



Emerging Technologies Post-Workshop Report

Three focus groups were held as a follow up to the Emerging Technologies workshops that were presented by Adam Wright and Christine Peterson. One focus group was held in Santa Fe at the State Library, one conference call group was held, and the final meeting was held in Albuquerque. While attendance at each group was low, the feedback was very thorough and profitable.

1. Name three new ideas or tools that you learned during the workshop.

The versatility of the web was mentioned by most participants: wiki as website, blog as website, how to push information such as RSS, how many tools are intuitive and easy to use, just how much information there is on the web, and the “experiential” possibilities with the communities. Technology may be used to provide more quality content and bibliographic control.

2. After attending the workshops, have your priorities changed concerning programs and services offered to your community. What is your public asking for concerning new technologies? What user groups are most affected by new technology?

There is a widespread feeling, primarily in the more rural areas, that much of the public fears technology or at least lacks confidence in using technology. It was suggested that “sensitivity training for technology issues” would be helpful. This was mentioned especially for areas in the pueblos and communities on the reservations. The possibility of using new technology for archival purposes was mentioned as a new service.

3. How will you plan to stay current with technology?

The State Library was mentioned as a main resource in all three focus groups. There are many methods the State Library may use to keep the library staff informed: create a distribution list to send out announcements of interest, RSS feeds through the State Library website, create a technology blog, create a technology wiki, include technology discussion at meetings with libraries, one-on-one consulting, continued workshops with technology, and using an online newsletter. A variety of methods

should be used since the area covered by the State Library has such diverse populations and skill levels.

It seems that there is a general sense to wait on information instead of taking a proactive stance to seek out information. This is probably due to limited staff and time in the libraries, again, especially in the smaller, more rural libraries. It is recommended that the State Library staff plan their strategy considering these varying skills levels – create a wiki or blog for the more advanced tech users to share information and use email and one-on-one consulting with the basic tech users.

Finally, assisting the more rural libraries in setting up consortiums to share information on a regular basis is needed. There seems to be a general feeling of isolation among the library staff in the rural areas. It was suggested that the State Library needs to be more visible to the libraries and communities. This can be done with more on-site consulting and training visits, bookmarks with the State Library logo, and posters with logos.

4. How would you like the State Library to follow up on these workshops? If the workshops were held again, what would you like done differently?

The majority of comments concerning the next steps included more training on this type of topic. It was also recommended that technology workshops be provided in locations that would allow for hands-on training.

Specific training that is more in-depth is also recommended. Topics mentioned were: providing templates for webpages, funding resources for technology, open source software possibilities, licensing laws, creating more robust technology plans, idea sharing – how are other libraries using newer technologies, security issues for computers, filtering pros and cons, creating tutorials that staff can access from their libraries – both for staff level and basic tutorials to help the public use the Internet, and computer maintenance and troubleshooting.

One consideration to assist in providing a variety of technology training with limited resources is to have a Technology Conference event. This can be set up as a mini-conference with a keynote speaker and break-out sessions. In this way, one event could cover basic and advanced user needs and the attendees could select what best meets their needs. This event would also provide a time for librarians to network and discuss ideas and brainstorm.

While discussing the Emerging Technologies workshops, several other needs were mentioned. It seems that some, if not many, of the libraries are having difficulty in providing new media – DVDs, books on CD, and downloadable books and movies. Since many of the library users are commuters, it is suspected that they often buy their own DVDs and books on CD. One idea to build the local library collection is to encourage the community to donate these items. A campaign could be done to promote the idea of donating materials. Often people purchase these items, pass them along to friends, and then put them on a shelf. A campaign such as “Share the Book with Your Neighbor” could be created by the State Library and shared with communities that have an interest. The State Library could create a press release, bookmark ideas and flyers to be distributed around towns in grocery stores, convenience stores, gas stations and other public space.

Also, creating statewide contracts to assist with materials discounts for all libraries is recommended. One method to accomplish this is to survey the libraries on collection development budgets. Use this aggregate amount in a Request for Bid to materials vendors. While the Albuquerque Public Library may be able to solicit discounts for materials, most smaller libraries will not be able to do this. It was mentioned by two different libraries that they regularly use Amazon. While Amazon certainly has its benefits, it does not provide the same support as a library distributor. At the very least, a statewide contract for print materials would be highly beneficial. This can also be included in seeking partnerships/aggregate contracts for downloadable books and movies, movie licensing and discounts for supplies and furniture.

Volunteer recruitment and retention was also mentioned as a need. Many one or two person libraries just do not have the time to create and promote new technologies and maintain the day-to-day operations. The State Library can provide training on volunteer recruitment and management. It is recommended that the State Library contact the libraries in New Mexico and determine which libraries have strong volunteer programs. Then, survey these libraries for ideas and techniques for working with volunteers.

Finally, it was asked if the PowerPoint from the workshops could be shared with the participants.

5. The State Library will be introducing a technology competency program during the next fiscal year. What would you like to see included? And would you prefer a two-tiered approach such as BASIC and ADVANCED?

This concept was well received. It was overwhelmingly agreed that there need to be two levels of training to compensate for the varying skill levels. However, some felt that a basic/advanced model was good, while others felt that an intermediate/advanced model was needed. After further exploration, it seems that library staff are generally at the intermediate/advanced levels, while the public they work with are basic/intermediate with some advanced users.

Basic:

Common troubleshooting with printers, copy machines, email issues such as printing, downloading, etc. It was also mentioned that it would be helpful to have a “how to” manual for volunteers to use.

Cataloging and circulation software was also mentioned.

Intermediate/Advanced:

Emerging technologies such as discussed in the workshops, web design, web usability, networking issues, security, filters, open source software and licensing issues.

6. Were the workshops personally successful?

Everyone mentioned that the workshops were thorough and useful. This was a great starting point for many. However, there is now the concern of information fatigue and burnout. The State Library will be key in ongoing information and training for staff. It seems that it is now time for libraries to create a virtual presence and any assistance to streamline the effort will be important for moving forward, as staff is so limited on time. Again, templates to help with webpages, blogs, wikis, and tutorials are all going to be needed.

It is noted that most comments included hands-on face-to-face training. While it is difficult to get away from the library to attend training, it is imperative for real skills to be developed. Online tutorials and training are recommended more for in-library training with other staff and volunteers.

Carolyn Davidson
Assistant Director
North Texas Regional Library System
cdavidson@ntrl.org