VII.   STATE LIBRARIAN'S REPORT

A.3.   Operations - Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries - Discussion

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RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: RE-ENVISIONING PUBLIC LIBRARIES (The ASPEN REPORT)

The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, created the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries to help advance the work that public libraries are doing to address community challenges and to support the transformation of communities and their public libraries in the digital age.

The Dialogue concluded that the long-term health of libraries is essential to the long-term health of the communities they serve. The report explores the essential role of public libraries in a networked world and begins to re-envision the 21st century library in a hyper-connected environment and dramatically changing world. Enabling all libraries to fulfill their new roles will require community leaders, civic partners and librarians to share a common vision for what public libraries can be.

The report is intended to raise the profile of public libraries to the center of the knowledge society, highlight the opportunities and possibilities, increase support for an expanded library role in a networked world and spark a national conversation and action to re-envision the 21st century library as a center of learning, innovation and creativity. It is also intended to provide a resource for engaging government leaders, trustees and community partners in dialogue to advance concrete actions for transforming public libraries.

The Aspen Institute may receive additional foundation funding to support several state-level dialogues and to develop guides/tools to help states and communities plan and convene conversations with policymakers and community leaders.

We have had an initial conversation about the report with the library development staff and with LiLAC (our Library Leadership Advisory Committee), and we plan to incorporate discussions in meetings of other of our advisory groups. We also understand that several Idaho public library directors have initiated conversations with their staff and/or boards.

The full report is at http://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/Dialogue-on-Public-Libraries/2014/report. Following are excerpts: "Strategies for Success" and 15 Action Steps for Library Leaders, for Policymakers, and for the Community.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Re-Envisioning Public Libraries

Expanding access to education, learning opportunities and social connections for all is one of the great challenges of our time. It is a challenge made more urgent by the rapid transition to a new economy in which knowledge and creativity are the drivers of productivity and economic growth, and information, technology and learning are central to economic performance and prosperity.

Public libraries are essential institutions for meeting this challenge.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

1. ALIGN LIBRARY SERVICES IN SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY GOALS

Public libraries that align their services to support local community goals will find the greatest opportunities for success in the years ahead. This will require a level of flexibility and adaptability to change as community needs change.

It will also require collaboration among libraries, policy makers and community partners to redefine the role of libraries as institutions that inspire learning, drive development, grow social capital and create opportunities.

2. PROVIDE ACCESS TO CONTENT IN ALL FORMATS

As the public library shifts from a repository for materials to a platform for learning and participation, its ability to provide access to vast amounts of content in all formats is vital. Libraries face two immediate major challenges in providing access to content in all forms:

o Being able to procure and share e-books and other digital content on the same basis as physical versions

o Having high capacity, easily scalable broadband technologies in every library that deliver and help to create content

Stakeholders must work together to find solutions to these challenges that meet the community's needs and work for content creators, publishers and the public.

3. ENSURE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Public libraries need to transform their service model to meet the demands of the knowledge society while securing a sustainable funding base for the future. Achieving this means libraries need to:

o Identify reliable revenue resources for both daily operations and long-term planning and investment

o Explore alternative governance structures and business models that maximize efficient and sustainable library operations and customer service

o Become more skilled at measuring outcomes rather than counting activities

o Balance the local and national library value proposition to consider economies of scale in a networked world without compromising local control

4. CULTIVATE LEADERSHIP

Leadership is needed to build communities and public libraries that thrive and succeed together. Every community needs a vision and a strategic plan, with input from all stakeholder groups. Key steps include

o improving communications with community leaders

o developing community champions

o strengthening intersections with diverse communities and communities of color

o reaching out to and engaging with young-professional organizations and demonstrating the collective impact of partners working together

15 ACTION STEPS
for LIBRARY LEADERS

1. Define the scope of the library's programs, services and offerings around community priorities, recognizing that this process may lead to choices and trade-offs.

2. Collaborate with government agencies at the local, state and federal levels around shared objectives. This includes partnerships with schools to drive learning and educational opportunities throughout the community.

3. Partner with local businesses, chambers of commerce and community colleges to provide access to curricula and resources, to technology and certification programs and to job search resources to maintain a highly skilled yet highly flexible workforce.

