

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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Report Submitted May 31, 2013

In 2010, the Oregon State Library awarded a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant 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 length of this grant was for three (3) years, and this report will cover year #3, the final year of the grant. I was pleased to have been asked to prepare the peer evaluation report for this grant in 2011 and in 2012.

On February 12, 2013, I met with the three library directors who have been administering this grant—Carol Dinges from Lebanon, Rose Peda from Sweet Home, and LaVonne Murray from Scio—as well as with May Garland, a volunteer from Scio who is on the committee overseeing this project as well as serving as a former member of the LSTA Advisory Committee to the Oregon State Library. From the other reports that I have prepared for “Opening the Doors Wider,” as well as an earlier Linn County district effort, I already knew May, Rose, and LaVonne, but this was my first opportunity to meet Carol. The time spent with the four on February 12 was productive—I made lots and lots of notes—and allowed me to re-familiarize with the project. I could not have written this report without the benefit of spending an hour with them and hearing of their experiences the past year. I appreciate the time given to me by these busy people.

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, 2012 to September 30, 2012)

This quarter will reflect sale of cards at the discounted year-two rate of 75% for the months of July and August. The year-three rate of 50% discount began on September 1. There were 69 household cards renewed during this quarterly period—38 in Lebanon, 19 in Sweet Home and 12 in Scio. 16 new cards were sold; these cards were made available for sale because cards sold in years #1 and #2 were not renewed by the original cardholder.

Goal #1 stated above is to develop new non-resident library patrons. The three libraries continue to build on the success of years one and two by developing processes and procedures for the renewal of second-year cards. Renewal letters will begin going out on November 15, 2012, one month before the cards expire.

To accomplish goal #2 of bringing together the librarians of the three East Linn County libraries, the committee held their quarterly meeting on August 10, 2012, in Lebanon. Topics of discussion at this meeting were requesting a time extension from the Oregon State Library for the third year of the grant, Sweet Home's large number of cards that don't expire until August 31, 2012, and the collaborative project. The committee developed two options to deal with these issues: one was to renew early those cards that expire after the June 30th deadline and/or to ask the State Library for a time extension for the ending of the grant.

For the third goal of developing a collaborative process that would bring the librarians in the three libraries closer together, the committee discussed bringing in an author to the area to provide programming for the three communities. They explored how you locate, contact, invite, schedule, and pay an author.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES FOR THE SECOND QUARTER (October 1, 2012, to December 31, 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 second-year cards which began expiring December 15, 2012. The renewal letters began going out November 15, 2012. 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 50%. Scio has 70 cards, Sweet Home has 200 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 50%.

To accomplish the third goal of bringing East Linn County librarians together, the committee held their quarterly meeting on December 4, 2012, in Lebanon. Ann Reed from the Oregon State Library attended this meeting and led the discussion. The group explored the option of splitting the LSTA funds among the libraries to buy materials based on circulation data for the patrons who have benefitted from the program. Other ideas discussed were the "tiny library" movement and making laptops and WiFi available where people congregate such as coffee shops. The purchase of materials for the collection to benefit the needs of LSTA patrons and the libraries was the consensus choice of the committee.

It was determined that an author's visit would no longer be one of the goals of the grant. The committee will continue to pursue an author's visit to all three libraries with the assistance of Friends' groups. A publisher has been contacted, and a visit scheduled for the month of February.

As for the renewal of the cards and/or the sale of those cards that were not renewed for the second quarter, Lebanon renewed/sold 42 cards this quarter, Sweet Home 13 cards renewed/sold, and Scio 4 cards renewed/sold. A total of 65 cards remain available for purchase, 61 of those in Sweet Home.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES FOR THE THIRD QUARTER (January 1, 2013, to March 30, 2013)

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, 2012. The renewal letters began going out November 15, 2012. 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 200 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 50%.

