

**Peer Evaluation Report  
Ada Community Library  
Ada Express: Security Locker System**

Reviewer: Dawn Wittman, Lewiston City Library  
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**Evaluation Summary:**

Ada Community Library had the desire to meet the needs of the Ada Community Library (ACL) District in an innovative, cost effective manner. The ACL district is extensive, including rural and urban areas, and is geographically aligned with the Boise Public Library system in some areas. All of which created a unique challenge “when contemplating how and when to meet the needs of residents with ACL boundaries”.

After studying demographics, researching possibilities, and gathering patron suggestions, ACL decided to provide two locations for convenient 24/7 pickup and drop-off for patrons to access materials they had placed on hold. The two sites included an access point between the ACL Star Branch and Eagle Library (Star Ada Express) at a community church and another location near a grocery store approximately two miles to the south of the main library at Lake Hazel and Five Mile (Hazel Ada Express).

This project was highly successful at the Hazel Ada Express location with locker capacity reached within a few months of the project. The Star Ada Express location is also successful, but not to the extent of the Hazel location. At least in part due to the success of the lockers at Hazel Ada Express, space has just recently been acquired to provide a new branch library at that location.

**Project Objectives:**

The objective of this project was to provide the best possible service to patrons within the personnel and facility constraints of ACL (Ada Community Library) by expanding access to library materials, encouraging the use of library materials and increasing the number of library cardholders. The grant particularly targeted services to individuals having difficulty using a library (because of geographic location) as well as a specifically underserved area of Ada County.

**Project Method:**

Secure locker units were purchased and located at two outdoor locations accompanied with book drops. The owners of both locations agreed to the use of their concrete pads to bolt the lockers in place and provide outside lighting at no cost to the library. Books and other items are delivered to the lockers at least three times a week, patrons then receive a phone call or an e-mail notifying them the requested items are available for pickup. Once at the locker unit, the patron enters the last seven digits of their library card number into the keypad and the door to their material automatically pops open so the materials can be retrieved. A patron may be assigned more than one locker depending on the number of items they have requested. After a few minutes, the library card number is erased from the unit's memory and the locker is available to be used for the next delivery. A book drop is located adjacent to the lockers so books can be conveniently returned.

Bookmarks providing instruction on how to search and reserve materials were created and disseminated to help patrons learn the new service, and announcements were made through the library webpage. Two new locations were added as designated pick-up

locations in the online catalog, “Hazel Ada Express South” and “Star Ada Express North”, making it easy for online users to choose where they wanted to retrieve their materials.

This project did not have a large impact on staff. Holds are processed in the library and a staff person delivers the materials to the lockers and empties the book drop. Each site takes about a half an hour of staff time – a lot of value to patrons using the service for very little staff impact.

**Project Results:**

Even though the project did not specifically meet the targeted goal of expanding the *total use of the reserve system* by 5%, both locations are heavily used – the north location (Hazel) continually at full capacity and the south location (Star) with a core group of dedicated users. Mary DeWalt, Ada Community Library director, feels more lockers at the north location would be easily utilized by patrons, however, the success of the lockers and the opportunity to lease space helped the Library Board decide a branch could be successful in that location.

Tracking *new library users* through patron use of the lockers proved difficult. The attempt to track new use in conjunction with lockers was done by offering a gift incentive - but these gifts turned out to be less of an incentive than the service itself as there were no ‘takers’ of the gift over the life of the project. So, although new library card holders increased during the span of this grant, it couldn’t be assumed it was due to the lockers themselves. Ada library staff does believe the lockers served an important advocacy role,

and word of mouth caused by the convenience of the lockers certainly had some impact on increased library card registration.

The success of the Ada Express locker system was shared with area libraries and the regional consortium. It could also be interesting reading if an article were to be considered for the Idaho Librarian.

**Project Impact:**

The most tangible impact may be the recent decision by the ACL Board of Trustees to place a branch in northern locker location (Lake Hazel & Five Mile). When that branch begins to provide service, the lockers will be located in another area of Ada County, continuing to provide service to underserved areas and meet the objectives of this grant. The use of lockers for reserved books in the two locations certainly seems to be appreciated by patrons as a very convenient, timely way to gather and return their materials.

