Meeting of the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont
Topic: Recommendations and Report Writing
Friday, September 22, 2023, 9:03am to 3:06pm

Minutes

Working Group members present: Meg Allison, Maria Avery, Jeannette Bair, Catherine Delneo, Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup, Andy Kolovos, Kelly McCagg, Karen McCalla, Susan O'Connell, Wendy Sharkey

Department of Libraries Staff Members Present: Thomas McMurdo, Janette Shaffer, Josh Muse, April Shaw, Lauren Kelley, Karen Gravlin, Jonathan Clark, Lilly Talbert, Kevin Unrath, Gina Hruban, Lucie Fortier

Guests present:
Judah Hamer, Constructive Disruption
Stephanie Chase, Constructive Disruption
Xusana Davis, Executive Director, State of Vermont Office of Racial Equity
Kathleen Hoyne, Director, Cabot Public Library
Michael Hibben, Director, Pierson Library
Mary Danko, Director, Fletcher Free Library
Jennie Rozycki; Director, John G. McCullough Free Library
Oceana Wilson, VLA President, Dean of the Library, Bennington College

Link to Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdPzcOpCUiI

I. Call to Order [00:00:08]
Catherine Delneo called the meeting to order at 9:03am.
A roll call of the Working Group members was followed by greetings of Department of Libraries staff and guests in attendance.

As a reminder to the public and Working group members, the Working Group website can be found here: https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/initiatives-and-projects/working-group-status-libraries-vermont
Written comments can be found at: https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/initiatives-and-projects/working-group-status-libraries-vermont/written-comments-working

II. Approval of Minutes [00:07:24]
Explanatory document: August 18, 2023 Draft Minutes
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/documents/2023_08_18_WorkingGroupMinutes_Draft.pdf
The Chair requested that the minutes be revised to include the draft recommendations document merged with minutes under appropriate agenda items.
Wendy Sharkey made a motion to approve the minutes as written with the suggested revision. Susan O'Connell seconded the motion. Catherine Delneo called for a vote to approve the minutes with the stated revision. Seven voted in favor, the motion passed.

Karen McCalla and Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup abstained from voting as they were not present at the August 18th meeting.

III. General Public Comment [00:16:25]
Catherine Delneo called for public comment; there was no public comment.

X. Report Writing Update [00:20:40]
The chair used the time available to begin share an update on the Working Group report writing and thanked the Working Group members for their report writing contributions. All draft chapters have been received from Working Group members.

The data and information from the Department of Libraries' reports presented at the meetings of the Working Group are being merged with the draft chapters submitted by the Working Group members.

The Department anticipates that it will take a month to format the document, so is aiming to complete compiling chapters by October 1st.

IV. Staffing & Salaries Survey presentation by Constructive Disruption [00:25:15]
Catherine Delneo welcomed the guests and prefaced their presentation by sharing that the survey was funded with appropriation to the Working Group, which had heard from the library community that a Staffing & Salaries Survey of public libraries was needed.

Catherine reminded all present that this survey was not the work of the Department of Libraries, and the Department will not conduct this type of survey moving forward as it is outside of the Department's regular scope of work, capacity, and expertise.

Judah Hamer and Stephanie Chase from Constructive Disruption shared their presentation.

Supporting document:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/InitiativesProjects/LibraryWorkingGroup/WorkingGroup_SalarySurvey/VT%20Working%20Group%2C%20Salary%20and%20Compensation%20Analysis%20overview%2C%209-22-23%2C%20updated.pdf
Public Library Compensation and Salary Survey Analysis document:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/InitiativesProjects/LibraryWorkingGroup/WorkingGroup_SalarySurvey/VT%20Public%20Library%20Compensation%20and%20Salary%20Survey%2C%209-20-23.pdf

The group hear that information on page 39 explains why counties were grouped into regions to summarize the data: "*While we have the county data for the libraries that are represented in the survey, a county-by-county would be at odds with keeping confidential the information provided by respondents. We provide here a regional approach, to lend insight into differences in wages that may exist in relation to geographic factors.*"

The group heard more information about municipal and incorporated library employee benefits and that there's no obligation in small libraries to provide health benefits to that employee.

