

## Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

# Overall Conversation Summary

July 2014

### Talking about the Future of Allegheny Libraries

In January 2014, the Boards of the Allegheny County Library Association (ACLA – which represents all 45 independent public libraries) and Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP) initiated a conversation about *Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The purpose of the conversation was to bring public libraries, library users, and others across the County together to build on discussions that libraries have been having for some time – how to ensure that Allegheny’s public libraries remain strong, sustainable community assets. Specifically, ACLA and CLP saw value in proactively addressing a number of important shifts happening they feel will influence the future of local libraries, including:

- Increased competition for public funding at all levels;
- Changes to technology influence the library service model;
- Changes to State Library Regulations; and
- Increased/ongoing need for library service from underserved areas of the County.

This Conversation Summary was written by the Independent Facilitation team that supported delivery of the *Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* process (Swerhun Facilitation). It summarizes the results of Part One and Part Two conversations with Library Directors, the ACLA General Membership and the conversations libraries had with their communities either face-to-face or by encouraging feedback through the process website (see chronological list of meetings that informed this Summary on the following page). More detailed reports of the feedback received are available on [www.countycitylibraries.org](http://www.countycitylibraries.org).

### Who was involved

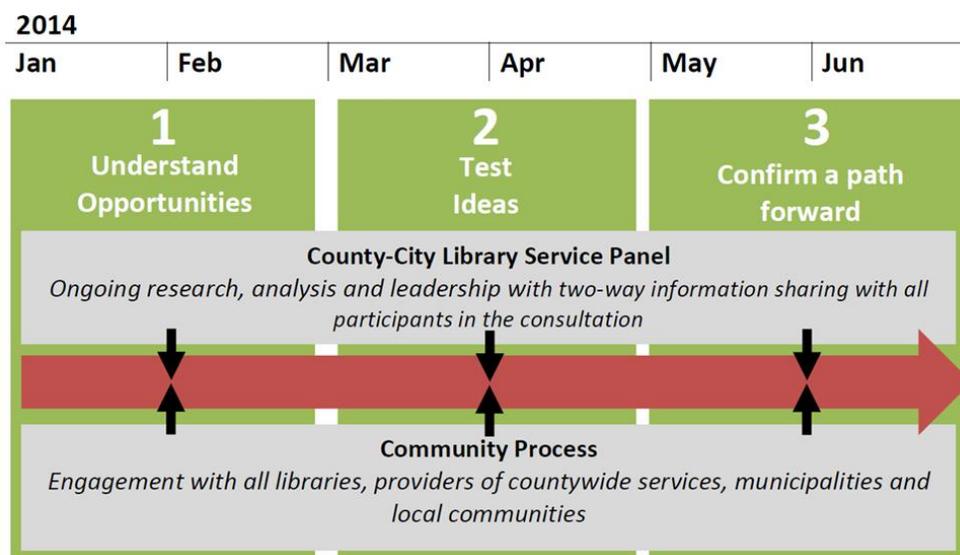
ACLA and CLP know that a strong, sustainable library system relies on the support of many individuals, organizations, governments, funders and others. As a result, the *Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* process was designed as a collaborative process that focused on understanding many different perspectives regarding the future of Allegheny public libraries. The process was designed to seek feedback from:

- the ACLA General Membership (Library Directors and Trustees) of the 45 public libraries in Allegheny County;
- Communities across Allegheny County (as identified by the 45 public libraries); and
- A County-City Library Service Panel made up of representatives appointed by ACLA and CLP, and chaired by the Buhl Foundation.

The Independent Facilitation team led the consultation with the ACLA General Membership and worked with Library Directors to design and support delivery of local community consultations. The Facilitation Team also designed and maintained the process website ([www.countycitylibraries.org](http://www.countycitylibraries.org)) and contributed to the materials shared with participants (including Discussion Guides, meeting agendas and summaries, etc.). The results of these consultations were shared with the Library Service Panel, and summaries of the Library Service Panel’s meetings were shared with the ACLA General Membership.

