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Innovation Study Title Library LiNK Program – Arlington Public Library

Category Community Relationship

Jurisdiction Name City of Arlington, Texas

City/County Manager Jim Holgersson

Population 366,057

Submit Innovation Study for an Alliance Innovation Award Yes [X] No []

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SYNOPSIS

LibraryLiNK Program – Arlington Public Library, City of Arlington

Libraries are one of the building blocks of strong neighborhoods. Community libraries strengthen the capacity of neighborhood organizations and individuals by providing easy access to valuable services, including reading materials for adults, information necessary for day to day life, as well as common ground where residents can gather.

One factor that affects our citizen's ability to use the library is the lack of public transportation in a city of almost 100 square miles. Currently most (but not all) of Arlington residents live within 2 miles of a library. However, traffic patterns in the city may still result in some residents never "crossing paths" with a library during their regular travels to work, school, shopping and back home. Providing small library service points in the neighborhoods within walking distance of where families live or services that families frequent is essential. In addition, locating libraries in schools increases the chance that parents will make use of library resources along with their children.

In response to these issues, the Arlington Public Library has, over the last 4 years, built a program that creates alternative ways of accessing library services in the community, especially targeting those residents who will benefit from literacy and life skills services. Currently, this program has three distinct "channels" for service: 1) School partnerships; 2) Pickup lockers & digital download stations; 3) Mobile services. It seems entirely possible that new channels may be developed as new partnerships are formed and alternative service models are created.

The intent of the LibraryLiNK program is to strengthen Arlington neighborhoods by increasing access to public library materials and programming to citizens currently not able to use a library or not aware of library services. In addition, the program aims to promote family literacy in Title I elementary schools where diverse families live and learn.

Program objectives include:

- Providing improved access to library materials and services in convenient community locations

- Building partnerships and supplementing services of community partners
- Increasing the number of families in Arlington who utilize public library services

LibraryLiNKs in Arlington Independent School District (AISD) and Mansfield Independent School District (MISD) libraries provide a circulating collection of materials for adults so that families can use school libraries together. These school libraries are open outside regular school hours to the families of children attending these schools. Library users (and school staff) may request materials from the Arlington Public Library collection to be sent to the schools for pickup and may also return materials there. School library staff members are able to issue Arlington Public Library cards to adults and children. Regularly scheduled programming is also offered for families with preschool children at these sites.

The first pickup locker and download station location opened at the South Cooper Street YMCA in the summer for 2011 and two additional locations are planned for 2012. Library cardholders may request through the Library's online catalog that materials be sent to a locker site for pickup. When the material has been delivered, the cardholder will receive an email with the locker combination. Materials can also be returned to the locker site. In addition, a computer kiosk is available where library card holders may plug in their mobile devices to access and download digital content such as audiobooks and ebooks.

The Library's mobile LibraryLiNK van serves childcare centers, nursing homes and assisted living facilities as well as area events and festivals. This service provides library card registration, technology programming (through a mobile laptop lab), as well as checkout of library materials. The current LibraryLiNK van will be joined by a "big brother (or sister)" in 2012 that will provide access to a computer lab containing 12 desktop computers and offering technology classes and internet access to apartment complexes and community organizations.

The majority of the costs for the LibraryLiNK program have been funded by grants from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (through the federal LSTA program), the Arlington Tomorrow Foundation, the AISD Foundation, as well as the federal Broadband Technologies Opportunity Program. The very first LibraryLiNK site at Roark Elementary School in 2007 was the vision of the school librarian and principal at that school who applied for a grant with the AISD Foundation to open the school

library after school hours and requested the Arlington Public Library's assistance in providing books for adults. From there, the program grew to additional school libraries, then to the mobile van and then to the locker pickup program. With the implementation of this program, the City has been able to make library service more convenient for residents while avoiding costs related to building, staffing and maintaining new brick and mortar facilities. The infrastructure for the LibraryLiNK program is funded through grants and ongoing maintenance of the program has continued without the addition of new staffing.

When additional library coverage is needed in areas of Arlington that are becoming more populated, it is likely that library staff will examine methods of implementing new LibraryLiNK services with school district and other partners rather than building new facilities. The LibraryLiNK partnerships in the community have caused staff to examine more closely ways of collaborating with existing community organizations to offer service rather than building new services from scratch. In addition, library staff has continued to see that library service can be offered in places other than just from within the four walls of the library building.

