

The Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries
in partnership with the
Connecticut State Library

Connecticut Rising to the Challenge

*A Report of the
Connecticut Dialogue on Public Libraries*

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This report is written from the perspective of an informed observer at the Connecticut Dialogue on Public Libraries. Unless attributed to a particular person, none of the comments, ideas or recommendations contained in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any specific participant at the Dialogue or their affiliated organizations.

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Foreword

It is a real honor for Connecticut to have been selected by the Aspen Institute to host the first state level dialogue on public libraries since they issued their ground breaking report—*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*. This opportunity comes at a very pivotal time for the State Library and libraries around Connecticut.

In 1893 the General Assembly passed the first law allowing for the establishment of free public libraries in Connecticut. It didn't take long for Connecticut communities to act. That legacy is some of the most heavily used public libraries in the country.

In the first report of the Public Library Committee, the committee noted that public libraries "are an efficient means of education and ought to be easily within the reach of every person in the commonwealth, especially should the advantages of a good library be proffered to every child."

While those words still have great resonance for us today, in the 122 years that have transpired, public libraries in Connecticut and the United States have been in a state of continuous change—responding to the changing needs of society and the communities they serve.

Today, our State faces great challenges. Local communities face great challenges. Our residents face great challenges. Libraries face great challenges.

How successfully libraries will rise to the challenge will depend to a large degree on how successfully communities, policy makers and libraries engage in re-envisioning the library.

This Dialogue is an opportunity for libraries to engage policymakers, business leaders and civic partners from across the state to explore new proposals, partnerships and initiatives to leverage the great assets our state has in its State Library and its public libraries.

Kendall F. Wiggin
Connecticut State Librarian
January 2016

Connecticut Rising to the Challenge

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Executive Summary

On April 13, 2015, nearly 100 library leaders, state and local policy makers, and civic partners convened at the Connecticut State Capitol to explore the opportunities for working more closely and more intentionally with Connecticut's public libraries. The discussions highlighted a series of opportunities for leveraging the critical assets that libraries bring to their communities while addressing the issue of library sustainability in the face of fiscal challenges. These issues and opportunities include:

Alignment and active engagement for sustained success and impact. Participants cited examples of library alignment with state priorities around education, youth and families, and economic and community development:

- Helping residents and their families secure health insurance through Access HealthCT, the state marketplace established under the Affordable Care Act.
- Providing a safe place and a robust support system for job seekers of all ages to meet today's workforce needs and build a pipeline of new workers who have the skills needed for long-term economic success.
- Supporting the youngest learners and their parents to ensure that children arrive at school ready to read and working against "summer slide" by offering creative summer reading programs that not only keep children engaged and energized but also provide evidence of improved learning outcomes.
- Supporting local and state economic development by making communities more vital and interesting and creating connections and learning opportunities that increase the likelihood of long-term economic success.

- Providing an essential civil society space that supports engagement and civil discourse and strengthens local communities and democracy.

Playing to library strengths. Participants discussed use of an asset-based approach that demonstrates library value and impact based on what the library does best in the community.

New forms of organizing. New modes of organizing among libraries in the state may provide an opportunity to connect knowledge and resources similar to how the Internet stitched together hundreds of millions of servers to provide end users with a seamless experience.

The role of philanthropy to advance library work in a sustained way. Corporate and community philanthropy will become more important as a vital partner for supporting library programs and helping to measure and communicate library value and impact both locally and statewide.

Proving the effectiveness of education programs in public libraries. Early literacy is a hallmark of public library service, and increased collaboration between libraries and schools in recent years has broadened the reach and effectiveness of summer reading programs. Libraries need to demonstrate through performance data the power and value of library pre-K and summer reading programs.

Raising the library's profile through leadership and marketing. Libraries are not sufficiently visible among policy makers and other stakeholders. Consequently, they are often left out of important conversations related to work in which they are directly involved or capable of making significant contributions. There is a need for visible statewide leadership combined with strategic marketing to raise the library's profile and broaden its effectiveness. Moreover, libraries need new skill sets that are different from what is taught in library degree programs—skills that include advocacy, marketing, asset-based strategic planning, business development, entrepreneurial thinking, grant writing, and relationship building to leverage philanthropy, program evaluation and measurement, and organization structure and strategy.

