LSTA Peer Evaluation for the *Libraries as Community Research Centers* Grant Project by The Oregon Council of Teachers of English as a partner of The Oregon Encyclopedia
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Summary of Evaluation

The Libraries as Community Research Centers grant program was centered around the Oregon Encyclopedia project. The Oregon Encyclopedia (OE) began as a project for Oregon's Sesquicentennial Celebration and will continue to evolve for the foreseeable future. Three organizations partnered to create the Oregon Encyclopedia – Portland State University, Oregon Council of Teachers of English, and the Oregon Historical Society. Willamette University has recently had some involvement as well. The OE is intended to be a comprehensive and authoritative resource of information about Oregon's history and culture.

OE staff decided to begin their project by focusing on entries about subjects underrepresented in traditional and other current Oregon history resources, such as minority populations, women's experiences and recent developments in cultural activities.

In order to grow their collection of these types of entries, OE partnered with 8 libraries across the state of Oregon to promote the project and engage Oregonians in helping with the project so that more obscure subjects could be exposed as possible entries for the OE. OE staff held two meetings at the chosen libraries where they described the project, how to research local history with the resources available to them (which were listed on an annotated bibliography that the local library had put together for this project and are available on the OE website and at the libraries), discussed possible subjects for entries, and recruited people of those communities to write entries for the OE. Once entries were researched and written, staff of the OE edited and fact-checked them and sent them back to the author for approval. Once they were approved by both the author and the OE, they were posted in the OE.

Since this grant went to the OE, it obviously benefited the project by expanding it physically by adding entries and also spreading awareness about the OE. But the grant project also benefited libraries across the state of OR. The meetings that were held at these libraries brought community members in and engaged them in discussions and research of their local history. Since the OE project is ongoing, the benefits of this grant project can also be ongoing. Now that these libraries have been exposed to the OE project, they can continue to encourage their community to be involved in it. The libraries also have a tangible byproduct of this project – an annotated bibliography of all of the OR and local history resources their library holds.

Libraries across the state, and even those in other states and countries, can learn from this project by seeing that there is interest in local history, that

community members have history to share, that it should be recorded, and that libraries can facilitate these things by being community research centers.

Project Objectives
The main goal of this grant project, *Libraries as Community Research Centers*, was to strengthen communities by helping libraries become centers of community life where Oregonians connect with information resources and with each other. The Oregon Encyclopedia staff set out to accomplish this goal with three objectives in mind.

1. The Libraries as Community Research Centers project will strengthen libraries as significant centers for pursuing information about local history and culture, especially relating to minority populations, women's experiences, and recent developments in cultural activities. As research centers, libraries will play an important role in bringing diverse people together to discuss local issues and history.
2. The Libraries as Community Research Center project will generate 140 Encyclopedia entries on underrepresented and overlooked populations in Oregon history and culture to post to its website by the end of the grant period.
3. The Oregon Encyclopedia and participating libraries will create an annotated bibliography on local history that will assist in the discovery, research, and writing of community history and the promotion of historical literacy.

Project Method
In order to meet the goal and objectives of this project, Oregon Encyclopedia staff worked with libraries across the state to help promote this project to local residents, who they hoped would be inspired to write entries for the OE.

Libraries were chosen by location. The OE staff tried to include libraries that cover as much and as many geographic regions of Oregon as they could, and also tried to find those with ethnic and women's organizations. Eight libraries were chosen: Harney County Library in Burns, North Bend Public Library, Newberg Public Library, Holgate Branch of Multnomah County Library, Shaw Historical Library in Klamath Falls, Baker City Public Library, Tillamook County Library, and Grand Ronde Tribal Library.

OE staff hosted two meetings at these eight libraries where community members learned about the OE project, how to research local history and what resources were available to them. They discussed ideas about possible subjects for OE

entries, and some community members agreed to write entries for the OE about those subjects. Before the meeting was held, each library created an annotated bibliography for the resources their library held. These bibliographies were made available to the community members and posted on both the library and OE website. (Originally there were only seven libraries chosen for meetings, but since only one meeting was conducted in Baker City, an eighth library in Burns was chosen to replace the second meeting. Thus, there are 14 meetings, but eight libraries and eight bibliographies.)

All 14 meetings (2 at each location, except for Baker City and Burns) were scheduled in the first quarter of the grant project. The meetings were publicized locally in newspapers, at the libraries, by personal invitations, and state wide through list serves and press releases. Annotated bibliographies of local history resources were created, or began to be created, by librarians at each of the eight libraries. In the first quarter, eight of the 14 meetings were held with an average attendance of 15 people. The librarians discussed local history and the resources at their library with the present community members, while the OE staff discussed topics that could be included in the encyclopedia. Each meeting generated a list of possible subjects and authors for entries, which were reviewed by OE staff. Once staff decided which topics should be pursued, they sent invitations to the prospective authors to write entries for those topics.

The OE staff learned from their experiences with the first meetings and tweaked their procedure for future ones, especially in regards to advertising the meetings and getting community members to attend. They found that people were more likely to attend if library and OE staff personally invited them, so they worked in the next quarters to use that form of publicity more.

