Notes of Binge Thinker
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Trusting the Library to Provide an Objective Voice

Welcome to Notes of a Binge Thinker, September Edition!

It is that time again to look at the guidepost for the Library of the Future, ebooks and other news here at North Texas Library Partners. Let's start with the guideposts.

The Library of the Future increases the overall value of its community by:

Guidepost 1: facilitating access to education as a service to the public.

Guidepost 2: staying aware of current interests within the community, finding information relevant to those interests, and making that information publicly available.

Guidepost 3: ensuring easy public access to information in all its forms.

Guidepost 4: encouraging civic participation through public information campaigns that explain matters of public policy, informing public decisions, and maintaining awareness of public services (including its own services).

Guidepost 5: maintaining its standing of public trust by operating as an independent "third voice" in its operations as well as its communications, and meeting on neutral ground.

Each month I will focus on one guidepost. I will highlight a library (or libraries) that I feel is following that guidepost closely and doing something innovative to make the guidepost a reality. I will then give some benchmarks (examples of what libraries can do to follow the guidepost) that the NTLP staff has developed.

This month I am focusing on guidepost number five which looks at how the library can retain its independence to give the community a neutral ground, and offer an objective "voice" to the many different opinions out there.

My library of choice this column is Benbrook Library District. Benbrook is funded through a library district and is led by Michael Baldwin, a strong supporter of this month's guidepost. He has emphasized the idea of the library being a place communities can rely on to provide objective information not slanted towards one side of the spectrum. He is a co-creator of Libraries for Democracy (I am the other co-creator), which focuses on helping libraries to provide objective programming and services to their communities and serve the role of a democracy center for their communities.

Mike makes a point of emphasizing the library as a neutral voice in the community. He told me in an interview what he sees as the role of the library when it comes to being the objective voice.

"I think the role of the library is to provide factual information. You are not really neutral if one side is providing biased information and another side is providing factual information. We provide factual information to people and that is the main thing we strive for...we provide exhibits that show statistics and other types of information about politics and about economics that probably some people of particular political persuasions would object to, but it is factual information."

One program Mike has just started is centered on Constitution Day, where the library will hold events focusing on the constitution and then discuss the document among community members. He plans to show a film focused on the constitution as well. Mike pointed out to me that he gears his programming towards being a neutral gathering place for individuals to come together to network and share. For example, his library has programs on poetry, organic gardening, book discussions and even a game night for people to get together to play old-fashioned board games. His hope is that by bringing the community together in such settings, individuals will understand others more readily and be able to think more critically about issues affecting the community and the impact the issue has on all sectors of it.

What does a library need to do to bring value to the organization when approaching this benchmark? Mike believes, as I do, that libraries need to diversify their offerings and begin to emphasize programs and services outside of circulating popular materials, and providing traditional programs. Mike told me that libraries are already known for providing books, DVDs, computers, storytime, etc. In order for a library to realize value as an objective voice, the library must begin to focus their public relations campaigns on the more substantive programs like computer instruction, finding jobs or helping patrons learn to read. Mike also warned that libraries need to be creative in their program design and promotion to better compete with other events going on in the community.

Here are some additional ideas that my staff had about this guidepost.

The most practical way for most public libraries to do something today is to focus on local history collections. Political issues are less hot when we focus on how things used to be, and most public libraries are not in a position to manage controversies that impact election cycles. To ensure an independent voice, they will have to reach out beyond newspaper articles.

They will need to find and interview people in the community who were around at the time. Many of the people may not be regular library users and will need to be contacted and asked to contribute. It helps to focus on "What was it like?" and "How did you make your choices?" style questions while avoiding "What were they like?" and "Why did they do that?" questions. Keeping the interviews focused on personal experience and away from speculation about others will expand the range of perspectives while decreasing the partisanship of the stories.

Also, the stories do not need to focus on major national events. They should also cover broad topics like life in the 1950s. Events of local significance like county fairs are another good focus.

