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Thinking Locally First

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Thinking Locally First

by Sue Jenkins, Library Director
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In thinking about this issue of the OLA Quarterly, I found myself examining some of our past experiences in finding grant support for projects at our library. While we furnished our current space with a LSCA grant in 1993, and have received humanities funding from the National Endowment for the Arts for a poetry study series, our success rate has been the highest with grants from local sources. Even though the formal request process may not be as involved, finding local funding outside the library budget should be based on the same premise as all grant programs, that of creating opportunity for both the library and the donor group through needs assessment and prioritization.

The following recommendations focus on the design and information collection necessary to build a grants resource file. This material can be gathered in paper form and put into a tickler file structure for retrieval and use, but I would recommend the creation of a resource file on the hard drive of your desktop computer as well. Many of the sources we use for our assessment and need documentation statements are also available electronically.

Community Assessment

If we think of the library as a clear sphere of services and programs, the community is the fiber that connects and supports the sphere. At the center of the sphere is the reason for having a public library: the user. Assessment of all three components of the sphere structure is necessary to fully establish a priority of services and programs to meet the needs of the user.

Defining the community by gathering and analyzing demographic information is the formal way to fill in the blanks of who uses your library. Sources for this information include your local census records, community development departments, school districts, chambers of commerce, economic development offices, and local community colleges. Each of these agencies gather information and document their "customers" in various ways, and all of this information is public in so far as it is statistical and not of a personal nature. Most agencies will send your library a copy of published reports or answer queries. This process needs to become habitual and should involve your reference staff as well as staff who index your newspaper and keep your public documents section current.

To balance all of the statistics, on-site observations should be synthesized. Talk with other library staff on a regular basis about changes noticed in user groups. Get out on lunch hours and walk the library neighborhood and as much of the community as you can. Drive through the areas where your rural library users reside. How many new houses are being built? What kind of new businesses are springing up to fill the gaps left by older businesses closing out? How many senior care residences do you serve? How many gated neighborhoods are in your service area? Is the employment base of your community changing because of a new factory or shopping mall? Where are the recreation sites in your town and who uses them?

Since the library is also part of the community, on-going assessments of programs and service levels should be habitual as well. Note changes in circulation patterns, reference and inter-library loan requests, as well as how those applying for new library cards compare with new users of the past few years. Is the percentage of children using the library the same? Are you seeing more retired users, as your town is becoming known as a "best place for golden years?" Are more and more of your customers bilingual or involved in a particular occupation or trade? Is your student use up? Or down? How does your mission statement and long range plan address these issues?

Community Connections

What other local groups is your library connected to? Make a list, with contact persons and mailing addresses, of all the local civic groups in your town, the social service agencies, education providers, elected officials, media serving your area, local and regional foundations, and active library supporters and volunteers. Make sure you include their websites and email addresses. This information can be kept as separate lists, or put into a database for retrieval. These are the people you will send your newsletters and other publications to as well as invitations to library events. And, of course, you will note what they may have given you and when you thanked them. Keeping this information current needs to be an ongoing process, and when the file is created you will have not only a master mailing list for the library, but a greater awareness of the "people wealth" in your community and your library's relationship to that wealth. Everyone on the staff and board can and should contribute to this list. It should be available to all staff for publicity purposes as well as for general community knowledge.

The Wish List—where should it come from?

We all have a wish list, stuck away in a desk drawer or the back of our minds, of things that would improve our library. If you don't have such a list started, I suggest that asking your staff what they need to improve the way they do their jobs will quickly generate the beginning of a wish list. Add to that list any opportunities that exist in other libraries that your users do not now have. Once you have the list started, separate the contents into hard and soft resources. Hard resources

are tangibles, like buildings or magazine racks. Soft resources are either short lived—collection materials and onetime events—or they are truly intangible such as program support for poetry readings, art exhibits to grace the library, or an endowment to insure enhancement funds for the future. Don't limit yourself or your staff on ideas, just get it started and sort it out now and then into immediate, soon, and "gee, we wish" priorities. Then share it with your staff and volunteers so everyone knows what is needed.

Reaching out—local partnerships

Once the wish list is made, go back to your database and see who might be a funding source or program partner for a bright idea. Perhaps several of your local clubs together could fund a program; we have three organizations as our major Summer Reading Club underwriters. Look closely at your local businesses to see if any of them are part of a national or regional organization that has a corporate giving division. Call the local manager and ask; if nothing else, he or she will become aware of the library. You might also want to organize some of your possible local sources into those capable of funding hard or soft resources. If a local club adopts part of the library collection as a focus for community support, a small amount given over the years will add up to steady enhancement. Our library enjoys an excellent large print section due to the ongoing support of our Lions Club, Eagles Auxiliary, and our Friends group. I include these examples of local support because so many of us think of "grants" as big dollar gifts from afar when some of our best opportunities come from our own communities. Local organizations can also partner with your library in a grant application that will have much more appeal and integrity as a joint venture than as a solo solicitation.

