

OREGON STATE LIBRARY

Library Services and Technology Act
Final Grant Activity Report
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LSTA Contract Number: 12-32-1p

Grantee: City of St. Helens, St. Helens, OR

Project Title: Come to the Library: Serving Unserved Families in the St. Helens School District

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See the instructions**1. Project Purpose (90-140 words)**

The St. Helens Public Library is within the boundaries of the St. Helens School District but only receives tax support from property owners within the St. Helens City limits. Library cards are available to nonresidents for an annually adjusted fee that approximates a City household's tax contribution to the Library (currently \$40 per year). Although a modest fee when considered on a monthly basis, this is still beyond the reach of many families. An additional barrier for nonresident library use was created when these cards were \$115 per year. Although that was a reality five years ago, that impression persists today. Thus, the primary purpose of this grant project is to extend library programs, collections and services to these unserved households with students enrolled in the St. Helens School District, and to a lesser (but related) extent: to rectify negative perceptions, build key relationships and begin the process of preparing stakeholders, voters and families for a potential future library district.

2. Project Activities / Methods (limit 250 words)

Library staff held events, purchased materials, created programs and participated in a variety of outreach activities designed to educate and draw un-served families to the library. Towards that end, Library staff used grant funds to purchase almost \$14,500 in new materials for the permanent circulating collection; replacing old and worn out items, filling holes in subject coverage, and adding high interest titles. "Buzzworthy" events were also added, creating word-of-mouth advertising in a community not always connected to typical advertising outlets. Library staff forged and improved relationships with local organizations that work with families, and visited a number of off-site facilities in order to advertise grant related library programs and services. The grant subsidized additional hours for library staff members, most notably giving the City the ability to increase the Youth Librarian's hours from 28 to 40 hours per week in order to work with families and manage all the new grant activity. The grant gave nonresidents the opportunity to get a library card free of charge if they had children in their household. This one grant-funded increase allowed 115 families to use the library where otherwise it would not have been affordable to them. When the Summer Reading Program started all these activities put such a strain on staff time that it was difficult to keep up with regular work flows – several times in

one week the patron count came close to breaking the recorded all time high, and program attendance often exceeded the Auditorium's capacity set by the local Fire Marshall.

3. Project Outputs

3. a. Outputs Summary Table— please report as appropriate depending upon your grant
(double click Word table to enter data- table can be altered to record appropriate outputs)

Actual # of people served this quarter	683	Actual # of people served to date	1790
# of programs /meetings /events	12	# of programs /meetings /events to date	31
# Program/meetings/events attendees	625	# of programs /meetings /events attendees to date	1675
# items purchased for the library's permanent collection this quarter	684	# Checkout of materials purchased with LSTA funds	1153
# New LSTA cardholders this period	58	Average # checkouts per grant card to date	47.1

3. b. Project Outputs Narrative (limit 250 words)

- The library added 1,064 grant items to its collection over the course of the 2012-2103 Fiscal Year. These books cost an average of \$13.63 per item and represent 1153 total checkouts for the same period.
- The library hosted 31 grant funded programs over the course of the year, representing 1,675 individuals in the community who took part; a number equaling almost 8 percent of the total population (approximately 13,000 people) of the library's service area.
- One hundred and fifteen families gained access to library programs, services and/or collections through grant efforts. If each of these families has the average 3.09 people per household (2010 Census), then this represents 355.35 people in our area who gained access to the library due to our efforts. LSTA patrons checked out 5,415 items during the grant period, representing five percent of the library's total circulation (roughly the same as the number of items checked out on Juvenile Resident cards during the same period).
- Library staff created a grant modification request to purchase almost \$14,000 worth of supplies and equipment which will be used to create a variety of high interest, noteworthy programs in the coming years. Stakeholders are most excited about the use of grant funds for a new Cultural Pass program, display fixtures for new materials, and a Drop-in-Science program that shows potential to be hugely popular.
- Library staff created and distributed a variety of ads, brochures, pathfinders and documents designed to help existing patrons find popular materials, while encouraging potential patrons to see the exciting new materials available at their public library.

4. Project Outcomes (limit 250 words all together including a-c)

4.a. Desired change in knowledge, skills or abilities of grant participants

The primary change the library wanted to see in grant participants was an increase in their knowledge and use of the library. Target grant participants were the group of nonresidents residing outside City boundaries, but within the St. Helens School District boundaries (representing approximately 752 estimated households).

4.b. Methodology(ies) of measuring used

The form of this Final Grant Activity Report changed during the grant period; our measures were originally based on the completion of a set of proposed tasks for a given timeline (as indicated in our original application), as opposed to measuring change in knowledge, skill or ability as is the currently desired measurement paradigm. It is possible to measure overall success though by looking at the number of target families that came to sign-up for library cards, and their library usage after receiving these cards.