Five more meetings were held in the second quarter, this time with 12 to 18 people attending each one. The process and the results were the same as the previous meetings. An average of 15 new topic ideas were received at each meeting. Around three new authors were identified at each meeting, which brought the total to 39 new potential authors at the end of the second quarter.

Due to the publication of these meetings, three other Oregon libraries contacted OE because they were interested in hosting meetings as well. Since these meetings were not included in the original grant proposal, they were not covered by the grant funds, but the fact that libraries are showing independent interest is a wonderful thing and will only lead to a more well-rounded, complete Oregon Encyclopedia.

The last meeting was scheduled for the fourth quarter, so no meetings took place in the third quarter. At the end of the third quarter there were 196 new topics (including completed entries and those in progress) and 42 new authors recruited all due to the community meetings.

Project Results

This grant project produced several concrete results. First of all, there were eight annotated bibliographies created by librarians in Oregon libraries for their collections of local and Oregon history resources. These libraries did not have these useful resources before they participated in this grant project.

There will be a total of 196 new entries added to the OE written by 42 new authors. Both of these results are important because these authors are now familiar with the project and may be interested in writing more entries in the future, and because the OE physically grew and expanded because of this project. The objective was to produce 140 new entries; hat was exceeded by 56 entires. These entries span many Oregon history subjects, including the types of subjects the grantees set out to cover. Some of them include Minoru Yasui, a Japanese-American lawyer, Ada Hastings Hedges, a woman poet, The Bomber Restaurant and Catering, a modern restaurant and museum, The Siskiyou Regional Education Project, a current environmental education and conservation organization, among many, many others in a very wide range of topics.

The meetings were concrete results, too. They brought members of the eight communities into the library where they became aware (if they weren't already) that there are many local history resources for research. They were also exposed to the OE project, which will help expose it to other people through word of mouth.

Results will continue to be seen in the future because the OE (and things like this project) seems to snowball. The more entries there are and the more people know about and contribute to the project, the more it spreads and the faster it grows. Just like the three libraries contacted OE to set up meetings because they heard about it and wanted to participate, people will hear about OE and want to contribute, the new authors will find new topics they want to write about, more people will see and use the OE because of its expanding number of topics. Hopefully more libraries will be inspired to host meetings and create bibliographies. They will bring more community members in and act as a research center for these people.

Project Impact
This grant project has a huge impact on many people. Every Oregon resident, every Oregon student, virtually every person in the world has access to a resource that holds vital, but often overlooked, information about Oregon history. This project has documented history that may never have been brought to light without it, and by making it a free resource on the Internet, they have made it accessible to billions of people. Literally, one impact of this grant is that people learn history.

The people who were involved in meetings and those who wrote entries have been touched by a new experience, and this may change the way they view history, their communities, and themselves, which in turn may directly affect these things. The Oregon libraries that hosted meetings experienced a way of acting as a community research center by interacting with their community members and discussing local history and library resources. Hopefully they can continue to be a community research center and other libraries can witness this and experience it for themselves.

Other institutions, or states, or countries, may realize they can create a project like this too. The Oregon Encyclopedia is a new model of encyclopedic resources. Other organizations can now see that it is possible to have a resource that is created by communities and multiple authors. The OE may spur any number of similar projects in the future.

The OE is especially useful for students studying the history of Oregon. Schools are becoming more involved in the project, with some teachers assigning projects relating specifically to the encyclopedia, including using it as a resource and even writing new entries. I only see this trend continuing to grow, especially as the OE grows. What an amazing concept to get people who use the OE to actively contribute to its content.

Suggestions for Improvement
Even though this project was run very well and produced excellent results, there are a few ways I believe it could've been stronger. I also think that the OE could utilize these suggestions in the future of their overall project.

It was mentioned in the quarterly reports that there was some trouble with getting some of the library staff involved, so obviously that could be improved. Although this is a difficult thing to improve since it is up to other people to actually carry out. But it would be helpful if the libraries could've worked harder to publicize the meetings and get more people to attend. This would've lead to even more

authors and entries and general community involvement. Maybe there are some sort of incentives the OE could offer libraries in the future.

Another thing that can be improved on (and this is more relevant to the future) is to have meetings in more locations around the state. I don't know if it was really necessary to have two meetings in each location, and if it was, that is fine, but if there wasn't a great benefit, maybe they could've had one meeting in twice as many locations. Either way, in the future, I hope they continue to have meetings in additional locations around Oregon in order to eventually cover as much of the state as possible in the OE. I think having the meetings really does help generate more entries and authors than relying on people finding the project on their own.

Another idea along the lines of both expanding meeting locations and getting better involvement from the libraries is to put a little more responsibility on the libraries. I have an idea of holding regional meetings, or trainings, for libraries that are interested in participating. These could be public libraries, private libraries, school libraries, etc. The OE staff would hold a training where library employees would learn about the OE project and be taught how to go about holding meetings for this project on their own in their own library. This essentially expands the number of people working for the OE without straining the current OE staff and significantly increases the coverage of the state in a short amount of time. Also, the libraries and librarians will then feel a little more ownership in the project and will work harder to get better results. They will take it upon themselves to see that their library is an active community center.

One last thing the OE can work on, which I believe it has plans to, is adding more popular, already known and covered topics to the encyclopedia. This would make the OE a much more well-rounded resource of the history of Oregon.