

*The Mission of Lake Agassiz Regional Library
is to share resources
in order to provide access to quality library services
that meet lifelong learning needs,
and enrich the lives of those we serve.*

LARL BOARD OF TRUSTEES SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the Lake Agassiz Regional Library Executive Committee was held Thursday, July 12, 2001 at the Detroit Lakes Branch. President Bursik called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Executive Committee Members Present: Bursik, Conzemius, Waller, Welte, Rooney, Iverson, Ellingson

Absent: None

Others Present: Fredette, Slicer, Mommens

PUBLIC INPUT

None

ITV MEETING

Bursik introduced members present at the meeting to the ITV participants in St. Paul: Joyce Swonger, Director of Library Development and Services (LDS) and Jym Wroblewski, Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Coordinator for LDS.

Fredette explained that the purpose of the meeting was to allow Board members a chance to ask questions of Swonger and Wroblewski, about the way grant funds were administered. LARL has been receiving federal funding for many years (since 1985, at least) and hearing that this funding may be reduced, restricted or eliminated is distressing. The LARL Board met in June and adopted the LARL 2002 budget for presentation to signatories in July and August. Since then, information was received that indicated some decisions have been made at the state level regarding distribution of federal funds. Fredette requested an explanation of the circumstances regarding the decisions.

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Swonger explained the history behind the decision. In the past federal funds did go directly to libraries and were considered operational funds under the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). These funds were divided into titles whereby public libraries received non-competitive funds. That federal program expired in 1996 with the implementation of the LSTA. Major changes included that funds were no longer earmarked into titles that were given out as a lump sum sub-grant, and the funds were for all types of libraries, not just public libraries. At that time LSTA was formed and the caution came out not to treat funds received as operating monies. Funds were to be distributed over five years using a formula based on funding which libraries had been receiving under the old program. In the third year, payment to Minitex for statewide services was moved to federal funds, freeing state aid funds. During the last (5th year) the final shift is being made to shift the money to competitive grant money as planned at the inception of LSTA.

Fredette questioned the need to make the funds available on a competitive basis. Rural areas are already burdened because of a smaller population base. The library systems have good grant writers but there is still concern about the competitive process. Swonger explained that the competition was not open to all libraries. One category for computer related grants has only regional and multi-type and consortia systems eligible to receive funding. In Minnesota there are about 20 applicants for those grants. Others who want to compete have to go through one of those organizations in order to qualify. The pool of applicants has been safeguarded to help those entities already in jeopardy. Since LSTA has full time staff, a resource is being provided to make sure that applications are well filled out and are "good" grant applications. LSTA will also have workshops to help people work on grants.

Operational cost concerns are acknowledged, but the grants are not intended for operational purposes. The grants are based on a federal statute and are awarded to provide for improvement and enhancement only. Because of this the state cannot do other than provide a means to distribute the grant.

Fredette explained the recent reduction of services in the LARL system. These service reductions resulted from a lack of funds from several of the signatories. Fredette asked for their perspective of "reality" if systems are not allowed to shift funds to keep libraries open. Swonger responded that she hoped that library closures wouldn't be necessary. Her concern was that somehow the message has not been relayed that the shift of federal grant money from operational to enhancement spending is upon us.

Swonger encouraged LARL to examine where we wanted to apply for grants to help in other areas. Fredette explained that increase in delivery stops for the LARL system, based on changes during the last year, were achieved via grant money. It will be difficult to retain those delivery stops without grant money during the coming year. Swonger suggested that a competitive grant

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for delivery might not be funded, but if the grant was worded in such a manner to ask for maintenance for a new program, it might be considered for approval. People who are reviewing grants will be people like our board. They will look for things that are new and will consider how new a program is and whether help is still needed for maintenance. Swonger suggested identifying a target audience (another area) to fit within the federal priorities to help LARL move away from operational based grants.

Iverson discussed his concerns about competition. Concern was expressed about the time and expense of writing grants and processing them at the state level. How do we service clients with reduced funds and also initiate new initiatives to get grant money? Iverson wanted to know the advantages of the new system versus the old and how much money is spent on administration of grants?

Swonger said that 4% (Wroblewski's salary for support to applications) of the grant money was spent of administration. Concerns about management of the program were big at the state department (CFL) also, which is one of the reasons applicants were restricted to the pool mentioned above. What is better about the new program? It provides the only seed money available to the libraries within the state.

Waller was concerned that the timing puts libraries in a bind. Five years ago local units of government were capped on revenues they could generate. The philosophy of not using money for operational expenses is okay, but the struggle to maintain the budget is difficult. If federal money is intended to enhance and improve the system, the money does not help us if we have no system to enhance. Swonger suggested highlighting lobbying for state aid. We need to increase state aid, not federal aid, because we have not had an increase from the state in a long time. Libraries are very small fish in the K-12 system. Swonger will pursue getting rid of the 10% deferral of state aid. This would be a one-time increase of 900K distributed among library entities in the state. Swonger will bring it up as often as possible at the state level.

Conzemius commented that we see the state asking us to write a grant for something new while we are struggling with the daily maintenance costs. Then we get the grant and are still on the hook for future operational dollars based on the new program we started with funds from the grant. Swonger suggested competing for money in areas that benefit from a one-time fix. For example, improvement of electronic connections, assistance with a major upgrade to the automation system, wireless service on the book mobile, etc. These are all one time costs with manageable maintenance costs. We could also connect the grant to an existing service where the grant would not increase operation costs.

Bursik reiterated concerns from shortfalls and how we see a decrease in services for the coming year. Our next step is library closure. The Board understands the federal money was legally barred from operational cost but it still puts LARL between a rock and hard spot.

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Fredette explained we would make an effort to write grants, and appreciated Jim's presence to aid us in grant writing. She stressed the importance of providing adequate library resources. We have had to give state money back when we need it for necessities. It seems ridiculous to send it back, because it would have been great to pay ahead on telecommunications services. The regional telecommunications aid program was being audited at the state level and there was no way to let systems keep unspent funds or pay ahead for services. The telecom aid program will be discussed at the state level.

Swonger volunteered Wroblewski to come to LARL to help write grants. She didn't guarantee that meant we will be funded but his help is available, at our request, for good quality proposal writing.

Rooney asked about the background of reviewers of grants. Would they have an idea of the problems rural regions face. Swonger said the state used citizens who volunteer to review grants. The state looks for experience in reviewing grants, and applicants without a cause for a particular grant to be accepted. They do look for background, people who are familiar with the grant process. They will pay travel costs for people from rural areas to help with the grant review. LARL can provide names to Swonger so that pool is well represented and knowledgeable about current issues.

End of ITV.

Bursik adjourned the meeting at 6:30 p.m.