An eBook Lending Program

Coloma Public Library in Coloma, Michigan

Information 520: Grant Proposal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coloma Public Library located in Coloma, Michigan, proposes the development of an eBook lending program in order to meet the needs of Library patrons. In a time when the digital divide, especially that in rural communities continues to expand, it is imperative for a small rural public library like the Coloma Public Library to find the means in which to bridge this divide. With the recent announcement from Amazon.com that eBooks have now outsold both hardcover and paperbacks, the Coloma Public Library is obligated to provide to our patrons the tools necessary to connect them to learning and knowledge, regardless of the format. This initiative will enhance patrons’ use of technology while ensuring the Library is striving to provide services to all of the community it serves.
SETTING

The Coloma Public Library Community:

The recently completed Coloma Public Library resides on the corner property of Center and Coloma Road in downtown Coloma, Michigan. It is an 18,200 square foot structure designed in a linear fashion with high vaulted ceilings and windows to bring in a flood of natural light. For residing in a small town with a population of only 1,595, the Coloma Public Library is a spacious structure with a children’s area as well as an adult reading zone with a brick fireplace that is two stories high. The Coloma Public Library is an institutional member of the MLA, the Michigan Library Consortium and the Southwest Michigan Library Cooperative. The library hosts year-round programs designed to both challenge and entertain the community such as weekly book clubs and children story hours, as well as the popular yearly book sale held the weekend of the Coloma Glad Peach Festival in August. While the population of Coloma, Michigan, according to the 2000 census information is only 1,595, the library’s legal service area also includes the Coloma Charter Township, as well as contractual agreements with Hagar Township and Bainbridge Township, with a combined service population of roughly 12,835. The community surrounding Coloma, Michigan is one of scenic beaches, sprawling vineyards, and an abundance of fruit groves. Nearby towns include Saint Joseph and South Haven, Michigan, both known as hubs of shopping, dining, and beautiful beach front property.
Library Mission and Programs:

The mission statement of the Coloma Public Library reflects the goals and responsibilities of our staff:

"The mission of the Coloma Public Library is to provide access to informational, educational, cultural and recreational library materials and services in a variety of formats and technologies; to be responsive to the public library needs of the community; and to uphold the public's freedom of access to information."

The library's programs and events consistently attract large audiences from Coloma and the surrounding communities. Besides weekly book clubs, the library also hosts computer classes, family literacy activities, as well as a popular summer reading club for students. Our annual book sale is held on the Saturday of the Glad Peach Festival, which draws thousands of visitors to downtown Coloma for a weekend of food, music, art, and festivities.

Library Facilities:

The Coloma Public Library was founded in 1963 and originally held in a back room of the Coloma City Hall. During the years the library took up residence in two different locations before moving into its current home on the corner of Center and Coloma
Roads on land donated by a prominent family in town. Considerable fund-raising efforts by residents as well as tourists provided for the completion of construction. The new and spacious 18,200 square foot facility provides for comfortable reading areas overlooking the park and masonry fireplace, a large community room, a children’s area with a dedicated program room and a story-telling tree, new and improve staff and storage areas, a drive-up book drop, and public computer stations.

**Library Staff:**
The Coloma Public Library staff consists of four full time and three part-time staff. The Library Director and Assistant Director both have LIS degrees while the remaining two full time staff, who serve as Library Assistants, have bachelor degrees. One of the Library Assistants is responsible for interlibrary loan, overdue materials, book club, and desk duties as needed, while the other organizes programming, other projects as needed, and desk duties. Out of the part-time employees, one is a college student and serves as an additional Library Assistant responsible for desk duty and cataloging the magazines, while the other two are student workers whose primary duties are to put away books and help at the desk when needed. The library’s Board of Trustees includes prominent members of the community.

**Library Collection:**
The collection at the Coloma Public Library is maintained through both donations from the community and purchases based on requests from the community. In a small-town
public library, such as the Coloma Public Library, a majority of the budget is spent on the purchase of popular fiction, popular non-fiction, and non-fiction materials on relevant topics such as job-searching, healthcare, and farming, as opposed to academic journals and reference materials. The library subscribes to both Alliance Plus and Alliance A/V, and the Michigan e-Library which are used to catalog records. Besides being used for cataloging, the Michigan e-Library is available to patrons to search, free of charge, and is accessible while in the Library or outside of the Library with a Michigan ID/Driver’s license. At this time, the Michigan e-Library is the only access to digital collections available to the patrons of the Coloma Public Library.