The Chair asked for questions or comments from the Working Group and then from community members present at the meeting.

Judah Hamer responded to a question about unionized workers, explaining that there were no questions on that topic included in the survey.

In discussing worker's wages, Judah Hamer commented that the basic wage should be thought of as a floor, not a ceiling. You would want people to have more than the basic wage to meet the most basic needs, because that doesn't even provide a safety net for saving.

The group discussed the low wages reported by public libraries and the trend of the feminization of library work and the stagnation of the wages and the predominance low wage labor that requires a master's degree in addition to the reliance on volunteers.

The chair thanked Constructive Disruption consultants for their time and their thorough and detailed report.

V. Working Group Recommendations: Staffing and Salaries [02:31:15]

The chair asked the group to discuss recommendations for the Staffing and Salaries topic.

The group discussed the possibility of recommending to the Department the addition of tiered standards of staffing and compensation in the Standards and highlighting the need to examine solutions and about other possibilities non-profit libraries could use to group together and purchase benefits for employees at a lower rate through economies of scale in the report.

The group discussed the idea of recommending to the legislature that it return to the broader goal of decoupling healthcare from employment, and making sure all Vermonters have access to healthcare, regardless of employment status.

The topic of equalizing funding to public libraries across the state similar to how the state equalized funds per pupil years ago was raised, as was the idea of requesting "state aid" to public libraries. The challenging economic situation in the state and nationally with projections of decreased revenue was discussed.

The chair encouraged the group towards actionable items including no cost or low cost recommendations and prioritizing things that will make the biggest impact. The chair suggested that the group prioritize no or low recommendations and then to put all its recommendations with costs associated with them in ranked order.

The group considered this wording for a recommendation: *As state revenue allows, consider increasing funding to the Department of Libraries to support equity-based state grants to public libraries, similar to funding provided by 42 out of 50 state library administrative agencies.*

VI. Lunch Break (12:24pm-1:00pm)

VII. Presentation of Draft Legislation on Intellectual Freedom - John Chrastka, Every Library [00:00:28]
John Chrastka shared a presentation of draft legislation specific to Vermont's public libraries on intellectual freedom legislation.
Supporting document:
https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/InitiativesProjects/LibraryWorkingGroup/Supporting/Framework%20for%20Vermont%20_Libraries%20for%20All_%20Act%20-%2030%20August%202023.docx.pdf

The chair shared that the Working Group's options included: include this draft legislation in the body of its report, include this draft as an example within the appendix of its report, or opt to do nothing.

The chair asked for questions and comments.

The group heard that when proposing legislation, it is a good idea to include a statement of legislative intent so that the purpose of the proposed legislation is really clear even if the language of the bill changes through the legislative process.

The chair thanked John Chrastka for his presentation.

VIII. Working Group Recommendations: Intellectual Freedom [00:38:48]
All seven members of the Working Group present voiced support for including the draft legislation in the appendix of the report.

IX. Break (2:02pm-2:15pm)

X. Recommendations and Report Writing [01:14:34]
The chair shared the status of the report writing including sharing an outline of the report sections on the screen.

The group discussed how to meet the report deadline of November 1 and also let the Working Group members review the final report before submitting to the legislature.

The group determined that the draft chapters would be shared via email with the group members, who would then reply with their comments on specific chapters to the chair and other department staff who are formatting the report.

The group discussed the audience of the report, which in addition to the Legislature includes members of the library community and library users.

XI. Schedule Early October Meeting on Report Writing [01:56:28]
The chair proposed holding a Working Group meeting on Friday, October 13th to go over the chapters together and discuss suggestions for minor revisions.

The group will also meet on Friday, November 17th to share an overview of the report with the library community.

XII. Adjourn (3:06pm)
The chair adjourned the meeting.