

July 2014

## Cooperative is our middle name: Why the Washington County Cooperative Library Services works

Eva Calcagno  
*Cooperative Library Services Manager*

### Recommended Citation

Calcagno, E. (2014). Cooperative is our middle name: Why the Washington County Cooperative Library Services works. *OLA Quarterly*, 4(4), 5-6+. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1497>

© 2014 by the author(s).

*OLA Quarterly* is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

---

# Cooperative Is Our Middle Name:

Why the Washington County  
Cooperative Library Services Works

by *Eva Calcagno*

*Cooperative Library Services Manager*

---

Formed 24 years ago to provide free public library service to the unincorporated areas and the rurally isolated residents of Washington County, the Cooperative Library Services approaches the end of the millennium as a strong federation of jurisdictions. The Cooperative has become a strong suburban library system providing quality service to 390,000 people in Oregon's second most populated county.

All public, academic, special, and high school libraries within the county are considered members of the Cooperative. This includes 10 public libraries managed by cities: Banks, Beaverton, Cornelius, Forest Grove, Hillsboro's Shute Park, Tanasbourne, Books By Rail branches, Sherwood, Tigard and Tualatin. In addition, non-profit associations manage two public libraries, Cedar Mill and Garden Home Community Libraries. The County manages one service outlet, the West Slope Community Library. All of the public libraries plus the Oregon College of Art & Craft and the Tuality Health Information Resource Center share an integrated library system, called WILNet, that includes a shared catalog, access to commercial databases, and Internet services.

The other academic, school and special libraries in the County make use of the Cooperative's Second-level Reference, Interlibrary Loan and Courier services. The Cooperative's ILL staff will post OCLC interlibrary loan requests for them, as well as borrow or photocopy materials from Multnomah County or Portland State University on their behalf. The libraries may electronically reserve materials on WILNet and the Courier program will deliver items to the libraries by van or by mail, depending upon the volume of deliveries.

## WHAT DOES THE COOPERATIVE DO?

Washington County's strategic planning document, *County 2000*, defines the levels of service delivery for the County for all areas including libraries, land use, and public safety. The County identified direct public library service as a local responsibility to be performed by a city or non-profit organization contracting with the county. The County performs three functions: serving as the primary funding source for public library service, providing centralized support services to contracting libraries, and providing direct service to special populations.

Primary funding source: The majority of the Cooperative's budget is used to pay contracting public libraries for providing free service to all residents. In FY1998-99 contract payments will total over \$8.2 million, or about 80 percent of the money spent on library service in the county.

Central support services: The Cooperative provides an automated system, MARC cataloging and authority control of the central database, Internet access, and subscriptions to electronic databases for member libraries. We maintain a second level Reference and Interlibrary Loan Program, countywide Telephone Reference Service through Beaverton City Library, seven-day per week intra-library Courier delivery, centralized Youth Services support, and publications and publicity for countywide promotions. In addition, the professional staff of the Cooperative provides consulting to libraries and organizes continuing education opportunities on various topics for library staff. We have a formalized process through which developing, volunteer-based libraries are mentored in preparation for full membership in the Cooperative.

Direct service: The Cooperative has managed one service outlet, the West Slope Community Library, since 1979. While the operation of a public library is not identified in *County 2000*, we will continue to support West Slope until Beaverton, the nearest city, annexes the service area. Our Outreach Program provides direct, personalized service to about 600 homebound patrons, providing readers' advisory service and mail delivery of library materials to patrons and offering rotating collections of materials for residential care facilities across the county. Outreach also coordinates mail delivery of loans to school, academic, and special libraries, and supports Library Express, a service through which patrons can have reserves mailed to their homes for a delivery fee. The Cooperative has recently initiated experimental programs to serve non-English speaking residents (primarily Spanish at this time), outreach to the daycare community, and is contracting with Hillsboro to operate an Inmate Library in the new Washington County Jail. Our intent with experimental services is to explore needs and establish service plans so that service may eventually be assumed by local jurisdictions. The Cooperative will spend approximately \$2.8 million on Central Support and Direct Services in FY1998-99.

Countywide, the public libraries enjoy a fairly high level of funding. About 80 percent of the money spent on public library service countywide comes from the Cooperative's budget; the remainder is from local jurisdictions and fundraising. The percentage of the local library's budget that comes from other sources varies from 0 to 63 percent. In FY1997-98 the county and the cities will spend over \$12,000,000 on public library service.

