

July 2013 Trustee Tip of the Month
Developing the Successful 21st Century Public Library: Special Message from Wayne Onkst,
State Librarian and Commissioner

I have so many wonderful memories as a youngster spending many hours in my small home town library examining the shelves and choosing stacks of books that introduced me to people I had never met and places that I someday hoped to go. What special services Kentucky's public libraries provided! At that time, there was no place other than the library or the bookmobile to find books and information. Like generations of Kentuckians who were shaped by the resources they found in those libraries or on bookmobiles that traveled Kentucky's roads, the library opened the world to me.

Almost everything in our world has changed considerably in the last few decades - including the public library. Information continues to provide the foundation on which library service is provided, but information has taken many new forms and we have many new channels through which it can be provided. Libraries that have resisted new ways for providing information services are being left behind and risk irrelevance at a time when public funding is threatened.

Leadership by library trustees is essential for a library to make this transition and thrive. What are the areas of development that trustees need to encourage so that their library remains relevant and continues to educate and inspire?

Focus on Community Needs

Where libraries formerly focused internally on building collections and housing services, the focus for the successful 21st century library is on the community. What are the community needs and what can the library do to help meet those needs?

Create Partnerships

Partnerships are being established with a wide range of community groups. No single institution can meet community needs, so only through partnering with a wide range of other organizations can the library multiply its resources and reach deeply into the community. By partnering with community groups, the library reaches many more citizens and the library's resources can be stretched to provide even more value for the community.

Design Customer Centered Service

Services should be created on a customer service model. Is the library open when users need it? Are services provided in homes, at businesses, and off site? In discussing services, staffing, and library hours, are the needs of customers the primary consideration? In order to be successful, your library must work to attract customers who find that your service meets their ever-changing and more-demanding needs.

The modern library has been transformed. It is a place for learning, e-government, e-health, business support, and a community center where people meet to exchange information. Yes, books are available in many formats and information is provided in ways that we could only dream about just a few years ago.

By focusing on community needs, creating partnerships, and designing customer-centered service, your library can be a catalyst for making the community a better place to live, work, and raise families.