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From the Chair: Payment Paradox

The fall *Communiqué* is generally devoted to the rants and wailing of library administrators bemoaning a lack of funding as we attempt to write budgets for the coming year. With apologies to the rank and file of WAPL members whose daily life bypasses the annual budget crisis, I respectfully offer a slightly different slant on the budget rant; I ask the question, "Are some libraries unfairly compensated at the expense of others?"

Consider the plight of Libraries "A" and "B" in Sample County. As you can see from the chart below, the libraries are identical in their expenditures. However, Library "A" provided twice the circulation of Library "B" in 2005 and twice the rural circ as well. Interestingly enough, because Library "B" had an overall higher cost per-circulation than Library "A", they actually received the same amount of funding from Sample County.

Chart 1: Base Year

2005	Expenditures	Overall Circulation	Rural Circ	Cost Per Circ	County Payment 2007
Library A	\$ 200,000.00	70,000	14,000	\$2.86	\$ 40,000.00
Library B	\$ 200,000.00	35,000	7,000	\$5.71	\$ 40,000.00

Did the two libraries deserve equal funding from the county? Who knows? We don't really know what went into the cost per circ at each library. It could be that Library "A" was super efficient while library "B" was critically overstaffed with a minuscule materials budget leading to a much lower circulation.

On the other hand, it could be that Library "A" drove up circulation by buying fewer books and circulating nothing much beyond very popular videos. At the same time, Library "B" purchased the average amount of books; however, it had a very large reference staff and purchased many electronic resources; neither of which were reflected in circulation. Though cost per circulation is enshrined in the statutes as the basis for county funding, there is no way to ascertain quality of service by looking only at the cost per circulation.

Nobody would ask too many questions comparing the libraries because the two were not in competition. Each received good funding from the city and county. Then came the 2008 budget year and levy limits. Circulation at Library "A" increased by 10% while circ at Library "B" decreased 10%. Rural circulation changed accordingly. With the change, the cost per circ at library "A" dropped even further, while the cost per circ at Library "B" increased even further. Both had identical increases in overall expenditures.

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Resume Tips for New (and Not So New) Professionals

Okay, admit it—who out there doesn't keep an eye out for job openings? We all like to see what other libraries are looking for (and paying!) and, maybe, if we find just the right opening, we'll dust off the resume and send it in.

I'm in the middle of the hiring process and it's reminded me about the importance of making a good first impression with a resume. I'm not making any guarantees that these tips will net you an interview, but following them will definitely not hurt your chances. Good luck!

- Apply only if you are qualified for the position. If you don't meet all of the requirements in the ad—i.e., you only have three years of experience when the ad requires five—then address this in your cover letter.
- Use professional (heavier) paper. Absolutely DO NOT use scrap paper. (Yes, believe it or not, I have received one printed on paper that had a web address footer printed on the back of it. I applaud the recycling efforts, but...),
- Print out the address label, unless you have very neat handwriting.
- Sign your name on the cover letter.
- Find the name of the contact person and address your letter specifically to them, rather than to Human Resources or "To Whom It May Concern."
- Maintain the same style throughout. For example, use the same font for the cover letter, resume and references. This tip and a few of the others may help to demonstrate a candidate's attention to detail and level of organization, attributes that are very important in many library jobs.
- Proofread your resume for any spelling or grammatical errors. Then ask another person to carefully proofread it.
- Do not staple the cover letter and resume.
- Use a larger envelope to avoid folding your resume.
- Include a sentence or two about why you want to work for that specific library in that specific location, especially if you are from outside the area or state.
- Be candid and forthright about any employment gaps.

With a clean resume and no distractions, employers will be able to focus on your talents and enthusiasm and see what a truly outstanding candidate you are!

— *Desiree Bongers, Ripon Public Library*

Future WAPL Conference

April 30-May 2, 2008
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(Holiday Inn)

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The Myth of Free Library Service

In their early days, public libraries often used the word "free" in their name, perhaps to distinguish themselves from subscription libraries, whose members paid a fee to use the library. It was common for a benefactor to open a new "free" library and provide an endowment to furnish and staff it in the future. The Enoch Pratt Free Library, for example, began as a gift of a central library, four branches, and an endowment of \$1,058,333 from Enoch Pratt to the City of Baltimore, Maryland. The library opened in 1886, and received public funding for the first time in 1908.