4.c. Results and Interpretation

One hundred and fifteen families signed-up for grant cards, which is approximately 15 percent of our target audience. Depending on one's frame of measurement, this could be viewed as either a success or failure; 85 percent of the theoretically eligible families did not get cards, then again, 115 families is a large increase in library usage for our small library. It is hugely significant. These families checked out an average of 47.1 books over the grant period, which is also impressive, since over half of the library cards given out were distributed in the last quarter of the grant. Basically, all these people (355 by our conservative estimate) went from non library users to fairly frequent users during a one-year timeframe.

5. Other Results (*optional- limit 200 words*)

- St. Helens Public Library was able to foster a close working relationship with its local public school district and with local private and charter schools by spending an increased amount of time communicating with and visiting these schools.
- Library assistants created 15 high-interest pathfinder brochures; some for popular book requests, others to support library programming.
- The library hosted 13 teen grant-funded events this Fiscal Year (FY) with a total attendance of 144 teens; more than doubling the number of teen events from the previous FY.
- Summer Reading Outreach was expanded to remote populations in the target grant area for the first time ever (this includes many home school students). The comments from these families and schools can be summed up as – “this is so cool, nobody from the library has ever come out here before.”
- The library staff was able to experiment with various programs, program times, services and advertising that it would not otherwise have been able to do. While this resulted in some misses, it has allowed a lot of learning to occur that would have taken years to accomplish without the grant.

6. What plans, if any, have you made for follow-up or continuation of this project? (*optional- limit 200 words*).

St. Helens Public Library has applied for and been granted another year of LSTA funding. Therefore, staff plans to build on the momentum and lessons learned in year 1. The Teen

Advisory Board (TAB) is all but set up; with a group of regular teen library users having pledged to take part in the first meeting on August 30, 2013. The library is currently working on advertisements for a local theater, a mailer for families that received the cards last year, new programs and collection offerings, and a host of other new (and enhanced) activities designed to attract eligible families that have not yet made it to the library. Library staff hopes to distribute the full 250 grant cards allocated to library users during this FY while building programs, collections and services that will remain in existence for the foreseeable future. This will be facilitated by the already registered 115 family cards being renewed and the addition of new families joining in year two of the grant.

7. What were the significant lessons learned in the course of the project that others considering a similar project should know? (*optional – limit 250 words*)

This was a learning intensive year for library staff, but the most important lessons can be summarized as follows:

1. The original grant written by library staff was almost too detailed and broad in scope. It is best to use the new outcome based evaluation format and spend a great deal of time up front considering exactly what it is the library wants to accomplish. Then design measures around that major goal. Do not get bogged down in the details, because as you work through your major goal you will learn what works and what does not. It is more important that you change your actions to reflect that new information than it is to stick to what you thought were your original deliverables. Continually assess grant success and be ready to modify goals, actions and priorities as needed to ensure you meet the primary goal set in the beginning of the grant.
2. The library got off to a slow start spending grant funds on materials and services. It would have been better to submit major purchases during the first month or two of the grant so that the results of those purchases would be available to current and new patrons. It is also much harder to spread the word about free cards and to reach the outlying areas than library staff realized, and a more decisive early effort may have paid dividends. Many times, adults /parents need to hear about the library grant a few times before they actually come in to get the details and sign-up for a card – that takes time.
3. If the library provides something that nobody else can do, or even something that is just difficult (messy, expensive, large scale, or just plain odd) – the community will get excited about it. If the library provides something that is basic, easy or “run of the mill” – participation will be low and those attracted will typically be the “usual crowd”.

8. Anecdotal Information (*optional – limit 250 words*)

- The library planned to create a Read to the Dogs program for the community during the first grant year. It turned out that qualified dogs and owners were not readily available in the area without either convincing several owners to commute from the Portland Metro area (45 minutes away) or creating a training program of its own for local dogs (a pursuit fraught with expense and liability). Library staff still believes that this program would be popular if it could be put into action, but the library may be time and money ahead if a DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) type of program were enacted instead.
- Local teachers and parents are very excited about science-based programs. Just today one parent asked about the new science equipment last year’s grant purchased and was jubilant when told programs would be starting in September. While the library’s primary

goal in using science-based programs has been to entice existing and potential users to the library (these programs are, after all, unusual for a library), staff finds that there is an enormous amount of goodwill created when effort is put into making library activities educational. The key, like in early literacy education, is not to create a classroom-like environment, but to create a fun environment where natural curiosity can be given room to grow.

- Due to this grant, several families were able to come back to the library, after as much as a decade of not being able to afford library service.
- For many years, the library has struggled to get teen services off the ground. While the new TAB is almost a reality, it was only through grant-funded, regular teen programming this year that a core group of young adults has emerged.

