

NH Library Trustee

The Newsletter of the New Hampshire Library Trustees Association

www.NHLTA.org

Staffing Challenges During COVID-19: Strategies for Retention and Advocacy

By Lara Berry, NHLTA Board of Directors,
Education Committee Chair

This spring as COVID-19 numbers drop and New Hampshire businesses reopen and more jobs are become available, unemployment figures are still higher than before last year's closures. Governor Sununu hopes ending NH's participation in the federal \$300 per week pandemic unemployment assistance, and providing incentives to those who return to work for a minimum of eight consecutive weeks (eligible to those who make less than \$25 an hour), will help remedy this situation.

However, the weekly federal unemployment benefit is only one contributing factor in why NH workers may not return to work. NH employers now face stiff competition from out-of-state companies in the information technology industry, who offer good pay and benefits as well as opportunities to work remotely. According to Brian Gottlob of NH Employment Security, despite not having an office in NH, Facebook is one of the top three employers recruiting IT professionals in NH.

Public service employers have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, and public libraries are no exception. In many NH towns, libraries that furloughed or laid off staff must compete with the new opportunities now available to workers. Mary Cronin, library director at the Cook Memorial Library in Tamworth, reports that the Settlers Green retail outlets in North Conway are offering \$1500 signing bonuses for part time workers. During the pandemic, library budgets have flattened or decreased, leaving them without means to provide comparable incentives to returning employees.

Libraries lost staff during the pandemic in other ways. Marta Smith, Fiske Free Library in Claremont, is retiring this year, citing a change in life priorities as the primary reason. "I... find myself leaving for retirement a bit sooner than I might have mostly because after the Covid scare I [want] to leave while I am still healthy enough to enjoy my retirement... I have seen how quickly life can end and I don't want to miss out." She attributes the recent increase in NH library job openings to other employees retiring, or having a similar change in priorities. "We are at the tail end of the 'Baby Boomer' generation so we will see more of our colleagues retiring than in previous years... people who are leaving are either retiring or have decided they can get by with less money if they get to spend more time with their families."

Additionally, libraries are further affected because of our predominantly female workforce. It's been well-documented that women workers have been affected the most by the pandemic, and according to NPR, women are now at the lowest workforce participation level since 1988. What would help these women return to the workforce? More flexibility in scheduling, better child care/caregiving support, short-term sabbaticals and mental health resources.

Applying these solutions in NH libraries post-pandemic will be challenging. Laura Clerkin, Bethlehem Public Library Director, had to furlough staff during the pandemic. As they return, they are requesting greater flexibility in order to pursue other commitments. She is struggling to rework the schedule and still reopen the library to

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Katrinka Pellecchia
NHLTA President

Happy Summer!

Happy Summer! So far, it's proving to be a typical New England summer – one weekend in the 60s, the next in the 90s.

The past year has been a year of uncertainty and a year of firsts as trustees and library directors faced new challenges and ways to serve their communities. There may be a relaxing of restrictions, but the pandemic isn't over. The lessons we learned and are still learning will continue to inform decisions now and for the foreseeable future. Despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic, NH libraries are busier than ever!

There is help available as libraries adapt and change to the "new normal." As Assistant State Librarian Lori Fisher writes on page 4, the State Library of New Hampshire has received \$2,297,692 as part of the American Rescue Plan; these funds will be dispersed to NH libraries through the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) Grants to States program. The deadline to use this funding is September 30, 2022. As this newsletter goes to press, the first round of grants is in process. The second round will open up in August. Details are available on the NH State Library website www.nh.gov/nhsl.

It has been my privilege to serve as president of NHLTA for the past year; it has been both challenging and rewarding. And it is also my privilege to place the leadership reins into the very capable hands of my fellow board member Marcia McLaughlin. In addition to serving on the NHLTA board for the past year, Marcia is a member of the board of trustees of the Weeks Public Library, located in Greenland, and has been instrumental in the Weeks Library's six-year effort to build an addition to the 123-year-old library. If all goes well, the renovated library will open this August. Marcia and her husband, Craig, have lived in Greenland for 11 years. They have two children and four grandchildren. Her earliest memory of a library is being walked to the local library with her kindergarten class and being issued a library card. She has stated numerous times that "the library is one of my favorite places in the world." Marcia has been a full-time volunteer for over 45 years, serving a myriad of organizations, including her local garden club – living proof of the saying: "If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need." She looks forward to continuing to help advance the mission and purpose of the NHLTA.