While few public libraries use the term "free" in their names today, many advertise free services. For example, a Google search of "free wireless internet" locates links to many library websites listing free wireless Internet as a service. (Ironically, the search also finds an article about a man who was told by police that his use of the library's wireless Internet service from his car after the library had closed constituted theft.)

Today, 26 of 29 members of Northern Waters Library Service provide wireless Internet. Growing use of wireless, rapidly expanding availability of downloadable audio and video, and ever increasing demand for new Internet-accessible workstations in the library is creating a constant need for additional bandwidth. Library directors recognize the importance of meeting this need, but they aren't sure how to fund this "free" service.

At an NWLS meeting in June, several library directors commented that municipal officials and citizens have begun to ask that their libraries extend coverage of wireless Internet to town halls, private businesses, even entire towns and cities. One business, located adjacent to a public library, was able to use the library's wireless, saving itself the cost of its own high-speed connection. Sure, this creates demand for bandwidth, but since wireless is free, why be concerned?

I recall a discussion with a library patron nearly 15 years ago in which I was asked to mail books to a friend of hers who worked at another library. This was before the statewide delivery service began, so libraries paid directly to send books through the US mail. When I refused to send the book because I could not justify use of public funds to ship personal materials, she insisted that libraries received free postage. Why? Because they advertise free interlibrary loan, which meant to her that there was no cost to move books between libraries.

Act 420, a new law passed in 2006 requiring counties to provide new funding for public libraries, will take effect next year. As I explain the new law to county officials, I often hear the remark that library service isn't free anymore. Whether we agree with Act 420 or not, we should be concerned that any elected official believes library service is, or ever was, free. On the other hand, it isn't difficult to understand why the misperception exists.

Why do librarians advertise "free" services? They want their services to be used and nothing attracts customers like something "free." Libraries want all to feel welcome to use the library and advertising services as "free" helps those who cannot afford to pay a usage fee recognize that they will not be required to do so. Further, state law requires that public libraries not charge for their services.

Still, it is difficult to understand why library trustees and directors advertise "free" services even as they express growing frustration with the difficulty in funding them. We must tell people that our services cost money, whether that money comes from government or the funding or service is donated.

Instead, we need to find a way that lets patrons know they will not pay a fee to use the library without telling them these services are free. One library director I know tells patrons that their use of the library is pre-paid through taxes. Another simply says that there is no charge to get a borrowers card, attend a library program, surf the Internet, or use other library services. Both are careful to avoid use of the word "free" because they recognize that if people believe library services are free, there is no reason to advocate for their funding. They refuse to perpetuate the myth of free library service. May they be an example to us all.

— *Jim Trojanowski, Northern Waters Library Service*



The Woes of Health Care

We are in the midst of preparing our 2008 budget so we call our city finance department for their input on our health insurance cost for next year. We are told it will probably be a 50% increase. The conversation went approximately this way:

Us: "We are working on our budget and need to know about health insurance costs."

City Finance: "Well, uhmm, we have been told by United Health, that uhmm, well, probably a, uhmm 50% increase."

Us: "Sorry – didn't quite hear that – did you say 15%?"

City Finance: "No, I said 50% as in a 5 and a 0."

Us: "Is that even legal?"

Well, yes – of course this is legal. Maybe immoral, but morality doesn't seem to have a whole lot to do with how our country conducts business. This is not a "liberal" vs. "conservative" or a "blue" vs. "red" agenda. This is about right vs. wrong and it is about our society surviving as a free, democratic nation that puts the welfare of its citizens first.

Our library community is continually lobbying on a state, local and federal level for funding that will preserve library services and programs that educate our citizens and help preserve basic constitutional rights. Maybe though, we should all be taking on the insurance companies and the corporate structure of our so called "health care" system.

This 50% raise in our health insurance does more than impact our 2008 operating budget. The contracts our city has with their health insurance companies run from October to October. This means that our 2007 budget will in the red by \$8000 by the end of this year unless we cut spending in other areas. Stop here a moment and think what your library could do with \$8000.

That \$8000 will be our additional cost to cover three staff members for three months. That is just for the library portion of the city's budget. Now think about the implications for the entire city budget and project that to all other city budgets across the nation and to small businesses and school systems and etc., etc.

Every aspect of what we endeavor to provide as our library's mission is affected by the astronomical cost of health insurance. On a larger scale, our country will be increasingly unable to provide basic health care for its children, its veterans, its older citizens. How much worse are we going to allow our so called "health care" costs to climb before we demand a better, more equitable solution?

— Maggie Waggoner, Director, Kaukauna Public Library



Payment Paradox cont.

