

How to work with less \$



It is becoming more and more apparent every day that we in the library land (and especially in Illinois) will have to do with less, at least for now. As state and local legislators grapple with sharing fewer resources, they are making some tough decisions, and so are we. As I try to figure out how to work with less, these are the things I am thinking about:

- Make a plan to reduce spending, but during the decision-making process, be sure to include all the players, like the board and staff. Don't just sit in your office and make the tough decisions in a vacuum. Everyone needs to be a part of the decision, so they can be part of the solution.
- In deciding what to cut, keep focused on your mission and goals. These days, I have them taped on the wall, right over my computer!
- Create a "gate keeper," one person who authorizes **all** spending. It is important that staff feel they are **all** bringing treated equally.
- Review all service contracts; is there an "opt-out clause" that you can afford?
- If you are facing a large budget reduction, the solution will likely come by doing many things, e.g. purchasing fewer resources, streamlining operations, and reducing service contracts. There is no one magic solution!
- Make sure that what you are planning to cut will, in fact, actually save money.
- Folks have been asking me if they should use reserve funds to make ends meet. My answer is yes, if it is:
 1. A temporary reduction (e.g. a one year cut) and funding is truly/realistically expected to return to previous levels.
 2. A large permanent reduction (e.g. a 25% + cut). It will give you time to determine service priorities and what to cut, but by year two, you need to be living within your means.

If it is a "smaller" permanent reduction (e.g. under 25% cut), adjust your budget and spending immediately, to meet your new income level.

- Finally, as tough as cutting back is, stay positive. A negative work environment will quickly take a heavy toll on your ability to serve your customers. A positive attitude and no-cost staff incentives for exceptional service will make it much easier for staff to move ahead and do good work.

So, you may be asking "where is the good news in all of this?" Well, we will get through this recession; in fact, we are already on the upward swing. The financial markets are improving, job losses are slowing, housing starts are up and the tax base that we rely on for library funding will follow. However, it will take time and our constant vigilance promoting the library cause to rebuild. We have learned much about ourselves and our communities in the last year. With good leadership and community support, libraries will emerge stronger and more relevant than ever. Of this, I am sure!
Have a great week.