A path forward. Participants discussed a range of action steps aimed at continuing the conversation by engaging a team of people from around the state, with particular attention to choosing doable steps that will produce tangible results, and working together to make libraries and the state stronger. The following action steps offer a path forward:

1. Create a working group to coordinate next steps.
2. Develop an asset-based framework that defines the essential elements of library service and establishes library standards.
3. Engage policy makers.
4. Leverage statewide partnerships to broaden library impact and promote collaboration.
5. Develop data and narratives around outcomes achieved by public libraries in Connecticut.
6. Tell the Connecticut library story through marketing, advocacy, dialogue, statewide engagement, and leadership.
7. Explore opportunities for leadership development and training.
8. Become statewide library champions.

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Overview

On April 13, 2015, nearly 100 library leaders, state and local policy makers, and civic partners convened at the Connecticut State Capitol to explore the opportunities for working more closely and more intentionally with Connecticut's public libraries. Two themes formed the focal point for the daylong discussions: (1) how to leverage the considerable assets of the state's public libraries to build more knowledgeable, healthy and sustainable communities across the state and (2) how to improve the sustainability of public libraries in Connecticut.

Convened by the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries in partnership with the Connecticut State Library, the Connecticut Dialogue on Public Libraries examined the work Connecticut's public libraries are already doing individually and collectively to meet community needs, address emerging challenges, and build more connected communities. Participants in the Dialogue also explored the economic and social challenges that are shaping community needs in Connecticut and fiscal challenges affecting library sustainability. Finally, the Dialogue considered new proposals, partnerships, and initiatives to guide collective action by the Connecticut State Library, the 164 local public libraries, and state and community partners.

The Connecticut session was the first in a series of state and local dialogues that will examine issues, challenges, and opportunities facing communities and their public libraries, building on the framework provided by the Aspen Institute's October 2014 report, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*. That report focuses on the emerging value proposition of the public library built around its three key assets - people, place and platform - and concludes that the long-term health of libraries is essential to the long-term health of the communities they serve. It identifies four strategies for sustained library and community success:

1. Align library services in support of community goals.
2. Provide access to content in all formats.
3. Ensure long-term sustainability of public libraries.
4. Cultivate leadership.¹

The Connecticut Dialogue morning program began with a presentation by Dr. Thomas Scheinfeldt, director of Digital Humanities, University of Connecticut, on testing new modes of networking and library collaboration. The morning featured two panel discussions exploring library alignment with state priorities—one panel focused on education, health, youth, and families, and the other focused on economic, workforce, and community development. Governor Dannel Malloy delivered a keynote address during lunch. The afternoon featured a roundtable session among panelists and other invited guests to identify insights, general recommendations, and potential action steps for the future.

This report summarizes recurring themes and outcomes from the presentations, participant discussion, and roundtable session. It does not attempt to recount the many excellent points and insights raised by panelists and participants during the two panel discussions, which are archived at <http://as.pn/libraries>. Instead, it focuses on outcomes, action steps, and a path forward for Connecticut's public libraries.

¹ Amy Garmer, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, A report of the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries, Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute (October 2014). Available at <http://www.libraryvision.org>.

Issues and Opportunities

Throughout the discussion, participants highlighted the stature, reputation, impact, and importance of public libraries in the communities they serve. Libraries were described as great equalizers and trusted advisors; safe places and vital community assets; models for democracy in action and essential educational institutions; facilitators for acquiring knowledge; centers for civic engagement, and community navigators.

Yet despite these positive descriptions, participants identified two sets of perceptions commonly shared by members of the public and policymakers that often constrain the opportunities for engaging libraries to take on new roles or add value to the work being done by others. The first is a lack of familiarity with what the library is or could be today rather than what people perceive it to be because that is what they have grown up knowing. Libraries are viewed, unwisely, as an institution of the past.

