

Wisconsin Public Library Consortium (WPLC) Progress Report August 2001 through January 2002

Activities which have been completed or are in the process of being completed to-date, as relates to the project outcomes and implementation sections of the original proposal. Please address any issues or problems that have been encountered in implementation, also.

Attached are the minutes of the WPLC steering committee minutes that explain completed grant activities and issues in detail. We are making good progress in all project activity areas.

netLibrary

The major problem we have faced since our August report has been the uncertainty surrounding the financial viability of netLibrary, our vendor of web-based electronic book collection. NetLibrary announced on October 13, 2001 that, after failing to raise needed funds in the tough investment environment following September 11, the company was up for sale. With approval of bankruptcy court, sale of netLibrary assets to OCLC, Online Computer Library Center, was finalized on Jan. 24, 2002. The consortium hesitated to purchase additional netLibrary titles until we knew the vendor would survive, which delayed our fall order for more than 800 additional ebook titles until January 23, 2002. The additional titles are now available to the public.

NetLibrary presented us with a new problem with this announcement on January 24: "Effective today, netLibrary will discontinue access to the off-line version of our eBook Reader. This will in no way impact you and your patrons' ability to access eBooks on-line from your library or from a remote location. It does mean that patrons will no longer be able to download eBooks for off-line viewing."

Waukesha Library System has been working with Troy Hergert at the Badger Association of the Blind (their community partner for the grant) to create instructions to help visually impaired clients use the netLibrary collection with their screen readers. That access relied on the netLibrary off-line version of the eBook Reader. NetLibrary has been informed of our concerns about access for special groups and we will continue to monitor the situation and work toward a resolution.

E-Book Readers

Four WPLC partners have purchased REB1100 hand-held reading devices and ebook titles and participating libraries have been trained to use them. Some libraries are circulating the readers to the public and collecting user surveys for evaluation. Problems that have been identified with the ebook reader project are inadequate technical support from Gemstar and the need for libraries to use credit cards for some online title purchases. (Some boards and municipalities do not allow agencies like libraries to have their own credit cards.)

Evaluation

Results of a telephone survey completed by Himmel & Wilson are attached. They will continue the ebook reader evaluation and will provide information about similar projects in other states for the consortium. Josh Morrill will conduct additional evaluation, including end user experiences and community partnerships.

Training

In addition to the “Ebooks Overview” and “netLibrary Basics” training programs, a session about “netLibrary at the Reference Desk” is being developed by WiLS. Consortium partners who have training funds remaining may use them for this session. Others will pay a per-session fee.

At the January 30, 2002 meeting, the WPLC Steering Committee identified another training need for which we are requesting a budget adjustment. In addition to the \$1,286.68 remaining in the grant budget for training, we are requesting that \$4,313.32 be moved from the netLibrary account into training. With this \$5,600 we would convert the “netLibrary Basics” session content to web format, which could allow us to offer online, interactive training sessions to staff or the public via WebCT from the UW-Madison campus. We would like to find whether we can successfully move the content to the web, if we can make it directly available to the end users, even from their homes and whether it will meet their training needs. Since learners have many different styles, we want to see if this delivery method will meet the needs of some of our staff and public. It could also allow us to easily offer training long after the grant ends

Consortium Plans to Continue

The consortium has made plans to continue with ebooks and other cooperative endeavors after grant funding is expended. A budget for 2002 was approved in September to continue cooperative purchase of more titles for our shared netLibrary collection, continued project management services, more training development, establishment of a WPLC web site and start-up funds for new ventures. In addition, an effort is underway to expand the consortium to include participation from schools and school districts.

Budget expenditures. Identify any purchases made toward the project, to-date. Please also include any changes in expenditures that have been made, even if I have approved them.

A copy of the grant budget and expenditures to date is attached. The only change requested at this time is outlined in the training section above.