

21st Century Reference Services – Convergence

“Between 1997 and 2007, per capita visits to public libraries increased nation-wide by 19 percent. During the same period, per capita circulation increased by 12 percent. This growth in demand for library services occurred even as people increasingly turned to the Internet to meet other information needs.” *IMLS Service Trends in U.S. Public Libraries, 1997-2007*. December. 2009.

“The buzzworthy trend at the Computer Electronics Show was “convergence”. This isn’t a new idea to librarians or tech folks, nor anything new in the world of consumer electronics, but the convergence specifically at issue in 2010 is something that libraries need to work into their long-rang plans or risk being overlooked as patrons gravitate toward services that better meet their content needs and desires.” Josh Hadro, *Library Journal*, p29. 2/15/10.

“It is important to note that libraries have never been afraid of technology. There is lots of evidence that libraries have embraced new technologies as soon as they come along....I think the posture for us is flexibility, nimbleness, being unafraid of technology, embracing it and bringing its benefits to our people – the people who use us and those are now people around the world.” Paul LeClerc, President and CEO, New York Public Library. *10 Sages Read the Future of Print*, Kurt Andersen, 2010.

“Based upon reasonable assumptions and current data, the Library is projecting a \$6 million shortfall – or structural gap – between operating revenue and operating expense by 2014.” *Sustaining our Future: Libraries for Life, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh - A Composite Report 2010-2014: Funding Outlook & Implications*, 2009.

Report Prepared by: Sheila Jackson

Task Force Charge:

Document current reference services and practices at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Main and branch locations, especially Squirrel Hill and Downtown & Business. Explore collections, services, trends, staffing and training with a goal of maximizing efficiencies and providing a service model for the future. Consider the impact of digital reference content and communication, e-publishing and media, and e-reading devices that takes into account changing user demands for how content is provided.

Introduction

Director Barbara K. Mistick and Deputy Director Mary Frances Cooper formed a Task Force under the direction of Assistant Director Sheila Jackson to respond to this charge. In January, 2010, working groups were formed to tackle the various aspects of this study. Since then we have met biweekly, reviewing research and discussing findings. This report is the result of that work. Each section generally contains four parts: the charge, a review of the status quo, research into the topic, and suggestions of where the Library’s position should be going forward. Some specific recommendations are included. Committee members and report writers are Richard Kaplan and Holly McCullough; Tina LaMark, Barry Atkins, Daniel Van Triest and Catherine Lamoureaux; Jeffrey Fortescue and Tim Williams; Holly Anderton and Ryan Hughes; and Karen Rossi, Bonnie McCloskey and Audrey Iacone.

Benchmarking Main/Central Libraries

Where We’ve Been

In 2000, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh hired consultant Ron Dubberly to review the services and practices of the Main Library and to make recommendations for the Main Library going forward. His report, which was embraced, provided for a reorganized Main, putting collections in classification order and eliminating the academic model of subject departments with separate public service points and subject focused reference librarians. He also recommended that Main abandon the practice of relying on and developing special files and indexes in favor of reliance on the resources of the Internet.

To validate his findings we did several things: we conducted a survey of our reference questions, we conducted public facility use surveys and focus groups, and we did an internal in-depth examination of the department structures and services offered by urban Main/Central libraries across the United States.

For the departmental structure review, we examined websites, exchanged email and phone conversations with colleagues, and identified trends among large systems with which Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh shares a similar history including their collection practices, and user bases. We also benchmarked ourselves with libraries that were being designated as award-winning, progressive library systems across the country, especially those found in the annual *HAPLR Survey* of outstanding library services. Our goal was to provide modern, customer-driven library services in our 1895 facility. The original 2000 research results are included as Attachments #1 and #2.

We learned at that time that there was a boom across the country in main library building projects – from Los Angeles, to San Antonio to Denver to Chicago to Cleveland. New buildings or major additions to older buildings were just being completed. Other projects were getting underway in Seattle, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and Phoenix. These new libraries often doubled in size to 300,000-600,000 square feet. These buildings would accommodate rapidly growing contemporary collections alongside older materials. Other libraries such as Columbus and Buffalo were streamlining their departmental organizations with an eye to being responsive to time-pressed customers' increasing needs to get in and out of the library building quickly, borrow items, download online information, to fax or transfer document files – all in a rapid and efficient manner. A growing understanding was acknowledged by all libraries with regards to the role the Internet would play in library services in providing access to the library catalogs and websites, leased databases, and world-wide web information resources.

Public libraries, generally, must live within their own four walls. As collections grow, space requirements grow. As the public demands at the library included new or expanded services and spaces like auditoriums, community meeting rooms, computer labs, media areas, food services, civic services, etc., library space requirements grew.

In Pittsburgh in 2001, there was no money to support, political pressure for, or even an internal resolve that there was an imminent need to build a new Main Library- although it was informally discussed. An estimate was made around 2003 that it would cost about \$35 million dollars to improve the systems infrastructure in Main's Oakland facility, including electric, communications and data services, HVAC, windows, roof, etc. This estimate was exclusive of furnishings and cosmetic improvements. A new library would cost in the ball park of above \$100 million. Either project was deemed at the time as way out of the realm of possibility. Focus was placed instead on modernizing CLP branch libraries which had become rundown, lacked climate controls and ADA access.