Katrinka

United for Libraries Membership for All NH Public Libraries through IMLS ARPA Funds

NH State Library is pleased to announce that they will use IMLS ARPA funds to provide an ALA United for Libraries membership to all NH public libraries for one year, beginning August 1, 2021. United for Libraries is a division of the American Library Association focused on library trustees, foundations and Friends groups. Their mission is to support those who govern, promote, advocate, and fundraise for all types of libraries. United for Libraries

provides a wealth of resources, including their Short Takes for Trustees series, many eLearning opportunities, and print articles/best practice documents. Info sessions about making the most out of this 12-month membership will be held

in August with United for Libraries staff, facilitated by Lori Fisher, Assistant State Librarian. These sessions will have both daytime and evening sessions in order to meet the needs of our library trustees throughout NH. Questions? Contact Lori at lori.a.fisher@dncr.nh.gov or 603-271-2393. –Lori Fisher

United for Libraries
Association of Library Trustees,
Advocates, Friends and Foundations



Staffing Challenges: Retention and Advocacy

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six days a week. She would like to add a new library clerk to fill the gaps, but has trepidation about attempting to hire right now, citing signing bonuses as one stumbling block: “I’m hearing companies are having a terrible time hiring people. The Littleton Burger King is offering a \$200 signing bonus!”

Lichen Rancourt, Jackson Public Library Director, cites providing staff flexibility and the option of bringing small children with them to work as strategies she has used to effectively retain her staff during the pandemic. On site and/or affordable child care for library workers with young children, or children learning remotely, could be invaluable in retaining female library workers, but it’s a benefit few public libraries can provide.

There is also ambivalence regarding support for working from home. One NH library director cited challenges from the board of trustees when creating a work-from-home policy during the Governor’s Stay at Home order. The perception that employees might abuse the privilege created tension and compromised the service the library was able to provide. “I don’t think anyone understands how hard it is to do what we do. There’s a lot to it and I don’t think people get it.” Visibly simple tasks like checking out and shelving books can obscure complex and demanding operations even at the best of times, but even more so during the pandemic. Another NH library director confided, “I think everyone is near their ends, overwhelmed with no relief in sight.”

All of these challenges culminate in an unprecedented changing landscape for NH library employment. Libraries that managed to weather the storm of the pandemic without losing valued employees may still feel the strain of these circumstances in the near future,

as librarians retire, and younger workers seek positions or professions that provide them with more time, benefits and money. Schedule flexibility, child care/care-giving support, sabbaticals and mental health support are known to be successful retention strategies for women. However, for public libraries, the immediate and obvious answer to the question of how to retain employees is “pay them more money.” Directors agree. “We are not paying people what they need to make, to live where they work,” one said. “We don’t pay our staff commensurate with what they do,” from another. “I am the highest educated but the least paid department head in my town,” another said. Mary Cronin specifically identified pay for part-time workers as an imperative. “We need a competitive wage for part-time workers.” Another director identified directors as needing special recognition: “Recognize your directors. This year more than ever. Give them a minimum of a two percent raise. At minimum.” Multiple directors acknowledged that while library workers love where they work, that is often not enough. Challenges arising during the pandemic created tensions between trustees and directors, directors and staff, and staff and the public that undermine work satisfaction in a number of libraries, and may persist indefinitely as COVID-19’s reach persists.

Many or all of the strategies discussed in this article face logistical and financial challenges to implement. However, “If you’re thinking about retention, you’re halfway there.” A successful approach will be individual to your library. Ask the staff what they want, and then make it happen or advocate for it. If it’s a financial need, prepare proactively by educating your community before, not just during, your next budget season, by articulating just how much your employees have been

doing, and how they have risen to the challenges. If you encounter resistance, work to dispel illusions that underestimate the value of labor in libraries. Convey to your community that valuing libraries is commensurate with valuing library staff, and that methods to retain will be more cost-effective and successful in the current environment than will attempts to rehire. In the meantime, don’t forget to express your appreciation in ways that cost little or nothing. Verbalize appreciation, encourage the use of vacation time, respond to mistakes with compassion, sponsor a complementary group meal or meals, acknowledge life events with appropriate cards and/or gifts, speak highly of the library to both employees and others, and above all, express gratitude. One director told me, “For the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, my board of trustees finally told me, ‘You have worked so hard.’ It meant so much. Feeling appreciated and valued—money can’t buy that.”

