Oregon State Library Services and Technology Act Grant Peer Evaluation
January, 2011

Project Name: Creating civic engagement through library volunteerism
Grant Project Number: 10-4-TPL
Project Manager: Abigail Elder, Library Manager, Tualatin Public Library
Evaluator: Max Leek 541-440-4439, willingmind@charter.net

Summary of Evaluation:
The title of the project, "Creating Civic Engagement through library volunteerism" is nicely expressed to catch the culture of the city of Tualatin and to provide a positive view of the centrality of the library to the community. Whether the grant project created civic engagement in this broad sense is hard to say; practically speaking, it may be difficult to measure civic engagement. Nevertheless, the grant project produced valuable results for the library and the community, through expanding and strengthening the library's volunteer program.

A great deal of the energy of the project was focused on training staff to work with volunteers. Some of this training was formal, with quarterly sessions and inclusion of volunteer management ideas in monthly staff training. At least as important, though were the many reminders to everyone at the library that volunteers were important to the institution. Everything from the existence and intent of the LSTA grant to reserving two purple book trucks for volunteer use only reminded staff and volunteers that the volunteer program was valued by the library (and city) administration.

More than the statistics and survey results, the atmosphere I found during my visit to the library spoke of the enthusiasm for the work of the volunteers, the understanding on the part of staff of the value and place of volunteers in the library, and the integration of volunteers into the library team.

The grant project was well-designed and executed to provide the training and environment necessary for a successful library volunteer program

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My visit to the Tualatin Library on January 13th was carefully and usefully arranged by Library Manager Abigail Elder. The day began with a tour of the library which immediately provided context for the grant under review: Ms. Elder pointed out the emphasis on community spaces in the physical arrangement of the public spaces, creating a library where the "collection" is one of the tools, rather than the end of the library's mission. Literally, the grant purpose was to provide social opportunities and civic involvement.

In addition to Ms. Elder, I spoke with Margie Bradley, the library's "volunteer specialist," and Victoria Eggleston, Volunteer Coordinator for the city of Tualatin. In addition, I discussed the grant project with Jaime Thoreson, Children's Librarian, and Library Assistant Amy Honisett. Ms. Bradley and Ms Eggleston were able to describe, in detail and with pride, the method and success of the grant project. From Ms. Thoreson and Ms Honisett, I learned of the confidence that the grant project had created in the staff--confidence in the value of volunteers, and confidence in dealing with volunteers. For the staff, one of the clear benefits of the grant project was a clear understanding of the "place" of volunteers in the library team.

Project objectives: The intent of the grant is 1)expand volunteer opportunities to meet the social, career, personal and civic goals of Boomer and Gen Y volunteers, 2) to help Tualatin residents meet their neighbors and interact with people outside their immediate social network; and 3) to engage Tualatin residents with their library, their city government, and representatives and to encourage active participation in the civic life of Tualatin.

It is immediately obvious that these goals differ from the traditional library mission. The point is to meet "social, career, personal, and civic goals", to meet neighbors and expand volunteers' "social network," and to encourage participation in civic life, not to "meet the information, education, and entertainment needs of the community"--the phrase often found in public library mission statements. While these goals diverge from the standard twentieth-century library mission, they are absolutely congruent with Goal #6 of the Five-Year State Plan 2008-2012, "Positioning libraries to help build strong communities." And those goals are perfectly in keeping with the civic vision of the city of Tualatin.

Project Method:
The intent of the grant project was to "expand" volunteer opportunities; that is, to improve a volunteer program already in place. A library staff position of "Volunteer Specialist" was already in place. The Tualatin City Volunteer Coordinator is a certified volunteer adminisitrator with extensive experience working with librarians and library volunteers.The first step, therefore, was to seek an assessment of the existing program from the volunteer Coordinator at Tigard Public Library, Trish Stormont. In addition, grant personnel reviewed best practices and standards for volunteer programs. With this information in hand, the city's "Volunteer Rules and Procedures" and library volunteer assignment descriptions were combined in a notebook.

Formal training for all staff on working with volunteers was provided quarterly,

and "informal training" was provided at every monthly staff meeting. The nature and frequency of training provided (for example, "Volunteer Motivation," "Delegating to Volunteers," "Designing Positions for Volunteers") resulted in an entire staff with more volunteer management training as most public library volunteer managers have.

Volunteers were integrated into the development of the volunteer program through an advisory group consisting of six volunteers and two staff members. In addition to providing ideas for the program and developing a "train-the-trainer" curriculum, this group provided a valuable means of communication to and from volunteers and library staff.

Volunteers and staff completed surveys at the beginning and near the end of the project to identify changes in perceptions of the volunteer program. For example, the survey measured staff and volunteer responses to statements such as "Employees have been trained to work with volunteers and to understand the needs and motivations of volunteers," and "The climate within our organization is conducive to productive volunteer involvement." The changes in responses to these statements revealed the successes of the program in changing attitudes.

