

**Focus Group Meeting Discussions on the Development of the
New Jersey LSTA Five Year Plan (2003-2007)
Held December 3rd, 4th and 10th, 2001**

prepared by
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New Jersey State Library

Background

A group of 48 librarians from public and academic libraries, library computer consortia and Regional Library Cooperatives attended one of three focus group meetings held in the northern, southern and central regions of the state on December 3, 4 and 10 respectively. The participants were asked to provide input on the following questions related to the development of a *New Jersey Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Five Year Plan (2003-2007)* required by the Institute of Museum and Library Services for the annual award of approximately \$4.1 million of federal funds to the State Library:

- What are the major challenges facing your library in the next three years?
- What new or expanded LSTA grants for technology, people having difficulty using a library, continuing education and statewide library services would you like to see offered?
- Name three statewide library services that are essential for your library and library community.

Librarians participating in the focus group meetings were self-selected. The Library Development Bureau mailed a brochure to all public and academic library directors which described the purpose of the meetings and included a registration form. An e-mail containing a PDF file of the brochure was sent to Regional Library Cooperative listservs to reach librarians who did not receive the mailing.

Participants at the three meetings were composed of: 40 public librarians, 2 community college librarians, 2 special librarians, 2 library computer consortia executive directors and 2 Regional Library Cooperative executive directors. In the public library group, 12 members represented large libraries; 20 members represented medium-sized libraries and 8 members represented small-sized libraries. Eleven members were from public libraries that serve economically disadvantaged communities. The public librarians at these meeting were directors, assistant directors and reference, children's, systems and electronic resources librarians. A list of the participants is included at the end of the report.

At each meeting, the participants were assigned to small discussion groups which contained a maximum of eight people. In so far as it was possible, each of these small groups had a mix of large, medium and small-sized public libraries and contained at least one representative from an academic library, library computer consortia and Regional Library Cooperative. Members of the Library Development Bureau facilitated each of these small discussion groups and recorded participants' comments and recommendations on newsprint. At the end of the discussion, the entire group was then reassembled to hear reports from each of the discussion groups.

Prior to breaking up into their small groups, the participants were instructed to brainstorm ideas for new or expanded programs and not to be concerned with the availability or the source of funding. Participants were told that they did not need to reach consensus on any issue and that diversity of opinions was valued. While participants were encouraged to make recommendations, they understood that the small discussion groups were not charged with the responsibility of solving problems or making decisions.

I. Challenges Faced By Libraries in the Next Three Years

The following challenges were mentioned by participants in all three of the focus group meetings:

- **Libraries Must Prove Themselves Relevant**
 - Fewer people are using libraries. Need to go where the people are by providing satellite libraries, electronic library branches, kiosks, etc.
 - Attract new users by developing new services.
 - Find out what the needs of people are who do not use libraries and meet them.
 - Develop programs to bring the community into the library.
 - Market public library services – educate public, governing bodies and agencies about library services.

- **What is the Function of the Public Library?**
 - Deciding who libraries are, what function they serve and then marketing this to the public. Are public libraries cultural centers? community centers? recreational centers? informational centers?
 - What types of collections should public libraries have? A totally popular approach with best sellers and DVDs or a more mixed approach of recreational and information resources?

➤ **Changing Expectations About Libraries**

- Traditional reference services are in decline while more patrons use the Internet.
- Demand for remote access to information that eliminates the need for customers to come to the library.
- Demand for rapid response to requests for information and delivery of materials.
- Demand for later evening hours and for expanded Saturday and Sunday hours.
- Competition with bookstore, Internet, e.commerce information providers.

➤ **Staffing Public Libraries**

- Recruiting professional librarians.
- Attracting qualified professional and support staff.
- More compensation for staff.
- Hire librarians with specialties (e.g., YA, computer, Internet trainers, etc.)
- Diversify staff to serve various ethnic groups in community. Hire librarians, support staff and pages from ethnic groups.
- Professional development and continuing education for staff.

➤ **Keeping Current with New Technology/Upgrading Equipment**

- Provide latest technology in response to rapid changes in technological developments and the introduction of new products and services.
- Keeping up with technology while balancing traditional services.
- Acquiring more full-text online databases and remote access to these databases.
- Customer demand for librarians to be computer experts providing assistance in installing PCs, trouble shooting, software training, etc.
- Lack of skilled technical staff results in many libraries not being able to maintain their computers and networks. There is a need for skilled staff or centralized local or regional technical support services.
- Money for new technology, replacement of old technology and equipment upgrades.

