

Plan of Service Focus Group Session

Columbia County Trustees | February 15, 2011

Challenges & Issues:

• **Funding**

- Continually seeking more funding from a variety of sources.
- Do not see anywhere else to cut in their budgets
- Would like to avoid charging patrons for service but concerned about the 2012 System fee
- Libraries without a stable funding source are finding it challenging to convey the value/worth of the library to town officials making budget decisions
- Relying on the System to help them plan for 414 votes in the coming years
- Seeking strategies for holding patrons from unserved areas fiscally accountable
- Looking to diversify fundraising efforts and broaden donor base; many libraries are still fundraising for operations; always seeking new fundraising opportunities
- Some libraries are seeking a more formal development/fundraising plan
- Some libraries are looking to improve the relationship between the board and their Friends; wrestling for control over funds raised.
- Seeking funds for 1) operations; 2) expanded collections; 3) expanded programs for kids and adults; 4) publicity; 5) facility maintenance
- More libraries are incurring facility related debt and looking to pay that off quickly
- "How do we achieve a margin of excellence beyond day-to-day operations?"

• **Community Communication**

- Agree it is a priority to raise awareness in the community about the library
- Most effective PR so far has been word-of-mouth from frontline staff to user base; Looking to improve their ability to facilitate good word-of-mouth marketing
- Seeking more opportunities to sponsor events in the community to raise the visibility of the library
- Some libraries find it difficult to streamline messages when there is no "community"; communication hub is decentralized.
- "The increasing diversity of local populations is making it difficult to appeal to everyone."
- Libraries are beginning to branch out their communications to online venues – the library's web site, Facebook, e-newsletters
- Libraries are seeking more face-to-face connections to get the word out (schools, businesses, government officials)
- Continually seeking ways to communicate with non-users.
- Continually trying to integrate "old timers" with "new energy" (read: newer residents) to create widespread support for the library

• **Board Development**

- Deep feeling of responsibility to "keep the library going."
- Recognize the value of a long range plan; some board struggling to find time for planning
- Working on the financial "know how" on the board.
- Unsure of how to evaluate the boards effectiveness

- Seeking ways to confront and manage growth
- **Management**
 - It is a priority to boards to have a director who is very connected in the community; "The director is the face of the library, our leader."
 - Trustees see a need to professionalize the library and its functions.
 - Looking to maximize the use of volunteers; seeking volunteer training curriculum and volunteer management training for staff.
 - Trustees would like to emphasize customer satisfaction; measure customer satisfaction
- **System Services**
 - Assign much value to the services of the System; want to see current services continue
 - Trustee education and board consultations are a priority
 - Concerns about the impact of state cuts and the reduction of System staff

Trends:

- Recognition of the need to adjust service priorities based on demographics rather than assumptions: example - less children in many communities, resources can be shifted to respond to the larger demographic groups
- Libraries are becoming the hub of communities.
- Steady demand for the library's computers
- Big increase in use of library's wi-fi
- 50% weekenders in Hillsdale. Younger weekenders looking to make this their home and get involved in community. Adjusting hours to respond to needs of community. More people with economic clout. Different interests in programs. Looking for a sense of community. Library as centerpiece.
- Libraries are getting better at working together with neighboring libraries
- Library as hub of the village.
- Other organizations / businesses leaving town.

What do you want people to say about your library?

- What makes this community special is the library
- That we are useful
- A friendly, welcoming place
- A place of education and knowledge
- A good place for kids
- A place for exhibitions
- A place where people come for all kinds of information – non-traditional (health, DIY)
- A place for community organizations to meet.
- Worthwhile in terms of time and money. A great idea.
- The place to come to find a lot of different services
- A community gathering place. A destination.