
Northern Lights Library Network 2001-2011

A Report to the
Governing Board
June 18, 2011

Ruth Solie

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A Report to the Governing Board from Ruth Solie, Executive Director June 2011

Northern Lights Library Network (NLLN) has been a steady, positive influence on the Minnesota library community in the 32 years of its existence. Over the past 10 years it has been my privilege to be its Executive Director and to work with the NLLN Governing Board in creating a dynamic and creative organization.

The work of the organization has been guided by the following statement of values:

- ❖ *We believe in the freedom of access to information in all forms, for all persons, and celebrate the process of life-long learning.*
- ❖ *We value open communication, cooperation, respect, and resource sharing among all libraries.*
- ❖ *We believe in advocacy based upon understanding of the social, cultural, political and historical contexts of the communities in which libraries function.*
- ❖ *We strive for integrity, competence, personal growth and service to our profession and to our communities.*
- ❖ *We are committed to the highest standards of ethics and integrity.*
- ❖ *We believe in the value of technology and its role in achieving our goals.*

These values have guided our efforts in the areas of library advocacy; educational opportunities; sharing ideas, materials, expertise, and experience; and in strengthening cooperation between all types of libraries. I have chosen a few key areas to trace the evolution of this work during my time as Executive Director.

In all, they have been highly productive years and the NLLN Governing Board and the far-flung NLLN member libraries can take pride in the achievements we have collectively achieved. NLLN has chosen to be a leader and innovator in the world of libraries, and to be social and collaborative in all our undertakings. I thank you for the opportunity to have been a part of this experience.

Continuing Education/Staff Development

Northern Lights Library Network has had a long history of providing educational events in the region that strengthen the ability of libraries to provide their best level of service. Some of these events have been the sole undertaking of NLLN; others have been in partnership with member libraries, other multitype regional systems, Minitex, State Library Services, professional organizations, or partners outside the library community.

Each year we have sponsored or been involved in 20-30 events, serving from 150-700 people. Over the years we have seen a major shift in how these opportunities are made available. The popular teleconferences (e.g., Soaring to Excellence) from the College of DuPage in Illinois have transformed from being available in-person at a satellite downlink site sponsored by NLLN to being made available via desktop streaming directly to library staff computers. The highly specific training related to individual databases in the Electronic Library for Minnesota have gone from multiple, on-site trainings to online webinars available live, or via an archived version, directly from Minitex to the end user. NLLN has successfully adapted its delivery of content to member library staff as these modes of delivery have changed.

Despite the dramatic growth in affordable and convenient online learning opportunities, we know that that member libraries are increasingly hard-pressed to maintain adequate travel and staff development funds for those events that do not take place online or for free.

NLLN Continuing Education Scholarship Program:

Beginning in fall of 2002, NLLN sought a way to make continuing education more affordable for the individual staff and trustees of the region's libraries. In addition to the continuing education and staff development opportunities NLLN offered in the region, we wanted to open the door to other opportunities. The NLLN Continuing Education Scholarship program was established to give individual staff members the ability to supplement institutional budgets in order to take advantage of opportunities that would enable them to better perform their library jobs.

From the guidelines for Scholarship Applications:

Northern Lights Library Network endorses career development and enhanced library service by supporting library staff and library board member participation in continuing education programs and events. These scholarships are intended to provide supplemental funds for continuing education and will be awarded as an incentive for individual growth, and development of the ability to provide improved library services in the NLLN region.

Beginning in FY2003, Northern Lights made Continuing Education Scholarships available to any staff member in an NLLN member library. Scholarships are intended to supplement tight continuing education and travel budgets of member libraries, and to allow workers to

participate in educational opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to them. On average, 43 scholarships are awarded each year to staff, at all levels, in all types of libraries.

Each recipient is eligible for up to \$500 per year and has written a brief report about their experience which has been posted on the NLLN website. These reports testify to the value of these educational experiences and the impact scholarships have had on the region as a whole. In every case, recipients have expressed their gratitude for the opportunity that a scholarship made possible for them.

NLLN has awarded 284 scholarships over the past 9 years (nearly \$70,000 in total) and reaped great results. Scholarships have gone to staff in all types of libraries (Public: 107; School: 137; Academic: 37; Special: 3) and across all parts of the NLLN region. They have been used for local, regional, national, and international events. See the reports, posted on the NLLN website (<http://nlln.org/scholarships.html>).

