

July 2014

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Recommended Citation

Heffner, J. (2014). "Who Me?" I thought, when my director asked me to write and article for OLA Quarterly. *OLA Quarterly*, 6(1), 14-16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1546>

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

“Who, Me?” I thought, when my director asked me to write an article for the OLA Quarterly

by Jill Heffner
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“Who, Me?” That was the reaction I had three years ago when my new director handed me the *Ready-to-Read* grant application. I had never written a grant before, but I knew that it was terribly hard and terribly involved. Why, I knew people who had taken workshops on how to write grants! And my friends in other libraries were always busy and harried and frustrated from writing grants. Writing grants was a difficult thing to do. And now my new director was asking me to apply for the *Ready-to-Read* grant. Oh no! “Okay,” I told my director, “but I may need some help; I’ve never done this before.”

She handed me the grant application.

Oh wow, then I did feel slightly silly—this application was EASY! Fill-in-the-blanks. I could do that. I had been filling in the blanks for years, and I was good at it. I LOVED filling in the blanks!

Name of applicant. Address of applicant. Contact person. Phone number. No problem so far. I had this under control.

Choosing books during the Children’s Outreach program at The Ridge.



Purpose of the *Ready-to-Read* grant. Okay. This might be a little tricky. But, wait! I had an idea! I knew what I wanted money for. It had been a thought in my head for a long time. I don’t know where it had come from—reading professional journals or listening to other librarians at conferences and workshops, or just seeing a need in my community—but I knew what I wanted to do. There was no question in my mind.

Our community, Lincoln City, is rather unique in our geography. As most of you know, our main street is Highway 101 and it runs for about seven miles. All business and government is located on the highway. Our library sits next to the highway, which on a busy, sunny day can see over 10,000 vehicles go by. This is not a community where the kids can walk or ride their bikes or skateboard to the library—or anywhere! So how do kids get to the library? Their parents have to drive them here. What if parents can’t, for one reason or another, bring their kids to the library? Well, too bad. Okay, so if the kids can’t come to the library, maybe we can go to the kids.

The previous year I had been going with the children’s program coordinator from Parks and Rec to a low income housing complex in the Taft area of town, about five miles from the library. I would do story time and Norma Jean would do crafts. We had chosen this particular housing complex, called The Ridge, because it was the only one that had a community room.

Now my idea was to do a kids’ outreach at The Ridge. Maybe I could take books up there one day a week after school for kids and parents of pre-schoolers to check out. But I was hesitant to take “real” library books there as the population was transient and there wasn’t much accountability that I could see. I was afraid I’d lose too many library books. But what if I had an outreach collection, just for that purpose? What if I had a lot of inexpensive paperbacks that wouldn’t be too badly missed if they were lost?

And so the idea of a Children’s Outreach program was born, and here was a grant that would buy those books.

Jill Heffner shares books with kids from The Ridge.



Purpose of the *Ready-to-Read* grant. Service or program. Target Audience. Not a problem now; I knew what I wanted to do with this grant money, I just had to fill in the blanks.

Measurable Activities. That was easy.

1. Provide outreach services.
2. Establish a lending library.

Proposed budget. That was easy too, as the *Ready-to-Read* grant allocates funds to each library based on a per capita calculation of children served. I would ask for all that I was allowed.

And that was pretty much it. There was some other financial and demographic information that I needed, but I got it from the library director and the city's financial officer. The director signed the grant application. Then the city manager signed it. I mailed it in. And there, it was done. I had "written" a grant!

Writing the *Ready-to-Read* grant was easy, receiving the funds was easier, and spending the money was the easiest of all. Imagine having "lots of money" to spend on children's and young adult books—it was like sitting down to a feast and indulging yourself to your heart's content! I bought paperback copies of all kinds of books: fiction and non-fiction; picture books; classics; young adult reluctant readers; easy readers. It was really fun!

Then came the hard part—going to The Ridge every Wednesday after school, week after week, month after month, and now, year after year. It was difficult at first. The Ridge has a program director (I've gone through three of them now). But when I started this outreach program, Laura was the Program Director. She was trying very hard to have programs after school and not be used as a baby-sitting service. It was not easy. The kids, who ranged from age six through thirteen, hung out at the community room. Some of them had no place else to go. Several cold, rainy days I've heard young grade school kids ask if they could stay there because they were locked out of their apartments until "Mom comes home."

The end of another successful library day at The Ridge.




