in libraries is up 5.6 percent this year, as people look for more economical ways to spend their free time. During this period of mass layoffs and business closings, job seekers are also turning to public library computers to search for work and create résumés. Unfortunately, the increase in circulation and use is often not met with an increase in funding. Many libraries have suffered budget cuts this year and are looking at even further cuts over the next two years. Librarians are left to fill the needs of their patrons with less staff and less funding. We have asked three colleagues to talk about how the economic climate has affected their libraries and the services they provide. Perhaps by reading their responses, you will get some ideas for weathering the storm.

Dianne Harmon, Associate Director for Public Services, Joliet (Ill.) Public Library

Public Libraries: What’s the biggest way the economic recession has affected your library?

DH: More people are visiting the library and checking out an increasing number of items. We’re up more than 15 percent from last year and some months our main library building has been up almost 25 percent. We hear comments about patrons looking for low cost or free things to do. We also have increasing complaints about fines for overdue materials. Our frontline circulation staff has full authority to make decisions about fines and they report a big increase in patron demands about waiving fines and renewing materials. Those demands are usually followed by a story about money problems, job problems, family problems, etc. We noticed this increase starting a few years ago and began offering staff training in dealing with this problem. The jump in this type of behavior has been remarkable in the last year, so we are again offering staff workshops on confronting change to help staff better deal with irate behavior.

PL: Have you had any staffing cuts or reduction in hours?

DH: No, but we’ve been doing this [working with less staff] for years. We
evaluate workflow fairly frequently and that tends to result in a scheduling reassessment for most departments. We put all books returned (all materials actually) on book trucks and place them on the public service floor where patrons will find them easily. At times we’ve put signs on the book trucks saying something like “check these out” and we tell patrons that anything they check out from a book truck means someone doesn’t have to shelve it. We’re gearing up our volunteers again and take shameless advantage of any of their talents or skills. We do not allow volunteers to see any patron information so we edit our daily “pick lists” so volunteers can go into the stacks to find items that have been requested. We do not have enough staff available to supervise many volunteers so we also take advantage of something temporary that a volunteer can do—sometimes it’s taking digital pictures of programs that their children are attending so we can use the pictures on our website. Our local high schools require community service of graduating seniors so we can get groups of them asking what they can do. They can contribute by making displays, processing deleted items from the collection, helping with crowd control at various programs, helping with crafts for kid programs, etc.

**PL:** Have you noticed a change in the way patrons are using your library as a result of the recession?

**DH:** We’ve seen a definite increase in people looking for jobs and needing to use library computers. We also see an increase in the number of patrons who spend more time each day at the library. Some of them are homeless but many of them are out of work and need someplace to go to get out of the house. We’ve also seen an increasing number of people who comment that they haven’t been to the library in many years so they need an introduction to our services. Many of them have no idea what is possible so staff are becoming quite adept at reference interviews in all library departments and those interviews turn into mini workshops on Basic Library 101. While we offer self check and self pickup of holds to make life easier for our regular patrons, we find that new patrons really need staff interaction. New patrons then have a chance to find answers to questions they didn’t know how to ask. We also see an increase in people using the library website—at least we get feedback quite quickly if we change something that they don’t like as well as an increase in suggestions about what we can do for them. One of the odd things I’ve noticed through the website is an increase in the number of authors asking us to buy their new books.

**PL:** Are you offering new programming to help your patrons weather the recession?

**DH:** We are now offering workshops on looking for a job, writing résumés, interviewing skills, and programs on living frugally—programs on couponing, growing your own garden. The free tomato plant giveaway was a big hit as five hundred heirloom tomato plants were gone in just over twenty-four hours.

**PL:** Have you tried any public awareness campaigns that have worked to bring additional support or revenue to the library?

**DH:** We were just able to hire a community outreach/marketing person last fall and have not been able to get a true campaign off the ground yet. We have increased our presence at various community events and think we’ve noticed good responses. We are a city library and our city has just been hit with a large budget deficit so mentions of more revenue bring more snarls than smiles. So we continue to find ways to tell our story throughout the community.

**Luren Dickinson, Director, Shaker Heights (Ohio) Public Library**

**PL:** What’s the biggest way the economic recession has affected your library?

**LD:** We are more cost conscious than we have been in years. We are evaluating virtually every expenditure and giving consideration to whether we will refill a position or not when it becomes vacant. Our materials budget has probably taken the biggest hit. We spent 24 percent less on materials in 2008 than we did in 2006 and we will probably spend 12 percent less in 2009 than we did in 2008. That’s approximately 38 percent less on materials in three years.

**PL:** Have you had any staffing cuts or reduction in hours?

**LD:** No, we have not had to cut staff or reduce hours because our local funding (which now accounts for two-thirds of our tax income) has been very stable compared to the state funding, which has been dropping this year. Plus, we have been trying to streamline our operations for years. Probably 70 percent of the libraries in Ohio, however, rely completely on the state’s Public Library Fund as their only source of tax income and they are really hurt-
ing. They are cutting staff, reducing hours, and exhausting any reserve funds they might have. For the past three years, Shaker Heights Public Library has been envisioning its future with a focus on strategic planning. We identified various operational challenges through the strategic plan and a subsequent staffing study and organizational assessment. As a result, we have been planning to move to a more proactive reference service, to reduce service desks, and to go self-service with both circulation and holds materials. We hope to have this accomplished some time in 2010. Also, we have been trying to reduce expenditures or enhance revenues wherever we can. We are also looking at what I call “invisible” cuts vs. “visible” cuts as worst case scenarios should we lose significantly more state funding. So far, we have balanced invisible and visible cuts by beginning to be very strict with hours for part-time and substitutes (saving perhaps $30,000), reducing appropriations in some areas (by another $10,000), and cutting the materials budget further (by $50,000).

PL: Have you noticed a change in the way patrons are using your library as a result of the recession?

LD: There are more people looking for work and more people are using computers, filling out applications online, working on résumés, etc. We also have a lot more people coming in saying that they have to learn how to use computers and they are signing up for e-mail addresses and our computer classes. There seems to be less leisure reading.

PL: Are you offering new programming to help your patrons weather the recession?

LD: Like most libraries, we offer ongoing free classes in our computer center to teach people how to use word-processing software and the more sophisticated programs of Access, PowerPoint, and Excel. Acknowledging the need for our customers who need software, but cannot afford to buy it, the computer center staff has begun teaching classes on OpenOffice, a free suite of software with features and functions much like the others.

Our Friends of the Library fund movie licensing rights so that we can offer free family films each month and they also provide a generous budget for us to offer free programs for our customers.

In September, we have scheduled a program on job hunting. We have also been asked by the schools to present a program for parents on how to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications as well as a program on college funding help. Our program committee is responsive to programs suggested by both staff and the public.

PL: Have you tried any public awareness campaigns that have worked to bring additional support or revenue to the library?

LD: We collaborate with the city and the schools to produce Shaker Life, a bimonthly publication that is mailed to every household in our district. This publication provides us with a forum to speak about our challenges, to explain how the public can give to the library, as well as to help us advertise our programs and services. We have also been working closely with other community groups as part of a countywide initiative to meet the out-of-school-time needs of youth. As a result, last year we received a grant of $17,000 which helped us to expand our teen center hours and programming during the summer, as well as to add gaming equipment. This year, we received a $19,000 grant that we are sharing with three other groups, all of which will be working with youth this summer. Another interesting twist is that we will be cooperating with the city to build a low-income senior citizen apartment complex, which will be adjacent to (and accessible from) our main library parking lot. We are hoping that the newly dubbed “Library Court” apartments will be a win-win for everyone by providing affordable housing for those who need it most and providing additional tax income to the schools, the city and the library.

Skip Auld, Director, Durham County (N.C.) Library

PL: What’s the biggest way the economic recession has affected your library?

SA: It’s pretty simple. We are learning how to meet community need for library services with fewer financial resources. Our main goal is not to cut our hours of operation during this downturn. The increased demand for our resources makes that critical.

PL: Have you had any staffing cuts or reduction in hours?

SA: No. However, Durham County government implemented a hiring freeze in December 2008. We thought that was going to be lifted with the new fiscal year but recently found out that, because of additional budget cuts at the state level, the hiring freeze will stay in place. We have
a number of highly critical positions that we cannot yet fill. The county manager worked hard to avoid reducing library hours in his budget proposal to the Board of County Commissioners. However, with the budget reductions and hiring freeze, it will require extensive restructuring of our staffing in order to make this work. Also, we will have many fewer positions overall than were planned when we embarked a decade ago to create a regional library system with four new regional libraries. We are restructuring our staffing by working with the county’s human resources department to reclassify numerous positions. At our Staff Development Day in May, we discussed the restructuring plans with all library staff and requested that each staff member complete a form telling what talents and skills they have, whether they’d like an opportunity to work in a new location or a new position, etc. We’re working to match people’s interests and skills with a new staffing pattern that will be focused on our customer-centered strategic plan, “Saying Yes to the Community.”

PL: Have you noticed a change in the way patrons are using your library as a result of the recession?

SA: Yes. Computer use has increased in the past three years from under 100,000 sessions to over 500,000 annually. Staff members are fielding more requests for help with job searches, etc.

PL: Are you offering new programming to help your patrons weather the recession?

SA: Yes. We are offering a follow-up program to a very popular one we had last fall as the economy crashed around us. This one is called “Is the Economy’s Turning Point in Sight?” and features Campbell Harvey, professor at Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business, who will examine the case for and against an economic recovery starting in the third or fourth quarter of 2009.

Also, we are offering more computer classes, including job hunting skills and résumé writing.

PL: Have you tried any public awareness campaigns that have worked to bring additional support or revenue to the library?

SA: Yes. We have had several print and broadcast reporters produce stories on people’s use of our libraries. We also have a foundation that supports our library, and we have worked with them to create fundraising appeals that educate customers about the increased usage libraries experience in difficult economic times. The community continues to be very supportive.

Editor’s note: Interviews were conducted via e-mail by Brendan Dowling.

Reference

This occasional column will focus on topical issues related to public library research and statistics. What do you need to know? Send ideas for topics to Kathleen Hughes, Editor of Public Libraries, at khughes@ala.org.

DENISE M. DAVIS is Director, Office for Research & Statistics, American Library Association; dmdavis@ala.org.

Challenges to Sustaining Library Technology
In a Tough Economy

Prepared as a presentation to the Pennsylvania Public Library district and system directors and staff, the following article highlights the range of services libraries provide through public-access computing and the core challenges to sustaining that infrastructure and those services. Acknowledgments are extended to the Public Library Funding and Technology Access project team, as much of what is reported in this article results from that research.

Library Use Increases in a Down Economy
Yes, it does. A 2002 American Library Association (ALA) survey explored the proposition of whether or not library use increases during an economic downturn. Monthly circulation data from the 25 largest U.S. public libraries was requested in mid-February 2002, all serving populations of one million persons or more. Statistics on total circulation for the full reference period (60 months) were provided by 18 of the 25 libraries. Although the 2002 study findings suggest a relationship between public library use and the economic cycle, they do not themselves specify the immediate causes.

Household surveys provide a snapshot of current library use and can be a source of trend data. Periodic household surveys sponsored by ALA indicate steady use of public libraries with modest fluctuations year-to-year within a reasonable margin of error (+/- 3 to 5 percent).\(^1\) In fact, the public library usage landscape has remained relatively stable over the past 11 years.
library users, about 61 percent more than $100,000 were strong $75–100,000. Even those earning $50–$75,000, and 68 percent earned $35,000 per year, 61 percent earned cents reported earnings of less than the past 12 months, about 58 per-
households reporting library use in household disposable income. Of is in decline may be directly linked to increased library use, with cir-
libraries is stable, frequency of use has increased substantially—both in-
ly two-thirds of Americans (about 130 million) continue to report hav-
ing a current library card and most still visit the library in-person. Most frequent users tend to be women, younger adults, college educated adults, parents of younger children, and urban and suburban residents.
Increases in frequency in use since 2006 are attributable to two groups: younger adults (ages 18 to 34) and households with children. These increases in use translate into 25 million more in-person visits, 11 million more uses via computer, and about 4 million more uses by telephone. Overall, more than 135 million Americans visited or used the public library during the last year and nearly two-thirds of parents with children under the age of 18 continue to take their kids to the public library.
Recent news reports also point to increased library use, with cir-
culation growth in double-digits (Chicago, Philadelphia, and many other cities report increases of 20+ percent in the last six months).2 So, a reasonable conclusion that libraries are used more when the economy is in decline may be directly linked to household disposable income. Of households reporting library use in the past 12 months, about 58 percent reported earnings of less than $35,000 per year, 61 percent earned $50–$75,000, and 68 percent earned $75–100,000. Even those earning more than $100,000 were strong library users, about 61 percent reporting they had used the library in the past 12 months.
The 2009 KRC household survey also found a switch in highest use services from education (the long-
standing top reason for library use) to entertainment—leisure reading, using computers, and borrowing music and movies—an increase of about 9 percent from the 2006 sur-
vev. This reinforces the notion that disposable household income is shrinking.
Americans are deeply satisfied with and have positive perceptions of their public libraries. In fact, seven out of ten Americans report being extremely or very satisfied with their public libraries—a ten-
point increase from 2002. “Friendly,” “convenient,” “providing opportuni-
ties,” and “comfortable” are the top descriptors for public libraries.
Even with this great data, there are things we don’t regularly measure about the impact of increased library use. We don’t measure what specific library services experience increases because of higher walk-in use of public libraries; how libraries anticipate and plan for increased demand for services, especially technology-based; or how libraries estimate technology expenditures twelve-plus months in advance.

Reality Check
If high use implies higher value, how are libraries dealing with all this love? To understand this in a context of technology-related services such as public Internet access, we need to understand library con-
nectivity levels, how these services are used, and how libraries pay for them. A multiyear study coordinated by the ALA Office for Research & Statistics, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and ALA, the Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study (PLFTAS) provides this detail.3 This three-year study of public libraries assesses public access to computers, the Internet, and Internet-related services in U.S. public libraries, and the impact of library funding changes on connectivity, technology deployment, and sustainability. The study builds on the longest-running and largest study of Internet connectivity in public libraries, begun in 1994 by John Carlo Bertot and Charles R. McClure.4

PLFTAS provides information that can help library directors and library IT staff benchmark and advocate for technology resources in communities across the nation. The data are also of importance for policymakers at local, state, and federal levels; manufacturers of information and communication technologies; and the communities served by public libraries. PLFTAS 2008–09 will be released in September 2009.

Key Findings: 2007–08 Study
Demand Is Up
Libraries serve a unique and important role in providing free access to all types of information and telecommunications services. The demand for such services has increased significantly with growing need for access to digital and online information—including e-government, continuing education, and employment opportunities. Almost 73 percent of libraries report they are the only source of free access to computers and the Internet in their communities.

Library staff members with higher skill sets are needed to support technology-based services. Staffing levels are not keeping pace with patron demand—both for those
staff who provide training and other
direct patron services, as well as for
those who maintain the information
technology infrastructure. The two
greatest barriers to supporting and
managing public-access technologies are
a need for greater staff expertise
and availability of staff (time).

Connectivity Speeds Are Up
However, libraries are not moving
above the T-1 speed as had been
anticipated during 2006–07. About
51.6 percent of urban libraries, 42.1
percent of suburban libraries, and
32.1 percent of rural libraries are
accessing the Internet at T-1. In the
2007–08 state library questionnaire
of the larger study, several state
librarians suggested T-1 should be
the minimum level of connectivity
for all libraries in their states.

