Connecticut Library Association Regional Town Hall Meetings

Overview
Initiated by the CLA Legislative Committee, town-hall style meetings were held in each of the six regions from September 2019-November 2019. The meetings were scheduled with the help of the six CLA Region Representatives who coordinated with the host library and publicized the events to their region members. All members of the library community including staff from academic, public and school libraries, Friends of the Library and Trustees were invited to participate. In total, approximately 70 members of the Connecticut library community participated. There was cross-over participation in some regions as participants were encouraged to attend any meeting that was convenient whether or not it was in their region. CLA Legislative Co-Chair, Beth Crowley facilitated the discussion and members of the current CLA Executive Committee were in attendance at each meeting.

Goals
The main goals of the meetings were to:
1. provide a forum within each CLA region where library community members could conveniently gather to share concerns with CLA Leadership.
2. discover issues of importance to the CT Library community to help inform and develop the CLA Legislative Agenda.
3. uncover reasons for the stagnation in membership in CLA and ways the Association can better serve its members.
4. offer current feedback from the Library Community to the new State Librarian

Major Findings
Twelve hours of discussion and over 50 pages of notes taken. While there were some differences in concerns based on the characteristics of a particular geographical location, many of the issues were consistent across all regions. The following are the top concerns that were raised by members of all regions.

Connecticut State Library

- **DeliverIt**
  - The return of the interlibrary loan delivery system to a more consistent and reliable service was the top concern among all regions.
  - Participants felt this was an extremely important, long-standing provision that brought added value to their patrons and saved their libraries money in purchasing and interlibrary loan costs. Now they are seeing decreases in circulation and increases in costs and patron dissatisfaction.
  - Participants said they find it difficult to relate to the more aspirational work of the CSL, such as EXCITE, when the fundamentals of library service are not working.
  - Concerns were we expressed about the quality of the communication and customer service provided by the CSL to libraries regarding this issue. Participants hope this will improve in the future and the tone will be more collaborative and customer-friendly.
While there was disagreement about whether the CSL should bear sole financial responsibility for DeliverIt, most hoped this would be a service the CSL would continue to provide or manage as a vendor-provided service. Many think it would be ideal for libraries in Connecticut to become part of one state-wide library system rather than broken up into three consortiums and stand-alone libraries.

- **BorrowIT**
  - While not a wide-spread concern, there was some discussion of the BorrowIt reimbursement.
  - Libraries would like to have their transit ILL’s to be counted towards their out-of-town borrows.
  - A concern was raised that the program can create disparity when a well-funded library is better able to meet the needs of a neighboring town. Such a library will receive more BorrowIt funding further adding to the divide.

- **RequestIT/FindIT**
  - Holdings need to be updated more frequently.
  - FindIT is “clunky” so libraries are not using it.

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- **Membership**
  - Location of events can be a deterrent for members in some of the more remote regions. Region 1 participants indicated that a drive of more than 90 minutes was problematic and that the Mystic Conference Location is too far. Region 3 shared similar views about traveling particularly with the loss of the WLSC. Participants suggested holding events within regions and rotating meetings around the state or providing a remote access option.
  - Part-Time employees have difficulty getting to professional development events due to their work/home schedules. Would like training options that could be done from home or within their libraries on work time such as webinars.
  - Dues might be prohibitive for lower paid employees.
  - Participants would like more training options for support staff or non-librarian staff members. Many don’t feel CLA membership is for them.
  - Some feel CLA is too public library focused.
  - It was expressed that membership might be more appealing if there was a personalized invitation to join with a message about “Why CLA Needs Me.”
  - Libraries could provide prospects to CLA when hiring new employees.
o When people have joined they have not received follow up messages from CLA or Committees they have indicated an interest in.

o Better marketing, messaging and publicity including a website that is easier to navigate were all suggested as ways of raising awareness of what CLA does. Also there needs to be more clarity on what the Sections do.

o Too much overlap between CLA/CLC/CSL trainings. Many often don’t know who the sponsoring organization is. Already belong to CLC as a library and can attend roundtables and trainings for no or little cost.

o Annual conference content has been lacking in credentialed, professional content and it has been difficult to incite staff to go.

o Too many Fall workshops – maybe stagger offerings each year?

- **Professional Development Needs**
  - Human Resources trainings for small, rural and association libraries.
  - Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
  - Dealing with First Amendment Audits
  - Mental health issues
  - Workplace safety
  - Customer Service
  - Excel
  - Records retention
  - Best Practices Document

- **Advocacy & Legislative Agenda**
  - Misunderstanding that the lobbyists aren’t actually doing the lobbying.
  - Need simplified talking points and CLA’s official responses to big issues
  - Would like strategies for effectively interacting with Legislators
  - Important issues:
    - Macmillan - eBooks
    - Net Neutrality
    - Healthcare plans for association libraries
    - Need a Media Specialist in each school
    - Defining Hate Speech
    - CLC funding