

Notes of Binge Thinker
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The Future of Regional Library Development and Collaboration in North Texas

I hope everyone is staying cool during the hot summer months. I am going to take another month off from the Guideposts as well as take a month off from the ebook scenarios. I am doing this because of recent developments here in Texas that affects the future of our regional library development and collaboration. I feel it is important that I address this topic in some detail in this month's column.

If you have not heard, North Texas Library Partner's main funding body, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), has decided to end their regional library development program in September 2012. They will fund the program for one additional year and invest \$2.5M into the program. After that, the government agency will go out for bid to fund some regional efforts but the Systems program as we have known it for the last 40 years will no longer exist.

At the July 29th System meeting, the current North Texas Library Partner libraries met to consider a recommendation from the bylaws committee to change the governance and structure of the organization from one of primarily serving as a regional system for TSLAC to one of a traditional membership driven organization. The recommendation passed almost unanimously with only one no vote on any of the proposed changes.

What does this mean? It means that NTLP officially becomes a membership driven nonprofit organization serving as a regional office for the Texas Library Systems program in FY2012. In FY2013, which will start in October 2012, the organization will continue to exist, but its affiliation with TSLAC ends and funding the organization falls to the "partner" libraries to develop.

As you can imagine, this does mean that most likely there will be annual fees. I am proud to say that the Board of Directors has been considering this possibility since early April and has formed a Development Committee to review possible fee schedules. There has been much discussion and research done by this committee, including performing primary research by leading a discussion on membership fees at the July System meeting. This committee will make a recommendation on a fee schedule to the board later this month.

In my conversations with library directors about this development, I came up with a parallel to the profit world that some might find useful. In essence, NTLP, or NTRLS, has been owned by TSLAC for 40 years. TSLAC came up with the funds to underwrite our operations and dictated to us how their funds would be utilized. In FY2012 and beyond, NTLP will be owned by the partner libraries, who will advise the NTLP Board of Directors on how their funds will be utilized. NTLP Partner libraries will take ownership of the organization and be able to move forward to begin programs and services that serve their needs and not the ones conceived of in Austin or Washington DC. The organization will no longer be tied down by unreasonable or unrealistic rules and regulations on what NTLP can do for its libraries.

What will the libraries get in return for their investment in NTLTP? As hard as it is to imagine, libraries will get whatever they want in return from the organization. NTLTP staff will do a very intensive analysis of partner library needs each year and seek input from the partner libraries on what they want the organization to do for them and their communities. NTLTP staff will work closely with the advisory group of library directors in a focus group structure to better understand what libraries are currently facing in assisting their communities. NTLTP staff will continue to innovate and offer good ideas for the organization to research and explore as possible services, but now the NTLTP staff will go directly to the partner libraries to get their “buy-in” versus looking at federal and state laws to see if the activity is “allowable.” NTLTP will create procedures and policies that will respond quickly to library’s needs versus waiting for the LSTA five-year plan to be rewritten.

One service that we will continue to provide is vendor discounts and consortia purchasing. These are value added services because they bring relief to the partner libraries bottom line. Janis Robinson, Director of the Grapevine Public Library, uses the phrase “cost containment,” when she talks about how she controls her expenses better through consortia because she gets the same service for less as a group than as an individual library. She has told me she is willing to pay the annual fees to keep NTLTP because consortia purchasing brings such large savings to her library that she will still save money even with the added cost of the annual fees.

We will also offer Continuing Education in some format. At this time, we are not sure what form this will take, but we are working with a consultant who is assisting us with how to frame our CE program without the support of state funds. Finally, we are seriously looking at how we can continue to provide consulting service as well as start to advocate more heavily for libraries in their communities, in Austin and in DC.

NTLTP staff hopes that NTLTP partners will be active members in the everyday life of the organization. We realize that it is difficult to think of a regional organization when your daily lives at your libraries are so full and busy. However, as “owners” of the organization, we feel that you will want to know how your investments are being used and want oversight on what we are doing. With this in mind, we are forming a finance committee in September to meet regularly to review how NTLTP is doing financially and provide reports back to the partners on its progress.

In the same vein, we hope libraries will work together and provide assistance where they can on raising funds in other ways like grant writing and fundraising. The more funds we bring in the door outside of annual fees, the less strain it puts on the partner libraries. With us working together, we can help the organization to pursue ways to help your library help your community.

I want to end this column by inviting all libraries in North Texas, both in our geographic region and those to the east and west of us to seriously consider looking into joining NTLTP. I believe you will be pleasantly surprised by the value it brings your library. “Nothing in Isolation” is the unapproved motto of my tenure here at NTLTP and I believe it holds as true today as it has in the past. Let’s join together to make a difference in our libraries!

Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some updated FAQs concerning the changes occurring at NTLP.

What needs to happen for NTLP to continue to exist beyond next year?

NTLP convened a bylaws committee to review the bylaws to make the needed changes for the proper governance and structure. These bylaw revisions were approved by the System Assembly at the July 29th System Assembly meeting in Bedford.

How will the governance and structure of the organization need to be changed?

