

Executive Director's Report January 2022

New York State Budget Update

Governor Kathy Hochul released the FY 2022/23 New York State's Executive Budget that includes:

- Proposed Library Aid is \$96.1 million, which is \$2 million more than what was proposed in last year's budget.
- The proposed amount for Public Library Construction Aid is \$14 million, which is \$20 million less than last year's allocation of \$34 million.

Library Advocacy Day – March 2, 2022

New York Library Association's (NYLA) Library Advocacy Day is on March 2, 2022, as a virtual advocacy effort. Westchester Library System (WLS) will be hosting virtual events to support this effort, with more details to come. Two key talking points for Library Advocacy Day 2022 concern support of an increase to the amounts currently in the budget for Library Aid and Public Library Construction Aid to:

- \$123.1 million for Library Aid
- \$45 million for Public Library Construction Aid

Trustees who are interested in these and other library issues can find more information on [NYLA's Library Advocacy Day 2022 website](#) that offers many advocacy documents to review.

NYLA Executive Director

NYLA announced that it has selected a new Executive Director, AnnaLee Dragon, who will start her new position on February 14th. Ms. Dragon is currently the Director of the Kinderhook Memorial Library, and we are looking forward to working with and supporting Ms. Dragon in her new role.

Open Meetings Law Update

Governor Hochul signed into Law Chapter 1 of the Laws of 2022 amending Chapter 417 of the Laws of 2021, which extends Open Meetings Law to allow for remote participation to the full period that New York State declares it is under a state disaster emergency as recognized under Executive Order 11 or any extension or modification of that Order. Remote participation can include the use of a conference call, video streaming or a similar service provided that the public has the ability to view or listen to the meeting and that the meeting is recorded and later transcribed. The allowance for remote participation is extended through February 14, 2022.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Audit

As discussed during the 2022 budget overview, WLS has initiated a DEI audit with [Your Choice Coach](#) to ensure that WLS fosters an environment where employees feel welcomed, valued, respected and heard. This engagement will include an audit of organizational policies, practices and processes through a DEI lens, with the goal of creating more equitable and proactive inclusion processes.

All WLS staff will be invited to participate in focus groups with the auditors and 5 staff and 5 trustees will be invited to meet 1-on-1 with the auditors to share their experiences, concerns and thoughts. A broad range of documents and informational resources will be shared with the auditors as part of this process. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Mission, vision and values statements
- Organizational chart
- Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) data for up to 3 years (employees by gender, race, age, position, etc.)
- Contract agreements
- Vendor agreements
- Trainings for employees
- Onboarding documents
- Policies
- Employee handbook
- Diversity-related community partnerships

The audit is tentatively scheduled to begin in mid-February 2022 and end in late-March 2022, with a follow up report to be shared with the Board at the April or May meeting.

5 Towns 1 Book Community Events

WLS has partnered with [CURE](#) a local volunteer, advocacy group in Larchmont and Mamaroneck, that views education about the structures and implications of systemic racism in our country's institutions as a critical step in dismantling it.

With the support and funding from the Westchester County Board of Legislators, CURE will be hosting its second annual *5 Towns 1 Book* community discussion. The public libraries in the 5 towns/cities of Harrison, Larchmont, Mamaroneck, New Rochelle and Rye will host moderated talks with experts focusing on specific chapters in the book, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, by Heather McGhee. Ms. McGhee is scheduled to lead an in-person discussion at the New Rochelle Public Library on March 27th.

All WLS member libraries have been invited to host, promote and participate in anti-racism and racial healing events during the January-March 2022 time period in support of this initiative. Libraries that have signed on to host events of their own include: Bedford Hills, Chappaqua, Croton, Eastchester, Field (Peekskill), Greenburgh, Hastings-on-Hudson, Hendrick Hudson (Montrose), John C. Hart (Yorktown), Lewisboro, Mount Pleasant, Ossining, Pelham, Pound Ridge, Scarsdale, Somers, Tuckahoe, Warner (Tarrytown) and Yonkers.

WLS worked with the vendor OverDrive to negotiate a lower purchase price for the e-book and audiobook formats of this title through the *Cost Per Circ* purchasing platform. This lower pricing will allow more copies of the book to be immediately downloaded and available to interested readers.