Direct comments and responses to:

l.berry@nhlta.org

Please include permission whether you may be quoted in future articles, anonymously or otherwise.

There’s still time!

Each year NHLTA is pleased to recognize the individuals and groups who have contributed to the excellence of New Hampshire public libraries.

Email nominations to nhlibrarytrustees@nhmunicipal.org. Instruction, all criteria and a description of the awards can be found at www.NHLTA.org.

**2021
Annual
Awards
submission
deadline is
July 31!**

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New Hampshire Library Trustees
Association

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The NH Library Trustee is published four times yearly by the New Hampshire Library Trustees Association (NHLTA), 25 Triangle Park Drive, Concord NH 03301.

This publication serves as a means of providing information and news to library trustees in New Hampshire

Subscriptions are included as part of the annual membership dues for the New Hampshire Library Trustees Association. The content published is for informational purposes only and is not and should not be considered a substitute for legal advice.

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POSTMASTER:

Return Service Requested

IMLS American Rescue Plan Act Funds Available through New Hampshire State Library

The NH State Library is receiving \$2,297,692 as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) passed by Congress earlier this year. The ARPA funds will be disbursed to the NH State Library through the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) Grants-To-States program. This funding is to be used by September 30, 2022 to help public libraries and their communities respond directly and immediately to the pandemic, as well as to address related economic and community needs through equitable approaches. The NH State Library will use the funds allocated to New Hampshire through IMLS to provide sub-grants to NH public libraries as well as statewide services. For more information, please visit www.nh.gov/nhsl/services/librarians/AmericanRescuePlanAct.html for the most up-to-date information on sub-grants and statewide service plans.



INSTITUTE of
Museum and Library
SERVICES

Sub-grant programs currently available include:

- First round of formulaic sub-grants to NH public libraries: this round will provide monies to every public library in New Hampshire. This formula includes a \$1,000 base amount, an amount based on the population served by that library, and potentially \$1,675 if the library is located within one of the five counties that has a Small Area Income and Poverty Estimate from 2019 that is equal to or greater than 9%. Visit www.nh.gov/nhsl/services/librarians/AmericanRescuePlanAct.html for application details, guidelines, and

a spreadsheet listing what every public library in the state can receive. The application process is only to meet IMLS requirements, and public libraries are guaranteed to receive the amount specified for them as long as they fill out the application.

Our goal is to have every NH public library apply for and receive these funds. Questions? Contact Michael York, State Librarian, at michael.c.york@dncr.nh.gov or 603-271-2397.

- Sub-grant opportunity to support the implementation of nhaisLOCAL Koha systems in libraries who participate in the NHAIS ILL System. Priority will be given to those public libraries that currently do not have an automation system. All NHAIS ILL System participants that have not already implemented an open-source Koha system in their libraries are invited to apply as well. (This grant application closed on June 20, 2021.) Full details about the sub-grant are available at www.nh.gov/nhsl/nhais/arpa.html.

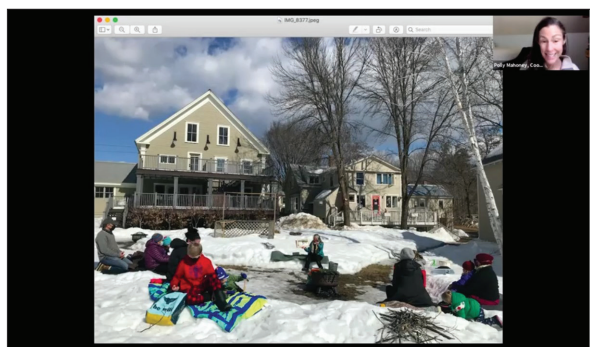
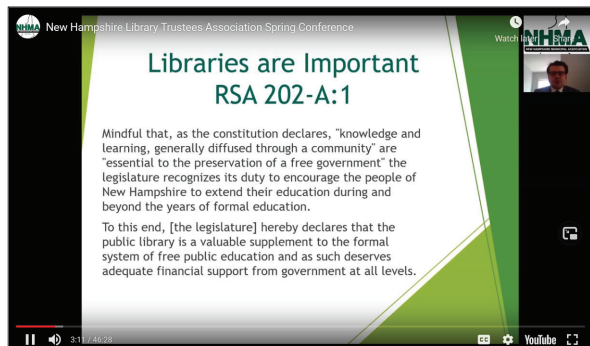
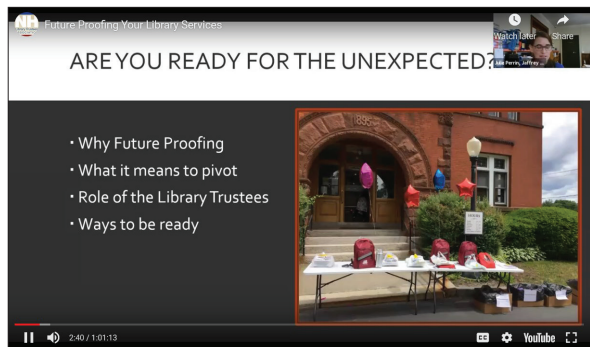
A second sub-grant round for public libraries will open in

