

Overview

The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation's strong commitment to libraries recognizes the important role they play in the life of the Pacific Northwest. Public libraries help build vital communities—places that foster creativity and innovation. For close to twenty years, the Foundation's Library Program has focused on building and sustaining the relationship libraries enjoy with the communities they serve. This brief report offers an overview of our Library Program. It looks back, at the Foundation's history of library-focused giving and related accomplishments, and forward, to offer a preview of our future strategic direction.

History of Giving

Since 1993, the Foundation's Library Program has provided more than \$25 million to public libraries, primarily in the Pacific Northwest. Eighty-five percent of these funds have supported capital projects, including the construction, renovation, and equipping of library buildings. The program also has supported strategic initiatives focused on:

- **Strengthening capacity** – The Foundation has helped public libraries build their capacity by supporting diverse projects such as implementing automated inventory systems, expanding volunteer programs, and strategic planning.
- **Providing early literacy services** – The Foundation has provided grants to expand library-based early literacy programs. These programs have particularly served vulnerable populations.
- **Improving access for underserved groups** – Foundation grants have helped libraries develop culturally competent programming for the diverse populations they serve and purchase materials to enhance the experience of different ethnic groups.

The table below shows how library grants have been distributed across the region since inception. The largest percentage of funds has gone to libraries in Washington state.

Geographic Distribution of Library Grants

State	Number	Amount	Percent
Washington	33	\$24,000,000	93.5%
Oregon	20	\$830,000	3.2%
Montana	4	\$370,000	1.4%
Idaho	5	\$231,000	<1%
Oklahoma	4	\$182,000	<1%
Alaska	1	\$50,000	<1%
Total	67	\$25,663,000	100%

The *Making Connections* Initiative

In 2009, the Foundation launched a new library initiative entitled *Making Connections*. The overall goal of the initiative was to strengthen the role librarians play in connecting people to ideas. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was disseminated throughout Washington State. In response, the Foundation received 20 concept papers and invited 11 proposals. Seven projects were funded.

Projects funded through *Making Connections* represent a range of innovative program design. While all projects retain elements of traditional library services, many introduce technological advances to better engage patrons of all ages. Following is an overview of three funded projects:

- **Seattle Public Library: Reader's Advisory Platform**

Long known for its creative approach to services, Seattle Public Library is training 600 staff to provide resources and readers' advisory services to patrons at 48 branches. To date, 196 staff members have received training, and more than 600 readers have received personalized reading lists. School librarians are using video book talks to introduce fourth and fifth graders to the Library's offerings. New readers' advisory software - in addition to an array of blogs, virtual book discussions, tours, and podcasts - enliven the library as a center of information. The project's evaluation (slated for May 2012) will develop policy and procedure recommendations to ensure ongoing readers' advisory services throughout the system and to offer a model for other urban libraries.

- **Tacoma Public Library: Digital StoryLab**

The Digital StoryLab at Tacoma Public Library offers photo editing, filmmaking, and music production software to teen patrons. The lab allows users to make their own movies, music videos, and digital drawings with the guidance of a staff media specialist. Through partnerships with local theaters and nonprofits, the library provides additional instruction, mentorship, and venues for sharing completed work. Since May 2011 the StoryLab has served approximately 150 students. The StoryLab has its own YouTube channel and has been featured on King5's "New Day Northwest" television show. By incorporating digital media into a broader educational experience, the project exemplifies how teen-focused library services can evolve.

- **Lopez Island Library: Local History Project**

Public librarians helped Lopez Island middle school students research, write, and publish a history of the island. The librarians familiarized students with reference materials, taught them how to use library databases to conduct research, and partnered with a local publisher to share information about book production.

To date, the *Making Connections* initiative has resulted in effective program experimentation, professional development for librarians, and innovative service delivery. At an August 2011 grantee convening, grantees voiced how private support was the critical difference between conventional library programming and services - with a low tolerance for risk - and those that break new ground and advance the field. The new programs are changing the way that the local communities view librarians and the way librarians view themselves.

Making Connections, 2012-2013

The Foundation is pleased to announce a two-year continuation of the *Making Connections* initiative. Our goal is to continue to help libraries adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Libraries increasingly face stiffer competition for public dollars to provide basic services, and while circulation of library materials and demand for services continue to climb, pressure to deliver on the bottom line obligates library administrators to prioritize services. To remain relevant, libraries must build lasting relationships with their patrons – by meeting their needs and remaining a critical source of information. Foundation funds will help libraries better connect with those they serve.

The Foundation will offer risk capital in the form of grants to libraries in Washington State and Multnomah County, Oregon so that they can experiment with new models of library service and relationship building with patrons. We recognize that fundamental shifts occurring throughout the library field are transforming time-honored services. With support from the Foundation, librarians will be able to embark on innovative projects without jeopardizing essential services.

An RFP in Spring 2012 will call for proposals that support programs designed to balance technology and traditional services, and those that reach broadly and deeply into the communities served. The Foundation will emphasize experimentation in its review criteria, focusing support on innovative projects that increase usage and patron satisfaction. The Foundation has a particular interest in projects that encourage library use by teens.

Conclusion

We are excited to build on lessons learned from our first round of grants and to help libraries adapt to changes in the ways users engage with their libraries. We look forward to partnering with libraries as they create vibrant centers where patrons can gather, connect, and learn.