

LIBRARY SERVICES AND TECHNOLOGY ACT (LSTA)
GRANT PROJECT EVALUATION OF
OPENING THE DOORS WIDER:
SERVING THE UNSERVED IN EAST LINN COUNTY

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I have been asked by the Oregon State Library to complete a peer evaluation of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant awarded to three Linn County libraries—the Lebanon Public Library, the Scio Public Library, and the Sweet Home Public Library in the eastern part of the county—for a project entitled, “Opening the Doors Wider: Serving the Unserved in East Linn County.” The anticipated length of this grant is three (3) years, and this report will cover year #2. I prepared the peer evaluation report for this grant last year.

On May 23, 2012, I met with the three library directors who have been administering this grant—Denice Lee from Lebanon, Rose Peda from Sweet Home, and LaVonne Murray from Scio. From other projects that I have worked on in Linn County, I already knew Denice and LaVonne, but this was my first opportunity to get to know Rose; I have crossed paths in the past with Rose in her capacity as extension services librarian for the Douglas County Library. May Garland, a volunteer from Scio and a member of the committee overseeing the grant, was unable to attend. I enjoyed visiting with Denice, Rose, and LaVonne about “Opening the Doors Wider,” and the hour I spent with them on the 23rd gave me a much better understanding of their project. I appreciate the time given to me by these busy librarians.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The project has three goals:

- Goal #1 is to develop new non-resident library patrons by offering them a discounted card for three consecutive years, with the discount decreasing over three years from 90% to 75% to 50%. During that time each library will use grant funds to complete the cost of the card (minus \$1 per card as an in-kind contribution from the participating libraries). This is year #2 of this project.
- Goal #2 is to gather responses through a survey from all grant-funded households for the first-year grant funded cards.
- Goal #3 is to bring east Linn County librarians from Lebanon (Library Director Denice Lee), Scio (Library Director LaVonne Murray) and Sweet Home (Library Director Rose Peda) together on a regular basis to establish and maintain regular meetings that will insure that the project is on target. These meeting will help to establish a professional relationship among the three librarians that will extend beyond the grant period.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

There are approximately 35,000 people in Linn County who are not currently served by any library. There is at the present time no countywide library district. The unserved do not live within the city limits and do not pay city property taxes. The city property taxes go to underwrite the expense of operating the town's public library. Therefore, non-residents of the city are not eligible to receive a free library card and must purchase one if they wish to use the library. While children's cards may be free in some cases, this benefit does not allow use of the library by other family members. The objective of this project is to get these families to make libraries a part of their lives—a habit that will extend far into the future.

“Opening the Doors Wider” will underwrite the cost of out-of-district library cards for nonresidents of the three communities served by these libraries. The amount of subsidy for the three years of the project will reduce each year from a high of 90% in year #1 to 50% in year #3. The table below shows the progression of the discount over the three years.

CITY	Card Cost	Discounted Cost - 90%	Discounted Cost - 75%	Discounted Cost - 50%
Scio	\$ 30.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 7.50	\$ 15.00
Sweet Home	\$ 35.00	\$ 3.50	\$ 8.75	\$ 17.50
Lebanon	\$ 50.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 12.50	\$ 25.00

LSTA grant funds and a \$1.00 in-kind donation will subsidize the cost of the cards.

The original intent of the project was to provide subsidies for 300 cards in Lebanon, 200 in Sweet Home, and 50 in Scio. Because of the demand for the cards and the success which the three libraries had in stretching the LSTA allocation, those numbers were adjusted in June of 2011 as follows: 350 in Lebanon, 204 in Sweet Home, and 70 in Scio. Cards that are not renewed after one (1) year are offered to other non-residents who have placed their name on a waiting list.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Residents of east Linn County adjacent to the cities of Lebanon, Scio, and Sweet Home who live outside the city limits of these communities and, therefore, are ineligible for free library cards.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES FOR THE FIRST QUARTER (July 1, 2011 to September 30, 2011)