Cataloging Services

Despite the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2021, WLS Cataloging Services served the member libraries and the public with no interruptions. In addition to their regular responsibilities – responding to the member libraries' questions, filling their requests, and processing their orders and loading vendor-provided MARC records into the catalog – the WLS catalogers took on some major projects. These projects all reflected WLS's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

In April, the ILS (Integrated Library System) Committee of the Public Library Directors Association (PLDA) voted to support changing "illegal alien"-related subject headings in the WLS catalog to variations of "noncitizens." As the American Library Association (ALA) expressed it in 2016, the existing terms had acquired derogatory connotations and were "becoming increasingly associated with nativist and racist sentiments." That same year, the Library of Congress (LC) announced plans to make the changes in their catalog, but the United States Congress halted the effort by threatening to micromanage all of LC's cataloging decisions going forward. Between 2016 and 2021, libraries throughout the United States unilaterally moved to change the headings in their catalogs, and WLS was proud to join them. Manager of Cataloging Services Douglas Wray and Cataloger Melissa Glazer completed the work in July. Prior to PLDA's vote, Mr. Wray had consulted with the directors on the ILS Committee, explaining the history of the matter and the scope of the project. He also worked with the Equinox Open Library Initiative to learn how to make the new subject headings fully user-friendly, which mainly required the creation of functional cross references which would point the catalog searcher from the old terms to the new terms.

Four months after the WLS project was completed, LC announced a plan to go ahead with the changes after all. However, the "illegal" terminology will persist in some of their subject headings, so WLS will continue to maintain our own headings.

Mr. Wray, Ms. Glazer and Cataloger Qingshe Ren cataloged a special collection titled "#Own Voices", which was assembled by Harrison Public Library and the West Harrison Branch Library. The "own voices" concept is becoming increasingly known throughout American society, particularly in libraries, academia and publishing, and this definition of it appears on the Vermont Book Shop website: "[Works] by members of marginalized or underrepresented groups writing about their own experiences or from their own perspective, rather than someone from an outside perspective writing as a character from an underrepresented group."

Ms. Glazer cataloged a special collection assembled by the New Rochelle Public Library, the "Israel Forum Collection." This collection is intended to further understanding between the United States and Israel.

In December, an agreement was reached between WLS and the National Maritime Historical Society in Peekskill whereby Mr. Wray, Ms. Glazer and Mr. Ren will catalog the society's multi-thousand-book collection. The collection has never been accessible via online catalog, and the WLS catalogers' work on the project throughout 2022 will make this treasure trove of information

available to Westchester County library patrons for the first time. It will also help the society organize the collection by subject, greatly enhancing the efficiency of browsing the shelves at their headquarters, where the collection is housed. Hendrick Hudson Free Library is also a valued partner, acting as the hub for shipping the materials, processing the books (i.e. adding spine labels) and searching the WLS catalog to find and set aside whatever few works might already be cataloged, before sending shipments to WLS Cataloging Services.

Mr. Wray and Ms. Glazer cataloged a large collection of Spanish language primary readers owned by Port Chester-Rye Brook Public Library. Original ("from scratch") cataloging was required for a significant number of these works, which are educational picture books intended to help young children learn about language, mathematics and other subjects.

Without the WLS catalog, Westchester County residents would not know what materials are available in the libraries, nor be able to borrow them. Thus, WLS catalogers' work to keep the catalog up-to-date and to maintain its functionality can be seen as an important component of outreach. In addition to the projects already mentioned, the WLS catalogers served the people of Westchester by adding a variety of other materials to the catalog. A very partial list of these includes: Launchpads (preloaded educational computer tablets) for a WLS Public Innovation and Engagement project; reading lamps and book holders used in Yonkers Public Library's "Library by Mail" program for homebound Yonkers residents; children's educational "backpack kits" for Greenburgh Public Library, and a backlog of books and audiovisual materials at New Rochelle Public Library.

Some of the languages of materials cataloged by WLS Cataloging Services in 2021 were: French, Spanish, Polish, Filipino (Tagalog), Vietnamese, Italian, Russian, Japanese and Chinese. It would seem that having these languages and others represented in the WLS catalog can only help underserved members of the community and further the respect for diversity.

