



PALOS HEIGHTS
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Serving Our Public 4.0 Review

Each year, in order to apply for the Illinois State Library's Per Capita Grant, we must review the document called *Serving Our Public*. It consists of various explanations and checklists of what is expected of public libraries in Illinois. Please review this document as you are able and see my comments below.

Chapter 2: Governance and Administration

Summary

This chapter outlines various concepts having to do with the highest level of authority in running a public library. It includes everything from Board operations to library policies to how the library handles various legal responsibilities. Notable points include the following:

- The three responsibilities of a board of trustees: manage the library administrator; determine library policy; financial oversight
 - Obviously, this is a dramatic oversimplification as you are all involved in the library's governance in various more nuanced ways, e.g. advocacy, long-range planning, fundraising. But this is a fair summary of the core functions of a board.
- The library complies with all applicable laws including the Open Meetings Act, Freedom of Information Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- The library has administrative structures in place to ensure continuity over time, e.g. succession planning, trustee by-laws, and proper record-keeping.

Checklist Responses

We can confidently check most of these boxes. We continue to update our policies as needed, and we are back on track with our long-range planning in the coming months. We also continue to work toward a long-term fundraising presence in the community.

Chapter 3: Personnel

Summary

This chapter outlines standards related to how the library is staffed. It covers a lot of HR basics including having a clear Personnel Policy, job descriptions, and compensation packages.

Checklist Responses

I'm proud of the work that we've done at both the Board and staff levels to ensure smooth personnel operations. Without qualification, we satisfy every item on this checklist.

Chapter 4: Access

Summary

This chapter deals with physical access to the library building and our resources. Standards include not just accommodating those with physical disabilities but also having shelving that is the appropriate height for children and not shelving things so low that many adults can't bend far enough to reach them.

Checklist Responses

Physical accessibility is not a major issue for our building, however there are a couple of areas where we could improve. I still think wayfinding throughout the building could be better. The YTS renovation greatly improved this on the second floor with clearer sight lines and physical cues such as carpeting and lighting that will intuitively demarcate different areas. On the first floor, I'm also thinking about how we can improve wayfinding, although I think this will need to wait a few years until we're ready to refresh this space.

Chapter 5: Building Infrastructure and Maintenance

Summary

This chapter talks about our physical space and how we maintain it. It includes things like routine maintenance of larger systems, maintaining an effective inventory, and budgeting for long-term facility health.

Checklist Responses

I'm proud of the work that we've done to keep our building up-to-date and in good shape. We are entering a period where this job is going to get bigger for us as various elements of our infrastructure hit their 20- and 30-year marks. I can confidently say that we check every box on this list. We continue to do a good job of staying on top of major systems throughout the building.

Chapter 6: Safety

Summary

Safety is underestimated in its importance in what libraries do. We are a public space where people of all ages gather and spend time. We need to provide a space that is secure for everyone who visits, and we need to have plans in place to deal with the various types of emergencies that can come up in this setting. These standards include everything from adequate planning and staff training to proper emergency equipment and adequate staff to always ensure a safe environment.

Checklist Responses

We do a good job of satisfying all of the elements on this checklist. Our emergency plans are thorough

and are reviewed with staff regularly. We have a comprehensive training program for all supervisors. We have a medical kit and AED that are both checked regularly.

Chapter 7: Collection Management

Summary

Collection management is an often-overlooked aspect of librarianship. The fact is, we have limited space in which to house a nearly infinite world of books, movies, and more. We must be judicious in how we select items for our collection, striking a balance between what is popular, what is necessary, and what is particularly relevant to our community. Thankfully, resource sharing and electronic resources make this process much easier than it used to be. Patrons have access to more materials now than ever before.

We also must be willing to throw out a lot of books. We have a maximum capacity of around 80,000 books, and we're typically close to that capacity at any given time. We purchase 5,000 new books each year. That means that we need to weed our collection of about that same number of books each year. Obviously, our staff puts a lot of effort into collection management.

Checklist Responses

This checklist is one of the easiest for us. We do all these things as a matter of course these days. We have conducted major weeding projects in all departments in recent years and are now in an ongoing process of weeding the collection as we go. Staff is also working on revising our Collection Management Policy.

Chapter 8: System Member Responsibilities and Resource Sharing

Summary

Resources sharing is one of the cornerstones of public librarianship in the 21st century. By pooling our resources, even small libraries can offer their patrons access to collections that no single library on the planet could offer on its own. We participate in resource sharing locally through SWAN, regionally through RAILS, and nationally (and sometimes internationally) through OCLC. Through these partnerships, we lend and borrow tens of thousands of items each year. Similarly, we also pool our resources to share the cost of database access so that we're able to offer greater access to information sources than we would be on our own.

