The Future of Diverse Libraries in Colorado:

Special Populations Committee Survey 2009

Needs, Benchmarks, Next Steps

Special Populations & Issues Committee

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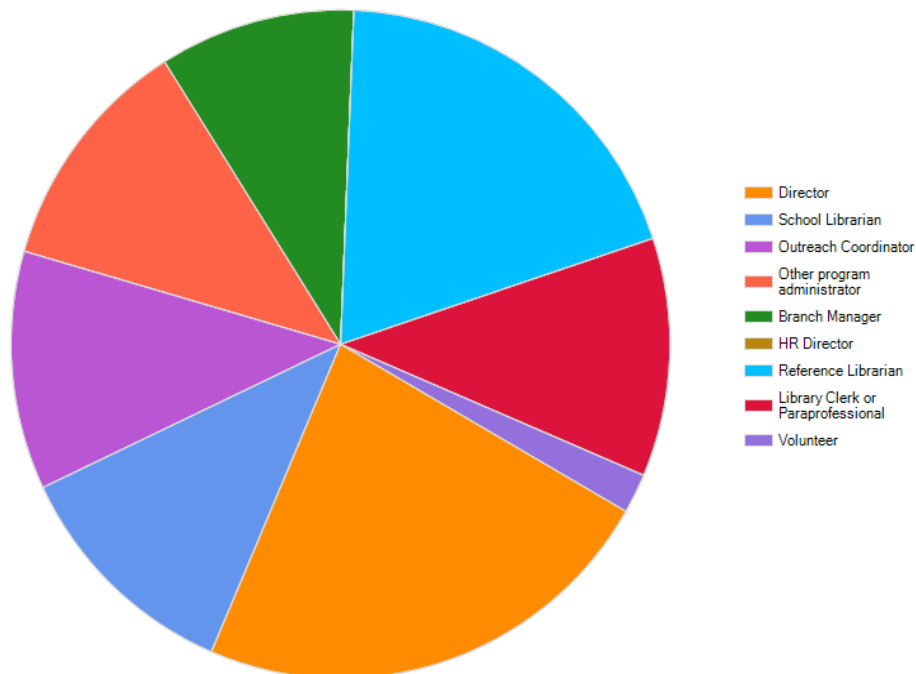## Needs, Benchmarks, Next Steps

Summary

The Special Populations and Issues Committee (SPC) requested input from Colorado libraries on their work on diversity. Libraries are interested in reaching new populations, but need training, hiring practices and plans to expand diversity in their services.

Libraries are already offering an array of services--such as ESL and literacy classes, assistive technology, citizenship and diverse collections. Opportunities such as the Library Diversity Ning and other resources of the SPC can help libraries share and expand these experiences with other libraries; raising awareness of these existing resources to the one-third to one-half of libraries not currently using them will make them more effective.

Survey

The SPC, an advisory group to the Colorado State Library, undertook a number of special projects over the past three years, supported by LSTA grants and the Colorado State Library. The Committee encourages quality library service to various special populations including ethnic minority populations, persons with physical and mental disabilities, seniors, the under served, and other groups. The Committee undertakes activities and provides information to assist local libraries and their communities.

What is your position at your library/organization?

- Director
- School Librarian
- Outreach Coordinator
- Other program administrator
- Branch Manager
- HR Director
- Reference Librarian
- Library Clerk or Paraprofessional
- Volunteer

As part of the closure of a series of special projects focused on assisting Colorado libraries with information on inclusivity, as well as the creation of the next five-year plan for the SPC, a survey was issued in the Fall of 2009. Seventy-one self-selected individuals (most of whom identified as interested in diversity issues) responded, with 50% of respondents in the metro area, and a significant number of decision-makers as depicted above.

