

Responding to Community Needs with Government Information – Transcript of audio

Good afternoon and welcome. My name is Helen and I a librarian at the U.S. government pushing office. I will be the MC for the room today. It is providing tech support with plenty of assistance. Today's webinar is responding to community needs with government information by Robin Miller. Head of library collections and discovery. Depository coordinator of the McIntyre library at the University of Wisconsin. The Q&A. Please add your questions in the chat and send them either through all panelists or all participants. If we have a live demonstration during the top, go to the bar and click on chat to activate chat. I will monitor the chat and the questions will be answered both throughout and at the end. Will also have periodic chat engagements for the audience of participation. This presentation is being recorded and will be made available shortly. I will have the microphone over to our speaker who will take it from here.

Thank you for that introduction, Helen. And you to everyone who joined today's webinar. As Helen said, I am Robin Miller. I am the depository coordinator at a library in Wisconsin. I will tell you a little bit more about my library and my community. First, I would like to say that I will be pausing at several points during the webinar today. So, when I pause, the reason I am doing that is to invite you to share comments in the chat. So, if we could take a moment for you to find the chat so that you are prepared to engage for those questions. I would appreciate it. Once you have found the chat, I encourage you to share your name and the library where you work if you are comfortable doing so. Regardless of whether you are comfortable with sharing your name and your library. Also, tell us what is your favorite client of government information. I will start. My favorite kind is census data hands-down. I am happy to have a legislative history lesson when I get one. Awesome. I see someone from my Wisconsin region. We have people from all over the United States. North Carolina, Vermont and some federal agencies. All kinds of government information topics. Great. So, thank you for entering some information about who you are. It's great to see for the purpose of engaging with you all throughout this hour together. Before we begin, you can see the agenda on my screen here. I hope you will humor me with one caveat that is not on the screen. What I would like to say is that this presentation is not about several things. The presentation that I'm here to give today is not about making exhibit with government information. It's also not about distributing swag. Although, let me say, I really enjoyed giving out those recent presidents and rulers that we are with. I will not be talking about strategies or increasing circulation of physical items that are howls in my depository collection. What are you going to talk about that? You must be thinking. I will share about McIntyre library in the communities we serve. We will go on to discussion of community needs and how I have tried to build a product this of responding to community needs with information. When I am able to uncover those needs. Finally, going to your questions, as I mentioned, a moment ago, I will pause at several points asking for examples of needs and responses. If you are not comfortable entering something into the chat and you feel like it is a yes or no answer then our webinar and interface also allows for a check mark or an exit. To begin. My federal depository library, McIntyre library, is located in the third congressional district. There are four libraries in this district. It is a geographically large district. It is helpful to have all four of us. We are located at public universities. They are on the far west and the others further east. Our regional depositories are in Madison and Milwaukee. If you are here today from a Wisconsin depository library. Whether it is state or federal, I hope you will say hello in the chat. Glad to see you here. In Wisconsin, depository libraries and government information specialist primarily interact through government Roundtable of the Wisconsin Library Association. Especially in the planning of the annual government information day. All

