

Notes of a Binge Thinker
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The Library as Civic Partner in the Community

Happy May!

It is that time again to look at the guidepost for the Library of the Future, ebooks and other news here at North Texas Library Partners. Let's start with the guideposts.

The Library of the Future increases the overall value of its community by:

Guidepost 1: facilitating access to education as a service to the public.

Guidepost 2: staying aware of current interests within the community, finding information relevant to those interests, and making that information publicly available.

Guidepost 3: ensuring easy public access to information in all its forms.

Guidepost 4: encouraging civic participation through public information campaigns that explain matters of public policy, informing public decisions, and maintaining awareness of public services (including its own services).

Guidepost 5: maintaining its standing of public trust by operating as an independent "third voice" in its operations as well as its communications, and meeting on neutral ground.

Each month I will focus on one guidepost. I will highlight a library (or libraries) that I feel is following that guidepost closely and doing something innovative to make the guidepost a reality. I will then give some benchmarks (examples of what libraries can do to follow the guidepost) that the NTLP staff has developed.

This month I am focusing on guidepost number four, which focuses on civic participation. I am going to take a different track this month. Instead of highlighting one library, I am going to present what I believe a library needs to be doing to make this guidepost a reality and why this guidepost is so important. As always, I will add at the end of this section some tasks that your library can do to reach this guidepost.

Here are some questions to ponder. What is the role of the library when it comes to civic participation of its community? Does a library take an active role, or a more passive one? What have libraries done in the past in regards to civic participation?

For me, a library has to take an active role in civic participation. I do not think this has always been the case in the past. One of the reasons I decided not to highlight a library this month is that I could not think of a library that was taking an active role in doing this. Nothing stands out in my mind. I am sure there are libraries working on promoting civic engagement, but there is not an aggressive one to my knowledge.

There are several arguments for and against civic engagement. One is that this role is not requested of the library. In this case, we get back to the age-old argument of a library providing services the community wants versus what it needs. In my opinion, a library has an inherent duty to be involved in its community from a civic standpoint, whether the community requests it or not. In today's world, when politicians seem to be even more polarized than in anytime in our history, each community needs an institution within the community to educate residents on the issues of the day through an aggressive public information campaign. It used to be the local newspaper, but these are dying so many residents are left in a vacuum without any clear guidance on what is happening civically in their communities. A library could serve this role.

Would it be difficult? Are there barriers to its implementation from a pragmatic standpoint? Yes to both questions. After all, most public libraries are funded by political bodies. A library director would be taking a risk in taking on this role, but librarians have been known to stand up for their beliefs, and this inherent role is one I believe we need to embrace.

The benefits are many. In the guidepost itself, you see that we have emphasized that a library needs to make its community aware of the services available to the community from the different level of governments. These services include the library's own. By being the herald of all things civic, a library is promoting its own value to the community. From a long term planning perspective, this is invaluable, because it starts to frame the library as more than the "book place", but one that a citizen can feel fully engaged in its community. We begin to build real value in the library offerings.

Now, here are some ideas my staff has regarding this benchmark.

- The library needs to develop materials to put into the public's hands. What it really comes down to is developing a marketing plan for this purpose. Newsletters and fliers would probably be the most popular.
- Libraries need to develop close ties with groups like Project Vote Smart (votesmart.org), the League of Women Voters (lwv.org), and FactCheck.org. People should automatically expect to find information from these non-partisan organizations at their library. (Just as they expect to find IRS forms at libraries.) Libraries should also be giving financial support to these organizations to help insure their continued non-partisan existence. After all, we would expect to pay for it if it were a book.
- Libraries need to conduct and distribute their own research on local questions, much like FactCheck.org does at the national level.
- Libraries need established forums for public debate. They need to conduct formal, moderated debates on issues of local controversy.

- Libraries need to develop their reputations as neutral third-parties whose funding does not depend on which politician wins. This, in turn, requires libraries to become fiscally separate from the rest of government.
- Libraries should engage the community civically through social media outlets like facebook and twitter.
- Issues of public policy can be used as the topics for adult (or teen) programs, and materials related to those topics can be featured in special exhibits.