The second perception is born of the many roles and service offerings of libraries today, including services that fill gaps left where other societal institutions are failing. This jack-of-all-trades image may contribute to a lack of clarity about the library's community role and the view of libraries as remedial and optional institutions. Much of the conversation focused on how to change these perceptions and establish libraries as essential community leaders with a unique blend of assets that can be used for broader reach and deeper collective outcomes.

The following sections summarize themes from the panel discussions and roundtable session and questions for further discussion.

Alignment and active engagement for sustained success and impact.

Participants linked library success to close alignment with state and community priorities, constant attention to what matters most in the community, and establishing the library as part of the community's "vascular system." The dialogue used two panels to explore library alignment with statewide priorities around education, youth and families, and economic, workforce and community development, identifying both current partnerships and opportunities for collaboration. Examples of how libraries have supported state priorities include:

- ***Workforce development and job skills:*** *Providing a safe place and a robust support system for job seekers of all ages to meet today's workforce needs and build a pipeline of new workers who have the skills needed for long-term economic success.* Because they are community based, libraries have knowledge of the local economy and are able to match skills with job openings and career paths, as well as provide access to important jobs-related databases that people cannot afford to buy independently. Fairfield County's Community Foundation has identified a significant youth unemployment problem in the state and has directed resources to address this challenge. Foundation President Juanita James observed, "The opportunity to identify where the job sector opportunities are, what skills are required, what are the qualifications, and match those up with those who are seeking opportunities is a really good portion of what libraries and community foundations can do together." Moreover, libraries can play an important role in introducing young people to new career paths, including high-tech manufacturing jobs that will require new skills sets. "Young people really should be able to see jobs, feel jobs, understanding that manufacturing is not this old clunky, greasy environment; that it's computer technology," said Deputy Labor Commissioner Dennis Murphy. "To the extent that libraries can expose young people to what real jobs are goes a long way in them envisioning a future that they can work towards."
- ***Early learning and literacy:*** *Supporting the youngest learners and their parents to ensure that children arrive at school ready to read and working against "summer slide" by offering creative summer reading programs that not only keep kids engaged and energized but also provide evidence of improved learning outcomes.* New Haven's public library sends a bookmobile to family daycare homes and childcare centers so that librarians and books can reach children and families where they live. New Alliance Foundation's "Ready for the Grade" program is centered around the partnership between the libraries and schools in four communities (Killingly, New Haven, Rockville, and Wallingford). These partnerships have enabled access to student test scores to compare the scores of children participating at the beginning of summer and then again in the fall, providing tangible data on the effectiveness of the summer reading programs. Such examples point the way for broader initiatives, such as the State Library and State Department of Education working together to change the tenor of the

Governor's summer reading challenge—shifting the measurement and celebration from the number of books read to the impact and outcomes of the reading program on Connecticut's youth and families.

- ***Healthcare access and literacy: Helping residents and their families secure health insurance through Access HealthCT, the state marketplace established under the Affordable Care Act.*** James Wadleigh, chief executive officer of Access HealthCT, noted that in the first year working with libraries, “We saw a 50 percent increase in enrollments through the libraries,” but he sees the next steps as even more critical. “Health literacy and education is the true success or failure for the Affordable Care Act,” said Wadleigh. Going forward, libraries can play an even more important role in improving individual and family health by promoting health literacy to help newly insured families understand how their health insurance works (e.g., what’s a deductible?) and where to access affordable health care. Matt Poland, chief executive officer of the Hartford Public Library, observed that there are opportunities to partner not only with Access Health but with hospitals and healthcare providers as well.
- ***Economic and community development: Supporting local and state economic development by making their communities more vital and interesting and creating connections and learning opportunities that increase the likelihood of long-term economic success.*** CTWorks@HPL is a satellite One Stop Career Center located at the Hartford Public Library that, in a more traditional era, would have been located in the facilities of the grantee (CTWorks operates 17 locations and is a partnership between the Connecticut Workforce Development Council and the state’s Department of Labor). Library makerspaces filled with technologies such as 3-D printers and other tools for making--such as the makerspace at the award-winning Westport Public Library--are often the public’s introduction to advanced manufacturing. And libraries play an important role in community development, maintaining a vibrant cultural life and community identity, as East Hartford Mayor Marcia Leclerc recognized upon taking office. “It was my mission to make sure that we started to evolve as a community, and my first thought was to obtain the money to expand and completely re-envision our library. Part of that was a new vision, with new employees, who had the same vision I had, which was for a library that would be a depository for our cultural assets,” said Leclerc.

