

July 24, 2019

Dear Members of the WLA Executive Board:

As representatives of the Wyoming Library Association Youth Services Interest Group (YSIG), we would like to formally request that our association adjust scheduling of our annual conference. We propose an “alternating year” schedule, so that annual conference could fall in August one year, and in September/October the following year.

The Youth Services Interest Group members had a lengthy discussion about this matter at our 2019 Spring Meeting, held in Laramie last March. As a follow-up to that discussion, our current Youth Services Interest Group leader, Monica Owens, recently sent a Google survey to our members to solicit further input. Responses by members to the first two questions of that survey are summarized here:

- Question 1: “Does the current schedule of holding WLA the first week of August work for you?” Of 22 respondents, 77% said “no,” and 23% said “yes”.
- Question 2: “Would a mid-September to mid-October date work better for you?” Again, of 22 respondents, 86% said “yes,” and 14% said “no.”

In both the survey and the discussion at March’s Spring Meeting, members agreed that scheduling the annual conference in August every year poses a hardship for youth services librarians in the state for several reasons:

- Many public libraries, and public library youth services librarians, are still involved in summer reading programming in August; of survey respondents, 12% indicated that summer reading programming is still happening at that time. Even if no events are scheduled, most public libraries offer summer reading incentives to their patrons throughout the month. As summer reading programming is one of the most important services our public libraries offer to youth in Wyoming, having regular staff leave their libraries to attend conference poses staffing difficulties and lowers the level of professional service for youth services departments throughout the state. 61% of survey respondents noted that, while their summer reading programming is finished by August, many staff reserve that time for vacations, making it difficult for their systems to send any remaining staff members to conference. The demands of finishing up summer reading programming, squeezing in vacations, and planning fall programming make attending an August conference difficult for youth service librarians: one survey respondent commented, “Also, after summer reading is over I just feel like I need a bit of a break, before I get ramped up for class visits, and afterschool programs at my library. A bit of a break in August seems nice, but by Sept. Or Oct. I may feel pretty ready for some great ideas at WLA.”
- Those youth services librarians who do attend the August conference are often mentally exhausted by the demands of the summer, making them less likely to optimize their conference learning, or to take an active role in presenting at the conference. It is our belief that both conference attendance and program proposal numbers are affected by the August date, at least among youth services librarians in the state.
- In speaking to several of our professional vendors, we have received feedback that the August dates are not good for them, either. They often do not have new material to showcase for fall book purchases, and so are losing some of the business they would normally conduct at our annual conference.

- Likewise, due to the financial structure of many public libraries in the state, funds from new fiscal year budgets are often not made available until mid- to late-August. In feedback from librarians attending our Spring Youth Services Interest Group Meeting, we learned that some of our members cannot attend the August conference, and/or make purchases from vendors, for this reason; 27% of our survey respondents indicated that their attendance/spending with vendors is limited by this fiscal reality.
- Finally, as you know, our state is a member of the Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP), a national summer reading/summer learning cooperative that provides programming ideas, graphics, summer reading incentives, and other valuable services to public libraries in the state. Recently, CSLP changed its own conference structure to more accurately align with the planning and budgeting needs of public libraries nationwide; CSLP is now hosting its annual meeting in the fall of each year, rather than spring. Our association pays for the state's CSLP membership, and the attendance of one person from the YSIG group at conference each year. (One attendee is paid for with the CSLP membership.) As the annual CSLP meeting has moved to the fall, scheduling the WLA conference in late September/early October has the potential to provide an efficient way for our representatives to disseminate important information from the CSLP meeting to youth service librarians throughout the state; 63% of survey respondents noted that they would appreciate the opportunity to get this important CSLP planning information at fall conference.

We hope you will give serious consideration to these reasons for adjusting the annual conference to an "alternating year" schedule as we have requested. We recognize that an August conference date can provide benefits that a later date cannot, which is why we are recommending the rotating schedule. However, public libraries' needs and, specifically, those of public library youth services librarians, deserve consideration in this important decision.

Respectfully,

Monica Owens
ACPL Youth Services Librarian
Albany County Public Library
Laramie, WY 82070
307-721-2580

Darcy Acord
CCPL Youth Services Librarian
Campbell County Public Library
Gillette, WY 82718
307-687-9229