

III. Federal Fund

B. Program - Partnership with Utah State Library – Information Item

The Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL) is restructuring the Idaho Talking Book Service (TBS) to take advantage of expanded services available through a trusted partner—the Utah State Library (USL). Through this partnership, Talking Book patrons in Idaho will gain access to more robust and resilient services that support long-term sustainability and enhanced user experience.

USL is a national leader in delivering full-service Talking Book programs and currently contracts with Montana, Wyoming, and Alaska. Idaho, along with 18 other states, has already worked with USL for decades to provide Braille materials to eligible patrons. As part of a broader trend of state library agencies restructuring to manage costs during uncertain budget times, USL has made two additional full-service contract slots available—and Idaho has reserved one of them.

Under USL’s full-service model, Idaho patrons will receive services that match those offered to Utah residents. These include:

- Circulation of audiobooks, large print books, and Braille materials
- Patron account maintenance and reader’s advisory support
- Access to the online catalog (OPAC) and local book download site (SHELF)
- BARD registration, account setup, and assistance
- Distribution and support for playback machines, accessories, and the BARD mobile app
- A toll-free number and email contact for direct patron support

In addition, USL provides:

- Statistical reporting and newsletter distribution
- Recording of locally and regionally significant books and magazines
- Special recordings such as voter information pamphlets for out-of-state patrons

This partnership will allow ICfL to continue providing high-quality Talking Book services while adapting to changing resource and funding landscapes.

The rationale behind this decision:

1. Service Growth & Awareness: We estimate the total number of people eligible for Talking Book services is much higher than the current number of patrons. In 2021, the National Library Service (NLS) expanded eligibility by simplifying the enrollment process for individuals with reading disabilities—further increasing the potential user base. In FY22,

NLS also introduced a national objective to increase active patron participation by 2.5% annually. By realigning ICfL staff time and resources toward outreach and promotion, we can help meet this national goal and better serve Idahoans who could benefit from Talking Book services.

2. Service Improvements: The USL partnership will also bring significant service improvements:

- **Access to Large Print Materials:** Patrons will begin receiving large print titles by mail—an option not currently available through ICfL.
- **Support for Local Libraries:** USL offers deposit collections of large print titles for small and rural libraries, expanding access through local lending.
- **Comprehensive, Proven Support:** USL’s full-service model has a strong track record of patron satisfaction in other states:
 - **Montana**, a USL partner since 2022, described the service as a “godsend.” The state reported only two patron complaints at the outset, with none since.
 - **Alaska**, partnering with USL since 2015, has maintained customer satisfaction ratings in the mid-90% range.
 - **Wyoming**, a longtime USL partner, consistently reports a high level of service and has received no patron complaints since transitioning.

These improvements align with our commitment to provide an inclusive, high-quality experience for all Idaho Talking Book patrons.

3. Service Resilience & Sustainability: With potential federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding reductions on the horizon this partnership positions ICfL to maintain vital services while improving financial flexibility. These savings will make it easier for the agency to shift to alternative funding sources, if necessary, without compromising patron experience.

Additionally, USL's program is supported by stable state funding, with supplemental support from LSTA funds to maintain and expand a large print collection of over 160,000 titles. Their reliable funding environment and established infrastructure provide confidence in the long-term viability of this partnership.

This transition also creates a more structured, less disruptive path forward for ICfL staff, allowing for better succession planning and support in pursuing other opportunities, rather than reacting in haste to future funding challenges.

4. Cost Savings:

Existing TBS Costs

- \$277,297 for 4 FTEs (salaries + benefits)

- \$3,276 for KLAS
- **\$310,573 total per year**

Contracting with USL

- \$60,000 base for each state
- \$91,200 (\$40 x 2280 Talking Book patrons)
- \$5,440 (\$85 x 64 Braille patrons)
- **\$156,640 per year**

The current cost of Talking Book services is approximately \$510,000 with six staff, KLAS software, and other operating expenses. By contracting with USL to provide the same level of services the cost would be approximately \$156,640 with initial cost savings of approximately \$153,933.

As part of the restructuring of the Idaho Talking Book Service (TBS), we anticipate retaining two full-time staff members: the current TBS Program Specialist and a reclassified version of the TBS Program Supervisor position.

The reclassified position will serve as the primary liaison between ICfL, the Utah State Library (USL), and the National Library Service (NLS). Responsibilities will include managing TBS outreach and marketing efforts, assisting walk-in patrons, reviewing new patron applications, and coordinating the submission of approved applications to USL. This role will focus heavily on building and maintaining relationships with organizations statewide to support patron growth, especially as we anticipate an increase in enrollment with the introduction of large print materials. In addition to these core responsibilities, we plan to broaden the position to include expertise in OverDrive and other assistive technologies. This would support public and school libraries in enhancing accessible services for their communities.

The TBS Program Specialist will continue in their current role, with many of the same duties, through the end of the fiscal year. We anticipate less time with studio responsibilities and more time supporting outreach as the year progresses. During this period, we will evaluate both roles to assess how workloads and outcomes align with the evolving service model.

Unfortunately, this transition will also lead to the reduction of four IMLS-funded positions: three Customer Service Representatives and the Office Specialist 2. This decision was not made lightly and reflects the significant shift in service delivery and staffing needs under the USL partnership. We remain committed to supporting all affected employees during this transition.

Measures of Success

To maintain a high standard of service and ensure that Idaho Talking Book Service (TBS) remains a valued resource for patrons, ICfL will evaluate the implementation of this proposal using the following metrics:

- The successful implementation of an outreach staffing model
- The creation of an outreach plan to target effective outreach to key stakeholders
- The number of outreach, educational, and engagement opportunities supported by ICfL staff
- The number of new patrons
- Patron assistance and readers advisory statistics
- Patron circulation rates
- Patron reported satisfaction
- The number of new talking book recordings relative to current recording capacity
- Circulation delivery time relative to current delivery time

Next steps and timeline

- May 14, 2025: Proposal shared with existing Talking Book staff
- June 12, 2025: Proposal shared with ICfL Commissioners
- July 2025:
 - NLS is notified
 - Contract negotiation initiated with USL
 - Keystone contract modifications initiated (ICfL contract ends September 25, 2025)
- August 2025
 - Patrons notified of pending changes (likely at least two mailings plus additional methods)
 - Contract finalized
- September 12, 2025: Patron information extracted from the talking book library system and transferred to USL
- September 15, 2025: Service from USL officially starts
- September 15-26, 2025: ICfL will surplus players, cartridges, and other equipment. Items will be returned to NLS or USL at the direction of NLS

- September 26, 2025: Last day of work for Customer Service Representatives and Office Specialist 2 if they have not found other employment options by then