Although many libraries improved
access by moving to T-1 from lower
speeds, there was a slight decline
(about 3 percent) in the number of
libraries reporting access speeds
above 1.5 Mbps. The very low speeds
are going away, but the midrange
speeds aren’t seeing increased
growth. This may be because of
availability and cost to increase
access speeds. There also is evidence
in the 2007–08 study that more
libraries have reached capacity in
their technology infrastructure. The
percentage of libraries that report
their connection speed is insufficient
to meet patron demand some or all
of the time is up about 5 percent
over the 2006–07 study.

An increase in the number of
libraries reporting connection
speeds greater than 769 kbps (up 11
percent from last year) is tempered
by the vast majority of libraries (75
percent) who report their wireless
and desktop computers share the
same network, thus diminishing
the effective speed of access to the
Internet at the workstation.

Costs to Increase Access
Remain Number One Barrier
Cost and availability of higher-
speed access limit libraries’ abil-
ity to improve access speeds.
Proportionally, all libraries (rural,
suburban, and urban) considered
the cost of increasing access speeds
to be a barrier hindering upgrades.
Rural libraries (24.8 percent) report-
ed that they are at the maximum
level of connectivity. For the second
year, libraries reported space issues
and challenges in maintaining an
adequate supply of building-based
electrical and IT wiring to support
technology-based services. More
than three-quarters of libraries (77.7
percent) reported that space limita-
tions are a key factor when consider-
ing adding public-access computers.
Another 36.4 percent reported the
lack of availability of electrical out-
lets, cabling, or other infrastructure
as a barrier—up from 31.2 percent in
2006–07.

Public-access Internet services
(including homework resources,
e-books, audio, and video) grew
dramatically over the past year. They
provide more options for library
patrons, but further tax the library’s
public services and technology infra-
structure. Many library buildings,
inadequate in terms of space and
infrastructure (for example, wiring
and cabling), cannot support addi-
tional public-access computers and
technology infrastructure.

Staffs Are Stretched As Far
As They Can Go
While the reported average is about
50 percent, some frontline library
staff, particularly those on library
reference desks, estimate that as
much as 85 percent of their time is
spent in any given day on technol-
ygy-related tasks. Along with an 86
percent increase in the number of
computers in U.S. public libraries,
there was an 18.6 percent increase in
library visits from 1.15 billion in 2000
to 1.36 billion in 2005. The number
of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff
grew only 6 percent over the same
time period.

Not surprisingly, there is an
inverse relationship between library
staffing and numbers of public-
access computers (see figure 1). In
addition, libraries reported spending
more time troubleshooting comput-
ing issues.

Moreover, staffs are struggling
with aging equipment. The 2007–08
study revealed that the age range
for library computers in use is quite
broad. Libraries in all types of com-
unities are keeping computers
older than four years in use to sup-
port patron demand. Key factors
affecting the replacement of public-
access computers: 89.6 percent
reported cost and 33.1 percent said
maintenance and general upkeep
issues as the greatest challenges.

Education and Job-Seeking
Services Skyrocket
Library staffs rank the top two most
critical uses of public Internet ser-
tice: education for K–12 students
(78.7 percent) and job-seeking ser-
tices (62.2 percent).

The 2007–08 study found double-
digit growth in the availability of a
range of resources in five key online
services (see figure 2):

- audio content increased 33
  percent (from 38 to 71 percent);
- video content is up 32 percent
Statistically Speaking

(from 16.6 to 48.9 percent); • homework resources grew 15 percent (from 68.1 to 83.4 percent); • e-book availability increased 13.5 percent (from 38.3 to 51.8 percent); and • digitized special collections increased by almost 13 percent (from 21.1 to 33.8 percent).

Educational resources increased through various licensed databases to support education (such as World Book and test-preparation materials), business (such as Standard & Poor’s), and life interests (such as genealogy). These are still the most commonly provided Internet-based services. These resources are available in 98 percent of urban libraries, 93 percent of suburban libraries, and 80 percent of rural libraries. In fact, rural libraries reported the greatest percentage growth in offering homework resources (up 15 percent) and audio content (up 34 percent). All of these services are great, but now let’s look at library funding.

Funding Libraries and Technology

There are three major expenditure categories in which library data are reported—salaries (including benefits), collections, and “other” expenditures. Expenditure distributions average 65 percent salaries, 13 percent collections, and 21 percent other. Other expenditures continue to increase as a proportion of overall library expenditures. In fact, an anticipated increase of more than 6 percent in other expenditures, compared with about 3 percent for salaries and collections, was found in the 2007-08 study and may indicate a “greater than inflation rate” expense increase in this area and a shift away from salaries, as well as collections. This phenomenon is compounded by an anticipated decline in capital expenditures for building repair or improvement that are not part of the general operating budget of a library. Capital expenditures declined slightly between fiscal years 2004 and 2005 (down to $1.22 million from $1.24 million), and continued decreasing in FY2006 (down to $1.14 million).5

Funding data reported by libraries since 2006 in PLFTAS indicate volatility in how libraries support this public-technology access. Even libraries with historically increasing funding...
are experiencing flat levels of local funding, and have reacted to this by shifting to soft funding sources (fees/fines, donations, grants, and so on) as a way to support public-access computing services. Local government revenue and “other” (soft funding) account for nearly 90 percent of overall public library funding, with very little funding coming from state or federal government sources.

Further, expenditures for collections are shifting and the disproportionate increases for staff salaries and “other expenditures” (including utilities, building repair, and technology) compared with collection purchasing raise an interesting question: Are the costs of salaries and benefits, as well as increases in basic utilities, eroding funds formerly directed toward collection purchases? Despite documented triple-digit increases in materials costs during this decade, far less gain in collection expenditures can be identified.

When comparing anticipated FY2007 operating expenditures reported in 2006–07 PLFTAS libraries with the actual expenditures reported in this year’s study, it quickly became apparent that anticipated expenditures were not realized. Overall operating expenditures fell short by 15.5 percent, and they varied by specific expenditure type from those anticipated by as much as 20 percent—20 percent below anticipated expenditures for salaries, 0.8 percent below anticipated expenditures for collections, and 12.5 percent above anticipated expenditures in other areas.

When considered by source of funding, average expenditures missed or exceeded anticipated levels as follows:
- local/county missed anticipated levels by -22.2 percent;
- state exceeded anticipated levels by +0.8 percent;
- federal exceeded anticipated levels by +28.6 percent;
- fines/fees missed anticipated levels by -22.5 percent;
- donations/local fundraising exceeded anticipated levels by +136 percent; and
- grants, including private grants, exceeded anticipated levels by +19.9 percent.

Table 1 displays federally reported library operating revenue (IMLS) and actual or anticipated operating revenue for FY2007–09 reported in PLFTAS. The distributions aren’t very different than those reported for FY2007 in the earlier study.

Looking at the data over multiple years, it appears there are shifts in both the source of funding and the type of expenditure. The most noticeable shifts when comparing anticipated versus actual FY2007 operating expenditures occurred with reported local/county support for salaries, donations, and local fundraising for other expenditures, and an unexpected increase in federal funding directed to support salaries and collections.

Libraries are becoming more dependent on “soft” money (fees/fines, donations, and grants) for staff salaries. This is alarming because these types of support are more volatile and can distort the true cost of library operations, positioning libraries to struggle year to year to maintain basic services when, in fact, sustainable public funding is declining.

Overall, the use of non-tax revenue (fines, fees, and so on) reported in PLFTAS 2007–08 are:
- about 37 percent was used to pay for staff salaries in FY2007; about 33 percent is anticipated in FY2008;
- about 20 percent was used to fund collections in FY2007; 23 percent is anticipated in FY2008; and
- about 42 percent was used to support other expenditures in FY2007; 44 percent is anticipated in FY2008.

### Table 1
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<tbody>
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<td>Local/County</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>60.58</td>
<td>57.5</td>
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<td>State</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>10.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Sources</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>27.39</td>
<td>30.88</td>
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</table>
Even in fall 2007 there were traces of declining local revenue in previously well-funded libraries. Suburban libraries—a segment of the library community that has historically had strong and stable local funding—anticipated continued declines in overall local/county support into FY2008, as well as declines in donations and grants directed to technology expenditures.

Libraries’ ability to report technology expenditures continues to be difficult. However, knowing what is spent on connectivity, hardware, software, staffing, and related services is critical to managing and sustaining these services. General operating funds pay for most technology-related services. However, reliance on non-tax revenue to support basic technology hardware and telecommunications expenditures is growing, and is a reflection of creating a revenue stream from soft-funding sources to build and support new services. This is especially evident in suburban and rural libraries.

Getting Ahead of the Curve(ball)

Tracking expenditure trends in your library is essential. Having ten years of data is best and five years is minimal. Understanding projected inflation rates and the impact on your budget planning is also critical. Consumer Price Index (CPI) data are online and are current within a few months of real time. See the Bureau of Labor Statistics website (ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpiai.txt) for current and historic inflation figures.

References

General Advocacy Resources


Library Use in Economic Hard Times Resources


Save Money—Use the Web!

Kathleen Hughes, our very patient editor, asked for a column focusing on libraries and the economy: “Not only are we thinking about how libraries are doing more with less, but also what libraries are doing to help the public (job fairs, foreclosure workshops, etc.).” We immediately said, “we can do that!”

Michael: There are many ways libraries can save a boatload of money—their own and their patrons’ money, too!

David: And do it using online tools and websites! Let’s start sharing. We present you with two lists:

Five Ways to Save the Library Money

1. **RSS.** Does your library purchase library-related trade journals for staff to read? Or books about librarianship? Try this free alternative instead—subscribe to some blogs written by librarians. In some cases, the authors of those slower-to-print journal articles have their own blogs (both authors of this column do, anyway). In some areas of librarianship (technology is a great example) reading a blog is where you will find the best information.

   Why? Because emerging technology trends are morphing and changing very fast. By the time a new concept or Web service is fully researched and printed in a journal, the information could be dated. This is why you’ll often hear the phrase “always beta” associated with emerging Web-based tools and services. By subscribing to an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed rather than reading (and purchasing) journals, you are saving the library money and potentially reading the freshest content at the same time.

2. **Online Conferences and Training.** Need to learn something? Want to hear some innovative ideas, but you don’t have the travel budget to pay for someone’s conference registration, hotel, airfare, parking, and food? Why not send staff to a webcast instead? There are a number of
organizations offering some great webcasts with top-notch speakers. WebJunction and the SirsiDynix Institute are a couple of examples that come to mind. The American Library Association is starting to get its feet wet with virtual membership and participation at conferences as well. Why not give it a try?

3. **Skype and IM.** Need to make a long-distance call? Instead of using the phone, why not use a free online service? Connect using video instant messaging (IM) or make a Skype call (Skype does video, too). These services are free, in many cases, and very easy to use. Need to make a conference call? Skype does this for up to twenty-four people. That’s a lot of people conferenced in—and it will cost you nothing at all.

4. **Online Storage.** Need to store some files, but your IT department is running out of storage space? Why not try a free or affordable Web-based alternative, like Box.net or Dropbox (getdropbox.com)? These services usually offer a “small” amount of storage space for free (Dropbox gives you 2 GB, and Box.net provides 1 GB). Then if you need more space, it’s cheap to upgrade both services. Plus, your files aren’t locked in your office or behind a firewall when you leave the office. They’re accessible anywhere (when you provide your username and password, of course). I wouldn’t recommend storing your library’s payroll records there, but still—free, easy, and accessible from anywhere.

5. **Open-Source and Web-Based Software.** Instead of updating to the newest Microsoft Office product, why not try an open-source alternative, like the well-known and useful OpenOffice (www.openoffice.org)? It does everything your favorite Office products do, but it’s free. Need to edit photos? Instead of buying Adobe Photoshopt, why not use a free product like Picnik (www.picnik.com)? Open-source and Web-based software has come a long way; an application that has a strong community attached to it is a strong contender (maybe even a replacement) for today’s pricey, store-bought software. Case in point—David’s recently published book was written using NeoOffice (the Mac version of OpenOffice).

Ten Ways to Help Your Patrons Save Money

1. **Mint.com.** There are a number of online services created specifically for saving money. Mint, an online money manager, is one of them. This free, Web-based service helps you set up a budget. Users of the service can enter financial account information and it will help track spending. From Mint’s “About” page: “In five minutes or less, you’ll see where you’re spending your money, understand how your investments are performing, and set up realistic budgets. Set up e-mail and SMS alerts and you’ll be automatically updated whenever there’s an important change in your finances.” And, yes, Mint claims to use the same security tools that banks use.

2. **RSS News Feeds.** Remember the RSS feeds mentioned earlier? Why not teach your news-reading patrons how to subscribe to news sites’ RSS feeds, instead of paying for a paper newspaper? It’s actually better news—it’s timelier than the print edition, it can be updated for changes on the fly, and you can read commentary in the comments underneath most articles. Plus, it’s free.

3. **Social Networking and Web 2.0 Sites.** Keep in touch with friends and family for free. YouTube account so you can share your amazing videos? Free. Flickr? Free, but a pro account only costs $25 a year (which is extremely cheap). Twitter? Free. Facebook? Free. And in this economy? Free is definitely good.

4. **Job Searches.** Maybe your library customers don’t need a financial planning site. Instead, they have been laid off and need to find a job. The library (and the Web) can help here, too! Right now, every public library in the nation should be holding classes on how to job hunt online. Many newspaper classified ads are online now, so they’re easy to search. But local job ads combined with those of surrounding areas, and larger
national job search sites like Monster.com, creates an easy way to search for and find a job.

5. **Teaching Basic Computer Skills.** Attendance numbers for some technology classes at David’s library have gone up since the recession kicked in—people are coming in to learn new skills and update or create a résumé. Plus, many jobs now require online applications. Guess where you can fill one out for free? Yep, in the library.

6. **Electronic Reference Services.** Patrons can access them from home, so they don’t have to drive, which saves gas and wear and tear on their cars. Plus, the fact that they’re able to access thousands of free magazine articles is also a money saver!

7. **Moving Traditional Library Services Online.** Even something as simple as placing a hold on a book can be a help. How? If patrons know how to place holds on books online, they can drive to the library when they know a book is ready to be picked up, thus saving their gasoline bill and time.

8. **Free Entertainment.** Link to the funniest YouTube videos of the week—even show them in the library on a Friday night, with popcorn, on a big screen. That could be fun. Link to new movies that Hulu.com has added to its site. Advertise and play some Facebook games with your patrons. Hold a Runescape tournament with tween boys. Invite kids in to show off what they’ve done to their Webkinz pet’s rooms. There are literally thousands of cool multimedia and gaming websites the library can use for an entertaining event. Again—all free to use and watch.

9. **Have Patrons Make Their Own Entertainment.** Hold a teen YouTube video contest like some libraries have done, and offer a pizza party at the end of the contest. For the adults, set up an online book discussion group and choose an open-source, online book that’s free to download. Then discuss.

10. **And Finally . . .** The best way to save patrons some serious bucks may be by simply telling your community how successful you are, by marketing both your services and your accomplishments. Have great DVD circulation stats? Make a posting about it and encourage patrons to be a part of the wave of people discovering the value of the library that way. Offer free classes or workshops? Talk about how many folks attended last year and upcoming events. Help someone find a job? Take his picture, get a testimonial, and make a poster out of it. Every single day we are surrounded by success stories that wouldn’t have happened without the library, and we need to do a better job of telling those stories to the community. If they see how we helped others, they’ll know they can also get help through us.

So use posters and local newspapers (online and print, *ahem*). Heck, why not call the local TV channels and have them come in so you can give them a tour of how you save the community greenbacks? It might just end up getting you more legal tender to offer more of these important services and it will endear people to the institution of the library at a time when they may be feeling less valuable, more vulnerable, and in need of some hope.