In this current fiscal year (FY2011), the NLLN Continuing Education Scholarship Committee reviewed and awarded 39 scholarships: 14 to public library staff; 18 to school staff; 6 to academic staff; and 1 to a staff member in a special library. Notable in this year was our funding of a “team” of media specialists and teachers from the Moorhead Public Schools to attend the Spotlight on Books Conference. This type of collaboration between teachers and librarians is something we will continue to encourage.

In FY2012, we will provide a special scholarship opportunity to school media center workers who would like to attend the national conference of the American Association for School Libraries to be held in Minneapolis in October, 2011. We have made a similar offer when other national conferences (e.g., Public Library Association in 2008) were held in Minnesota, in order to expose the greatest number of staff to the offerings of a national conference.

One of the key successes of our CE Scholarship Program is the ability of staff at any level to apply and receive funding. It is often the case that institutional funding is more readily available for travel and staff development to administrators and professional-level staff than to staff deeper in the organization. NLLN provides funding opportunities to all. Another strength of our scholarship program is that individuals can choose a continuing education event that specifically meets their needs. This is especially helpful if they work in an area that has specialized requirements and few continuing education offerings in this region.

Other Continuing Education Events and Activities

Spotlight on Books (<http://nlln.org/spotlight.html>): NLLN is the fiscal agent for this Conference which has been held in northern Minnesota for the past 23 years. In addition, the current NLLN Executive Director, and her predecessor, have been the general conference co-chairs for the past 10 years. This outstanding children's literature conference features nationally known authors and illustrators, and is supported and organized by volunteers throughout the northern part of the state from all types of libraries, schools, and colleges. It is always well received and has provided an outstanding program each year. NLLN has supported the Spotlight Conference through in-kind contributions of its staff, through occasional financial grants to the Conference, and through scholarships to attendees from our region.

23 Things on a Stick; More Things on a Stick; Things on a Stick News:

<http://www.23thingsonastick.blogspot.com/> <http://morethingsonastick.pbworks.com>
<http://thingsonasticknews.blogspot.com/> <http://23thingsonastick.blogspot.com/2007/09/nlln-blogs.html>

The 23 Things on a Stick program was a joint project of the 7 Minnesota Multicounty, Multitype Library systems and was launched in early 2008. This program provided several thousand library staff across the state an opportunity to engage in a personal learning project involving Web 2.0 tools. In the NLLN region we had over 100 library staff involved in the first year, and slightly smaller numbers in the following years (More Things on a Stick [2009] and Things on a Stick News [2010]). NLLN had involvement in all levels of these projects, not only in supporting participants in our region, but also in the development, deployment, and monitoring of this very large and very successful learning project. The feedback we received from participants over the years indicated that the 23 Things projects provided important learning and networking across our region and across the state.

Also as an outgrowth of that project, the multitype systems have provided programs at national and state conferences, provided an "Internet Café" at state conferences in recent years, and assisted other states in developing similar programs for their regions.

Back to School Workshops/Midwinter Conferences:

As a result of the Enhancing Education Through Technology grants, which enabled the rapid growth of the North Star Library Consortium, we have been able to provide at least 2 staff development workshops per year for school media center staff since 2004. These workshops have been very popular and have provided an opportunity for school media center staff to network, learn, and grow as they provide 21st century learners with 21st century skills. Each year we have had the opportunity to showcase outstanding regional and national library leaders. Thanks to NLLN funding, partnerships, and grant funding, these events have been at low or no cost to participants and have yielded great results.

In 2010, our midwinter conference featured Buffy Hamilton, and in 2011, our midwinter conference featured Laurie Conzemius and Gay Galles. We anticipate continued collaboration with the members of the North Star Library Consortium in presenting workshops and conferences, in addition to training opportunities.

