

The State of Utah Libraries: The 2003 Legislature

The 2003 session of the Utah Legislature was pressured, filled with agonized debates about how best to deal with unpleasant financial realities. In fact, tough decisions began almost as soon as the 2002 session concluded. Legislators were called into session repeatedly to deal with declining state revenues for the **current** year budget – FY 2003. Budgets for the coming year, FY 2004, took those reductions as a starting point.

Utah State Library

Overall, the State Library Division's General Fund appropriation was reduced by 9.9% or \$441,400. Although the Division's total budget is higher than last year, the increase is solely due to anticipated increases in LSTA funds and in dedicated credits (the Division's revenue from contractual services). The loss in General Funds will be particularly difficult for the Division to absorb, since the Division has had no budget increases for services since 1995, has lost 3 FTE since FY 2000, and has large fixed costs associated with the bond payment on the current building.

Public Libraries

The General Fund losses in the State Library Division budget also reduce the amount available for Public Library Development grants. The reduction is \$125,600 for FY 2003 and \$191,600 for FY 2004. The magnitude of this loss raises a serious policy issue: how to allocate the cuts. Prior – and smaller – losses in grant funds have been distributed on the same percentage basis among all eligible libraries. However, the development grants are especially critical to smaller and poorer libraries. For example, of Utah's 70 libraries, 14 rely on the grants for more than 20% of their operating budget; at the other end of the scale, the grants are less than 5% of the budget for 35 libraries. As a result, the State Library Board has directed the Division staff to scale the reductions so that those libraries most dependent on the grant will take the least reduction. Exact figures have been communicated directly to library directors.

Public Education

The Legislature tried very hard to hold the public education budget "harmless" during the session and largely did so. However, until each school district establishes a firm budget for FY 2004, it will be difficult to assess the impact of the session on the budgets of individual school library media centers. At the state level, however, the position at the State Office of Education formerly allocated to oversight and consulting for school library services has been reduced from a full time position to approximately a 15-20% position.

Higher Education

The Legislature also made a great effort to meet the needs of Higher Education. As with public education, the impact of Legislative appropriations on individual college and university budgets and their libraries will take some time to assess. However, the Utah Academic Library Consortium received roughly status quo funding: \$32,500 in Senate Bill 2 and \$2,883,500 in House Bill 1. Both the Marriott Library (University of Utah) and the Merrill Library (Utah State University) were seeking a capital appropriation: a replacement building for Merrill, and a renovation and seismic retrofitting of the older portion of the building for Marriott. The final bonding bill included \$40 million for the Merrill Library (a \$2 million reduction from the initial request), but did not include the Marriott request. Legislators, however, expressed strong interest in giving that project a high priority during the 2004 session.

Legislation

Senate Bill 87, Library Amendments, sparked much discussion and debate during committee hearings, in the press, and behind the scenes. Sponsored by Senator Michael Waddoups at the request of the Utah Association of Counties, the bill was intended to address concerns on the part of county commissioners about liability and insurance coverage. Although the initial bill was unacceptable to the Utah library community, library leaders worked closely behind the scenes with county commissioners and the staff of the Utah Association of Counties. Senator Michael Waddoups delayed moving the bill forward until a compromise was agreed to by all parties. After ULA withdrew its opposition, the bill passed the Senate, the House, and has now been signed by the Governor.

Essentially, the bill clarifies that the authority exercised by county library boards is delegated directly from the county executive and reflected in county ordinances. Compromise language established that "those powers and duties as prescribed by county ordinance" to be delegated include, but are not limited to, "establishing policies for collections and information resources that are consistent with state and federal law." The bill also establishes that the "library board shall recommend to the county executive for appointment a competent person to serve as librarian" and that "all library personnel are employees of the county," and are hired "in accordance with the county merit system, personnel policies and procedures."