Library Needs
The most pressing needs in fostering inclusivity in the library profession were identified as:

Engaging new community users	65.7%
Increasing collections	61.1%
Creating plan for library diversity	58.3%
Community support for diversity	53.3%

The second most pressing needs were defined as: training on implementing diversity, with 70.6% of respondents selecting this as their second choice, and sharing with peers, selected by 83.3% of respondents. Other needs were: peer acknowledgement of need for diversity, promotion and use of assistive technology, diversity being a secondary concern to other issues, staffing and budgetary issues, hiring diverse staff and getting administrative buy-in to diversity.

Libraries responded to a list of diversity resources they would access in the next few years, with an average of 2.6 resources selected per person.

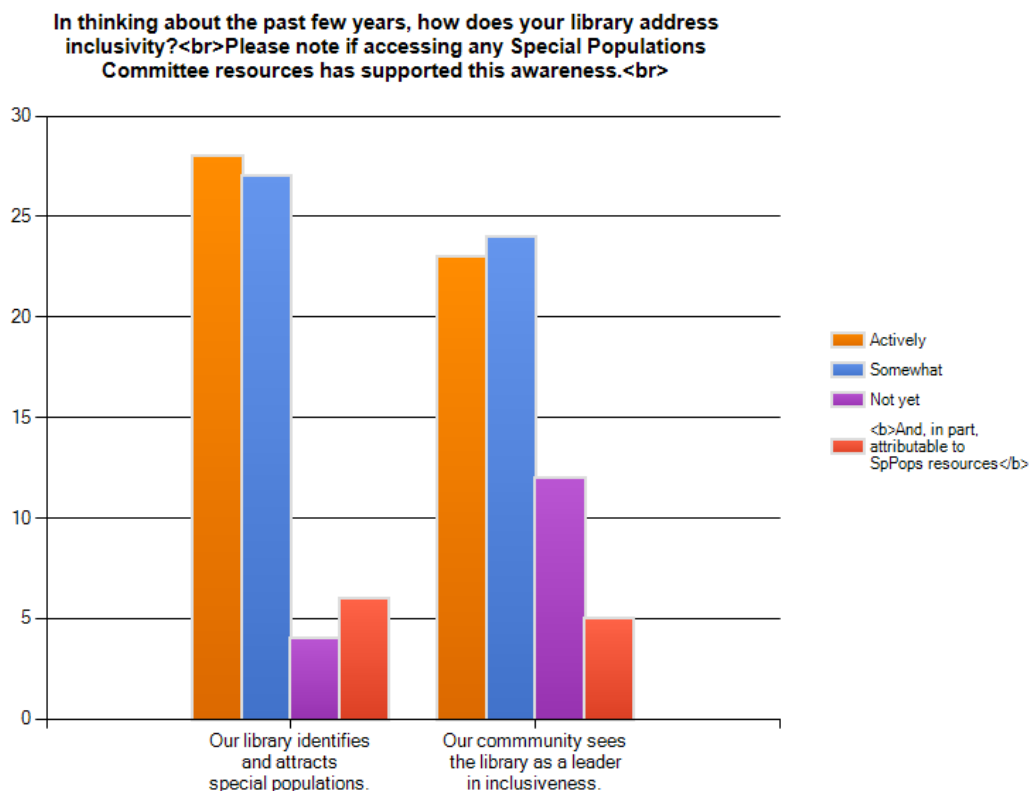|	
Recruiting Diverse Staff	48.1%
Marketing to & Collaboration with Diverse Populations	48.1%
Library Diversity Training	44.4%
Community Needs Assessments	40.7%
Community Programming Curriculum & Ideas	40.7%
Planning for Diversity	38.9%
Diverse Collection Development	38.9%
Mentors	16.7%
Service to a particular population*	13.0%

*Identified as: children on the autism spectrum; hispanics, aged, handicap; Muslim and Asian outreach ("sometimes Latinos get all the attention though they're not the only minorities!"); marketing to frontier and rural counties about our services; African-American youth; people with disabilities; How to incorporate diversity into collections that support a college curriculum? Differing viewpoints on subjects is easier, but that's not "big enough" for diversity.