## The process

The *Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* process was organized into three parts for implementation over six months, starting in January 2014 (see graphic that follows). In Part One, conversations focused on identifying what the public libraries of Allegheny County are collectively trying to achieve, and in Part Two they moved forward to testing different ideas on how to achieve it (including how to structure and fund 21<sup>st</sup> Century library service). Part Three was intended to focus discussion on a proposed path forward. As the process unfolded it became clear that additional time to explore and test ideas during Part Two was required. As a result, Part Two discussions with the ACLA General Membership and the community extended to early June 2014. The third and final part of the process “Confirm a path forward” has been the focus of the County-City Library Service Panel; a broader Part Three discussion with communities across the County as well as the ACLA General Membership was not held. The recommendations of the County-City Library Service Panel will be submitted to the ACLA and CLP Boards for consideration, and the Boards will then consider how best to move forward with the advice received.



A chronological list of all activities implemented during Part One and Part Two consultation with communities and the ACLA General Membership is included on the following page. Note that the work of the County City Library Service Panel was documented separately and is available at [www.countycitylibraries.org](http://www.countycitylibraries.org).

### Chronology of Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conversation included in this Summary

	Type of Activity	Location	Date
<b>PART ONE</b>	Engagement Training 1	Engagement Training 1 with ACLA Library Directors	October 31, 2014
	Engagement Training 2	Engagement Training 2 with ACLA Library Directors	January 9-10, 2014
	Community Meeting	Oakmont Carnegie Library	January 17, 2014
	Community Meeting	Northland Public Library	January 21, 2014
	Staff Meeting	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh	January 27, 2014
	Community Meeting	Andrew Bayne Memorial Library	February 3, 2014
	Board Discussion	C.C. Mellor Memorial Library	February 4, 2014
	Donors & Volunteers Meeting	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (East Liberty)	February 6, 2014
	Community Meeting	Avalon Borough Building	February 6, 2014
	Friends Council Meeting	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (Brookline)	February 8, 2014
	Community Meeting	Upper St. Clair Township Library	February 10, 2014
	Community Meeting	South Fayette Township Library	February 11, 2014
	Community Meeting	Monroeville Public Library	February 11, 2014
	Community Meeting	Carnegie Library of Homestead	February 12, 2014
	Community Meeting	South Park Township Library	February 13, 2014
	Community Meeting	Bridgeville Public Library	February 13, 2014
	Community Meeting	Braddock Carnegie Library	February 13, 2014
	<b>ACLA General Membership 1</b>	<b>Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – East Liberty</b>	<b>February 13, 2014</b>
	Community Meeting	Community Library of Allegheny County	February 2014
	<b>Integrated Summary Report</b>	<b>Part One Community &amp; Online Feedback</b>	<b>March 4, 2014</b>
<b>PART TWO</b>	Engagement Training 3	Engagement Training 3 with ACLA Library Directors	March 6-7, 2014
	Community Survey	Community Survey - Oakmont Carnegie Library	March - April 2014
	Staff Meeting	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh	March 24, 2014
	Community Meeting	Northland Public Library	March 25, 2014
	Community Meeting	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Squirrel Hill	April 1, 2014
	<b>ACLA General Membership 2</b>	<b>Hampton Library</b>	<b>April 3, 2014</b>
	Community Meeting	Bridgeville Public Library	April 7, 2014
	Community Meeting	Monroeville Public Library	April 8, 2014
	Community Meeting	South Fayette Township Library	April 8, 2014
	Community Meeting	Avalon Public Library	April 10, 2014
	Community Meeting	Upper St. Clair Township Library	April 10 & 16, 2014
	Community Meeting	Carnegie Library of Homestead	April 15, 2014
	Community Meeting	South Park Library	April 15, 2014
	Community Meeting	Mount Lebanon Public Library	April 20, 2014
	<b>Integrated Summary Report</b>	<b>Part Two Community &amp; Online Feedback</b>	<b>May 6, 2014</b>
	LAC Working Session	Community Library of Castle Shannon & Northern Tier	May 8-9, 2014
<b>ACLA General Membership 3</b>	<b>Jefferson Hills Public Library</b>	<b>June 5, 2014</b>	
<b>Conversation Summary</b>		<b>July 2014</b>	

## ACLA General Membership Working Sessions – Participants

All 45 ACLA members were invited to participate in each of the three ACLA General Membership working sessions held during the *Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* process. There were 37 of the 45 ACLA member libraries represented at one or more of the sessions. The library participant list is included below. Note that participating libraries are listed in **bold** and the numbers in brackets reflect which of the three session(s) they attended. Representatives of ACLA, eiNetwork, the Regional Asset District (RAD), and the County-City Library Service Panel were also participated in these working sessions.

