

LSTA Grant Evaluation: “Improving Library Services to Canby’s Spanish Speaking Community”

FFY 2011
Canby Public Library
292 N Holly Street
PO Box 930
Canby, Oregon 97013

Summary of Evaluation

The Canby Public Library effectively and efficiently used LSTA grant funds to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for improving services to Spanish speakers within the Canby community. A major portion of the grant money was used to fund a one-year project librarian, to coordinate and undertake many of the specific activities of the grant. Through the careful planning and work of the project librarian and other Canby Public Library staff, services to Spanish speakers have measurably improved. This evaluation will discuss the methods, successes, and impacts of the grant. In sum, the Canby Public Library developed clear, realistic, and measurable project goals, and consistently accomplished them. Other public libraries should be able to use this project as a model for developing a tailored plan for their local population.

Project Objectives

The Canby Public Library received grant funding to fund a full-time project librarian position for one year, in order to build the Library’s capacity to serve the Spanish-speaking community in Canby. While the Hispanic population accounts for around 25% of the Canby population, the Library’s recent history of precarious funding, along with other factors, prevented the development of a strategic, sustainable plan for serving Spanish-speaking patrons. No programming or outreach targeted Spanish-speaking patrons, little of the Library’s collection budget was allocated for Spanish language materials, and a bilingual staff person was available only one day per week. This resulted in low usage rates of the Library by this growing portion of the Canby community. In order to improve library services to Canby’s Spanish speakers, the specific areas of focus of the project librarian’s work were: 1) research and information gathering; 2) relationship building with community partners; 3) collection development/management; 4) marketing; 5) creation and implementation of library programming; 6) mentoring and training of library staff. Within the broader goal of improving services to Spanish speakers, the Library focused its efforts on serving children and families and building a service-delivery model that would be sustainable past the end of the grant period.

Project Method

The project librarian worked closely with the Library’s bilingual library assistant and the Library director to undertake specific tasks related to the six objectives of the grant.

1. Research and information gathering
and

2. Relationship building with community partners

The project librarian and bilingual library assistant met with local community-service providers in the Canby area, local public K-12 school staff and officials, local community college staff, and local Hispanic business people to gain information about the Spanish-speaking Canby population and explore possibilities for collaboration on events and programs. Library staff also talked to Spanish-speaking patrons within the Library about current services as well as about desired services; patrons using the library collection and attending library events were asked for their feedback, and patron comment forms and purchase suggestion forms were translated into Spanish to open more channels of communication.

Following initial contact with the above community partners, the project librarian and bilingual library assistant attended community events representing the Library and promoting library services, and also offered and provided professional support to these organizations in order to strengthen the Library's collaboration with its community partners. For example, the project librarian provided guidance on school library collection development to the Canby school district media specialist.

3. Collection development/management

Using the information they gained during the initial stages of the grant, the Library re-created the Spanish-language collection to include materials most likely to serve the information needs to the particular Canby community, and re-organized the materials to reflect how patrons locate and use library items. The project librarian created a detailed collection development plan for Spanish-language items based on information gathered from the local community and American Library Association best practices. This plan will be re-evaluated annually to remain relevant. In order to gain more extensive knowledge about the breadth and depth of contemporary Spanish-language publishing, the Library also applied a small portion of grant funds to send the bilingual library assistant to the Guadalajara Book Fair, a leading international event for purchasing Spanish-language materials.

The Spanish-language collection was turned into a browsing collection with prominent signage and thematic organization, based on the observation that the majority of patrons using the collection were not utilizing the library electronic catalog to look up specific titles. Along with this, materials for learning English were pulled out of the collection and grouped together in an easily-seen location for better visibility and access

4. Marketing

The project librarian created a marketing plan tailored toward Spanish speakers that will be integrated into the overall marketing plan for the Library. Additionally, the project librarian and bilingual library assistant attended community events, spoke to school groups, personally visited Latino businesses, and regularly distributed information about library programs and events (such as the Summer Reading Program and Oregon Battle of the Books) to market library services.

5. Creation and implementation of library programming

The project librarian met with the bilingual library assistant and the three existing staff members involved in adult, children's and young adult programming, and developed an annual programming plan. This plan includes regular programs, outreach activities, informational tours, and community events, and reflects the local community calendar and specific characteristics of the local population. It will be re-evaluated periodically to maintain its relevancy.

As part of this plan, the Library planned and inaugurated a number of new programs, such as Spanish-language computer classes, Spanish storytimes, a bilingual Spanish-English adult conversation group and a workshop on Mexican craft presented by a Latina master artist. Alongside programming and events delivered in Spanish, the programming plan also includes making English-language programming more accessible to Spanish-speaking patrons through regularly offering (and promoting) the services of language interpreters at library events.

6. Mentoring and training of library staff

The library director, project librarian, and bilingual library assistant offered numerous one-on-one and group trainings of Canby Public Library staff. Training and mentoring took place during staff meetings, through emails, and during the course of daily activities. In addition, the project librarian organized library staff to attend cultural awareness trainings offered by a local community service organization.