STATEMENT OF NEED

On January 27, 2011, Amazon.com announced that fourth quarter sales for 2010 indicated that Kindle books, or eBooks, had outsold traditional paperback books. According to Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon.com, "Kindle books have now overtaken paperback books as the most popular format on Amazon.com." ("Amazon,” 2011). This announcement was made only six months after Amazon.com had announced that the Kindle books had outsold hardcover books. This trend towards digital books is one that cannot be disputed or ignored. The recent surge in digital books is all the more evident by ProQuest’s acquisition of ebrary, which “hosts more than
273,000 digital books, handbooks, reports, maps, journals and other content from about 500 publishers that it offers to libraries and other institutions under a variety of services and platforms,“ and by JSTOR’s recent announcement that they are beginning their own e-book program called “Books at JSTOR” (“Proquest,” 2011, “Jstor,” 2011). A new generation of eReaders such as the Kindle and Nook have caused a greater demand for eBooks, and “as books shift to electronic formats, public libraries need to re-think collection development” (Chief Officers and State Library Agencies [COSLA], 2010).

In June 2010, The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) eReader Taskforce published a report on the eBook and its important future in public libraries. The committee summarized that “as electronic books grow within the public consciousness and more devices and economic models arise to vend them, public libraries are increasingly concerned about how it will affect their core audience” (COSLA, 2010). The committee interviewed ten library managers and staff from all types of public libraries, and covered topics such as eBook access, delivery, and devices. The committee concluded that most participants are in need of “finding a low cost way to lend devices through the library or let people try them out [and] improving the ease of use for discovering and getting library eBooks” (COSLA, 2010). The committee argued that public libraries should look to consortia to help with the purchasing of eBooks and to newer technologies such as the Internet Archive’s Book Server “as a way for library users to more easily discover the services that are available” (COSLA, 2010). The committee further argued that “as traditional printed book lending shifts more and
more to downloadable eBooks, libraries should take advantage of the opportunity to repurpose their space and experiment with new services” (COSLA, 2010).

According to the *Funding and Priorities: the Library Resource Guide Benchmark Study on 2011 Library Spending Plans*, which was produced by Unisphere Research and sponsored by ProQuest, patron requests for eBooks have increased by 41% over the past year, yet only 3% of the respondents’ content acquisitions budgets have been devoted to the purchase of eBooks. The COSLA report suggests that public libraries should look to cooperative eBook purchasing and consortium to offset funding issues. Small public libraries across the United States are looking to consortiums and other online services in order to add eBooks to their collection. As a rural small public library, the Coloma Public Library cannot afford to simply ignore the evolution of eBooks and digital technologies, and should look to our consortia, the Michigan Library Consortium, to aid us in the development of an eBook collection. One such example that could be looked to is the Des Plaines Valley Public Library in Illinois, which has recently teamed up with OverDrive to allow patrons with eReaders to check out eBooks (Antinori, 2011). The OverDrive database allows patrons to download eBooks to a variety of devices, including iPhones and iPads, or the digital books can be downloaded to a PC as a pdf file. The Des Plaines Valley Public Library allows patrons to ‘check out’ three eBooks at a time for a varied rental period in which the books are automatically returned after the period is over (Antinori, 2011). This cutting edge technology is one that public libraries must embrace as “e-book collections offer librarians an opportunity to complement
their existing borrowing models and provide a ‘cutting edge’ service. They provide an opportunity for librarians to experiment with new formats and further develop their electronic resources” (McKnight & Dearnley, 2003). As a library with very little access to electronic resources it is important for the Coloma Public Library to find new formats in which to develop their collection, and with both the rise and continuing presence of the eBook, this is one technology that would be worth experimenting in.

