

Florida Library Network Council
Minutes
November 1, 2003
Tallahassee, Florida

The following council members were in attendance: Barratt Wilkins, Barry Baker, Mary Brown, John Callahan, Jim Corey, Danny Hales, Betty Johnson, Richard Madaus, Judi Ring, Diane Solomon, Joe Stines, Sandra Ulm and Julia Woods,. State Library staff in attendance included: Mark Flynn, Dan Lhotka, Loretta Flowers, Jennifer Womble.

Barratt Wilkins opened the meeting at 10:00 am with a report on statewide meetings for librarians held in September 2002. The purpose of the meetings was to present the new Florida plan for library development entitled "Gateway to Information." The meetings were well attended and evoked many comments of support for the Florida virtual library. There was discussion and concern expressed at all of the meetings regarding the use of existing state and/or federal funds to implement and sustain the Florida virtual library. Mr. Wilkins reported that the outcome of the meetings was confirmation that the Florida virtual library is the top priority for the State to move forward on and that librarians throughout the State are looking forward to participating in the development of the virtual library.

Wilkins also reported on the presentation of a proposal for funding the Florida Virtual Library at the Annual Library Directors Conference held in October 2002. The U.S. Congress is not able to increase LSTA appropriations as hoped in the next Federal fiscal year. LSTA is currently under a continuing resolution. The omnibus bill that appropriates LSTA has not been passed by the Congress.

Consequently, Wilkins proposed to the library directors the repurposing of Federal and/or State Aid funding to implement the Florida virtual library plan. The purpose of the proposal was to stimulate discussion about funding options. To do this would require concurrence of libraries in the State.

The consensus of the library directors was that they are willing to repurpose some Federal dollars but not to the extent that would force suspending the award of competitive grants to individual libraries. The library community is not interested in repurposing any other type of funds for the virtual library. As the State is anticipating a substantial shortfall in revenue funding, any new funding would require a substantial advocacy effort. At this point in time, there is a lot of uncertainty about the impact of proposed constitutional amendments, if passed, that would mandate new funding for school classrooms.

The concern about funding was affected by the budget numbers that were shared with the library directors. The \$10.5 million planned is probably too expensive and there is a need to carefully reevaluate all cost data in an effort to make the budget realistic. Even with a smaller budget, implementation may require a phased approach over three to five years.

Another suggestion made by the library directors was that the Division and Network Council formulate a short concept paper to describe the virtual library in terms of benefits to the State. Mark Flynn prepared a two-page description and it is being used to communicate the virtual library plan components and benefits to stakeholders.

Review of Plan Implementation Schedule

The Council next took up a review of the virtual library plan proposed implementation calendar. The calendar is updated as project activities are started and finished. The Council reviewed schedules for various components including access to databases, portal development, union catalog development, virtual reference implementation, Interlibrary loan & resource sharing, digital collections, communications & marketing, and administration. Current activities are centered on the database project, the union catalog, virtual reference and communications & marketing. Other working groups are being formed for discussing issues relating to development of a library portal, managing access for digital collections and Interlibrary loan and resource sharing, but have not met yet.

Database Project

The Florida Division of Library and Information Services and the Florida Library Network Council announced that the Division completed negotiations with The Gale Group, a research and reference publisher, to give Florida residents access to fourteen databases through the Florida Virtual Library. The databases will provide a core collection of electronic resources for general periodical access, health, business, homework help, and reader's advisory services. Access will be provided through Florida's public libraries and will include remote access for users. Access will begin in January, 2003. Gale will provide training in the first quarter of 2003.

The license agreement is for three years at a cost of \$1 million dollars per year. The agreement includes an option to extend the program for two additional years at the option of the Division. Pricing is guaranteed for the life of the agreement without an increase. Funding for this project is being provided by the Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).

Union Catalog

Through the Division of Library and Information Services, the state of Florida is participating in a pilot program with OCLC, the Online Computer Library Center, Inc., to create a statewide union catalog representing the holdings of over 400 Florida libraries as set in OCLC WorldCat. Approximately 18 Libraries throughout Florida will test a prototype of a state union catalog and provide input to OCLC and the Florida Library Network Council in developing this service. A statewide union catalog is one of the components of the Florida Virtual Library Plan. Florida is one of two states invited to assist OCLC in testing new technology for resource sharing.

The pilot will be conducted in three phases starting in October 2002. Phase one will focus on the Florida group catalog interface; phase two will focus on resource sharing and fulfillment services, including interlibrary loan; and phase three will focus on searching additional resources, including OPACs and online databases, from the Florida group catalog. The pilot began on October 28th and will continue through June, 2003.

