

Standards for Oregon Public Libraries (2013 Revision)

Executive Summary

Overview

The Public Library Division (PLD) has been charged with reviewing the Standards for Oregon Public Libraries since the early 1990s. Typically, the Division has reviewed only segments of the Standards each year. This year, however, the PLD Executive Board determined a full review was needed due to the rapidly changing library landscape.

Methodology

The PLD Executive Board sent out an invitation to all Oregon public libraries in September 2012 to participate in the review and revision of the current Standards. Almost 20 library employees from diverse libraries and backgrounds joined the PLD Board to form the PLD Standards Committee. The Committee served as an advisory group to the PLD Board, the entity charged with making a final recommendation to the OLA Executive Board and all Public Library Division members.

The PLD Standards Committee met as a whole and initially discussed the role of state standards and a process for the project. After two initial meetings, small groups were formed to focus on individual standards. At each full committee meeting after that point, the small groups presented their findings and suggested revisions and asked for clarification and support.

In order to include the larger library community, a table was set-up at the OLA/WLA 2012 Conference to answer any and all questions about the revisions to date.

With input from the Division and Committee members, a complete revision of the Standards document was produced. From this point on, format and structure became the focus of the PLD Board in order to ensure that the document was readable, accessible and was supported by an appropriate introduction and resources.

In order to provide the same Standards revision to all audiences at the same time, the PLD Board decided to provide an Executive Summary as an overview. The Standards draft to date will be presented electronically on January 2, 2014 after the PLD Board has addressed the Public Library Directors, the OLA Executive Board and the Oregon State Library Board of Trustees. The PLD Board will accept responses and feedback during January and February; rework the revision in March and send the final Standards document out to PLD members for electronic voting prior to the 2014 OLA Conference. At the conference business meeting we can then have a discussion about a, hopefully, adopted document.

Findings

There was much debate about the role of the Standards and how they should be applied. The primary difference rested on whether to take a carrot or stick approach. Some members were concerned that a poor grade in standards, tied with punitive measures, could start a downward spiral for a struggling

library. Furthermore, aggressive standards could make even the most basic level, “essential,” seem out of reach. Other members felt that giving teeth to the standards was the only way for struggling libraries to get more support locally and beyond.

Conclusions and Recommendations

One of the most significant changes in the Standards was to adopt a more qualitative approach to measuring success. This allows flexibility in a highly fluid world, and future, where the success of a library cannot easily be measured by the number of square feet, books on shelves, or computer stations. However, the Committee recognizes the resourcefulness of quantitative numbers to advocate for library needs and has incorporated relevant statistics within the document.

Standard headings were changed to reflect current library trends. In the last revision the standard headings were: Governance, Access, Staff, Materials and Services, Community Involvement and Facilities. The current versions headings are: Governance, Staff, Materials, Services, Technology, Advocacy and Facilities. These new headings matched many other state standards as well as eliminating redundancies that existing in previous standards.

In an effort to address the carrot and stick debate an idea was floated to issue certificates to participating libraries which recognizes them for achieving a certain level of competency in the Standards for Oregon Public Libraries. The certificates could be placed in a prominent area of the library. If this idea is adopted, the State Library and OLA could potentially support this process with press releases to state and local media.

The PLD Board, along with the Standards Committee, is aware of the labor required for libraries to assess their level of competency. One method to support the application of the Standards is to have Oregon Public Library Statistics directly reflect the Standards.

Finally, taking on the entire Standards document at one time is an arduous task. The PLD Board wants to thank all of the members of the Standards Committee as well as the many others who helped us along the way with their expertise, suggestions, funding and comments. We hope the PLD Board can review the Standards annually at the May Board meeting.