

POS Focus Group
Dutchess County Directors
March 9, 2006

Issues/Challenges

- Technology
 - Pervasive in day-to-day operations
 - Bad PR for the library when it doesn't work; "If tires and wires fail, nothing else matters."
 - Impacts the majority of patrons
 - "Victims of our own success"
 - staff really feel the crunch of the popularity of holds
 - How to balance patron education with everything else?
- Funding
 - Costs being passed down to local library
 - Worried about cuts at the local level
 - System cuts & proposed fees are worrisome
 - Votes
 - Perceived decline in support for library funding (votes and capital campaigns)
 - Worried about tax revolts
 - People take the library for granted/think "someone else" will take care of it
 - Difficult to explain MHLS services/fees to the public
 - Too many libraries?
 - A broader funding base could be achieved through consolidation of individual libraries.
 - Is there a future for consolidation? County-based organizations?
 - "local pride" of boards and communities a barrier to consolidation
- Public Awareness
 - Difficult to raise public's awareness of library funding issues
 - Difficult to explain MHLS-related funding to the public; state and federal funding also confusing to the public and to trustees
 - Libraries do a poor job of sharing the realities of their funding situations, always put out "happy news"
- Trustees
 - Directors find it difficult to explain funding and the role of MHLS to trustees
- Demographics
 - More younger families moving into communities and using library
 - Shift from quiet library setting to more of a community center role
 - Tension between "natives" (who like the quiet library role) and new residents (who relate better to the community center role)
 - Libraries see a big PR opportunity with these new families
 - Struggling to balance all the different segments of the population using the library, more diversity in the age-ranges than in the past
- "Dutchess Co. more homogeneous"
 - people are generally willing to support the library
 - better understanding of the library's value than 20 years ago

- challenge is how to appeal to the broadest spectrum of the community without over-promising
- Reference
 - Questions staff receive seem harder
 - Maybe because people do their own initial research and come to the library with higher level questions

System Services

- Trustee Education Sessions
 - Scheduled more frequently for smaller geographic areas
 - Schedule for libraries by type (association, municipal, school district, special district)
 - Would like MHLS staff to have more, regular contact with boards in the individual libraries
 - Suggestion: Mandate at least one visit, per library, per year; staff should be proactive in scheduling this with the library
 - “boards need more tangible proof of the value of MHLS”
- Consultations for member library staff
 - Would like more regular visits to libraries by member library staff
 - Suggestion: Mandate at least one visit, per library, per year; staff should be proactive in scheduling this with the library
 - This would help directors explain the value of MHLS to their trustees
- “Viability of MHLS”
 - more staff
 - ability to stay “open and flexible” to new things
 - continue design services; either continue print services or collective outsourcing
- Maximize what we can do through Millennium
 - For example: PERL scripting, Create Lists, Course Reserves, PR opportunities through the OPAC
 - This will help attract newer residents
 - “Back-end” Millennium work needs to happen quicker
 - See a need for better communication between Automated Services and Computer Operations department
- Publicity
 - More publicity of services that are used at every library (OPAC, HomeACCESS)
 - Continual flow of template press releases that can be customized at the local level
 - Handouts (like Request-a-Title bookmark) to help explain services to the public
 - “do this well or not at all”
- Youth Services
 - Need help “keeping the kids” as they get older
 - Especially through the teenage years
 - Investigate the overall “transitional” phases of life and how to keep the library has part of a persons life throughout these phases
- Programming
 - Need increased support for adult programming
 - General focus on this issue (like the current focus on children’s)

- Support for member library staff who conduct adult programming
- Workshops related to adult programming
- Develop the EZ Library Program database to include much more adult programming resources
 - Including presenter info
- “How-to” help for marketing programs
 - picking the right topics to draw in the people (i.e. local history, health & nutrition, local scholars)
 - dealing with regional competition from other organizations and activities
 - partnership opportunities
 - collective opportunities for multiple libraries to take part in

How do you define quality service?

- Patron satisfaction
 - Quick and accessible services
- Starts with adequate funding
 - To pay staff with; benefits
 - To have a quality collection of resources
- How well you articulate what you can (and can't) deliver
 - Deliver what you said you would well
 - If funding is cut, cut services appropriately – don't “make do”
- Manage patron expectations
 - “pleasing patrons within limits”
 - being able to refer patrons to another library, organization or outside resource that will help them when you can't
 - “do what we do with materials for services” (i.e. resource sharing of materials → awareness of other library's services, other agencies services)