LibCampNYC "Unconference" Looks at Reference

Nearly 140 people attended the recent LibCampNYC 2009, sponsored by CUNY's Brooklyn College (where it was hosted) and the Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO). While the attendee-supplied topics ranged from the Semantic Web to green libraries, two of the most popular sessions concerned reference.

Nearly all in attendance agreed that in-person reference transactions are down, but the root cause remains up for debate. While some suggested that the general need for reference is in decline as students seek out information on their own, others said students are simply acclimating to new technologies. Alexa Pearce of New York University libraries indicated that colleagues now field hundreds of reference questions a semester by SMS text messages alone.

Moreover, Pearce indicated that many of those messages come from users inside the building, not from far-off dorms. The topic of technology-assisted reference similarly dominated a session on the future of digital reference. The sessions were facilitated by Stephen Francoeur of CUNY's Baruch College, and librarians spent much of the time hashing out the differences among—and relative merits of—email, IM, chat, text message, and even Twitter reference services.

Chat reference platforms, like Docutek and QuestionPoint, provide a more comprehensive approach to real-time reference than basic IM. They collect valuable reference usage statistics, and store the transcripts of anonymized reference transactions for later use and review.

Though many agreed that the interfaces of these chat platforms could be better designed, the servic-

es also offer far more flexibility in terms of staffing.

Can Twitter and text messaging help, or are messages too brief? One potential compromise: consider these auxiliary forms of reference at least in part as outreach. They can be an effective way of starting conversations with users, participants said.

NJ Legislature Drops Bill Halving Library Tax Base

Some vigorous advocacy by library supporters has helped beat back a resolution pushed by the New Jersey League of Municipalities (NJLM) that would have required payment for library funding to be reduced from one-third to one-sixth of a mill for every dollar of assessable property (see *Library Hotline*, 5/25/09).

When the bill emerged on May 7, the New Jersey Library Association (NJLA) soon activated its legislative action center, based on the American Library Association's CapWiz. In two weeks, library advocates sent some 2200 emails to legislators.

Also, the sponsor of the Senate version of the bill, Sen. Brian Stack, was contacted by the library director, board, and Friends group at the Hoboken Public Library. Stack, who's also the mayor of Union City, introduced the bill on behalf of the NJLM.

"We hope those who support cutting libraries by half have learned this is not a very a popular idea with the public," said NJLA executive director Pat Tumulty. She said the state still has to reform its tax laws, given that they currently disadvantage some libraries. Municipal libraries, unlike county ones, operate in communities that face a four percent cap on property tax hikes.

Models You Can Use

As part of *Library Journal*'s new national rating of public libraries, the *LJ* Index of Public Library Service, America's Star Libraries have been invited to share "models you can use," and *Library Hotline* is excerpting those reports. For the entire package, go to www.libraryjournal.com/ljindex2009.

Upper Arlington PL, OH

This library listens, seeking patron feedback via exit surveys, program assessment sheets, and the "ask the director" section on its web site. Then, it implements requests when possible and publicizes those actions. To generate excitement about the collection of new DVD releases, it introduced "DVD 2 go," which allows two new releases for a maximum of two days— and imposes $2 fines. Also crucial are partnerships with other local organizations. And the library meets its patrons where they are, including MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter.

LIBRARY JOURNAL INDEX 2009 STAR LIBRARY

Darien Library, CT

This library embraces the big organizational questions, such as outsourcing the acquisition of shelf-ready books and technology management. Staffing schedules have been reorganized to meet demand, ensuring that more staff members spend more time face to face with patrons. Key staff members' broadband access is paid for so they can work at home.

Port Jefferson Free Lib., NY

While this library is relatively small, serving fewer than 15,000 people, it draws many to its wide array of programming. Its patrons, many of them professionals, demand "a higher, more sophisticated level of service" and are willing to pay for it, says Director Tara D'Amato. The library isn't afraid of innovation, but it must fit its service model and make a service or collection easier to use.