- **Democracy and civil society:** *Providing an essential civil society space that supports engagement and civil discourse and strengthens local communities and democracy.* The Ferguson Library in Stamford hosts monthly conversations about community challenges, on topics such as racial understanding and homelessness, where people who do not normally cross paths come together in conversation. For example, a senior corporate official could be seated next to a grassroots community organizer discussing a topic about which they both care deeply, reflecting the type of interactions that do not occur outside of library spaces on a frequent basis. In the wake of the Ferguson, Missouri, trauma, the library and interfaith council in Stamford hosted a community conversation on race and its challenges. New Haven Mayor Toni Harp spoke of the value of libraries to democracy, saying, “You can’t have a strong democracy without having libraries. It’s a place where people gather, and they talk about things. It’s a place of lifelong learning, and it’s really a great place for people who are retired and want to think about new things. So I think it’s a really important function of our democracy, and it’s one of the things that makes us strong.” For Estela López, interim provost at the Board of Regents for Higher Education, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, the U.S. public library system has always been a magical place after growing up in Cuba which had one national library. “The public library is democracy,” Lopez said, adding that libraries are like Disneyland because of all the opportunities they offer. “But I’ve been to Disneyland and I’ve been to Disney World, and the public library is better.”

Consistent alignment with state priorities will require active engagement with state agencies and proactively seeking opportunities that connect local libraries to state priorities, issues, and needs including serving on relevant task forces.

Questions for further discussion: *How can libraries better align with community and state priorities on a sustained vs. ad-hoc basis? What specific individual and collective actions will lead to sustained alignment? What does active engagement for alignment look like? What are the most important state resources and agencies with which to connect going forward to ensure sustained alignment?*

Playing to library strengths.

The deficit-service model is built on reacting to needs, filling gaps, and providing services that patrons cannot otherwise access—services that may be more

appropriately offered by other institutions. By pursuing diverse opportunities and stepping into new services when there is a need or gap, libraries may diffuse their ability to make a measureable difference in the “right places.” Participants discussed use of an asset-based approach that demonstrates library value and effect based on *what it does best* rather than *what others do poorly*.

Questions for further discussion: *What do libraries do best? What are the essential elements of library service in any community? What are the “right places” for libraries to take the lead in meeting community needs? With a long history of responding to whatever the community needs/wants, how can libraries make good choices that provide the best community outcomes?*

New forms of organizing.

The discussions raised ideas about new forms of organizing to maximize cost-effective service delivery, support consistent library services across a region or the state, and minimize duplication and overlap in regions served by multiple libraries. Opening speaker Tom Scheinfeldt introduced the idea of the Internet as an operating model for sustained collaboration by facilitating the free flow of information between users and their content. New modes of organizing among libraries in the state may provide an opportunity to connect knowledge and resources similar to how the Internet stitched together hundreds of millions of servers to provide end users with a seamless experience. With 169 diverse cities and towns each with its own library infrastructure packed into a very small geographic area, Connecticut may be an ideal place to test new models of library collaboration.

Questions for further discussion: *Can libraries collectively operate more like the Internet? What would that look like? How can libraries operate more regionally while retaining their quintessential local identities? How can libraries across the state collectively ensure that the weakest libraries improve through collaboration and/or new forms of organizing?*

Role of philanthropy to advance library work in a sustained way.

