Plan of Service Focus Group Session
Putnam County Trustees | February 8, 2011

Challenges & Issues:

- **Funding**
    - Most libraries feel their budgets have stagnated
    - Much concern about getting budget votes passed: "In order to maintain the level of service we want to provide and [that the] community expects, we have to raise taxes. We are trying to keep increases small but are still worried about the "vote no" mentality that has been on the rise in recent years."
    - Fear of competition with the school vote
    - Libraries without a public vote on their budget are very concerned about how library funding will be treated by town officials; looking to improve relations with town officials
    - Trying to balance keeping increases small enough that they are palatable to the community but cautious about being too conservative [to the point of crippling the library]
    - Difficult to fund health care benefits for staff
    - Concern about rising technology costs (more computers; increase bandwidth; ebooks; gadets...)
    - Seeking opportunities to fund capital improvements
    - Re-evaluating contracts; issuing new RFPs for insurance, CPAs, human resources management support
- **Facilities**
    - Difficult to keep up with facility repairs and needed renovations
    - Most libraries feel they have limited options for expansion; looking for ways to utilize existing space more efficiently/effectively
- **Planning**
    - Developing a solid long-range plan was a priority for many boards in attendance; How to set big long-range planning goals?
    - "We want to shape services to meet community needs."
    - Many feel their libraries have "reached capacity" [staff levels, facilities, budgets] and they are not sure what happens next
- **Outreach**
    - A number of libraries are looking to "re-brand"; some libraries are considering hiring a PR professional; some seeking to develop a strategic PR plan
    - Ramping up "vote yes" efforts; concerns about low voter turnout and apathy
    - Libraries are planning to put more emphasis on the consequences to the community when there is not enough funding to meet needs/demands; frontline staff are being trained to educate patrons about vote outcomes; would like to see advocacy integrated into day-to-day operations
    - Still struggling with conveying "the basics" about the library; "We need to let the community know what they are *already* getting not just what they could get if we had more."
    - Looking to build support by using local businesses and services; "Despite increased costs associated with doing this the trade off is worth it."
    - [Need to let] local government know how important library is to community year round (not just at budget time); how to create a partnership with them?
- **Management**
    - Does not seem like there is enough staff to do the work; more stress on staff; will this impact customer service?
    - Concerned about retaining/attracting employees with technical skills; recognize this is becoming more important as technology becomes more ubiquitous
    - Need to increase positive interactions with community [outside of the library]

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- **Board Development**
  - ○ Board are too small/not enough active members
  - ○ Board contact with community members [seems lacking]
  - ○ Fear that there is not enough energy/manpower to make the switch to the district model
  - ○ Boards are afraid of growth.
  - ○ Looking for more budget "know-how" to understand how to tighten up the budget.
  - ○ Want to develop policies that work for new uses of the library; creating a good experience for all users

Trends:

- New residents seem less invested in the local community; disconnect with all info about town services and local information; Library not on radar of new residents who are community; "Benign neglect, not willful."
- Less volunteering. Volunteer base is disintegrating
- Young mothers need to work in this economy. More stress on mothers and families
- Demographic changes:
  - ○ Hispanic community: dads working nights; one parent at the library, more dads coming in during the day with children; As Hispanic population grows is their use of the library growing?
  - ○ Newer European immigrants have a higher level of education (Ukrainian and Polish)
- Good local response to literacy programs
- People getting local information in different ways
- A lot of connections to be made with local business community

What do you hope people are saying about your library?

- ○ They want to come to the library
- ○ That the staff are wonderful
- ○ That the library is valuable