Other partnerships in Continuing Education:

NLLN has long had a partnership with Minitex to provide in-person, hands-on training and education related to the Electronic Library of Minnesota (ELM), the Minnesota Digital Library, and to other Minitex services such as training for use of CatExpress, MnLink, AskMN, and other programs. Often these workshops and training sessions are done in partnership with our member libraries and are customized to particular audiences. In 2009 we did a series of ELM workshops in the region that were directed at teacher/librarian cohorts, and for public library staff/users. These workshops, occurring in diverse locations across the region, bring the expertise of Minitex staff to librarians of all types in our area. They have been important and useful.

In 2010, we partnered with Lake Agassiz Regional Library, Minitex, and others to sponsor the Stephen Abram workshop, "Imagining the Library in 2025." This was an informative, exciting, and timely event, well attended by staff and trustees from all across Minnesota.

Cooperative Library Automation Projects

Long before I became Director, NLLN had been instrumental in cooperative library automation projects. NLLN had been responsible for the bibliographic retrospective conversion for nearly all the major libraries in the region and had established and managed the Northern Lights Cooperative Automation Project (NCAP), a cooperative project among 3 regional public library systems (Kitchigami Regional Library, Lake Agassiz Regional Library, Northwest Regional Library) to share a library online catalog system. NCAP was also the MnLINK Gateway Server site for the shared catalog of these 3 regional library systems.

In response to changing times and needs, the NCAP project was phased out in 2002 and replaced by new library management systems in the LARL/NWRL region and in the KRL region. At the same time, the Waubun-Ogema Schools and the Kittson County Schools (Hallock) began to explore the possibility of having an affordably priced, web-based, centrally located, hosted

library management system for school media centers. By the summer of 2004, the North Star Library Consortium was created, selecting the Follett Destiny library management software as the Consortium software, and the expertise of the ESV Region 1 in Moorhead to be the Consortium's software host and fiscal agent. The partnership between NLLN, Region 1, and the first school libraries quickly led to 2 successful Enhancing Education Through Technology (E2T2) grants totaling \$646,000. This partnership and these grants allowed the North Star Library Consortium to blossom.

In the first 18 months, the Consortium grew to 75 school and special libraries on the shared catalog hosted at Region 1. Each member library received extensive training, follow-up support, and professional development opportunities. With the second E2T2 grant in 2008, the Consortium was de-centralized (though still hosted at Region 1) and membership was extended into the central Minnesota area and then into southwest and south central regions of Minnesota. Today, the Consortium membership includes 208 public and private school libraries across the entire state, with holdings of nearly 3 million items, serving 141,000 users (students and staff), and an annual circulation of over 13 million items. The value of the collections included in the Consortium is in excess of \$13 million. Of the 208 member libraries, 122 are from the NLLN region and 5 of these are special libraries. These special libraries include the White Earth Tribal and Community College Library, the White Earth Early Childhood Programs Readmobile, the Leech Lake Tribal College Library, the Leech Lake Early Childhood Programs Library, and NLLN.

The North Star Library Consortium is a model of library cooperation that serves the needs of our member libraries. The Consortium is financially self-sustaining, provides good value to participating libraries, and continues to be a vital support to the school media programs in our member school districts. The partnership between NLLN, Region 1, and the participating school districts and special libraries has been fruitful, efficient, affordable, and highly effective. NLLN continues to provide professional development opportunities for the Consortium, to recruit new members, and to represent the library interests of the Consortium; Region 1 continues to be the software hosting site as well as the fiscal agent for the Consortium.

NLLN Special Cooperation Projects

Each year NLLN has undertaken a variety of special projects on its own, or in partnership with member libraries, to provide special or innovative services, to develop needed programs, and to explore new service areas.

Over the years, these projects have included such activities as the creation and support of the Area Information and Reference Service (AIRS), delivery grants to regional public library systems, a church library workshop, creation of a mobile laptop lab, and implementation of the Every Child Ready to Read at Your Minnesota Library program.