Putting it all together

This is the part that can be the most daunting and the most creative. Looking at your wish list and knowing your community and the changes that are occurring should bring into focus what needs to be acquired first. If it is a small or onetime need that can be funded locally, send out some proposal letters to your local funders and ask to speak to them at their next meeting. Keep the letter (and the talk) specific, stating your need and how you think the particular group or business can help fulfill that need for the library and the community at large. If you are targeting a specific group of users such as children or senior citizens, make sure to include the group or business connection to the user group. Remember that the goal of your proposal letter, as in all grant applications, is to create opportunity for the library users and opportunity for the granting organization to be part of the library by providing community support. Most local groups and businesses will respond within a month so you should know fairly soon where you are in the request process.

Many foundations will entertain proposal letters as well, and will send you an application package if they

feel your request is appropriate to their mission. Doing research in foundation directories will help you to narrow your focus to those foundations that target library, educational, and humanities support. A phone call to the contact person listed in the directory can also be helpful to make sure you meet the grant awards cycle established by the foundation board. Again, be succinct in your inquiry, whether it is by telephone or letter. And, make sure you send a thank-you to the individual who helps you along the way.

Each grant application will be different, but there are certain basic requirements for every application, however short.

1. Establish a time line for each grant so you know when applications are due. Mail the application in plenty of time to meet the deadline. Enter the date of mailing in your time line. Late applications are rarely accepted.
2. Fill in every blank, even when the information requested seems redundant.
3. Use the most current information at your disposal and be prepared to provide supporting documentation if necessary. This is especially true if a project budget is part of the application.
4. Request any letters of support in plenty of time to include them in the application packet.
5. Proofread the final draft; have someone else from your staff do so as well.
6. Provide all the copies requested and make sure you keep a couple for your own file.
7. If you get the grant, publicize it like crazy and send off an immediate thank-you to the grantor and any one else who helped you with the application.
8. Arrange a photo opportunity that includes representatives from the granting agency and those who supported the application.
9. If you don't get the grant, write a letter of thanks to the grantors for their consideration of your application.
10. Many foundations or groups will also tell you why you were not funded so that you can improve on the application and reapply for the next award cycle.

Using grants as sources of funding for projects, seed money, programming, or collection development can be a very creative process. It can feel sort of like working on several jigsaw puzzles at once, if you are putting more than one grant into a project. However,

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door, but while I sat in the library van and waited for them to return, the kids came flocking up to get their new library books. I ended up just opening the side door of the van and checking out books right there on the sidewalk. Fortunately, it was one of those rare rain-free days on the coast. The kids were so excited to check out library books. The kids and I now have a good rapport, and there are no longer any behavior problems. Sometimes the teenage girls check out books

and *TEEN* magazines and leave; other times they stay and we take turns reading to each other. When it's cold and raining, the ones who are locked out of their homes stay and read quietly. The Ridge has become a pleasant place to spend a Wednesday afternoon, and I look forward to it now. And to think it all began with a fill-in-the-blank *Ready-to-Read* grant! 

National Connections

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And what did new readers gain? Positive reading and discussion experiences, books to keep and share with family or friends, an introduction to the library and what it can provide, an excitement about education that has some of them searching out new educational opportunities, and the pleasure of reading and the humanities as lifelong joys. Participants, when asked in the final evaluations what they would choose if they could add one thing to the program, replied: to have more people come, to have more time for discussions, to have more sessions... and to have it not end!

If you would like more information on *National Connections* or would be interested in continuing to share ideas, experiences, successes and failures about serving the Hispanic community with other Oregon libraries please contact me at the McMinnville Public Library at (503) 435-5551 or by email at goldmad@ci.mcminnville.or.us. 

Thinking Locally

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A Resource Shelf

The following items are readily available in many large library reference sections or through inter-library loan for short periods of time for in-library use only. If you can manage the cost, I would recommend acquiring those texts marked with an *. I have included a few online resources to get your research started as well.

Cyberlibrary: *Grants and Fundraising*. <http://www.lsc.cc.fl.us/library/cygra.htm/>

The Foundation Center, <http://www.fdncenter.org/>

Hall, Mary, *Getting Funded: a Complete Guide to Proposal Writing, 3rd Edition*,* 0-87678-070-2. Continuing Education Publications, Portland State University.

LibraryLand, *Administration: Grants, Budgeting, Fundraising*, <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/LibraryLand/admin/bud.htm>

Miner, Lynn and Griffith, Jerry, *Proposal Planning and Writing*, 0-89774-726-7. Oryx Press, 1993

1999 Oregon Foundation Databook, McPherson, Craig, Ed., C & D Publishing, Portland, OR 97205, <http://www.foundationdatabook.com>

Winning Grant Proposals, Frost, Gordon, Ed., 0-930807-36-7. Fundraising Institute, Rockville, MD 20852