And as far as hope is concerned, we can even create book displays with encouraging titles, upcoming events, or guest speakers. The important thing is to not be afraid to toot your own horn. If you don’t tell people how critical the library is, especially when people are feeling stressed, then many of them might not know just how the library can help in their coping and recovery. It’s up to you, so go start planning what you can do for your community!
"Bringing in the Money" presents fundraising strategies for public libraries. Many librarians are turning to alternative funding sources to supplement shrinking budgets. Fundraising efforts not only boost finances, but also leverage community support and build collaborative strategies.

Fundraising and Advocacy in Tough Times

After 9/11, the economy took the worst downfall we had seen in many years and library budgets took huge hits. We thought we had seen the worst of times. The effect of that economic downturn on library budgets was far less severe than what we are facing today. Demand for library services is at an absolute peak while funding is being slashed by percentages that I have not seen in my eighteen years as a public library fundraiser.

In spite of what we read and hear every day, the sky is not falling. These are tough times, but they provide an opportunity to look at the fundraising glass as half full. Consider the following:

- Many library donors are older and less invested in equities (stocks) that have shown the worst losses in the last eighteen months.
- Annual giving for most working donors comes from their salaries, not their invested assets. Donors with a job will continue to be able to give.
- Those donors who feel the economic pinch tend to continue to give to programs and organizations that they view as essential to the community’s well being. Never have libraries been more essential and it is prime time for making the case for annual support.
- In most states, the creation of new nonprofits is at a standstill. Competition for donors is not increasing so now is the time to focus on reaching 100 percent donor retention.
- Tough economic times can provide fertile ground for bringing in new donors at all levels of giving. The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library (FSPPL) recently launched a campaign to Stock the Stacks. This campaign to boost the library’s collection budget raised more than $30,000 in just over a month, with more than 450 gifts (from $20 to $1,000) and brought hundreds of new donors in the door.
- Private and public supporters do not respond well to panic. The library’s mantra should be, “We provide high quality programs and services in...”
all times.” This message should be communicated to donors, public officials, corporations, and foundations. It does not diminish the need for support but portrays the library as a strong, constant thread in the community’s tapestry.

The flip side of the fundraising coin is containing expenses. While a first reaction might be to slash programs and staff in reaction to budget constraints, the wiser approach is to plan and move strategically—looking to the long term.

Take time to examine all of your library’s programs, services, marketing, and fundraising activities and identify which ones are successful. Eliminate those that cost excessive staff time or are just not producing strong results that will yield long term support for the library. It is shortsighted to measure success by numbers only. It is also measured by impact and potential for building loyalty and potential supporters.

FSPPL created a special fundraising event five years ago. Opus & Olives: Fine Print & Fine Food is a reception, dinner, and program with five authors. The event was conceived as a fundraiser but the spillover effect has been tremendous. Last year’s event drew more than seven hundred guests and netted nearly $100,000. Beyond these numbers, the event has brought in new annual donors, corporate sponsors, board members, strategic partnerships, and incredible visibility for our library and The Friends. While now might not be the best time to take on a big, new event, I offer this as an example of the many ways that a program or fundraising activity can measure success.

Now may not be the time to add new fundraising staff or move into big fundraising initiatives, but it is pound foolish to cut fundraising staff with the goal of saving money. Focus on fundraising activities that have a solid track record of engaging supporters for the library.

Cultivating and maintaining loyal individual donors is the cornerstone of private fundraising efforts. There are no donors too small. Stories of individuals who led quiet lives and left big dollars to libraries and other organizations are always in the news. More than ever, now is the time to focus on individual donors.

Individual donors need to be presented with a strong case for supporting an organization, other than “We need your money because these are tough times!” It is easy to present the same case year after year. These challenging times provide an opportunity to change your message. Consider making the case for how libraries help people find jobs, learn to write résumés, and find support in the library setting. Showcase how the need for library materials, programs, and services goes up in huge numbers when the economy plummets. Take time to create writing and talking points for all your communicators (staff, board members, Friends, and other library supporters) to tell the story of how vital libraries are in these times. Post these messages on your website and write editorials and white papers. Now is a marketing opportunity that should not be missed.

Do not assume that individuals cannot make an annual gift, or other contribution to their library. Individual giving declines only marginally in tough economic times. Fundraising campaigns should acknowledge the challenge but never back away from making “the ask.” Individual donors need to be thanked and recognized for their support. Every one of our Friends’ donors gets a personal phone call some time during the year from our staff, board members, or other volunteers. This is not always easy to do but this has helped build a broad, strong base of loyal library donors.

Planned giving is always an important fundraising activity for libraries. Donors may be shell-shocked by their losses in the stock market and their retirement plans and worried about having enough assets to sustain themselves, let alone having enough money to leave their children or charities. Now may not be the time to increase solicitation of new planned givers, but it is certainly the time to nurture your existing estate donors.

Create opportunities or structures for special recognition of donors with a long history of supporting the library. Let them know that you know who they are and how much you appreciate their ongoing support. FSPPL recognizes these individuals in a number of ways. Donors of $500 or more are invited each year to the Donor Society Luncheon. The event is small in scope but big in impact. There is no mention of fundraising at the event. We feature a popular author and give a signed copy of his or her book to every donor at this level (even if they do not attend the event). This event draws more than one hundred individual donors every year and we hear over and over how much they appreciate being invited and recognized.

Another way of recognizing donors is creating a Loyalty Circle. Our Loyalty Circle is made up of donors who have a ten-year history (or longer) of supporting the library, at any level. Loyalty Circle members are recognized in our annual report and thanked by being invited to special events. This group contains...
many of your most likely prospects for planned gifts.

Your annual giving campaigns are as good as your database. Eighteen percent of the U.S. population moves each year. Incorrect addresses cost money, irritate individuals, and ultimately result in lost donors. Weed your database and keep it up to date.

When we use the term *fundraising*, we generally think of annual campaigns, capital campaigns, and planned giving. But for libraries, the lion’s share of funding comes from public sources. What can Friends and foundations do to secure and expand this source of support? One solution is to create a grassroots, citizen-based advocacy campaign. This goes hand-in-hand with private fundraising.

The need for public support of libraries never diminishes. In critical times, advocacy moves right to the top of the priority list of support activities. Having a solid advocacy program is essential to any library. Now is the time to expand your advocacy efforts. If your library Friends or foundation does not have an advocacy committee, create one. If one already exists, be creative in looking for new partners and innovative ways to raise new public dollars.

FSPPL recently expanded its advocacy efforts from the city level to the state level. Library advocates, including FSPPL, were successful in getting $4.25 million per year set aside from a new state sales tax dedicated to supporting library arts and culture programming.

Grassroots advocacy efforts are extremely successful. While individuals may not have dollars to give to the library, most everyone believes the library is critical to the health of a community and will give their time and raise their voices in support of libraries. Think beyond the usual suspects in identifying individuals and groups who might support your library at the local level.

Advocacy coalitions are effective ways to band seemingly disparate groups together to secure public funding. Coalitions can make the case that funding community programs and organizations (such as arts, cultural, new Americans, senior groups, libraries, and so forth) helps maintain the economic viability of the city or state. Advocacy initiatives like these also attract corporate support from businesses that believe healthy communities attract and retain good employees, where *everyone* thrives in the long term. Working in coalition is a lot more effective than going it alone.

The need for new, expanded or renovated libraries does not go away even in these rough times. Many capital campaigns have been-postponed temporarily, but this may not be a luxury of time that your library can afford. Capital campaign gifts are larger than annual gifts so contributions usually come from an individual’s assets rather than from their annual incomes. While these gifts have been adversely affected in this economy, there are still many wealthy individuals with diverse portfolios and investments who are surviving the downturn with substantial assets still intact. If you are still planning a capital campaign, it is more critical than ever to conduct a feasibility study before you begin the campaign to determine the potential success of a campaign goal and identify lead donors.

A final word of counsel is about looking at your fundraising structure and activities. If your Friends group is not bringing in enough money to provide serious support to the library, now may be the time to consider creating a library foundation. A foundation can live side by side with an existing Friends group but each has a separate role. Creating a foundation allows the library to recruit a fundraising board, populated with individuals with affluence and influence. This does not diminish the work and contributions of Friends groups, but expands a library’s capacity for raising money in good times and bad.
Refuge in the Library

Ask any group of people and you’ll be stunned how many of them grew up poor. Whether you’re in a dorm, at an upscale cocktail party, or hunkered around a keg under the stars, you’re going to meet a heck of a lot of poor people, or a few poor people and a great many fibbers. Believe it or not, being poor has a certain coolness factor, if you aren’t actually poor.

I grew up in what would be politely called the “lower middle class.” We never lacked for the basics (food, shelter, clothing) but I knew that my mom had to mend my clothes more times than she would care to admit because new ones would cost too much. I knew that my mom didn’t like me to open my Christmas gifts in front of my cousins for fear I’d be embarrassed. I knew that my childhood asthma meant my mom had to take a third job on the weekends. I knew that I’d be paying for college if I wanted to go. I knew that when my mom came to me and asked if I could help with grocery money after I got my first part-time job in high school that she cried about it. I knew that cheap shoes don’t last but you can get five pairs for less than one good pair and alternate. I learned how to do my laundry and cook at age eight, how to ride the bus and El train by nine, and was taking myself to Cubs games at ten.

My mom worked and worked and worked. With a high school education, she went from loan collector to bank vice president by sheer grit. She always saw that I was safe, but she missed a lot providing those basics. My dad died when I was six and she had to be everything and anything a parent might need to be. I was a latchkey kid, a term I hate because of the connotation that somehow being one reflected badly on your parents. I walked home from school, called to check in, called if I was going out, and always told my mom when I’d be back. Of course, she knew where I was most of the time—at the library.

The Albany Park branch of the Chicago Public Library (CPL) was my second home for much of the late ’80s until the mid-’90s. It’s a one-story building, right at the corner of Foster and Kimball avenues. It’s a ’60s-era building,
so it lacks the red brick spot and polish of more recent CPL buildings. You’ll find a number of branches in the system with eerily similar layouts. Nevertheless, this one was mine, all mine.

I devoured spinner racks of cheap, pulp sci-fi. I read Faulkner and Hemingway for the first time thanks to a display about American authors. I participated in a Halloween costume contest with my friend Tommy Deluca, dressed as a murderer and victim respectively. I—very gently, I assure you—bopped Tommy on the head with a candlestick, my vision of murderers being informed entirely by the board game Clue.

The librarians were patient souls, answering a millions questions, but refusing to do my homework for me. There were plenty of other kids who, like me, were hanging out. Many of them were children of divorce. I had an odd status as the kid whose dad wasn’t simply out of the house, but dead.

The library saved my life on more than one occasion. Being chased by a grade-school pack of thugs? Run into the library and wait them out with a good book. When a cataclysm of circumstances led to my mom being unable to pick me up by closing, and nowhere near a phone, the good-hearted librarian sat with me at the bus stop, in the rain, until my mom showed up crying and far more scared than I was at the time. The mountains of books I read, the board games I mastered, the friends I made. Moreover, it didn’t cost me a penny.

You can call it the “global financial crisis” or the “econoclasm” or “ecopocalypse” or a recession or just be honest and say it’s hard out there these days. Whatever term applies, there are more and more kids whose parents are working longer hours. Music lessons, martial arts—these often get scaled back to save on money. Suddenly, tweens and teens are facing a long, empty afternoon landscape. What can we do, as librarians, to make it better?

Keep Everything Free (Or Darn Close To It)

This one is obvious, because it goes to our very souls as library professionals. However, the creeping trend of charging for materials and events has been going on for a while. Especially in a time when local bud-
gets are being slashed to the bone, the pressure to charge can be overwhelming. Programming costs can always be cut back.

**Simplicity Works**

Popcorn, a movie, and a television to show it on. Colored pencils and a theme. Paper squares and an origami book. I’ve kept a notebook of programming ideas for years and one category I have is “the moths in the wallet” program. If you’re tapped for money, go simple. The most successful programs are often the most simple. Young adults want to be free to self-define. Give them the run of the art closet and a mandate to decorate part of the library. Create art projects for local military personnel. Writing and poetry cost nothing. What’s stopping a library from hosting a play or even a series of dramatic readings from literature? Twenty bucks and a trip to a thrift shop or dollar store will score you some great props and costumes.

**Beg, Borrow, or Steal (Sort Of)**

Asking for community sponsorship and support in a bad economy seems like a bad plan, but many businesses are looking to support their community and reach out to new customers. They can do it without spending money, too. Maybe the copy shop loans you a digital camera for programs. The hot dog stand might have spare t-shirts that can be used for crafts or costumes. Look beyond what a business does to what assets they might be able to share. In return, the library can offer exposure, maybe help drum up business by getting a little synergy going. Offering an upgrade on a car wash or a free drink with a library receipt dated today is just one possibility. As for stealing, grab any and all good ideas you can. Librarians are already ridiculously connected online; why not offer up your programming ideas as a PDF “out of the box” kit? Steal this program.

**Tread Lightly**

Nothing gets librarians arguing like policies on unattended children. Usually this doesn’t affect young adults as much, but with parents out of work or pulling more hours, often teens are stuck watching younger siblings. The temptation is to stick close to the letter of the policy. After all, it’s a legal defense and eminently sensible. However, what happens when a fourteen-year-old tells you his dad won’t be home until after 8 p.m. and he’s the only person his sister has to look after her? You can build a relationship here with a parent. Maybe they can’t afford daycare or perhaps they simply can’t connect with the right nonprofit to help. Working with parents and connecting them to resources that can help make a hard time easier, that’s a proactive solution.

When my mom passed away, we did the somewhat traditional funeral procession drive around the old home sites. Leaving the church, we headed past our old apartment on Sawyer Avenue then out to the cemetery. Now turning right on Foster at Sawyer you go about three blocks and pass right by the Albany Park Library. I remember that was where I felt a sense of deep gratitude. Growing up poor, you often don’t feel very welcome, but the library was one place I always felt accepted. A place where my mom didn’t have to worry and I could get into all kinds of smart trouble. Telling librarians that libraries are important seems silly. But it’s true all the same.

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**OCLC Receives Grant to Develop Community-Based Awareness Campaign**

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a $5 million grant to the OCLC library cooperative to develop a public information campaign that will help public library leaders heighten awareness of the needs of local libraries and increase support for the services they provide during these challenging times. OCLC will pilot the campaign in select areas of Georgia and Iowa starting this summer along with a limited number of other communities to be selected later. In addition, OCLC will make available community awareness campaign materials and other guides to assist library leaders throughout the country.

OCLC will work with Leo Burnett USA, a Chicago-based marketing communications agency, to design and test the community support campaigns in Georgia and Iowa. They will use advertising, direct marketing, online engagement, public relations, and grassroots community initiatives to heighten awareness of the need for increased library support. Approaches will be informed by market research OCLC and Leo Burnett conducted in 2007 identifying factors that drive and limit support for public libraries.
In the current economic climate, virtually no government agency is safe from financial hardships. Libraries all over the nation are feeling pain, often in the form of cuts to hours, programming, materials, or even staff. Now more than ever, people are turning to libraries for the services that they can no longer afford, such as media purchases and Internet access. The combination of library funding cuts and a growing library patron base has many libraries throughout the nation stretched thinner than ever before.

For this article, the authors talked to library administrators representing communities of varying sizes across the country about the difficulties they are facing and the ways that they are coping with their libraries’ struggles. Most libraries are making difficult decisions about how to best prioritize the valuable and necessary services on which their patrons depend. Many library patrons are relying on services such as Internet access to apply for jobs, complete college applications, or work on homework—many things that they used to do from home.

According to a recent issue of Time magazine, 63 percent of the approximately one thousand people interviewed for the article have cut back on entertainment purchases due to the economy.1 For better or worse, the perception of the public library is changing from that of an information source to an entertainment source, which can lead people to look at the library as an expendable resource. While many library patrons and staff know the important role libraries play in a community, many non-library users and municipality leaders may not see the value of the public library.

