



Kentucky Sister Library Project

Libraries Helping Libraries

A Manual for the Kentucky Sister Library Project

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Table of Contents:

1) What is the Sister Library Project?	Page 2
2) What Types of Activities are Involved?	Page 3
3) How Does the Project Work?	Page 3
4) What are the Benefits of Participating?	Page 4
5) Guidelines for a Successful Project	Page 5
6) How to Get Started?	Page 6
7) Questions and Answers	Page 6 - 7
8) Summary	Page 8

1) What is the Sister Library Project?

Introduction

Libraries in the rural parts of Kentucky have historically been poorly funded, and, indeed, some areas have gone for many years without library services. In other areas of the state, some library systems have enough resources that would enable them to form partnerships (sister libraries) with those lacking in resources. Through this collaboration, libraries with unmet needs will have access to resources that will assist them in achieving their goals.

Why do we need such a project?

Library services have traditionally been slim to non-existent in some Kentucky counties, particularly in the most rural areas. Funding is being cut at libraries across the nation; rural counties in Kentucky are generally already underfunded. As a result, some libraries are only able to offer the bare minimum of services to their patrons. Some libraries are not able to employ professional level staff due to their budgets. In some cases, existing staff members do not have the time or the expertise to carry out projects or programs that would improve services to patrons. In the current economic climate, libraries with resources have an opportunity, and, perhaps, an obligation, to fill a greater need in the state of Kentucky.

Background

- Carter County Public Library became an official library in 2010; one of the most recent in Kentucky. With a shoestring budget and three employees, resources were limited.
- In March 2010, the Kenton County Public Library and the Carter County Public Library embarked upon a pilot sister library partnership, which currently continues.
- The two library systems have benefitted from the collaborative effort, with staff members sharing resources, including expertise. This initial project has served as a real-life primer into what works successfully, as well as what does not.



How is this different from other sister library endeavors?

- Previous models have historically involved partnerships with libraries in other countries. The activities centered around mostly symbolic endeavors, such as pen pal correspondence, creating displays and bulletin boards, exchanging photos, and similar efforts.
- This new model pairs libraries from the *same state* with one another. Libraries with more resources pair with those in need. Meaningful and substantive projects are identified and carried out. Supportive, mentoring-type relationships are fostered between employees.

2) What Types of Activities are Involved?

- The answer to this question depends on the needs and resources of the libraries—some possibilities include:
 - i. Collection development
 - ii. Weeding
 - iii. Programming
 - iv. Web site development
 - v. Staff exchanges
 - vi. Grant writing
 - vii. Policy development

These are just a few options. The goal is to strengthen libraries, so any activity that falls into that category is worth considering.

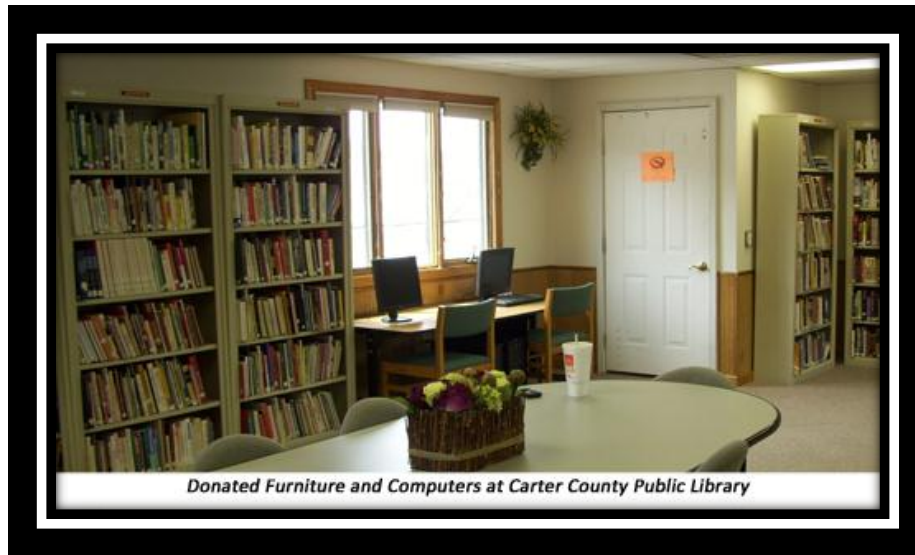
3) How Does the Project Work?

- Representatives from mentoring (or, informally, “big sister”) and mentoree libraries hold an initial meeting, usually at the mentoree library. Projects and activities can take shape in whatever way suits the participating libraries the best. However, as a guideline, here is a suggested course of action:
 - i. An initial list of needs (of the mentoree library) is drawn up. (Examples of needs: to develop a series of programs for adults; to write a policy manual for circulation procedures; to develop a fund-raising program; to develop a local history or genealogy collection; etc.)
 - ii. The mentor library representatives then review the needs and determine which items their library can help with.

- iii. Goals and objectives, with timeframes, are then drafted and agreed upon for the first year of the project.
 - iv. Projects are then implemented. Goals and objectives are met by the specified deadlines.
- After the year-long endeavor is finished, the two participating libraries will assess the success of the program.
 - If both libraries agree, goals and objectives then can be set for the second year. The process would then continue as it did during the first year.

4) What are the Benefits of Participating?

