

Plan of Service Focus Group Session

General Trustee Session @MHLS | April 16, 2011

Challenges & Issues:

- **Funding**

- Funding concerns dominated the conversation.
- Much concern over the future of stable, sustainable funding for association and municipal libraries; general concern amongst all related to the tax cap
- Seeking strategies for passing votes
- Concern over reduced state funding to Systems resulting in increased costs locally for libraries
- Dealing with a history of underfunding
- How to deal with tax payer fatigue?
- How to do more with less?
- Increasing sense of competition for tax dollars.
- Making the case to patrons who live in one town but use another library
- How to respond to calls for consolidation
- Need for library finances to be handled professionally (bookkeeper/CPA)
- Concerns about inadequate pay levels for staff
- How to balance capital campaigns/facility financing with pursuit of increases in operating budget
- Fundraising success is tied to good service; "good service" under strain due to budget and staffing constraints
- Clear demand for more, but not clear support for budget increases.
- 414 libraries feel the support MHLS has provided to them to get their votes passed is vital to their success

- **Planning**

- Long range planning is seen as critical to finding funding solutions
- Interested in learning how to evaluate what truly "adequate" funding would be
- How to evaluate which services should be kept/stopped?
- Interested in library services/funding benchmark data to help make local decisions
- Interested in learning how technology trends impact patrons' usage and needs
- How to deal with the gap between what the community is asking for and what the library can provide
- "We want to maintain the ability to constantly improve."

- **Facilities**

- Many libraries reported a lack of space and plans for expansion
- Seeking ways to make the most of the space they have
- Dealing with financing for space is secondary to stabilizing operations
- Need to update the look of the library; more focus on user interaction with other users and staff; "more space for people"
- Need for more electrical infrastructure



- **Technology**
 - Higher demand for computers not being met
- **Outreach**
 - Seeking deeper/broader community buy-in and engagement; general ramping up of PR efforts; outreach was indicated as being rated within the top three goals of every library in the room
 - “We don’t know what we don’t know”; need for more market research; how to collect significant data
 - Seeking ways to reach non-users; concern that current efforts only reach people already convinced of the library’s value
 - Continuous need to educate the public about the library’s funding and need for increases
 - Looking for ways to convey value of libraries in current economic climate.
 - Would like more engagement with younger generation
 - Strengthen the library director’s role as an advocate in the community on behalf of the library; director should use the board president as a partner to work on the relationship with municipal leaders
 - Seeking ways to use technology to attract more public participation
 - Would like to see more engagement with youth; strengthening of the consistent usage of the library from childhood into adulthood
 - How can neighboring libraries work together more / share services
 - How to establish more community partnerships
 - How can the Friends Group be part of the outreach strategy
- **Board**
 - More time being spend on finances
 - Some reports that it is more challenging to come to consensus at board meetings lately; Some trustees report feeling burned out from too much work on the board
 - Feeling that boards need to improve their own community connections/relations
- **Trends**
 - More people using the library on weekends exclusively
 - More people are coming in with laptops

What do you hope people are saying about the library

- Awesome & Energizing
- Want to come back
- Willing to talk to others about the library
- I want to check in with them on Facebook
- I love what the library is doing
- There are a lot of activities
- Not just books – more
- Friendly welcoming place where they are very well served
- A great community resource
- A great friends group – fun
- Free access to unlimited info.
- The center of the community – not just resources, people and participation.