Because the distribution of library cards in year #1 did not actually begin until December 15, 2010, and the renewal date for these cards will, therefore, not begin until December 15, 2011, there was little activity during the first quarter. The quarterly meeting of librarians in the three communities was held on September 13, 2011, in Lebanon. Brownsville librarian, Sherri Lemhouse, was invited to attend the September 13 meeting to hear about the project and to update the group on activities at the Brownsville Community Library. Other business/discussion on the agenda were the review of the final year #1 report, review of a draft of the survey that will be sent to all grant-funded card holders, development of processes and procedures for renewal of the grant-funded cards, other grant opportunities for Linn County libraries, online training opportunities, and the Oregon State Library annual statistical report.

PROJECT RESULTS FOR THE FIRST QUARTER (July 1, 2011, to September 30, 2011)

There were no results to report since the grant-funded cards will not expire until December 15, 2011. One quarterly meeting was held.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES FOR THE SECOND QUARTER (October 1, 2011, to December 31, 2011)

To accomplish the first goal of creating new non-resident library patrons, the committee has developed processes and procedures for the renewal of the first year cards which began expiring December 15, 2011. The renewal letters began going out November 15, 2011. From November 15th on, renewal letters will be sent to patrons at least one month prior to the expiration date of their grant-funded library cards. Card holders are encouraged in the letter to renew for a second year at the discounted rate of 75%. Scio has 70 cards, Sweet Home has 204 cards and Lebanon has 350 cards to go through the renewal process. If cards are not renewed, they become available to another out-of-city household at the discounted rate of 75%.

To accomplish the second goal of gathering responses through a survey sent to all households registered for the first year grant-funded library cards, the libraries worked together to create a survey giving the card holders an opportunity to give feedback on their experiences receiving library services. The survey asked if they were using their cards; if not, why not; what services they were using; what services they'd like to see that were currently unavailable; why they bought the card; and how many people were in their household. To date, Lebanon has received 107 responses (350 surveys mailed); Sweet Home 81 (204 surveys mailed); and Scio 29 responses (70 surveys mailed). The results of the survey are to be collated and summarized for the final report on the second year of the grant project.

To accomplish the third goal of bringing East Linn County librarians together, the committee held their quarterly meeting on October 12, 2011, in Scio. This was Rose Peda's first LSTA meeting. Rose is the new library director for the Sweet Home Public Library. We introduced ourselves and talked with Rose about the project. Other items of business included approval of the final draft of the survey sent to all grant funded card holders; finalization of the processes and procedures for renewal of the grant-funded cards; a discussion of promotional ideas for selling the unrenewed cards; a review of the grant budget; and discussion of various library management topics such as weeding, ordering books, rebinding and mending books.

PROJECT RESULTS FOR THE SECOND QUARTER (October 1, 2011, to December 31, 2011)

As the first grant-funded cards did not begin expiring until December 15, there have been very few renewals of the cards. To date, 4% of the Lebanon cards that were set to expire have been renewed, 3% in Sweet Home, and 10% in Scio.

Surveys were mailed to 100% of the holders of non-resident cards and to date, 31% of those surveys sent to Lebanon grant-funded cards holders have been returned, 40% in Sweet Home, and 41% in Scio. This is an excellent return for a mailed survey.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES FOR THE THIRD QUARTER (January 1, 2012, to March 30, 2012)

To accomplish the first goal of creating new non-resident library patrons, the committee has developed processes and procedures for the renewal of the first year cards which began expiring December 15, 2011. The renewal letters began going out November 15, 2011. From November 15th on, renewal letters will be sent to patrons at least one month prior to the expiration date of their grant-funded library cards. Card holders are encouraged in the letter to renew for a second year at the discounted rate of 75%. Scio has 70 cards, Sweet Home has 204 cards and Lebanon has 350 cards to go through the renewal process. If cards are not renewed, they become available to another out-of-city patron at the discounted rate of 75%.