The result is illustrated in Chart 2 below. Sample County must cap its appropriation for Library Service at 2%, according to State levy limits. The County Board decides to make up a little money for the Sheriff's Dept., also under levy limits, and decides to give each library 95% of cost, still well above the statutory minimum of 70%. Library "A" provides more circ to County Residents, but the actual payment from Sample County declines.

Library "B" provides less circulation, less service, but due to their higher cost of circulation the county payment increases over the previous year.

Chart B: Comparison under Levy Limits

2006	Expenditures	Overall Circulation	Rural Circ	Cost Per Circ	County Bill for Service 2008	County Payment under Levy Restraint
Library A	\$ 206,000.00	77000	15400	\$2.68	\$41,200.00	\$ 39,140.00
Library B	\$ 206,000.00	31500	6650	\$6.54	\$43,488.89	\$ 41,314.44

The issue of whether or not funding provided to the two libraries is fair or not is in the eye of the beholder. It seems counter intuitive to give the library providing more service less money while giving the library providing less service more money. The two libraries are now in competition with one another for their slice of a limited funding pie. If Library "A" is indeed far more efficient and providing better all around service than Library "B", the situation becomes truly egregious. We have a situation from the state where libraries providing poor or inefficient service are rewarded while libraries providing effective service are penalized.

The statement of the solution is simple—encode accountability into funding formulas. Unfortunately, how this is accomplished is far from simple. The answer should come from the library community, however. If we are to be truly credible in our request for funding, it is up to us to devise a system of accountability. We can rant against the unfairness and inequity created by the levy restrain system, however, removing levy limits only rewards the library that is operating efficiently. It does nothing to question the practices of the library that is poorly run.

—Ken Hall, WAPL Chair; Director, Fond du Lac Public Library



Weathering the Storm cont.

Your final out (and you may have to take it just before you are out the door), is to refuse to sign the library annual report. So, if you are sure that your library board does not have exclusive control of its funds, or that the village has usurped the hiring authority for library employees, or that you are required to charge fees to system residents that you don't charge to residents, then tell your board that you don't think the corresponding box should be checked on the annual report. If they say to check it anyway, let the board know that you cannot in good conscience apply your signature. After all, your signature certifies that the information provided is true and accurate, so how can you reasonably be expected to certify what you know is not true?

That's enough for a gloomy topic in a gloomy climate. I look outside and see the sun peeking through the clouds. It's time to take a walk!

—John DeBacher, Consultant, DLTCCL

Reading Between the Lines

“For want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the rider was lost; for want of a rider the battle was lost; for want of a battle the kingdom was lost. And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.”
— English nursery rhyme

We’ve been hearing a lot about “infrastructure” since the tragic bridge collapse in Minnesota focused national attention on the hidden long term consequences of underfunding public necessities.

Modern infrastructure meeting fundamental social, humanitarian, and economic needs is not accidental. The support elements that made living, gathering, hunting and producing possible for primitive human communities has continuously evolved into complex systems and subsystems, deliberately created and planned – either well or poorly – most often with direct government involvement.

The Minneapolis *Star Tribune* recently revealed that a 20-year goal of ensuring 65 percent of the state’s bridges were in good condition adopted by Minnesota’s transportation agency in 1997 fell short “because of financial challenges.” By 2003, state officials lowered their expectations to 55 percent after learning that just 43 percent of bridges were listed in good condition nationwide.

This definition of adequate is acceptable unless you happen to be among the unlucky travelers motoring over one of the un-good spans when it suddenly gives way. When everything crashes around you, it’s too late to contemplate the ultimate cost of chronic infrastructure neglect spawned by political opportunism, the quest for private profit at public expense, tax shifts from corporations to average home and small business owners, and transferring responsibility down to smaller units of government without literally passing the bucks.

The ten-to-fifteen-second plunge into oblivion claiming thirteen lives in Minneapolis took less time than reading the preceding paragraph. It’s a wake-up call to redirect priorities, but we must look beyond overstressed concrete and steel to examine and shore up human potential as well. Are catastrophes caused by terrorists the only ones worth preventing?

The need to maintain education and information infrastructure is no less important to the economic, social and political health of our people and nation. Another vital element of community infrastructure is the presence of quality child care, early childhood education and strong schools to prepare young people for a college degree and their place in the global economy. Millions of students aren’t getting past the toll booth on this important bridge to success.