- Patrons in some rural counties will benefit from the enhanced library services that would result from such a program.
- Opportunity for the mentoring library to further staff development at both libraries by allowing qualified staff to assist with collection development; reference duties; programming; policy development; web site development; etc., at a different library system.
- Opportunity to learn about different regions, communities, and patron bases.
- Opportunity for the mentoree library to benefit from the provision of professional staff members to consult with its current staff. Mentoring staff would visit in person and also be available via email or phone.
- Opportunities for mentoring libraries to share materials and equipment (donated books; computer equipment; etc.). As an example, the Kenton County Public Library has donated used equipment to the Carter County Public Library in Kentucky.
- Opportunities among library staff members to connect – getting to know fellow library workers across the state – builds a better sense of library community.
- Working with a sister library over an extended time period gives both libraries the chance to develop a long term, solid working relationship, built on experience and trust.
- Builds good will between institutions.



5) Guidelines for a Successful Project

- Secure the support of both libraries' boards, directors, and management.
 - i. Consider asking for time on the agenda at a board meeting to garner support. Get to know your sister library's board members.
- Identify the strengths and needs of both libraries.
- Communicate frequently with all involved (at both libraries).
 - ii. Keep everyone in the loop
 - iii. Plan ahead
 - iv. Brainstorm with others in order to produce the best ideas
- Be flexible.
 - i. Expect the unexpected. Anything can happen, and often does.
 - ii. Empower one or two employees to get things done. This is critical in order for projects to move quickly and smoothly. Adaptability is a key trait for the person responsible for implementing the project's tasks to have.
- Be fearless (yet humble).
 - i. Take risks
 - ii. Think outside the box
 - iii. Display your humility; it will serve both sides well. All library employees can learn from one another, no matter how big or small their organizations.
- Funding – Assistance from Friends' Group.
 - i. Friends' groups are a possible resource for funding costs associated with the projects, such as travel expenses, meals, etc.
- Consider geographical distance.
 - i. A maximum of two hours travel time (each way) is a good rule of thumb
 - ii. Transporting books or other donated materials and supplies becomes increasingly difficult the greater the distance.

- iii. Staff exchanges are easier to arrange if travel time is minimized.



6) How to Get Started?

- Contact April Ritchie, coordinator for the Kentucky Sister Library Project, at 859-962-4000 (extension 4121); april.ritchie@kentonlibrary.org
- Visit the Kentucky Public Library Association web site for additional information: <http://kpla.org>

7) Questions and Answers

➤ *How will my library benefit from this project?*

The benefits are numerous! From professional development opportunities to strengthening libraries statewide, there are many reasons to get involved. Please see page five, "What are the Benefits of Participating?" for a more comprehensive list.

➤ *What sorts of resources can be shared with our sister library?*

- i. Books and other materials that have been weeded
- ii. Donated materials not needed by your library's Friends group
- iii. Staff time
- iv. Staff expertise
- v. Furniture no longer needed
- vi. Computers no longer needed

➤ *Can we share databases, electronic resources, and library cards?*

Libraries must be careful not to violate the terms of their contracts with vendors of databases or other electronic resources. Issuing library cards to residents outside of a library's district may allow them to access ebooks, music downloads, and other resources. Caution must be exercised to ensure your library is compliant with

vendor stipulations. Additionally, your library's first priority must be to serve cardholders in your own district. Ensuring that your own library's cardholders are not competing for resources with users in another geographical area is essential to the integrity of the project.

On occasion, it may be appropriate to issue a few of your library's cards to your sister library's staff members. This is to ensure that they may access your library's electronic databases when they do not have the materials to answer a patron's question. Some libraries in the state do not have the funds to purchase reference databases.

➤ *How many staff members will I need to devote to this project?*

The number of staff members required depends on the level of involvement on the part of your library and the projects you have chosen. The number of staff members may fluctuate throughout the year, depending on the activities related to the projects. Designating one person to be the overall project coordinator is a good idea, but beyond that, the number of employees you devote to the endeavor is discretionary.

➤ *Should our library's resources be used to serve the patrons in our own county, instead of the patrons in a different county?*

Certainly a library's resources should be used to best serve the cardholders in their own district. The Sister Library Project does not aim to add a competitive element to the scarce library resources in the state, but rather, it aims to strengthen all Kentucky libraries by building an overall stronger system. A solid foundation of libraries throughout the state will help ensure that we can provide the services and materials needed by all residents. When deciding upon projects and activities, it is wise to choose ones that do not put a strain on the resources needed to serve the communities of each library. For example, when planning a meeting between two library systems, it may be easier for the "big sister" library representatives to do the traveling, in order to ensure that the smaller library has key personnel on hand throughout the day to serve their patrons.

➤ *Can any symbolic gestures be incorporated into the project?*

Of course! Be creative and show your support for your sister library. For example, mutual support for milestone events is key to a successful project. Consider attending your sister library's major events, such as fundraisers, grand openings, important programs, etc.



Summary

Kentucky libraries have an opportunity with this Sister Library Program to share resources, especially staff expertise, via a structured, goal-oriented approach. Libraries with unmet needs would have a unique avenue open to them for achieving plans that otherwise may fall by the wayside. As a result, those libraries would progress towards their end goal of better public service. After all, that is the end goal of *all* public libraries. The outcomes could make a real difference in the lives of community members across the state.