Ebook Future Scenario 4: Ebooks skip the library

Here is my fourth of four scenarios on the future of ebooks in libraries.

City Manager Ann Stuart read over the library director's report again. It was budget time in the annual cycle and each department head was required to give evaluation reports to the City Manager's office. The report was a description of the programs and services offered by the library during the previous year along with hard quantitative numbers. The city had also starting using Outcome-Based Evaluation to measure effectiveness of its various departments. Benchmarks were engaged to gauge how well the city was doing versus other cities of similar size and makeup.

The library report was alarming although it was not totally unexpected. Its numbers were down in all programs and services you would expect from the library. Circulation had fallen off by 50% off its peak of five years ago while the number of citizens attending traditional programming had fallen off even more dramatically. People were just not using the library in the same way any longer. The numbers for new programs, like job hunting classes, computer usage and community-based programming aka civic meetings and ESL classes, had sky rocketed from five years ago. The library had also seen a slight increase in the number of individuals using the buildings. It seems the community needed a place to study, network and socialize like never before.

In looking over the OBE models, the library had submitted, Ann saw very quickly that the library staff had anticipated all of this. The objectives seemed to be centered on the new services to show their value to the community while the more traditional services were judged more heavily by their hard numbers than the qualitative information you glean from OBE. The librarians foresaw that the community needed the library for different reasons. It had changed from one of getting books and DVDs to one of community gathering place offering a wide variety of services helping community members with their daily lives.

In thinking back to the times she had interacted with library staff, she recalled a conversation with the library director about the future of the printed book. Federal laws had been upheld to allow publishers to restrict the circulation of ebooks. Libraries were not allowed to offer this digital format to their patrons without paying a hefty fee, one that was cost probative for the library. She also remembered a news report she read this year saying that more than 75% of the books produced today were in digital format.   Printed books were now the minority and libraries had suffered in their traditional offerings because of this development.

The library staff had done an excellent job of preparing the city for this evolution. As the librarians predicted, people were still using the library, but for different reasons. The library had diversified its offerings to appeal to as many community sectors as possible. From the very rich

to the very poor, it seemed the library was reaching out to the entire community to offer real value.

Ann liked what she saw. I'll have to make a point of convincing the Mayor and the council that the library is an essential part of our community. This data will help me do that…, Ann thought to herself. Let's hope they agree.

Ann went on to the next set of reports.

I will give my strategy tips for this scenario next month.

NTLP News

NTLP is currently accepting applications for being an partner of NTLP. To sign up, please go to http://www.ntxlibpartners.org/partnership2012. To get a good idea of the benefits and the ROI you get from being a Partner, please go http://www.ntxlibpartners.org/membership.

Here are the criteria.

Eligibility
The eligibility criteria for 2012 Partners of NTLP (9/1/11 - 9/30/12) are as follows:

- Public library Partners must pay annual fees according to the fee schedule linked below, which was recommended by the Board-Appointed Development Committee and approved by the NTLP Board. Fees for non-public libraries will follow a similar schedule but will use different criteria to determine size of the library.
- Partner libraries may be of any type, must be in Texas, and must be accredited by an objective body.
- Individuals and product vendors/service providers do not qualify to be Partners of NTLP at this time but may be eligible in the future. Product vendors/service providers are invited to join NTLP's North Texas Library Commercial Partner Program by offering special pricing to Partners of NTLP.
- Libraries managed by a single entity shall be considered a single Partner and must meet the criteria related to all of their Texas libraries together. This applies to libraries with branches, school libraries within a single ISD, libraries managed by outside organizations, etc.

As far as annual fees, the committee based it on the TexShare model. Please see below for more information.

NTLP Partnership Fee Schedule for Fiscal Year 2012 (Sept. 1, 2011 – Sept. 30, 2012)
Yes, 13 months – for a 12-month partnership fee!

