

# Plan of Service Focus Group Session

## Ulster County Directors | March 23, 2011

### Challenges & Issues:

#### **Space Issues**

- Facility issues were the #1 self-identified challenge.
- Significant need for programming space throughout the county libraries.
- Accessibility is an issue for a number of libraries.
- Lack of space is infringing on the staff's ability to do their job; spaces look disorganized to the community.
- Not all libraries are looking for new or expanded space; much interest in using existing space more efficiently with updated layouts/furniture
- Not enough electrical outlets to handle current needs.
- A number of facilities were not planned for expansion leaving the library with the additional struggle of finding a new location to obtain more room.
- Lack of quiet space, for patrons, for staff
- Looking for help with issues associated with building renovation / capital expenditures / legal aspect of facilities.

#### **Funding issues**

- All libraries reported dealing with increased usage in the face of decreasing funding.
- Biggest concern is related to staffing levels; staff is being asked to do more and more at the same rate of pay and without increases in hours.
- Concerns about state funding cuts and delays in payouts as they relate to local budgets and the System budget; the trickle-down effect is worrisome
- Significant worry about passage of budget and bond votes; seeking support to help pass votes.
- Disconnect between plan of service and budgets; Budgets not enough to support services for community. Increases not enough to keep solvent
- Budget decisions by the board seem driven by fear; not responsive to community needs and realities of running the library; Pattern seems to be maintenance rather than keeping up with growth
- Continuing to seek strategies for passing budgets
- Boards need help budgeting and with fiscal oversight and planning
- Concerns about the increase in fuel bills
- Observation that other tax supported entities are not "holding back" on increases (schools, municipalities) but libraries are
- Years of "making do" have hurt us; we have a lot of catching up to do
- Increase pressure to provide appropriate programming (child & adult) given cost/ benefit and library mission
- See a need for increasing adult programming

#### **Community support**

- Struggling to get the word out that libraries are essential to the community.
- Looking for the ability to do more communication to the community as a whole rather than just to users; "The community does not know what to expect. The library seems complicated to outsiders."

- Perception that there is not enough staff, time or money to do outreach beyond the walls of the library
- Seeking strategies to identify non-users and persuade them to use the library
- The importance of voter education is on the rise.
- Struggling to help the community understand the state of the library and its finances.
- Continually trying to get the community's buy-in
- Need bigger budget lines (staffing, postage, paid ads) for publicity.

### **Management Challenges**

- Directors are feeling pulled in all directions as they are filling frontline "staffing gaps" while dealing with all the administrative, leadership and outreach roles of a director as well; "This is the never ending job of managing everything."
- Directors expressed a desire to be more effective in managing multiple projects, prioritization, community outreach and time management: "How do I maintain open door policy and still get more done?"; "There's just not enough staff and not enough time."
- Boards are against allowing for staff to be working in the library or receive training when the library is closed to the public; the feeling is that this is hindering directors ability to help their staff be up to speed in all areas
- Directors report that some boards have expectations that everything will get done regardless of planning for the future and budget increases; this is resulting in directors and staff being stretched thin
- How to decide what the library no longer needs to do?
- How to get the biggest bang for the buck?
- Directors would like to be able to make better use of volunteers for non-essential duties; struggling with the time needed to train and manage a volunteer work force.
- Staff are concerned about how to keep the library going; "My staff see me spending extra time at work to get things done and they are worried."
- Directors are seeking techniques to convey the complexity of their jobs and the delicate balance of time/staffing constraints without resorting to whining to the board, staff and community
- Directors report difficulties in keeping part time staff skills up to par with full time staff; in-house training needs are growing

### **Technology**

- Very concerned that staff are "not keeping up" when it comes to technology know-how
- Seeking ways to become better at technology trend watching
- Struggling with the public perception that everyone who works in the library is an expert and can help with technology
- Patrons are seeking increased levels of assistance with research and technology support
- Noticing an increase in the number of patrons coming in with low tech skills; demand for staff with tech skills on the rise
- Are we losing sight of "the big picture" by expecting all staff to be technology experts?
- Observation that the public's perception of libraries and librarians are changing – this could be both an opportunity and a threat depending on how libraries and the System respond

### **Board Development**

- Trustees need continual education opportunities; MHLS education program needs to continue

- Looking to improve board recruitment and succession; "It is a struggle to get the right people involved."
- Board activity levels seem to be lagging; this is attributed the lack of a shared vision in some cases
- Board members not active enough. Not committed. Not unified. Just do their "part" rather than work towards a shared vision.
- Many directors reported misunderstandings with boards surrounding the boundaries of what is the role of the director versus the role of the board.

### **System Support**

- Directors want to see the current level of support they receive continue.
- In particular they are looking to see the consultative support for their library to continue, in particular the support for directors, boards, smaller libraries and new directors.
- Continuing education for boards is a priority; "Workshops like the Advocacy Boot Camp are extremely helpful as it motivated trustees and injected needed energy and direction for our board."
- Directors appreciate the established rapport system consultants have developed with library directors, boards and staff.
- Libraries are open to fee for service opportunities for non-critical items (for example, publicity support)

### **What do you want people to say about libraries in Ulster County:**

- "That we are awesome!"
- "You have to check it out!"
- It's not like it was when you were kids
- Worth the taxes; Good value
- Integral to their lives; Lives would be depleted without it
- It's their 3<sup>rd</sup> place
- That they are happy with the library the way it is now
- Its where they go for information