1. Andrew Bayne Memorial Library
2. **Andrew Carnegie Free Library (1, 2, 3)**
3. **Avalon Public Library (2)**
4. Baldwin Borough Public Library
5. **Bethel Park Public Library (2, 3)**
6. **Braddock Carnegie Library (1, 2, 3)**
7. Brentwood Library
8. **Bridgeville Public Library (1, 2, 3)**
9. **C.C. Mellor Memorial Library (1, 2)**
10. **Carnegie Free Library of Swissvale (1, 2, 3)**
11. **Carnegie Library of Homestead (2, 3)**
12. **Carnegie Library of McKeesport (1, 3)**
13. **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (1, 2, 3)**
14. **Clairton Public Library (3)**
15. **Community Library of Allegheny Valley (1, 2, 3)**
16. **Community Library of Castle Shannon (1, 2, 3)**
17. **Cooper-Siegel Community Library (2)**
18. Coraopolis Memorial Library
19. **Crafton Public Library (1, 2, 3)**
20. Dormont Public Library
21. F.O.R. Sto-Rox Library
22. **Green Tree Public Library (2, 3)**
23. **Hampton Community Library (1, 2)**
24. **Jefferson Hills Public Library (3)**
25. **Monroeville Public Library (1, 2)**
26. **Moon Township Public Library (2, 3)**
27. **Mt. Lebanon Public Library (2, 3)**
28. **North Versailles Public Library (1, 3)**
29. **Northern Tier Regional Library (1, 2, 3)**
30. **Northland Public Library (1, 2, 3)**
31. **Oakmont Carnegie Library (1, 2, 3)**
32. **Penn Hills Library (2)**
33. **Pleasant Hills Public Library (1, 2, 3)**
34. Plum Borough Community Library
35. **Robinson Township Library (1, 2, 3)**
36. **Scott Township Public Library (2, 3)**
37. **Sewickley Public Library (1, 2, 3)**
38. **Shaler North Hills Library (1, 2, 3)**
39. **South Fayette Township Library (1, 2, 3)**
40. **South Park Township Library (1, 2, 3)**
41. **Springdale Free Public Library (3)**
42. **Upper St. Clair Township Library (2, 3)**
43. Western Allegheny Community Library
44. **Whitehall Public Library (1, 2, 3)**
45. **Wilkinsburg Public Library (3)**



Working Session #3 with the ACLA General Membership (June 5, 2014)

## What We Heard During Part One (January - February 2014)

During Part One there were 14 community meetings held across the County and one working session with the ACLA General Membership. Detailed reports of the feedback received at all meetings, as well as the Discussion Guide used to inform the conversations, can be found at [www.countycitylibraries.org](http://www.countycitylibraries.org). What's reflected here represents a summary of the feedback shared at the community meetings and in the almost 200 responses received to the online feedback form (which asked the same questions posed to participants through the Discussion Guide).

Feedback from the **Community** (through meetings and the online feedback form):

### 1. What's unique and different about your community?

*Here's what people said:*

- Some walkable and dense, others not walkable and no access to good transit
- Diverse in terms of age, ethnicity and religion
- Some economically depressed, some economically stable, others have a mix of income (connection to library funding)
- Some with strong sense of community, some less so

### 2. What's your vision for the communities in Allegheny County?

*Here's what people said:*

- Increased job and career development, living wages for all
- Improved public assets – transportation, infrastructure, public services, medical infrastructure, recreation opportunities, affordable housing
- Strong education services and strong technology
- Strong culture of community and cooperation

### 3. What are the 3-5 most important ways your library currently helps your community?

*Here's what people said:*

- Education, training and skills development, and related staff knowledge and support
- Internet and technology, and related staff knowledge and support
- Community connector – both as a social space and quiet space
- Programming to all ages
- Free and easy access to top quality collections and materials (print and electronic formats)

### 4. What can libraries do in the future to support you and your community?

*Here's what people said:*

- Expand capacity as social hub and community center
- Increase community outreach
- Additional technology resources and staff support to use them
- "Keep doing what you're doing"
- Expand training and education support
- Expand programming and catalog offerings
- Add locations and expand hours

5. What ideas would you like to see explored as we think about how to best structure and fund 21<sup>st</sup> century library service in the County?