The Cooperative Library Advisory Board is made up of representatives of contracting public libraries,

plus a representative for the West Slope community. For the cities this is usually a city councilor or manager, mayor, or staff person. Because these people representing different jurisdictions need to also work together on other issues like land use or public safety, they tend to try to cooperate. They know that harmony with the neighbors goes a long way to future support in other arenas. Another strong reason to cooperate is that if a board comprising eight cities and two non-profit organizations can reach agreement on an issue, the recommendation holds considerable weight with the County Board of Commissioners.

#### WHAT DO MEMBER LIBRARIES DO?

Member libraries set their own lending policies, determine fee structures, staffing levels, hours of service, collection focus, children's and adult programming levels, etc. Cooperative members have access to the resources and expertise of each other and realize that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Members that are also WILI libraries have adopted

common policies and procedures to establish quality-control standards for the shared database, and to assure that patrons receive similar treatment from one library to another. Their collections tend to complement each other. Unlike branches of a large centralized system, our public library collections tend to have more unique titles and less duplication. Member libraries get the benefits of being in a large system, but still maintain local autonomy. Patrons maintain an identity with their local communities and feel an ownership of the local library because

they can provide input to local boards. "We feel a part of, but are still apart from" is how Karen McClelland, Garden Home Community Library Director, describes this relationship.

County residents have traditionally had an aversion to big government. Local determination of decisions and policies is important to member jurisdictions, and voters have responded positively when allowed to choose from a menu of services. Residents of the urban unincorporated areas prefer to choose services rather than assume that a bigger county government will provide all of those services in one package for them.

#### WHAT IS IT WE DO DIFFERENTLY?

The Cooperative's long-range plan is our blueprint for service. It is drafted by staff and member libraries, refined by committees, adopted by the Library Directors' Board and the Advisory Board. As a group

we evaluate any new service or program with these questions in mind: Does it support the mission of the Cooperative? Is it best done locally or centrally? Is it more efficient or economical to do centrally? For example, in order to offer second-level reference service, the Reference Program rents space at Multnomah County's Central Library to make use of its vast reference and historical collections. Two years ago the Outreach and Courier programs began renting office and loading dock space at Hillsboro's Tanasbourne branch to have access to a full-service collection to fill loan requests for Outreach patrons and to reduce courier deliveries to and from a large library.

Applying the basic divisions of responsibility from *County 2000* to the planning of library service has built a trusting relationship between the County and cities. Local libraries know what services they can count on the County to provide, and that working together insures the success of all partners. Over the years, the Advisory Board has worked hard to accommodate the needs of individual members, especially small libraries, and this genuine concern for the good of the whole is an important factor in our success. "The Cooperative continues to be successful because there is a trust relationship between the county and cities at all levels—advisory boards, city council and county administration, not just librarians," explains Debra Brodie, Hillsboro Library Director.

Trust takes time to develop. Several years ago Cornelius hired City Manager John Greiner, who came from another state where successful city-county partnerships did not exist. After serving as Chair of the Cooperative Library Advisory Board, his initial skepticism faded when he realized that the "spirit of cooperation" cited in the mission statement was genuine. "Washington County is an anomaly. I've never seen a county that works this well in bringing everyone together; the joint partnership really works. Cooperative—the name really fits what's happening."

#### NO BOUNDARIES

Not only are residents encouraged to use any library in the county that best meets their needs, residents are also not confined to their own county. Many residents of the Metro-Portland area do not live and work, shop, or dine in the same county. We believe that people tend to use libraries near where they work, shop, or seek entertainment, not necessarily close to home. To respect this, the Cooperative has maintained a long-standing agreement called MIX (Metropolitan Interlibrary Exchange) with Multnomah, Clackamas and Hood River counties, plus the Fort Vancouver Regional Library System and Camas Public Library in Washington, to allow free direct loans to residents of all jurisdictions. Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties reimburse each other annually for the net imbalance of loans at the rate of \$1.00 per loan, and Washington and Clackamas pay Multnomah an additional \$60,000 per year for patron usage of Multnomah's

*See Cooperative page 6*

*"Washington County Cooperative Library Services exists as an agency of county government to coordinate, contract for and/or provide a full range of library and information services to all residents of the county. Libraries in Washington County work together to share resources and information in a spirit of cooperation which goes beyond local boundaries in order to provide excellent countywide library service."*