of that is to say that I have a great immediate group of depository colleague who I know I can turn to at any time that I have a question or if I want to bounce off an idea about outreach or some other aspect of managing our depository resin in the state. Locally, McIntyre library is a selective federal depository and selective state depository. McIntyre became a depository library in 1955, I believe. We are located on the campus of the University of Wisconsin. Our population of students is primarily undergraduates. With a few graduate degree programs in congressional domains. The University enrollment and all 2022 was about 8400. Then we have a work force of about 1200 people. The library employees 29 people in total. Including 10 librarians. I am the sole depository coordinator. The government information specialist for the purpose of this service. I am assisted by my catalog person who manages all of our physical processing's. I have been the depository coordinator since 2010 when I joined the library. In that sense, I may be unique in the group of people who are logged in today. I don't have a great sense of what depository demographic are in general. But that could be an interesting subject for a future FPL webinar. In preparing to talk with you all today. I had a chance to reflect on my library's community. I have always thought of myself as a community center or oriented librarian. When talking initially with Helen and colleague at GPO, I suggested to think about the government information landscape from the perspective of the community that we serve. The type of questions they like to ask. My depository library is very specifically centered in a university in an academic library. I know that some of you are not located in academic libraries. You may be coming from public libraries, special libraries within government agencies these or another kind of organization. We are all coming at the subject matter from different places. I think that's my thinking not just about the type of library we are in but the type of community we serve can be a helpful way of conceding the kinds of information that we can bring to our various constituencies for the public. If you can take a moment to think about the communities served by your library. Enter them into the chat if you are comfortable doing so. When I look at this diagram here in front of us. For my campus community, I drill down even further. I can think about specific student populations, specific majors that utilize government information. I think about specific faculty and disciplines that may engage a lot with the community. Perhaps around social service needs or around development/transportation/business. There are a lot of different ways to understand our community on a micro and macro level. Earlier when I show you our congressional district, I can definitely think of this from the perspective also of industries in the region. I can think about my community in terms of a wide variety of constituencies that arise in this. I will pause for a moment. I will call out Daniel Cornwall from Alaska. Daniel has said that he has community that includes government employees, residents, residents of Alaska and geologist with historians. This jumps out to me because I actually grew up in Southeastern Alaska. Hello, Daniel. Hello, Alaska. Wherever our communities are, we all have some different and what we might be able to do with information in all communities. We can think about what is a need. After we articulated the title of today's topic. I realize that we never look at the definition of a need. I am a parent of young children. My kids and I often talk about the difference between needs and wants. It occurred to me that the word need is largely subjective. So, my needs maybe your wants and vice versa. I am going to post to you today. A community may have a need to address a deficit or we may have a need to grow in some way. These deficits or areas for growth could be intellectual, social, physical or economic. So, these are the type of needs that I'm thinking about. Certainly there are actual needs to that we may engage with in some way. Remembering that we are library professionals and not emergency first responders. So, I am here to talk today about how we can view the primary currency of our profession which is information to help our community address a deficit or grow to meet a need in some way. Again, these could be intellectual needs, social, economic, et cetera.

To begin to apply this in a very concrete way, let us start with a pretty contemporary example. That is the COVID-19 pandemic. Back in early 2020, the fact sheet that is on the screen right now began to

appear in communities all over the United States. This is a great example of government information. Being developed in response to an information deficit. At the time, when the COVID-19 pandemic was ramping up and we were in a international public health crisis, one of the problems that we had was that we did not really know about COVID-19. We did not know what the coronavirus was going to do. To some extent, the information had to be collected through experience because it was a new thing. This flyer here. It is an example of some information that was distributed early on in the pandemic. At the time that the CDC released this, one of my colleagues suggested that we print them and put them up not only in our libraries but places around our community. In our specific contacts that involved putting them up and around our University of Wisconsin Eau Claire campus. People started to notice them and asked if we had more copies. We distributed even more than. I still see these flyers in the community on bulletin boards, bathroom stalls et cetera. Some are looking a little bit rough but they are still there. Sharing facts about COVID-19. This is an example of government information that was distributed to address a knowledge deficit. My library was certainly not the author of this flyer. As libraries, we know we can often be a conduit of useful information for the public. I would never argue that the library should be the mediator of information like this or the central focus of distributors. Our public service practice, I believe the library is often a center to finding high-quality information. Especially in a time of crisis. So, if you work in a library where this fact sheet was posted on bulletin boards or maybe distributed electronically in social media or something like that. You were responding to a community need for information. Information deficit. Sharing the information. Looking back on the COVID-19 pandemic. Can you think of another government document that addressed information deficit related to the coronavirus? If you can think of something please enter into the chat. We will pause to allow people to do that. Something that comes to mind for me related to COVID was public health data that many communities began to see on dashboards. I am seeing here the CDC website in fact sheet. Community level pages. Safety guidelines for public spaces. Vaccine information. All great examples. When I mentioned COVID-19 dashboards -- I am thinking of a dashboard that you might see the University show. It shows the rate in our campus community. They are also by data collected by our public health department. As well as putting it into a national context with data from the CDC. They were developed by all kinds of organizations. Certainly, those efforts maintain a problem for some because they were made with discrepancies and sources of information. During the early days I got a lot of questions from people. Asking about the sources of different data related to health, vital statistics and things like that. People were trying to make sense of the local information available about our COVID situation. Of course, it is important to remember that not all -- in fact, most information needs are not crisis information. So, COVID created a lot of it. I think that is widely understood. When we think about other information. How we might respond to those needs as librarians. Whether it is a deficit like I said earlier or an area for growth. I think of these as outreach. There are three very specific types of outreach. Cold calling, I will talk about that verse. Then professional development. Also networking. These are all overlapping. There are times where one might be engaging in all three at the same time. We will begin with the idea of the cold call. On the screen here. I am showing a bit of the national bait topic for high schools for 2022 and 2023. When I first became a depositor coordinator. I talked it and I introduce myself. I shared my Congressional research annual compilation of information related to the national debate topic. This took very little time. I did it over email. It was an annual message that I would send to debate coaches who often changed because they moved on to other schools or retired. Gradually the coaches and the debate students started responding to my annual about the national debate topic. Sometimes they want to clarify a statement. Maybe something that they found in the CRS report. Sometimes they wanted to find a specific document that they had read about in the news. May be they just needed help understanding the differences between various documents that supported their arguments. There are a lot of reasons to ask you library for help right? If you are not sure what I mean by the national debate topic in go to gov info and search national debate. It is a pretty long link but I can