Here's what people said:

- Explore a range of new funding mechanisms / Stabilize funding
- Acknowledge that technology is a central piece of service provision and focus on innovation
- Define and explore the areas where libraries could share resources to increase efficiency and consistency in service provision, but be aware that there is no “one-size-fits all” solution.
- Explore the creation of one county-wide library system
- Address inequities in the library funding model to provide the best possible library service to all
- Cut costs and increase efficiencies

Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
**DISCUSSION GUIDE 1**  
 January 2014, Part One of Three

**A County-Wide Conversation about Public Libraries**  
 Libraries are an important asset to communities throughout Allegheny County. There are 45 independent public libraries that operate with a commitment to delivering outstanding service in a total of 70 locations across the County.

Library service across Allegheny County is generally well utilized and many communities provide strong support. At the same time, a number of important shifts are happening that will influence the future of local libraries, including:

- Increased competition for public funding at all levels;
- Changes to technology influencing the library service model;
- Changes to State Library Regulations;
- Increased/ongoing need for library service from underserved areas of the County; and
- Increased reliance of the community on the expertise and specialized skills of librarians to help library users discover and discern quality information in the Information Age overload.

The Allegheny County Library Association and Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh are initiating this opportunity for libraries in Allegheny County to proactively come together to consider and discuss these shifts, and to decide on the best path forward.

**A Three Part Conversation**  
 This Discussion Guide describes Part One of a three part conversation which libraries in Allegheny County are having with each other and with the communities they serve. The purpose of the conversation is to:

1. **Identify what we are collectively trying to achieve** (including identifying an overall vision for all library services in the County that will best meet the needs of the public);
2. **Test ideas on how to achieve it** (including how to structure and fund 21<sup>st</sup> Century library services); and
3. **Propose a path forward.**

Changes are expected as a result of this process, and those changes will be driven by the needs of the public and library customers. There are no foregone conclusions at this point – discussion will focus on the kind of community we want, how library services can support that community, and what systems will get us there. Any changes will need to have a positive impact on the quality of life for people in our region.

Please join us in a rich discussion about how we can work together to ensure our public libraries remain strong, sustainable community assets.

[www.countycitylibraries.org](http://www.countycitylibraries.org)

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**What are we trying to achieve?**  
 Part One of this conversation is focusing on what libraries and communities are trying to achieve together for library service in the County. This includes a vision for the communities in which libraries work, and a vision for the services our libraries provide.

Here is an example of what a potential vision for our communities could include:

- We envision communities where everyone continues to learn and grow. This means that every child enters school ready to learn; every student succeeds in school with the support of out-of-school opportunities; and every adult has meaningful work and the skills needed to thrive.
- We also envision communities where everyone enjoys a full and rich life. This means that anyone can explore a broad range of interests; everyone feels connected and included; public services are easily accessed; and relevant and current information is always available.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **What is unique and different about your community? Identify 2-3 things.**
2. **What is your vision for the communities in Allegheny County? Identify the 3-5 most important elements of your vision.**
3. **What are the 3-5 most important ways your library currently helps your community?**
4. **What can libraries do in the future to support you and your community?**

Potential elements to include in your vision for library services are listed below. Feel free to draw on these and/or identify new elements or ideas that reflect your vision of library services:

- Providing efficient access to library services for all residents of Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh;
- Providing consistent quality for consumers across all libraries;
- Providing comprehensive library services based on data that informs decisions;
- Being responsive to individual consumer and neighborhood needs;
- Improving our ability to leverage existing and future resources;
- Collectively advocating more effectively for funding; and
- Improving access to library services and building on local strengths.

