

Building Libraries, Building Communities:
A Summit on the Role of Public Libraries in Re-creating Community on the Gulf Coast
Summary Report
January 17, 2007

SOLINET, the State Library of Louisiana and the Mississippi Library Commission hosted a Summit in Baton Rouge, LA, November 28-30, 2006, designed to assist libraries in planning for rebuilding after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. The Summit is part of the Gulf Coast Libraries Project, funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and administered by SOLINET. The invitation-only Summit was for teams from the affected libraries in Louisiana and Mississippi. A planning taskforce, chaired by Leslie Burger, President of the American Library Association and Director of the Princeton (New Jersey) Public Library, met in mid-October to develop the agenda for the Summit. Committee members included: Bruce Astrein (Americans for Libraries Council), Steven B. Bingler (Concordia Architecture & Planning), Diane M. Brown (State Library of Louisiana), Steven Davies (Project for Public Spaces), Martin Gomez (Urban Libraries Council), Rebecca Hamilton (State Library of Louisiana), Robert Lipscomb (Harrison County Library, MS), Kate Nevins (SOLINET), MaryEllin Santiago (Gulf Coast Libraries Project), Diantha Schull (Americans for Libraries Council), Sharman Smith (Mississippi Library Commission), Bernard Vavrek (Clarion University of Pennsylvania), and C. David Warren (Richland County Public Library, SC). Elizabeth E. Bingham (Bingham and Associates) served as consultant to the planning taskforce.

SUMMARY OF SUMMIT PRESENTATIONS

Day 1: Libraries Transforming Communities, Communities Transforming Libraries

The first day of the Summit focused on the theme “Libraries Transforming Communities, Communities Transforming Libraries.” MaryEllin Santiago, Manager of the Gulf Coast Libraries Project, welcomed participant teams from the 14 affected communities in Louisiana and Mississippi. She then turned the program over to Jill Nishi, Program Manager of the U.S. Libraries Initiative at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Nishi reviewed the process that the Foundation used to identify needs and develop a program to provide support for the libraries affected by the storms. She met and held discussions with many concerned groups, and began discussions with SOLINET at the 2006 ALA Midwinter Conference. These discussions led to a grant to SOLINET in August 2006, to fund a three-year project to ensure that library and public access computing services remain available and accessible to residents and communities in hurricane-impacted areas. She outlined the expectations of the Foundation for establishing and maintaining quality library services to the communities. She also reiterated the Foundation’s commitment to replace all library public access computers that were lost during the storms. She stressed the importance of not just rebuilding but using the planning process as a way to improve library services to the residents of the coastal communities.

Kate Nevins, Executive Director of SOLINET, thanked Jill and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their commitment to not only replacing computers but also providing temporary

and mobile libraries, including staff, for the affected areas. She then introduced Nancy Tessman, Director of the Salt Lake City Public Library, *Library Journal* Library of the Year in 2006.

Impact: How Libraries Create Community

Nancy Tessman told the Salt Lake City story. She explained that she could not compare the Salt Lake City Public Library (SLCPL) transformation with the transformation underway in Gulf Coast public libraries, but she said that many of the principles are the same. The SLCPL has established itself as the center of town, the community-gathering place. The city block it occupies, now called Library Square, is where citizens practice democracy. It serves as the “cultural warehouse” for Salt Lake City and Utah, a community of readers, a place where people interact with information materials and each other. The Library is a crucial center for the city, the agency to start and sustain a celebration of diversity. The SLCPL provides the full array of traditional and modern library services. The new building features creative displays of materials, wonderful physical spaces, and a glorious collection of settings for library use by adults and children. “One thing we’re proud of is that this Library is built for people of all ages,” says Tessman. She showed a video of the many innovative things that were incorporated into the design and function of the Library building and how the building reflects input from members of the community. She then introduced Mary Ann Villareal, President of the SLCPL Board.

Dr. Villareal spoke about how much the SLCPL means to her and how committed the community is to fulfilling the mission of the Library. She spoke of the importance of communication, cooperation and sensitivity during the planning process. The library is a place that represents different things to different people. Reaching out and listening to the many voices of the community is an important part of libraries. Increasing awareness of ways community members can contribute and showing how different partnerships can work are vital to the success of the library. Villareal talked about how the library is a “tradition of a public voice and a place of dialog, an investment in which we become.”

To conclude the session, Tessman talked about leading from every position, not only by building but by talking. She cautioned the audience to pay attention to the young people. You have to “learn to work and play well with others.” In addition, “be sure not to forget to celebrate small victories.” She closed by saying that “libraries represent liberty and justice for all.”