To accomplish the second goal of gathering responses through a survey sent to all households registered for the first year grant-funded library cards, the libraries worked together to create a survey giving the card holders an opportunity to give feedback on their experiences receiving library services. The survey asked if they were using their cards; if not, why not; what services they were using; what services they'd like to see that were currently unavailable; why they bought the card; and how many people were in their household.

To accomplish the third goal of bringing East Linn County librarians together, the committee held their quarterly meeting on April 3, 2012, in Lebanon.

PROJECT RESULTS FOR THE THIRD QUARTER (January 1, 2012, to March 30, 2012):

To date, household grant-funded cards for non-residents have been renewed at the following rates:

- Lebanon (350 cards issued in year #1): 198 or 56% have been renewed in year #2
- Sweet Home (204 cards issued in year #1): 62 or 31% have been renewed in year #2
- Scio (70 cards issued in year #1): 42 or 60% have been renewed in year #2

To date, Lebanon has received 109 responses; Sweet Home 83; and Scio 29 responses to the 624 surveys that were mailed in October, 2011. The results of the survey are to be collated and summarized for the final report on the second year of the grant project.

Denice, LaVonne, and Rose believe that the response to the survey was excellent. On the other hand, they have been disappointed in the renewal rate for the cards, although there is no data from similar programs on which to base their opinion. The discussion and planning for efforts to promote the unrenewed cards will be a continuing part of their agendas for upcoming quarterly meetings.

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS AND PROJECT IMPACT

All three of the librarians involved in the project agree that collaboration amongst the three participating libraries has been enhanced because of "Opening the Doors Wider." The quarterly meetings have been most useful in increasing this collaboration and reducing the sense of isolation that staffs of small libraries feel. This has been especially true for Scio, which is a one-person operation. The three librarians are planning a collaborative program, possibly an author appearance, for year #3 of the grant cycle, if funded.

It is very obvious that there is a demand for library services for non-residents of the three communities—the maximum allotted number of cards were issued in all three communities. I also believe the rate of renewals in year #2 has been healthy, though the librarians have been somewhat disappointed in that regard. There has been no shortage of non-residents to step up and take the cards of those who chose not to renew. The response rates to the surveys mailed to all participants has also been good, indicating that there is interest in the program.

I am optimistic that this project will lead to the movement for the creation of a county-wide library district. Several responses to the survey indicated that residents would be supportive of such a development. The three librarians involved in this project have invited the library directors in Brownsville and Albany to attend their quarterly meetings from time to time. Another collaborative effort in Linn County that could prove to be fruitful in drawing the county together is the joint migration of the public libraries in Albany and Lebanon and the Linn-Benton Community College to the Evergreen integrated library system. All of these collaborations can have a meaningful long-term impact on the development of library services for Linn County.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

It is apparent that a timeline extension until November, 2013, will need to be requested in the year #3 grant request, if “Opening the Doors Wider” is funded for the final year. This is necessitated by the fact that the first year of the grant did not commence until November, 2010.

As this is year #2 of the three-year project, an application for year #3 has already been submitted. A decision on that application is pending a decision by the LSTA Advisory Committee. This application outlines the following steps to insure success of the project in year #3:

- Track renewal of the second year, grant-funded non-resident cards as they expire.
- Promote card renewal (i.e., renewal letter to be sent to second-year card holders as their cards expire, flyers for posting in the libraries, press releases for local newspapers).
- Continue quarterly meetings of the three librarians and other interested parties to discuss any program issues and seek other ways to collaborate.
- Prepare a summary of the project to be submitted with the final report.
- Conduct a survey of second-year card holders.
- Create a collaborative project between the three libraries.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As someone who has been a close observer of library developments in Linn County for eight years, I admire the tenacity of the librarians in the county who continue to strive to develop a county-wide library district, striving to overcome significant barriers to the creation of larger areas of service. Projects such as “Opening the Doors Wider” are attempts to break down these barriers. I commend projects such as this one for attempting to overcome these obstacles and would encourage the Oregon State Library to continue to look with favor on programs such as this one.