

**IDAHO COMMISSION FOR LIBRARIES
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FUNDED THROUGH LSTA
An Independent Evaluation of Idaho’s Implementation
Of the LSTA Grants to States Program, 2013 – 2017**



HIGHLIGHTS

The evaluation of the Commission’s 5-year LSTA plan implementation was conducted in the fall of 2016 by Carson Block Consulting and Himmel & Wilson Library Consultants. Following is the introduction to their recommendations (see the last section of this document for the recommendations):

The evaluation of the Idaho Commission for Libraries’ (ICfL) implementation of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States program reveals that Idaho has a highly-targeted, well-managed LSTA program. For a state with a modest LSTA allotment, much work has been done (and is being done) that is not simply fundamentally sound; several programs are, in fact, exemplary and worthy of attention and replication by other states. Examples include the outstanding Read To Me (RTM) program and the innovative Special Projects Library Action Team (SPLAT) approach to encouraging new ideas and integrating new technologies and service delivery practices throughout the state.

Following are highlights from the evaluation report. The complete 2013 – 2017 evaluation report can be found at:

STRATEGIC ISSUE 1: ACCESS

The evaluators received strong indications that much of the [staff] training received has been implemented in local libraries to the benefit of end-users. P. 5

The evaluators believe that Idaho’s activities warrant an achieved rating due primarily to the comprehensive design and excellent implementation of the Read To Me (RTM) program and other early literacy initiatives. This program is built on a solid research base and there is clear evidence that the tenets of this program have been internalized by library staff delivering services to young children. Several librarians reported in interviews and focus groups that involvement in the Read To Me program has successfully changed the way library staff approach children’s services in general, and well beyond official RTM programs. This “purposeful programming” had a significant impact on preschoolers in a state that does not require Kindergarten and has influenced programming for older children as well. The evaluation component for RTM (and other services to young children) is among the best the evaluators have witnessed. P. 5

The real strength of Idaho’s LSTA Grants to States program is its efforts on behalf of children, and to a lesser but not insignificant extent, teens. Efforts are well organized and training efforts

(targeting the library workforce) are extremely well integrated into programs ranging from Read To Me to initiatives focused on teens (Make It at the Library). Family literacy is also a specific, highly integrated focus of several initiatives. P. 7-8

In fact, Idaho's array of training opportunities is, in many ways a model for the nation (and to some degree for the world). ICfL's online Alternative Basic Library Education (ABLE) and Supplemental Alternative Basic Library Education (SABLE) programs have enabled librarians and library staff without formal library education to gain basic skills and to enhance their abilities to serve the public. P.13

As is evident from the large number of projects that have "summit" as part of their title, ICfL also takes their role as a "convener" very seriously. The state library agency manages to extend its reach by enlisting and engaging professionals in the state as partners in leadership and innovation. The Library Leadership Advisory Committee (LiLAC) and the Special Projects Library Action Team (SPLAT) are examples of this strategy. P. 14

. . . the scope of the programs [to reach all segments of the population] carried out is impressive. They include major efforts targeting the Hispanic population (Dia de los Ninos/ Dia de los Libros), programs designed to engage families (Idaho Family Reading Week), and programming related to Science Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Several focus group participants expressed the opinion that the Make It program had been particularly successful in attracting non-traditional audiences to the library. P. 19

The My First Books project received many positive comments in the web survey and in focus group sessions. One respondent heaped praise on multiple programs. "We love My First Books. It is by far the most valuable Read to Me program available. The JumpStart Kindergarten Registration program is a close second. Availability of books through the Year-Round Underserved program is also a powerful resource. Those three largely build our capacity to serve and help tremendously in allowing us the resources necessary to make a strong impact in our community." P. 20

Another focus group participant shared two anecdotes related to My First Books. "When describing the program to a group of kids at school (learning that they could get up to nine books free) the kids cheered. One girl said '9 books? I don't even have one book!'" P. 20

The TBS (Talking Book Service) has also done an exceptionally good job of getting information out to the public about the program. P. 21

Training and the provision of resources to launch makerspace efforts are bringing new people into libraries across the state. P. 21

The librarian from one library participating in the Make It at the Library project said, "This has been a great program in that librarians are being trained in a variety of new technologies, the

most obvious being the 3-D printer, and we're able to expand our services to a new type of patron. I would just say keep the ideas rolling. We love what you're doing." P. 21

STRATEGIC ISSUE 2: LITERACY

These [Read to Me] activities as well as the Stop the Summer Slide project and the Bright Futures initiative carried out under Goal 2.1 serve to solidify the place of Idaho libraries as centers of learning, especially for children and teens. The evaluators rate the goal achieved . . . because Idaho libraries appear to be strengthening their claim as learning places. While many states do "nice" things with their LSTA Grants to States funding, the evaluators believe that Idaho's efforts in early literacy is important work worthy of study and replication by other states. P. 6

Activity targets for the Read To Me that relate to professional development include conducting early literacy training and demonstrating the role of librarians in the education process. The number and scope of staff development opportunities that are available to Idaho librarians are exceptional. Clear expectations for outcomes are established for every workshop and training event. P. 24

While this is just a single training event [RTM Rendezvous], it evidences a common theme. Training generally presents soundly researched concepts, establishes concrete desired outcomes, and attracts participants from all types of libraries. P. 25

The evaluators explored whether early literacy training (Bright Futures, Read To Me, etc.) had changed the way librarians approached programming for young children. It is clear this is the case. For example, one librarian told the evaluators that she thinks about and applies the principles presented in workshops and training sessions in all her storytime programs; not just in those that fall under the Bright Futures, Summer Slide or Read to Me banners. P. 25

