Budget Assignment

LIS 4040

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Denver Public Library (DPL) and Seattle Public Library (SPL) are two urban library systems with similar visions, goals, and service populations. Both systems serve a diverse range of patrons in large city environments and neighborhood branches. The overall vision of each library system is for their respective cities to be informed and inspired. Denver Public Library serves 634,619 people on a budget of $40,288,206 and Seattle Public Library serves 626,000 people on a budget of $60,217,644. As public library systems, both DPL and SPL are charged with budgeting their funds in accordance to public service, the American Library Association’s values, as well as their community-specific missions and values. Each year, the American Library Association (ALA) issues a State of America’s Libraries Report in which the ALA analyzes trends and needs in American libraries. Seeing as their budget allocations align with their own missions, visions, and values, as well as the suggestions from ALA’s State of America’s Libraries Report (2015) the Denver Public Library and Seattle Public Library prove to be mission driven organizations.

Before delving into DPL and SPL’s budgets, as according to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (“Compare public libraries,” 2016), it is important to have an understanding of each organization’s focus. Denver Public Library’s mission is to “connect people with information, ideas and experiences to provide enjoyment, enrich lives and strengthen [their] community” (“Mission & strategic plan,” 2016). Seattle Public Library’s mission is quite similar: “to bring people, information and ideas together to enrich lives and build community” (“About the library,” 2016). Both library systems are focused on connection - both people to ideas, and people to others, with the goal to create stronger communities. DPL’s vision is: “An inspired and engaged Denver” (“Mission & strategic plan,” 2016). SPL’s vision for Seattle is: “A city where imagination and opportunity thrive” (“About the library,” 2016). Again, the
libraries exhibit similar visions, with a dual focus on community awareness, as well as less education-centric goals, like “imagination.” While DPL and SPL have similar missions and visions, the way which they serve their communities are different in practice.

The first noticeable difference between DPL and SPL’s budgets are the size. In 2013, Seattle Public Library’s budget exceeded Denver Public Library’s budget by an amount just shy of $20 million. Total expenditures per capita were $63.48 and $94.91 for DPL and SPL respectively. In addition to having a larger per capita budget, Seattle’s funding was sourced only through the local government ($57,749,415), and other sources ($2,468,249), such as donations. Denver Public Library gained most of their funding through local government ($37,927,617), but also received funds through the state government ($136,077), federal government ($120,098) and other sources ($2,104,414), as well. The fact that SPL could be sustained almost solely on local government funding indicates that the SPL’s patrons valued its service highly. Since local government spending is often put to a vote, it can be presumed that Seattle voters approved a significant amount of tax dollars to go to the Seattle Public Library. While such local support is impressive, one is left to wonder how much more SPL could serve their community had they gained state or federal funding in addition to their local funding.

Another major difference between DPL and SPL is their internal structure. As established above, in 2013, Denver and Seattle public libraries served a very similar size population, so it follows that each library system had a similar number of branches, as well. Denver Public Library had 24 branches; Seattle Public Library had 26 branches. DPL has 134.75 librarians, and 361 staff members, whereas SPL has 128.1 librarians and 482 other staff members. The most noticeable difference between DPL and SPL lies in their operating costs pertaining to their staff members. DPL’s total salary budget was $22,112,797, which allocated
evenly across all staff members would provide an annual salary of $44,582. SPL’s total salary budget was $31,702,525, which allocated evenly across all staff members would provide an annual salary of $51,971. Of course, it is understood that funds do not get distributed evenly across every staff member, but the aforementioned example proves that SPL invested in more salary dollars per staff member than DPL did in 2013. Similarly, DPL invested less dollars per staff member in benefits than SPL. DPL budgeted $7,518,258 for staff benefits, or $15,157 per staff member; whereas SPL budgeted $14,225,200, or $23,369 per staff member. Without understanding the difference in cost of living between the two cities, it is hard to infer too much about the salary differences, however, the difference in SPL’s investment in benefits as compared to DPLS’s reflects demonstrates SPL’s high value of their employees. Neither DPL or SPL had any outlined values in regards to their employees, but SPL surpassed DPL in the benefits coverage of their employees.