Development

YEAR IN REVIEW SUMMARY:

Total dollars raised: \$412,057 *[This report reflects funds received or officially committed in 2021.]*

Private/ Corporate and Foundation	\$266,000
Special grants	140,927
Matching gifts (Bank of America)	615
Total Grants	\$407,542

Our practice is to apply for grants that meet our mission, vision and goals. We seek grants that would support WLS outreach programs' efforts to meet the increased needs of underserved and unserved Westchester populations, leveraging library funding from NYS Department of Education, Division of Library Development and Westchester County. Grants received this year supported adult literacy programs in Spanish, bilingual program collateral, middle school and teen programs in libraries, member library training, digital equity, including materials and access, and community outreach efforts.

Grants are solicited through specific funder guidelines; most are project specific. Some grants will cover the full project costs; others, only a portion of the overall project's costs. In some

cases, funds may be used for personnel in addition to a percentage of overhead (up to 15%) of the requested project.

All grants require a final report – this can vary from a detailed impact and expenditure report (required by all government funding) to a more general narrative describing the program's success and impact. Note: Final report requirements are not necessarily tied to dollar amount of the grant. In other words, the detail required on the final report for a \$15,000 grant is often as much as that of a \$100,000 grant.

Total Individuals: 2021 - \$4,515 *[Average individual gift: \$146.67 / 31 gifts]*

Board Giving	\$ 790
Staff Giving	1,022
Other Individuals	\$2,703

These funds are used to support WLS outreach initiatives, including digital equity projects. Funds are solicited through the website donor portal, email blasts, Giving Tuesday and Library Giving Day, and through the GuideStar portal.

Individual donations come from patrons, often participants in either the Senior Benefits Individual Counseling Services (SBICS) or Career Coaching programs, in gratitude for the service provided.

Brief Overview of some 2021 Grant Awards *[Support for these programs were received in 2021. Some grant projects may not be completed by the end of the fiscal year; grant monies are held as temporarily restricted assets until project funds are fully expended.]*

CON EDISON: \$15,000

STEM in The Library Project This project is designed to assist libraries in planning and presenting theme-based STEM workshops for middle school aged children. This project will include model workshop presentations for up to ten libraries with professional technology trainers from Digital Arts Experience (DAE). WLS Technology Trainer (WLS TT) will offer pre- and post-workshop support to help library staff build confidence in presenting and developing ongoing STEM programs, utilizing WLS resources, including those of the WLS LEADER LAB. Three age-appropriate curriculum-based workshops presented as a sequential series of five one-hour workshops will be offered. Workshops will be conducted by DAE professional staff and will serve as a basic template for future library-lead programming. These participatory, hands-on STEM learning experiences will also include a theme with social outcome, such as anti-bullying and social media safety. Libraries will be encouraged to share workshop outcomes with their community via public presentations, newsletters, social media posts and You Tube videos.

Outcomes: Allison Midgley (WLS) and Rob Kissner (DAE) are working with youth librarians to build a library-based STEM curriculum in a workshop setting for middle school students. Due to the challenges presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is expected that programs may begin in the Spring. Libraries will self-select based on their capacity to fulfill program requirements. **This program will be completed in 2022, with final report required by September 2022.**

TD BANK CHARITABLE FOUNDATION: \$5,000

This grant supports the **expansion of adult education services and resources for adult Spanish-speaking community members**. WLS offers several programs designed to assist adults who want to read independently, obtain a high school diploma, and improve their job opportunities. By expanding our Spanish language resources and services for job seekers, those working towards a high school diploma and English language learners, WLS can address our persistent challenge in providing appropriate resources to the more than 20% of the County's population that is Spanish speaking, many of whom are seeking to address both employment and educational goals. Our overarching program goals are: (1) to develop Spanish-language print and video content to guide clients in the use of library resources, and (2) to make available Spanish-language resources that address educational and job search needs. **These funds have been fully expended with final report due in February 2022.**

Outcomes: This grant along with grants from The Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, The Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation and United Way of Westchester Putnam supported the Spanish translation of the Job Search Tool Kit online (<https://www.firstfind.org/espanol/>) and audience segmented bilingual brochures in 2021. Remaining funds will be used in 2022 to support coaching in Spanish and the bilingual High School Equivalency brochure.