Ebook Future Scenario 3: Ebooks go the way of DVDs

I also want to present four possible future scenarios for ebooks and public libraries. Here is my third scenario on ebooks. My proposed strategy follows next month.

Larry Collins looked at the screen again. He still could not believe what he was looking at on the computer screen. The library's ebook circulation had actually gone down for a third straight month.

"This is amazing," he muttered out loud to no one in particular.

"What is amazing?" Larry looked up to see his library director Yvonne Davis standing next to his desk. He shook his head at her.

"Really nothing. It is just that our ebook circulation has declined for the third straight month. It seems that our printed books are gaining traction again."

Yvonne did a little dance when she heard this. She had assigned Larry the job of keeping their Overdrive service afloat two years ago when the library decided to offer the service to the community. At the time, the legal difficulties in offering ebooks had just been overcome so libraries were able to offer the digital format in the same way as printed books. It had been a revelation and seen as a way for libraries to save themselves from their doom of shutting their doors in America.

Larry smiled at his director's little dance. He knew that they had made an offhand bet that printed books would be out of the library by the middle of the decade. Well, it looks like he lost that bet. Printed Materials were as popular as ever and ebooks ended up being just another service offered to patrons like the public computers or DVDs. The digital format did not replace print after all.

"It looks like I am going to have to buy you a diet coke. According to our little wager, we would be comprised mostly of digital books and our printed collection would only make up a small percentage of what we offer. I never would have thought ebooks would have lost its steam like they did." Larry retorted to Yvonne.

"Well, I always thought they would just be a novelty item for the well-to-do. Most of our patrons that need the library never had the resources to get the readers or the ebooks. Plus, many of them simply did not want to learn something new. It was just easier in the long run to just read the printed material."

“I realize that now. I feel like we wasted all those hours and money on ebooks when we didn't have to...” Larry said.

“Well, you were partially right. It does look like about 20 percent of circulation comes from ebooks, but not nearly as high as you thought. I think the prep work you did to get ready for the service was good for the library in the long run. It really showed us that we need to do some things differently. Without your work, we would have never known that we needed to redo our long range plan to fit the times. Now, we can just make ebooks part of our many service offerings.” Yvonne replied. “Come on. I'll let you buy me that Diet Coke during our break.”

The two went off to the break room.

I will give my strategy tips for this scenario next month.

National/State News

Latest Texas State Library Budget News

The budget picture is becoming clearer as we move towards June. None of it is good for libraries. Texas Library Association summarized the most recent developments in their latest Texline.

Library supporters **must act now** to help restore funding for statewide library programs. The Legislature is in the final phase of completing the state budget for 2012-2013. Both the House and Senate have completed their respective versions of the budget and the budget conference committee has now been named.

Conference committee members are: Rep. Jim Pitts (jim.pitts@house.state.tx.us), Rep. Myra Crownover (myra.crownover@house.state.tx.us), Rep. John Otto (john.otto@house.state.tx.us), Rep. Sylvester Turner (sylvester.turner@house.state.tx.us), Rep. John Zerwas (john.zerwas@house.state.tx.us), Sen. Steve Ogden (steve.ogden@senate.state.tx.us), Sen. Juan Hinojosa (juan.hinojosa@senate.state.tx.us), Sen. Jane Nelson (jane.nelson@senate.state.tx.us), Sen. Tommy Williams (tommy.williams@sentate.state.tx.us), and Sen. Robert Duncan (robert.duncan@sentate.state.tx.us).

The automated email system to legislators has been updated with the latest information so everyone should send a message again to legislative offices. Go to [TAKE ACTION!](#) to send an email. *Please edit the message to customize the email. Explain why library programs are important to your community!*

Actions Needed – Ask state senators and representatives to:

- 1. Adopt Senate version of \$3.5 million for TexShare AND House Article XI amount of \$5.25 million for K-12 databases and TexShare (i.e., library resource sharing). If adopted, this amount would still represent over a 30% cut from current levels.**
- 2. Adopt House recommendation of \$3 million in Article XI for Loan Star Libraries (Direct Aid to Public Libraries). If adopted, this amount would still represent an almost 80% cut in this program.**

Do note that HB1/SB 1 as introduced cut \$32 million in state funding for library programs. Even with recommended funding levels above, library programs would still be cut by over 60%. This figure does NOT include the expected loss of millions of dollars in federal funds.

