



How are folks cutting back?

Several weeks ago, I asked the ALS membership (a group of 254 school, public, academic and special libraries spread across Central Illinois) how they were planning to cope with budget reductions. This is what they told me.

- 80% (53) of the 66 respondents anticipate a cut in their libraries' budget this year, and 20% (13) do not.
- When asked what they will cut: 26% (36) said magazines; 19% (27) said reference material; 14% (18) said databases; 11% (14) will cut non-fiction; 14% (20) said databases, 10% (14) said fiction; 9% (13) said audio visual materials; 9% said fiction and 6% (9) said they would cut children's books.
- 50% anticipate no reduction in library programs
- 83% anticipate no increase in fees/fines
- 41% anticipate no change in their public relations / marketing budget
- When asked about library hours of operation they said: 57% (31) will stay the same and 11% (6) expect a reduction of less than 4 hours/week. Reducing library hours was, by far, the least popular of all budget cutting options.
- When asked about staffing costs: 19% (21) said staffing levels will not change, 16% (18) would reduce/eliminate travel/conference attendance, 13% (14) are implement a hiring freeze; 8% (9) will introduce days off without pay (furlough days...5 furlough days equals a 2% cut in salary) and 5% (6) would resort to permanent or temporary layoff.

In the comments section of the survey, many libraries said, "I sure wish we had put a little money aside every year, a small savings account, to help us get through these lean times." As tough as it is, if the library has not been saving, the board needs to establish a savings account immediately. If the library has been spending the principal of an endowment to make ends meet, **stop**. Spend the interest yes, but leave the principal, it's your nest egg, for times like this!!! Respondents also discussed alternate revenue sources and fundraising opportunities. Folks seem very interested in learning more about how they can add to the revenue line of their budget.

Our two-week survey was very small, but it is a look at how libraries in Central Illinois are approaching budget shortfalls and the decision making process. Interestingly, the overall feeling from folks was very positive, and the vast majority are focusing on living within their means as quickly as possible. Sixty-six libraries in Central Illinois are confident they will get through this recession and emerge better from the experience. I hope our survey and "group think" helps you, in some small way, make better financial decisions for your library and your community. Have a great week!