The Library as a Public Space and Social Asset

Fred Kent, President of the Project for Public Spaces, described ways in which public spaces influence and shape communities. He talked about the importance of creating destinations within a community and explained the “rule of ten” by asking the audience to identify ten destinations within their communities and to look for commonalities and ways that these destinations work together. He then discussed placemaking, which is turning a neighborhood, town, or city from a place you can’t wait to get through to one you never want to leave. It is creating a place for everybody, a place people care about and where they want to be. Placemaking is the process of giving space a story that is shared by many. Through photographs of various communities and libraries, he illustrated the power of using the library destination as a way to energize the community. Kent told stories and used examples of ways public markets, transportation stops,

public squares and green space can help define areas and contribute to a sense of community. Defining the library space is an important component in the rebuilding process. Participation of the community in this planning process is critical to success. Kent identified potential partners for Gulf Coast libraries in the rebuilding effort. He ended by sharing the following eleven principles of creating great places:

1. The community is the expert.
2. You are creating a place, not just a design.
3. You can't do it alone.
4. They always say it can't be done.
5. You can see a lot just by observing.
6. Develop a placemaking vision.
7. Form supports function.
8. Use the power of 10 and triangulation.
9. Start with the petunias.
10. Money is not the issue.
11. You are never finished.

The Library as an Economic and Educational Asset

Dr. John C. Bertot, Professor of Information Studies and Associate Director of the Information Institute at the College of Information, Florida State University, explained and illustrated how libraries create an economic impact on communities. He described the fundamentals of economic impact and value determination, and discussed the library's contribution to education, literacy, general and lifelong learning, information and technology literacy, and e-government. Bertot talked about the 17,000 public libraries in the United States and how the resources needed to maintain their collections and the facilities impact the local, regional, and national economies. Total expenditure for materials in public libraries in 2003 was \$1,154,075,943. "That's a lot of money," said Bertot. In addition, one should not forget that the technologies and materials in libraries support jobs and industries. Libraries can revitalize neighborhoods, like the Harold Washington Library has helped revitalize downtown Chicago.

There are multiple approaches to measuring the economic impact of libraries, to estimating market values and contingent value determination. Bertot explained how each approach makes different assumptions and determines a "dollar-equivalent" value for library service, the library as a whole, and the overall impact of libraries. This can be looked at from a state, regional, or national perspective.

One approach, contingent valuation, is an economic method used to assess the benefits of non-priced goods and services (such as libraries or specific library services) by examining the implications of not having the goods or services. Contingent valuation can be used to establish the value of a particular service – for example, determining the value of a library's technology training program, analyzing costs/benefits for a journal or book collection, or determining the value of a library system to the surrounding community. He cited examples of where this has been done in public libraries in Florida, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina. Bertot explained how to compute the value of technology classes, collections, and equipment provided by libraries in

dollars. He advocated describing the return on investment in libraries to policymakers. He gave specific examples and provided formulas that the audience could apply in their own communities.

Economic impact studies range in approach and make a number of assumptions, but do offer support of the economic benefits of public libraries to users, communities, and states. Libraries planning to look at return-on-investment data need to look at a range of situational factors that can affect the results. There are limitations in regard to quantifiable data on institutions, programs, and services, but libraries must be credible and demonstrate that they are just as important as the local Wal-Mart to the economy of the community. Economic impact and educational impact go hand-in-hand and there need to be links between the two.

The Public Library as Community Asset: Panel Discussion

This session was facilitated by Leslie Burger. Panelists included Nancy Tessman, Fred Kent, and John Bertot.

Members of the audience asked questions and told their stories of survival and recovery in the aftermath of the storms. The panelists agreed that the libraries' recovery efforts are models for libraries elsewhere. Libraries in the affected communities invented solutions on the fly to supply vital services to their communities. Communities not directly hit by the storms were also affected as they worked to provide services and support to people from the hurricane-impacted areas.

The participants and the panel agreed that it is important to be proactive in telling the government and community about what libraries did and are continuing to do to bring their communities back. The library is an asset to the community and an essential service that must be widely recognized. Community partnerships and collaborations can and should begin with the library. Librarians should not wait to be invited to sit at the table -- they should make sure their needs and stories are heard. Sharman Smith, Executive Director of the Mississippi Library Commission, said, "This is a real opportunity to measure the impact of libraries during a disaster. Libraries are providing a pivotal role in the recovery effort that might not have anything to do with books, but through technology, or just being there to listen." Libraries can create a sense of normalcy for communities. Jeannie Ripoll, Director of the Long Beach Municipal Public Library in Mississippi, told the story of a woman who came to the temporary library and said, "It was the first time that she felt things were getting back to normal because there was a library."

Keynote Presentation: Have a Heart

Dr. Eugenie Prime engaged the audience with a presentation on the library as the heart of the community. She was a cheerleader for the affected Gulf Coast libraries. She entertained and charmed the audience when she talked about the 5 C's.