Despite the dark days many of America’s libraries are facing, the directors of the profiled libraries consistently expressed hope for the future and optimism that things may be brighter than ever once the economy turns around.

The Libraries

Saxton B. Little Free Library

The Saxton B. Little Free Library (SBLFL) has been a presence in the small community of Columbia, Connecticut, since 1883. Staff members currently work to meet the needs of a population of just fewer than five thousand citizens. Though library funding has always been tight, recent years had seen small but steady...
gains in the budget. Director Su Epstein notes that in 2006, the library negotiated with the city for a substantial increase to take place over the course of several years. This additional funding was earmarked for much-needed salary adjustments for library staff. Once the economic crisis hit, the city reneged on this agreement, and made cuts to the library’s budget.

In the fallout of the city’s broken promises, Epstein and her staff had little choice but to reduce the level of service being provided to the citizens of Columbia. “While we have tried very hard to not cut, we have purchased less materials and reduced the number of programs offered,” she said.2 More service cuts may be coming.

**Oskaloosa Public Library**
The budget woes of the Oskaloosa (Iowa) Public Library (OPL) date back to 2004, when the state legislature made a $60 million cut to local governments. Like other cities and counties across the state, the city of Oskaloosa (population: 11,000) made across-the-board cuts that year. The city budget line item for library materials was slashed from $47,000 to $1,000. Left with few options, the library board and staff turned to “windfall money.” These funds are primarily comprised of small special-purpose grants and memorial bequests.

OPL has tried to keep most of the cuts behind the scenes. The primary example of this came in February when the board voted to cease the library’s RFID tagging program. The original equipment purchases were made with a large bequest, but the ongoing cost of supplies has been a financial burden.

The library’s decision ushers in a new era with a new philosophy. No longer will ambitious new programs with substantial ongoing costs be initiated with windfall money. Generally, if the library’s operating budget cannot support the fixed operating costs of a project, it’s risky to commit the library to it.

Despite the change in philosophy, the point is almost moot, as available windfall money has been drained with little to replace it. OPL has to use the trickle of windfall money for materials, so it must find other areas in which to reduce operating expenses. Next on the horizon: a probable move from SirsiDynix to a less expensive integrated library system.

**Oak Lawn Public Library**
Oak Lawn (Ill.) Public Library sits in the suburbs of Chicago with a population of just over 55,000. ALA Council member James B. Casey heads the library. Oak Lawn has not yet experienced the drastic budget slashes seen in other public libraries. Casey noted that the administrative team has been able to “hold the line in resisting budget cuts and has maintained a balanced budget through the current recession.”3 But this doesn’t mean that the library isn’t feeling the economic pinch. The administrative team has been able to negotiate reductions in costs with vendors and service providers. However, the escalating cost of staff benefits has been difficult to absorb in a flat budget year. A partial freezing of salary increments accepted by staff has helped. Casey is noticeably proud of the library’s employees for keeping staffing levels under control. “The increasing demand for service by the public has been met by astute management of existing staff by supervisors,” he said.4

**Washoe County Library System**
Founded in 1904 as the Reno Free Public Library, the Washoe County (Nev.) Library System (WCLS) currently serves a population of 420,000 citizens and is led by Director Arnie Maurins. The situation in Washoe County is bleak. In the last two years, the system’s budget has been reduced an astounding 40 percent, primarily because of the area’s declining tax revenues. Maurins explained, “Sales taxes have been decreasing in Washoe County for over two years, and property taxes have been declining due to foreclosures and adjusted property values.”5

Where are the cuts being made? Spending on materials and database subscriptions has been halved. A shared library with a middle school has been closed. Smaller branch locations, such as the one housed in Washoe County’s Senior Center, have seen reductions in operating hours of up to 35 percent. The larger branches will likely see hours cut in the new fiscal year and more closures may be imminent. The coming year will also see mobile and outreach services significantly reduced.

Perhaps the hardest to swallow for Maurins and his staff is the closure of the partnership library with one of the area middle schools. He noted, “We had provided public library service in that facility for nearly thirteen years. Families in the immediate neighborhood now have to travel several miles to reach one of two alternative branches.”6 Staff layoffs may also be a difficult development on the horizon. “That would be an extremely painful decision, even if there are no other viable alternatives.”7

**Phoenix Public Library**
The Phoenix Public Library (PPL) has been serving the public since 1898 and currently meets the needs of a population of 1.5 million. According to Director
Toni Garvey, the facility has lost about 26 percent of its payroll budget in the last two years. Services have been hard hit. Much less adult programming takes place, although employment-related programming has been maintained, given the economic situation. Teen programming has been reduced from one per week to one per month. Gone are the school tours and the outreach program for the area’s first graders, Grade One at the Library. The materials budget has been slashed by a million dollars. The hardest cut to make? Library hours, which have been decimated.

Before the cuts, every library in the system was open seventy-two hours per week, and each had the same hours, which included Sundays. Now Sunday hours only exist at half of the branches, and those libraries are open for four hours instead of the previous six. Each building operates one eight-hour shift per day, six days per week; bringing total open hours down to forty-eight per week. Garvey recalled, “For years we could say, ‘we’ve got the best hours of service of any library in the country.’” Bigger in geography than Los Angeles, Phoenix is served by a central library and only fifteen branches. “Accessibility was about the hours we were open, not a lot of buildings. We really redefined what access meant.”

**Brooklyn Public Library**

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) Executive Director Dionne Mack-Harvin took the helm at a difficult time in the library’s history. The institution has been open to the public since 1892, and currently serves a borough of 2.5 million citizens. Brooklynites are now watching helplessly as the library takes a city and state funding hit to the tune of $2.1 million. Early in the budget process, the library system is typically pegged for cutbacks, but funding has typically been restored during budget negotiations. Mack-Harvin noted, “This is the first time in several years that a proposed budget cut has gone through, and that is due to the state of the economy. Our operating budget, or spending ability, has also decreased—regardless of an actual budget cut—since funding has not increased along with inflation.”

All Sunday service throughout the system has been eliminated. Mack-Harvin said, “It’s always a challenging decision to reduce hours of service, but in order to make the savings we need for the upcoming fiscal year, we closed six locations on Sundays at the beginning of this year. By eliminating Sunday hours, we’ve saved almost $1 million in operating expenses. A hiring freeze for nonessential positions is now in place, and the purchase of new materials has been severely curtailed.”

**Increased Usage**

While libraries all over the nation are feeling the effects of cuts to the budget line items for materials, programming, and staff, more and more people are flocking to libraries for entertainment and other needs.

Fall 2008 book sales were down about 7 percent compared to the fall of 2007. With standard hardback books typically costing well more than $25, it is no surprise that people are cutting that expense out of their personal budgets and instead turning to their libraries. At the main library in Modesto, California, circulation of books, CDs, and DVDs is up about 15 percent. The Boise Library saw a 61 percent increase in library card usage in 2008.

These incredible increases in usage are great for libraries, in the sense that it seems like more and more people are realizing the value of the public library. Unfortunately, if the cuts get much worse, libraries may be forced to cut the very services that the patrons are using more than ever.

According to a January 2009 article in *The Boston Globe,* “at the Revere Public Library, circulation in fiscal 2008, which ended June 30, was up 20 percent over the previous year, according to library director Robert E. Rice Jr. He said usage has risen noticeably since then.”

In Seattle, the two primary library systems in the area—the King County Library System (KCLS) and the Seattle Public Library—loaned more than two million more items in 2008 than in the previous year. KCLS is one of the busiest libraries in the nation, second only to the Queens (N.Y.) Library. KCLS saw an increase in circulation of about 6.5 percent in 2008.

The American Library Association’s (ALA) Public Information Office (PIO) reported that, as of September 2008, an estimated 68 percent of U.S. residents have a library card, up about 5 percent from 2006. PIO also reported that 76 percent of U.S. residents visited their public library during the previous twelve months. When compared to a study from 2006, this is a 10 percent increase in library visits.

In the same press release, PIO stated that in a recent poll of U.S. residents, 92 percent of the respondents felt that their library is a very important community resource. Given these reported increases in visits and circulation, libraries are struggling to make sure that they can serve their communities in the best way possible.

Library materials related to the job search process have also seen spikes in circulation. At the Boulder (Colo.) Public Library, circulation of books related
to job hunting has increased approximately 14 percent in the last year. The Arlington Heights (Ill.) Memorial Library has seen an increase in homeless patrons appearing in business attire and spending long hours job hunting. Despite the increases in the use of this category of materials, struggling libraries may have difficulty in updating their job seeking and résumé materials or replacing those materials when they become worn out from use.

More people are turning to their libraries as a substitute for entertainment purchases such as movie rentals and music. Cutting the entertainment budget may be easier for some families when they know that the library can provide them with the latest movies or most popular CDs. But with increased use comes increased replacement and mending costs. It may become more difficult for libraries to maintain an attractive collection of materials.

Of course, most library staff members love the increase of patrons and usage. After all, that is why the library is here, to be used! However, it must be acknowledged that the downturn of the economy, the stresses of layoffs, and the struggle to make ends meet is causing concern among library users and staff. More and more people that come into the library are already stressed to the breaking point. Little disappointments or unmet needs at the library can make their temperament or attitude take a downward turn.

Generally, crime rises when the economy sours. The increases in usage and stress have resulted in many libraries taking measures to make sure that their patrons and staff members are safe. At OPL, police officers have taken a proactive approach to safety—providing training to library staff and periodic walkthroughs of the library building by officers. They hope that showing that they are present and ready to respond to trouble will deter people from stealing or harassing staff and patrons. According to the New York Times, libraries all over the nation are facing increased security concerns and some may need to increase the measures they take to protect their employees and patrons, but they may not have the funds to do so. The average cost of an unarmed security officer is about $26,000. Many libraries do not have the money to pay for their current staff, let alone the additional expense of a guard.

Most libraries have seen or will see an increase in library use as long as the economic climate looks bleak. Hopefully, the vast majority of libraries will be able to maintain their collections, staff, and facilities until their funding increases. The interesting point will be seeing if the patrons that have discovered the value of their public libraries will continue to use library services after they are back on their feet.

**Reduction Considerations**

When there are no other choices other than to make cuts, how do we make these difficult decisions? Some rely heavily on statistics and make highly researched decisions; for others, the best choices are obvious.

With the vast majority of a library’s budget going toward salaries and associated benefits, laying off staff might seem like the quickest fix. But few stones cause more ripples than staff reductions. Unless a library is overstaffed, which is unimaginable for most administrators, fewer employees means poorer service. Other devastating results can include shorter hours, fewer professional employees, longer waits for materials, and so forth.

Mack-Harvin noted that protecting staff positions was key for BPL. The system’s administrative team recognizes that protecting staff positions and maintaining a high standard of customer service go hand in hand and are therefore top priorities for Brooklyn’s library. “By cutting non-essential spending, not filling vacant positions and eliminating Sunday hours, we have been able to safeguard in fiscal year 2009 and preserve six-day service at our sixty libraries,” she said.

Staff of the PPL knew that hours must be reduced, and the administrative team worked to make the most informed decision possible. Formal usage studies were conducted to determine the foot traffic patterns for each branch location. The resulting data provided hour-by-hour, day-by-day information about the number of people entering the building and the circulation valleys and peaks. The ultimate goal was to reduce hours, yet still be available to patrons during the busiest times. Garvey learned that the hours from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. are key, but steady morning traffic clearly indicated earlier hours were needed as well. Garvey said, “We’re now open from 11 to 7 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; 9 to 5 on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Close to the same number of customers are now being served by 30 percent fewer staff.”

The system’s visits-per-hour statistics show that the library is busier than before.

In light of the brutal cuts endured in Washoe County, Maurins considered a variety of factors. Primary on the list was the impact on the public. Geography was a strong consideration in closing a branch or reducing hours at others. The distance between branches and the open hours of each location was carefully studied. For staff reductions, the
The Methodology of Service Prioritization

Unfortunately, the cuts that libraries have to make are not uniform across the nation. Libraries have to evaluate their communities’ needs as well as their mission in serving the public. For example, in one community it may be obvious to cut the seldom-used job search classes, while in another community the job search classes are well attended and needed.

Many libraries have been forced to cut programming, which in turn may decrease the number of new patrons coming into the library. Libraries have to look at their own circulation records, library usage records, and successful elements in order to fully understand what cuts and sacrifices are needed.

At SBLFL they looked at what programs were most needed and used. They also tried to keep programs and services that cover the broadest of needs. By taking this approach SBLFL will, hopefully, be able to cut major costs without cutting vital services to its patrons.

OPL was able to use its remaining windfall money to cover the 2009–10 budget year. An operational efficiency committee was also created, consisting of a combination of board and staff members, to evaluate the everyday expenses of the library and make sure the library’s money was being used in the best ways possible.

Maurins said Washoe County Public Library System did not use any special methods when making cuts, but rather followed a balanced scorecard strategic plan when deciding on a plan of action. The director also said that plan will likely be modified in the future to account for financial and human resources cuts.

PPL looked at its priorities and goals and decided that cuts that it would try to avoid would be preschool services and early literacy programs (preschool programs were eventually reduced in number). The library also had to adjust operating hours. In order to ensure that the new staff schedules would be manageable and effective, managers prepared sample schedules for various-sized branches to ensure that proposed staffing levels would be sufficient.

BPL’s finance team created multiple budget models with possible cuts and some likely situations. After much evaluation the team decided that cutting Sunday hours would save the most money at the greatest rate.

Each of these libraries tried to look at all possible cuts and what sacrifices they were willing to make in order to make sure that they can still provide the best service to their communities without resorting to closing their doors. Ultimately, one hopes that most libraries will look at all money saving avenues before being forced to cut staff.

According to an article in The Tampa Tribune, the Pasco County (Fla.) Library System (PCLS) cut library hours across the county. The cuts will result in the seven libraries being closed on Mondays and each library will be open for only forty hours per week. The county is likely to have a $30-million-dollar budget deficit next year. The libraries are also being asked to cut an additional 18 to 20 percent from next year’s budget. The library has already had to cut seventeen employees, and it is looking like they will have to cut four more by September. PCLS’s situation is a scary one that most library staff and patrons would hate to have their library face, but this story is not a lonely one. Libraries all across the country are being forced to make difficult and often unpleasant decisions.

While one hopes that most people in any given community would hate to see their libraries close...
doors, there have been a small few who are calling for the removal of libraries all together. A notorious March 2008 editorial by George Elmore in The Gainesville Sun sent shockwaves through the library community. Elmore claimed that libraries are basically useless and that if the library in his area were gone he would save roughly 5 percent on his property taxes. Elmore further asserted that the Internet and Google have replaced the library and that no real, or “serious research is carried on in the library stacks.” It would appear that Elmore is not a library user. If he were to visit his local library, I bet he would find a plethora of information, entertainment, and other services that he never knew were available to him. It also appears that Elmore has forgotten that many people, in the wake of lost jobs, rely on the free services of the library to find a job or develop new, helpful skills. Unfortunately, many of these free services that are so helpful to the residents of the community that cannot afford Internet access or other luxuries are being taken away and ultimately could mean removing many opportunities from the hands of our loyal patrons. It truly is an ironic situation. While the need and demand for library services is on the rise, libraries are being forced to cut services, hours, staff, or even close the doors all together.

Utilizing Public Opinion

Only one of the libraries profiled in this article utilized direct public input in making services reduction decisions. Maurins described the efforts of the WCLS’s administration to ensure the public had a voice. “For this most recent round of cuts, we are holding a series of town hall meetings at different branches, in order to solicit budget ideas, hear which services are most important to try to maintain, and also hear which days and hours our branches should be open to best serve the public,” she said. For those patrons unable to attend the town hall meetings, sharing their ideas and suggestions is still an option. The library system is providing special comment cards to gather patron input. Patrons are also encouraged to submit their comments through the library’s website.