NY CARES ACT FUNDS / Digital Loaner Program: \$65,927

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the digital access gap in Westchester; moreover, the loss of jobs, distance learning and isolation due to these ongoing challenges have further widened that gap. The **Library Digital Loaner Program funded by the NY CARES Act** grant sought to address the issues of digital equity. The program leveraged strong partnerships with County government, nonprofit social service agencies, community-based organizations and funders to identify and support those in need of a digital device and Internet connection. This program endeavored to strengthen member libraries' capacity to reach and engage with underserved communities. Further, professional development for library staff focusing on virtual programming platforms, best practices for virtual patron engagement, and technology assistance were included in the project.

Outcomes: Based on a member library survey that indicated a need for Chromebooks for loaning to patrons, 100 Chromebooks – all CIPA (Child Internet Protection Act) compliant (required by funder) – were purchased with NY CARES Act funds and made available to library patrons through member libraries. Information in Spanish and English was distributed widely through nonprofit partners and member libraries; patrons were encouraged to call a special hotline number to reserve a Chromebook and WLS staff arranged for the devices to be delivered to their local library. Explanatory webinars to library staff were presented by WLS early in the project and included Chromebook training to assist patrons on using their Chromebook. This project is ongoing and no longer requires that patrons be on federal assistance to borrow a Chromebook. This loaner program is offered to member libraries at no risk to the library. **Project funds were fully expended by June 30, 2021. However, the Digital Loaner program continues with materials purchased as part of this program. As of January 19, 2022, there are 16 NY CARES/WLS Chromebooks in circulation.**

NYS BULLET AID: \$75,000 [These funds will be fully expended in 2022.]

- \$25,000 – NYS Assemblywoman Sandy Galef to strengthen and expand its adult education services and resources for adult Spanish-speaking community members.

- \$50,000 – NYS Assembly Westchester Delegation to support in part the renewal of the digital learning resource, LinkedIn Learning (formerly Lynda.com) and Tutor.com. Funding will also support a public awareness campaign for these resources.
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ON TARGET FOR 2022

SCHMIDT FUTURES/ NATIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ALLIANCE: \$250,000

In the last week of 2021, we learned that our proposal to Schmidt Futures has been tentatively approved pending final grant review for compliance, organizational due diligence and execution of an agreement managed by the Schmidt Futures grants management team in early 2022. This two-year grant for \$250,000 will support and enhance WLS Reentry Services specifically providing digital access and training for recently incarcerated individuals. The project was conceived by WLS Outreach and Development in consultation with project partners Westchester Reentry Task Force and the STEM Alliance.

Information Technology (IT)

The WLS Information Technology (IT) Department saw many changes in 2021. One of the major changes dealt with the completion of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) which was signed by all libraries. This gives libraries the desired a la carte model which was requested while maintaining the core service model that will allow the IT Department to continue to provide essential services to all libraries.

One of the major milestones was the hiring of our new IT Operations Manager—a key step in addressing some of the comments from the IT audit. One of the major goals for this new team member will be completing and streamlining the helpdesk software and the helpdesk team. The helpdesk software has been in service all of 2021 with good results. The self-service portal and knowledge base provide easier access to information and service for staff.

Libraries in the fall of 2021 started their migrations to the new wireless service plan. This project would allow for faster wireless internet access for libraries and for new wireless equipment. The plan was to begin the conversion of libraries to the new equipment before 2022 to help library staff and IT staff get accustomed to the new environment. The hardware conversion was phase one of the project and is near completion. Supply shortages delayed the installation of all the wireless equipment in 2021. In the first quarter of 2022 libraries will have their wireless internet circuits either boosted or installed, this will be Phase two.

The data dashboard project has been a surprise as it progresses. A new platform, which began with the concept of providing Evergreen (ILS) data for all library staff to consume and generate, has taken off. Other databases are being integrated into the platform to all allow staff a place to easily produce their own data charts on demand. Staff has been testing out the platform, and it will be fully operational at the end of the first quarter of 2022.