Libraries shared successes that include ESL and citizenship classes, programs held outside the library and appealing to special populations, assistive technology volunteers and programs. Challenges cited include a lack of management support for diversity, a need to recruit people of color to the field, and turning attention to focus on diverse populations other than ethnic to utilize the strengths of the libraries in serving seniors and those with disabilities. Responses regarding successes and challenges are listed in the appendix.

Most importantly, the majority of respondents indicate they are only engaged in inclusivity to some degree. This is an area of concern that the Special Populations Committee will continue to address, in order to assist libraries in attracting and serving special populations and having the public perceive the library as a center of inclusive services.

Benchmarks

The Special Populations Committee set six goals for Colorado library achievement in 2005. Benchmarks for accomplishment of these are now set by libraries' responses in 2009. The complete response summary is provided in the appendix.

**In thinking about the past few years, how does your library address inclusivity?
Please note if accessing any Special Populations Committee resources has supported this awareness.
**

Legend:
- Actively
- Somewhat
- Not yet
- And, in part, attributable to SpPops resources

To further support the idea that libraries who serve diverse needs experience greater community support, responses indicate that of all diversity-related functions listed in the survey, libraries are doing the best at:
- appropriately welcoming diverse communities,
- providing a variety of collection materials (even though increasing collection diversity was also identified as a desire of responding libraries), and
- supporting staff involvement in the community.

Identified most strongly with a need for improvement were:
- having staff that represent the community's diversity,
- including special populations in library decision-making,
- training staff and volunteers in cultural competence or awareness, and
- having an overall library diversity plan.

In five of the six goal areas (excepting diversity of collection materials) nearly all benchmarks identified 60% of responders doing 'less than a good job.' The Special Populations Committee has existing tools and resources to assist libraries in implementing improvements. However, the challenge of integrating diversity with other priorities in management and planning remains.

Available Resources
In examining the current state of diversity in Colorado libraries, the Special Populations Committee activities influenced 8 to 10% of respondents' ability to serve diverse populations, according to the survey.

The question of 'diversity not being an extra' program to implement is an area of focus for the Special Populations Committee. Many existing resources require little to no cash outlay, only the investment of time--a precious commodity in an overworked and underfunded environment. Two-thirds of survey respondents were familiar to varying degrees with these resources, including the Special Populations Committee's:

- Website
- Resource weblinks
- Ning social network
- Mentoring
- Community Conversations mini-grants

Libraries were somewhat aware of other available resources including statewide diversity partners, diversity training, and Diversity Toolkit bibliographies. Promising Practices and collection materials lists were the least recognized services of the Committee.