drop it in the chat too. That is a link to and query for the topic for high schools that you find. If you ever contacted someone, please do share in the chat. While entering the examples, summarized by saying this example illustrates the sum library outreach is speculative. I knew that high school debate teams might use this very specific piece of information. As a high school student I had been on it and I remember using some documents like this. So, that little information was in my mind. It is often the case that we share information like this through a message or maybe a social media post like that. We are throwing something against the wall to see if it has any sticking power at all. The sticking power may not be very obvious for a long time. That certainly has been my experience in working with debate teams. An interesting cascading effect of that relationship which really began as a blind outreach effort is that now, students who are on those debate teams have articulated. They have gone to college. They sometimes have gone back and say that's my. Now I have a different topic. These relationships can have a long tail if we begin to cultivate them. Okay, we can also think about our efforts to uncover community needs. Going for professional development. So, when I say professional development, I do not mean the type of professional development that we are participating in here. Where you guys are listening to me and I'm telling you something. What I actually mean is the kind of professional development where you might provide some instruction to a group of people. Maybe it is a discussion or something like that. Probably not even librarian. Those who might be using their knowledge that you're sharing to apply in some community progress. This is an aspect where I think academic libraries are likely to have an edge over libraries that are not located within universities or educational settings. The reason is that we are often in a position to work with first student whose professions may lead them back to the library that help them when they were in their degree programs. Also, we are often in a position of working with instructors who may have some professional expertise or community relationships that are unrelated to their teaching or not directly related. They may pull us in to those types of research queries that otherwise we might not be exposed to in our professional expertise. An example of that. Here we have a strong journalism program. Students in advanced reporting learned that good stories in newspapers or other kinds of publications often involve data, documents and people. I have worked with as many of future reporters to locate current data and documents related to a story. In the initial classes that I first worked with, we were focused on census data. I certainly also help students locate other types of data related to the economy. Especially data that helps to explain educational trends and the higher education environment especially. It is often the case that the state it would be readily available to students if they knew where to go. Instructors also know that students often need some guidance when it comes to getting their feet wet with the biggest available tools. Bringing them into a course can be a great first step to introducing future journalists to the types of information that could inform stories. Returning to me with questions from the national Center. Department of Energy, from the census and various other platforms. Libraries can also provide for community groups, scholars et cetera. Regardless of the connection that those organizations have with the curriculum. There is a cold calling aspect in relationships. Going with an organization that might want to use this kind of outreach. One example around the time of the 2010 and 2020 senses, I reached out to a local genealogy group. On both occasions I offered to talk with the group. In one case it was in person and the other time it was on zoom. About how the senses works. What to expect from not just current census that is being conducted but also from releases of historical data. These two things are different, right? They are not managed in the same way but our community of very enthusiastic genealogist may think of it as the census. The timely and topical opportunity present itself as a way of sharing some basic information about how it is really important and how it works. Then how we can make the most of it both in our contemporary setting as well as when researching historical actuation. The census is generally great at offering opportunities to learn things. I find in my role in government information that the census is a quick release of new data. It often presents great opportunity to reach out to different members of my community. An announcement about a new data release can be a way of keeping them aware that I am