1. **Conceptualize** why-nots and what-ifs.
2. **Crash** the party and look like a legitimate guest.
3. **Create** and allow yourself to be creative.
4. **Collaborate** in everything.

5. **Capture** ideas, thoughts and materials.

She assured the audience that they would be able to do anything if they followed the C's. She said that the body must have a heart; the heart pumps and infuses life. Likewise, the library infuses life into a community. This is the role of libraries in recreating and rebuilding communities.

Day 2: Public Libraries of Today and for Tomorrow

Trends in Public Perceptions and Use

Diantha Dow Schull, President of the Americans for Libraries Council, presented the results of a nation-wide study, *Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public and Leadership Attitudes about Libraries in the 21st Century*. She referred to questions being asked by some about the relevancy and need for public libraries with the availability of the Internet. How can libraries command priority in the competition for public dollars? What place do Americans see for libraries in the 21st century? Is the public library rooted in the past or is it essential as a tool for equity, opportunity, and community development in the future? The study, *Long Overdue*, explores the position of public libraries today in the minds of not only library users, but also people who run libraries and those who provide oversight and funding.

The study's methodology involved telephone surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The complete survey results appear in the published study. Schull discussed some of the results and presented questions for the audience to explore as they begin to rebuild their libraries.

The study found that the public's view of libraries includes the following:

1. Libraries are perceived as valued, well-run institutions.
2. For most Americans, traditional library services remain a high priority.
3. The public believes that computers and Internet access are important, too.
4. Different groups in the community see libraries through different lenses.

Examples from various communities were described and could be used to envision changes in the range of Gulf Coast library services as they plan to rebuild. Telling stories in the community about what libraries do and enlisting support through partnerships and collaborations are important. Creative and forward-thinking involvement of library advocates is imperative to the rebuilding effort. As the Gulf Coast rebuilds their communities, libraries can be the vital connection to make things happen.

Trends in Technology in Public Libraries

Steve Cisler, a librarian and technology expert, reviewed ways that technology can enhance and improve the library landscape. He discussed the barriers that impede even distribution of library technology. This includes the library's budget, the economy, and the priorities of the people, local authorities, and library administration. Cisler said, "We must remember that technology is not a linear path from low tech to successful high tech spread of tools, software and services."

Categories of technology that he discussed were in-building services for the public; serving the public not actually within the building; youth services; back-end functions such as inventory, collection development, security, and circulation; and projects for interlibrary cooperation and resource-sharing. Cisler also discussed how libraries react to other technologies introduced into the library that can affect existing library services.

Some of the problems and challenges of technology in libraries include changing media, public computers, and intellectual property. Cisler cited examples and discussed specific types of computers and media that have been developed over the past 20 years. He reiterated that we can't forecast what will be the next big change, but spoke about the iPod-equivalent for reading and the "One Laptop per Child" concept.

Cisler gave examples of wireless hotspots in airports and how comfort level and noise play an important role in wireless environments. In comparison, the "library attempts to be a guardian of privacy, tries to provide an experience that addresses users' needs in a comfortable, quiet setting, and most of the staff is there to help."

Demographic and Economic Trends in Louisiana and Mississippi

Dr. Loren C. Scott, Professor Emeritus of Economics at Louisiana State University, talked about major construction ahead on the Gulf Coast. He cited that over 207,576 houses were rendered uninhabitable in New Orleans. He described the impact of issues related to insurance and the differences between recovery initiatives in Louisiana and Mississippi. Projected expenses for some major community construction projects ahead include:

- \$963 million for a new 6-lane twin span bridge over Ponchartrain
- \$660 million to widen the Huey P. Long Bridge
- \$314.9 million for expansion of the New Orleans Convention Center
- \$1.2 billion for debris removal
- \$1.2 billion for US Army Corps flood control projects
- \$11 billion in federal funds to rebuild homes
- \$282 million for expansion of the World War II D-day Museum in New Orleans
- \$3.2 billion for two large refinery projects.

Scott projects that re-population will proceed slowly. A significant percentage will choose not to return. For those who have or will return, they face significant problems in getting homes repaired. Utility rates are affected by levels of population. For example, Entergy New Orleans serves only the New Orleans area. Since the customer base is smaller, the cost of providing energy to the city is spread over fewer customers.

Lake Charles, on the other hand, has experienced growth since the hurricanes. The area has seen an increase of more than 2,900 jobs over 2005-06. There is also a 35% increase in construction jobs, representing more than 3,500 jobs in the Lake Charles area. All of the Lake Charles public schools and hospitals are open. Although Lake Charles lost two casinos, all but three of its hotels have re-opened. The Airport has a full commercial schedule.