Libraries would like to see additional resources on:
> finding multilingual staff; Bilingual Staff Resources; how to reach special populations; language training for current staff, especially in areas where there are a larger number of ESL community members; training of library school students on diversity; how to convince your administration of the importance of diversity!; coping with the co-workers who resist/resent diversity training; programming for special/rural populations; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender; programming for special populations, particularly Native Americans; integrating new immigrant populations; citizenship; mini grants; presentations for students and faculty
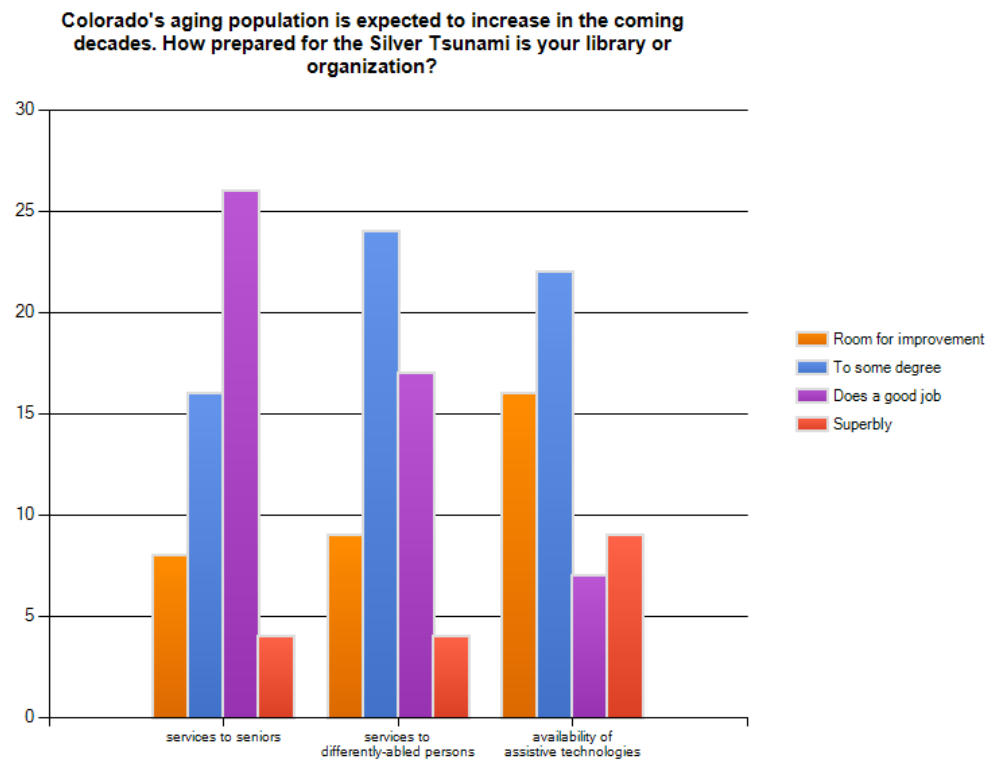
Next Steps in Library Services
With the expected increase in Colorado's aging population, the survey asked how well libraries were equipped for this 'Silver Tsunami.'

By 2010, Colorado is estimated to have more than 770,000 seniors age 60 and over, according to the Colorado Department of Human Services Commission on Aging. Between the years 2000 and 2030 the Colorado Department of Health & Environment predicts that population over the age of 65 will increase 247%.

Libraries indicate they are prepared to serve seniors in general, but as impairments impacting aging populations increase, so do the needs for services to differently-abled

populations and assistive technology. Other areas of need identified were: little money to meet the wide range of needs; lack of prioritization of this issue; need for more volunteers or other resources to give one-on-one attention to assistive technology users; layout including the space needed for technologies; staff training in assistive technologies and customer service. Another respondent posed an insightful question: "What are the top three areas libraries should focus on to serve this large population with tight funding and staff shortages?"

To augment results of this survey, a number of key informant interviews will be undertaken by the Special Populations Committee to provide additional insights to its next long-range plan. The existing six goals will guide this plan beyond 2010, with revised goal statements and new objectives and action plans.

Colorado's aging population is expected to increase in the coming decades. How prepared for the Silver Tsunami is your library or organization?

Legend:
- Room for improvement
- To some degree
- Does a good job
- Superbly

Appendix: 2009 Colorado Library Benchmarks of Special Populations Committee Goals

The following questions and responses were recorded during the August-September 2009 survey of 71 Colorado libraries who voluntarily responded to a call for input. The number of answers in each category and question is provided below. Yellow indicates an area marked for improvement or lacking in achievement to date; green highlighting shows areas where libraries feel most confident about their services.

The Special Populations Committee established six goals that guide our activities. Please help us evaluate these goals for the future.

1. LIBRARIES RESPOND TO CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

In considering the following goal areas & activities, consider how your library or library organization:

	Room for improvement	To some degree	Does a good job	Superbly
seeks special populations' input to library decisions.	21	21	15	2
supports staff involvement in the community.	11	14	27	7
provides services, volunteers, and staff proportionate to the local population makeup.	23	21	11	4
facilitates requests from special populations for programming, services, access, language materials, etc.	10	25	17	7

82% response rate

2. LIBRARY STAFF & VOLUNTEERS ARE DIVERSE

My library or library organization:

	Room for improvement	To some degree	Does a good job	Superbly
staff & volunteers reflect local population.	23	20	11	5
values and promotes diversity through library policies.	6	23	21	9

