

**Peer evaluation**  
**12-02-5p Multnomah County Library**  
**Homework Help Year 1**  
**Victoria Campbell, evaluator**  
**April 30, 2013**

**Summary of Evaluation:**

Multnomah County Library is seeking to replace their current Homework Center website. It is too large and they do not have the staff time to moderate the links effectively. The website is not interactive. Although the main page has lots of page hits the sub pages have a lot fewer hits. They wanted to create an App or other tool that will engage students while addressing their homework help needs.

This is year one of a two year grant. During the first year, the library conducted research to identify the best new tool. To do so they hosted focus groups, interviewed staff and outside stakeholders, conducted research and learned more about what their new catalog, Biblocommons, and new website, Drupal, had to offer. An outside group was contracted to lead the focus groups. The Project Coordinator also worked with experts within her library to learn more about MyMCL and student needs via School Corps. Once the research was analyzed it was shared with various staff groups.

The Project Coordinator gathered results from the focus group, research and the interviews. They were able to accomplish the original objectives of the project. After learning more about Drupal and how the adult librarians were using it, it was decided to support a similar tool for the new Homework Center.

The impact after Year One is mostly internal. However, after Year Two this project will be significant locally as Multnomah County students are directed to a resource that is interactive. An updated tool is a great way to reach out to teachers during an educator card drive. Many other libraries that do not have the resources to create their own online Homework Centers link to Multnomah County. This will be an example to them of what may be possible at their library. At this point in the grant project, Multnomah County Library has conducted valuable research and amassed plentiful data that it will continue to implement during Year Two of the grant as it further establishes a new Homework Center that will benefit both the Multnomah County Library and its patrons as well as other library systems.

**Project Objectives:**

Multnomah County Library received a grant to design a new homework center tool by evaluating the needs of its users (students, parents, librarians and educators.) Multnomah County Library serves approximately 116,471 K – 12 students in eight school districts, private schools and homeschools (based on school year 10/11 Oregon Department of Education Enrollment estimates). The tool needs to meet the diversity of student needs and experiences from a digital standpoint. In order to achieve this goal a Project Coordinator will be hired as well as a Project Consultant/User Interface Designer, who will provide additional assistance.

Multnomah County Library's current web 1.0 Homework Center contains over 45 homework guides. Most guides are broken up further into more specific subject areas. For example, in the Mathematics Homework Guide, there is information on Megasites, Algebra, pre-Calculus and Calculus, and more. In 2011, their Homework Center had over a million page views. The grant seeks to replace this popular homework portal with a web 2.0 tool. The current site grew too big and there were not enough staff resources to keep it up to date. The new tool needs to be easier to maintain. To find the right way to convert this popular tool, the Project Coordinator will hire a firm to conduct focus groups, analyze literature, investigate Bibliocommons and Drupal, and interview Multnomah County Librarians and outside stakeholders. Once this information is analyzed a new tool would be selected. The system will be created and tested during Year Two of the grant. The primary focus of Year One is research and analyzes.

### **Project Method:**

The primary methods of research during Year One were: focus groups, scholarly/peer research, technology investigation and interviews with internal and external stakeholders. This information was then analyzed and mock-ups of the new tool were created. A timeline was created to determine when each of these areas would be researched.

#### *Focus Groups:*

The first major project was to select Consumer Opinion Services to conduct the five focus groups. The focus groups included major outside stakeholders: one parent group, one educator group, one school library staff, and two student focus groups (Middle School and High School). Youth Services Staff, the Project Coordinator, and a Bibliocommons Consultant observed the focus groups and provided feedback.

#### *Scholarly/Peer Research:*

The Project Coordinator research focused on four main areas: homework, technology, study tools offered and educational trends. The coordinator read

articles, blogs, and websites, watched webinars and podcasts, and conducted online searching. This research continued throughout Year One of the grant.

*Technology Investigation:*

The Project Coordinator learned how the new mobile app (multcolib), new website (Drupal) and new catalog (Bibliocommons/My MCL) worked. The Project Coordinator met with Bibliocommons staff and the MyMCL Librarian during various stages of Year One. It was essential that the Project Coordinator know if the use of Drupal was a possibility.

*Interviews:*

The Project Coordinator interviewed 20 youth services staff members to determine what is working, what needs to change, and what could be improved with the current way Multnomah County Library provides Homework Help during the First Quarter. The coordinator also interviewed outside stakeholders including a staff tech writer for Educational Week, school district members and HN County Library's Homework Coordinator during the Second Quarter.

*Analyze Research and Determine Next Steps:*

The Project Coordinator with the School-Age Services Manager had to take all of this information and set a direction on where to go with the grant. A white paper was created and presented to staff groups for feedback in early 2013.

