

## Town Hall Meeting :: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Libraries

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5:30-8:30 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2009 attended by about 80 people

### Presenters + Facilitators

- Bill Wilson (Himmel & Wilson Library Consultants)
- Chris Beck (Agnew::Beck)
- Charles Wolforth (Anchorage Library Foundation)
- Gretchen Krug (Anchorage Public Library)
- Clare Stockert (Anchorage Library Foundation)

### General Suggestions for Library Improvement

- Marketing 2.0, Twitter/Facebook
- Tutoring students
- Online book lists + book reservations
- Online communication, events (+calendar)
- Reach out to young parents
- More libraries
- Analysis of state library plan, fiscal support

### BREAKOUT SESSION I: LET PEOPLE KNOW WHAT THE LIBRARY OFFERS.

#### A. Enhance marketing

- (3) Advertise in paper, twitter, facebook, APL website, NPR, tv, radio
- (3) Large sign with upcoming events i.e. Performing Arts Center, Museum (possible revenue generation if you include sponsors)
- (2) Email newsletter for APL
- (2) Utilize social networking, keep updated
- Create an overall plan
- Regular, consistent communications
- Home for all Anchorage events on website
- Library commercials
- Advertise in coffee shops, bookstores
- Advertise on 1st floor regarding events that occur in building, community events – flat screen listing programs
- Advertise/sponsor specific collections
- Advertise in bills – MLP, Enstar, etc

#### B. Target specific audiences to find new users:

- (4) Develop liaison with ASD, with focus on MS and HS
- Partner with nonprofits
- Outreach to prisons, hospitals
- Partner with UAA
- Send storytellers to Campfire
- Presentations at schools
- Posters in schools
- Reach out to school board, develop proposal for cooperative coordination
- Outreach to ethnic communities through volunteer presentations

- Ask for suggestions of materials in other languages
- Use young people as interpreters
- Teach an ESL class – partner with Anchorage Literacy Project
- Assistance with immigrants

**C. Make library more accessible and draw in new users with creative programs/events.**

- No charge of facilities
- Purchase a system to record group meetings – high tech
- Performances in library – poetry slams, first Friday openings, field trips  
Established professionals give lectures
- Show movies
- Partner with organizations like ASD to access online license programming
- More programming and coordination
- Photo contest on website
- Treasure hunt/geo cache at APL
- Post book reviews, have HS students review books in ADN
- Coordinate with movie theater
- Have more community book reads
- Make reading fun!
- Have prominent figures promote their favorite books
- Create an APL mascot
- Enlist Mayor, Senators, other elected officials to promote APL
- More presentations in the winter

**D. Teach patrons about services.**

- (2) Offer trainings on database searches, advertise in ADN
- Advertise what databases can do
- More staffing for database/research instruction
- Use proactive volunteers to give presentations
- Add virtual tour to website i.e. database searches, facility, services
- Smart phone apps
- Informational scavenger hunt

**Other**

- Look to other successful libraries Joint venture with rural communities
- Library needs to evolve with technology – what are European countries doing?
- Look at Joyce Valenzuela
- Business sponsorships
- Age appropriate gift certificates in books i.e. coffee shop gift card
- Find out what sources share community information

## **BREAKOUT SESSION 2: ENHANCE CUSTOMER SERVICE**

### **A. Staff needs to adopt common retail customer service concepts.**

- **\*\***(2) Consistency-- need to set a bottom line of what is absolutely required of staff and what rules are flexible to make the patron happy
- **\*\***Consistency – example, accountability needs to come from the top, make sure everyone knows what is expected of them and the reasons behind the rules (Anchorage School District is a good example)
- **\*\***Offer help immediately when people walk in building
- **\*\***Make it quick and efficient to use library services
- Staff dress and act professionally
- Staff needs more training on personal interactions/instruction
- Use the term ‘patrons’ not ‘customers’
- Have more staff wandering around to offer help, like box stores, department stores
- Youth services sets a good example – they know kids’ names, have good personal interactions
- Constant communication/feedback from patrons to find unmet community needs and figure out how the library can fill them
- Work with union to get through rough areas – don’t use them as an excuse for why we can’t change systems
- Help patrons feel invested/responsible for library so they treat it better and staff can spend less time policing bad behavior
- Reach out to youth – build future supporters