- **Attracting Young Adults to Use the Library**
 - “If we don’t get them, we are out of business”.
 - Young adults used to resume using public libraries when they had children. This is not happening. Need for programming, collection development, reference and computer services tailored to this group.

- **Changing Customer Demographics**
 - Aging: need for direct delivery of materials.
 - Demand for services to multilingual, multiethnic customers is rapidly increasing. Need for world language collections, programming and training in ESL, citizenship and naturalization. Libraries are often called upon to serve five or more diverse multiethnic and/or multilingual customer groups.

- **“Responsible” Public Library Trustees**
 - Train trustees to provide leadership and to actively participate in decision making.
 - State Library should make it mandatory that trustees, within one year of appointment, attend trustee training. If they do not meet this requirement they can not be seated on the Board.

- **Funding for Public Libraries**
 - Increase local funding for public libraries.
 - Increase Per Capita State Aid.

- **Construction/Building/Space Issues**
 - Funding and fund raising for new construction, renovation and ADA compliance.
 - Need space for community, recreational and program activities.
 - Aging library facilities must be upgraded.

II. New or Expanded LSTA Grant Programs

The following recommendations for grant programs for technology, people having difficulty using a library, continuing education and statewide services were mentioned in two or more of the focus group meetings. The listing is in priority order with those programs mentioned in all three of the group meeting being listed first.

➤ **Technology Grant Programs**

- Upgrade public library telecommunication lines used for access to online resources to T-1 lines.
- Expand free statewide database licenses to include the following: *New York Times*, *LearnATest*, *Electronic Library*, specialized science databases and full-text periodical foreign language databases, especially in Chinese, Korean, Indian and Arabic languages.
- Provide technology help onsite to requesting libraries for hardware and software problems and for staff training.
- Wireless technology grants for installing computer training labs and for using PCs and lap tops any where in the library.
- Upgrades for existing PCs, routers, servers and for computer training centers and integrated library systems owned by individual libraries and consortia.
- Cover staffing costs to provide PC and software training to patrons and technical assistance in computer training centers when they are available for independent use.
- Upgrade telecommunication lines for Hub Libraries.
- Purchase palm pilots and lap top computers for use in library and circulate them for off-site use.
- Maximize staff taking advantage of automation through purchase of: self checkout equipment, RFID radio frequency chips, network printers and software to schedule patron Internet use and manage payment for printing.
- Digitization of New Jersey historical, cultural resources made available on the web.
- Technology Consultant for network and portal design; and able to evaluate the state of a library's technology, recommend improvements, greater efficiencies, new directions, etc.
- Hub Libraries support web pages and provide a simple web page design template for member public libraries without web sites.
- 24/7 services for public library customers. All public libraries should have web sites to promote remote access to catalogs and free statewide full-text databases.
- Statewide contract for vendors for technical support of PCs, LANs, etc. who will work at a fixed rate.

➤ **People Having Difficulty Using a Library Grant Programs**

- New Americans: programs, services and collections that will attract them to use the library, including citizenship preparation courses. Need for individualized services and collections for each culture in the community; assistance with selection and cataloging of foreign language materials especially in non roman alphabets; and development of a statewide union catalog of non roman alphabet library materials.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) training for New Americans.
- Young Adult programs and collection development grants to attract them to use libraries (e.g., after school computer clubs, CD listening centers, etc.)
- Outreach programs to non users of public libraries including community surveys and public relations/marketing campaigns.
- Adaptive Technology/assistive devices grants for: purchasing equipment, providing demonstrations of technology and advice on purchasing; and developing a database of NJ libraries who have adaptive technology/assistive devices and provide programs and services for people with disabilities.
- Literacy training for adult readers, family literacy programs and reading programs serving pre-school children.
- Statewide Summer Reading Program.
- Homebound delivery services that take the library to homebound individuals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, senior centers, etc.
- Senior citizen services including library materials for people with low vision, PC and Internet training, etc.
- Parenting, child care, baby wellness classes cosponsored with community agencies.
- Pilot Project for tutor.com "type" program where outsourced teachers provide web-based homework help service.
- Funding to assist libraries in close proximity, who share patrons, to develop an interface to share resources, develop open or reciprocal borrowing agreements.