Additional Information:

Innovation/Creativity:

While other library systems have undoubtedly implemented some LibraryLiNK services in their communities, we feel that the way we've packaged the three components (School partnerships, Pickup lockers, Mobile services) and marketed them to the community is distinctive. Our LibraryLiNK program is not just set of standalone services to be offered, it's a way of thinking about library service to us and remembering that by making those "links" to the community we are often able to offer service in much more meaningful ways than ever before.

While cooperation between school and public libraries happens quite often (though not often enough) installing a digital materials download kiosk in a recreation center or gym is not something that we've seen other examples of. Having a kiosk for downloading audiobooks, ebooks, and music on a portable device will make it convenient for Arlington residents who workout at a community recreation facility to

access library resources anytime the location is open, before, during, or after using the athletic equipment. In addition to the convenience factor, these facilities also offer a larger span of operating hours than those offered by our branch libraries.

Listening to literature has become more and more popular over the last decade, both for commuters, as well as for readers who have difficulty holding or seeing a printed book. In FY 10 there were 118,264 circulations of audiobooks from our collection and downloading these recordings has become more and more popular with our customers, counting for over 11,000 circulations during FY 10. In FY 11, we expect that number to increase to over 50,000 downloads. We anticipate that many recreation center users will enjoy having this service available to them so that they can listen to a book or music while they exercise.

The digital materials download kiosk will be available for patrons to use with their own portable device to download audiobooks, ebooks, and music. The kiosk will include a monitor, docking capabilities for multiple media players, simple instructions, and eye catching signage. Software utilized on the kiosk will be Overdrive's Download Station, as well as Internet Explorer to access the Library's online catalog and other vendor's catalogs of ebooks and downloadable e-audiobooks. Faronics DeepFreeze security software is used to effectively lock down functionality of the kiosk to allowed programs and Internet sites only. Customers may also search the Library's entire catalog from this station, place holds on material and apply for a library card to be mailed to their home. YMCA staff will be provided with documentation to be able to do minimal troubleshooting as needed with the kiosk.

Often the largest obstacles to a program such as this are the computer networks operated by varying organizations. Installing new software and allowing access to the Internet through networks that are owned and operated by unrelated organizations often presents insurmountable obstacles. Rather than trying to hurdle those obstacles we've instead just gone around them. The "circulation system" operated by the schools to check our items out and enter new library card information is actually just an internet form that collects information and emails it to library staff. While this does require more manual intervention by our staff than we would like, it has filled a need and allows us the time to investigate and gain buy in for more sophisticated methods. Gaining internet access to the pickup lockers at the YMCA and allowing internet access for the digital download station presented initial problems due to lack of network access. As a result, a low-cost wireless "hotspot" now serves both of those purposes

and may be expanded at some point by the YMCA to offer wireless access to YMCA users.

In addition to the implementation of new services, these partnerships have also served to build the bridges between staff members in the related organizations.

Communication between the school staff and public librarians have improved and cooperative programming between the library and the YMCA has also increased. All service improvements have been facilitated by staff; no outside consultants have been used.

Outcomes Achieved:

Usage of the current LibraryLiNK collections continues to grow as teachers and families become more aware of their existence and their benefits. In addition to the onsite collection, library users may also place holds from the Library's regular collection and have those items sent to the LibraryLiNK location. The total collection size of the LibraryLiNK locations has grown from a few hundred books at one elementary school in 2007 to over 5,000 books in 7 schools in July 2011. Circulation of material still represents a mere fraction of the over 2 million items circulated by the library system annually, but continues to increase every year. Last year, there were 185 new Arlington Public Library cards issued from these locations.