A recent article in the New York Times “Digital Age Is Slow to Arrive in Rural America,” argued that “as the world embraces its digital age — two billion people now use the Internet regularly — the line delineating two Americas has become more broadly drawn,” even while President Obama is emphasizing the digital expansion by meeting with such individuals as Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, and Carol Bartz, president and CEO of Yahoo (Severson, 2011). This digital divide has become even more important to address for small public libraries in rural comminutes, such as the Coloma Public Library, where patrons are looking for access to these digital services, such as eBooks, and to date, the library has been unable to provide. In fact, the COSLA report found that “most of our respondents felt eBooks will increasingly attract or keep library patrons who like this format or desire convenience. The Internet, audiobooks—all have driven traffic to libraries, despite worries they would do just the opposite. Respondents reported that patrons will often get a reader and immediately run to the library to try filling it with eBooks” (COSLA, 2010). Large or small, public libraries such as the Coloma Public Library, must strive to meet the growing needs of the community, and “with
predictions that the eBook will account for over 50% of purchases worldwide within 10 years, it is critical for libraries to implement solutions and provide relevant information to the whole community” (Duncan, 2010). In order to survive, we must maintain relevance in an ever changing digital environment.

**PROPOSED PROGRAM**

"Introducing e-book collections offers a range of potential benefits to public libraries... raising the public library profile as a leading edge service provider and offering collections which are available on 24-hour access to those who have Internet connections at home.”

(Dearnley, McKnight, & Morris, 2004).

**Overview and Goals:**

The Coloma Public Library proposes to encourage technology to assure free and open access to information through the establishment of an eBook lending program through the Midwest Collaborative for Library Services. With recent developments in computer technology, online resources, and an increased use of eReaders in the community the Coloma Public Library serves, it has become necessary for the Library to expand its collection in order to fulfill its mission to meet the needs of its user population. As technology evolves it is imperative to uphold the values of the profession by both encouraging these technologies as a means to connect users with knowledge and
learning and by ensuring that these technologies play to the strengths of the profession. According to Janes (2002), these “strengths include an emphasis on lifelong literacy and education; a focus on selection and quality of information and helping users find the best of what they seek; organization for access; and special concern for young people and the development of their critical information skills” (p. 50). The goal of the eBook lending program will be just that – to ensure that the Library patrons are provided with the greatest means for lifelong literacy and education through the development of a meaningful and well rounded collection and to strengthen the importance of the Library and its services to the community by meeting their needs. “Public libraries can work together to craft research that reveals how and why people blend print and electronic formats to make a stronger case for the library as a critical part of that formula” (COSLA, 2010).

**Required Resources:**

Due to the nature of the small staff of the Coloma Public Library and the limited financial resources, it will be necessary to utilize the consortia of Midwest Collaborative for Library Services, which has a digital collection of eBooks and download center that is powered by Overdrive, which will create a custom website to match the Coloma Public Library’s site. Collection acquisition staff for the Coloma Public Library will then select eBooks from a list of 300,000 from over a hundred different publishers. EBook selections will be based on patron requests and community reading trends towards popular fiction and nonfiction. Patrons will be able to browse the website and check-out
up to three digital books with a valid Coloma Public Library card. Patrons will then be able to download the selection to a desktop or laptop at home or at the library, and can read the materials on their computer or transfer the selections to one of the supported devices. “Library users can borrow the books for three weeks, after which they disappear from their reading devices and become available to other borrowers” (Barber, 2011).

With the implementation of new technology such as eBooks into the Coloma Public Library, the most important resource the Library will be able to provide to our patrons will be enthusiastic customer service. In order to ensure that the staff is adequately prepared to answer questions on the eBook lending program, it will be vital to appropriately train the staff. “One of the most important challenges when implementing any new service or collection, especially one as fraught as e-books with technical and cultural issues, is creating an enthusiastic staff base...if the staff are not promoting the service, explicitly and implicitly, then users will perhaps be less inclined to use it” (Dearnley, McKnight, & Morris, 2004). Training for staff will include the history and evolution of the eBook and eReader, its impact on public libraries and their communities, and both the hardware and software necessary.
**Proposed Implementation Schedule:**

The development of the Coloma Public Library eBook lending program will take place over a period of eight months. After the program is implemented, Library staff will evaluate the program after six months of use to determine if it is meeting the goals of the program and the needs of the user community.