Project Results

The grant activities have been consistently successful, both by conventional benchmarks, and by more intangible measures.

The staff involved in the grant established solid channels of communication between the Library and local community organizations, Hispanic businesses, schools. This ongoing communication provides the Library with information about the local population and allows the Library to promote awareness of library services to the population. In addition, through the regular presence of bilingual staff, the increased visibility of Spanish-language materials, the increased frequency of Spanish-language library programs, and the creation of Spanish-language materials such as comment forms and better signage, Spanish speaking patrons have more opportunity to communicate directly with library staff about their needs and opinions of library services.

The relationships that the project librarian, bilingual library assistant, and library director established with all of the major Canby community organizations, local schools, and local businesses are collaborative in nature and appear to lay a solid groundwork for long-term partnerships around common goals. The Library's successfully re-organized Homework Center, developed jointly by the project librarian and a local school media specialist, is just one example of many.

The collection development plan was completed, and the Spanish-language collection was thoroughly weeded, reorganized, and portions were relocated to make the collection visible, relevant, and usable. Materials are now being added to the collection according to a targeted plan based on the needs of the local community. This has resulted in greater usage of the materials by Spanish-speakers.

The percentage of Spanish-language materials in the Library's collection increased to 5.65% from 3.3% over the course of the grant year. There are now close to 4,000 Spanish-language items in the Canby Public Library collection. This increase is not modest given that the pre-grant period Spanish language collection was weeded by nearly half, because items were outdated, not circulating, or in bad condition. In terms of patron usage of the materials, each grant quarter has seen a 30% increase in circulation of Spanish-language items. During the grant evaluation site visit, library staff also reported that in-house usage of the collection appears to be heavier than what it was prior to the beginning of the grant, especially of English-language learning materials and Spanish-language children's materials.

Library programming targeting Spanish-speakers has been very successful, with large attendance numbers at events and a very positive community response overall. In answer to my question as to whether there have been any surprising results during the grant period, the project librarian said that the biggest surprise was how immediate, and how positive, the community response to the Library's new programming was. During my site visit, the Spanish-English conversation circle "Intercambiar" had over 10 people show up, with both regulars and newcomers in attendance. Group participants stated that they found the program very useful, and viewed the Library as a welcoming, friendly, and accessible resource for English language learning and other services. During the grant period, the Library presented or participated in close to 70 events targeting the Spanish-speaking community, with an overall attendance of nearly 800 people.

Project Impact

The impact of the project can already be felt among library staff, patrons, and the local community at large. Through the grant activities, the Canby Public Library was able to create a detailed, community-specific plan for the ongoing delivery of services to Spanish-speaking patrons. This plan is based on community, patron, and staff input and best practices. It reflects an intimate understanding of the Canby community's needs, and is in tune with the current staffing and funding resources available to the Library. Finally, the activities of the grant were strategically designed and implemented to provide both immediate successes, and long-term benefits vis-a-vis service to Spanish-speaking patrons. Based on statistics (mentioned above) and anecdotal evidence, Spanish-speaking patrons are already checking more materials out, are attending more library programs, utilizing more of the Library's services, and are beginning to use the Library as a center of community. In the community at large, the Library has become a regular part of community events, has reached out to local Hispanic businesses, and has begun to position itself as a hub for connections between a variety of community-serving organizations and government agencies. At the micro-level, a Spanish-speaking patron attending the Spanish-English conversation circle program commented that she views the Library as a place where she can go to 'find resources to educate herself so she can reach her potential, and also help her children succeed in the community in which they live.'

Suggestions for Improvement

The scope and goals of the project were based on best practices (including practical experience of the Canby Library director) and tailored to meet the specific needs of the community; each aspect of the grant has seemingly produced positive results without fail.

Building upon the impressive work of the grant, some possible future activities might include:

- Continuing to foster relationships with the Hispanic business community and Spanish-speaking community leaders to involve members of the community as Library board members and/or volunteers. The Library director and other staff have already started focusing their attention on this.
- Continuing to find ways to integrate the Library into the daily life of Spanish-speaking patrons, to the same degree to which it is a part of the Library's Anglophone patrons. A staff member mentioned that the grant has done much of the important work of convincing Spanish-speaking patrons that services and resources are available to them at the Library, and so now is the time to focus efforts toward making the Library a central aspect of community life for these patrons. Work can be done to increase the culture of regular library use among Spanish-speaking patrons. The Canby Public Library is very much on track to do this in their community.
- Continuing to evaluate library services and policies to ensure that they are as inclusive as possible. One example already undertaken by the Library was removing the requirement for new patrons to show State-issued photo ID to obtain a new card; instead, new patrons can use other forms of photo ID, so long as identity is proven. Similar evaluations of the process/requirements for becoming a library volunteer, and other entry points into the Library may present opportunities for making the Library more inclusive to under-served populations, such as immigrants.

- Respectfully submitted by Christina Hanson
February 2012