Last year, AISD staff members in each location were consulted regarding improvement of services in the LibraryLiNK locations and mentioned the following:

- A more reliable and easy to use circulation interface to APL would improve efficiency. (currently in progress)
- Increased signage outside the schools regarding the LibraryLiNK s would increase knowledge of the services and increase usage. (funded by a grant in 2011)
- Surveying current school families regarding collection materials would improve the quality of the collections (ongoing; some results below)

A survey of parents attending the LibraryLiNK sites last year revealed the following information:

- Parents want their LibraryLiNK open Monday – Thursday and on Saturdays (probably not realistic for school staffing, but school staff have been responsive about increasing hours)
- Given the opportunity to express their needs, both parents and teachers were overwhelmingly supportive of new books in all categories – fiction, nonfiction, adult services, and child services
- 203 parents completed the surveys and, of these, 33% wanted parenting materials, 34% wanted ESL materials, 24% wanted GED materials, and 19% wanted citizenship materials.

Arlington Public Library has used the survey information to continue to improve services and have worked closely with AISD staff to increase service hours and usage by school families.

In our community, the LibraryLiNK program has been recognized in numerous presentations to community partners and especially related to the City's Building Equitable Communities program. Installation of LibraryLiNK service has illustrated the ability to partner with other entities such as the school district or YMCA and have also demonstrated to neighborhood residents that city government does care about the quality of their neighborhoods.

3. Applicable Results and Real World Practicality

On a regional, state or national level, we feel that this level of collaboration with community institutions such as schools and recreation centers can serve as a model for other communities. While hours of operation in library buildings may be decreasing for budgetary reasons, projects like this demonstrate that the library exists outside regular library walls and that by partnering with other organizations we can continue to make services accessible to our users and increase our reach into the community instead of pulling it back due to economic pressures.

We continue to measure the level of usage from all LibraryLiNK sites through circulation of material, downloads of material, program participation and borrower registration and have seen continual increases since the program was established in 2007. While none of these sites will probably ever replace a library branch, making

library service more convenient to users has proven to increase usage and often times will allow a non-library user to understand what services that library has to offer that he/she may be able to make use of to improve his/her life. As a result, a LibraryLiNK user may eventually become a library branch user, taking greater advantage of the services offered.

4. Innovation Study Presentation

Attached is the brochure developed for the LibraryLiNK program to advertise these services. These brochures are distributed within the libraries, schools and partner organizations.

If invited to make a presentation on our program, we would be happy to put together a “day in the life” of a LibraryLiNK site video to illustrate the impact that these partnerships have on our community in Arlington.



Schools



LibraryLiNKs in AISD and MISD schools provide a circulating collection of materials for adults so that families can use school libraries together. These school libraries are open outside regular school hours to the families of children attending these schools. Library users may request materials from the Arlington Public Library collection to be sent to the schools for pickup and may also return materials there. School library staff members are able to issue Arlington Public Library cards to adults and children. Regularly scheduled programming is also offered for families with preschool children at these sites.



Pickup Lockers & Download Stations



The first pickup locker and download station location will open at the South Cooper Street YMCA (7120 South Cooper Street, Arlington, TX 76001-6718) in early 2011. Once available, cardholders may request through the Library's online catalog that materials be sent to a locker site for pickup. When the material has been delivered, the cardholder will receive an email with the locker combination. Materials can also be returned at the locker site. In addition, a computer kiosk is available where library card holders may plug in their mobile devices to access and download digital content such as audio books and ebooks.



Mobile Library

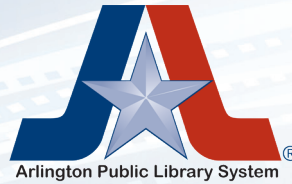


The mobile LibraryLiNK van serves childcare centers, nursing homes and assisted living facilities, as well as area events and festivals. This service provides library card registration, technology programming (through a mobile laptop lab), and checkout of library materials.



The Arlington Public Library's LibraryLiNK program

provides innovative service to the Arlington community that goes above and beyond traditional branch library facilities.



Most LibraryLiNK materials and services have been funded by grants from the Arlington Tomorrow Foundation and through an LSTA grant provided by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.



The LibraryLiNK program is made possible through partnerships established with the Arlington Public Library, Arlington Independent School District, Mansfield Independent School District and the YMCA of Arlington.

For a current list of school LibraryLiNK sites and hours, see the Library's web page:
www.arlingtonlibrary.org/librarylink

To suggest additional pickup locker and download station sites or to request service from the mobile LibraryLiNK, please call: 817-459-6925



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