The grant application stated “Library 2.0 is a concept of a very different library service that operates according to the expectations of today’s library users. In this vision, the library makes information available wherever and whenever the user requires it.” Other research stated it is important to “quickly and conveniently put the item into the user’s hands”. In the case of this grant, ACL successfully provided the opportunity for library users to pick up their materials at their convenience at anytime of the day or night, regardless of library hours or day of the week.

*Could this project be replicated in other parts of the state?* Yes, although this specific project does depend on the availability of businesses or community organizations to provide an appropriate location, including lighting and a method to secure the lockers. Collaboration with some community entity would certainly be worthwhile to provide convenient access to materials for patrons, promote libraries by using creative methods to deliver service, and develop business or organizational partnerships. Providing patrons secure lockers and a book drop in a convenient, well lighted location is a cost-effective option of delivering library service. Any library community that is constrained by location, hours, budget or personnel issues could implement this project to increase access to materials in underserved areas of their communities.

**The Project in Retrospect:**

*What worked well and what did not?*

The Star Ada Express location did not, and still does not, have the capacity of use as the north (Hazel) location. The Star location may not be as convenient, even though it is located on a well traveled route between Star and Eagle. This location may also be off-putting to some patrons as it is situated on private church property and not as comfortable for users to access, as compared to the Hazel location in front of a grocery store. Library Director Mary DeWalt states, “One thing I’d do differently regarding the Star unit in particular is perhaps attempt to poll residents in a target area to see where the most convenient location would be – usage patterns. That being said, I realize that just because a location is identified as optimal that doesn’t mean the owner of that building/mall is interested or able to partner with us in providing “permanent” access.

We were fortunate that our current location hosts are happy to provide not only physical space (and allowed us to bolt into concrete) but electricity and nearby lighting as well.”

*What are suggestions if the project were to be repeated?*

In a recent conversation with Mary about the Star location, she stated, “We actually think the location (Star) is pretty good so perhaps the other thing I would do differently is in addition to simple promotion, we could have found a way to provide one-on-one guidance on how it works to residents in the area – e.g. presentation and tip sheets at a neighborhood meeting. It is clearly an unfamiliar service, one that requires remote item requests (via either phone or online catalog). Regular users are in the online groove and are very savvy catalog users, but there are many others who only experience libraries as walk-in shelf browsers. They would likely need some sort of ‘personal introduction to this kind of service.’”

*Was enough planning time allowed?* Yes, the project activities were completed on schedule. During implementation of the project, a mechanical issue involving one of the lockers was quickly resolved by the locker company and did not impact the project timeline.

*Were additional resources or publicity needed?*

As stated earlier, the Hazel Ada Express was quickly filled to capacity with no additional resources or publicity, but the Star location has not reached capacity. Although there are dedicated users in the Star location, additional resources including a usage pattern study and additional publicity, may help increase usage in that area.

*Did the ICFL provide adequate assistance throughout the project?*

“The Idaho Commission for Libraries staff was incredibly helpful - attentive and responsive throughout the project. Consultants provide excellent guidance from pre-application stage through completion.” Mary DeWalt, Ada Community Director.

**Final Summary and Comments:**

As a reviewer of this project, I quickly became excited about the possibilities of implementing this creative way of delivering service in other library communities. I had assumed the project would be staff intensive and cumbersome, and it is not. It is a simple, efficient concept that is used by post offices for delivery and pick up, and probably other entities as well. This project takes the Library 2.0 philosophy of serving our public and very simply extends that premise on several levels:

- places resources into the hands of users quickly and conveniently (24/7 access),
- uses hi-tech (placing books on hold online) and,
- low-tech (open a locker and retrieve your materials).

The project very effectively reached a population that had been minimal users of the library, making it evident that libraries are a growing, changing, adapting entities and are also fiscally conservative. Good job Ada Community Library!

Respectfully submitted / September 15, 2010

Dawn Wittman