Community and Library Information

Describe your library and the community it serves, including demographics, dynamics, and key issues or challenges it faces. What should reviewers know about your library and community in order to understand your proposed project?

The Public Library serves residents of [three communities], which has a population of 7,592 as of the 2020 census. The library provides free cards to every student in the local school district and all students at the [local university]. We also offer a paid membership option for residents from the surrounding towns that either do not have a library or have a smaller library with fewer items/hours. According to the 2020 U.S. Census data, 25% of our community is over 65. The median household income is $45,789 in 2020 dollars, with about 20% of the population living in poverty.

As is typical in small towns, our community is fairly spread out. There are few choices for public transportation available. It can be quite difficult for people to get around town or into the library. In addition, we have several assisted living facilities and group homes. While we do our best to serve the people residing in these places, it can be difficult for these folks to get to the library as they rely on facility staff for transportation. Increasing access to this population, as well as others who are homebound, has become an area that the Public Library is interested in improving.

Primary Audience

Describe the primary audience for your project. Why did you choose to focus on this audience? How, if at all, do you currently serve this audience? What are your plans for outreach efforts to engage this audience throughout the project? What are your overarching goals for engaging this audience with your project?

The primary audience for our project is homebound patrons, or those who have difficulties getting to the library due to either a physical or intellectual disability. We chose this audience because we have been noticing an increased number of patrons who have been encountering challenges getting to the library building. Many rely on others for transportation. The unreliability of their transportation causes issues for these patrons. Sometimes when reserved items arrive at the library for homebound patrons, they are unable to find transportation before the hold period expires and the item needs to be returned to its home library or given to the next person. We also know several patrons who call and talk to us about how they wish they could take advantage of our services but are unable to because of transportation or other related problems.

Our plans for outreach to our homebound patrons involve bringing library services to them instead of expecting them to come to us. The first and most significant way we will do this is by going to visit the assisted living facilities and group homes in the area. We also plan to create an informational mailer that we will send to people in our service area. The content in this mailer will include information about library services and our plans for this grant funding and invite people to fill out a survey or connect with us either online or by phone to give feedback on what they would like to see and what they feel would
be the most helpful way we can serve them. This method will help us reach those who may not know about what the library provides and engage people who aren’t able to leave their homes. We can start to form connections with those in need who we will continue to communicate with throughout the implementation of this plan.

Rationale

What challenge or opportunity does your project seek to address for the primary audience? How was it identified? Describe how you used relevant information from reliable sources to define the need, challenge, or opportunity you seek to address.

Our project seeks to address the problem of homebound patrons being unable to receive library services, or receiving only limited library services, due to their inability to get to the library building. This challenge was identified through discussion with some of our homebound patrons who struggle with finding reliable transportation to and from the library. These range from people in residential assisted living settings, to patrons who used to be able to come to the library but can no longer drive or walk on their own. Library staff have had an increased number of conversations with people who express frustration with the difficulties they are now facing receiving library services, and we have been searching for ways that we can accommodate these people’s needs.

Aside from discussions with affected populations, we also researched known community needs in our state and county. The 2021 Statewide Community Needs Assessment, compiled by the [State] Community Action Partnership, listed transportation as one of the top 5 issues our state’s communities are facing. It’s widely known that most people need a car in our state, especially in rural areas. Those who are unable to drive or walk long distances, which includes many seniors and adults with disabilities, must rely on others to drive them places. This project will allow the Public Library to bring library services to the community members most in need.

Project Plan

Describe your preliminary plan for addressing the challenge or opportunity identified. What activities will you carry out to execute the plan? How has the input of the primary audience influenced this plan? How will the perspectives and input of the primary audience continue to be incorporated throughout the project? How will you share information about the project and its outcomes? Do you have any community partners in mind (existing or new) that you plan to engage in the process?

The ini tial step for this project involves establishing a connection with our homebound patrons in order to ensure they are aware of the program and to get them fully engaged. We want everyone who is able to benefit from this program to have input. We will set up visits at the various assisted living facilities and group homes in town and create and mail out information to community members letting them know about our plans and encouraging them to reach out to us with feedback.

There are several activities we will initiate as part of this project. The first is starting a program where library staff deliver books to residential living facilities and those who are homebound. We will establish a regular schedule with these facilities where library staff drop off requested books and pick up returns each week and deliver books to patron’s homes.

Additionally, we will purchase several tablets with cellular data capabilities and begin to loan those out as part of the delivery service. This way, even patrons without internet or technology at their home can take advantage of our electronic collection. We will also increase our collection, especially in areas that would be most beneficial to people with disabilities. This includes increasing our electronic collection, as
these items are more accessible to those who have difficulty seeing, as well as adding braille books and books geared towards adults with intellectual disabilities. These are all items that have been previously requested by our patrons.

Our community partners for this organization will be the local assisted living facilities and group homes, as well as other community agencies that work to provide services to people in their homes. We will all work together to spread the word about this initiative to those who need it and encourage feedback so we can make necessary changes. Press releases will be submitted to both print and electronic news sources.

Budget Plan ($10,000 ONLY)

Describe your plans for the grant funds. What will you use the funding to purchase or support? Please be specific (e.g. $5,000 will be spent on staff time to support the development and implementation of the project, $3,000 will be used to purchase and install an automatic door opener, $1,000 will be used as incentives for conversation participants). The total amount of this section should add up to $10,000. $3,000 will be spent on the purchase of five tablets to loan out to homebound patrons. $2,000 will be used to pay for cellular data service for these tablets for one year. $2,000 will be used to increase our electronic collection. $1,500 will be used to increase our print collection, with a special focus on accessible materials. $1,500 will be used for outreach services, which includes staff time and mileage reimbursement to travel around town and creating and mailing informational materials to homebound patrons in the area.

We will work to rally community support around this project so we can include any ongoing costs for these services (data service for tablets and increased staff time and mileage) in our regular budget for the years to come.