

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

Meeting of the Trustees Strategic Community Engagement Committee Friday, October 8, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. Held via Zoom

MINUTES

A meeting of the Boston Public Library Trustees Strategic Community Engagement Committee held virtually on Friday, October 8, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. via Zoom.

Present at the meeting included: Committee Chair Joyce Linehan, and members Evelyn Arana-Ortiz, Vice Chair along with members: Zamawa Arenas, Joe Berman, Michelle Coleman, David Leonard, John Linehan, Dayron J. Miles, Nam Pham, Chynah Tyler, Pam Waterman.

Committee member Imari K. Paris Jeffries was absent due to scheduling conflict.

Also, present were Boston Public Library staff including Director of Library Services, Michael Colford, Lisa Pollack, Chief of Communications and Strategy, and Clerk of the Board Pamela Carver, along with members of the public.

The Meeting of the Trustees Strategic Community Engagement Committee (“Committee”) was called to order at 8:31 a.m. The Clerk took a roll call was taken and determined there was a quorum. Attendees were reminded that the meeting was being recorded.

Joyce Linehan, Committee Chair, welcomed all to the meeting. She introduced herself to the group and welcomed all who attended. Ms. Linehan read the Trustees reaffirmation welcoming statement.

Ms. Caroline Driscoll, Legal Counsel for the BPL, gave a brief overview of the MA Open Meeting Law and quorum requirements and reviewed public records requests under the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”). She explained that all emails and documents exchanged by the committee on any BPL matters are subject to disclosure under public law.

The committee began its informal dialogue by trying to define “engagement”. Mr. Michael Colford clarified the term “community engagement” as talking to patrons outside of the building of the services we provide inside of our buildings. The term “outreach” refers to a more formal definition of providing actual services outside of the library buildings.

Mr. Leonard spoke to the shift of the BPL’s focus from those who came into the library buildings to bringing the library outside the walls of the buildings and to the people in the community. To build on that premise and develop better outreach as a form of marketing and invitation to find missing patrons where they are; building a culture that collaborates more directly with members of the community. Ongoing engagement may help build the services of BPL’s future.

Mr. Colford gave a brief overview of collaborations done with other City departments as well as the work of the Community Learning team. He explained that community engagement works through both strategic and programmatic partnerships for all ages.

The Committee discussed the system of how the BPL tracks program partners and how they are shared system-wide and hoped to add DEI tracking and if minority and/or women-owned organizations.

Mr. Colford explained that they do a lot of work with older adults around literacy and technology, specifically. He explained they were reinstating “home delivery” and their work with Boston’s Age Strong Department. There were various programs around GED/High School diplomas and engagement with a Civic Engagement focus.

Mr. Colford added that they also worked with public housing, having done several informational programs and drop-in appointments offering legal consultations. In an effort to retain college students, there was a focus on workforce development and assisting those with job searches, but also closing the loop to connect them with recruiters.

Ms. Linehan noted she wanted to explore seniors, who were experiencing more isolation than any age group. Those who were not reachable from agencies like Age Strong, especially seniors of color and in low-income areas.

Next, Lisa Pollack explained that the Communications Department oversees marketing, public relations, and web services for the BPL. She explained in terms of strengths, the BPL has a good broad reach with the newsletter reaching 250,000 people and on social media, they reached 32,000 on Twitter, 40,000 on Instagram, and 50,000 on Facebook. She noted some challenges Communications has had due to the BPL patronage being so diverse with 26 locations. Every patron is a priority, so trying to figure out key audiences proved to be challenging.

Communications’ operates with a small-centralized staff, making it difficult to dig deeply into branch stories as much as they would like. She explained they were adding two staff members who would increase their capacity to improve their reach into the communities.

Ms. Pollack explained the providing translation services of our documents was due to our need to outsource our translation services and it was time consuming.

In terms of opportunities, she noted she wanted to do more micro-outreach, with the opportunity to do some focus groups and demographic research and prioritization. BPL was clear on priorities but learning to understand whom exactly we are trying to reach. The goal is to glean more information into how people are getting their information. The focus was on patron acquisition and reacquisition of lost patrons.

The Committee discussed successful programs not always being marked by higher attendance but rather on its impacts and perhaps considering doing fewer programs with more marketing and targeting for better success rates and the need to prioritize should be the focus. They discussed that each member should consider how best to involve the BPL Friends Groups in strategic engagement, being a channel for great resources and partners. Committee members were encouraged to join a Friends group meeting or two in the coming months.

Ms. Arenas explained the benefit from some sort of strategy on three core principles that drive our community engagement approach: Expand, Deepen, and Sustain. Expand, relates to who are the groups we are missing, who we are not engaging. Deepen what communities we really need to forge deeper relationships with, and focus on strengthening those partnerships through community contacts in the branches. Sustaining how do we continue to adapt our programming so it is responsive to the needs of the community. Then using that information not as a rubric but as a way to learn where to put in more

effort and how do we prioritize the work that we are doing and the programs that we are designing so that we are really focused on where we are most needed and where do we need to put more resources.

The committee discussed some current program partners and what ways they might incorporate successful initiatives from their varying areas of expertise.

They also discussed focusing on requisitioning former patrons who may only get their information digitally or lax BPL cardholders, to remind them to come back to the BPL to highlight all the incredible services and programs that the BPL offers.

Ms. Linehan asked all members to think about a few things before the next meeting: defining engagement, committee goals, what the deliverables are, and what an appropriate timeline was.

Mr. Leonard reminded the Committee of the Roxbury Celebration/ribbon cutting to celebrate the 1 year anniversary of the reopening on October 23, 2021 branch.

Ms. Linehan asked for new business for which there was none. She called for public comment.

David Vieira, board member of the City-Wide Friends. He explained he was a former President and presently liaison to City-Wide Friends groups. He noted it was encouraging hearing the discussion to involve the Friend's groups. He added there was a Memorandum of Understanding between the BPL and the City in regards to nominating Trustees to the BPL board. When the board expanded from nine to fifteen members, it intended to involve a member of the Friends and was not. Mr. Vieira was upset about comments made in the beginning of the meeting in jest regarding pets attending the meeting during public comment. He noted he felt it was disrespectful and felt insulted by the comment. The members apologized for the comment and any unintended slight it may have caused Mr. Vieira.

With no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pamela R. Carver, Clerk of the Board