

Scholarship Recipient Reports for the 2012 Association of Rural and Small Libraries Conference

Wendy Campbell (Darby Community Public Library)

The Association of Rural and Small Library annual conference in Raleigh was beneficial to my work as the director of a small library. The conference provided me with the opportunity to connect with directors of comparable libraries as well as learn and share library accomplishments. I participated in six thought provoking workshops that provided helpful information for my present and future work.

The computer technology workshops, Using Social Media and Creating Online Resource Guides, were not what I expected but increased my knowledge. I chose social media to learn how to create a face book presence for the library; however, the workshop focus was to refine your library page so I gained information about attracting people to our page once it is created. The Online Resource workshop included discussion of the positive and negative attributes of different online platforms beginning with platform definitions so I found the workshop to be especially informative to librarians like me with limited knowledge of the subject matter.

I attended a Volunteer workshop because we have many volunteers with many corresponding issues that need to be addressed if the library is to operate with efficiency and professionalism. Although this workshop was primarily helpful to someone considering using volunteer help, it helped to clarify some of the needs to be addressed at my specific library. I realized one of my goals is to strengthen the volunteer program by revising volunteer application and including a volunteer policy. I also seek to improve our work by delegating specific tasks to individuals in order to best utilize their skills.

General library workshops on advocacy and development included The Entrepreneurial Librarian and The Library as Community Anchor. The Entrepreneurial Librarian workshop was motivating and challenging as it called for all librarians to develop a strategic plan and set specific and measurable goals. I recorded notes so that I can return to the information presented. This workshop reiterated for me a need to better organize daily operations so that I have time for leadership development. The Library as Community Anchor workshop was primarily a workshop of sharing ideas where I gathered ideas for library classes, workshops, and events.

Finally, the workshop I found to be most informative and fun was Signature Events for Libraries because of the ideas for events including what worked and what did not. The presenter used many examples of diverse events and settings. I have included a notes page on this workshop as I thought it might be useful to others. [see page 5 below]

I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to attend this conference. There were many benefits to meeting with other librarians of small and rural libraries. The greatest benefit to me was learning what other libraries of similar population and budget size are accomplishing knowing that it is possible for each of us to do the same.

Rebekah Kamp (Belgrade Community Library)

My objective for attending the ARSL conference was to learn more about strengthening the library as a community center. Toward this goal, I attended

workshops on community engagement, strategic planning, community based advocacy, and innovative services. I also visited with vendors and librarians to find out what works best in other rural communities. This report details the information and ideas I gathered from my experience at the 2012 ARSL conference.

Workshops

I attended eight workshops and a pre-conference event, and I took home something useful from each event. However, there were a few workshops that stood out as particularly relevant for Montana's libraries. These workshops focused on practical, affordable ways that libraries can reach out to their rural communities and maintain relevancy in changing times. The best part about each of these

programs was that the suggestions stemmed from real life successes.

Strategic Planning on a Shoestring

To be relevant to the community and in-touch with citizen's needs, a library needs to design services with the aid of a community assessment and strategic plan, but these critical resources do not need to be developed alone. Libraries operating on a shoestring budget should involve other community stakeholders. Lana Gardner, the director of the Cherokee County Public Library, demonstrated how her library conducted a community assessment and created a three-year strategic plan in partnership with the local United Way and other local clubs and businesses. CCPL's example shows how drawing upon community partnerships can create a more successful outcome than trying to rely on the library's limited budget and resources alone.

By taking information from a community assessment spearheaded by a local service organization, the library was able to devote more of their time and staff to drafting their strategic plan. As the director of CCPL stated, results from a community-based effort "represent a broader knowledge of your service area, its patrons, community assets, and other available resources that will assist in future planning endeavors." She also used the acronym STEAL to remind librarians that is okay, and smart, to "steal" ideas, templates, and phrasing from other libraries and organizations when creating your own strategic plan.

The Programming Workshops

In addition to strategic planning, I wanted to learn more about innovative, successful programming. I attended sessions for each of Belgrade's target audiences (children, teens, and adults), and brought home some excellent ideas to share.

- My favorite DIY children's program can be reproduced on the cheap, and better yet, it involves science! Paula Lopatic from the Vespasian Warner Public Library in Illinois shared several experiments developed by Steve Spangler. Spangler is the son of two professional magicians and a science teacher. His website www.stevespanglerscience.com shares several fun experiments that can be used during school visits or a summer program. For example, Paula showed us how to create instant snow and how to suck an egg into a milk bottle.
- Melissa Hager, youth services coordinator from Alexander County Library in North Carolina, shared some of her most successful teen programs. She emphasized "keeping it simple sweetie" and partnering with other businesses and organizations. For example, she does a teen poetry slam in partnership with the local coffee shop. The teens also develop an annual publication with

their stories, poetry, photography, and art. One of my favorite poetry programs mentioned is called “blackout poetry.” Teens take a page from a donated or recycled magazine and black out all the words except for the ones that will make up a poem. This is a great way to get teen started even when they may not feel comfortable finding their own words.