**Phase One: Planning and Procurement**

The project will begin in June by surveying the community (and especially students who are out of school and taking part in our Summer Reading Program) of their eBook needs, for example how many members of the service population have some form of eReader and what type of eBooks would be most popular. Initial surveying has already taken place in the form of conversations with Library patrons but additional surveying must be completed for the librarians in charge of collection purchasing to determine the amount of eBooks that should be purchased in the initial program. It must also be determined which model the Coloma Public Library will purchase for their eBook lending program. The MCLS offers six models: shared collections, individual collection, static collections, growing collection, subscription model, and purchase model. Once a determination has been made on which model will be used, the librarian in charge will contact the MCLS to establish the subscription mode by the end of August.
Thanks to the Coloma Public Library’s institutional membership in the Michigan Library Consortium and the Southwest Michigan Library Cooperative, costs for the various subscription models for eBook lending would be greatly reduced. Since the Library will not be supplying its own eReader devices, the bulk of the budget will be directed towards membership costs for the MCLS. The size of the Coloma Public Library’s staff ensures training costs will be at a minimal or non-existent, and the small size of the town guarantees small marketing costs.

**Phase Two: Training and Marketing**

After securing the MCLS subscription membership, Library staff will begin meeting weekly in September in order to both become familiar with eBooks and the MCLS through training conducted by the Library Director, but also to devise ways in which to best market this new Library service. It will be necessary to stress that “marketing new e-book collections should emphasize their supplementary benefits and avoid user reaching conclusions that eBooks are set to supplant p[rint] book collections” (Dearnley, McKnight, & Morris, 2004). It will be important for the Coloma Public Library to ensure patrons that the lending of eBooks will not be replacing traditional circulation, especially in a rural town where the digital divide has continued to exist. However, it will also be important for the Coloma Public Library to showcase its ability to remain vital in a technology driven world. “Seeing the library as a partner in eBooks and reading devices is good advertising for the library. Many people may not think of the library as a place that is tech-savvy or even interested in new devices and innovations” (COSLA, 2010).
Once the Coloma Public Library eBook website has been established and the selected eBooks are available to checkout near the end of October, we will begin advertising the new eBook lending program with the community, through the use of town meetings, the local newspaper, the Halloween parade, and the Coloma Public Library website. Trained librarians and staff will also begin conducting small classes or one-on-one sessions with Library patrons interested in checking-out the new eBooks. The eBook lending program will be fully functional in time for the Christmas break.

**Phase Three: Evaluations**

The Coloma Public Library anticipates enthusiastic response to the new eBook lending program, especially among younger patrons who have already requested the use of eBooks.

The following are the anticipated results of the program:

- By October all of the Coloma Public Library staff will be trained on the eBook lending program and ready to answer patron questions on how the program works
- By November the new eBook lending program will be marketed to the user community and classes will be extended to those interested
- By January the eBook lending program will be fully functional and eBooks will be checked-out by Library patrons
• The eBook lending program will be reevaluated in June, after six months of use, to determine if patron use warrants a growing collection model from the MCLS which would allow titles to be added to the Library’s lending program

• The number of visitors to the Coloma Public Library eBook website is expected to increase by 30% after the first six months of use due to staff marketing and enthusiasm for the new program

*Proposed Budget:*

Since no additional staff will be brought in to complete the project, staff salary is not included in the proposed budget.

*Equipment*
Membership to MCLS Digital Books $5000

*Training Materials*
Office Supplies $100

*Marketing*
Printing Supplies $200
Mailing Costs $100

*Program Total* $5400
CONCLUSION

According to the 2010 COSLA report “most respondents believe libraries have an obligation to provide all emerging information formats, if possible. Some stated that it is just as dangerous to cease being relevant to average citizens who can easily look elsewhere for information and entertainment. Haves and have-nots are connected in their needs, with the library hanging in the balance” (COSLA, 2010). Finding ways in which to stay relevant in a digital environment while continuing to meet and exceed patron needs is the ultimate goal of the Coloma Public Library’s proposed eBook lending program as we continue to strive to fulfill our mission to be responsive to the public library needs of the small community of Coloma, Michigan.

Appendix materials

A. Inventory of Coloma Public Library Collection
B. Invoice estimates from MCLS for Digital Books
C. Staff list
D. Library’s annual report