As Connecticut waits for its post-recession economic recovery, state and local funding is likely to continue shrinking, leading to the need for more non-government financial resources to sustain libraries and new ways of delivering essential services. Corporate and community philanthropy, therefore, will become even more important as a vital partner for supporting library programs and helping to measure and communicate library value and effectiveness, both locally and statewide. Participants noted that when foundations consider investing in public libraries, they want to know that their investment will make a concrete and measureable difference. Foundation resources (not limited to financial resources) may be available to support library operations, a statewide library marketing campaign, establishment of outcome measures, or leadership training for library personnel.

***Questions for further discussion:** What corporate or community foundation resources offer the best potential to support Connecticut public libraries individually and/or collectively? Are there opportunities for collaborative projects to support shared library interests and needs? How can libraries in the state thrive over the long-run despite the likelihood of reduced government funding?*

Proving the impact of education programs in public libraries.

Few question the role public libraries play in supporting efforts to improve education outcomes, particularly their pre-kindergarten and summer reading programs. Both are hallmarks of library education efforts. Increased collaboration between libraries and schools in recent years has broadened the reach and effectiveness of summer reading. For example, four years ago, the Hartford Public Library's summer reading program had 350 regular participants. Since the library began working more closely with the school system to promote summer reading, participation grew to more than 6,000 kids. However, participation in programs and numbers of books read doesn't prove effectiveness. Instead, libraries need to be able to demonstrate through performance data that children who participate in pre-K library reading programs arrive at school truly more ready to read, and summer readers return to school in the fall reading at the same or a higher level than when they left in the spring.

***Question for further discussion:** Where do libraries fit on the community learning landscape? How can libraries "own" pre-K learning as a core function? What metrics are available or can be developed to demonstrate the value of library learning programs? How can libraries better demonstrate the power and value of their education programs?*

Raising the library's profile through leadership and marketing.

"Libraries need to be considered as an essential community asset contributing to the community's image and growth," said Elliot Ginsberg, president and chief executive officer of the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology, Inc. "Similar to schools, parks, and museums, as well as institutions of public safety, libraries enrich towns and aid in attracting residents and businesses. This understanding of a library as a community asset is critical to its future."

Participants agreed that libraries are not sufficiently visible among policy makers and other stakeholders and are often left out of important conversations related to work in which they are directly involved or capable of making significant contributions. That low profile contributes to recurring questions about the purpose of and need for public libraries today among individuals who are not directly connected to or aware of the scope of 21st century library programs and services. "We still face annual budget battles because those making budget decisions may not be library users," said Juanita James.

Participants emphasized the need for visible statewide leadership combined with strategic marketing to raise the library's profile and broaden its impact. "The best marketing approach for public libraries is to open their doors and show the community what the library can do," said Mayor Marcia Leclerc who has led an effort to expand and revitalize the town's main Raymond Library. State Senator Tony Hwang said libraries are loved "close in" by their most regular users but are less known outside that inner circle. As a result, Hwang said, libraries must do a better job of marketing themselves to a broader audience as centers where jobs, economic growth, and innovation occur naturally. State Representative Jonathan Steinberg said libraries are not "on the radar screen at the Capitol" and urged library leaders to take a "more militant approach to selling your virtues." Frances Padilla, president of the Universal Health Care Foundation, said a successful marketing campaign requires an "entrepreneurial zest" to declare oneself as an essential asset/resource.

As the local, state, and library landscapes continue to change, innovative leadership is essential to library success. That leadership involves more than knowing how to run library facilities and programs. Many of the issues discussed during the dialogue pointed to the need for new skill sets that are different from what is taught in library degree programs, and it was noted that Connecticut does not have a library degree program. Examples of the types of leadership skills that may be needed on the path forward

include advocacy, marketing, asset-based strategic planning, business development, entrepreneurial thinking, grant writing, and relationship building to leverage philanthropy, program evaluation and measurement, and organization structure and strategy. In addition to honing specific skills, participants talked about a leadership attitude that is more aggressive, more externally focused, more visible, and more entrepreneurial