Despite a few differences in their budgets, DPL and SPL both follow the trends outlined by the ALA’s State of America’s Libraries Report (2015). The first library trend mentioned by the report was “helping meet America’s broadband needs.” That is to say, not all U.S. households have the internet and most public libraries offer free internet access. Both Denver Public Library and Seattle Public Library provided about one million public internet sessions in 2013 on about 1000 computers. Denver hosted 921,782 sessions on 914 computers; and Seattle hosted 1,359,358 sessions across their 961 computers. Providing free internet access to patrons not only fits with a national trend, but also serves both organizations’ values, as well. One of DPL’s values is to provide people with access to information. Similarly, SPL’s dedication to “technology and access” is met by providing computers and internet access (“About the library,” 2016). SPL provided more computers to patrons in 2013 which allowed for 400,000 more public
internet sessions than in DPL. Although neither library system explicitly outlined a plan for digital literacy education, with their dedication to technology and community building, it would make sense that both library systems hosted digital literacy education events. The published budgets of the libraries do not outline the monies allocated to science, technology, education, and math (STEM) programming or collaborations, other ALA noted trends. While such programs would be aligned with both DPL and SPL’s values, hopefully in future budget reports, libraries will be asked to budget for such expenditures.

Also according to the State of America’s Libraries Report (2015), public libraries are emphasizing public programs, especially programs for teens and children. DPL holds two core values relevant to programming: collaboration and innovation. Programming itself is also one of SPL’s core values. In 2013, DPL had better attendance in programs than Seattle. Denver Public Library had 350,297 program attendees whereas Seattle Public Library’s programs drew 251,315 attendees. DPL’s programs have included story time for all ages, teen game nights, and one-on-one computer help for adults. SPL’s program attendance lacked about 100,000 participants behind DPL’s. Even so, SPL’s total library attendance was greater than Denver’s. Perhaps by creating more community focused programs, Seattle Public Library could entice even more patrons through their doors. Both DPL and SPL have specific goals in regards to children and teen programming, which happens to be another trend ALA noted, as well. DPL’s 2016-2017 goals include early literacy plans as well as out of school learning, which would apply to children of all ages. SPL’s first outlined service priority is in regards to youth and early learning. More specifically, SPL’s goal is to: “provide library services that support youth and families in academic success, career readiness, and life” (“About the library,” 2016). Seattle’s hope to create programs in regards to create programs relevant to young people’s lives leaves room for a
wide variety of youth programs. In library budgets going forward, it would be interesting to know how libraries allocate monies for specific programming; that is, the breakdown of monies spent on youth programming, adult programming, family programming, etc.

ALA observed one trend not reflected in either library’s core values or budgets. While both libraries value intellectual freedom, neither library had outlined advocacy for diversity in children’s literature in their values, or budgets. While both libraries value intellectual freedom, it is unclear if, or how, either library system participated in advocacy for such.

Both Denver Public Library and Seattle Public Library systems serve their communities with the vision of informed and imaginative cities. While both systems are values-driven, both systems also have room for improvement. For example, although DPL values customer satisfaction and loyalty, its library visits per capita in 2013 was 6.89, in comparison to SPL’s 10.75 library visits per capita. Seattle Public Library patrons were so loyal that most of SPL’s 2013 funding came from local government. Conversely, the only one of SPL’s core values not represented in some way by the State of America’s Libraries Report was its dedication to Seattle’s culture and history. Perhaps if other public libraries across the U.S. dedicated themselves to their communities in such a bold way, not only through written values, but also in practice, then other library systems will gain such loyal patrons, and maybe even as much local funding, as SPL. In the same way the Denver Public Library system could learn from Seattle, so to could SPL from Denver. DPL’s programs drew more participants in 2013 than SPL’s programs did. Seattle Public Library could emulate some of the programs which drew large audiences, or consult with DPL about how they create programming ideas, advertise to the community, and ultimately draw patrons into the library. DPL and SPL have values that align
with national trends, set high standards for new trends, and also have room for improvement to their services.
References


https://www.denverlibrary.org/content/about-dpl