August, which will be a competitive round for grants of \$5,000 or greater. Grant applications in this round will be reviewed by a panel of library professionals, with the goal of award notification to successful applicants in December 2021. Public libraries are encouraged to partner with other stakeholder groups, community organizations, or libraries for larger projects that have a broader and sustained impact on local communities. Details about this sub-grant round will be released in July, with information sessions available in July and August.

—Lori Fisher

Virtual Conference 2021: *Embracing Change!*

This year, NHLTA definitely embraced change and presented our first-ever virtual conference, using Whova and Zoom technology. We weren't sure what to expect, but ultimately hosted 203 attendees from 89 libraries all over the state. Thank you to those who responded to our conference evaluation; feedback is invaluable in helping us plan. We appreciated direct suggestions for topics, and will put them into practice in future offerings. Though technical challenges inhibited the smooth function of the conference here and there, the workshops, technology and support were overall a success. Thank you to the presenters, our sponsors and the volunteers who hosted and moderated sessions. We'll see you in person at the Grappone Conference Center in Concord on May 10, 2022!



“Deo was an excellent keynote speaker! ... I came away with some great ideas to bring to my library.”

“This was one of the best keynotes I have heard in some time – and he's local!”

“I had heard good things about [Lori], and she certainly delivered an informative session. She is extremely knowledgeable and a great asset for NH libraries. I especially appreciated the overview of CARES and ARPA funds for NH public libraries. And, I greatly appreciated having her slides available for downloading.”

“Julie Perrin did an excellent job of creating excitement around all the incredible projects she and her staff created in a very short period of time. I wrote down so many ideas for our library. She also did a great job of stressing that the trustees are an essential part of the library team. What a creative woman!”

“I came away with lots of new ideas for our library... It is important to cover this topic every year in order to keep us old folks tuned in to social media which is so important to the marketing of library programs. I appreciated the inclusion of Manchester's social media policy for downloading.”



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Diversity Workforce Coalition

www.diversityworkforce.org

PO Box 927, Manchester, NH 03105

The Diversity Workforce Coalition is comprised of employers and other community members whose purpose is to promote diversity in the workplace through education, training, enhanced networking opportunities, and to identify and connect resources to its members and the public.





By Natch Greyes,
Municipal Services
Counsel,
NH Municipal
Association (NHMA)

Reopening, Masks, and Vaccines

With the reopening and changing guidelines, libraries have started asking questions about Governor Sununu's end of the pandemic emergency announcement, the NH Universal Best Practices, and what's allowed (and what's not). Fortunately, there are some definite answers.

HIPAA & ADA: We have received numerous questions regarding HIPAA, ADA, and related laws and whether they apply. Can you help clarify some of the federal rules?

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, commonly called HIPAA, is probably the most misunderstood of all the voluminous federal statutes. HIPAA privacy rules apply to health care professionals as well as employers. It does not apply to a regular person, a business, or most other entities. It is entirely permissible, for example, for a retail establishment to ask if an unmasked customer has been vaccinated prior to allowing that customer to access that business's facility.

Similarly, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has clarified that the federal equal employment opportunity laws do not prevent an employer from requiring all employees physically entering the workplace to be vaccinated for COVID-19, subject to some exceptions. Importantly, an employee who does not get vaccinated due to a disability (covered by the ADA) or a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance (covered by Title VII) may be entitled to a reasonable accommodation that does not pose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business. For example, as a reasonable accommodation, an unvaccinated employee entering the workplace might wear a face mask, work at a social distance from coworkers or non-employees, work a modified shift, get periodic tests for COVID-19, be given the opportunity to telework, or finally, accept a reassignment. This will be very role-specific and employers should consult with an attorney who practices employment law in New Hampshire and is familiar with N.H.'s labor laws, including

RSA 202-A:17, in situations where an employee is either unvaccinated or unwilling to share vaccination status upon employer request.