Windows 10 computers have been placed at public usage areas in all libraries. These new devices will allow patrons a faster and safer environment to use. The VDI environment is the last phase of deployment and conversion to Windows 10.

The first quarter of 2022 will see phase two of the wireless project come to completion. All libraries will provide a minimum standard of wireless internet speed when using WLS IT for service. WLS IT will

also address the Local Area Network (LAN) at libraries and start the transition to a new Internet Service Provider (ISP). This will increase internet speed at libraries as well as change the infrastructure, which will increase security and flexibility in serving the libraries. Finally, the new VDI environment should be deployed at all library by the end of the first quarter, this includes new hardware and Windows 10.

Public Innovation & Engagement (PIE)

An update on three key senior-directed services: One service down-sizes, one thrives in a pandemic, and another launches after a delay.

Senior services have long been a focus of outreach programming. While these programs are generally designed to serve the needs of low income community members, many of whom also have limited experience with digital/internet devices, they also serve the broader Westchester community. The current status of three initiatives are detailed below and intended to illustrate the value and challenges of these programs relative to our member libraries, patrons, and to WLS.

Senior Benefits Individual Counseling Services (formerly Westchester Seniors Out Speaking)

Just over 20 years ago, Westchester Seniors Out Speaking (WSOS) began as a special project of the Medicare Rights Center (MRC), a national advocacy and educational organization. WSOS was its test of a grassroots program to educate broadly on Medicare. In 2013, despite a thriving volunteer pool (75+) and active Medicare counseling sites at local libraries, MRC decided to step away from the program. With supplemental funding identified, WLS adopted the program in 2013 with an eye toward leveraging volunteer efforts to also promote library services. In subsequent years, over 1,000 counseling clients were served annually and offered educational programs with an annual attendance exceeding 14,000.

The breadth and complexity of Medicare as a topic necessitates a high commitment to learning and research. To manage WSOS also required skill in recruitment, training, counseling, presentations, and ongoing volunteer education on Medicare and senior benefits.

These needs were met for several years by a power team of four paid part-time program coordinators. As this once-in-a-lifetime team retired, moved away, or passed on, we found ourselves scrambling to maintain the level of quality assurance and care they had provided for this program and its volunteers.

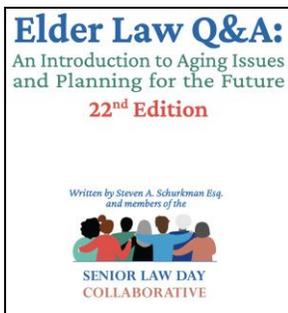
After a challenging couple of years trying to counsel through the pandemic, one of our remaining two coordinators found full-time work and the other decided that it was time for a much needed break after 10+ years of post-retirement employment. At the same time, we learned of a similar senior benefits counseling service being launched by WestCOP, which received a significant grant from the National Council on Aging. We also learned that MRC was seeking volunteers who could deliver Zoom-based and phone counseling via their national Helpline. The time was right for us to end the program and channel our volunteers to other opportunities.

Going forward, via our SENIORS website (seniors.westchesterlibraries.org), we will provide referral to WestCOP and MRC programs and continue to provide occasional presentations and materials on how Westchester residents can advocate for themselves in navigating Medicare and other senior benefits.

While these decisions were difficult to make, we feel that the program has served its purpose in supporting seniors at a time when a distinct majority were unfamiliar with Medicare's moving parts and its shift to online platforms. We look forward to being able to focus on more sustainable educational programs and capacity building.

The Senior Law Day Collaborative

The Senior Law Day Collaborative, a program developed by the Westchester Public Private Partnership for Aging Services, is a key resource for Westchester residents seeking guidance on topics related to legal, financial, and health planning. The Collaborative is unique in that it provides a high-impact forum to which attorneys and financial planners can direct their pro bono hours in support of education related to elder law and elder planning topics. The Collaborative serves a diversity of clients—from seniors to family members and caregivers, with special outreach done to low-income and Spanish populations.



From its inception in 2000, the primary Collaborative offering was an annual Senior Law Day at the Westchester County Center. Additionally, it produced an annually updated reference work - [The Elder Law Q&A](#). At present, program activities include local and online educational and consultation events, an email Helpline, and diverse content.

