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Catherine A. Lemmer calemmer@iupui.edu

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Advertising Representative

Innovative Media Solutions
320 W. Chestnut Street
P.O. Box 399
Oneida, IL 61467
Telephone: 309/483-6467
Fax: 309/483-2371
Email: bill@innovativemediasolutions.com

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from the editor

By Catherine A. Lemmer



Community Building Line Item by Line Item

As I write this in early December, life and work at the Legal Resources Centre of South Africa (LRC) over the past few weeks has been rich and varied. In addition to my regular job responsibilities, I helped finalize documents and register participants at the International Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Work before the United Nations Human Rights Commission Conference, which was co-sponsored by the LRC; searched for historical images and photographs of LRC activities during the anti-apartheid struggle; proofed and checked citations for an upcoming publication of the Bram Fischer Memorial Lectures; and cheered as the LRC cycling team crossed the finish line in the Momentum 94.7 Cycling Challenge. I have also moved furniture, pulled trash bins, and helped clean the library and its ancillary storage spaces. All things considered, these experiences have been both enjoyable and beneficial to me as a change management leader at the LRC library.

The LRC is a workplace where job descriptions and actual job responsibilities don't always align perfectly. While this may be problematic for some, it is a great advantage for me as I am new to the LRC environment and need to come up to speed on not only my responsibilities but also on the work of the LRC overall. The advantages of having invested time in these activities became increasingly clear to me as I prepared a three-year budget for the LRC libraries that will form the basis of a donor funding proposal.

Budget preparation requires a well-developed understanding of the core work of your organization. My extracurricular, "not in my job description" activities helped fill in the gaps in my understanding of the LRC's work. My understanding of the dual role of the LRC as both a public interest law firm and a human rights research center was enhanced by the time I spent working with people across all aspects of the LRC's work. More importantly, these projects enabled me to interact with and develop relationships with LRC staff that will provide a friendly platform when the time comes to negotiate and explain certain challenging aspects of the library's budget. In short, a few extra work hours and missed lunches were exchanged for some valuable community bonding and building.

This foundation of familiarity and good will with the LRC staff will prove invaluable as we finalize the details of what is necessarily a bare-bones library budget. There is no room for luxuries, no print/online resource duplication, no pricing based on unlimited users or vendor preferences for the sake of preferences. As an example, though the proposed ILS, a basic cloud product developed by OCLC called Web Services for Small Libraries, is only \$125 (the annual fee scaled for developing economies), this is still an investment to be evaluated and not just assumed as viable. Unimaginable in most U.S. law libraries, the LRC library proposes to provide one research platform and a few specialized databases with limitations on the number of users in an environment in which there are more than 65 lawyers, three librarians, and a number of interns and researchers working on LRC publications and programs.

In the context of an array of hard zero-sum-game decisions about what will receive funding, we were careful to provide the resource that will best support the LRC's legal and research work. We differentiated in every decision between those resources that were absolutely necessary and those that would simply be "good to have." Gaining the necessary buy-in for these tough decisions was made easier as a result of the relationships I developed by spending time to understand the LRC's core work.

Marty Linsky, adaptive leadership theorist, faculty member at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and co-founder of Cambridge Leadership Associates, suggests that "the Nobel Prize for Leadership should go to the person or persons who have demonstrated unusual courage and skill in disappointing their own people at a rate they could absorb, in furtherance of the purpose of resolving a long-standing, seemingly intractable, problem."

Budget development requires library directors to sift through and separate the essential from the expendable. The result is that in most cases law library budgets are disappointing to both users and library staff alike. Users express frustrations with reductions in hours, services, and resources while library staff often resists developing new skills to support a wider variety of organizational goals in the face of frozen salaries and benefit reductions. A successful director will have developed the relationships necessary to manage this disappointment.

A library budget is perhaps the first reflection of the changes the law library must undergo if it is to successfully adapt to the changes in legal education and the legal industry. Moving the library forward will require changes in people's beliefs and work habits. In order to navigate from the known to the new—that is, to encourage change in people's beliefs and work habits—I suggest the benefits of simple community building, both with your staff and user community. Such conversations and activities will engender a view of the library as a full partner, not just an add-on, in the organization. If my experience here at the LRC is any guide, it is not only advantageous but also enjoyable! ■

calemmer@iupui.edu
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