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

- Lebanon (350 cards issued in year #1): to date, 156 cards have been renewed/sold in year #2, leaving 194 cards still available.
- Sweet Home (200 cards issued in year #1): to date, 82 cards have been renewed/sold in year #2, leaving 118 cards still available.
- Scio (70 cards issued in year #1): 57 have been renewed/sold in year #2, leaving 13 cards still available.

To accomplish the goal of bringing East Linn County librarians together, the committee held their quarterly meeting on February 12, 2013, in Lebanon. The primary topic was the development of grant modification. A modification to the grant budget was made to reallocated funds from the “contractual” line to “library materials.” The rationale for the modification is that the increased number of patrons had placed a strain on the available library materials, especially for Scio which has a comparatively small collection. The following reallocation was agreed upon:

- Scio, \$3,000
- Lebanon, \$2,000
- Sweet Home, \$2,000

The budget modification for the grant was submitted to the Oregon State Library by the fiscal agent and approved by the State Library.

Planning continued for the author visit with the assistance of Friends groups. Dean Adams, author of *Four Thousand Hooks*, was invited to speak at the Scio, Lebanon, and Sweet Home libraries and did so in February. His appearance was well-received and well-attended in all three libraries. The librarians consider the visit by Adams to have been a great success.

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS AND PROJECT IMPACT

On February 12, I met with the three librarians involved in the grant—Carol Dinges from Lebanon, Rose Peda from Sweet Home, and LaVonne Murray from Scio—and May Garland, a volunteer from Scio. What follows is a summary made from the notes which I took during that meeting.

Sweet Home experienced a slow start to the “Opening the Doors Wider” program in the early stages, probably due to the turnover in the Library Director’s position. But since that time, Sweet Home has experienced a resurgence in interest in the program.

The three libraries requested an extension of the program past the June 30 deadline, but that request was denied. That means that those cards set to renew between July 1 and November 30 will need to be renewed early. A letter was sent out to those affected, asking those patrons to renew by June 15.

Due to underspending in several budget lines—library cards, other supplies, and travel—there was \$7,000 in the grant budget that was not spent. These funds were reallocated for library materials, with Scio receiving a larger percentage.

One of the most successful outcomes of the grant program was the collaboration among the librarians in the three libraries. The quarterly meetings were a very positive result of “Opening Doors Wider,” especially the appearance by Dean Adams, a Seattle author, at all three libraries in February. Adams’s book—*Four Thousand Hooks*, a fictionalized account of halibut fishing in Alaska—appealed to both men and women. The committee requested that grant funds be used for this collaborative program, but the State Library declined their request. In lieu of grant funds being used for this purpose, the committee turned to local Friends groups for financial support.

The quarterly meetings, begun during the grant time frame, will continue after the grant ceases, and will include Ed Gallagher, director of the Albany Public Library.

A hoped-for result from this grant as well as an earlier Linn County grant was the creation of a county-wide library district, with a dedicated tax base. Unfortunately, due to opposition from Linn County commissioners, this dream appears to be just as distant as it always has been. I am hopeful in time that the climate for the creation of a library district will change and that will become a reality.

The librarians believe that grant projects such as theirs would be beneficial to other smaller libraries. The grant is a simple one, and would benefit other libraries that have large numbers of unserved within their area. One recommendation I would make is that other areas with similar numbers of unserved in their service area might look to replicate this project in their jurisdictional area. Possibly the State Library might offer encouragement to other libraries in the state to apply for a grant like this, even to go as far as offering assistance to these libraries in writing the grant.

Recordkeeping for administering this grant was a concern. The inclusion of funds for clerical assistance in managing records would have been a benefit. There was a great deal of effort needed to be made just to send out 650 renewal letters in years #2 and #3.

The small amount of in-kind contribution—\$1—was important in holding down the out-of-pocket expenses to the libraries, especially to Scio, the smallest library of the three.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As someone who has been a close observer of library developments in Linn County for nine 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 the tenacity of those involved in this project, especially the librarians and volunteers, and admire their efforts to improve library service to the citizens of Linn County.