➤ **Continuing Education Programs**

- Train staff to serve diverse multiethnic, multilingual communities with an emphasis on services for specific nationalities and cultures.
- Train staff to provide hands on computer training to the public for Internet access, PC literacy, business application software, etc.
- Train for specialists in Youth Services.

- American Disabilities Act (ADA) statewide training for library professionals and trustees.
- Training in strategic planning, marketing and evaluation of library services.
- Financial management training for public library directors.
- Continue Train the Trainer, Super Supervisor and Leadership Academy training.
- Web portal to professional librarian distance education courses. Make more programs available online for professional and support staff. RLC's training programs have lost critical mass. Many courses can't get 10 people in one location at the same time.

➤ **New or Expanded Statewide Services**

The following new or expanded statewide services received support from participants in two or more of the focus group sessions and are listed in priority order:

- Statewide Library Card.
- Hire State Library Youth Services Consultant.
- Expand the number of free statewide databases offered.
- NJ Nightline "type" ready-reference service for patrons which operates 24/7 to which librarians could refer their customers when they could not answer a question.
- Statewide Summer Reading Program.
- Professional development and training for professional librarians.
- Hire State Library Space Planning Consultant.

IV. Top Ranked Essential Statewide Services

The following statewide services got seven or more votes from participants in the three focus group meetings:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------|----|
| • Free Statewide Database Licenses | 31 |
| • Hub Library Network | 29 |
| • Delivery of Materials | 17 |
| • Regional Library Cooperative Services | 15 |
| • Reference Center/Contract Libraries | 11 |
| • Access Center for OCLC ILL | 10 |
| • Statewide ILL System | 7 |

**MORRIS COUNTY LIBRARY
LSTA FOCUS GROUP MEETING
DECEMBER 3, 2001
9:30 - 1:00 P.M.**

Jayne Beline, Parsippany Troy-Hills PL
Eileen Burnash, Mendham Twp PL
Barbara Carroll, Washington PL
Joe DaRold, Plainfield PL
Sundra Fenn, South Plainfield PL
Susan Gulick, Morristown & Morris Twp PL
Dorothy Key, East Orange PL
Allan Kleiman, South Plainfield PL
Len LoPinto, Paramus PL
Michele Maiullo, Hasbrouck Heights PL
Mac Nickles, Garfield PL
Lewis Ostar, Middlesex Co. College Lib
Phyllis Palley, Westwood PL
Susan Persak, Chester PL
Jan Perrier, Roxbury PL
Carolyn Ryan Reed, East Orange PL
Diane Rhodes, Maywood PL
Miriam Sawyer, Rutherford PL
Seth Stephens, Jefferson Twp PL
Joanne Tropiano, Nutley PL
Robert White, BCCLS

**CAMDEN COUNTY LIBRARY
LSTA FOCUS GROUP
DECEMBER 4, 2001
9:30 - 1:00 P.M.**

Al Addis, Burlington Co. Lib
Nancy Bennett, Camden Co. Lib
Pat Bruder, ERIC
Molly Connors, Burlington Co. Lib
Judy Crudele, Cherry Hill PL
Susan D'Ottavio, Cumberland Co. Lib
Elizabeth Egan, Gloucester City PL
Andrew Martin, Cape May Co. Lib
Linda Meuse, Cherry Hill PL
Robert Stewart, Asbury Park PL
Jason Stone, East Brunswick PL
Gail Sweet, Burlington Co. Lib
Ellen Tiedrich, Gloucester Co. College Lib

**LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND
LSTA FOCUS GROUP
DECEMBER 10, 2001
9:30 - 1:00 PM**

Stephanie Bakos, Berkeley Heights PL
Ingrid Bruck, Long Branch PL
Pat Butcher, Pennington PL
Monica Eppinger, New Brunswick PL
Karen Hyman, SJRLC
Lorraine Jackson, South Brunswick PL
Joe Lyons, Sayreville PL
Christine Matteo, Ocean Co. Lib
Ellen Parravano, LMxAC
Susan Permahos, Springfield PL
Connie Paul, CJRLC
Deborah Rutledge, LBH
Janet Wheeler, Union PL
Madathikudy Kuriakose, Trenton PL