Idaho has approached early literacy in a purposeful way seen in few states. The ongoing involvement of Dr. Roger Stewart of Boise State University in the "Stop the Summer Slide" project is providing new insights into what works and what doesn't work in regard to summer reading initiatives. The project is providing longitudinal data on the impact of reading and various behaviors (such as visiting the public library) on student performance. The ongoing project is tracking differences based on a number of characteristics (Hispanic, Limited English Proficiency, etc.) While some of the data is inconclusive, a variety of hypotheses are being tested to determine the factors that make the biggest difference in maintaining reading proficiency over the summer months. Idaho's work in this regard is of national significance. P. 25

STRATEGIC ISSUE 3: COMMUNITY ANCHOR

ICfL's strong staff development efforts are translating into library services that are more closely aligned with community needs. By implementing the concepts that have been shared, libraries are becoming central places of learning in their communities. P. 6

. . . ICfL provides a rare combination of leadership and support for libraries. . . . evidence supports the conclusion that ICfL both understands and enables libraries to serve the public more effectively. P. 6

. . . a public librarian in a focus group said, “There has been a change in the relationships between elementary schools and public libraries. We can see a change – Kindergarten teachers seek us out to talk to their kids and parents. We have developed an excellent relationship with teachers. Another said, “The Teens and Technology program has changed the public’s perception of what a public library can be.” A third pointed to another project and offered that, “Dia de los Ninos has been a success. We have developed partnerships with local Hispanic storytellers, musicians, artists and local Hispanic bakeries. We often get a higher Latino turnout at our Dia programs and the families often continue using the library. Once families come into the library for the first time, they are hooked and we get repeat patrons.” P. 29

Focus groups and interviews as well as responses to the web survey support the view that the Idaho Commission for Libraries provides an all too rare combination of leadership and support for libraries. . . . evidence supports the conclusion that ICfL both understands and enables libraries to serve the public more effectively. P. 31

The following testimonial offered by an Idaho librarian in a focus group is helpful as well. “I always tell people ICfL does not operate like a typical government agency – they are proactive instead of reactive. They are always looking ahead and are research-based, which I appreciate. I put my trust in them and I know they are addressing things as they can and they are encouraging us all to serve our patrons even better.” P. 32-33

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTANTS

The finest organizations are those that are constantly seeking to improve, and it is in that spirit that the LSTA evaluators offer the following recommendations:

1. **Maintain a sharp focus on early literacy**

In part, this is a “don’t throw out the baby with the bath-water” recommendation. It is an affirmation that what is being done is working. Although some may be critical that early literacy and a focus on young children consumes such a significant portion of Idaho’s LSTA allotment, the evaluators believe that this is warranted in terms of needs (given the lack of a mandate for Kindergarten in the State) and that programs in these areas are highly effective.

It is particularly important for the field of librarianship that ICfL continue to build on the baseline of research on the relationship between early literacy programming in libraries and student achievement. The research already conducted raises almost as many questions as it offers answers and determining what factors related to library services are most effective in preparing children for school is of national significance.

2. Seek ways to create greater integration between/among LSTA-funded projects/activities

Most of Idaho's LSTA projects are "standalone" in nature. This is not at all unusual. The evaluators have observed that this is the case in most states. However, given Idaho's relatively modest LSTA allotment, leveraging dollars to achieve the greatest results is essential.

Given Idaho's estimated population of 1,655,000, the state's annual LSTA allotment of approximately \$1.275 million per year translates into 77 cents per person on an annual basis. It is obvious that LSTA funds alone are inadequate to meet the library and information needs of all Idaho residents. Meeting the library and information needs of Idaho's residents requires, and will continue to require, partnerships involving local governments, school districts, public and private institutions of higher learning, and an array of governmental and non-profit agencies. The Idaho Commission for Libraries' (ICfL) challenge is to find ways to make 77 cents per person transformative in terms of library services; to leverage a small amount of money to accomplish major results by strategically deploying funds and leveraging other public and private monies in support of library and information services. Creating greater integration between/among services by crafting programs in such a way as to create dividends in multiple areas through a single activity is one strategy for doing this.

3. Develop "Human Resource" measures for the evaluation of the Talking Book Service

It is very difficult to justify expenditures on the Talking Book Services on a transactional basis. The costs per circulation transaction common among NLS affiliate programs across the nation are extremely high. Using circulation as a measure of the talking book services represents a misunderstanding of the importance of the program. Developing and tracking qualitative "Human Resource" impacts based on the outcomes described in the Measuring Success intents will provide a much better picture of the efficacy of the program and will also suggest ways in which the Talking Book Service could be modified to produce measurable results.

4. Seek to develop a stronger funding partnership with the State of Idaho for the Talking Book Service

The evaluators recognize that the likelihood of securing additional state funding for ANY program in the current fiscal environment is a “long-shot” at best. . . . While it goes without saying that LSTA funds cannot be used for lobbying purposes, a grass roots effort to secure additional direct aid for the Talking Book Service would have the same impact as receiving new LSTA funding. Imagine the possibilities if even \$100,000 in additional LSTA funding was “freed up” for other purposes.

5. Examine the success in changing staff practices brought about by the Read To Me program and attempt to replicate this success in relation to Teen Services

The evaluators saw that one of the greatest strengths of the Read To Me program was the fact that the structure and concepts introduced in Read To Me training were “internalized” by youth services staff across the state. Children’s librarians have applied what they have learned to a much broader array of programming activity than just programs branded as Read To Me. Examining why this worked with Read To Me and trying to replicate this success in the area of teen services could prove transformational with an important target audience.