Where We Are

Instead, with about \$3 million in funds made available from our system-wide capital development projects, it was determined to renovate the First Floor at Main. Using the principles of information architecture, the department was designed as a user-driven, customer services-based destination for readers and for special programming. At this time we were also able to reorganize and implement streamlined reference services at Main in Oakland. Some minor cosmetic changes were made on the 2nd and 3rd floors. We eliminated 4 major subject departments and merged the nonfiction and reference collections under Reference Services - an integrated service model. Staff cross-training was initiated. Collections were reorganized in call number order, making them accessible and intuitive for customers. Almost every type of library material at Main, over 3 million items (circulating and reference books, journals, government documents, standards, specifications, patents, map and audio visual items) were moved. This was a deliberate, conscientious, thoughtful process. Almost all specialized information and

reference files from Humanities, Social Sciences, and Science and Technology were eliminated. Collections critically reviewed and reshaped.

Following the academic model, that was also used by the big public research libraries at Boston and New York, a depository for our heritage collections of reference books and pre-1970 journals was established. The non-public services areas and stacks at the old Allegheny Regional Branch, an air-conditioned space, was designated as the depository. This made room at Main for moving collections around within the Oakland facility.

This reorganized service model, rolled out from mid-2004 has served the citizens of Pittsburgh well for the past 6 years. Collections are easily accessible, and customer satisfaction can be seen in Main's circulation and visitor statistics, which have increased and our user statistics are modestly growing again.

Where We Are Going

We are now reaching another new paradigm shift in library services at the end of the first decade of the 21st Century. At a time of high customer need during the world-wide economic downturn, libraries are increasingly being turned to for their services. Content, media and information are in demand, in ever-expanding formats, and for electronic devices which change from week to week in popularity and price. Customers want information and entertainment instantaneously, at home, at work and play and, yes, even at the library.

We are at the early stages of the convergence of myriad changes in information products and services that will impact how libraries do their business. The publishing industry is desperately trying to find successful business models that will sustain and develop productive markets for a company's bottom line. They are trying to morph print materials into cost-effective e-formats for as yet non-standard e-readers and other hand-held devices. Authors and journalists of books, newspapers, and magazines are grappling with ways to continue producing intellectual content, and to earn a living, without giving away their self-generated property.

In the digital age new models of service delivery must be considered. But a consensus has not been reached as to how to accomplish that for the greater good. Business models for libraries will come after that is resolved. In the mean time, libraries must be flexible and thoughtful as they spend the tax payers' dollars in providing services.

Bibliographic access to collections – i.e. how the user locates and identifies library materials is changing too. Free text, natural language searching over the Internet search engines prevails. Library management system catalogs will be shifting from the current proprietary systems to cheaper, open source options. Library reference publishers are struggling to adjust their content for online environments. Libraries will have to make thoughtful hard choices to wisely invest tax dollars for relevant reference resources. The words that women and men form to make ideas that educate, inform, and entertain a free society will need to be available to push civilization forward. Librarians, long the custodians of the words, will endure, but they will need to listen closely to customers' needs to make the right decisions in the information marketplace.

To benchmark where CLP Main stands in relation to other major urban libraries in 2010, we repeated the same search strategy performed in 2000. See Attachments #3 and #4. Major statistical categories are compared among libraries as well as an examination of Main Library department structures to identify trends and services across the country. What we have found is that while the new libraries built over the past ten years have continued the trend for integrated reference service, most still have multiple service desks to staff because of the vast size of some of these libraries. Libraries like Los Angeles, and Chicago,

with big modern renovated edifices have since gone to this more integrated model, streamlining their library departments. Cincinnati followed Pittsburgh by integrating reference services in 2007. Others like Cleveland, Boston, and Baltimore are considering doing so in the near future. Washington, DC, Enoch Pratt in Baltimore, Buffalo-Erie County, Lexington, Philadelphia, Knoxville, and others have visited CLP-Main to examine our department organization as well as our dynamic and static signage systems that were the outcome of our “user-centered” design concept for the First Floor renovation. With our limited resources, but with careful planning and execution, CLP-Main has been at the forefront of integrated reference services.

Children’s and Teen need a dedicated programming space. Could basement space be used for meeting rooms or other services or amenities when eIN’s contract runs out in the next year or so? Some minor additional department consolidations could be made at Main. There is space at the new Depository at East Liberty to accommodate additional older collections. This will allow us to provide additional stack space for collections which now occupy prime public floor space. Consideration should be given to an enhanced PC service area with non-professional staff. Full public access to the stacks is not possible at Main due to the low ceiling heights on some stack levels. Could some administrative functions be moved to another location in the system? Should Technical Services be returned to the Main facility? Space should be found to provide an improved presence for the Special Collections Department.

Main is landlocked in a historically designated building. Expansion on this campus might be limited to the underground at the front of Main, but further study could be made about the area adjacent to the Children’s Room. As collections will not be growing dramatically in the future due to the availability of online resources, it will be possible to comfortably provide reference and readers’ advisory services for children, adults and teens within the current Oakland facility. But Main, in Oakland, regardless of added efficiencies in staffing and consolidation in services, will always be complicated because its relatively small footprint of 150,000 square feet which is spread over 4 floors, with many rooms, and an 11 level book-stacks. Consideration of building a new, modern, flexible, efficient, centrally located in Pittsburgh, Main Library with an auditorium and meeting rooms, access to major bandwidth and other amenities should remain under consideration for the long term.