

**LSTA Grant Project Evaluation**  
**Applicant: Emmett Public Library**  
**Project Title: Demonstration District – Establishment**  
**Grant project T04352-00, 12/2003**  
**Project Evaluator: Katie Crill, West Bonner Library District**

**Evaluation Summary:**

The goal of this project was to garner voter support and a positive outcome at a districting election by demonstrating the advantages of a library district to the unserved population outside the city limits of Emmett, Idaho and form the Emmett Valley Library District.

Emmett Public Library (EPL) faced some challenges during this process, their second attempt at forming a library district. The plan was to go to election soon after funds were awarded in May 2004 with a contingency plan in place to repeat the election process in November 2004 if the election was unsuccessful. In the event of a positive outcome the demonstration grant would become an equalization of services grant.

Shortly before the election, the Gem County commissioners reduced the size of the proposed library district to the Emmett city limits. The intent was to cause the library to cancel the election and force EPL to expand proposed boundaries to include all unserved portions of Gem County. The board of commissioners found that EPL was unable, by Idaho Code, to cancel the election and so the library encouraged a 'No' vote in order to avoid forming a smaller district. The grant was revised in August 2004, as was the election date. EPL was unable to hold the second election in November because election law requires six months between elections. The original grant was revised to reflect the new timeline and a February 2005 election.

As a result of the Commission's attempt to force a boundary change, morale was damaged and momentum was lost. The working committee was disbanded, leaving staff and board members to continue the campaign. A poor working relationship with the local press and a negative campaign launched by a citizen's group also hindered EPL's efforts and the February 2005 election failed

This evaluation consisted of interviews with the current Library Director, Alyce Kelley, Loretta Lewis, Assistant Library Director and Cari Zisk, Acquisitions Coordinator. Marsha Werle, Library Director during the grant cycle was not available. Loretta Lewis and Cari Zisk were both on staff at EPL during the course of the grant.

**Project Objectives:**

The objective of this grant stated "By May, 2004, the Emmett Valley Library District will be established by election." Because of an unsuccessful election, the date was revised to February, 2005.

**Project Method:**

Prior to this grant application, EPL formed an Exploratory Districting Committee that became the Working Committee once the decision was made to go to election. This group formulated an election logistics plan that included a contingency plan to go to a second election if the May, 2004 election failed. Activities to accomplish the objective included following this plan, promotion of the district using presentations, public meetings, posters and brochures. Staff hours were increased and positions were added resulting in a 47.5% increase in FTE. Library open hours were extended by 20%. The

newly hired Program Coordinator created new programs to draw in underserved population. A network technician was hired and began solving EPL's long term Internet connectivity issues.

### **Project Results**

The May 2004 election attempt was unsuccessful and the grant was revised with a February 2005 election date. This election failed by a 90% margin. Staff members hired with LSTA funds were let go and library open hours were reduced from 50 to 32 hours per week. This was a decrease in the original hours due to a reduction in funding from City of Emmett.

The grant projected increases in library card applications, circulation, attendance and computer use. During the demonstration time frame, families using the library increased by 39%, with a desired project outcome of 50%. Attendance at children's programs increased 35.5%, .5% more than projected. Circulation projections were surpassed by 175 items, with 5175 items checked out per month. Computer use projections were also exceeded with 812 people using EPL per month, more than the 759 estimated.

### **Impact:**

Locally, while the original objective of forming a library district was not successful, the library continued to benefit from equipment and furniture purchased. Awareness of the library and its services was increased and has continued. Hiring a network consultant, even for a short time, helped to finally solve Internet connection

problems. The program coordinator helped to establish new programs and successful programs were continued. Staff reports that people outside city limits continue to purchase non-resident cards and that increased attendance by Hispanics has continued.

Statewide, much can be learned from this project. EPL was compelled to suffer through a doomed election the first time. Good communication with City and County officials may have avoided this scenario.

Errors in computing personnel costs made it necessary to cut staff hours funded by the grant. This, coupled with low wages and the lack of job security in the event of an unsuccessful election, also served to damage morale and resulted in staff turnover. The lesson that can be learned is to always check and double-check figures and make sure wages are commiserate with job requirements.

**Project in Retrospect:**

*What worked well:* Staff members interviewed felt that everyone involved worked well together and learned much about the election process. Even though the districting effort failed a total of three times, there is now much more awareness of the library and its services. The reorganized library space and additional staff workstations continue to be a benefit.

*What did not work well:* There was a lack of support from the city council and from some library trustees as well as a negative campaign by opponents. An error was made in the health insurance rates for new hires resulting in severe cuts in hours for new employees in order to stay within the LSTA budget. There was a lack of commitment

from new employees who saw themselves as possible 'short-timers' if the election failed resulting in staff turnover. Timing was unfortunate for the second election. There were issues with the city's water supply that came to a head during this time and a bond to improve the water system was on the ballot. This may have contributed to the lack of votes. Thorough research, adequate planning time, awareness of opposition and building positive relationships with the city and county boards are recommended.

**Comments and suggestions from the staff if repeating this project today:**

- Allow adequate time for research and planning. Evaluate the community and other problems it is facing. Staff felt that staying with the original plan to spend one year preparing would have yielded better results.
- Focus on making the main branch exceptional instead of spreading funding thinly by trying to cover too much outlying area.
- Foster more community involvement and support from the city council. Persuade the city and county governments that the library is a need and not simply a chance to get the library off the city budget. Districting projects should be entered into the city's long range plan.
- Conduct focus groups. Recruit and train volunteers and have them in place before the grant begins.
- Educate the public about the budget. They do not realize the city budget is augmented by donations and grants.

- Have a procedure in place to avoid issues with unemployment. There was much confusion and negativity during this process. A possible solution would be to use a staffing agency.
- Staff also felt that the county commissioners should have been more familiar with Idaho code before they made the decision to shrink the proposed district boundaries.
- Do your homework. Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate.

The staff felt that ICFL provided excellent assistance and support throughout this project. There were comments made that having an attorney available would have been helpful and that ICFL could have been more prepared to answer questions, especially relating to staffing and unemployment issues. Generally, there was a strong feeling that the Commission did everything possible to help them surmount the obstacles that were presented.

The staff felt strongly that practices begun during this grant continue to benefit EPL and that this grant helped to make the library what it is today. Much was learned during the process. Awareness of the library and its services was raised. The library's Hispanic collection is being utilized. A teen Halloween party held during the project was the beginning of the teen program that continues today. Reorganization of the library with upgraded equipment and furniture resulted in a better working environment. A site visit to EPL reflected a busy library with a pleasant atmosphere, full computers and an attentive staff. While there are no plans to repeat a districting

election, the consensus was that the project was well worth the effort. Even though the grants objective of forming a library district was not realized, this project could be considered a success.

Evaluated by:

Katie Crill

January 29, 2009