**Project Results:**

Below are summaries of the results of the research of the focus groups, scholarly/peer research, technology investigation and interviews with internal and external stakeholders. The new tool was selected based on these research results. Although there was a slight delay in when the grant started due to staffing changes, the objectives were met within the timeline.

*Focus Groups:*

The focus groups provided a wealth of information. The focus groups found that students will use Google before the library. When thinking of resources for homework, no one thought of the library as their first resource. If they do think of the library, they went to their school library first. The interviews confirmed that the Homework Center needs to be easy to use. Students liked chat because they didn't have to give an email. Students that attended schools that still had school librarians were more likely to know what the public library had to offer. Parents didn't know about databases. Part of the grant's success is based on having these focus groups so early in the grant process.

*Scholarly/Peer Research & Interviews:*

After conducting research and interviews the Project Coordinator created some infographics. An Education 2.0 infographic explored the new ways of teaching and learning. Her research found that educators are still learning how to use new technology in the classroom and are trying new things such as Flipped classrooms. Common Core Curriculum is new and needs to be supported with the new tool. The coordinator's research even extended beyond the US, as she looked at what model was being used in Finland (Joy of Learning.) It is obvious that the Project Coordinator did thorough research. The creation of this infographic and others helped present her findings in a clear, easy to read manner.

Patrons ask about tutoring at the library and many libraries offer tutoring programs. A volunteer program was created but was not sustainable. Instead a list of tutoring options in Multnomah County will be maintained. The Project Coordinator created a To Tutor or Not to Tute? infographic. Again, these infographics help provide easy to use results.

*Technology Investigation:*

At first the Project Coordinator thought that an app might be the way to create the new Homework resource. Tutor.com, an important part of the Homework Center with almost 4,000 K-12 sessions a year, would not integrate with the multcolib app. The adult librarians at Multnomah County Library had already started to use blog posts on their MCL's Topics pages. These blog posts were searchable since MyMCL returns both catalog and non-catalog results. Bibliocommons encourages social networking since lists can be made or titles tagged. Students only need to Internet to access the resource. The Project Coordinator was also really excited about the Bibloschools project that New York Public Library is working on and will continue to closely watch its progress.

*Development of a New Tool:*

The Project Coordinator created a white paper that she shared with Youth Services Librarians, the ExTeam, and then more widely to library staff. The combination of the results in those four areas resulted in a clear choice. The project decided to focus recreating the Homework Center within the Drupal website.

The site will not be as vast as the current site but will provide seven areas and 25 subjects. It is clear that lots of thought was put into which topics should be chosen. The team accounted for things like topics that were not easy to Google. Each subject will include 5-10 links, blog posts, and booklists. The booklists allow readers to see the cover of recommended titles. The format of the booklist will be well received because students like to see book covers. Blog posts by staff will be 2-3 paragraphs and show up to five urls.

The team is focusing long term by adding a subject area to youth services librarians collection development duties. School Corps has knowledge about databases and videos, the grant team is using their expertise to curate the Homework Center databases and making short videos or info-graphics that will appeal to kids. Additionally, School Corps will create resources for educators and parents.

With help from the My MCL Librarian and School Corps, the Project Coordinator created mock ups of a page in the Homework Center for "Native Americans." It includes a general description, database and website links, booklists and blog posts. The Project Coordinator and her team have thought of how students will use the page. A chat widget will be on the side of all the Homework Help topics. To make the website more interactive students 13 years and older can leave comments, tag, access lists from school and make their own lists. They know they will have to teach the kids to look for blog posts. It will be interesting to see how teens interact with the new tool.

Through the process of research analysis and the initiation of the redesign, the project team was able to accomplish its stated objectives. Overall, future results will be derived from utilization of the new tool that is in the process of being developed over the course of the grant project. This should more actively occur during Year Two of the grant.

### **Project Impact:**

In Year One of this project, the main impact has been on staff at Multnomah County Library. The results clarified for staff all the areas they were already meeting homework help needs. The duties of the youth services librarians have changed to include curating a subject area of the new Homework Center. The idea of using infographics in other MCL projects was created.

The larger public impact will be felt in Year Two when the new website goes live in February 2014 (soft launch in January). Since the Project Coordinator was able to come to an early conclusion about how to host the future tool, there will be time to do some usability testing in Year Two. School Corps can help get the word out to teachers with educator card drive. A change like this can be an excellent way to make a new connection with teachers.

Other libraries in Oregon and beyond will be able to use this research to aid their decisions on how to meet the homework needs of their students. Many libraries do not have the resources to create a center like this of their own and link to Multnomah's center. All of the infographics and videos created will also be shared

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widely via social media and other outlets. Multnomah County Library plans on presenting and introducing the new Homework Center at OLA 2014. The presentation and resource sharing will allow other professionals to glean valuable information from Multnomah County Library's work and research over the course of this grant project.