As you can tell from the blurb, library funding is still due to be cut by over 60%. The Senate recommended adding \$3.5 M back into the Texshare and \$5.25 M to K-12 databases. The house recommended \$3 million to the Loan Star Libraries program. It is not nearly where it should be, but if the conference committee accepts all the recommendations, it will be better than the initial budget proposed in January.

What does this mean for the Texas State Library Systems Program? We still do not know. Our latest communication from the Texas State Library indicated that budget decisions concerning library development were still being considered. We hope to know more in early August.

Texas Interlibrary Loan

Our wonderful State Librarian Peggy Rudd released a letter to the library community stating where they stood on Interlibrary Loan. The highlights from the letter are seen below (as taken from an email sent out by Beverly Shirley).

- TSLAC will continue to support the transition of public libraries to OCLC's Navigator service and to cover costs of providing ILL through Navigator.
- TSLAC will continue to provide access to OCLC's WorldCat database for both public and academic TexShare member libraries at no cost to libraries.
- TSLAC will no longer be able to support the Project Loan net lender reimbursement program. To encourage libraries to continue to provide interlibrary loans free of charge to Texas public libraries, we are asking that all libraries benefiting from the state-sponsored subscription to WorldCat agree to lend to Texas public libraries without a charge. We realize that there are some constituent groups for which this may present a special hardship, and staff will work with these libraries to determine a fair and equitable means of sharing.
- TSLAC will continue to subsidize the TExpress courier, but at a reduced funding level. We are working with the TexShare ILL/Courier working group to determine the best way to allocate available funds for the subsidy among participating libraries and plan to have that information available in the next few weeks.
- We must accelerate the speed at which we close down the TexNet Centers that currently serve Texas public libraries. TSLAC staff will work with the TexNet Center staff, our partners at OCLC, and our resource sharing community to ensure that interlibrary loan services remain available to all Texas public library users. This means that some libraries may have to move into the WorldCat Resource Sharing system pending full implementation of Navigator. We will provide training and support for both systems.

IMLS Budget for FY2011

They always say that bad news comes in threes. We received word last month that the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) budget was reduced by \$28.5M. To accommodate for this loss, the agency has reduced the Grants to State Library Agencies program by \$12.6M for a total of \$160M. Since the Texas State Library Systems program is funded directly by these monies, NTLP will most likely be impacted. It is my understanding that most of the impact will be felt in FY2013.

Workshops

Register for these workshops at <http://www.ntrls.org/ce/>. If the course is full, let us know if you want to be put on a waiting list.

- **Online Workshop: Customer Service at the Library**, 6/1/2011
- **Transitions: Moving Through, Keeping Up and Moving On**, 6/10/2011
- **Save the Date! I Have These Statistics - Now What? Getting Started on the Path of Collection Analysis**, 7/22/2011, Mansfield Public Library
- **Homebound Services: Lessons Learned**, 8/16/2011, Haltom City Public Library
- **Homebound Services: Lessons Learned**, 8/18/2011, Denton Public Library - South Branch

Conferences

I am sorry to report that we will be postponing all conference activities after August. This is due in part to anticipated budget cuts. Our hope is to start the conferences up again when funding is restored.

Technet 2011

Time and Location August 3, 2011 at the Decatur Civic Center in Decatur, Texas

Tentative Theme: Quick Response Through Technology.

<http://www.librarytechnetwork.com/conferencenews.html>

This conference is all about technology.

Children and Youth Conference 2011

Time and Location TBA (Target Month is November 2011)

<http://www.libraryyouthservicesnetwork.com/>

CANCELLED! This conference has been cancelled due to budget cuts.

One Final Note

NTLP's longtime Assistant Director, Carolyn Davidson Brewer, is leaving the organization effective June 3rd. She has been with the organization for six years. It is with heartfelt gratitude that I extend my thanks to her for her dedication to libraries. She will be missed!