82% response rate

3. LIBRARY COLLECTIONS REFLECT SPECIAL POPULATIONS

My library or library organization:

	Room for improvement	To some degree	Does a good job	Superbly
collections reflect a variety of language, disabilities, cultural groups & materials types.	2	24	27	6
experiences increased usage by special populations.	9	18	26	5
uses resource sharing such as ILL to serve special populations.	5	21	25	7
includes special populations in	24	12	17	5

materials selection and as volunteers or trustees.				
welcomes diverse users appropriately.	5	13	30	10

82% response rate

4. PERSONNEL ARE CULTURALLY COMPETENT

My library or library organization:

	Room for improvement	To some degree	Does a good job	Superbly
leadership shows a commitment to diversity.	8	16	26	8
trains staff & volunteers in cultural competence or awareness.	21	17	17	3
is used by special populations due to our customer service.	9	21	21	7

80% response rate

5. LIBRARIES RECOGNIZE SPECIAL POPULATIONS

My library or library organization:

	Room for improvement	To some degree	Does a good job	Superbly
offers diverse programming.	12	18	22	7
invites community groups to use libraries.	10	17	20	11
makes the diverse community aware of library meeting space and resources.	13	23	16	6
experiences special populations utilizing story hours, galleries, displays, classes, etc.	14	22	13	9

82% response rate

6. LIBRARIES EVALUATE IMPROVEMENTS IN SERVICES TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS.

My library or library organization:

	Room for improvement	To some degree	Does a good job	Superbly
has a library diversity plan.	27	17	11	3
adopts policies, procedures, and outcomes in regards to serving special populations.	18	19	16	5

80% response rate

The following successes and challenges were shared by Colorado libraries through this survey:

- We partner with the public schools and Focus Points Resource Center to provide space for Spanish-English ESL classes, including daycare.

- (XX) does not promote indigenous leadership within the library system, therefore negating the community they are dictated to serve.

- We offer 7 group sessions per week (at 2 libraries) for new immigrants to learn to speak English… these groups have been facilitated by volunteers for over 5 years and they are very popular.

- 81 individuals have become citizens through our citizenship mentoring program.

- We have recently recruited three well-qualified assistive technology trainers that are on call to provide assistive technology workstation orientation sessions on request. It has been a definite challenge to get any competent assistive technology trainers to volunteer, but getting three volunteers in 2009 is a success worth sharing with others.

- Our third Nuestra Biblioteca (Hispanic Resource Center) celebration and car show had 1,236 attendees. We also are about to have our first Citizenship ceremony in decades. We have partnered with different community agencies to provide ESL/Citizenship classes this year, along with many other partnerships to provide programs for Latinos, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. We also started a program to take books and programs out to the Hispanic community and for those who live in poverty or find it hard to go to the library. Our challenge is providing adequate staffing for our diversity programs and services.

- I work in a prison library; we have special challenges due to the nature of our patrons which other libraries don't have to deal with, such as security concerns. Our population is much more diverse than the surrounding community. Programming is a challenge for several reasons: our location--it's hard to get people from metro areas to come down, and there is a lot of red tape involved. There are items presenters might bring that wouldn't be a problem on the "outside," but aren't allowed inside a prison.

- We serve school libraries and all students participate. They reflect the diversity of the population we serve.

- We recently received a $20,000 grant for Assistive Technology. Community members from the blind, hearing impaired etc. were part of an advisory board to help us with kick-off plans, choosing the equipment, etc. We held a kind of "health fair" for 40 support groups, etc. for the kick-off--with entertainment by special needs groups, etc. Very successful--now we need to work on a plan to better utilize the equipment.

- As librarians - we are a very lily white group; we need to recruit people of color to the field

- Our library needs to focus on diverse populations other than ethnic - we have lots for people with disabilities and seniors.

- Our library has a literacy program, whose client base is far more diverse than overall library patronage, staff, or volunteers. My answers do not reflect everything they do, since many of their activities are self-contained, and their successes do not compensate for the lack of diverse resources in our library services as a whole.