

LibPAS South Dakota State Library

Interview with Shawn Behrends, State Data Coordinator

Located in the capital city of Pierre, the South Dakota State Library (SDSL) serves primarily public and school libraries. As part of the South Dakota Department of Education, the SDSL also provides the state government with a range of services, including reference service and digitization.

SDSL provides service to 112 public library administrative entities, 31 branches, and 4 bookmobiles. More than half of South Dakota's public libraries serve legal service areas of fewer than 2,500 people. The State Library also serves 363 school libraries at the system level. This includes 150 public school districts, 44 non-public school systems, 20 tribal systems, and one special school for the blind.

The State Library implemented Counting Opinions' LibPAS in 2014. SDSL uses LibPAS to collect statistics from South Dakota's public libraries and created a second survey to collect data from school libraries. According to Shawn Behrends, State Data Coordinator, completing the Public Libraries Survey is mandated by South Dakota state statute, but is not tied to any state funding. Although providing data through the survey is essentially voluntary, 100% of the public libraries have participated in the survey for the past four years.

All South Dakota school districts and systems are asked to complete the annual School Libraries Survey, which gathers information on budgets and facilities, circulation and programs, staffing and professional activities.

Flexibility and Reporting Tools Key Drivers of LibPAS Decision

Behrends says SDSL was using another tool for gathering public and school library statistics prior to adopting LibPAS. Although the decision to switch systems pre-dates her joining the State Library she knows from talking to her colleagues that they were looking for an affordable, more "do-it-yourself" platform that would be easy to adopt and that provided robust report tools.

- **LibPAS makes it easy to change, add, or delete survey questions.** Behrends says there are always last minute changes that need to be made right before the surveys open. "Each year we add supplemental questions to the basic surveys to gather new information on outreach and other activities. LibPAS makes it really easy for us to make these changes—and changes to the portal home pages—ourselves." In addition, she says, "it's easy to rearrange questions as needed and put them into grid format. Feedback from libraries shows that using the grid format creates a perception that the survey is shorter and easier to complete."
- **LibPAS facilitates importing of data to pre-fill fields.** Behrends pre-fills data such as population statistics, ebook consortium holdings, and SDSL database usage so that libraries don't have to find this information on their own. "For 2016 we were required to collect statistics on database usage. With LibPAS, it

was easy to add questions related to this and to pre-fill the answers for each public library." She also says that pre-filling improves data integrity because there are fewer opportunities for keying errors.

- **Ability to expand the type of data collected.** SDSL recently added a new collection, putting the public library accreditation application online. Public libraries can access this new collection survey using the same user name and password as they use for the Public Libraries Survey. "In the past with the paper application, we've had a lot of confusion among our libraries about what evidence was needed to support their accreditation application," says Behrends. "The ease of using the LibPAS file uploading feature led me to move forward with this project to facilitate filing the accreditation application—and all the evidence needed to support it—online through LibPAS. Now we have a file upload element with each question that requires evidence. This has made the application easier for librarians to complete and for staff to review. Some of our staff work remotely—as I do—and having the application materials available online in one place saves time and makes review easier by eliminating the need to scan and file the applications."
- **Ability to use LibPAS to gather data that can be repurposed.** Using the repeating rows capability in LibPAS, Behrends says they have created for the first time a directory of school library staff. "Our school libraries vary widely," she says. "Some have one staff person while others have thirty. We tried maintaining a spreadsheet but with turnover it was very difficult to keep it current. Now library staff information is recorded in LibPAS every year. We can download it and be assured we have an up-to-date directory for each school in our survey that captures school library staff, their certification levels, and contact information. We can also run a nice report from LibPAS to show us the number of library staff in each district. This helps schools as well with peer-to-peer comparisons."

Data Analysis and Marketing through LibPAS Reports

Behrends likes the flexibility of LibPAS, but if there's one aspect of the system that really stands out for her, it's the reporting tool. "I use LibPAS Reports on almost a daily basis for peer comparisons or data requests from administration, such as trustee mailing lists, School Libraries Survey staff certification, etc. LibPAS makes it easy to run reports and then drill down into the data."

SDSL has provided training to libraries so they can run their own reports, but Behrends admits most libraries would rather ask her to run the reports for them. She says that even though they don't do reports themselves they are more aware of the data that is available to them. "I get a lot of requests for peer comparison reports that libraries

can use to advocate for more funding, larger spaces, longer hours, or library director salaries. Both public and school libraries use reports to compare materials budgets. And certainly within the State Library we use the reports for planning and outreach services.” She also encourages libraries to plug their financial and service statistics into ROI calculators for presentations to city/county commissioners or for other marketing activities.

Behrends highlights other benefits of LibPAS Reports, including:

- **Ability to set up templates to merge individual library data into a form or a publication.** For example, libraries can use an annual report template to create a customized professional-looking brochure with their annual statistics merged into the report. This makes it easy, especially for smaller libraries, to tell their story to their community or for budget presentations. Behrends plans to develop an infographics template using the merge function so libraries can create infographics with their data to tell their annual report story in a graphic way.
- **Easy to create spreadsheets demonstrating peer to peer comparisons.** When SDSL staff go out to visit public libraries they can easily download a report that shows how the library being visited compares to other similar libraries. Behrends set up a template to generate these “quickie” peer comparison spreadsheets.
- **Readily accessible Published Reports.** Behrends uses the Published Reports tool to make some of the Public Libraries Survey data available and downloadable from the State Library website. She says sometimes data coordinators from other states use these reports, as do libraries seeking information about other libraries for comparison purposes.

SDSL continues to look for and find new ways to use LibPAS for gathering and analyzing state library data. In considering the ways they benefit from LibPAS, Behrends sums up the key reasons why she would recommend Counting Opinions and LibPAS to other state libraries.

- **Flexibility to edit your own surveys and make last minute changes.** You can adjust the wording of a question if you see that respondents find it confusing.

- **Ability to import your own data and pre-fill fields,** saving libraries time and reducing the potential for keying errors.
- **Ability to add new areas in which to collect data.** For example, SDSL created a new collection for public library accreditation. Other state libraries might want to collect grant applications and upload supporting documentation associated with the applications.
- **Ease of creating reports, report templates, and merged reports.** These reports are useful for peer comparisons, collection and facilities planning, and communicating to funding authorities and community members the value of the library.
- **Thorough documentation and responsive one-to-one support.** Beyond the benefits of the platform, Behrends points to the support and service provided by Counting Opinions. “Counting Opinions was extremely helpful in migrating the school libraries survey and data from the system we were using previously and retaining several back years of data for comparison. I turned over the questions and downloaded the data files. They got it all in shape for us in the first year. After that it was really easy for us to make changes.”

Finally, Behrends says, “We wanted to work with a company that would be responsive to our support needs. In the time we have worked with Counting Opinions we have been impressed with the quick, kind, and generous service from the support staff. I really can’t say enough about their great support team. If I have a problem or want to change something I know I can count on them to do it for me or give me all the instructions I need to do it myself. You can’t ask for more than that from your software provider.”

For more information,
www.countingopinions.com/states

*Note: Interview conducted and case study prepared by
JAM Marketing LLC*



Please cite this article as: Shawn Behrends, State Data Coordinator, South Dakota State Library
Interview conducted and case study prepared by JAM Marketing LLC