4. Engage the community in planning and decision making, and seek a seat at tables where important policy issues are discussed and decisions made.

5. Connect resources from other agencies or libraries to the library platform rather than reinventing the wheel or always going solo.

6. Develop partnerships and collaborations with other libraries and knowledge networks that can contribute to efficiencies, using the opportunities provided by digital technologies.

7. Support the concept of a national digital platform to share collections nationally while continuing to maintain a local presence and focus; participate in content-sharing networks and platforms.

8. Deploy existing resources in new ways.

9. Collaborate in negotiations with publishers on reasonably priced and easily accessible access to e-content and develop win-win solutions like "buy-it-now" options.

10. Provide mobile devices for in-library, in-community and at-home use.

11. Measure library outcomes and impacts to better demonstrate the library's value to the community and communicate these outcomes to key partners and policy makers.

12. Communicate the library's story of impact directly to the public, partners, stakeholders and policy makers. Include the new vision built on the library's people, place and platform assets.

13. Develop a richer online library experience and stronger competencies in using digital and social media to demonstrate the library's role in the digital transformation.

14. Change long-held rules and operating procedures that impede the development of the library's spaces and platform.

15. Take proactive and sustained steps to brand the library as a platform for community learning and development.

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15 ACTION STEPS
for POLICYMAKERS

1. Use the authority of office to bring together community stakeholders to create a comprehensive strategic plan for the library and other knowledge institutions in the community.

2. Define libraries as part of the community's priority infrastructure along with other established infrastructure priorities such as schools, transportation and parks, and make sustainable, long-term funding that reflects the library's value to the community a budget priority.

3. Develop strategic alliances and partnerships with local library leaders to advance educational, economic and social goals.

4. Leverage the economic development potential of the public library as a community platform.

5. Make access to government information a model for curating open data.

6. Integrate librarians and state library agencies into development planning and policy making in all departments and at all levels of government.

7. Reduce barriers to libraries' ability to access some funding sources in authorizing and appropriations legislation.

8. Review state-level policies that affect the public library's ability to transform itself for the future.

9. Support a study on funding and governance structures for public libraries to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities that will lead to the development of stronger, more efficient public libraries.

10. Support and accelerate deployment of broadband, including high-speed, scalable broadband, to all libraries

11. Develop local, state and national plans to address digital readiness.

12. Promote the deployment of wireless hotspots in libraries and other public places, especially in economically disadvantaged and minority communities where there are fewer Wi-Fi hotspots, to access the library's platform anytime, anywhere.

13. Support rural and small libraries to ensure that all residents have access to world-class resources regardless of where they live.

14. Promote and invest in the infrastructure for a national digital platform that is scalable, flexible and serves diverse needs and new uses.

15. Be an informed champion for the library and what it offers in the community.

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15 ACTION STEPS
for the COMMUNITY

1. Collaborate on the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the community's information and knowledge ecosystem, including the library and other knowledge institutions in the community.

2. Develop strategic partnerships and alliances with public libraries around content or specific organizational or community needs.

3. Bring diverse expertise to bear on helping libraries create and share technology tools.

4. Connect knowledge resources in the community to the library's knowledge networks.

5. Participate in the library's platform for curating local history and culture.

6. Leverage the economic development potential of the public library as a community platform.

7. Bring resources, including financial resources and technical expertise, to partner with libraries where objectives align well.

8. Volunteer organizational and technical expertise to mentor and support learning that takes place in library spaces and on its platform, including in innovation labs (especially those aimed at youth), maker and hacker spaces and resource-rich coworking spaces.

9. Structure grant opportunities in ways that small and rural libraries can take advantage of them; for example, not always emphasizing cutting-edge technology.

10. Leverage foundation or corporate donations to public libraries through the creation of a public-private trust for libraries.

11. Support the deployment of broadband, Wi-Fi and digital literacy skills throughout the community, especially to economically disadvantaged, underserved and other special needs populations.

12. Advocate on behalf of the long-term sustainability of public libraries.

13. Collaborate with libraries in areas of mutual interest.

14. Explore the library's people, place and platform assets.

15. Support efforts to re-envision and rebrand the library as a vital community institution in the digital era.