

Anchorage Public Library Sounding Board – Aug 5, 2009 Meeting Notes

The second meeting of the Anchorage Public Library Sounding Board was held in the Loussac Public Library on Aug 5, 2009. 17 people were in attendance.

Questions about these notes should be directed to Bill Wilson wilson@libraryconsultant.com or (608) 868-1133 or to Chris Beck, Agnew::Beck, chris@agnewbeck.com or (907) 222-5454.

Sounding Board in Attendance

Brian Gerd – Teen Library Advisory Board, South High
Teresa Churchel – APL, Youth Services
Jason Criqui – First National Bank
Sherrie Edwards – Senator Murkowski’s office, parent
Gretchen Weiman – Chair, Library Advisory Board
Abbe Hensley – Best Beginnings
Sue Urig – Library Foundation
Karen Keller – Anchorage Public Library, Director
Lydia Gray – USKH / Parent, uses Chugiak-Eagle River Branch
Julie Decker – International Gallery of Contemporary Art and UAA
Peter Briggs – Corvus Design - Landscape Architect, small business
Karen Keller – Anchorage Public Library, Director
Deborah Mole – UAA Library

Project team:

Clare Stockert – Library Foundation, Development Director
Bill Wilson – Himmel & Wilson
Chris Beck – Agnew::Beck
Leit Downing – RIM

Agenda

1. Review of Draft “Prospectus” Report
 - a. Background Information: “Good, Bad, Ugly”
 - b. Group Discussion – Themes for Library
2. Overview of Community Outreach
3. Exercise – Three Hypothetical Users
4. Next Meeting
5. Miscellaneous Additional Thoughts

Ia. Prospectus Review – “Good, Bad, Ugly”

Background information in executive summary was reviewed; using a Powerpoint summary. The review focused on current library situation – “the good, bad, and the ugly”. Several points were fleshed out in more detail:

- User map – where there are people there is use; Loussac is the primary library for the entire Anchorage Bowl; e.g. more use by south anchorage and east anchorage users of Loussac than nearby branches. (Conclusion: branch libraries are not penetrating surrounding neighborhoods. In contrast, in Eagle River & in Girdwood, there seems to be stronger local use, and a stronger local sense of ownership)
- Use varies dramatically by area: from 20% of households using the library, to 60% of households (Girdwood most active)

- Staff levels at the Library are low relative to peer group libraries (*Question*, if staff is already low, why was staff cut several times over last decade - no really good answer except the boom and bust economy).
- Use levels in Anchorage are relatively low compared to peer group libraries; not certain why; possible explanations:
 - Lack of convenient, nearby branch libraries
 - Anchorage has relatively less staff, smaller collection
 - Library less able to meet needs of increasingly diverse population
- **Question:** Were cost figures adjusted for higher cost of living in AK? (no, but performance/service area differences are too large to be explained by cost of living alone)
- Stock in Trade chart – percentage of budget tied to IGC (inter-governmental charges) has grown from 24% to 32% of total budget over last 6 years; this is significant in a budget over a million dollars. Suggests that ACL might take over some of these responsibilities directly, and try to provide creative, entrepreneurial strategies to offer comparable services at lower costs. BW - “It appears that if APL is going to make progress that these charges need to be controlled.”

1b. Prospectus Review – Characteristics of a Successful Library

- General response – many of terms in the draft report are passive, e.g. welcoming. Better to use more active, memorable terms. Suggested additions are below:
- **Responsive** – to needs in community, to questions by patrons, book requests, to technological assistance
- **Flexible, Adaptive, Dynamic** – for example, able to respond to technological changes (e.g. wifi). Note – centralized IT is a constraint to flexibility in technology
- **Inclusive** – a dimension of welcoming; inclusive means needs are met for all parts of community; goes beyond “welcoming”
- A place to find, build community; e.g., through branches located adjacent to local neighborhood commercial centers, a place for neighborhood meetings, a place where people know your name. Reclaim that sense of community taken over by places like Barnes and Noble
- **Comfortable** – Barnes and Noble does a better job than library (e.g. library coffee shop is separated from library)
- **Involved in the community**, vs. engaged – involved maybe a stronger, more active, warmer term; example, library could be a paid member of community orgs like Kiwanis
- **Innovative**, including rewarding staff with innovations, for creative ideas (don’t punish those who offer ideas)
- **Visible/Prominent/Communicative** – the “big sign” – direct, tangible improvements, as well as a range of outreach programs; better at sharing information about available services
- **Convenient/timely** – concern with paying fines/concern with requirement to return books before finished reading
- **Irresistible**

2. Outreach Summary

- Focus Groups
 - Some already done; others planned, including business groups
- Surveys/Community contacts
 - Some already done; others planned, including library users (done cooperatively with friends of library)
- Website – to be updated with new summary information

- Web-survey – suggest sending a list to sounding board for review, additions
- E-newsletter – used to get out news about project
- Sounding Board – representative of diverse views, one key part of outreach process
- Townhall Meetings – review draft findings

3. Exercise – three hypothetical users; how better connect them to library system, to existing library?

Ariana – 29 years old

- Provide specialty material, like Bear Tooth Monday night movies
- REI or equivalent to offer tips on outdoor activities/gear (use community resources to offer information)
- Home repair information
- Links to i-phone; is there an library app. (by Anchorage, by a consortium of national libraries)
- Option for downloading books at remote sites
- Twitter connections
- Personalized computer...
- Sponsor “building community” events, e.g., connection to her peers (college alumni, outdoor activities)
- Rethink coffee location
- Connections to “green life” – community gardens, information about green, venue about speakers, Midtown Park connections, victory gardens, courses on how to mow lawns. Demonstrations of new technology, examples at Mountain View library. Links to green businesses.
- Round table discussions
- Convenience - options to take library materials into community (e.g. vending machine at Kaladi’s)

Josh – 22 years old

- Career discovery center; career fair.
- Star wars convention
- Speakers - fantasy authors, illustrators
- Library as outpost for Title wave
- Sound recording studio, with classes associated; video-editing
- Better computers, fast & high quality – edit movies, use Photoshop,
- Sponsor film festival; enlist young people to take active role in creating such events
- Use young people to help review, improve movie collection
- Partner with university to offer lectures
- Better understand (ask Josh) means to access information. Might not be place based, perhaps later at night.
- Outreach through Facebook
- Music at the park
- Open mic night – poetry night
- Provide a place for young people to be – “the pub, the comic book shop, the hangout, Bosco’s”

Charles – retired military, genealogy

- Venue to get together with other folks with similar interests

- Partnering with knowledgeable interest groups (e.g., fish and game; fly tying club,- nice to have alcohol, active military)
- Partner with big companies to support community events
- Events at lunch time for nearby workers
- Provide information relevant to kids, e.g. information on colleges
- Improved personal assistance on topics of interest (e.g. college information, technology; added support for genealogical research – films, books, etc.)
- Use interest in genealogy as catalyst for broader interests in reading
- Use Charles as mentor (library users as library resource)

4. Next Meeting

- Tues, October 6th, 3-5 pm, Ann Stevens Room

5. Miscellaneous:

- Add library presence in public buildings (e.g. community center)
- Jason – getting ready to go on trip, but didn't even think of library (went to B&N)
- Explore options to minimize competition between library and private bookstores (e.g. get credit for donating books to library after buying)
- encourage concentration of specialties (e.g., one branch knows green information, knows foreign films)
- downtown as “innovation library”, create an innovation/technology “salon” to develop ideas for innovation
- check libguides.com
- library as venue/technological center – barriers include limited staff; restraints imposed by centralized IT
- partners to survey – SBS, Home Depot