In 2011, NLLN has provided funding for the following special cooperation projects:

1. A grant to the Wadena-Deer Creek School district for restoration of their high school library, which was destroyed by a tornado in summer of 2010. Books and funds were donated to help with this major undertaking by the community of Wadena. The school is being re-built and plans are to open it by the 2012 school year.
2. The Minnesota Library Futures Initiative was granted \$5,000 to support the work of this group as it explores future of Minnesota libraries. Three of the 24 participants in this Initiative come from the NLLN region, and of those 3 participants, 2 are NLLN Governing Board members. The 7 Minnesota Multicounty Multitype Library systems were instrumental in establishing this Initiative and Metronet (a multitype system) is the fiscal agent for the Initiative. NLLN receives periodic reports from this group and looks forward to the outcomes of their work over the past year.
3. "Catching the Vision: The Library in 2020 with Stephen Abram" was presented in October 2010, in Moorhead. NLLN was one of the many sponsors of this very popular event provided by Minitex and Lake Agassiz Regional Library. It closely tied into the work of the Library Futures Initiative.
4. Viking Library System Delivery Service to all types of libraries was funded to provide timely interlibrary loan deliveries to schools, colleges, public, and special libraries in that region. This service has been on-going for a number of years and continues to grow with each year.
5. NLLN will sponsor author and presenter John Coy at the 2011 Communities Collaborative Brain Development Conference in Mahanomen. This conference showcases local and national professionals working in schools, Head Start programs, and social service agencies and is provided for the benefit of all people who work with, or care about, children. This year's Conference will offer sessions and keynote speakers on reading, early literacy, and brain development.
6. The Spotlight on Books Conference received funds to allow for expansion of the Conference program and to engage greater participation from teachers, librarians, authors, and others who work with children.

Other Special Cooperation Projects (with no direct funding involved) have included distributing books nominated for the 2010 Minnesota Book Awards; working with the National Indian Child Care Association (NICCA) and Star Bright Press on a Native board book series; facilitating a team of teachers and librarians from Horizon Middle School in Moorhead to attend the Spotlight on

Books Conference in April; providing support for Library Legislative Day participation and presentations; working with the Becker County Early Childhood Initiative startup; working with the White Earth Early Childhood Initiative programs and projects; and facilitating distribution of Kill-A-Watt meters to public libraries in the Viking Library System.

Library Advocacy

“We believe in advocacy based upon understanding of the social, cultural, political and historical contexts of the communities in which libraries function” (from the NLLN Statement of Values).

Northern Lights Library Network advocates for all libraries in a wide variety of ways.

Membership on the NLLN Governing Board is an act of advocacy as Governing Board members contribute their time and experience to supporting libraries in our region. The work of Board members has been exemplary and supportive throughout the years -- to me, to NLLN, and to the broader library community.

In addition to the Board, the Executive Director of NLLN is often the advocacy voice of NLLN. During these 10 years I have met with school boards and administrators who wanted guidance about challenged books or the value of library media centers, I have talked with elected officials at all levels about the role and value of libraries in their communities, I have participated in planning programs and visioning sessions for libraries, and I have participated in taskforces and boards that were not library focused in order to have a library presence at the table. I have participated in broadband conferences and planning activities, have been very active in statewide early childhood education and early literacy activities, have focused attention on underserved populations on our 3 tribal reservations, have been an advocate for sustainable rural communities, have promoted and participated in the Minnesota Book Award program for many years, and engaged in the MLA/MEMO Library Legislative Committee, the MLA/MEMO Legislative forum/platform committee, and Library Legislative Day at the Capitol.

I have written letters, made phone calls, visited in person, and engaged in a wide range of activities that were meant to support and call attention to the role and value of libraries.

NLLN has supported library advocacy through professional engagement funds and through the work of NLLN Governing Board members.

I have seldom promoted or called attention to NLLN since most advocacy has been about the libraries that make up NLLN, not NLLN itself. We are part of a largely invisible infrastructure that supports all libraries and assists them in working together to provide service. In the case of the 2010 report on public library funding done by the Office of the Legislative Auditor, I became a strong voice in support of the work of multicounty, multitype library systems, stressing their vital role as a part of the library infrastructure that facilitates library cooperation for the good of Minnesota’s citizens.

Professional Engagement Funds – another expression of advocacy

In 2008, NLLN received additional funds from the Minnesota state legislature in our multicounty, multitype library system state operating grant. We wanted to use the additional funds we received to strengthen libraries and library service by supporting those library workers in our region who are doing the work of the profession, above and beyond their daily jobs. We have viewed this as a special type of library advocacy and support.