For PPL, the library’s support groups are thought of as a focus group of sorts. Members are obviously very familiar with the library’s wide array of services. During the recent round of cuts and reductions, their input was solicited. A secondary benefit of asking support groups for suggestions can also be realized—with the built-in advocate base that a library support organization provides, asking for assistance provides an excellent opportunity to educate the advocates. Public input can also be quite casual and small in scale. SBLFL’s strategy for selecting periodicals to discontinue demonstrates than an informal exchange of communication can yield highly relevant information. For those newspapers and magazines under consideration for elimination, staff members placed notes on the publications for the patrons reading them. Patrons were asked to let library staff know if they were reading a particular publication. This method also provides a little customized publicity about the library’s financial plight and how it could directly affect the patron reading the note.

Garvey had other thoughts on patrons having a voice in PPL’s reductions and cuts. The administrative team went back to the library’s strategic plan for guidance in what services best met the library’s mission and goals. “Though the input is indirect for reducing services, the patrons had quite a bit of input into our strategic plan,” Garvey said. Provided that a library has a current strategic plan partially or fully based on patron feedback, every time the resulting tool is used, patrons have a voice.

Turning to the frontline staff also sheds light on the pulse of a library’s patron base. Frontline employees work with patrons every day. They hear the off-hand remarks made by the public, understand which needs are being met, and those that still need to be addressed. The BPL administrative team utilized the direct input from frontline staff in making reduction decisions. Mack-Harvin said, “All changes to service were carefully discussed with our board of trustees and executive management, with input from library staff who serve the public directly.”

For the smaller communities of Oskaloosa and Columbia, the question of seeking out direct public input was academic. With a more limited array of services, fewer staff members, and less money to shift around, the service reduction choices were clear-cut. In libraries serving small communities, the administrative staff is likely to be comprised of just the library’s director. Library directors in smaller communities more often have the opportunity to work directly with the public, thereby eliminating the middleman.

Sharing Difficult News

Early rumblings of service cuts usually spread quickly through the building. Keeping the library’s staff well informed as events unfold is important for employee morale and will make things easier for patrons later in the process. Some administrators may feel that
providing confirmation or denial for solutions under discussion is pointless. The “I’ll let them know when we’re sure” philosophy can lead to rumors that are far worse than reality. Meeting with a board committee to discuss reduction of service hours? A quick all-staff e-mail from the director announcing the meeting will help tremendously with information control. The hierarchy shouldn’t matter. Every staff member, from maintenance to pages to catalogers, should receive the same information. Service or staff cuts impact everyone; take the time to get everyone on the same page.

Once the decisions are official, how do you tell the public the library is preparing to provide less service? In the current economic climate, the news is not surprising. Maurins said, “We have tried to maintain an objective tone, stating the dollar amounts of our cuts, the ideas we are considering, and the possible impacts to the public.” Epstein agreed: “I have been very straightforward. Our budget was reduced, our expenses have increased, we have had to make difficult decisions. We are trying to balance our cuts to minimize public impact.”

With honesty, the script writes itself. Mack-Harvin noted, “We’ve been very straightforward that eliminating Sunday service, in which all staff were paid overtime, was the quickest way for us to make necessary savings to maintain six-day service across the borough.”

The local media outlets are an important tool in getting the word out. Notifying the public early and often will make upcoming changes unfold more smoothly and reduce the chances of anger and shock. Mack-Harvin had an enormous patron base to notify. “We are as disappointed as the public about having to cut our hours of service. With 2.5 million people living in Brooklyn, we decided a direct and far-reaching approach was the best way to disseminate the message. In December, we alerted media via press release that Sunday service would be eliminated within a few weeks,” she said. In addition to notifying customers through the press, staff posted signage in the system’s buildings and a notice on the website.

Garvey has been careful to consider the needs of specific subgroups of people who might be impacted by the library’s changes. Notification flyers were distributed to people entering the library so kids wouldn’t be stranded unexpectedly. The police were notified. Local schools were alerted. Think not only of the patrons, but also of the organizations that may routinely refer the public to the library and its range of services.

Several libraries used special-purpose tools distributed within the library to communicate the message and reduce the amount of staff time spent answering the same questions repeatedly. At PPL on the day of the city council vote, a special communication plan was rolled out. It included an impressive variety of information-dissemination methods. Library staff members continue to distribute a printed “frequently asked questions” flyer within the building and an electronic version on the library system’s website, detailing the budget cuts and the reasons behind them (see appendix on page 38).

BPL’s administrative team uses the media not only to publicize cuts and reductions in library service, but also to help redefine the focus. Despite the lost hours, Mack-Harvin is quick to focus on what the library still has to offer, putting a positive spin on the situation. “Our customers can still conduct much of their library business on our website, such as place books on hold, renew library materials, get free homework help, and download e-books,” he said. Maurins said that while the library system’s recent press releases convey unsettling news of massive cuts and reductions, the “primary message is that we will strive to provide the best service possible, whatever amount of resources we have.” Casey acknowledged the importance of “a strong and positive public relations effort providing local media and residents with announcements of new materials and program opportunities.”

Public Reaction
From all accounts, public reaction has been one of understanding. As our patrons suffer the consequences of the economy’s downturn, they understand the prioritization that comes with making do with less. That is not to say they are accepting the changes with nonchalance. Garvey said that Phoenix patrons are enduring three and four-hour waits to use a computer. “They’re understanding, not angry. But the frustration level is high.”

Are patrons too understanding? Maurins described a small minority in Washoe County who “shrug it off and think it’s not a big deal or that libraries should be shut down completely.” Does public apathy make the problem worse?

Many of OPL’s patrons have noticed a stark reduction in the purchase of materials. A handful of them have been vocal about the change. Most seem to shrug it off. Though circulation is very strong for a library serving a community of just more than ten thousand, very few seem willing to take steps to help the library or publicly support it to local officials. People express their frustration while they’re in the
library, but would never consider addressing a city council or county supervisors’ meeting on its behalf.

Bright spots do exist. In some communities, patrons are working to improve the situation. Mack-Harvin tells of BPLs “Support Our Shelves” campaign. “We’re asking the public to give what they can to help ensure our shelves are filled with books during these challenging economic times. In just the first thirty days of this three-month initiative, we’ve raised nearly $150,000 of our $300,000 goal, and received hundreds of postcards addressed to Brooklyn’s elected officials pleading for library budgets to be restored,” she said.44

Are Libraries Easy Targets?

Doesn’t it often seem that when something must be cut, libraries come first? It’s difficult to determine statistically if that’s really the case. One interviewee cited the example of public schools. Many districts across the country have cut professional staff from their libraries or shuttered them entirely; despite all of the statistics that prove academic performance suffers in the absence of a library.

Are public libraries easy cuts for municipalities looking to reduce services? Maurins believes they are, clearly indicating who the favored children are:

Unfortunately, I think that is true. In Washoe County, libraries were lumped together with parks and the law library in the lowest-priority tier of services, meaning that those departments are taking the biggest budget “hits” in terms of percentage reductions. Library service has always been rated very highly on the citizen surveys conducted by the County, and our library system has been able to get two ballot measures passed since 1994 that have provided revenue to expand from bonds and tax overrides. On the surveys, however, citizens’ willingness to support libraries through the normal operating budget doesn’t score as well compared to how other departments (such as the Sheriff) fare. Safety, security and health are at the top of most everyone’s list of basic needs, so it makes sense politically to minimize funding cuts in areas such as public safety, health and social services, while allowing “non-mandated” services such as libraries to take a much larger share of the cuts. Until society as a whole values lifelong learning comparably to other needs such as survival and safety, it will be difficult to make the case that libraries and schools deserve as much (or more) funding as the agencies that are involved in law enforcement or public health.45

We know libraries are often undervalued and underfunded. But do those terms have much meaning when we can’t think of a time when they weren’t true?

A core group of vocal advocates can completely change the environment in which library cuts are made. Statistics and examples of the value of library service are proudly touted by library administration. Vitriolic support from those not in the employ of the library can carry even more weight and certainly garner more attention. Casey put things in perspective: “It helps to have respected and influential trustees representing the library’s interests to their counterparts in the municipality, and for grass roots support to be represented by a vigorous and resourceful Friends of the Library.”46

OPL and SBLFL face a problem common among public libraries in poorer communities—their primary users are not movers and shakers in the community, often not property owners, and often without a voice. Epstein contends that those who most need and use the public library are portions of the population that have little political power. “Although the public library is one of the few institutions that serves every member of the community, regardless of demographics, it is an institution that is often taken for granted,” she said.47 Many people seem to support the idea of a public library, but supporting it publicly is very low on the priority list.

In the absence of organized support, educating the patron base is key. The library can inform patrons without recruiting them. Both PPL and WCLS provided helpful, fact-based information to help patrons understand the budget issues and know who in government dissatisfied patrons could speak to about the library. Garvey noted that Sunday hours were originally eliminated during the council’s budget slashes, but public comment during the budget hearings caused the council to rethink the decision. As a result, Sunday hours were partially restored at about half of the city’s branches.

Casey and Garvey both understand that the burden of proving the value of libraries rests on the shoulders of the staff and patrons. Casey stated simply, “Our library has not allowed itself to be an ‘easy target’ for municipal funding cuts. The public appreciates the services provided by the library and voices that support in many ways during the course of the year.”48 Garvey added that any municipality department that cannot prove its worth is an easy target. “It is incumbent upon the both the library staff and the community to communicate the value of the library,” she said.49
Speaking not only for BPL, but perhaps for libraries everywhere, Mack-Harvin said, “When you are an institution that solely exists to serve the public, there are no easy cost-cutting targets. Reducing costs hurts the entire public, whether it’s decreasing the number of books we buy or deciding not to fill the vacancy of a staff member who helps children learn to read. Our customers are affected when our budgets are affected.”50

Have the Roles of Public Libraries Changed?
Before the Internet boom of the 1990s and the instant access to seemingly endless amounts of information, the library was one of the primary public sources of information. Now, many public libraries fulfill less of an informational role and act as more of an entertainment hub. It has been said that librarians are the original Google—a statement with a strong basis in truth. Just fifteen years ago, the public’s primary information search portal was the library.

This is probably where the idea of the library being a boring and dusty building was born. Libraries, however, are not immune to societal and cultural change, and to survive they have had to change their approach to public service. Casey believes that “the single most important factor assuring future development and public acceptance will be the library’s willingness to invest the time, talent, and money needed to keep up with the technological innovations and trends that capture the public’s interest.”51

With all the recent cuts, many library administrators may be worried about whether or not they can afford to keep up with the ever-present changes in technology, or even maintain the equipment or resources that they have. The grants that some libraries receive through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are certainly helpful, but may not cover all of the upgrades needed.

Regardless of what we believe is the primary role of a public library, we can’t deny that things are changing. Ultimately, the directors of these profiled libraries see change, but believe the core roles remain the same. Epstein said, “I think the appearance has changed, the forms of media have certainly changed, but the function and role has not.”52

OPL has also seen an increase in people, especially teenagers, coming in to use the library for the sole purpose of Internet access, primarily to use social networking sites.

Writing for American Libraries, Chrystie Hill noted, “more than 14 million people regularly use public library computers to access the Internet.”53 With this abundance of in-house Internet users, access to the Web as a resource is more important than ever. Libraries should not hesitate in adapting to the changes in technology. A library does not have to abandon its original mission to accommodate a growing desire and need for new forms of technology and media. In fact, it is core to a library’s mission to meet the information and technological needs of the community.

Many libraries are even using social networking sites for free advertising. OPL, for example, has recently created profiles on social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. This demonstrates to the technologically savvy that the library is dedicated to remaining relevant. Some libraries, such as the Denver Public Library, have created MySpace pages dedicated to teens. They can post blog entries about upcoming events and other information that is pertinent to their teen users. The Birmingham (Ala.) Public Library also has a MySpace page where they post a calendar of events and videos. Michael Porter of Webjunction and David Lee King of the Topeka & Shawnee County (Kans.) Public Library offer the following list of possible uses for a Twitter account:

- connecting with patrons and colleagues;
- connecting with other organizations;
- advocacy;
- answering and asking questions;
- professional development;
- using it as a listening tool to “hear” what your community says about the library;
- broadcasting announcements;
- throwing ideas around;
- promoting services or events; and
- job postings.54

With many libraries making difficult cuts from their budgets, having resources such as MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter to use as free advertising can loosen up some of the money used for traditional advertising and maybe reach a much greater audience. Many of the sites let you search for users in your area, which allows you to reach out to the people of your community. BPL has found that Web 2.0 outlets create a dialogue between staff and customers that didn’t exist before.

Internet access, while vital, is not the primary factor that has initiated the recent increase in public library use. Many people can no longer afford going to the movies, renting DVDs, buying CDs, or sub-
scribing to cable television. The public library is, in a way, acting as a media outlet. This is a big change from even a few years ago when many libraries were only seen as an educational resource.

The changes in information delivery methods have led to changes in professional library staff. While some library staff members would rather refer to print resources than the Internet, the growing ease of services such as Google makes serving the patron much faster. With a younger generation of library staff members arriving on the scene, the methods are bound to change. A fresh-out-of-college library employee may be more comfortable using search engines, wikis, or online directories than using the traditional print resources that were the primary go-to of people only a generation or so older.

The public library has always been, and will continue to be, an organic entity. To best serve the public, library administrators must work to embrace evolving technology to find new and exciting ways to fulfill classic roles.

**Hope for the Future**

In the previously mentioned *Time* article, survey respondents were asked, “What is your best guess about how long it will take before the economy starts to recover?” Twelve percent said it would be six months, 26 percent said one year, 24 percent said two years, 9 percent said three years, 11 percent said more than three years, 14 percent see the current state of the economy as the start of a long-term decline, and a full 56 percent of respondents believe America’s best days are ahead.55

Despite the bleak situation the libraries profiled here face in today’s current economic climate, the common thread among their leaders is optimism about the coming years. “As public libraries are now playing a vital role in the recovery, they will secure an even greater place within the new prosperity,” Casey said.56

When asked if she felt PPL would be able to return to its previous level of service, Garvey replied that it depends on how you define “level of service.” Depending upon how long the library operates under the current circumstances, Garvey questions whether it’s better to go back to the previous mode of operation or if perhaps it would better to “find another way to meet the community’s needs.”57 Today’s difficult situation offers her administrative team an opportunity to step back and take a fresh look at things.

Mack-Harvin is hopeful that library funding will be restored once the recession comes to an end so her team “can provide Brooklynites with the library service they deserve.”58 She acknowledges the broad spectrum of patrons who depend upon convenient library hours to meet their individual needs:

Adding hours would mean that we can more effectively meet the needs of everyone in Brooklyn’s communities, from the working adults who want to stop in before or after work to pick up a book they placed on hold to kids who come in after school for a safe place to hang out with friends and families who take advantage of our free cultural and recreational programs on the weekends.59

Maurins is confident that WCPL will survive and thrive. An expansion fund passed by voters in 1994 will continue to produce a large stream of revenue until 2024. The administrative team hopes to utilize the resulting funds to build new libraries either as replacements or new branches in areas that currently do not have a library nearby. Maurins sees better times in the near future. “I believe we will surpass our previous service levels within five years, although our staffing patterns and delivery mechanisms may look significantly different than they do today,” he said.60

**Conclusions**

We hope that we’ve seen the worst of the recession, as libraries across the nation are struggling. Librarians have always had a knack for stretching budgets and making do with less. The current economic crisis, while certainly difficult, is not the worst that libraries have endured. As in the past, we have stepped forward and made the difficult and often gut-wrenching decisions that must be made. When libraries suffer, communities suffer.