Virtual Reference

A joint project of the College Center for Library Automation (CCLA) and the Tampa Bay Library Consortium (TBLC) has been awarded a \$339,000 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant. The grant will provide for the collaborative development and delivery of live virtual online reference services to over four million library patrons throughout Florida. This project will implement live virtual reference at every community college library in Florida, and at select libraries within the TBLC member group. Florida's Division of Library and Information Services, Bureau of Library and Network Services (BLNS) will also participate. These individual organizations will collaborate to demonstrate that a statewide live virtual reference network is both possible and desirable. The Florida Library Network Council will oversee this project as a pilot, and a second phase of this project is planned that would explore expanding this network to include libraries throughout Florida.

Currently, the project is undertaking a procurement process to purchase software. In addition, an advisory committee has been appointed to assist in planning implementation and deployment. The RFP for software serves to conceptualize what the service components are for virtual reference. Copies of the RFP were distributed to the Council members in order to allow for greater clarity and understanding for the services planned. The first phase of the implementation is anticipated for Spring 2003.

Communications/Marketing

Alexis Sarkesian, marketing consultant, provided an overview of the issues she will address in her final Marketing/Communications Plan. The key to the plan will be how to reorient the goals of the Florida virtual library in terms of consumer benefit and associate the services with the library community in Florida. Alexis stressed the importance of making a distinction between the virtual library and the free internet. The word library connotes something more than the free internet. It is important to use a name that will get Florida residents to go to the site and use the services found there. The name should be meaningful to your intended audience. "Don't do librarian speak. Do consumer speak". The virtual library is a non-traditional service and should be used to attract new users to libraries. It is important that consumers recognize it as a library service.

Sarkesian recommended that components of the virtual library need to be tied together and identified as an electronic library. However, the real promotional effort to the general public should be the final virtual library product, not just the individual components. The virtual reference project, the database project, etc. are components of a larger plan and the names for the programs should reflect this.

The database project should be associated with the Florida Virtual Library. That does not mean that you need to do a hard roll out of the Florida Virtual Library at this time, but you need to do it by association. So, it is a “soft roll out.” It has to be at a web site, a portal, that people identify and associate with the Florida Virtual Library.

Gale will produce a page for Florida that will provide access to the Florida database products. The page should be associated with the Florida virtual library. Other icons can go there as they emerge, but they should all be associated with the Florida Virtual Library. Keep the message simple but have the consumer understand that it is part of a whole.

This approach also will orient library peers to the program as it evolves. The Web site should provide advocacy information, an FYI on how to access the databases, online training, etc. Make the site rich in information and tools that librarians can use.

Sarkesian also recommended that Florida seek customized printing. The print products need to explain that this program is the result of three years of assessment work to determine what the services of a virtual library should be. It has involved negotiations and Federal dollars to assure Florida libraries have got the best rate for high quality information resources. To keep the message fresh, the State Library needs to manage this site. Gale can create it, but the State Library should manage it. The most important marketing tool you have is “word of mouth” from your peer group. It’s very important to connect with reference librarians who help the public use electronic services.

A lot can be done in the first year even with limited funding. Using Gale as a resource is important. Using your peer group throughout the state is important. Using partnerships with libraries throughout the state is important for promoting the virtual library. Consider sponsorships from media companies in major media markets. They are able to produce public service announcements and promote your program in other ways.

The objective of the marketing plan being developed is to differentiate the Florida virtual library service from other information services currently available on the Web. The one thing that does that is the search engine. The ability to do searches that retrieve high quality information from libraries is a unique service that would have a lot of appeal to the target pop population. This is scheduled to be the last component to implemented, but it is a very powerful service to market. This will give a “big bang” idea for launching the Florida Virtual Library when it is complete.

Another suggestion is to reorient the vision statement in the plan so that it talks about the provider of these services. “Who is responsible for delivering these services? Florida librarians.” The current vision is appropriate and exciting as it fits into a strategic technology plan. But it does not mention the librarian. You have not identified the speaker of the vision. Librarians drive the virtual library. The information found at the virtual library will be validated information that will be accurate and up to date.

Administration

The Council went into Executive Session to discuss administration of the virtual library. A decision was made to contract with Tallahassee Community College to act as Fiscal Administrator for the virtual library. In addition, the State Librarian was directed to appoint a project director for the program at a competitive salary/benefits package to be paid from grant funds earmarked for administration.

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