We established the NLLN Professional Engagement Awards to be used by library staff and trustees in our region who devote time and service to the ongoing work of the profession. These activities take many different forms, but it is work done in addition to the daily job and is not continuing education in nature. These activities are considered acts of professional engagement and serve to strengthen the profession. This work is a benefit to the entire library community and takes place at many different levels and in many different forms.

In the first three years of this program, the NLLN Committee reviewed and funded over \$10,000 for 15 Professional Engagement Awards for 8 individuals who are working within such organizations as:

- the American Library Association (ALA): Committee work, editorial work for Cognotes.
- the Minnesota Library Association (MLA): holding office, work on committees/taskforces, Conferences.
- Minnesota Educational Media Organization (MEMO): Conference organization; holding office; workshops.
- Funds have also been awarded for a major presentation made at an international library conference in Spain which discussed library work being done in Minnesota.

The work undertaken for each of these awards has been documented on the NLLN website in posted reports. The values of NLLN have been realized through the work of these individuals, and we have been proud to support our profession by supporting this vital work.

Reports can be found at: <http://nlln.org/profengrpts.html>

Statewide Multicounty, Multitype Library Cooperative participation

NLLN is one of Minnesota's 7 multicounty, multitype library systems. The directors of the 7 systems are my closest colleagues and we meet on a regular basis to share amongst ourselves and to engage in statewide projects that benefit the entire Minnesota library community.

Our daily work is generally in isolated settings, but are closely linked by a strong virtual network. This has enabled us to collectively provide larger programs with a bigger impact than any of us could do on our own. In doing statewide projects we have also been able to link all types of libraries, and staff from all levels within those libraries, in some very exciting ways. Overall it serves to strengthen libraries from within and from without. And they have been quite fun!

Most notable of the joint projects has been the series of Things on a Stick (see Continuing Education above), Every Child Ready to Read at your Minnesota Library, and formation of the Minnesota Library Futures Initiative.

As multitype systems we actively engage with the Minnesota Library Association (MLA) and its sub-groups; the Minnesota Educational Media Organization (MEMO); the Minnesota Library Foundation; Minnesota State Library Services; Minitex; and the Minnesota Association of Library Friends.

We have, collectively, provided programs at recent state conferences, sponsored keynote speakers, and provided an Internet Café for Conference attendees in recent years.

Communications – for advocacy, information, sharing, and education

For many years, NLLN provided a printed monthly newsletter that was distributed via the US postal system. In 2007, we transitioned from the print version to an online occasional publication with a much larger electronic distribution to the NLLN membership. At that same time the NLLN website was re-designed and upgraded to provide more information and a more interactive platform. NLLN members have been kept in the electronic communication loop in an efficient and cost-effective way via the NLLN listserv; the North Star Library Consortium listserv; wikis and Google docs for planning events; a FaceBook page for the Spotlight on Books Conference; NLLN blogs; and my personal Twitter/FaceBook accounts.

Communication across such a large region with such a diverse membership has always been challenging, but new electronic tools have enabled more communication, in a more timely way, to a larger audience. It has allowed us to accept scholarship applications online and process them quickly and easily; it has allowed online registration for events; it has allowed for more people to be involved in planning, participating via online meetings and online tools; and it has provided greater access to information about the programs and services of NLLN than was ever possible in the past.

Nothing completely takes the place of face-to-face encounters or personal one-on-one conversations. Our presence at many types of events and functions allows for that; our workshops and conferences allow for that; our toll-free telephone number allows anyone to call NLLN when they need to. Communication is always a challenge, but improved communication systems have allowed us to expand our circle of communication to a broad audience.

Finale

I would like to thank the NLLN Governing Board -- past and present members -- for ten years of satisfying and rewarding work. I share with you a belief in the mission, vision, and values of NLLN and hope to continue my association with NLLN into the future. Working with Board members on countless different activities and issues over the years has been extremely rewarding.

As I leave this job, libraries, literature, and literacy will continue to be the focus of my attention. I know I have a rich future before me, and one that will continue to be informed and strengthened by NLLN.

I feel confident that I am transferring a vital and vibrant organization to a new Executive Director who will continue this work, with the support of a strong and engaged Governing Board, well into the future. Thank you for the opportunity you have given me and my best wishes to you for the continued success of Northern Lights Library Network.

Ruth Solie
June 19, 2011