Map of Public Libraries in Allegheny County

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Part One Discussion Guide (pages 1 and 2) which was posted online and distributed at the community meetings and many libraries

Feedback from the **ACLA General Membership** (during February Working Session):

There were five clear objectives for this process identified, including:

1. Libraries will be seen as a logical partner in community building;
2. Libraries will identify what we can take responsibility for and can implement now, and do it;
3. Libraries will have equitable, sustainable funding based on a much deeper understanding of current funding and a 5 year economic strategy for the whole county;
4. Libraries will have a shared commitment that everyone in the County has equal access to excellent library service; and
5. Libraries will come up with a way to work/negotiate/plan together for the entire county – including building trust, building consensus, and recognizing that we're in this together.

Several participants indicated that it will be important to test where on the continuum between total consolidation and total independence the best library services are provided, and then to determine the most cost effective way to provide those services.



Where on this continuum are the best services provided? Once that's determined, what's the most cost effective way to provide those services?

## What We Heard During Part Two (March – June, 2014)

During Part Two there were 11 community meetings held across the County and two working sessions with the ACLA General Membership. Detailed reports of the feedback received at all meetings, as well as the Discussion Guide used to inform the conversations, can be found at [www.countycitylibraries.org](http://www.countycitylibraries.org). What's reflected here represents a summary of the feedback shared at the community meetings and in the over 100 responses received to the online feedback form (which asked the same questions posed to participants through the Discussion Guide).

Feedback from the **Community** (through meetings and the online feedback form):

1. Are there resources and/or services that are important to receive consistently throughout all libraries in the County? If so, which ones?

*Three most frequently provided responses included:*

- **Technology:** Technology was raised the most frequently, in a variety of different contexts. Access to the internet for all patrons is key, as is the provision of training on using the technology and consistent staff knowledge of how to use technology and to support it. Several respondents raised the consistent availability of e-materials and hardware to use them. Another point raised several times was the importance of having consistent user policies for computers.
- **Borrowing and Circulation Policies:** Specific areas that were raised frequently as items to create consistent policy for included: check out procedures for materials, loan durations, fines and cataloguing methodology (i.e.: standardized systems for managing materials).
- **Collections:** Access to books and materials that are in high-demand was raised often, including best-sellers and online databases. Additionally, several patrons raised the importance of providing materials in multiple formats, especially for those without access to the Internet. It's important to note that this item was also raised as a top item to define locally, with additional details below.

2. Are there library resources and/or services that are important to customize locally? If so, which ones?

*Three most frequently provided responses included:*

- **Programming:** Defining programming to be responsive and supportive of the local community's needs and demographics was far and away the most important item for local customization. This included language based programs, career development programs and programs for users based on age, whether as seniors, families or youth and teens.
- **Community Relations and Communications:** Working with local patrons, community hubs, volunteers and related partners, such as schools, was raised often as a responsibility of the local library. Additionally, focusing communications at the neighborhood level regarding events and programming was also frequently raised as a key strength of good local community interaction that the individual libraries have had and would continue to have the most success providing.
- **Collections:** Providing materials and resource selections with content relevant to the local community. Several participants said it was important to have the local staff knowledge contribution to the selection and curation of each library's collection, especially in areas such as history, career needs, or local civic matters.

## Highlights of Community Discussions in January and February 2014 (Part 1)

Note: The points listed here are a summary of the most frequent responses to the questions posed – the order of the responses is not intended to reflect priorities. All individual meeting summaries are posted at [www.coallegheny.org](http://www.coallegheny.org) in a full Part 1 Summary.

1. **What's unique and different about your community?**  
*Here's what people said:*
  - Some walkable and dense, others not walkable and no access to good transit
  - Diverse in terms of age, ethnicity and religion
  - Some economically depressed, some economically stable, others have a mix of income (connection to library funding)
  - Some with strong sense of community, some less so
2. **What's your vision for the communities in Allegheny County?**  
*Here's what people said:*
  - Increased job and career development, living wages for all
  - Improved public assets – transportation, infrastructure, public services, medical infrastructure, recreation opportunities, affordable housing
  - Strong education services and strong technology
  - Strong culture of community and cooperation
3. **What are the 3-5 most important ways your library currently helps your community?**  
*Here's what people said:*
  - Education, training and skills development, and related staff knowledge and support
  - Internet and technology, and related staff knowledge and support
  - Community connector – both as a social space and quiet space
  - Programming to all ages
  - Free and easy access to top-quality collections and materials (print and electronic formats)
4. **What can libraries do in the future to support you and your community?**  
*Here's what people said:*
  - Expand capacity as social hub and community center
  - Increase community outreach
  - Additional technology resources and staff support to use them
  - "Keep doing what you're doing"
  - Expand training and education support
  - Expand programming and catalog offerings
  - Add locations and expand hours