Although the focus of the interviews conducted for this article was on difficult economic circumstances and the resulting service reductions, each of the administrators of the profiled libraries spoke with hope. Rather than concentrating on what has been lost, they have chosen instead to focus on the many ways in which libraries can continue to meet as many of their patrons’ needs as possible.

With diminishing funds, providing these services can be challenging, but rewarding. Libraries now, more than ever, are needed to help patrons with job searches, skill development, entertainment needs, or even just maintaining a sliver of normalcy in chaotic times.

The necessary cuts are often excruciating to make, but libraries all over the United States are using this
opportunity to evaluate the needs of their communities and become more efficient than ever. Perhaps the silver linings are the valuable lessons learned. Our dedicated and loyal patrons want to see their libraries well supported and successful. Many are willing to head initiatives to raise money and awareness for their local institutions. In other communities, the support may not be as vocal, but the fierce loyalty that many people have for their libraries should be applauded. Without our patrons, no matter their demographics, libraries across the nation would cease to exist.

Libraries of all sizes from coast to coast are facing similar challenges. Through the combined efforts of dedicated staff and patrons, we will work to restore full service to our struggling institutions, making them more vibrant than ever before.

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Appendix
Phoenix Public Library Budget Reductions—Frequently Asked Questions

Why has the library cut its hours?
By law, the city of Phoenix must maintain a balanced budget. Recent drops in tax revenues, resulting from the economic downturn, required the city to reduce its budget by more than $270 million. The majority of city departments (except public safety departments) were asked to reduce their budgets between 27 and 28 percent.

Did you cut other things before cutting hours?
Between 2002 and 2007, the city has reduced the library’s budget by 16 percent. During this same time, library use has grown. Between fiscal years 2001–02 and 2006–07, the number of library visitors increased by nearly 13 percent while the circulation of library materials increased by almost 39 percent.

To increase efficiency, we have installed self-checkout machines at all locations, outsourced materials cataloging and processing and much of material selection, and reorganized library staffing. We have also deferred maintenance of facilities, delayed opening new branch libraries, and eliminated the library’s print calendar of events. From 2006 to 2009, we reduced our materials budget a total of nearly $1 million annually.

How much has the library’s budget been cut?
The library’s budget will be reduced by nearly $10 million over a sixteen-month period, effective March 2, 2009.

Other than hours, what reductions will the library make?
The library has reduced its materials budget more than $500,000 annually. We have cut back on some programs (e.g., storytimes, computer classes, and GED/ESL classes) and eliminated other programs completely (e.g., Grade One at the Library).

How can the library build new facilities and renovate existing buildings while cutting hours, programs, and the materials budget?
Funding for operations (service hours, programs, and materials) comes from a different source than funding for construction and renovation. Most construction is funded through Citizen Bond Programs. Currently, the library is implementing projects approved by voters in the 2001 and 2006 Citizen Bonds. These funds cannot be used for operating expenses, such as salaries. Bond projects include the construction of Agave Library (2001 Citizen Bond), a community library in partnership with South Mountain Community College, and the improvement of the library’s computer infrastructure, including additional public-access computers at many of our libraries. In addition, private funding is supporting the development of College Depot and additional renovations at Burton Barr Central Library.

If I have concerns about these cuts, to whom should I direct my inquiry?
You may submit comments/concerns to library management via Contact Us at phoenixpubliclibrary.org—see tab near top of page. If you would prefer to voice your concerns directly to city of Phoenix management, you may visit phoenix.gov and submit a comment through Contact Us—at the bottom of the page.

How can I help the library during these difficult economic times?
The library has several organizations that support its work. These include the Friends of the PPL and the Phoenix Public Library Foundation. The Friends and Foundation provide funding for library programs such as our summer and winter reading programs for children and GED/ESL classes for adults.

The library also welcomes volunteers. Please visit www.phoenixpubliclibrary.org for more information.

Funding for your library is critically short. You know that you provide critical community resources. Cutting programs and hours, especially in a down economy, is a disservice to people who need their library. Pointing fingers or embarrassing budget-makers will make lethal enemies of them far, far into the future. On the other hand, rolling over and being a good sport will guarantee that your library will be seen as an easy target in future budget years. How do you advocate for adequate funding without alienating the very people whose good will you rely on?

Queens Library (QL) is one of three public library systems in New York City. Approximately 85 percent of its operating costs come from the city, another 10 percent from the state of New York. Each year’s funds are allocated as part of the city’s and state’s budget processes, following several months of advocacy efforts and intense negotiations among the various political bodies and personalities. It is a labor-intensive process. To complicate matters, the “final” budget is never final. Midyear adjustments are common, depending on whether city and state revenues materialize as predicted.

Whether your library gets funding through annual negotiations, brings a budget before the voters, has the security (or suffers the penury) of millage or some combination, you must walk the tightrope between zealous advocacy and keeping the good will of the people holding the purse strings. The less money there is to go around, the more delicate the balance becomes.

In this very difficult budget year, QL has a list of advocacy activities that include:

- face-to-face meetings with elected officials;
- mobilization of our grassroots advocates;
- letter- and postcard-writing campaigns;
- petitions;
- enlisting the cooperation and support of the union that represents much of the library’s staff;
- organized rallies;
- a dedicated advocacy website; and
- making good use of the partnerships and tools provided by the American Library Association (ALA), PLA, and our state association.
These are the visible manifestations, perhaps 20 percent of the total effort. The strategic advocacy plan takes place all year around, in good times and bad.

**Tightrope Walking Is an Art**

We all wish there was an absolute, mathematically defined midpoint so we could say “do not go beyond here.” If you do not advocate with enough vigor, you will not realize the funding you need to provide quality library service. Push one step beyond and you will do irreparable harm to your cause.

At QL, we characterize our efforts as “intelligently aggressive.” We want to keep pressure on our budget-makers without being reckless. If we chose to conduct a nasty, name-calling, burn-all-bridges public campaign for funding, we might get what we asked for. But we would only get it once. We would be doomed in the eyes of embarrassed elected officials for all eternity. How do you know how far to go?

We make it a point to know the individuals involved. We know how much they will tolerate and still maintain a good opinion of us. We know who is a true friend of libraries, and we leverage those connections. We know who only lip-synchs library support. If we cannot connect with them, we try to connect with others who can influence them.

The goal is not to annihilate our opponents. The goal is for all of us—the library, the community we serve, and our government funders—to walk away from the budget process feeling that we all did the best we could in the current climate. We need to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect.

**Whose Side Are You On, Anyway?**

To advocate successfully for your library’s budget, you have to be single-minded in your agenda. Your library’s services are critical to your community’s well-being. You need adequate funding to keep the doors open and materials on the shelves. End of message. Other publicly funded services are also important in their way, but none is a better long-term investment than your library’s role in creating a well-educated, literate, job-ready society.

You are polite. You are respectful. You are professional and well-reasoned. You should not, and cannot, waffle or equivocate. You must make eye contact. Your body language and your words have to convey the message. You must be a zealot. You must believe it, with every fiber of your being. If you cannot, someone else should bring the message to the budget-makers.

**Relationships Are Everything**

Never miss an opportunity to network with the opinion-makers in your community, whether it is at a social event, Lion’s Club meeting, school event, or beach picnic. It might seem like you are investing a lot of time just to shake a hand or chit-chat for a few moments. The familiarity will serve you well when the time comes to call and ask for support or intervention. There is a big difference between getting a phone call from someone who is known to you, even marginally, and a cold call from a stranger.

Do your best to cultivate cordial relationships with elected officials. Don’t neglect their subordinate staffs. They often are influential. They may do research or write speeches for their bosses. They interact with other opinion-makers. They may go on to run for office successfully themselves. They need to have a good opinion of the library and understand its value.

**Get to Know Your Elected Officials**

The only way you are going to know how far you can push your agenda is to know the individual elected officials involved. Every committee on which you’ve ever served is a microcosm of local, state, and federal government, with a similar range of personalities. Some individuals are high-minded and generous of spirit. Some individuals are petty and vindictive. Some have loved libraries all their lives, while others are quite indifferent. You won’t know on whose help you can rely unless you know the players.

Know, before you do it, how an elected official is going to react to each action you are contemplating. Open a dialogue. They don’t have to love whatever it is—nobody likes criticism—but it should not be a cause for all-out war, either. The best way is to simply ask the official, or a friendly, knowledgeable staff member: “Hi, this is so-and-so from the Anytown Public Library. We met at the July 4 picnic. I was hoping you would give me your candid opinion on something. You know, the Friends of the Library are very upset that funding may not be enough to keep the library open on Sundays. Actually, we’re all upset about it. They are thinking about a petition drive. How do you think the city councilperson will feel about that? I know the Friends are anxious to advocate, they love the library, but I thought you should have a heads-up, and I’d love to get your take on it.”

You will find out very quickly whether you are taking an acceptable risk or stepping off a cliff.

When an elected official is not open to forming a relationship, try to get close to someone else who knows him or her. Your board is a good way to
expand the number of relationships you are able to maintain on your own. It is a legitimate consideration when developing your board. *Who* they know truly may be more important than *what* they know.

**Let Them Know What They Have to Lose**
Tell the community and elected officials exactly what they will lose if your funding isn’t adequate. Tell them in very specific, measurable terms and humanize it in dramatic terms: “We will be forced to close two mornings a week. Three hundred of our community’s seniors, who usually use the library during those hours, will not have access to recreation and referral services, and will suffer loneliness because they do not have the advantage of socializing during those times. Molly G., 86, lives alone. She walks to the library every morning to visit with her friends and the staff, and also to save money because the library is heated in winter and cooled in summer. She reads the newspapers and crochets. She, along with so many others, will have nowhere to go.” It is so much more convincing than just saying “cutting the library budget is a bad thing.”

**Do Not Allow Yourself to Be Pitted Against Other Worthy Recipients**
Everybody agrees that first responders, education, and healthcare are essential services. Libraries are equally essential. It is not an either/or choice. Nobody would argue that we can’t have both firemen and hospitals. Nobody would suggest that if money is tight, we close schools or hospitals one day a week. All essential services require funding. Libraries are essential services. Libraries require funding.

**Never Let Elected Officials Off the Hook for Funding Libraries**
According to ALA’s *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 2007–2008*, “Libraries are more dependent on ‘soft’ money (fees/fines, donations and grants) for staff salaries. This is alarming because these types of support are more volatile and can distort the true cost of library operations, positioning libraries to struggle year to year to maintain basic services when, in fact, sustainable public funding is declining.”

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Budget-makers have to make tough decisions. That is their job. They face many worthy recipients competing for the same pool of money. Naturally, they will take the path of least resistance if it is offered. Once you indicate, by word or deed, that you will “understand” or can “make do” with less, it is guaranteed that you will have to. There is no benefit to being Ms. or Mr. Congeniality.

How contentious should you let it get? That is the balancing act you need to perfect.

Outside Support Should Never Take the Place of Government Funding
Grants and philanthropy are valuable to libraries and well worth our time to pursue. They are, and must remain, supplementary to the operating expenses the public sector provides. It is government’s obligation to keep the library’s doors open and books on the shelves. That is non-negotiable. If you are lucky enough to receive a large gift or endowment, good for you! It does not mean your public funding sources owe a dime less.

Identify and Leverage Allies
Quite possibly, there is a very vocal opponent to library funding in your midst. Someone else, hopefully equally influential, will be on your side. Find your ally. Ask your ally to speak on behalf of the library. It serves three purposes:

1. It helps get your message out.
2. It is credible, because it is coming from someone who does not have a vested interest in keeping his or her job.
3. It will draw the opponent’s fire away from you and you will be able to avoid a public face-off, which is always desirable.

Friends of the Library and other grassroots activists make wonderful allies. If they love the library, they will write to the newspapers, circulate petitions, visit elected officials, and phone to get the vote out for the library budget. If you don’t have a Friends group, look toward the school’s Parent Teacher Student Association. There is a lot of mutuality of interest. It is often the same personalities who will support both.

Sell Your Message Constantly
If you are reading this, you believe that libraries are inherently good. Your library users believe it, too. That is a long way from motivating them to do something to preserve it or voluntarily agreeing to pay more money out of their taxes, which are already higher than they like. In the same vein, most people agree that conserving the environment is a good thing, but very few want to take cold showers to save energy. Of course, not everyone in your community is a library user, either.

You need to sell your message constantly. Forget what “everybody knows.” If you didn’t tell them today, they don’t know it. Identify with hot issues. Use the same rhetoric to talk about library services. Public libraries do just about everything in one way or another; it isn’t much of a stretch. When everyone was talking about “bridging the digital divide,” libraries were right there. Now, perhaps “workforce development” and “entrepreneurial support” will resonate more.

Tell your local media outlets about your success stories. Tell every business in town how to access telephone reference. Invite every teacher to an open house once a year. Offer to help elected officials research local issues. Don’t neglect the basics, either. Do new parents in the community know you have toddler programs? Give local real estate professionals information to give out to potential new residents. Connect with young adults who have gone away to college or into the military. Do they know they can still access your databases remotely with their hometown library cards?

Some people in your community have never used your library. You still must court their good opinions. Even though you probably do not need more demand for free services, find something that will interest them and invite them in. Have a monthly Sunday jazz brunch, or an online genealogy club, or invite the Kiwanis club to meet in the library. Give them a reason to be in favor of adequate library funding.

Some of your elected officials probably never use the library, either. Educate them. Bring them in. Offer to help their staff members research when necessary. Invite them to use the library as a traveling district office, or for town hall–style meetings. Use the opportunity to sell them on what libraries do for the community.

Know When and Where to Expend Political Capital—“Winning” Is Relative
In theory, any funding that does not allow the library to stay open 24/7 is inadequate. In reality, depending on the overall political and economic climate, flat funding or even moderate losses are the best you can do. It takes judgment (that is, the tightrope walk) to
know the difference. If you cash in your chips over everything, you won’t have any left when you really, really need it. Choose wisely.

Publicly Express Gratitude for Relative “Wins”

We never get all the funding we want. Some years are particularly bleak. Look at what your library was allocated compared to other essential services, and thank your funders if you can possibly find a silver lining. Do it without comparing the library directly to the others. Try to use phrases such as, “This was a year full of tough decisions. Thank you for making library service a priority. I know I can count on you to support adequate funding as the fiscal picture improves.” Write a letter to each elected official who supported you. Write an open letter to the local media, and post it on the library’s website.

Library Staff Are Talking to Funders for You

Your staff must realize, and be constantly reminded, that they work in the proverbial goldfish bowl. However your budget comes to the table, it is ultimately being enacted on behalf of the people in the community you serve. The best way to be perceived as giving good value is to actually give good value. As public libraries, we say we give our services to the public for free. That is not accurate. We may not charge a per-use fee, but everyone who pays taxes is pre-paying a flat rate for your library’s services, whether they use them or not. The more people who use, and appreciate, the fundamental good your library represents, the easier it is to get funding.

Staff members are on the frontlines. They are often the public face of the library. As such, they have the ability to make friends and build alliances through terrific customer service and a friendly manner.

Sticks and Stones Are Just Sticks and Stones

Inevitably, not everyone will agree that libraries are valuable. Some people think that libraries are obsolete. Some people also think the world is flat. Do not let them derail your mission. We are doing righteous work. Keep preaching the gospel. Libraries are critical community resources. Libraries need adequate funding.

Reference


Further Reading

In the fall of 2008 as the presidential election heated up and the economy sank deeper and deeper, Capitol Hill talk focused on the seemingly inevitable call for passing another stimulus package to revive the U.S. financial system. The American Library Association’s (ALA) Washington Office immediately recognized this open dialogue as an opportunity to not only promote what libraries were already doing to help a public struggling with a weakened economy, but also to position libraries to advance their services with the aid of an unprecedented surge of federal funding.