In 2021, the Collaborative produced 26 webinars; live events were attended by 871 individuals, with an additional 671 subsequent views online. The list below of just a few recent webinar titles illustrates the diversity of the information that can be accessed through the

Collaborative. Additionally, in 2021, more than 115 people tapped our consultation events and Helpline. Despite the pandemic, we participated in two live events that reached almost 600 community members.

A sample of 2021 webinars: How do I pay for long-term care? Planning with and without long-term care insurance | A primer on senior living options. | Maximizing your choice and option during Medicare open enrollment. | Elder Law 101: Everything You Need to Know About Maximizing Your Assets | Making Tough Choices: Using Public Data to Compare Nursing Homes and Hospitals | Making Medical Decisions for Another | Using the New Power of Attorney Form for New York | How Tax Planning Changes Through Four Stages of Retirement | Consumer Directed Personal Care Program Under Medicaid.



WLS is a key partner in the Senior Law Day Collaborative. We are named among the sponsors of the initiative and the PIE Director Elena Falcone has served as a co-chair since 2016. Specifically, we designed and currently maintain the website (seniorlawday.info), coordinate the activities of the online Helpline, and produce educational and marketing materials. Ms. Falcone has both delivered webinars for the collaborative and has frequently served as an event moderator. The Collaborative's [Essential Online Health Information for Older Adults](#), a program originally delivered in 2018 and funded through a grant from the National Library of Medicine, is an actively used resource on the website; its popularity is prompting a third reprinting and update in 2022. Megan Brown, also a member of the Outreach team, redesigned the Elder Law Q&A and works to deliver annual updates that includes coordinating fact-checking and translation.

The value of this work to WLS has been to assure that member libraries and patrons can tap authoritative, non-commercial information for educational programming and referrals. In addition to scheduling in-person and Zoom-based programs, libraries such as Ossining Public Library and the Yonkers Public Library, have worked with the Collaborative to provide local Senior Law Day (counseling) events. Our participation has worked to make us a logical partner to agencies that advance legal access (Pace Women's Justice Center, Legal Aid Society of Westchester) and those concerned with senior services generally.

VisionLabs

VisionLabs is an outreach effort designed to reach adults new to vision loss and connect them with resources and services that can keep them reading, i.e., informed and connected. The VisionLabs program is primed for direct patron service with our new large-print, bi-fold brochure. Through our pilot program we have already worked with individual patrons that are referred to us from VISIONS, the NYS Talking Book and Braille Library, the Department of Senior Programs and Services, and through direct support requests. Our hope is that the new brochure will support our outreach efforts to draw in patrons from around the county for one-to-one support and referrals.

Actions in 2022 will include placing an ad in the Senior Voice magazine and Resource Guide, preparing e-readers for inclusion in "sample" tech kits, and renewed accessibility programming for both librarians and the public. The Yonkers Public Library-Grinton I. Will Branch remains the primary partner library in this program, but we hope to collaborate with other libraries and their patrons in the coming months.

Upcoming Events

TRUSTEE HANDBOOK BOOK CLUB: Thanks to the success of this series, it will be continued in 2022. All sessions will be held on Tuesdays from 5-6:30 p.m. Below is the schedule and the registration links:

January 18 | Topic: Budgets & Finance

Registration link: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_h-O8JVTXTbax4XJ8EUxgLQ

February 22 | Topic: Facilities

Registration link: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KacE2TMZTaqrnDIdS3_ljQ

March 29 | Topic: Policies & Risk Management

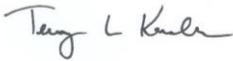
Registration link: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Ji0sYwV9TxiHeuWmJq8v8w

WESTCHESTER LIBRARY ASSOCIATION: Mid-Winter Conference: Safeguarding our Digital Spaces with Guest Speaker Rory Mir, Grassroots Advocacy Organizer at the Electronic Frontier Foundation

February 2 | 9:30 a.m. to 12 noon

Registration link: <https://bit.ly/3EZLU9w>

Respectfully submitted,



Terry L. Kirchner
Executive Director