Questions for further discussion: *What are the most important messages for library marketing, and who are the primary audiences? What kinds of skills are needed to improve library marketing capacity? Would a collaborative marketing effort at the state level have greater impact and would a foundation support a statewide marketing campaign? Where will library directors and their staffs develop competency and mastery of new leadership skills? How can library participation in broader leadership and networking programs be encouraged and supported?*

The Governor's Perspective

In his keynote remarks, Governor Dannel Malloy described his lifelong commitment to public libraries as a user and a policymaker and the importance of exploring alternative sources of revenue to support library sustainability, particularly as Connecticut faces significant economic and fiscal challenges. The dialogue took place during the debate about the state's next biennial budget when possible reductions in state funding for public libraries were being considered. "Although Connecticut has been able to do some things like working on e-books on a statewide basis as opposed to an individual library basis, the economy has not roared back in any way approaching what was every other post-World War II recession recovery," Malloy told the group. "We're six years into recovery and still waiting for and looking for a robustness that has so far eluded us." The sluggish economy, growing statewide needs, and spending caps, Malloy said, had contributed to a particularly challenging budget process and the likelihood of continued fiscal challenges in the years ahead.

Malloy said honest and frank discussions - such as this dialogue about how public libraries can thrive in an environment where government may not be able to contribute significant sustained funding - are essential to long-term library success. He pointed to the potential of greater foundation support and fundraising that is "systemic in nature," along with creative collaboration and innovative use of technology for service delivery as opportunities for sustaining strong libraries.

A Path Forward

Participants in the afternoon roundtable discussed a range of action steps aimed at continuing the conversation by engaging a team of people from around the state, including but not limited to library leaders, trustees, state and local policy makers, and stakeholders to broaden the reach and awareness of library roles and capacity throughout the state, led by the Connecticut State Library with the Aspen Institute as catalyst. The group urged attention to low-hanging fruit, choosing doable steps that will produce tangible results and working together to make libraries and the state stronger. The following action steps offer a path forward.

1. **Create a working group to coordinate next steps.** The dialogue raised a range of challenges and opportunities for increasing library value and effectiveness statewide. A working group led by the Connecticut State Library would help sort through the issues and ideas that emerged from the dialogue and shape the opportunities that offer the most promise for collective action among Connecticut libraries.

2. **Develop an asset-based framework that defines the essential elements of library service and establishes library standards.** While one size doesn't fit all, creating a framework for essential elements and standards/benchmarks for library service would help define what makes libraries vital to successful communities and to the state's long-term economic health. The State Library is already working on public library standards against which to measure performance. Combined, the framework and standards could provide a basis for Connecticut's public libraries to:
 - Reset their role in the communities they serve, as well as collectively throughout the state, in the face of both new needs and continuing fiscal challenges.
 - Identify programs/services that are scalable and able to be leveraged across the state versus those that are uniquely local.
 - Take the key messages and principles of the Aspen Institute report on re-envisioning public libraries and apply them to a collective statewide effort.

3. **Engage policy makers.** Ensuring that local policy makers are closely connected to their public libraries and are aware of the opportunities for collaboration among

community libraries is essential to library sustainability. Library leaders can partner with local government leaders to convene policy makers on a community, regional and statewide basis to learn from peers how to leverage libraries for economic development, education and other community priorities.

- 4. Leverage statewide partnerships to broaden library effectiveness and promote collaboration.** Groups such as the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) and the Connecticut Library Association will be valuable resources as library leaders and local policymakers work together to re-envision Connecticut public libraries. In particular, CCM could play a role in broadening awareness of public library capacities in helping to meet a range of local and state priorities and in engaging state policy makers. Other potential partners include community and corporate partners and statewide school and education organizations. In October 2015, the Connecticut Library Association partnered with the Aspen Institute to convene a session on the new roles for libraries at the annual conference of CCM.
- 5. Develop data and narrative around the outcomes achieved by public libraries in Connecticut.** There is an opportunity for multiple sectors in the state, including the philanthropic sector, the academic sector and the business sector to work with public libraries to support the creation of overall educational and marketing messages around the value of public libraries in the state. This could be accomplished through collaboration among a group or several groups of interns, marketing, MBA and public policy students, and/or professionals in libraries and allied fields to create a series of case studies for the library sector in general and then tap into the local communities to help libraries communicate those messages.
- 6. Tell the Connecticut library story through marketing, advocacy, dialogue, statewide engagement, and leadership.** Library leaders need to become advocates for the essential and central nature of public libraries in the state and step up to this challenge. Combining local stories about library effectiveness can contribute to a bigger picture about the collective impact of libraries across the state.