Volunteers were also asked to complete an "Exit Survey" when they left the library volunteer program, and these responses helped in understanding volunteer needs and motivation.
A series of visible reminders of the existence and importance of volunteers served to let volunteers know they were valued, but at least as valuable was the message sent to library staff. Name badges were provided for volunteers, a dedicated volunteer workspace was created out of limited library staff space, and a white board was provided for volunteer use. Software to help with volunteer management (Volgistics) was purchased and implemented. The two new book trucks, purple and reserved for volunteer use only, are a powerful symbol of the special status of volunteers in the Tualatin Library.

Extensive efforts were made to publicize the library's volunteer program and need for volunteers, including a YouTube video linked from the library's web page and articles in the city's newsletter. A volunteer newsletter for the city of Tualatin, which includes library volunteer news, is being published. Brochures in English and Spanish were created.

Project Results:
The Tualatin Library volunteer program has seen a 25% increase in "teen volunteerism," and has achieved the goal of retaining 42% of volunteers who commit to six months

of service. More importantly, the library has developed a culture which is friendly to volunteers, and has the structure in place for training staff to maintain that culture. Although the majority of volunteers are still doing jobs traditionally assigned to volunteers, such as shelving, cleaning, and mending the collection, some stretching has taken place. An example is using volunteers to train volunteers, and volunteer positions for newsletter editing.

The drop-in volunteer event, "Spruce up the Tualatin Library," is held monthly. The nature of this volunteer opportunity makes it an important expansion of the volunteer program: several staff noted that there was no ongoing commitment required, and that the "Spruce up" day was one of the few opportunities in Tualatin for families to volunteer together to help their community.

Although some work was done on Goal 3 of the grant proposal (Generation Y and Boomer volunteers) and Goal 5 (Relationships with other organizations), these were not the strongest part of the grant project. It should be noted, however, that the measures proposed for these goals were primarily "output" measures, and they were largely met. For example, Objectives 3.5 and 5.2 refer to the preparation of print pieces in English and Spanish.

As a result of the extensive staff training in working with volunteers, as well as the visible attention paid to volunteer training and the resources directed to volunteers, the staff's awareness of the place and value of volunteers in the library was increased dramatically.

Project impact:

The methods employed in Tualatin would be useful in building volunteer support in many public libraries. Carefully analyzing the exisiting structure, identifying needs of the library and of volunteers, encouraging more communication with and among volunteers, advertising and recognizing volunteer efforts--all these will have wide application and value. The most significant factor in the success of the grant, however, was the focus on training staff in how to work with volunteers, and developing a real change in attitude towards volunteer workers in the library. Any attempt to duplicate Tualatin's successful program will have to maintain the same emphasis on training staff to work with volunteers.

Some factors which contributed to the success of the grant might not be found in every library community. For example, Library Manager Abigail Elder brought not only energy and intelligence, but also experience in volunteer programs in Multnomah County,

including the LSTA supported grant directed at involving Baby Boomers in the library (KABOOM!). There was certainly incentive for all library staff to get more volunteer support because of the huge increase in demand for services that followed the opening of the new library. Newly hired MLS staff had little experience with working with volunteers (something that, as Ms. Elder noted, is not covered in most library school curricula). The city of Tualatin is committed to citizen involvement, including volunteers, and the city volunteer manager was crucial in the development of the grant project and working with volunteers. Finally, a perennial obstacle to encouraging volunteers in libraries is the sense on the part of library staff that their jobs are threatened because they can be replaced by volunteers, or their status in the community is threatened because they can be replaced by volunteers with little training. These concerns were addressed by the grant method, but a major factor was that Tualatin Library was adding staff at the time, so there was no fear that staff positions might be lost to volunteers.

In Tualatin, the basis for continuing and expanding the volunteer program is strong. Staff is still optimistic about further developments in library volunteer work, including volunteers who will be able to offer "higher level" services. The crucial factor is staff attitude and skill in contributing to volunteer program success, and the LSTA grant project has been very successful in that aspect. Tualatin plans to continue meetings of its "Volunteer Stakeholder" group, which will maintain high levels of communication between administration, staff, and volunteers. The training and training plans developed over the course of the grant will facilitate the continuing use of volunteers.

There has been another, perhaps unforeseen impact of the grant program: the expertise, effort, and commitment required to enhance the volunteer program illustrated, to anyone paying attention, the need for trained paid staff in order to use volunteers effectively. This lesson was learned by staff and volunteers, and perhaps by the community as well .

Suggestions for improvement: Although the grant project did not make a lot of progress in some goals described in the application--particularly meeting needs of Boomer and Gen Y volunteers--it may be that the Tualatin project points out the relative insignificance of those categories. The Tualatin LSTA grant application describes "characteristics" of the two age groups, but the grant project shows that the similarities among committed, continuing volunteers of all ages are more important than the stereotypical differences among ages. Good ideas for volunteer management--the trained staff, the consistent recognition, the attempts to make volunteer jobs rewarding--are good ideas for Generations A through Z.