In Biloxi-Gulfport, the casino industry is key to the area's recovery. Eleven of the casinos have re-opened and another four are planned. Mississippi has agreed to allow the casinos to build inland. Scott predicts that this expansion will make the area "the Las Vegas of the South." He also talked about the return of manufacturing and shipping as it relates to economic recovery. By mid-November, all hospitals and public schools in Biloxi-Gulfport had re-opened.

In Pascagoula, Scott described the impact of damage to a major employer, Ingalls, which sustained \$1 billion in damages and employed 16,500 people pre-Katrina. The port of Pascagoula is at 95% of pre-Katrina capacity.

There is much work to be done. Recovery requires housing and basic services. When these issues are addressed, there will be growth.

Envisioning Public Libraries of the Future

Leslie Burger and Pamela Pridgen, Director of the Library of Hattiesburg (Mississippi), described ways to garner community support and design service-oriented libraries.

Burger talked about funding, and about libraries as "destinations of choice." She reiterated that you must be passionate, share passion, engage people in the community, listen, be willing to talk, take risks, and use new practices that challenge the status quo. She said, "You must build a culture that takes risks." Burger also said that you must "Keep everlastingly at it and never give up!" These are principles she applied to planning the library of the future in Princeton.

Pridgen showcased the new Library of Hattiesburg. She described how they used pieces from the old structure in the design. She also described soliciting funds from any and everyone. Pridgen discussed "unlikely partners," and how these partnerships helped establish new and additional ones. She recommended that the library develop a story and tell everyone, that librarians go outside traditional library circles, get people involved, and be open to suggestions from everyone. In addition, the Library celebrated everything during the process of rebuilding. As a result, the Library is central to the Hattiesburg community and has become a destination for tourists. Pridgen's library of the future is:

- Born of community vision.
- Responsive to community need.
- Aligned with community partners.
- Focused on customer service as a priority.
- Grounded in convenience and comfort.
- Flexible and responsive to change.
- A fun, warm, and welcoming environment.

Building Back Better

Raymond Santiago, Director of the Miami-Dade Public Library System (Florida), spoke about how Hurricane Andrew devastated his library system and how he has been able to use the disaster as a pivot point to rebuild and secure additional funding. The Miami-Dade Public

Library is an example of how libraries can not only rebuild, but rebuild better. Santiago shared his views on building libraries, showing pictures, floor plans, and furniture designs. He also gave insight into getting things done under adverse conditions.

Rebuilding Public Libraries in the Context of Louisiana and Mississippi

Andy Kopplin, Executive Director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA), and Leland Speed, Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority, shared their recommendations for libraries as they begin to rebuild.

Kopplin's presentation illustrated the programs of the LRA. He discussed housing, jobs, and the Nexus planning process. He talked of the importance of cooperation and planning within the context of community. He described neighborhood planning initiatives and shared facilities. Kopplin provided a framework for discussion for communities in Louisiana as they continue to rebuild.

Speed talked about recovery in Mississippi. He provided the following recommendations to assist libraries in making their case:

- Have the facts.
- Get the right team.
- Deal with reality.
- Focus on what you have, not only in what you need.

Speed also talked about downtowns and how the "Mayberry concept" can work. Downtown development usually follows downtown living, with coffee shops and book stores. Libraries can be part of that development and provide valuable resources to the community on developing small businesses.

Some of the questions and answers for libraries as they plan include:

- What is the library uniquely positioned to do?
- Are there small business development opportunities?
- Can the library use matching funding formulas?
- Are block grants possible?
- Highlight how libraries can make neighborhoods come to life.
- Place the library in the county or parish recovery plan.
- State the library's case and state it well.

Design Principles for Public Libraries

Steven Binger, Concordia Architecture and Planning, and Cynthia Nikitin, Project for Public Spaces, led participants in small group discussions to define design principles for libraries.

Day 3: Where to Go from Here?

MaryEllin Santiago described in detail the process for upcoming activities in the Gulf Coast Libraries Project, including planning for and delivery of temporary library facilities. She described the planning grants that are available to libraries, to assist in developing and implementing library building programs, and reiterated that these planning grants are not competitive. State workshops in the spring of 2007 will provide further assistance in planning and grant applications for participating library systems.

Santiago reminded the participants to:

- *Think* about what was learned from the Summit
- *Share* what was learned
- *Evaluate* what was learned, and
- *Act* on what has been learned.

She recommended that participants look over *The Engaged Library* and consider how this process can be used to support community-wide planning for library rebuilding.

Closing

In closing, Kate Nevins talked about how libraries rise to the occasion. She quoted Teddy Roosevelt – “Far and away, the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing” – and reminded participants of the value of being and staying connected, because “no library is an island.”