Implementation of the act will proceed on a county-by-county basis through the adoption of local county ordinances. The Utah Library Association and the State Library Division are working with the Utah Association of Counties to develop model ordinances to assist individual counties in this process. The entire text of the bill may be found at <http://www.le.state.ut.us/~2003/htmldoc/sbillhtm/SB0087S1/htm>.

One other bill of interest to the reference desk is **House Bill 233, Changing State Song**. (<http://www.le.state.ut.us/~2003/htmldoc/hbillhtm/HB0223.htm>) "*Utah We Love Thee*" by Evan Stephens is now the state hymn, and "*Utah This is the Place*" by Sam and Gary Francis is now the state song.

Prospects for Next Year

With the hope that next year's economy will be improved, librarians may be able to restore the lost Public Library Development grant funding for FY 2004 and future years. The Marriott Library will renew its request for an appropriation for the complete renovation and seismic stabilization of the older section of the library. In addition, the Utah Library Association is also considering the possibility of proposing a complete revision of Utah's current county library law. Such a revision would seek to address the concerns of the Utah Association of Counties and to modernize and clarify further the current statute.

A Crown Jewel of Utah Libraries Opens

More than four years ago, in November 1998, the voters of Salt Lake City overwhelmingly approved a bond for \$84 million to build a new main library. In the wake of this electoral success, Nancy Tessman, Salt Lake City Public Library Director, promised that city residents "will get a library they can be proud of and enjoy." On Saturday, February 8, 2003, as the new Main Library opened for service on Library Square, it became amply apparent that Tessman has made good on her promise.

The new library building itself is magnificent, the design reflecting, as has been said, "the city's imagination and aspirations." It has 240,000 square feet on six floors, doubling the prior library's size in square footage. Architects have used much natural light; spacious windows open up to panoramic vistas of the Wasatch Mountains to the south and east. Fireplaces on each floor invite reading and quiet conversation. The library has rooftop gardens, and below, a reflecting pool, fountains, engaging gardens, and an amphitheatre in the outdoor plaza. The signature feature of the building is the five-story leaning crescent wall, which promises to engage the energies of persons of all ages in walking to the top for an elevated view of the city and mountains beyond.

Enhancements to services in the new library parallel the innovations of the building's design and structure. Self-checkout machines speed patron transactions. Telephone reference services have been expanded. A technology center and training lab equipped with 140 computer workstations opens the vast information resources available over the Internet to patrons. The City Library also houses one of four Gates Library Training Labs found in Utah*.

The existing library collections from the old library have been augmented by nearly \$2 million dollars in new materials, broadening and deepening the library collections. The new Main Library collection now exceeds 500,000 items.

The library has unique spaces for special patrons and purposes. Children have a large story room, as well as "Grandma's Attic" and an "ice-cave" in which to explore and to read, and a crafts room for participation in on-going art projects. Teenagers can meet in "the Canteena" to visit and find their special materials. A Special Collections Library displays rare books not previously available to the general public. There are large browsing collections for everyone. An art gallery allows the Library to feature the works of local artists. Meeting rooms, a conference center, and a large, 320 seat auditorium create public space at the heart of downtown Salt Lake City where people can share ideas and engage in civic dialogue.

When questioned on the topic, Nancy Tessman reflected that the greatest personal satisfaction in the extended planning and building process leading up to the library grand opening has been the strong *affirmation* of the community within the process, the extended *cooperation* of hundreds of people and numerous organizations, and the pronounced sense of *anticipation* of what the future holds for library patrons in the City. (Given the role that the City Library plays in Utah, it might be said, "in the state, as a whole.")

On their next trip to Salt Lake City members of the library community should make sure they are part of the projected 1.5 million annual visitors to the City Library. There should be plenty of available parking in the 600-space underground parking terrace at Library Square.

*Gates Training Labs are found at the Weber County Library (Ogden), the Salt Lake City Public Library (Main), the Provo City Library, and the Washington County Library (St. George).

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