

X. STRATEGIC ISSUES

A. Libraries and Telehealth – information item

Idaho libraries help keep students learning, adults earning, and improve the health and well-being of Idahoans across the state. During the last year, the ICfL with funding from the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation, launched the Telehealth and Libraries program in two Clearwater County libraries. Each library received \$10,000 to help make existing spaces private and comfortable with soundproofing, better lighting, and upgraded equipment. The ICfL also received \$10,000 from the Foundation to cover site visit costs and to develop a marketing campaign to get the word out about the program.

Idaho is one of four states in the nation to pilot a Telehealth and Libraries program. The Orofino and Weippe libraries offer their patrons the opportunity to “check out a check-up @ your library.” Marketing efforts focus on community members in Clearwater County and also health care providers in the area. The Clearwater Valley Hospitals and Clinics (CVHC) have been an active partner in the initiative. Both libraries are currently scheduling appointments for people in the area who appreciate not having to drive hours to see a physician.

Next Steps

Expanding this program to more libraries throughout the state will benefit more Idahoans. The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation is interested in expanding the program to more libraries in 2022 and Health and Welfare and the Veteran’s Administration are also interested in working more closely together to enhance efforts.

The Governor has recommended that ICfL utilize U.S. Treasury Department funding for coronavirus capital projects. If approved during the 2022 legislative session, one-time funds of \$3.5 million available in FY23 through FY26 will be used for one-time construction/remodeling expenses to improve public library buildings designed to enable work, education, and health monitoring in communities with critical needs for the project as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Telehealth equipment and programming support are also eligible costs. Based on an informal survey completed in January 2021 and a follow-up survey done in late October 2021, the ICfL staff estimates 25% of all Idaho library jurisdictions (104) may apply for grants.

The ICfL will administer a competitive grant program and provide training and consulting support based on best practices for telehealth, workforce development, and supporting the educational needs of Idaho students. This will be done with existing staff and no additional funds would be needed to maintain or sustain this program. Grants would be available in funding tiers:

- \$300,000 for the \$5,000 to \$25,000 tier (12 projects at the maximum amount)
- \$1,050,000 for the \$25,000 to \$150,000 tier (7 projects at the maximum amount)
- \$2,000,000 for the \$150,000 to \$500,000 tier (4 projects at the maximum amount)

- \$3,350,000 with a minimum of 23 funded projects (possibly more if not everyone asks for the maximum amount)

This would provide maximum flexibility, covering a range of needs, from libraries that may have minimal remodel requirements to those with more extensive needs. The remaining \$150,000 in operating costs will be used by the ICfL to provide telehealth training to libraries, cohort support, site visits, information technology, and marketing support. The ICfL has a solid history of responsibly granting funds to the Idaho library community and supporting their capacity to carry out successful grant-funded projects.

This funding will allow a minimum of 23 Idaho communities to begin offering telehealth services in a private setting in their libraries. People who may normally need to visit health specialists out of state, veterans, and those needing to schedule behavioral health consults will benefit from having access in their own communities. Additionally, these versatile spaces can be used to serve other community needs such as workforce training, client meeting spaces, and community education. If the project is not funded, libraries will need to rely on bond elections or other sources of funding for remodeling efforts to ensure privacy and it will take many more years to provide this needed service.