Plan of Service Focus Group Session

Columbia County Directors | February 10, 2011

<u>**Challenges & Issues:**</u>

- **Space**
    - o Space issues came out as #1 self-identified challenge.
    - o Libraries are seeking everything from a new building to renovations to handicapped accessibility projects to finding space for programs, technology, collections and quiet space as well as staff work space.
- **Funding**
    - o Directors are concerned about the rate of growth occurring (patron demand, technology changes, format expansion) and the lack of infrastructure development to keep up (funding, staff, space).
    - o Libraries reported that their local funding is not keeping up with demand, particularly in the areas of
        - ▪ Personnel costs: "Staffing = funding. [We need to] determine the actual cost of staff."; "We can't pay for the level of staff we need to run the libraries but volunteers are problematic."
        - ▪ Programs: "We can't provide consistent programs with current funding"
        - ▪ Promotion: "How can we promote services with low funding?"
        - ▪ Facility: "Not enough money to complete our building [project] or pay for a new roof."
    - o Concerns that the timing doesn't seem good for 414 vote; recognition of the need to get equalized funding for all areas served but need help doing this.
    - o Fundraising is a challenge; libraries report trying to capitalize on small fundraisers that add up but need help motivating boards and Friends to do more fundraising.
- **Staffing**
    - o Lack of adequate staffing levels was a universal issue identified.
    - o Libraries are feeling particularly pressed for staff to assist:
        - ▪ 1. At the front desk; working with Millennium
        - ▪ 2. With programming
        - ▪ 3. To support technology in the building
        - ▪ 4. To assist patrons with technology
    - o Directors reported the lack of staff means the director is stepping up to fill all the roles in the library which means administrative and leadership tasks are fall by the wayside.
    - o Procedures and workflow methods need adaptation to staffing levels and technology available to help do library work. Directors do not always have the time to fine tune how the library is running.
    - o As libraries are growing there is a need for a more hierarchical administration structure.
    - o Identified problems with volunteers using Millennium. Significant increase in errors noted in libraries that rely on volunteers to work the front desk.
    - o Some directors expressed need for assistance in time management for themselves: "How to prioritize. What to let go. How to triage what comes across desk."

MID-HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM

- **Outreach/PR**
  - Libraries see new opportunities for integrating with community agencies/organizations but feel hindered by lack of staff, funds and time to do outreach.
  - Would like to capitalize on the population of people who only come in for tax forms. "Now they are especially grateful without the government printing and sending" how can we capitalize on that good will?
  - Recognition of the need to grow programming at the library to meet community needs but struggling to do so with space, funding and staff constraints.
  - New people coming in for DVDs. Appealing to low economic patrons.
- **Technology**
  - Technology is a big draw, people are coming into the library to use computers. Wi-fi is an important service and appealing to people who are not traditional library users.
  - Some areas of Columbia County do not have high speed connectivity. Patrons with dial-up at home rely on the libraries for a better connection.
  - Libraries report that patrons have higher expectations regarding technology when they come in. People are seeking higher bandwidth – many watching video and expect staff assistance to be provided to help them while they are online and with their personal devices (laptops, ebook readers)
- **Board Support**
  - General observation made that trustees are becoming more involved in library governance and operations.
  - Directors agreed it is important for the System to continue to provide support for trustee education and board consultation.
  - Directors are looking for support in helping educate their trustees about daily operations at the library, staffing levels and salary needs, and the role of the director.
  - Finding that as boards are more focused on policy development; directors are feeling stressed to carry out all of the new rules/procedures that are created.
  - Some directors expressed a need for assistance in mediating the board-director relationship and managing board expectations.

What do you want people to say about libraries in Columbia County:

- They are necessary
- They find a comfortable atmosphere when they come in for help
- Library is in integral part of the community
- A friendly place to come
- They had a nice experience. Establishing a mind set with youth that is positive and will extend into adulthood.
- My tax dollars are going to support an essential service