- 7. Explore opportunities for leadership development and training.** Participants all agreed on the need for more and better training to support public library directors to meet new leadership challenges including how to leverage philanthropy, how to communicate more effectively with state policy makers, and developing the entrepreneurial skills to lead in a changing environment.

- 8. Become statewide library champions.** Participants were urged to think individually about how to be positive, enthusiastic, well-informed library champions outside the boundaries of their own communities. That role includes developing a “noble message” about library roles, taking responsibility to advocate a vision for 21st century libraries, and seizing opportunities to raise the profile of public libraries across the state.

Activities Continuing the Dialogue and How to Get Involved

Since the adjournment of the Connecticut Dialogue on Public Libraries roundtable in April 2015, the Connecticut State Library and the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries have developed a series of activities to adopt and advance the recommendations in this report. A critical initial step has been to work with Connecticut's public libraries to build their capacity to deliver services in line with the changing needs of communities in the state. A second important focus has been to engage community leaders in thinking in new ways about the role of the state's public libraries in helping to achieve their priorities.

The twin focus on public libraries and community leaders is designed to move each community to engaging in a robust, ongoing dialogue that builds relationships and partnerships and leverages the state's network of public libraries for the benefit of all.

Activities to date include:

- August-November 2015, Piloting the Aspen Institute Action Guide for Re-Envisioning Your Public Library – In response to requests from public libraries for resources to help use the *Rising to the Challenge* report more effectively in their communities, the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries created an Action Guide for library leaders to assess the alignment of their library programs and services with the needs of the community and plan to engage community leaders in a public dialogue about the library's role in the community. The Connecticut State Library nominated three Connecticut libraries – Middletown Public Library, the Ferguson Library in Stamford and the Wallingford Public Library – to participate in a national pilot of 23 libraries helping to develop an effective resource. The Action Guide was formally released in January 2016, and the Connecticut Division of Library Development is currently planning programming to implement the Action Guide across the state. The three pilot libraries will serve as Connecticut Aspen Mentors for Connecticut libraries.

- October 2015, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities Workshop - The Connecticut Library Association and the Aspen Institute partnered to sponsor a workshop session for municipal leaders, “Re-Envisioning CT Libraries in Your Municipality,” at the annual conference of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities in October 2015. Workshop attendees included participation of individuals who serve Connecticut communities as mayor, deputy mayor, first selectman, town manager, town administrator, town planner, chief of staff, deputy general counsel, library trustee and others. The workshop included a panel of speakers from the initial Connecticut Dialogue to share the latest trends and challenges facing libraries and communities, as well as new models for library programs, services and partnerships that are anticipating and meeting community needs.
- April 2016, Connecticut Library Association Conference – The Connecticut State Library’s Division of Library Development, under the leadership of Director Dawn La Valle and in partnership with Aspen Institute Dialogue advisor Maureen Sullivan, will convene a kick-off session at the 2016 conference of the Connecticut Library Association.
- Ongoing, consultants working with the Division of Library Development are integrating the Aspen Institute report and recommendations of the Connecticut Dialogue into the consulting provided to libraries across the state, including strategic planning, training, staff development and facilitation of community conversations.

To learn more about these and other activities in Connecticut, to access resources or to get involved, please contact:

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To learn what other communities are doing to transform their libraries, download the *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries* report or its companion, *Action Guide for Re-Envisioning Your Public Library*, or to share the work that you are doing around library and community transformation in your own community, please visit the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries online at www.LibraryVision.org.

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