### **B. Expand staff capabilities to provide more opportunities for individual interactions.**

- Staff is overworked!!!!
- **\*\***Develop a better/bigger cadre of volunteers who get training from staff and are more specialized in their volunteer skills
- **\*\***Work with ASD student government to recruit youth volunteers – Student Advisory Board represents student governments and reports to School Board. There is a dearth of opportunities for teen volunteers who are required to do service for graduation – take advantage of that! Teens could offer reference help at desks for other teens.
- **\*\***Education campaign to expand volunteer program
- Utilize interns/mentors from ASD, UAA, APU (even small paid internships are effective)
- If there are further cuts, maintain outreach staff – it is one of the most important roles the library can offer
- Volunteers could...research, read at story times, assist with technology, run high tech equipment, run programs, teach classes

### **C. Help patrons better understand library services, so they have a better experience.**

- **\*\***Promote online services – holds, renewals, etc. Use clear, good graphics, interactive
- Create tutorials to teach patrons how to use services
- Develop a library orientation – especially useful for immigrant populations
- Feature different library services monthly on the website
- Host scavenger hunt to learn how to use library i.e. have them look up certain books, websites
- Need better organization/labeling of Loussac building

#### **D. Make the buildings more user-friendly.**

- **\*\***(2) Entrance needs to be better at greeting visitors – make it okay to make noise, visit with friends in the lobby
- **\*\***Distinct spaces within library for the different uses i.e. a quiet area, a collaborative/noisy area/teen center/youth center
- More computers – use alternate (cheaper) models, like mini-laptops, iPhones
- Reference staff use Microsoft Notebook to help with roving reference
- Have computers at entrance
- Stand alone teen center – have comfy chairs, reference & fiction materials
- High tech meeting rooms
- Provide more opportunities to leverage personal technology – better bandwidth, docking stations for laptops

#### **E. Provide extra services that enhance the visitor experience.**

- **\*\***Be open the hours when people need them (DO NOT cut weekend hours), provide services/programs at times that are appropriate for the target audience
- **\*\***Increase story times, hold at hours that are more convenient – weekends and evenings
- **\*\***Ability to pick-up materials at public schools or other locations
- **\*\***Update technology- IT infrastructure
- Re-open Alaska Collection full time
- Provide tutoring/ESL instruction
- Simple English adult books for ESL (don't make them read kids books to learn English)
- Move away from govt. funding – memberships, promote Friends and Foundation
- Highlight community success stories in publications- like athlete of the week in newspapers
- Check out Kansas City Library for example on how to go big with E-books
- Have upgrade service like paying additional money to get a longer check-out period/ahead in line for popular materials, book club books (without putting up barriers to access for others)
- Netflix-style delivery model
- No fines – encourage ownership, user responsibility

## **BREAKOUT SESSION 3: REDUCE OPERATING COSTS AND SECURE NEW SOURCES OF FUNDING.**

### **A. Efficiencies**

- Base shortened hours on usage/traffic – hours related to user needs
- Branch Locations (better leases/ smaller)
- Branches – assign other duties (librarywide) during less busy hours
- Increase energy efficiency
- Fines & fees – do they cost more to collect than they make?
- Expand use of technology to increase efficiency
- Branch consolidation
- Use university students – e.g., Ed students for storytelling
- IGCs – Getting other municipal departments involved in reducing IGC costs
- e-books – are there any savings to be had?
- Volunteers – to increase awareness and as labor for certain tasks – programming
- Support Services (any way to reduce costs)
- Comparison of revenue sources – monitor peer libraries – look at public/private partnerships

