Plan of Service Focus Group Session

Putnam County Directors | February 22, 2011

Challenges & Issues:

- **Funding**
  - Libraries are finding it challenging to balance the community's needs with available funding.
  - Finding more funding is becoming more and more difficult. Libraries are feeling "squeezed" by building costs, tax cap, reduced state and county funding.
  - Can only bring in so much with fundraising, it won't keep the library running; we need sustainable funding we can count on.
  - Board would like to see the library become more environmentally friendly to try and reduce operating expenses.
  - New awareness of funding options available.
  - Increased focus on library relationship with town leadership. Three libraries in this county do not have secure funding.
  - Balancing how not to cut off access to people who have less; New trend of patrons willing to pay for certain services to ensure they have access. Fears this will create a tiered service structure that damages the equity of access libraries are known for.
  - Some libraries report their boards are not planning for the future, feel hopeless about the financial situation.
- **Staffing**
  - Staff is hearing, for the first time, that the library is facing potential layoffs / cuts in hours.
  - Staffing levels are currently static or on the decline; staff are becoming resentful of always being asked to do more; busier without help in sight.
  - Concern about staff morale and how this will impact customer service.
  - Staff are dealing with more difficult patrons because of the economic downturn. High level of high need patrons. Difficulty in how to balance the library experience for all.
  - Difficult to "keep staff on the same page" so they all have the same information about the library's finances, plans and policies.
  - Need PR staff.
  - Increased demand for summer programming.
  - Directors are being pressured to use volunteers for jobs that really need paid staff people for training retention and consistency.
  - Staff are asking how they can become advocates. Looking for ways to fine tune their willingness to talk to patrons.
- **Technology**
  - Keeping up with the latest technology, especially ebooks, and patrons expectations is challenging from a staffing level, staff training and budget perspectives.
  - How to provide equity of access to devices
  - Ebooks are very important to the future of the library and how we prevent ourselves from becoming obsolete. "We don't want to become the museum of paper books."

- o Patron expectation of staff assistance with technology is higher than the library can currently meet. People need more help at higher levels.
  - o Noticeable information literacy gap.
  - o People are using the library more from home: results in the library being busier – higher circulation – but showing a lower door count.
- **Community Communication**
  - o It is challenging to convey to people the relevance of the library in their lives. "We need a 'relevant to the people' plan!"
  - o Libraries want to make it a priority to be very patron friendly: "If they are not coming in what are we doing?"
  - o Dewey-free as a marketing tool.
  - o Facebook is helping to draw in people to the library.
  - o Trying to find the balance of using all the means of communication but not inundating the public to the point of annoyance.
  - o Some libraries reported a disconnect between what the board thinks and what the community needs.
  - o Clear need to improve internal communication to help get the word out externally.
  - o Looking for new ways to connect with newer residents who are rather disconnected from local government.
  - o Trying to target people in 20's & 30's to keep community support going
  - o Looking for ways to get more people to say good things about the library out in the community
  - o How can we build on programming and ebooks to bring in new people to the library?
- **Space**
  - o Interested in rearranging library space
    - ▪ More retail features
    - ▪ More "people space"
- **Board Support**
  - o Continuous effort to make sure the library is modern and moving forward.
  - o Need more trustees who are advocates for the library in the community. They need help to know what to say and how to say it.
  - o Trustee education is a critical System service.
- **System Services**
  - o Critical to maintain automation and delivery services
  - o Importance of shared development
  - o Retain what the System uniquely dose that no one else can do
- **What do you want people to say about libraries in Putnam County:**
  - o They are great stewards of our tax dollars
  - o A great value
  - o A place I enjoy visiting – in person & online
  - o Library needs our help
  - o Satisfied
  - o Useful (Pleasant & welcoming is nice, but useful & relevant is better)