Masks: We require masks at the library and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. What should we do if someone shows up to the library without a mask? Are we required to let them in, or can we deny them access, like any one of the numerous businesses in town that requires masks?

The library can deny access to a person if the person refuses to wear a mask in accordance with the rules for its facility much like a business. However, libraries should keep in mind that it may be possible to provide some services, such as scheduled curbside checkouts, to the unmasked public as an alternative means of allowing unmasked individuals into the library itself. These alternative arrangements are not only a good method of minimizing risk, but may also provide greater library access to individuals, such as the elderly or disabled, who otherwise may have difficulty accessing library services.

Use of Facilities: Our library is located in another town building and has meeting rooms that we allowed outside groups to use, including municipal boards, pre-COVID-19. Who decides what happens with the library and those rooms?

RSA 202-A:6 clearly places the "entire custody and management of the public library and of all the property of the town relating thereto" in the hands of the library trustees. Therefore, it is important to know what is and what is not library property. It

It is entirely permissible . . . for a retail establishment to ask if an unmasked customer has been vaccinated prior to allowing that customer to access that business's facility.

Mildred McKay Scholarship Fund

is reasonable to assume that the physical space occupied by the 'library' as delineated by walls, doors, signs, etc., qualifies as the 'library' that is under the exclusive custody and control of the library trustees. So, just as the trustees set the hours for the library, they could set other rules for access of the library facility.

In this case, it may or may not be difficult to know whether the meeting rooms qualify as part of the library itself as the library is not freestanding and, thus, easily distinguished from other town property (which, unless delegated to another board, is under the control of the select board pursuant to RSA 41:11-a). If the rooms are only accessible by going through the library (e.g. walking through the stacks, etc.) and not accessed by other hallways, etc., in the town building, then they are likely part of the library and controlled by the trustees. However, past practice – such as who is charged with overseeing room reservations, etc. – and any understanding as between the select board and library trustees can be equally informative.

Regardless of whether the meeting rooms qualify as library property – and thus are governed by the library trustees – or not, it is a good idea for the trustees to discuss reopening plans with other relevant boards and bodies, such as the select board. Working collaboratively, municipal boards can come up with ways to make traditional programs – such as a children's story time – both accessible, safer, and fun by, for instance, moving it to the town gazebo or under the big oak tree in front of town hall. It's important for everyone to remember that even though more than half of our state has been vaccinated, the threat of infection by COVID-19 is still very real for those who have not yet had the opportunity to be vaccinated because of their age, and it's important to take steps to try to mitigate their risk.

The NHLTA Board of Directors believes that continuing education is a prime factor in providing the highest quality of library services. The Mildred McKay Scholarship Fund provides us a way to improve library services within the state.

In 1965, the NHLTA Board of Directors established the Mildred McKay Scholarship Fund in honor of the former NH State Librarian. The New Hampshire Charitable Fund manages the perpetual endowment and distributes funds to NHLTA to be awarded as scholarships on an annual basis.

There are several categories of scholarships:

NHLTA Conference Scholarships

To encourage attendance at the NHLTA Spring Conference, we offer NHLTA members the opportunity to make conference attendance possible with scholarships. The deadline for applications will be one month before the registration deadline.

Library Workshops Scholarships

To encourage trustee and library staff education, scholarships to NHMA,

NHLA, ALA and other workshops or conferences that cover library topics and issues are offered to NHLTA members. Please check the NHLTA website and the NHLTA LISTSERV® for conferences that may be of interest.

Workshops for Consortiums, Co-op Groups

New Hampshire library consortiums or co-op groups may apply to present a workshop for members, other library staff and trustees.

Educational Assistance for Graduate Study

- \$1,000 outright grant. Two grants are offered each fiscal year.
- Applicant must be currently employed by a NH library, full or part-time, and enrolled in an ALA accredited school of Library or Information Science.
- Application Deadlines: February 1 (summer), June 1 (fall), September 1 (spring).

All applications may be found on the NHLTA website. Please send applications and inquiries to: the NHLTA Scholarship Committee Chair at NHLTASCHOLARSHIP@nhlta.org.

Congratulations
to the libraries
who are completing and celebrating their
new building and renovation projects!

Exeter Public Library	Open during renovations Open House, August 19
Weeks Public Library, Greenland	Opening Celebration, August 28
Peterborough Town Library	Grand Opening, September 12



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