“From the onset, we knew that libraries were on the verge of a historical opportunity—if we were able to effectively communicate to Congress the need and the benefits of investing in libraries as part of a stimulus package,” Lynne Bradley, director of the ALA Office of Government Relations (OGR), said.1

“For months, we had no clear picture of what the bill was going to look like, but we continued to engage in an intensive campaign to give libraries of all types a voice in Washington. In the end, every phone call, every report, every meeting, and every letter we sent out during that time, along with the efforts of other groups lobbying on behalf of libraries, paid off. The final bill wasn’t a wish list for libraries, but we were in.”

Nearly a year later, the groundwork has been laid, and libraries of all types know where to put their aim, but the process of actually securing the funding available to libraries through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), which was signed into law February 17, 2009, continues and evolves every day.

“As with any federal process, there is red tape to cut through, but this particular situation is different, as there really is no preexisting model to go by,” Bradley said. “The agencies tasked with doling out the funding face an unprecedented challenge of interpreting this law and executing it efficiently; for those of us on the other side, being a part of this process is incredibly challenging.”

OGR and the Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) use a divide-and-conquer approach to working through the intricacies of the ARRA. By focusing on each area of the stimulus that libraries can benefit from, the team then reaches out to the appropriate ALA membership in many ways in order to ensure they have the information and resources necessary to secure stimulus funding.
Bradley said bimonthly calls to the ALA state chapters and Chief Officers of State Library Agencies have been a key way to share the inside-the-Beltway news, as has utilizing online resources such as the Washington Office blog, the District Dispatch, and the ARRA-focused website www.ala.org/knowyour stimulus, where libraries can learn about the sections of the stimulus package from which libraries can tap into funds.

$7.2 Billion for Broadband Libraries Positioned to Advance National Broadband Deployment

For public libraries, perhaps the most exciting piece of the stimulus is the $7.2 billion for broadband.

With more than 100,000 libraries (including 16,592 public libraries) in communities across the nation, each library plays a vital role in supporting job searches and career development; small business creation and development; school homework and research; and access to online education, training, and e-government resources through their no-fee, public-access terminals.

Libraries today must have a robust broadband Internet connection to provide these essential services to the public. ALA believes ARRA funding has the potential to benefit millions of people via high-capacity, future-proof connections to the Internet if invested in large aggregation points (or “hubs”) such as libraries.

In most communities, libraries are the only provider of no-fee access. According to ALA’s Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2008–2009 (PLFTAS), 71 percent of libraries are their communities’ sole provider of free Internet access; that number goes up to 79 percent in rural communities. As a result, many libraries have been reporting double-digit growth in computer usage in 2008.

To meet the public’s growing need for access to computers through their libraries, America’s public libraries have made substantial investments in technology resources over the last decade. According to the ALA Office for Research & Statistics (ORS), today virtually every public library provides computers and Internet access free of charge to the public. The number of computers available has doubled in the last decade, Internet connections have become faster, and Wi-Fi has become commonplace in many libraries (see figure 1). In only five years, the number of public libraries offering free wireless access has jumped from 17 to 76.4 percent.3

Despite the gains libraries have made in adding more public workstations, wireless, and increased Internet connections speeds, the greater demand for these services is putting new strain on libraries as they struggle to meet patron expectations. PLFTAS outlines many of these challenges, including “inadequate technology infrastructure, costs associated with operating and maintaining that infrastructure, and bandwidth quality/availability issues.”4

ORS also found greatly increased use of library technology for job-seeking as well as preparing résumés and filing for unemployment benefits. Aiding job seekers is increasingly viewed as a critical role for public libraries, with 62.2 percent of libraries report-

Figure 1. Average Number of Public-Access Workstations

Source: Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, www.ala.org/plinternetfunding
As more and more government services are accessible only online, libraries are also providing critical instruction and other as-needed assistance to their patrons on how to navigate these often difficult e-government forms and websites. In 2007, 74 percent of public libraries indicated their staff provided these support services.\(^5\)

Given the relationship between libraries and job seekers and those individuals’ increasing dependency on library technologies during the current economic situation, utilizing broadband stimulus funding to support libraries and investing in the library is an appropriate and highly efficient use of federal dollars. Not only do libraries supply the necessary technology, but they also provide individualized support critical to successfully accessing Internet resources. Investing ARRA broadband dollars in local communities will lead to economic growth across the nation.

OITP Director Alan Inouye said the ability to obtain additional funding for broadband is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for public libraries, and those libraries who want to receive funding should take time to assess their current needs as well as needs in the future.\(^6\) In order to plan accurately for future broadband requirements, many libraries will need assistance in doing an infrastructure assessment. Critically assessing a library’s current broadband technology will help the library determine if it is sufficient to meet increasing patron demand for bandwidth heavy services.

### Assessing the Broadband Situation

The stimulus broadband funding is being administered by the Commerce Department’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), who will oversee $4.7 billion, and the Agriculture Department’s Rural Utilities Service (RUS), who will oversee the remaining $2.5 billion.\(^8\) No less than $250 million of the broadband provision is targeted for innovative projects that encourage sustainable broadband service. The first step for the agencies—which has proven to be a lengthy and extensive process—is defining the program rules.

After accounting for the specific uses of ARRA funds, such as the one for public computer center capacity, more than $3 billion remains available for general purposes. Public libraries are likely to be eligible to submit project proposals for these funds—in particular for large broadband build-out and deployment projects that will deliver high speed (fiber) broadband to libraries. Although the public computer center capacity provision explicitly specifies public libraries, ARRA does not preclude libraries from applying for all of the other funding areas.

NTIA and RUS have until September 30, 2010, to spend the $7.2 billion. The funding will be awarded in three rounds.

There is tremendous competition for these funds from a variety of for-profit and nonprofit entities, as the program is open to a wide audience including educational institutions, healthcare facilities, small businesses, telecommunications providers, and, of course, libraries.

Public libraries have many advantages that could increase their chances of securing funding. Because the core mission of the public library is to provide public-access computing, the $200 million in federal broadband funding to expand public computer center capacity is a perfect fit for libraries, and libraries have a number of angles to consider when developing proposals for the broadband program.

The main focus of the ARRA broadband provision is to provide broadband access to “unserved” areas and improve the quality of access in those areas considered “underserved,” but these terms were not defined when the bill was signed into law.

Specific funds are set aside for broadband awareness and outreach education. Though many people are already Internet users, there remains a segment of the population that lags behind. Libraries are poised to provide access and support to these vulnerable groups. Librarians can stimulate broadband demand by helping their patrons understand the critical role the Internet plays in everyday life. To do so, libraries can develop proposals for staff and patron training, equipment, and other support for services related to encouraging broadband use.

Because so many ARRA broadband provisions in the program dovetail with library services, they underscore what libraries are already doing. Thus, ARRA provides an opportunity to not only find support for traditional library services but also to plan for the connectivity needs of the future. Libraries can think ahead and identify services their communities will be likely to need as the Internet continues to become the key source for necessary information.
In most communities, libraries are the only provider of no-fee access. According to PLFTAS, 71 percent of libraries are their communities’ sole provider of free Internet access.

What Libraries Can Do Now

The ALA Washington Office has distributed a “Top Ten List” of things libraries can do now—before the agencies announce the program rules. Those steps include the following:

1. **Assess your library’s telecommunications services and identify future needs.** Think about the library services that can be enhanced by broadband applications. Focus especially on your library’s role in helping people gain new job and career skills, search for and apply for new jobs, and support small businesses. Also start to identify resource people who might work with you to develop proposals to NTIA and RUS.

2. **Inventory the connectivity at your library and in the surrounding community.** What types of telecommunications services are offered? What providers serve your library and your community, campus, or school? What are your patrons’ needs? (E-rate recipients: Build on your tech plans and other features of your E-rate applications.)

3. **Talk with your local government officials, library boards, the governor’s office, and the state library agency in your state.** What plans do they have for broadband and ARRA? Will you have to work through them or will your library be able to apply directly for ARRA programs? Check out their websites. Connect with your state library agency and any regional or multi-type library cooperatives to find out what they are doing.

4. **Think creatively and collaboratively.** Contact other libraries as well as other institutions in your community to find out what they may be planning. Can you work together to aggregate demand for broadband? As you learn more about what others are doing, identify potential models that you may want to adapt for your community.

5. **Working with the key administrators in your organization, contact potential partners—public and private.** Talk to phone companies, cable providers, Internet service providers, and even power companies. Ask about their plans and needs while explaining to them how your library utilizes telecommunications and why expanded broadband services for libraries will help the whole community. Push for “fiber to the library” and other advanced technologies. Think of your library as an anchor tenant in your community’s broadband network.

6. **Identify the job/career, employment, and small business needs and resources in your community.** While you are doing this research, share information about how your library is already helping people find and train for jobs, learn new career skills, and serve small businesses. Describe how broadband will expand your services for recovery and reinvestment.

7. **Start thinking about sustainability.** What will your library need to make sure that your broadband services are stable and robust? Will you need other human and software resources? (Although undetermined at this time, some parts of the NTIA and RUS programs may support “non-technology” resources.) Start strategizing now to obtain local funding for long-term continuation of projects and services started under ARRA grants.

8. **Stay up-to-date on the status of ARRA programs.** Monitor the ALA webpage www.ala.org/knowyourstimulus. As details become available, more information will be added to the site—so please check often!

9. **Think BIG!** Even a small fraction of $7.2 billion dollars is a lot of money. We know that libraries need broadband to serve users. ARRA is a one-time opportunity to advance broadband build out to the underserved, the unserved, and “special populations.” Libraries potentially fit into several parts of the NTIA and RUS programs. Think “fiber and other technologies to the library.”

10. **Finally, say “thank you” to your U.S. senators and congressional representatives for passing ARRA.** Make sure to keep them informed about your library services related to job growth and employment information—and share with them
your concepts for ARRA grant applications and broadband deployment. Emphasize how your library services promote new jobs and employment skills, for example, through information and Internet literacy training.

By partnering with other local government agencies under the leadership of the Office of the Chief Technology Officer, District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL) in the nation’s capital is in many ways creating a model for other public libraries to consider when pursuing stimulus funding.

DCPL and the agencies are preparing to submit a citywide proposal for technology stimulus funding in an effort to secure money for projects that would increase the number of public-access computers in libraries, provide public computer training, expand and promote library Web content that uses broadband services and encourages its adoption in homes, and upgrade their buildings to make better use of broadband and support the municipal Wi-Fi network.

“Stimulus dollars can help the library provide better technology services to users by increasing the number of public access computers and improving broadband,” said Ginnie Cooper, chief DCPL librarian. “This funding can also help the library build ‘greener’ buildings and make existing ones more energy efficient, a priority for Congress and the Obama administration.”

**Working With the Funding Agencies**

In April, ALA took advantage of opportunities to engage directly with the administering agencies as well as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which serves in a consultative role.

ALA filed comments to NTIA and RUS, defining the position of libraries on the ARRA Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and the RUS program.

The comments underscored the essential role that libraries play as the premier public computing center and as information hubs in their communities, while also making a compelling case for a nationwide “fiber to the library” initiative.

ALA commended NTIA officials for correctly suggesting that ARRA establishes four separate funding areas—expanding public computing center capacity, stimulating broadband adoption, mapping, and building broadband facilities—and outlined the position of libraries in each area.

ALA recommended that NTIA and RUS target funding for high-speed broadband connections to libraries and develop grant criteria in a way that reflects the critical role libraries play in providing no-fee access to the Internet.

ALA believes that fiber optic cable will be the best long-term solution for high-speed broadband deployment for most libraries and urged NTIA and RUS to target a significant amount of funding for a program to bring fiber to the nation’s public libraries—though excepting some states or regions for which fiber solutions would be cost-prohibitive. These fiber projects should be primarily funded through the “building broadband facilities funding” area, though some of these projects might be funded through the funds allocated for “expanding public computing center capacity” area, especially requests for smaller amounts for library projects that address multiple purposes.

Because public libraries can serve as “community anchor institutions” for a robust nationwide fiber network, funding for “fiber to the library” is a cost-effective solution that will offer almost unlimited capacity for decades. Once in place, it is often less expensive and less difficult to maintain than other technologies.

Key community service organizations such as libraries should have a definition of broadband that recognizes libraries and similar organizations provide public-access computers for many people at once. Their broadband requirements are therefore greater than those of a single residence. Rather than a definition based on a fixed number of megabits per second, a flexible definition addresses the unique needs of libraries and the role libraries play for their particular communities. In any event, areas that do not meet the agency’s definition of unserved and underserved based on residential broadband availability should not disqualify community service organizations such as libraries. Private-sector applicants should be encouraged and rewarded for efforts to include libraries and other entities mentioned in their investment plans.

Improving libraries’ broadband capabilities involves more than a bigger pipe to library buildings. The technical and physical infrastructure within libraries often needs to be upgraded to accommodate faster Internet connections and improve wireless service in and around libraries.

These improvements include hardware (for example, routers and servers), software, inside wiring, and building renovations. Additional expertise also may be needed, such as technical advice and support and capacity and sustainability planning. These investments all enhance access and support for broadband
services. ARRA funding should be available for these costs.

Most libraries have significant financial need. The 20 percent match required to receive NTIA grants will be a major challenge for most libraries, given the severe economic downturn. Libraries should be accorded accommodations to the match requirement.

State priorities deserve some deference but there are also other important priorities. ALA advised NTIA to allow funding for multistate applications, some in-state applications exclusive of a state’s strategy, and national-level applications (for example, assessment, research, and aggregated services).

ALA also encouraged NTIA and RUS to include libraries in broadband mapping and asserted that the broadband map should not be limited only to residential customer information. The map should include key community service organizations such as the more than sixteen thousand public library outlets in the United States. To the extent that it is practical, ALA asked for as much data collection about libraries’ current broadband service as possible. The results should be publicly available, since these efforts are being supported by taxpayer dollars.

ALA’s comments to the FCC, also filed in April in response to the FCC’s call for comments to help inform the commission’s consultative role in the broadband provisions of ARRA, reiterated these points.

$53.6 Billion for the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund

The largest source of funding that libraries of all types can benefit from in ARRA is the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF). This program includes $48 billion in block grants allocated among the states.11

Out of each state’s allocation, 81.8 percent ($39.8 billion) is reserved for the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) and 18.2 percent ($8.8 billion) is reserved for the Government Services Fund (GSF) for the governor to use for education, public safety, and other government services. GSF is flexible and the governor has the discretion to use the funds as he or she sees fit.

Melanie Anderson, associate director for ALA’s Office of Government Relations, said GSF is a great possible source of funding for libraries because the funding is flexible and state governors have complete discretion to use the funds for their priorities.12

The funds do not have to be spent entirely on education activities like ESF. Possible uses of the funds include technology, materials, construction, and staffing. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has tracked what each state has received so far under GSF.13

On April 1, 2009, USDE issued guidance on how the SFSF funds can be spent.14 The guidance stated that the funding can be used for library construction in certain circumstances (see table 1). The guidance allows governors to use GSF for new construction and modernization of any type of building that would include public libraries.

Anderson said that after the guidance was issued, ALA compiled and distributed a chart (see table 1) to help libraries understand how SFSF funds could be used for construction. Additional information is available at www.ala.org/knowyourstimulus.

$120 million for Senior Community Service Employment

To help more people gain employment, one initiative the stimulus included was a $120 million investment into the Senior Service Employment Program, a community service and work-based training program for older workers. This money will mean an additional twenty-four thousand jobs available to older workers.

Know How Your Library Salaries Measure Up!

Consult ALA-APA Library Salary Data Tools for Credible, Industry-Specific Information for Your State and Region

Robust database and print tools with current salary data for more than 65 Librarian and Non-MLS positions in public and academic libraries.

Easy to use Salary Database — http://cs.ala.org/websurvey/salarysurvey/salary/surveyform/form.cfm

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Base your management and career decisions on real salary data.

