

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
The regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
October 28, 2024
at William Hall Library
Program Room, Lower Level
1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905

Members Attending: Aaron Coutu, John Bucci, Jessica David, Melody Drnach (Chair), Laura Kohl, Christopher La Roux, Doug Norris, Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: Kenneth Findlay, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Monica Nazareth-Dzialo, Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran

Present from the Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS): Karen Andrews, Nicolette Baffoni, Karen Mellor

Guests: None

Materials Distributed: None

I. WELCOME

Ms. Drnach called the meeting to order at 4:05 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES from the September 16, 2024, meeting

Moved By: Mr. Coutu

Seconded By: Ms. Space

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE-CHAIR

Ms. Drnach welcomed members and thanked Mr. Coutu for chairing the September meeting.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

i. Grant in Aid (GIA), Public Library Annual Survey

All but 3 libraries have completed the public library annual survey. No maintenance of effort (MOE) or standard non-compliance issues were noted, with the potential exception of Central Falls.

RI General Treasurer James Diossa is the chair of the Board of Trustees of the Adams Public Library in Central Falls. Ms. Mellor met with Treasurer Diossa, who is interested in helping the library rebuild and meet standards of service to better serve the community. The library has had funding challenges since the city filed for bankruptcy in 2011; funding has still not been restored to the pre-bankruptcy level. The current interim director is leaving at the end of December; no other librarian is on staff. At the request of the Treasurer, OLIS is convening a group of librarians to potentially serve as a library advisory group to the Central Falls Board

of Trustees and assist them in their efforts to revitalize the library. Ms. Mellor will continue to provide Central Falls library updates.

ii. Field Service Visits

OLIS' professional staff have visited almost all public libraries. The visits provide insight into issues facing libraries and allows OLIS to better serve them.

iii. Quarterly Public Library Director Forum

A quarterly Public Library Director Forum coordinated by OLIS was held this morning. Forum meeting agendas include broad questions to initiate conversations. Today's discussion was about civic engagement. The upcoming presidential election and leading events were addressed in relation to libraries providing and directing patrons to accurate unbiased information in a non-partisan fashion. Information literacy related to librarians' personal, political, and professional beliefs, building relationships with municipal government through candidate forums, and potential voter education through the League of Women Voters was discussed. East Providence Public Library has created a webpage of election resources. A RI Secretary of State (SOS) representative spoke at the September forum. The SOS website has expansive election-related resources.

Ms. Mellor noted that libraries sought guidance from OLIS on the provision of election information; sometimes less experienced library staff want to advocate for specific political positions while the role of the library is to present a broad range of information not informed by their own perspective and be neutral to the extent possible. Mr. Coutu noted that libraries have always faced neutrality issues, but that times are different. Ms. Space noted that it will be helpful for library directors to meet in person in a less formal environment to openly discuss current issues facing libraries. OLIS will shift its December Public Library Directors meeting from an online to an in-person event with time after the meeting for an informal Directors-only networking meeting.

Ms. David is a Common Cause board member and advised that the board is concerned about the election and its aftermath and could serve as a conversational partner for libraries. Ms. David inquired whether URI could be a conversational partner through their 'Courageous Conversations' initiative.

Mr. Norris noted that conversations should take place because some people are afraid to communicate and allow others to dominate conversations, and that people are relying on opinions rather than facts. Ms. Drnach recommended OLIS, and the board, be well prepared and well informed with facts, and construct conversations about how libraries could be impacted. Ms. Wodehouse inquired if post-election programs should be planned due to outcome challenges. Mr. Bucci noted there is no real way to plan for election outcomes.

Ms. Baffoni reported that Danielle Margarida, Youth Services Coordinator, is focused on non-political community building activities, and that many libraries have built non-political community relationships.

iv. RI Department of Education (RIDE) Literacy Program

OLIS is working with RIDE on a Comprehensive Literacy grant focused on the science of reading and structured literacy, a phonics approach to learning how to read. Eight libraries will receive book kits for new readers: East Providence, Greenville, Newport, North Kingstown, West Warwick, Woonsocket, Knight Memorial in Providence and South Providence. Decoding Dyslexia RI will help libraries with collection integration and provide community engagement support.

v. Continuing Education (CE) (Ms. Baffoni)

OLIS purchased an allotment of Library Journal courses including Media Training for Library Leaders, Community Co-Design, Customer Service for Front-Line Staff, Budget Management Fundamentals, Foundations of Integrating Artificial Intelligence in Libraries, Creating Acceptable and Neuroinclusive Libraries, Realizing a Community-Centered Library: Strategies for Leaders, Science of Kindness: Reimagining People Management, Data Fluency Foundations, and Library Management Training. The programs will run this Fall and next Spring and will be open to all library staff on a first-come first-served basis until OLIS uses its course allotment.