### **B. New Revenue Sources**

- Make it easier to give small gifts
- Corporate Sponsorships
- Keep the Development Position
- Museum quality gift shop – gifts from artists as well as selling their art
- School District – get some of the State money
- NPR model fund-raising
- Get more grants/soft dollars
- School \$\$\$/Partnership to get State dollars
- Value added services - Alternative to Blockbuster – enhance revenues
- Break away from the Muni – become a separate entity e.g. special purpose district
- Smart card – charge over a certain threshold
- More space for community events – rent space
- Permanent fund check-off for Library
- Diverse community – have groups do events/performances and donate proceeds to library

### **C. Increase Return on Investment by Increasing Use**

- Get the light from under the bushel
- Big Sign
- Break down barriers to community use
- Social Enterprise Model
- Better broadband
- TV/radio program
- Communicate, communicate, communicate
- Create “campus” setting

## BREAKOUT SESSION 4: ENCOURAGE A NEW GENERATION OF LIBRARY USERS WHILE ENGAGING TRADITIONAL USERS

- Programs—literary performances
  - readings
  - perform locally written scripts
  - involve all age ranges
  - use Wilda Marston theatre more
- Self-check machines that are easier to use
- Computers and tech hardware to reach young people
- Outreach—use volunteers, not just staff
- Donated computers
- Book mobiles {bigger issues of access & transportation
- Facebook and social media -keep updated!
- Greater number of computers for teens
- Teen programming—Twilight
- Outreach collections—shelters, Covenant House, bus station
- Awareness of interlibrary loan for schools
- Homework help
- Netflix model—books by mail
  
- Explore grant \$\$ for foreign language/cross-cultural material
- Look for ways for APL/ASD mutual support
- Transportation for teens—student ID as bus pass
- Twitter, Facebook, 2nd Life
  - use youth volunteers for this
  - offer school credit
  - create a youth committee to give feedback on what teens want
- Access youth who need community service opportunities
- Locations for meetings—formal, informal, ad hoc—not ssh!
- Teen space—not quiet
- Create welcoming entrance
- Open house to build awareness of what we offer
- Online tour, scavenger hunt to build awareness
- Kid-made video for YouTube to publicize library
- Use UAA students for manpower and ideas on how to communicate to kids—give credit
  
- Enlist cultural groups for performances (charge admission fee?)
  - connect with non-profits to create diverse relationships
  - bring UAA programming to the library
- Make better use of Wilda Marston theater
  - cut rental cost?
  - improve tech facilities
  - it should be constantly busy
- Create list of groups to partner with
- Informal meeting space
- Use (or not) school libraries
  - get ASD \$\$ for our services
- Brown bag sessions to learn use of tech and online resources

- take info sessions to schools
- Book talks by authors (for youth, adults)
- Teen advisors for what they want
- Keep up periodicals and popular materials
- Find interests of retirees
- Teach financial information/literacy
- Ask Permanent Fund to endow financial literacy program/center
- Media studio—record music, video, video conferencing set-up
- Community center model—no shh!
- Internet cafe—food—homey reorganize existing space:
  - Barnes & Noble model
  - chess club, go club
  - nicer furniture; more seating, tables
  - art openings—First Friday

## **BREAKOUT SESSION 5: CREATE A MORE WELCOMING, COMMUNITY-CENTERED LIBRARY**

- Priorities identified in highlights brochure are on target (but the “outreach to community groups” strategy should be moved from ‘thrive’ to ‘survive’, as it is relatively inexpensive, and offers near term benefits)
- The library needs aggressively to provide many, many more reasons for people to use the library. There are dozens of ways to do this, but a couple of main themes emerged:
  - Become Anchorage’s premier destination for community-driven, face-to-face learning and exchange of information.
  - Leverage interest in the library’s traditional materials by hooking people with information about current events (from budget debates to the release of a new Harry Potter book), and with ongoing face-to-face events (lectures, book clubs).
  - Take advantage of volunteers as providers of information (e.g., get young people to teach elders about internet, Facebook, etc.; “not just restocking shelves”)
  - Staff skills and responsibilities need to evolve to fit this new paradigm
- My personal favorite single idea: Library should host a website/bulletin board that links people who want to share skills/knowledge, with people who want that knowledge; imagine an website with an entry: “experienced sea kayaker seeks small group for 3 week short class on basic packing, cooking, camping & self rescue skills in Prince William Sound”; the library could become “a kind of knowledge-seekers/knowledge-providers dating site”
- Without fundamental changes in functions, the library will not thrive or survive