NTLP governance is constructed in a way that will retain the balance of power between the board of directors and the library membership. The old bylaws tied the Corporation and the Texas Library System closely together so what is dictated by the Texas State Library and the Texas Library Systems act played heavily into the governance of the organization. NTLP will continue to act as regional organization for the Texas State Library in FY2012. However, governance of the organization will no longer be tied to Austin. To help with the transition, we are calling all library members of the corporation, *NTLP Partners*. Library members of the Texas Library Systems program will continue to be called *System Members*.

How does one become a NTLP Partner library?

The board of directors will establish a set of pre-defined criteria for being a NTLP partner at its August meeting.

If annual dues are part of the pre-defined criteria, how much will they be?

The board of directors convened a development committee in May to look at this issue. It is made up of representatives from the board, and a library director from each of our regions. This committee is currently investigating various fee models. Libraries will be given an opportunity to become NTLP Partners in FY2012. NTLP Partners will be eligible for certain programs and services available only to NTLP Partners and they will be part of the corporate governance. Texas Library System members will receive programs and services underwritten by the Texas State Library, which will include consulting and resource sharing.

Huh??? Now am I confused, isn't being a NTLP Partner the same as being a System Member?

I can understand your confusion. It is a confusing picture that has been painted for us in FY2012. NTLP Partners will be the libraries who choose to join the corporation by meeting the pre-defined criteria set forth by the board of directors. These libraries will be the ones who share the responsibility of governing the corporation with the board of directors in FY2012. System members will be the libraries who meet the pre-defined criteria to be System members in 2012 as dictated by the Texas State Library. The System members will only have a say in how the resources from the state library are utilized. The other difference between the two is

that some services will only be available to NTLP Partners while the services underwritten by the state library will be available to all libraries who qualify as System members, which are currently the 78 member libraries being served by NTLP.

Ok. What are the programs and services that are only available to NTLP Partners in the transition year of FY2012?

NTLP Partners will receive a discounted cost to attend NTLP workshops in FY2012 and be eligible to receive the vendor discounts negotiated by the NTLP staff.

What are the programs and services available to System Members in the transition year of FY2012?

For FY2012, resource sharing (consortia) is being underwritten by the Texas State Library so NTLP will continue to support resource-sharing consortia for System members. Examples are the Overdrive consortium and the Evergreen ILS consortium. System members can also receive basic consulting services. More advanced consulting projects will be available through NTLP, for a fee.

Will all workshops cost money in FY2012?

Yes. CE will not be underwritten by the Texas State Library so NTLP will have to charge fees for workshops in order to cover costs. NTLP staff will do its best to keep these costs reasonable. NTLP Partners will receive a discount. The amount of discount is still being considered by the development committee and the board of directors.

What vendor discounts will be available to NTLP Partners in FY2012?

NTLP staff is currently working on negotiating discounts with select vendors for FY2012 and beyond. NTLP staff is also planning on going out for bid on books, databases and other collection materials. These contracts will be in place sometime during FY2012.

What resource sharing (consortia) will be available in FY2012?

As it stands right now, NTLP has consortia for Overdrive, Evergreen, Learning Express and Live Homework Help. NTLP staff is open to other ideas for consortia.

What is the difference between consortia and vendor discounts?

NTLP distinguishes between these two services in the following way. Consortia are a collection of libraries who receive a discount on a product or service because of their collective purchasing power, or who combine resources to increase the level of service they can provide to their patrons. NTLP handles the contractual and financial aspects of the consortia including the collection of funds from the libraries and the payment of all expenses associated with the consortia. NTLP also assists the consortia with administrative and support tasks. Vendor discounts are price breaks extended to NTLP Partners, but all administration and financial

transactions are handled by the participating Partner libraries. Book contracts fall under vendor discounts.

What other benefits does my library receive from becoming an NTLP Partner in FY2012?

Well, other than the prestige of being a founding member of the new NTLP, the library would also be part of the decision making process for planning for FY2013. NTLP Partners will be the libraries that will consider all planning documents for FY2013 and provide feedback to the board of directors in governing decisions. Also, these libraries will be the ones to vote in board elections in FY2013. Finally, any bylaw revisions are voted on by NTLP Partners.

What if I don't want to become an NTLP Partner, but I want to use some of the services offered to the Partners, can I pay NTLP to provide them?

Yes, you can. NTLP will have a listing of services available to all libraries a la carte. NTLP will administer these services and depending on staffing levels, either handle them internally, or contract them out.

What about NTLP staff?

It looks like NTLP will have to reduce its staff from 9.5 FTEs in FY2011 to 3.8 FTEs in FY2012. For FY2013, staffing level will depend heavily on the projected income.

What other ways are NTLP going to bring in funds in FY2012 and beyond?

The development committee is considering fundraising and grant writing as possibilities. NTLP will also provide a selection of fee-based services a la carte that will be offered to all libraries for the purpose of bringing in additional funds.

Do I still have to file an annual report?

The Texas State Library has indicated that they will still be providing accreditation services for public libraries. If you want to receive certain services from TSL, then you will have to provide the data. According to a letter sent out by TSL, "accreditation will be required for participation in TexShare, eligibility for competitive grants, and other special services." The NTLP board of directors will look at accreditation closely to determine if it should be part of the pre-defined criteria for being a NTLP Partner.

Can Library Directors or staff members or board members serve as the voting representatives for their libraries?

Each NTLP Partner designates a representative for their organization for voting reasons.

Can Library Directors or staff members serve on the NTLP Board of Directors?

Yes