**PART 1 ACTIVITIES:**
  - 15 community meetings
  - Working session with libraries
  - Website
  - County-City Library Service Panel
5. **What ideas would you like to see explored as we think about how to best structure and fund 21<sup>st</sup> century library service in the County?**  
*Here's what people said:*
  - Explore a range of new funding mechanisms / stabilize funding
  - Acknowledge that technology is a central piece of service provision and focus on innovation
  - Define and explore the areas where libraries could share resources to increase efficiency and consistency in service provision, but be aware that there is no "one-size-fits all" solution.
  - Explore the creation of one county-wide library system
  - Address inequities in the library funding model to provide the best possible library service to all
  - Cut costs and increase efficiencies

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*Part Two Discussion Guide (pages 1 and 2) which was posted online and distributed at the community meetings and many libraries*

Feedback from the **ACLA General Membership** (during the April Working Session):

1. Work needs to be done to identify potential efficiencies among the three organizations providing library service across the county – ACLA, eiNetwork and CLP District Services;
2. Concern from some participants on the prospects of integrating the Human Resource function across ACLA libraries, with a suggestion that efforts focus first on easier areas of collaboration (e.g. programming);
3. Interest in seeing common definitions identified for key terms;
4. Debate regarding the financial projections for libraries and how to respond to them;
5. Concern about the work of the County-City Library Service Panel, including a strong push for open meetings of the Panel and sharing data;
6. Concern from many that there was a foregone conclusion to the *Library Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* process, though the majority of the room did not share this point of view; and
7. The importance of engaging municipal managers was stressed.

Feedback from the **ACLA General Membership** (during the June Working Session):

1. **VISION**  
What is your vision for countywide library service?
  - The vast majority of participants talked about the importance of consistency in service and excellence in the patron experience countywide – used different words to get at this point (equal access, uniform policies, standardization of service, best possible literacy and learning for all residents).
  - There was a feeling among many that countywide strength must happen hand-in-hand with strength locally – including local autonomy, ability to direct local funds, flexibility of local programming, customization of services, etc. One group of participants suggested 2 levels of service based on whether the patron's municipality supports libraries.

- Many also said their vision includes a countywide population where the value of libraries is common knowledge.

## 2. COUNTYWIDE SERVICES

- What are the most important countywide services libraries currently receive?  
Top 3 were: (1) technology/eiNetwork, (2) shipping/delivery, and (3) shared catalog. Couple of tables identified “pass through of RAD funds” as key service.
- What are new centralized services that could improve the patron experience?  
Most common responses included: (1) marketing & communications, (2) training, (3) expanded technology support, (4) cataloging, (5) fundraising.

## 3. SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

- What would be required to “make the case” that new sources of revenue are necessary to support county-wide library services? (1) Focus on limits: Show inability to provide certain level of service; (2) Focus on opportunity: highlight what we do, show that we do it well, and get people thinking about how much more libraries could do with more money; (3) Get data: Need to establish that there’s a real need; provide transparent and credible budget projections; have outcome measures that connect quality of life in communities to libraries.
- Other options for county-wide funding? Local options will likely be more successful (because stronger connection to local library); Identify outside sources available; Check box on county real estate bill; Develop corporate sponsorship program and advertise on the system; Drink tax; and Strongly incentivize participation by local governments.
- How would you like to see county-wide funding options assessed? How “hot” is it politically? Does it tap new sources of funds? Does it mean fewer staff at local libraries? Does it mean a reduction in vital local services? Does it support libraries that are adjacent to communities that don’t pay? (consider something like a regional use reimbursement).
- Other: Need to understand what we’re spending countywide funding on now, and live within the budgets we have – maybe we can’t afford additional services. There are no more resources (retail decreasing and so funding will decrease) and more local funding is not available. Have to demonstrate local value for funding - if community contributes nothing to libraries but gets the same service, there’s zero incentive for other communities to invest.