Complex state formulas penalize children and families needing the most help in property rich districts already challenged by transportation costs. “No Child Left Behind” requirements are enforced despite flat federal funding, so inflationary shortfalls are covered by cutting other programs closer to the bone. Praising emaciated school districts for making the tough choices necessary to stave off bankruptcy and accepting rising university tuition as merely another example of market supply and demand does nothing to address structural faults.

Federal, state and local government agencies are increasingly dependent upon public libraries – frequently the only free community computer access point – to deliver a range of services now only available on the Internet. Libraries become the first refuge for citizens seeking agency information and assistance as they begin to rebuild their lives after natural disasters. They are the only source of state and federal tax forms, as well as Medicare registration in many areas. This responsibility, however, comes without additional dollars for computers, technical support or staffing.

Last spring, all 15 branches of the Jackson County, Oregon, library system were closed after 80 percent of its budget was lost in a crisis precipitated by changing federal funding priorities, questionable railroad deals, the spotted owl and a shrinking timber harvest. The concrete impact of the largest library collapse in US history didn’t rate extensive cable TV coverage.

There are more ways to define the “loss of a life” besides ending up at the bottom of a river. Individual lives are also lost when opportunity dies prematurely. We are the nails holding this country together.

—by Kris Adams Wendt, Director, Rhinelander District Library

Weathering the Storm

With floods, grey skies, and record rains, this August’s weather hasn’t helped the beleaguered library director survive the annual budget ordeal. There are no blue skies on the economic forecast, the stock market has taken another plunge, and the legislature can’t seem to agree on the state budget, including some library issues.

It may be just me, but it seems as though an unusual number of library directors are in the hot seat of late, and an inordinate number of them are jumping ship. I hate to see people flee the kitchen when they can’t take the heat (because somebody else—maybe the board, the staff, or the municipality—started a grease fire), so I’d like to offer suggestions so that, when the going gets tough, you can get going in the productive sense, not the departure sense.

1. Remain calm. It’s too easy to take criticism or injustices personally. But is it worth it? Are you paid well enough to lose sleep over library issues? Enough said.
2. Talk to colleagues. Misery loves company. Talk to some of your associates at other libraries to get a “reality check.” Talk to system staff. Maybe you’re over-reacting. Or maybe you’re right and there’s a clear answer you hadn’t considered. But talking will give you time to breathe, settle down, and decide what to do next. It’s better than stewing or fuming.
3. Know the facts and make the facts known. Either you or the critic may not know the big picture. In the course of discovery, you may determine that either your staff was not aware of library policy or that you or your board did something wrong. That happens—if it does, take corrective action and apologize. Then move on. If, on the other hand, the municipality is acting improperly (for instance, cutting the appropriation below required levels, or absorbing the county payment instead of crediting it to the library fund), then gather the facts, suggest to your library board how to proceed, and let them take care of it (knowing that they may want you to help state the case). Avoid taking action without board approval.

4. Be diplomatic; know when to back off. You are not a district attorney. You may know full well that something is wrong, but you can’t necessarily make it right by yourself. If you are a library director, you are probably an at-will employee. So be careful how forcefully you rub your employer’s nose in the facts—they might just turn around to bite you. Although you may be the key force in getting things done in the library, you really only have as much authority as is afforded you by the library board and the library statutes. That ought to humble you!

5. Know when to surrender. While the prayer aspect can put some people off, there’s a lot of truth in the three sections of the Serenity Prayer. By asking for help, you hope to be granted the serenity to:

- Accept the things you cannot change. Just face it—in some realms you are powerless. Get over it.
- Change the things you can. You can be much more effective in changing unacceptable situations if you are not in a total lather about it.
- Wisdom to know the difference. That’s the hard one—sometimes you have to keep chipping away at a roadblock, or find some way to go around it, with the attendant setbacks. But sometimes you just have to turn around.

6. Cover your tracks. If you find something unacceptable and you can’t make it right, at least make it appear as right as you can. I know it’s somewhat of a sell-out, but it goes along with being able to be somewhat serene after accepting that you are powerless. For example, if your board really wants to impose a change in policy that you do not think is completely fair or legal, point it out in your director’s report (diplomatically, of course, with the facts as you understand them), and state it in the library meeting, noting that you hope your sentiment (diplomatic as it is) will be reflected in the minutes. At least you will know that you did everything in your limited power. And your board may think twice about proceeding, since they know your objections were so publicly stated. But don’t tack up your objections on the library door, or call the local paper—that may be bypassing the “wisdom to know the difference” step.

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