B. Report from Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA)

Ms. Mellor attended the annual COSLA meeting in Huntsville, AL, on October 21-24. Attending were 40 chiefs from across the country and US territories.

i. National Library Service (NLS)

The National Library Service (NLS), a Library of Congress agency, provides materials and equipment for OLIS' Talking Books Library (TBL) for the blind and print-disabled. NLS instituted a policy this summer requiring parental permission for new and current users under 18 who are enrolled or wish to enroll in the service. Effective as of October 1, 2024, parental permission must be secured by January 1, 2025, for any members who are minors. Three states (Connecticut, Montana, and Vermont) have existing laws that allow minors to receive a library card without parental permission and the new policy violates those states' laws. The states are working with the federal government on the issue. OLIS implemented the policy because at this point no RI law governs the age requirement for acquiring a library card. TBL currently has 14 underage patrons and will seek parental permission for policy compliance. The age for Rhode Islanders to receive an Ocean State Libraries (OSL) library card without parental permission is 13.

ii. COSLA Library Data Thinktank, Measuring Reading Programs Impact

The thinktank is an offshoot of the 'Measures That Matter' initiative that identified measurable data to help define the value of libraries. The group is seeking to study the impact of reading programs on literacy, especially early and childhood literacy. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) conducted a 2023 literature survey titled *Research on Motivation, Literacy, and Reading Development: A Review of Best Practices*, and discovered little information on the subject. Ms. Space noted the Providence School Department

completed a past study, funded by the United Way, that measured student baseline reading skills from Spring to Fall and the impact of the Summer Reading Program on participants.

Because little data is available, the thinktank will review pathways to secure it. OLIS is considering revising its Summer Reading Program with a greater focus on reading skills. Ms. Drnach inquired about initiating conversations with RIDE about tracking school literacy. Members discussed potential and prior public library programs and resources to build and measure children's reading skills. Ms. Mellor noted that a statewide coordinated effort of libraries and schools is necessary to improve childhood literacy, though libraries are not positioned to teach or measure reading skills but are vital partners in supporting reading initiatives.

iii. Voices for Libraries

COSLA will run a National Library Legislative Day, similar to ALA's discontinued event, in early March 2025 in Washington, titled 'Voices for Libraries'. COSLA has partnered with ALA on the event in the past and has invited ALA to participate in this initiative.

C. Museum and Library Services Act Reauthorization (MLSA)

Ms. Mellor is working on the MLSA reauthorization with COSLA and the ALA's Committee on Legislation Reauthorization sub-committee. The committee is contacting library organizations to develop a report to assist Senator Jack Reed's office with changes the library community would like to see in the legislation. The current MLSA, which includes the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), expires in September 2025.

D. American Library Association (ALA) & Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Updates

The ALA executive director position is vacant. Applicants are being sought for this and the Washington Office of Public Policy and Advocacy director position. Leslie Berger is ALA's Interim Executive Director.

The IMLS Director position is vacant. Ms. Cyndee Landrum, Deputy Director for Library Services, is the Acting Director but her position is time-limited. She will be stepping down and replaced by the Deputy Director of Museum Services at IMLS but reinstated in January after the presidential inauguration.

E. Ms. Space & Ms. David, Award & Recognition

Ms. Space received the Page Turner award from the RI Center for the Book for her contributions to libraries and literacy.

Ms. David received recognition in the Providence Journal for the Community Investment Fund. The Community Investment Fund is a RI investment fund that provides community benefits and investment financial return.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Federal & State Legislative Updates (OLIS website [updates](#))

No federal or state legislation was discussed.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. Wodehouse

Ms. Wodehouse recommends a new book, *All the Books*, by RI authors, Hayley Rocco and John Rocco. The Providence Athenaeum was the inspiration for the book.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Public Library Minimum Standards: Updates (Ms. Mellor)

Updated standards language will be shared with the Public Library Minimum Standards Committee and the Board before the next LBRI meeting. Meetings will then be convened across the state to gather input from the library community. After a final draft is developed and approved by the Board, the regulatory process will proceed. The standards will be reframed with 5 categories, governance, policies, facilities, personnel and standards. The governance section will include trustee information, including meeting, training, and education requirements. Itemized information about specific law adherence will be included in the revision, along with strengthened personnel requirements.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Library Futures

Ms. Mellor recommended a convening about library futures and opened a discussion about making libraries resilient and responsive to evolving public needs. National library organizations are also convening on the topic. Discussion topics/subjects and library trend recommendations were requested. Ms. Wodehouse recommended conversations about facilities. Ms. David suggested more library funding. Ms. Space discussed school involvement to include RIDE's all-course network. Mr. Norris recommended more adult education programming.

A statewide program/project could leverage Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds to support this initiative. Board members noted that society's infrastructure has degraded, and conversations should commence about the library's place in the community, in terms of supporting societal interactions and individual learning and cultural advancement.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for November 25, 2024, from 4-5:30pm, at William Hall Library, 1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905. Members will be notified of date or venue changes.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Ms. David

Seconded By: Mr. Bucci

The meeting adjourned at 5: 32 p.m.