paying attention. I might be able to help them or a student with that information. I want to say that Wisconsin has very interesting politics. One of the status meetings about my time working here professionally is that I don't get a lot of questions about elections or issues on ballots. As a former political science major, that is something I assumed that I would track with a lot more as I worked in the field of government information. However, during a recent election season, a group of activists contacted me. Some of them were former students from the University. They were looking for help in researching a local reprimand him. Their information was related to data about the issues. As well as, some historic regulation to how the issue had been handled previously. We were able to locate the information. Going with some peer-reviewed literature. They are also an instructor at the University. All of this to say that instructional relationships can have a big payoff for depository libraries even when we are thinking beyond our university institutions if that is where we are located. There is certainly some leg work to do. I don't want to minimize that this is something that we can just wait for. Cold calling and cultivating relationships intentionally in our various communities can be a great way to start. So we can build up some interest. Also just unreliability in our services that we provide. So, referrals from libraries, professionals and experts in another aspect of this. In the Venn diagram I showed earlier, I mentioned cold called him a networking and professional developments. I say they are overlapping. I still maintain that that is always going to be the case. So, while I am talking now, if you can think of a time when a question was referred to you by a library professional from side of your particular institution or employer. Please do share that in the chat. Referrals come to depositories from so many directions. It is often because of our local or regional professional networks. In addition to reaching out to local organizations that may have an interest in a kind of information. For example, genealogist that I mentioned a moment ago. I think a crucial aspect of being a depository library and or coordinator. Whether it is selective. Reaching out to people who are also librarians who may not have the same specialties as we do. So, in one example, with my local public library in the past. I've been invited to give three skill building workshops to help staff build confidence with common question using government information. So, a common question that comes up a lot is how a particular elected official voted, for example. In my experience, that can be hard to figure out. It depends on the legislative body and all of that. The information is stored in a lot of different ways. When we look at non-depository records of votes. The information can be wildly inaccurate or really difficult to piece together. This was an example of a question that a public library asked me for some assistance. Going into training. In my experience, these workshops have that immediate impact of helping a group of people learn how to answer a question quickly, efficiently, independently without having to refer it. That is great. The need here is the need to refer to a government information specialist. When topic is in the news, a complex question may be referred to me from another library. That context could be a single person in a single query or whole bunch of people asking about a certain topic.

I do find that local controversies often lead to interval inquiries. An example from my local community is a public trip transportation conversation that has been going on for the last several years. The city where I live and work applied for a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to build a new or offset the expenses of building a new transit transfer station. The grant was awarded and that was great. The conversation also led to people in the community and in the media talking about whether or not this was a community need. How far people are commuting? Where do they need to be? Things like that. I received a number of questions both students who were interested in the topic from a transit activism perspective. As well as people in the community who were interested in information about public transit funding from the federal government and other municipalities. A wide range of inquiries. The point here is that a community controvert conversation can be the catalyst for developing some knowledge about the government information that could address a question. My experience is that we take a little bit of initiative to say, where can I find that transportation data? That is one example. I am