The kids that first year were unruly, sometimes rude, and very hyperactive. One time there was a screaming and yelling scene between one of the mothers of a teenage girl and the aunt and grandmother of two other teens. The altercation spilled into the community room where the little kids and I were reading. I was appalled and surprised at such a scene. Laura managed to shoo the adults back outside, but what really shocked me was that while this was going on, none of the kids looked up or paid any attention. Were they just used to such occurrences, or were they so really engrossed in their reading? Well, of course, I'd like to think it was the latter. Laura tried everything she could—talking to the parents, writing contracts with the kids. It was not pleasant. Wednesday afternoons I would often beg my co-workers to please just shoot me in the foot so I wouldn't have to go to The Ridge.

The premise of this outreach was to sign up kids with library cards and let them check out books. As the program refined itself, we learned to limit the checkouts to two books at a time. At first the kids were running in, checking out books, leaving, running back in, leaving—so again, we refined the program and requested that they either check out books and leave, or stay and read. Soon, they were staying and reading. Sometimes Laura or I would read to them, sometimes they would read to each other, and sometimes they would go off into quiet corners and read silently to themselves. Those were the rewarding days. It warmed my heart to see these often hyperactive kids sitting and reading. One mother even told Laura that she had seen her child's reading level improve since the library had been coming to the complex.

Another thing that has kept me going back is a young Hispanic mother who doesn't speak English, but who comes to see me every other Wednesday to get books for her two preschoolers. Mrs. Reyes is very shy. I started out taking bilingual picture books to her, but soon she also began to take one or maybe two English picture books. I found out that she had an older boy who likes animals, so I began taking non-fiction books to her for "el nino." Now I also take adult Spanish books to her and she is so happy to have books to read in her own language. The smile on her face makes it all worthwhile to me. I also took Spanish books to the last program director who did not speak much English either. He, too, was thrilled to have books in his primary language. He thought I was wonderful, but, unfortunately, he was only there for about six weeks. Another person who thinks I'm wonderful is the mother of a teenaged, mentally handicapped son. Each week I bring easy readers for Sean, and they are both excited to have new books to read. Another teen likes to check out books on signing; we try to sign to each other (he's teaching me.)

When I am between program directors, the managers open up the community room for me and I conduct the program alone (which, actually, works really well.) Recently, the directors were not there to unlock the


door, but while I sat in the library van and waited for them to return, the kids came flocking up to get their new library books. I ended up just opening the side door of the van and checking out books right there on the sidewalk. Fortunately, it was one of those rare rain-free days on the coast. The kids were so excited to check out library books. The kids and I now have a good rapport, and there are no longer any behavior problems. Sometimes the teenage girls check out books

and *TEEN* magazines and leave; other times they stay and we take turns reading to each other. When it's cold and raining, the ones who are locked out of their homes stay and read quietly. The Ridge has become a pleasant place to spend a Wednesday afternoon, and I look forward to it now. And to think it all began with a fill-in-the-blank *Ready-to-Read* grant! 

National Connections

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And what did new readers gain? Positive reading and discussion experiences, books to keep and share with family or friends, an introduction to the library and what it can provide, an excitement about education that has some of them searching out new educational opportunities, and the pleasure of reading and the humanities as lifelong joys. Participants, when asked in the final evaluations what they would choose if they could add one thing to the program, replied: to have more people come, to have more time for discussions, to have more sessions... and to have it not end!

If you would like more information on *National Connections* or would be interested in continuing to share ideas, experiences, successes and failures about serving the Hispanic community with other Oregon libraries please contact me at the McMinnville Public Library at (503) 435-5551 or by email at goldmad@ci.mcminnville.or.us. 

Thinking Locally

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A Resource Shelf

The following items are readily available in many large library reference sections or through inter-library loan for short periods of time for in-library use only. If you can manage the cost, I would recommend acquiring those texts marked with an *. I have included a few online resources to get your research started as well.

Cyberlibrary: *Grants and Fundraising*. [http://www.lsc.ccc.fl.us/library/cygra.htm/](http://www.lsc.ccc.fl.us/library/cygra.htm)

The Foundation Center, <http://www.fdncenter.org/>

Hall, Mary, *Getting Funded: a Complete Guide to Proposal Writing, 3rd Edition*,* 0-87678-070-2. Continuing Education Publications, Portland State University.

LibraryLand, *Administration: Grants, Budgeting, Fundraising*, <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/LibraryLand/admin/bud.htm>

Miner, Lynn and Griffith, Jerry, *Proposal Planning and Writing*, 0-89774-726-7. Oryx Press, 1993

1999 Oregon Foundation Databook, McPherson, Craig, Ed., C & D Publishing, Portland, OR 97205, <http://www.foundationdatabook.com>

Winning Grant Proposals, Frost, Gordon, Ed., 0-930807-36-7. Fundraising Institute, Rockville, MD 20852