Get the Real Numbers! You need accurate data for:

» Budgeting
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» Market data comparisons
» Performance reviews
» Job searches
» Statistics and trends
» Job descriptions

For more information, call ALA-APA at 800-545-2433, x2424 or email jgrady@ala.org.

“… an additional resource when presented with the challenging issues of salaries.” — Sue Groff, Litchfield, IL Library
Program participants are placed in a wide variety of community service positions at nonprofit and public facilities, including daycare centers, senior centers, governmental agencies, schools, hospitals, landscaping centers, and libraries.

It is important to note that libraries do not apply for this funding. If a library is interested in participating, they must notify the point of contact in their state listed on the U.S. Department of Labor website, www.doleta.gov/seniors.

“I encourage public libraries to look into this initiative,” Anderson said, “it’s a great opportunity to bring in helpful staff at a time when libraries really need additional workers to meet the demands of the public, and it also brings a sense of community involvement to the library.”

There are currently seventy-four grantees. Grant awards are made to eighteen national nonprofit organizations and fifty-six state and territorial governments. In most states, the governor has selected the State Office on Aging to administer the program.15

An Additional $130 Million for the Rural Community Facilities Program

The Community Programs is a division of the Housing and Community Facilities Programs at the United States Department of Agriculture.

These programs, which include the Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program, the Community Facilities Direct Loan Program, and the Community Facilities Grant Program, develop essential community facilities for public use in rural areas. Such facilities include schools, libraries, childcare, hospitals, medical clinics, assisted living facilities, fire and rescue stations, police stations, community centers, public buildings, and transportation.16

Public Libraries Must Act Now

ALA is available to help libraries, but they must take action. Libraries should talk with local management, regional library cooperatives, state libraries, state library associations, and governors’ offices. And libraries should ensure that they are part of an application. If nothing is happening or available, libraries should consider submitting their own application or collaborating with others in their communities, which can include non-libraries.

Remember, there are three rounds of applications, with one round likely in early 2010, so even if a library misses the first or second round, there is still time. But the money will not just be handed over to libraries—they will have to make it happen.17

References and Notes

Table 1. How SFSF Funds Can Be Used For Library Construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>New Construction Allowable</th>
<th>New Construction Not Allowable</th>
<th>Modernization and Repair Allowable</th>
<th>Modernization and Repair Not Allowable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education Stabilization Fund $39.8 billion</td>
<td>• K–12 public school libraries (including charter schools)</td>
<td>• K–12 private school libraries</td>
<td>• K–12 public school libraries</td>
<td>• K–12 private school libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Services Fund $8.8 billion</td>
<td>• K–12 public and private school libraries</td>
<td>• Public and private academic libraries</td>
<td>• Public libraries</td>
<td>• Public libraries</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ALAs Library Instruction Round Table

We Provide

- Networking opportunities for professional instruction and information literacy groups
- Programming that appeals to instruction librarians from all types of libraries
- Assistance in developing, improving, and promoting library instruction and information literacy activities
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15. The contact information for all existing grantees is available at www.doleta.gov/seniors. The “Contacts” link on the right side of the page will take users to page that where they can find a list of grantees.
16. Libraries in rural communities interested in upgrading or building a library with the aid of this funding can find more information at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/cf/cp.htm (accessed May 29, 2009).
“By the Book” reviews professional development materials of potential interest to public librarians, trustees, and others involved in library service. Public Library Association policy dictates that PLA publications not be reviewed in this column. Notice of new publications from PLA will generally be found in the “News from PLA” section of Public Libraries. A description of books written by the editors or contributing editors of Public Libraries may appear in this column but no evaluative review will be included for these titles.

Pop Goes the Library: Using Pop Culture to Connect with Your Whole Community


Pop Goes the Library began as a blog, but while the blog is an excellent source for the most up-to-date ideas, the book version is a great way for those new to the concept of pop culture in the library to get a solid footing. Brookover and Burns have a simple message: No one is isolated from pop culture. It is everywhere: books, TV, movies, music, and magazines. The authors provide a broad definition of pop culture: “whatever people in your community are talking, thinking, and reading about.”

There is no secret formula for discovering what is popular—reading and talking are key. There is no alternative to finding out what your patrons want, except by talking to them. If you’re a shy librarian, an interview with Ilise Benun provides tips for stepping outside of your introverted shell.

Also included: Core Pop Culture Resources for Library Professionals (online and print resources), Pop Programming Year-Round Calendar, Survey Questions, websites (broken down by chapter), and an index.

—Carrie Scarr, Assistant Director, West Fargo (N.Dak.) Public Library

Better by Design: An Introduction to Planning and Designing a New Library Building


Managing Your Library Construction Project: A Step-by-Step Guide


While it’s easy to dream of a better and bigger facility, the actual project may seem like a mountain to climb. But don’t worry, well chosen road maps such as Better by Design and Managing Your Library Construction Project may be just the resources needed to help your library find its way to its next home.

Both books predictably cover topics such as how to find an architect, roles of architects and libraries, and the many steps in the process. Another common topic between the two texts is communication—both
emphasize communication at different steps in the process. Khan emphasizes communication during staff and community relations, while McCarthy emphasizes communication during marketing and the pre-construction meeting.

In Better by Design, Khan includes five key principles to manage change: “different people react differently to change; everyone has fundamental needs that have to be met; change often involves a loss and people go through a personal process of negativity until there is a recognizable positive outcome; expectations need to be managed realistically; and fears have to be dealt with” (37).

Both texts are well researched and organized, however the choice of one or the other will depend on the collective experience of the library management. McCarthy’s text is much more user friendly—containing checklists and duties for both librarian and architect, making this text a good choice for the librarian who is new to construction projects.

Two unique features in Better by Design include dual-use libraries and shelving diagrams. The section on dual-use libraries packs a lot of information in just a few pages, but Khan provides a starting point for libraries who are considering this option. The shelving diagrams are a particularly good guide that indicate number of shelves, total height, and shelf labels (such as “squatting,” “browsing,” and “canopy”).

Two subjects that are absent from both books are library foundations and Friends of the Library—both of which can play essential roles in public relations and monetary support. Khan doesn’t mention library boards either, which often play an essential role in a library’s decision-making processes. Both books can compliment each other; however if a library only buys one book for an upcoming construction project, buy Managing Your Library—the checklist layout will provide an essential road map that will supplement the guidance provided by an architect and consultant.—Carrie Scarr, Assistant Director, West Fargo (N.Dak.) Public Library

Our New Public, a Changing Clientele: Bewildering Issues or New Challenges for Managing Libraries?


This compilation of articles by library professionals from Australia, Canada, and the United States focuses on management and service to the newest generation of library users: Generation Y, also known as Millennials.

The information is thorough and academic in scope. Topics covered include how to tailor service towards this new generation of users, how to educate this generation on extracting the best information, diversity, serving Generation Y in school and community college settings, and moving forward into the twenty-first-century challenges in the library. Information is also provided about selecting new format materials and changing priorities for libraries and Millennials.

Overall, the book is resourceful and perfect for a library science textbook or supplemental information in management or serving Millennials.—Lori Sigety, Branch Manager, LaSalle Branch Library, St. Joseph County (Ind.) Public Library

Listen Up! Podcasting for Schools and Libraries


Listen Up! is a great reference for anyone interested in podcasting. Braun’s enthusiasm for the subject shows in her easy-to-follow guide. Librarians will appreciate her concise descriptions of podcasts and related technologies. Instructions on producing a podcast are provided.

Suggestions are listed for equipment and software needed; she points out that much of the equipment is common and may already be owned by the library. Braun gives many examples supporting the importance of podcasting in libraries that may be helpful for librarians preparing proposals. Types of podcasts that are applicable to libraries are discussed, as well as real-life examples. Includes an interview with a public librarian who shares his experience of making podcasts of author visits at the library and how the service allowed others to enjoy the program at their own convenience. These examples encourage the librarian to brainstorm about many creative ways that podcasting can be used in libraries.

A helpful checklist is provided, an excellent planning tool. A list is provided of podcasting tools and resources described in the book, as well as a sample podcast feed.

Librarians may be interested in reading this book simply for the easy-to-understand technical know-how. Braun also describes how services like Skype and iTunes work, which may be helpful when working with the public.—Lisa Erickson, Youth Librarian, Fort Worth (Tex.) Public Library
Optimal Resume Online Service

www.optimalresume.com

Optimal Resume is an award-winning online service that can help ensure that displaced or transitioning patrons reenter the workforce as quickly as possible. The proven career tools are now used at more than six hundred career centers and can help job seekers of all levels perform a successful job search.

Patrons log in through a library’s website to get twenty-four-hour access to a comprehensive suite of self-directed online career tools for creating résumés, cover letters, portfolios, video introductions, and networking websites. They can practice for job interviews with a virtual interview practice module, as well as conduct career research and assess their marketable skills.

Evanced Brings New Level of Library Access and Convenience

www.evancedsolutions.com

The new GoLibrary from Evanced Solutions allows libraries, large and small, to provide services 24/7 from anywhere in the community. GoLibrary offers a new form of library service—a completely automated library machine. It promises to do for libraries what the ATM did for banks. GoLibrary handles the complete process of storing books and other media, handling loans, accepting returns, and performing basic administration functions. Library patrons access GoLibrary using their regular library card; the process is simple, quick, and available 24/7, 365 days a year.

There are three GoLibrary models available to meet particular needs:

● GoLibrary Popular Materials—Allows for a mix of popular books, CDs, and DVDs.
● GoLibrary Media—Specializes in DVD and CD media to offer a wide array of titles.
● GoLibrary Reservations—A totally automated reservation/holds system accessible 24/7.

While GoLibrary machines can be installed inside or outside library buildings, more importantly, they can also be installed at locations where a traditional library could not operate, such as shopping areas, schools, hospitals, offices, residential areas, airports, and recreational/community centers.

LearningExpress Library

www.learningexpressllc.com

The LearningExpress Library online learning platform provides more...
than seven hundred of the most up-to-date test-preparation and skill-building resources, helping both students and adults prepare for a wide range of academic and career-oriented exams, as well as to improve basic skills in reading, writing, and math. Job-skills tutorials are available to assist in creating a great résumé, honing interviewing techniques, and improving business communications.

LearningExpress also has new interactive practice tests in the following growing industries and hot areas:

- healthcare and social assistance (including practice tests for dental assistants, certified medical assistants, pharmacy technicians, radiography, and more);
- educational services;
- civil service and government agencies; and
- business and professional services.

**Libramation Announces the 24/7 Library**

[www.libramation.com](http://www.libramation.com)

Libramation announced the latest in library robotic self-check technology. The LibraMate allows patrons to borrow library materials 24/7 without extending library hours or hiring extra staff.

Libraries can allow patrons twenty-four hour access with a machine that looks and feels much like an ATM. Using a simple touch screen, patrons can browse through a list of the items available and make their selection. The library can configure the system to determine how many items a patron can borrow. The patron simply scans their patron card (standard barcode or RFID), then the item is quickly dispensed by the machine in a protective case. LibraMate also acts as a return station; returned items are cleared with the integrated library system and are immediately available for the next patron. In order to make optimal use of the system, the cases come in two sizes to accommodate various materials. The cases are bigger than current products on the market, allowing up to 95 percent of a library’s collection to be circulated through the LibraMate.

**Career Cruising**

[www.careercruising.com](http://www.careercruising.com)

Career Cruising is an online career exploration and portfolio development system. With detailed occupation profiles, comprehensive post-secondary education information, and industry-leading assessments, patrons move seamlessly through the career exploration and planning process. With Career Cruising’s portfolio system, patrons are able to make concrete, long-term career and educational plans. Librarians also have access to aggregate reporting and customization tools to help meet the needs of their communities.

**Comprehensive Online Spanish-Language Encyclopedia Available from World Book**

[www.worldbookonline.com](http://www.worldbookonline.com)

World Book announced the launch of Gran Enciclopedia Hispanica, a comprehensive, online Spanish-language encyclopedia designed for native Spanish speakers, bilingual students, and English as a Second Language/English Language Learners (ESL/ELLs). Offered as part of the World Book Web of online reference resources, Gran Enciclopedia Hispanica was created through a partnership with Hispanica Saber, one of the world’s most respected Spanish-language publishers.

Written from a Latin American perspective, Gran Enciclopedia Hispanica includes more than one hundred thousand articles; an interactive world atlas; a timeline; tens of thousands of biographies; and more than nine thousand illustrations, videos, animations, and sounds that contribute to language comprehension. It offers broad coverage of all fields of knowledge with a special emphasis on science, technology, history, and art topics.

**Authoritative Literary Criticism from Harold Bloom**

[www.factsonfile.infobasepublishing.com](http://www.factsonfile.infobasepublishing.com)

Bloom’s Literary Reference Online features Facts On File’s extensive print literature collection and hundreds of Harold Bloom’s essays examining the lives and works of great writers throughout history and the world, as well as thousands of critical articles published by noted scholars under the Bloom’s Literary Criticism imprint. This accessible database also contains an archive of more than forty-four thousand characters; extensive entries on literary topics, themes, movements, and genres; and almost 170 video segments.

Helpful features for students include:

- essays on how to write about literature, including crafting
strong thesis statements and conclusions, writing outlines, and properly citing sources, and sample essay topics;
- “How to cite” guidance includes examples of full citations in Modern Language Association (MLA), Chicago Manual of Style, and American Psychological Association (APA) styles;
- a dictionary tool that allows users to look up more than thirty-four thousand words without opening a new browser window; and
- a “Did you mean . . . ?” search enhancement.

Piper Mountain Webs Now Offers Website Content Assistance

www.librarywebsites.com

Piper Mountain Webs, LLC announced the release of a new set of tools to help small and midsize libraries populate their websites with interesting, relevant content.

Piper Mountain Webs provides public libraries throughout the United States with full-featured website templates and user-friendly content management systems. Their newest features signal a broadening of their services to include development of actual website content.

The company’s newest features include webpages that update themselves automatically with interesting and current library-related content—such as a list of bestsellers complete with book cover images and product descriptions. They have also added a “Content Catalog” that allows library staff to browse through and easily select website content from a storehouse of regularly changing stories and articles. The catalog’s content is categorized by audience—adults, teens, and children.

Innovative AirPAC Brings Library Catalog Access to iPhones

www.iii.com

The Orange County (Fla.) Library System (OCLS) is providing iPhone access to its library catalog using Innovative’s AirPAC product. A test-group of library users is now using iPhones to search the catalog, request items, and renew checked-out materials. This new capability launched in January 2009 as a development partnership between OCLS and Innovative.

Six staff members at OCLS have worked closely with Innovative as part of a development partnership for the new AirPAC product. OCLS Digital Access Architect Cassie Shivers said, “The ability for users to manage their accounts with the iPhone is a huge aspect. If you are ‘out and about’ you can request a title from wherever you are. If you see a book in a bookstore, hear one mentioned, whatever.”

Bibliotheca Announces New “On-the-Fly” RFID Conversion Software

www.bibliotheca-rfid.com

Bibliotheca Inc. announced non-proprietary “on-the-fly” RFID conversion software that allows libraries equipped with barcodes the flexibility to convert to RFID at the self-check station or book return as patrons complete routine check-out/check-in of library materials. The RFID conversion software helps unburden libraries from the amount of time, labor, and cost needed to convert entire collections from barcodes to RFID. Bibliotheca’s flexible, patent-pending BiblioChip conversion software will work with Bibliotheca’s line of self-check stations and book returns, as well as products from other vendors.

Blank RFID labels are simply applied to media and placed on the shelves. When the patron checks out items at the self-check station, the barcode is read and—at the same time and unnoticed by the user—the RFID chip is initialized with the barcode item ID data. Or, in the same manner, media can be automatically converted to RFID at the book return when patrons return materials to the library.

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