

Notes from the April 24 and April 28 Virtual Roundtables

Since the Annual Conference was cancelled, as were the two Regional Meetings which were scheduled in April, NHLTA held two virtual roundtables via Zoom on April 24 and April 28 that were very well-attended by both library directors and trustees, with over 70 participants in each one. The same topics were discussed at both roundtables.

Programming During the Pandemic

Lots of virtual programming using Facebook Live, YouTube and Zoom.

- Several libraries (Barrington, Jaffrey) started Storytimes via Facebook, then switched to Zoom because it was interactive – i.e., the kids could sing songs together or do a craft project. Other libraries (Newington, Pembroke) switched to YouTube. There was some discussion about copyright, apparently not all books are available, there is a list of copyright free material. Deb Dutcher, from the State Library, has put a lot of resources on her blog about doing Storytimes within copyright – her blog can be accessed through the NHLA COVID19 page, nhlibrarians.org/covid-19-resources/. Kensington has been involving the community in Storytimes, getting people such as the fire chief, select board members to read stories. In Bath, where they don't have strong broadband, the librarians are mailing patrons a box full of crafts and books that should last them a couple of weeks.
- Other examples of virtual programming: book groups, coffee chats, online trivia tournaments (played on the honor system – no looking answers up!), Netflix parties, comic book discussions, STEM classes. Derry offers a "Mystery Monday" – posting questions that can be answered by exploring the library's databases. Peterborough put together a show they call "Library Home Companion" – with people doing magic acts, musical performances, etc. In between, the library director gives infomercials about online services. Jaffrey has developed a platform they call Library-to-Go, which is available 24/7 on demand and multi-generational – everything from art to science. Brookline offers "Dial A Librarian" from 11-noon every day, when patrons can call with questions. Meredith offers a genealogy club via Zoom and has a "Quarantine Theater" where they highlight books that are available for download. Minot-Sleeper's knitting group even meets via Zoom!
- Streaming services have been very popular: Hoopla, Kanopy, Acorn TV, the Great Courses, InfoBase. These services do cost, but the libraries are taking funds from their print budget. Usually, there is a limit of seven views per family per month. And Kanopy is making some movies available for free during the pandemic. Some smaller libraries report seeing an increase in first-time patrons who want cards in order to access these digital resources.

Smaller libraries are keeping in touch with their regular patrons by sending notes or making phone calls – especially to those they know live alone. Many are doing newsletters on a weekly basis instead of their usual monthly schedule. Sandown's children's librarian is sending "Missing You" cards to all the kids who are Storytime regulars.

Getting Ready to Re-open

The NH State Library has put together a task force of 20 librarians, concentrating on communication with town officials, employee safety, reopening and what questions libraries need to ask themselves. There will also be guidance from the state and the CDC. Obviously, what each library does needs to be tailored to their community. Requirements for masks will vary by town. The task force will be sending updates as they meet. It seems very likely that the Stay-at-Home order will be extended. In order to limit the number of people inside the library, it was suggested that patrons can call or email for appointments.

Staff furloughs/layoffs

Many libraries are keeping their staff on the payroll; larger ones (Keene) have furloughed half their staff, Manchester has a hiring freeze; at some libraries, the part-time staff has furloughed themselves. Hampton Falls is keeping staff; they have cancelled subscriptions and are looking for ways to cut the budget without cutting staff. Gilman's staff is working remotely; they held a Zoom meeting with the trustees to report on what they are doing. Some have been asked by the town about returning money at the end of the year and/or cutting budgets. Some are curtailing expenditures in anticipation of budgets being cut next year. Summer programming is an issue, the NH State Library is also working on that.

Thanks to all for attending! Please note that Lori Fisher, NH State Library, will be posting weekly updates to both the NHLTA and NHAIS LISTSERVs. If you haven't done so already, we urge you to sign up for the NHLTA LISTSERV, and to visit the NHLTA webpage regularly for updates.