

Library Advisory Board Minutes: January 9, 2024For Multnomah County Library Advisory Board

The Multnomah County Library Advisory Board (LAB) met virtually on Tuesday, January 9, 2024. The meeting began at 5:03 pm.

Board members present were: Cassie Duprey, Clare Wilkinson, David Jarvis, Domiè Newton, Gabie Mbenza-Ngoma, Hazel Burke, Jade Chan, Kate Fleming, Kelsey Fong, Kristi Ketchum, Mabel Reed, Madison Riethman, Nikia Kae Solbjor, and Taryn Sauer. Lizzie Martinez and Megan Parrott were unavailable.

Staff members present were: Annie Lewis, deputy director; Eduardo Arizaga, community engagement manager; Katie Shifley, finance and facilities manager; Jen Studebaker, community services director; Johnette Easter, HR director; Jon Worona, director of innovation and technology; Kirby McCurtis, location services director; Laura Lien, community partnerships manager; Maddelyn High, management analyst; Shawn Cunningham, director of communications and strategic initiatives; Sonja Ervin, equity and inclusion manager; and Vailey Oehlke, director of libraries.

Commissioner Lori Stegmann, District 4, Multnomah County; and Jeff Renfro, county economist, were also in attendance. Alexander Achmatowicz, a member of the public, also joined.

WELCOME & CHECK-IN

Meeting attendees joined the virtual meeting either via video or phone and participated in a warm-up exercise in virtual breakout rooms. Attendees shared highlights from their conversations when the group came back together.

Alexander Achmatowicz, a member of the public, introduced himself and shared that he is attending to learn more about the library and its governance.

BOARD BUSINESS

Meeting minutes for the December 12 meeting were approved.

LAB liaison, Maddelyn High, shared that Danielle Pacifico-Cogan resigned from LAB, and folks expressed gratitude for Pacifico-Cogan's participation up until now.

High then shared a preview of plans for upcoming LAB meetings through the end of the fiscal year (June 2024), asking for feedback on the draft schedule and any gaps in other topics LAB members may want to learn about. LAB members shared support for the planned schedule.

UPDATES FROM LIBRARY LEADERSHIP

Library Director Vailey Oehlke shared highlights from the Director's Report and recent systemwide updates, including:

- A reminder that this year's [Everybody Reads](#) programming, featuring *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* by Gabrielle Zevin, has now launched. Oehlke noted that free copies of the book are available at local libraries, and High let folks know if they can't get a copy, she can mail one.
- A reminder that tomorrow (January 10) is the grand opening for the new Operations Center, which is a big moment (the first completed building) in the library bond program. LAB members are welcomed and encouraged to attend.
- Reopening of Gregory Heights Library on January 4, after bond refresh work was completed. The public's reception has been positive.
- An update on Central Library's reopening, which is expected to reopen after refresh work in late February. Oehlke noted that the improvements at this library demonstrate where the library is trying to go — creating spaces to center the human experience and centering those furthest from opportunity.

Deputy Director Annie Lewis also highlighted two upcoming cultural celebrations at the library, the [Slavic New Year Festival](#) (which was postponed due to winter weather) and the [Lunar New Year celebration](#). Lewis added that staff are always happy to see LAB members at these events, and LAB members are encouraged to identify and introduce themselves.

Oehlke expressed excitement for folks to meet and hear from meeting guests, Partnership Manager Laura Lien and Community Engagement Manager Eddie Arizaga, noting that these positions represent investments in terms of how the library thinks about partnerships and how it will engage with and welcome communities into new library spaces.

PARTNERSHIPS + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Meeting attendees introduced themselves, shared their home library, and other affiliations. Partnership Manager Laura Lien (she/her) and Community Engagement Manager Eddie Arizaga (he/him) joined and introduced themselves, shared their backgrounds and prior experience, and described their portfolios of work.

Arizaga gave a brief overview of MCL's Community Engagement Team (CET), a workgroup within the Community Services unit. CET staff connect with and build relationships with communities, especially those who have been under-resourced and underserved. The staff members on this team look for ways to uplift voices of the community, and to connect non-users and reconnect lapsed patrons to the library. Much of this work is conducted through coordinated events (including large cultural celebrations) and partnerships, and one-on-one engagement with individuals and community organizations. Engagement helps the library understand community needs and how those needs might be translated to goals/programs/services, as well as where the library is meeting goals and where there are gaps to fill. In the same way that Community Engagement Team staff provide information to community members on how they can influence library services and materials, Arizaga invited LAB members to further think about and share any thoughts they have about the reach the library can have.

Lien noted that this is a fruitful time for MCL to capitalize on unique opportunities about how we

activate new library spaces and invite folks in. Feedback gathered from engagement work can be put into implementation through partnerships, which is where Lien's work comes in. Lien shared that one of her goals is to centralize some of this knowledge so MCL has a better understanding of who it's partnering with and who it should be reaching out to, as staff members have many interactions and maintain many different types of relationships across the organization. Formalizing partnership work will allow the library to expand upon what it already does well and to honor and support other organizations in our region who do work the library doesn't do well (and whose vision matches MCL's). Lien noted that she has only been in her role for about three months, and offered to come back and talk more with LAB after her work is further into development.

LAB Chair Clare Wilkinson thanked Lien and Arizaga for joining to share their work and for bringing energy to the meeting. In response to a question, discussion ensued about how the library defines "community," and how the understanding of this term is interactive (involving community) and has to continually be redefined so it includes the most people. Lien added that she and Arizaga are working on some frameworks to outline the spectrum and scope of "engagement," from a one-time event or program to sustainable relationships over time.

Oehlke also thanked Lien and Arizaga for bringing their experience, passion, and expertise to MCL.

Lewis echoed that work to better define partnerships and workflows is still in the formative stages, encouraging LAB members to think about how they'd like to stay connected and be involved as the library builds intentional structure.

ACTION ITEMS + CLOSING

High reminded LAB members to email their current address to receive a copy of the Everybody Reads book via mail. High also noted that she is working to schedule LAB committee meetings, and to look for meeting polls via email.

The meeting adjourned at 6:28 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:
Maddelyn High, director's assistant
Multnomah County Library, Oregon