- The Adult Programming Coordinator from Hiawatha Public Library breaks her programming down into six categories, literary, musical, foodie, fun, civic, and crafty. Out of all the excellent programs mentioned, the holiday recipe swap stands out the most in my mind. She invited community members to bring in their favorite baked good recipes to trade (with samples of course). So many people showed up that there were building fire code concerns! The only cost to the library was staff time and publicity.

Community Based Advocacy and Engagement

Jennifer Pearson, an OCLC and Geek the Library representative, hosted a workshop on advocacy and community engagement, and it was the most powerful training session I attended. Pearson started off her program with a firm message—we need advocacy because we have competition. This

competition is coming from every direction, and our competitors are advocating too. It has become increasingly important to show the community what investing in the library looks like and why, just like the fire station and schools, we are worthy of funding.

Our libraries are connected to community success—we help people find jobs, we encourage business development, and we improve the quality of life, but sometimes we do a poor job describing these assets for a lay audience. Pearson recommended advocacy strategies that emphasize transformative programs and services. Rather than over-informing city council members with information like circulation stats, she suggested sharing a powerful testimonial video. In her example, a library presented a statement from a job-seeker that used the libraries computers to find work. The testimonial coupled with a basic statistic (e.g. 5,000 people reported using the libraries computers for job searches in 2011) was far more meaningful than the number alone. As Jennifer pointed out, “facts make you think, emotion makes you act.” The video and similar advocacy methods create supporters who will in turn advocate for the library.

Vendors

Inspired by Jennifer Pearson’s presentation, I decided to talk with the vendors representing OCLC’s Geek the Library. Geek the Library is a community based advocacy campaign developed by OCLC with funding through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Many will recognize the catchy black, white, and red posters (see right), but the real power of the campaign stems from community engagement. Geek the Library encourages libraries to go out into the community to ask, “What is important to you?” If somebody “geeks” (is passionate about) mushroom hunting, the library can then demonstrate how they already support or plan to support the hobby (e.g. resources, programs). They can also invite the hobbyists to host an event.

Libraries that commit to participating in Geek the Library should plan on at least a sixth-month stretch of devoted effort. While there is no specific cost for starting a campaign, the library should plan to set aside a portion of their budget and staff time to

producing publicity materials, attending community events, and spreading the message. However, none of this is done without support. OCLC delivers (mandatory) staff training and a start-up kit. They also give interests libraries a flash drive containing PowerPoint presentations, marketing plan templates, press releases, and videos to share with the library board and other stakeholders.

For those that are willing to put in the effort, this campaign appears to work. Research from OCLC has shown that the campaign helps stimulate community interest. It also helps stakeholders and city council members see the importance of the public library. Currently, no Montana libraries participate, but Belgrade plans to explore the campaign further.

Connections

While I found the workshops and vendor information useful, some of the best ideas came from chatting with other librarians between sessions and at dine-arounds. A director from a rural community in Utah told me about a simple but effective method they use to get the word out about the library. They take some of the books donated for the annual book sale and leave them at local cafes and other hangouts. Each book has a note saying "This is a gift from your public library. Please take me home." This idea is essentially free, and it will reach people that may not come to the library. We plan to do a related project at our library in November and December. For the coming holiday season, we will be hosting a program on letter writing. Instead of books, we will send around baskets with donated stationary, postcards etc. with a note inviting the public to send a letter to a loved one. There will also be a small poster with information about the library. We hope to get people involved in a library program before they even step through our doors.

Conclusion

The biggest message I took home from the conference was that if you want to succeed as a community center, you must actually leave the library. As the final speaker Dr. Ron Carlee pointed out,

the strongest, most effective advocates for the library will be non-librarians. If you are involved with other organizations and actively communicating with other community stakeholders, they will remember the library and speak on its behalf.

Debbie Wellman (Chouteau County Library)

I was able to attend this conference for the first time this year. My first impression was that it is very well organized and a conference that makes everyone feel welcome.

The first event was a mixer at the North Carolina State Capitol Building, which is beautiful and was open for us tour. There was food, drink and entertainment which were a very nice touch.

The choice of workshops offered was on a variety of topics that I felt were well suited for rural and small libraries. It was nice hearing from librarians with small staff and budgets and learn what they are doing.