### **A. Public Knowledge of library materials**

- People (especially young people) don’t know about all the good things the library offers; for example, current DVD’s, current CD’s
- Need much more outreach to prospective users at schools, at UAA; there are likely community-minded businesses who would help do this in exchange for some favorable publicity
- Need to reach out directly to kids in local schools; community volunteers are a resource for this task “I’d be willing to go to schools and tell kids about the library”
- Arrange for more field trips to library by schools

### **B. Connections to the community: New activities at the Library**

- Expanded outreach to community groups is a great idea; doesn’t have to always by “physical groups”, can be social networking groups
- Take advantage of particular skills of different types of residents, working as volunteers, to help with library outreach. Eg., UAA students could help set up and maintain a library Facebook page.
- Recognize that work with volunteers still requires skilled, paid staff
- Kids need resumes showing community work (e.g., for college applications). Tap into this pool of volunteers to expand library services, especially in areas where, for example young people, have particular knowledge
- Host learning sessions on a range of topics
- Spaces for events
- Spaces for games, for gatherings of people with particular interests (e.g., “magic” – fantasy card game)
- Book clubs, book discussion groups, organized by library and/or community; could cover themes – history, travel, novels, etc.
- Host a wide range of events: music, lunchtime music, fun for kids, art
- Do what has been happening recently with MOA parks department: offer classes, activities for individuals, for community groups
- Diversity – Anchorage is a very diverse community, 96 languages. Library doesn’t reflect that diversity, or welcome people outside of mainstream ethnic groups. Library needs staff, materials and outreach efforts

to be more inviting to the 50% of the Anchorage population that isn't white. Bringing in new users doesn't just benefit those users, it leads to partnerships, fund raising, cooperative programs. Good for everybody.

- Partner with school districts; e.g.. art for loan
- Need "brain friendly" school libraries, active, engaging places that provide new perspectives
- Sponsor art events – library first Friday
- Encourage chess clubs, "go" clubs – go clubs attract a very diverse set of people, young and old, professionals, white and Asian...
- Poetry reading, poetry slams
- Loussac Library needs better connections to transit. Library should be a transit center.

### **C. Access to library materials – arrangement of spaces, information**

- Internet connections are poor, a nuisance to log in; off-putting to have something that should be so easy be hard
- "I come to the library a lot, mostly for internet access. Signing on and using library data bases is not easy; it's much more complicated than it should be."
- Hard to find things in the library; confusing spaces
- Need to improve "way-finding" within the building – provide helpful signs, other features that make it easier for people to find their way through and around the library. Moving between floors is confusing, people don't know about stairs. Confusing that floor most people enter on (2nd floor) seems like it might be the first floor.
- "I hope the mayor was misquoted in the paper when he said Anchorage already offers abundant internet access – reality is that many people don't have their own computers, and don't have money or time to buy a cappuccino and hang out in an wifi coffee shop"

### **D. Information**

- Library should be a clearinghouse of information about community information ("too often I don't hear about some event till after it happens")
- Library should host a community events website; where people could both list events and find out about events. Set it up so that people wanting to use a space could quickly see what nights were available (like booking a public use cabin)
- Provide display spaces on topical subjects; e.g. news clipping and background information on budgets when budget issues are in the news, tied to relevant secondary sources (books, web citations)
- Offer educational films, entertainment films, daytime and evenings
- Respond to current community needs, library needs to be "fleet of foot" – e.g., job training "help people find jobs and they're going to love the library"
- Provide books and magazines that kids would enjoy – e.g. skateboard, snowboard

### **E. Library Environment**

- Need greeters at the front door; provide a friendly helpful face for the library, that isn't there now. Option the work with volunteers
- Decorate entry differently through the year, to correspond with holidays, with literary happenings, e.g. release of a new Harry Potter book
- "Rejuvenate entry"
- Lighting is atrocious – "whole place is lit like dim cozy nook"
- Need spaces for classes
- Entry need to be redone. Entry is intimidating – "about as inviting as passing through airport security"
- Put in sound-dampening banners in entry area