MISSION STATEMENT,  
WASHINGTON COUNTY COOPERATIVE  
LIBRARY SERVICES

---

## Corporate Partnerships *(continued from page )*

### 4. FOCUS YOUR EFFORTS.

Just like relationships, it's tempting to want to throw in the towel if you are unsuccessful at first. It takes work to make them work. I don't like asking for money from strangers. It's not fun. I would much rather cultivate a friend so that the asks can eventually come down to a quick e-mail or phone message. When a relationship is established, it's easy to find support. The only way to do that is focus on a handful of good prospects. Don't paper the city with proposals to people you don't know, unless you need some prizes for a Summer Reading program. Target the likeliest funding sources and cultivate their support.

Oftentimes, what you thought was a solid idea for funding morphs into something the corporation favors. Caution: don't be transfixed by the lure of money. Is this really what you want the money to go for? Does it fit your organizational objectives? Or is there some way of making the library and funding source happy by compromising? Perhaps not a full-fledged, door-to-door outreach program, but maybe a published resource guide and web page?

### 5. DO WHAT YOU SAY.

So the money is in hand. You can relax. Right? Sorry, again. The key to establishing a good reputation in the corporate giving world is follow-through. Do what you say you were going to do. If the corporate logo was going on the program's T-shirts, make sure

## Cooperative *(continued from page )*

reference collections. In FY1997-98 MIX libraries made nearly 1.3 million direct loans. Washington County residents borrowed 306,544 items at other counties, and our participation in the MIX program will cost the Cooperative \$81,504 this year. At 27 cents per loan, that is a very cost-effective extension of our services.

Assuring Excellence: The County defines library service levels through our contract with city and non-profit associations. The current contract's formula for distributing funds is based primarily on reimbursement for circulating materials, paying for service provided. While circulation may not sum up the total worth of a library, over the years we have found that in addition to being an easy and objective unit of measure, it tends to parallel other levels of a library's service. If you have knowledgeable staff that provides good customer service and your collection meets the needs of the local community, your library will circulate more books. Just like department stores, people return to places that have good products and good service.

In 1993 we added a reference component to the formula. Libraries received an amount of money adequate to maintain a current basic reference collection. The goal was to assure that even the smallest library could provide basic reference service and

it is there and send them a few as tokens of appreciation. If you were going to buy three computers, show them photos or give them a tour of your new center. Have them meet with some of the participants. Up to this point, I have talked about serving corporate needs. Don't underestimate the power of your programs. Let them sit in on a story hour for preschoolers rapt with attention over the telling of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Have them meet one of your most inspired volunteers in the *Homework Helper* program. Emotion is good. Appeal to their hearts as well as their brains.

### 6. YOU CAN NEVER, EVER SAY THANK YOU ENOUGH.

Find different ways. Report back on the success during the funding period, offering highlights. Have volunteers or participants write letters of thanks. Give them a certificate of appreciation or plaque they can frame. When we re-opened for Sundays at Central, we had a thank you brunch (with donated food) for Starbucks, Tektronix, and Nordstrom. Nothing is as powerful for givers as to be thanked by their own employees for making a gift.

You may find that developing a corporate partnership is easier than I have outlined here. You would be lucky if that were the case. But if you follow these guidelines, you'll be in a better position to realize the kind of partnership that keeps on giving. **Q**

that larger libraries could enhance their reference collections. In 1996 we added a third component as an incentive to increase library access. Libraries received additional funding equivalent to .25 or .50 of an average library assistant's salary to meet OLA standards of Adequate or Excellent for hours open to the public. (The amounts were enough to staff a building for the additional number of hours.) Countywide we have less than half the square footage recommended by OLA, so to make the best use of these crowded facilities, we created this incentive to keep the buildings open longer hours. It worked. All libraries met at least the Adequate standard for their respective service populations, and beginning this month there are now seven libraries open seven days per week.

In the future we'll be looking at ways for the reimbursement formula to measure better collection value, i.e. reward libraries for investing in the quality of their collections, especially items that are expensive or non-circulating like reference materials and local databases. We've also discussed using the Reference Grant funds as a pool to be used for subscriptions to shared electronic databases, rather than distributing it in small amounts to libraries. In the last 24 years we have matured from providing basic service to delivering a full range of services for a diverse and growing community. **Q**