Checklist Responses

This is a brief checklist, and we do all these things. Regarding actively participating in these groups, I serve on the SWAN Board of Directors. I attend all RAILS quarterly membership meetings and regularly correspond with the RAILS director and assistant director. Various staff members participate in roundtable discussions in their areas of expertise including programming, circulation, and technology.

Chapter 9: Public Services: Reference and Reader's Advisory Services

Summary

Public services, as referred to in this document, concerns reference and readers advisory services that are provided to the public. Reference services are information related and reader's advisory services are related to matching people up with things they will enjoy. Every librarian receives formal training in how to conduct a proper reference or reader's advisory interview. It is one of the core competencies of the job. As you can see from the standards listed, the emphasis in reference work is on providing access to information as opposed to providing information itself. Librarians are here to guide people to the resources they need and not to do the research for them. Regarding reader's advisory, the focus is on maintaining a broad knowledge of literary trends, and our staff spends a lot of time staying on top of what's going on in the publishing world.

Checklist Responses

Most of the items on the reference checklist are basic services that we provide during our regular operations. We continue to work on developing our local history collection. Staff keep up to date through various continuing education experiences. Staff members participate in local clubs and organizations. This is a straightforward set of standards to meet.

Chapter 10: Programming

Summary

Having fun, educational, free programming for all ages is one of the ways that libraries contribute to the cultural vitality of a community. There is always new ground to be broken in programming. There are new performers and program types popping up constantly. Part of what makes living in such densely populated area is that we have a treasure trove of talented people who are eager to share what they do with our community.

Checklist Responses

Programming continues to be one of the great strengths of our library and is a core library function. A lot of lifelong library users were first introduced to the library like I was, by going to story time at the library. Our programs are free and accessible. We continue to develop powerful partnerships to bring high quality events to our area.

Chapter 11: Youth/Young Adult Services

Summary

This chapter summarizes pretty much everything that we do regarding serving youth patrons. Everything from programming to collection management to outreach is mentioned. These services constitute the core of what it means to serve youth patrons as a public library. There is nothing particularly surprising or noteworthy in what is mentioned here. We do all these things as a regular part of our operations.

Checklist Responses

With regard to the checklist, we are very strong on almost all these items. We could do more to serve those with disabilities and language barriers, and we are addressing those weaknesses. We have addressed a primary barrier to library services for youth patrons in ensuring that all children in the area are eligible for a free library card. We offer appropriate programming and collections, and we have a space that is appealing and interactive.

Chapter 12: Technology

Summary

This library is fortunate to have a staff and board that understands the crucial role that technology plays not just in every aspect of how we serve the public but also in the lives of our residents. It's not just that so much of what we do centers around providing access and the knowledge needed to use the kind of technology needed function fully in our society, but technology permeates everything we do. It is as vital a piece of a library's infrastructure as electricity and plumbing. This chapter lays out standards related to various aspects of technology in the library environment.

Checklist Responses

In general, we do a very good job of keeping our technology up to date. We include technological infrastructure in our capital asset plan. We provide access to as many services as possible online. We provide access to computers and WIFI throughout out building. We hire consultants who lend us their expertise and keep our equipment up to date. And we are constantly on the lookout for coming changes and trends that will help us improve our services.

Chapter 13: Marketing, Promotion, and Collaboration

Summary

There isn't a library that I'm aware of that doesn't struggle with effectively communicating with the public regarding all the services we offer. Even those with the budget to hire full-time marketing professionals rarely can engage in high quality marketing initiatives. We do our best to train librarians to be better marketers and to work with outside groups to create economies of scale that allow us to do more. Marketing will always be a struggle, but we continue to get better at it.

Checklist Responses

More effective marketing and communication is one of the core planks of our strategic plan. We continue to train staff to use better tools and to be savvier about communicating our message through traditional means as well as on social media and other emerging technologies. We have also been successful in pressuring the consortium and ILS to devote more resources to marketing public libraries in general. We continue to partner with local groups to raise awareness of library services and programs. And we do our best to make sure that the library is in local media as much as possible, via press releases, segments on Channel 4, and our online and social media presence. There are definite areas for

improvement here, such as having a more coordinated marketing plan and consistent messaging. This is an area that we continue to devote more and more attention to.

In sum, I would say that we do a very good job of satisfying the State's benchmarks for public libraries. There are definite areas for us to continue to focus on, particularly outreach and marketing. As our major renovation project winds down, we will have more attention to put on these and other areas.