often preparing myself to be able to efficiently answer the question when it inevitably comes. Another example from several years ago. I think this one always sticks with me. In Wisconsin we have a state statute. It is known colloquially as the --. They once contacted me after being referred by the public library. They really wanted to find the actual statute. They wanted to read it. Responding to a person's question. Not necessarily a widespread community need for this information. And responding to the question, I was able to quickly help them locate the act and the information in the children's code. Also to build our community's capacity in general to respond to a complex reference question. I think, as information in the government space -- we are aware that government and regulatory information can be a challenge for everyone. This is an area where I tried to maintain my knowledge. Keeping an eye on what is actually happening. Going with it locally, and federally. Questions about what is happening often turn into reference questions. That is an abstract way of conceiving a need. Being aware of the types of questions that people might ask can be crucial to my product. In the chat, also my regional depository library and. Says that they've gotten questions from library staff in the days or months after the presentation. That is a great example to maintain a professional network. Certainly, also, being available for those types of referrals. The payoff for the type of outreach that I have discussed today. From my personal experience. First of all, arguably, it is less work than spending a lot of time building. Displays that people may not see. It may be more authentic in general. Going to the needs of an actual community that might use this information. It can be more timely. Another aspect is that it can be formatted in an agency-agnostic way. I do not spend a lot of time talking in my community about how people consult the catalog of McIntyre library to find government information. I don't refer people to the catalog for government publication. Things like that are not a part of my practice. Instead, I like to start with a question. What do you need to know? If you need to know something then what are the potential sources that could help me to answer that question? This is more of a listening relationship in a lot of ways. Before responding with information. I have found through some years of experience that this really works for me. It works for my library and our community. I would certainly never argue that my library status as a federal depository is frequently discussed as an aspect of the community or anything like that. Those constant outreach through networking and professional development offering cold calling to people who might be used as specific types of conversations. It has generated some continuous and steady interest in the services that we offer here. Within the congressional district. I promised Helen that I would leave a lot of time for questions. I do want to hear from people who are listening today. I appreciate it so much. The time that you have taken. I certainly welcome your questions and theories. My email address is listed on the slide here. You are very welcome to email me following this presentation. Or refer to someone else if that's more helpful. Thank you so much for your time.

We have a new question coming in.

Think that I question. If we think about areas for growth. The example of the federal grant that my community received for transportation is an example. Information was important in a different part of that process. It wasn't necessarily that there was a deficit of information but the people writing the grant proposals to the D.O.T. would need information about our population. Going with the local infrastructure. Much of that was readily available. Going through various government agencies. That is an example where people are preparing the documentation. Needing to make the request. Consult with a librarian. Collect information that is incorporated into the grant proposal. I work in a grantmaking environment. I know it is often the case that people who are preparing need to consult with libraries not just about the grant process but the nuts and bolts of the immunity situation and the need. That is one example of an area for growth. Cold calling the debate coaches about the national debate topic. We are talking about a group of high school students who are probably high achieving and also are interested in

a topic that they committed to debating for a whole year. Not necessarily a group who has a lot of pre-established information. That is an intellectual area. It is going to be an area for growth that is largely achieved through personal development. Not necessarily through a structured curriculum. That is a way of doing it. It is often the case that when people are looking at information, it is not because they are viewing with that particular crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an example of a crisis in the sense that there were many problems. One of them was a basic lack of information. It is often the case that libraries are not really responding to information crisis. We are helping someone to develop an expansion of that knowledge. That is what I mean by an area of growth.

I was wondering, what about the community of the library? How often, across the nation, do they possibly have the same issue?

We are not committed. We do have a pretty large direction especially in the area of --. I would have to do some investigating to find the answer to the question. We lend -- on a fairly regular basis. I might mean one every couple of months. Typically what we are lending is institutions that do not have access to a pay tool. Typically using something or looking for a document that never has been digitized before. We certainly do risk quests like that in our library loan. People are discovering them. That is certainly the advantage of having an entire catalog collection. Everyone has that perception. It certainly has been important for us in maintaining our relationships.

I will slowly start wrapping up the webinar. Anyone in attendance has any last-minute comments? Thank you and we enjoyed your talk. Fabulous presentation. You are showing a survey link. This webinar has been reported and will be notified shortly when it is available. If you enjoy today's webinar, please check out some of our upcoming webinars. We will put two links in the chat. It is about the F DLP Academy and the calendar of events. All right, Robin, thank you for your presentation. Have a marvelous day, everyone. [Event Concluded]