I attended a workshop on "Turning Your Library into a Community Anchor" and was given ideas of types of support we should be offering (nutrition and hearing awareness, living wills, and dress for success are a few examples). Then there are classes that can be on-going such as basic computers, GED prep, knitting and

crocheting. The topic of programs was also discussed and these would include book clubs, art festivals, book signings, family literacy night, back to school night and story time to name a few. The library is the one stable place the entire community can come to for help finding information, support and books. Possibly doing a survey of the community to see what the community would like to see the library offer and what they want to see happen in their town

I also attended a session on Librarians with Black Belts that discussed the need to practice alertness in our library. A good way to do this is to have the staff practice "30, 30, 30", for 30 days, every 30 minutes, scan the surroundings for 30 seconds. You would be amazed at what you will start to notice and how you will be able to predict situations with patrons, therefore possibly defusing what could potentially be bad.

A couple of sessions I attended were on events at your library and ideas were discussed on what has worked and what hasn't. Also the why's and how of doing events: fund-raising, PR, get non-users in, something different and fun for the community... try to find something "unique" to the library".

For me one of the highlights besides the conference was the "Dine Arouds", you were given an option to sign up to go to one of the local restaurants for dinner with other librarians. This was a great way to meet people from around the country in a casual setting where you could share about libraries but also talk about everything and anything.

There were several vendors I had never heard of which was very nice. There is even one that sells discarded books for you on a commission. Each vendor took time with you to answer questions if you had any.

I was able to speak to several librarians from the mountain west and several told me that they budget the ARSL for the directors to attend and have their staff attend the state conferences so that all bases are covered. I can definitely see where that would be beneficial.

My overall experience was excellent. It is nice to hear about and from an organization that is working to support and promote the rural and small libraries as it is easy to be lost in the shuffle of the bigger libraries. I truly feel the experience was worthwhile and am grateful for receiving the scholarship and I hope I can attend in the future.

Thank you.

P.S. Next year the conference is being held in Sioux City/Omaha.

Signature Events for the Library presenter Cassie Guthrie notes from ARSL conference [from Wendy]

What is a signature event? A well-attended unique event owned by an organization

Why do a signature event? Raise funds, awareness, and positive publicity (Fundraising and Friendraising)

Signature Event Examples

1. Treasure Gala: discover untold riches at your library
2. Sample New York: wine hors d'oeuvres silent auction
3. Much Ado about our library: Library staff and guests dressed up as literary characters.
4. Booktoberfest
5. Golf Tournament Barber automotive first annual golf tournament businesses sponsored holes for the tournament
6. Library hosted Run Book it t shirts and sponsors on back 5K run at library, 5K walk, bookworm wiggle for children
7. Putt-Putt golf course in library- businesses and organizations each sponsor a hole.
8. Family literacy event
9. Dinner in the Library
10. Mystery Dinner Theatre
11. Chocolate in the Stacks (Valentine's Day) Friends contributed food for chocolate table Quilt Show was displayed Small town businesses may submit prizes for auction that can be one joined with others like rubber boots from hardware and sub and pizza coupon in one package maybe oil change from auto business.
12. Some libraries do Signature event not to raise money such as a Bookmark Contest- k-5 enter at the library with sponsor Kiwanis club for printing and gift certificate for winners. Judges from community are teachers who buy in and promote event in their classrooms.

Organizing the Event *Organization will make or break event.*

Some of the preparation will include the following.

Consultation with Teen Service Group,

Develop invite list of 200 to include school staff

Form partnerships with co- sponsors of event- businesses, service org., schools, colleges, scouts

Create Event statement including why we are doing this event and specific, measurable, realistic goals

Outline your Objectives

Example: Fundraising Raise 10,000, Secure at least 300.00 in sponsorships, sell 100 tickets

For budget, start with what you hope to net, what we bring in minus expenses, work backward

Questions to ask when organizing

Will there be live music, appetizers, cash bar (need liquor license)?

Who will be listed as sponsor? Catering,

Should Board of Trustees do the invitation

Will event benefit specific purpose such as children's story room, Library Youth programs and collection development

Consider a Comp ticket for journalist to ensure press coverage

Maybe solicit businesses for products instead money.

Fundraiser options:

Politician lead live auction

Silent auction- place bid on paper. *Note: Parents will likely bid on star wars guys or toys.*

Chinese auction- Looks like silent auction with a jar by each item or item group.

Participants buy raffle tickets and put raffle tickets in jars by item they want to win. Staff pulls ticket from jars for winner.

Follow up to event may include handwritten thank you's with an invitation to a ribbon cutting event to showcase special purchase as a result of event while also including next year's date for signature event