Population Served in 2010 according to TSLAC (in thousands)	0 to 11	11 to 17	17 to 25	25 to 30	30 to 37	37 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 79	79 to 100	100 to 130	130 to 160	160 to 200	200 to 270	270 to 500	500 to 600	600 to 1,000	1,000 to 1,250	1,250 and up
0 to 8	$200	$200	$400	$400	$400	$400	$700	$700										
8 to 12	$200	$400	$400	$400	$400	$400	$700	$1,100	$1,100									
12 to 20	$400	$400	$400	$700	$700	$700	$700	$1,100	$1,100									
20 to 25	$400	$400	$700	$700	$700	$700	$700	$1,100	$1,100	$1,600	$2,000	$3,000						
25 to 35	$400	$700	$700	$700	$700	$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,600	$2,000	$3,000	$3,000					
35 to 50	$700	$700	$700	$700	$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,600	$1,600	$2,000	$3,000	$3,000					
50 to 70			$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,600	$1,600	$2,000	$2,000	$3,000	$3,000	$4,000	$4,000			
70 to 100			$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,100	$1,600	$1,600	$2,000	$3,000	$3,000	$4,000	$4,000	$4,000	$8,000	$8,000	$10,000	$12,000
100 to 120										$4,000	$4,000	$6,000	$6,000	$8,000	$8,000	$10,000	$12,000	
120 to 200										$4,000	$4,000	$,6000	$6,000	$8,000	$10,000	$12,000	$14,000	
200 and up														$10,000	$10,000	$12,000	$14,000	$15,000

Collection Development Budget (in thousands of dollars) as reported to TSLAC in the library's 2010 Annual Report

FY2012 Committees

We are looking for committee members. According to our bylaws, we have the following three standing committees.

Partner Advisory Committee – This committee advises the NTLP Board on programs and services for partner libraries.

Development Committee – This committee advises the NTLP Board on activities related to the development of the organization including setting membership fees, fundraising and grant writing.

Finance Committee – This committee advises the NTLP Board on the health of the organization's financials. This committee is made up of members from the NTLP Board.

We need volunteers to serve on the Partner Advisory Committee and the Development Committee. All committee volunteers must be associated with a Partner library. The committees will meet quarterly starting in November.

TSLAC System FY2012

NTLP is also serving as the administrator of the North Texas Regional Library System, one of the ten regional library organizations established by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. Due to budget cuts, this will be the last year we will serve in this capacity. Basically, the NTRLS membership has not changed from last year and these libraries are eligible to receive basic consulting services and participate in resource sharing projects like the consortia. For more information on the services available to NTRLS libraries, please visit http://ntxlibpartners.org/downloads/FY2012/membershipinfo/2012benefits.pdf.

NTLP Website

We have a newly designed website. It can still be reached by typing in http://www.ntrls.org, but we do have a new URL that we are migrating towards which is http://www.ntxlibpartners.org.

Please take some time to check out the new design and provide us with feedback. We plan to use this website as the main tool for communicating to our Partner libraries.

Workshops

We do plan to offer workshops this year. It has to be done as NTLP since CE is no longer being funded by the Texas State Library on the regional level. We hope to have some concrete plans in place by November. Stay tuned!

Other Services in FY2012

Texas Workskills Development in Libraries

In order to make up for the loss of funds from the Texas State Library, NTLP will seek outside grant funds in partnership with Central Texas Library System(Austin) and EPAL, inc (El Paso). We hope to continue the Workforce Development courses that were available through the program. If anyone would like to assist NTLP with this effort, please let me know.

Libraries for Literacy

Our Libraries for Literacy program was also underwritten by the Texas State Library. It is our hope to work with the libraries within this group to find some outside

funding for individual literacy programs. If you are interested in assisting, or participating, please let me know.

I would like to conclude my column by stating again publicly what a wonderful staff I have. Without them, we could not accomplish what we do today. They deserve a firm thank you the next time you see them.