- Worn, original carpets still in place in large majority of library; consider replacing with carpet squares (like at UAA, they can be replaced in worn areas easily). Note – library has no budget for cleaning carpets.
- Decorative hangings look dusty, faded
- Barnes and Noble book store – has features that make it more attractive for users (late hours, fireplace, comfortable places to sit, welcoming entry, good lighting, helpful staff)
- Take better advantage of third floor spaces

#### **F. Branch Libraries**

- Need more branches, best way to link to people, make library a part of daily life
- No reason to have a branch in a mall. Inconvenient – congested roads, difficult parking. Stand alone branch is much preferred. And, on the other side of same issue: “Dimond branch is good for teens who would otherwise not use library. And mall has good access by transit.”
- Need many stand alone library branches
- Need more branch libraries – best way to reach out to new users

#### **G. Convenience, Service**

- Operating hours have big influence on use-ability of library. Student at UAA says if there were programs later in the evening they would be popular. “not many people can take advantage of programs during middle of working day”
- Cutback in hours that happened last summer was exactly the wrong thing to do. Weekends are prime use times.
- People are now confused about whether or not library is open; so they don’t go.
- Need to rethink staffing structure, to allow different shifts to match staff needs and public needs
- Need consistent hours
- Library checkout staff is not always friendly, can often be very grumpy. Rest of library staff is helpful, courteous
- I like Eagle River branch, but it closes too early; makes it hard to support book clubs, community meetings

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

### Group 1: Let people know what the library offers.

- Can't always trust internet – library can provide opportunity for face to face information
- Library has access to on-line resources, data base not available to general public; most people don't know that
- “Tech is not the solution” – library will never be able to have the most current, sophisticated technologies, and shouldn't try. Library can, however, offer face to face human interaction and information that isn't available on line

### Group 2: Enhance customer service.

- Consider Netflix model – get books and return them by mail
- Take advantage of skills of volunteers (e.g. to help with technology), “not just re-shelving books”
- “I'd be willing to pay for a postage paid envelop to I wouldn't have to make a second trip to return a book” This would increase use of the library, and even be a way to make money

### Group 3: Reduce operating costs and secure new sources of funding.

- Bandwidth a real problem. Library lost IT person years ago, now relies on low quality generalized muni service. Libraries must have someone who really understands information technologies. “Library needs its own system”
- Need to change library culture – goal is to disseminate information, not to protect the collection
- Huge bandwidth sits right next to library, at GCI phone center
- “I would pay extra to use higher quality IT services, and to have longer access to the library's computers. An hour isn't enough
- Library needs to get a divorce from the City

### Group 4: Encourage a new generation of library users while engaging traditional users.

- Library should sponsor birthday parties – get a library card and a first book
- Open up spaces for free, provide cameras so meetings can be broadcast and shared with a wider audience (“not just those who have time to come the meetings”). Arrange for “accountability of impact”, a campus model with varied services and programs, and a smart card to track use (and charge for) services provided.
- Need a skilled, energetic volunteer coordinator (KSKA provides a good example of how this can work). Chugach optional, another example – with a hierarchy of committees, and coordinator of coordinators
- People at University, in High Schools don't know what library has to offer
- Host a scavenger hunt for “things you can't find on the internet” but that are available through the library data base

### Group 5: Create a more welcoming, community-centered library.

- Key concept is creating dozens of new reasons for people to come to the library; and once they come, the library should offer more than expected.
- Library should host DDF (debate, drama and forensics) events; would be an upgrade of the environment for HS kids, could offer entertainment to the public and a link to research materials, and might provide a pool of volunteer debate judges
- Library should host a website/bulletin board that links people who have and want to share skills/knowledge, with people who want that knowledge; “experienced sea kayaker seeks small group for 3 week short class on basic packing, eating, camping skills in Prince William Sound”, a kind of a “knowledge date site.”