

**Fort Belknap College Library**

**IMLS Enhancement Grant**

**“Meeting Community Needs through Expanded Outreach Services”**

**ABSTRACT**

This project has been developed to address the goals of the Fort Belknap College Library (FBCL), the educational needs of the Fort Belknap community, and the goals of the Library Services and Technologies Act (LSTA). The overall goal of the project is to enhance the library's outreach programs and services in order to more effectively meet identified community needs and increase library use. The project will achieve this goal over a two-year period by: (1) increasing the variety of outreach opportunities offered by the library, (2) increasing the diversity and availability of online information resources, and (3) expanding library holdings on topics of local interest, particularly Native American history, culture and literature. In order to accomplish these objectives, library staff will carry out a number of project activities, including: holding library sponsored Tribal Community Circles, expanding diversity of subscriptions to online databases, and increasing library holdings on topics of local interest. As a result of these activities, the library's outreach programs and services will address identified educational needs and interests among both children and adults in the Fort Belknap community, while meeting the library's goals of improving access to library resources and increasing community use. The project's success in achieving its goal and objectives will be evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in achieving specific and measurable outcomes related to increases in: library use among community members of all ages, access to the library's online information resources, circulation transactions, and patron satisfaction.

## Application Narrative

### I. Assessment of Need

This proposal is submitted by the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council (FBICC), which serves as the official governing body of the Fort Belknap Indian Community of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. The present reservation was created by an Act of Congress on May 1, 1888 and serves as the home of the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre Tribes. It is located in northcentral Montana and extends across portions of both Blaine County and Phillips County. Roughly rectangular in shape, the reservation is approximately 28 miles wide (east to west) and 40 miles long (north to south), and covers an area of 675,147 acres. See Attachment A for a map of the reservation.

There are over 5,200 enrolled members of Fort Belknap's Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes, 2,959 of whom live on the reservation. Fort Belknap Agency is the primary residential center on the north end of the reservation and also serves as the headquarters of the tribal government. Hays (35 miles south of Fort Belknap Agency) and Lodge Pole (40 miles southeast) are the population centers for the south end of the reservation. Many tribal members also live in rural locations or scattered site housing across the reservation. In addition, approximately 1,000 tribal members live off the reservation in the neighboring communities of Harlem (three miles northwest), Chinook (20 miles west) and Havre (45 miles west).

Economically, Fort Belknap is among the poorest areas in Montana and the United States. According to the 2003 Bureau of Indian Affairs Labor Force Report, the unemployment rate on the reservation is 74%. Census data show that 44.2% of the reservation's families with children under 18 are living below the poverty level. Out of Montana's 56 counties, Blaine County, which contains approximately 90% of the Fort Belknap Reservation, ranks dead last in median household income.

The project described in this proposal will be administered by the Fort Belknap College Library (FBCL). The library facility is located at Fort Belknap Agency and housed in the Red Whip Center, a community center jointly operated by the Fort Belknap Indian Community and Fort Belknap College (FBC). The library was established in 1984 to serve as an information resource center for the entire Fort Belknap community and to support the educational mission of Fort Belknap College. The facility covers an area of 3,000 square feet and has seating capacity for 28 patrons. It contains approximately 10,000 volumes covering a full spectrum of subject areas, from popular fiction to analytical chemistry. Library holdings also include a variety of materials in other formats, including periodicals, newspapers, microform, video, and computer software. Patrons have access to information resources not physically housed at the library through interlibrary loan, computers with Internet access, and online subscription services for reference materials, periodical literature, and databases. Along with two typewriters, the library possesses twelve computers, which were purchased with funds received from previous Basic Library Services and Enhancement Grants provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). All library records have been converted to a computerized catalog and circulation system that is available on the library's computers.

Currently, the library employs one full-time professional librarian, who serves as library director, and one para-professional library assistant. The library's regular hours of operation are from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm, Monday through Thursday, and 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Friday. The library director reports directly to the FBCL Board (library board), a four-person body comprised of one Gros Ventre community representative, one Assiniboine community representative, one FBC faculty member, and one FBC student. The library board provides guidance and direction for the planning, operation and evaluation of all library services.

In 1998, the library board completed a comprehensive self-study review of library services that resulted in the identification of a number of short-term and long-term goals. In 2001, the library board reviewed and revised these goals. Four of the library's updated short-term goals are to: (1) improve and

expand library services available to community members, (2) increase library usage by members of the Fort Belknap Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes, (3) provide expanded library services to the children and young adults of the Fort Belknap Reservation, and (4) increase the availability of specialized materials concerning local and tribal history and affairs to foster interest in the heritage of the Fort Belknap Reservation.

In recent years, library board members have expressed their concerns about the library's effectiveness in meeting the information needs of *all* residents of the Fort Belknap Reservation. Results of a library use questionnaire distributed during June and December of 1998 show very high levels of satisfaction among library users. For example, 91% of the respondents said that the library was easy to use, and 96% reported that the library staff was helpful. However, these numbers reflect only the experiences of those residents who actually visit and use the library. The library's relatively low number of circulation transactions (1,200/year) suggests that a significant portion of the reservation population may not be using the library at all.

In order to increase community use, library staff are making a concerted effort to offer library programs and services that address identified community needs and interests. In 2001, the Fort Belknap Small Business Development Center (SBDC) conducted a community-wide survey to assess the educational needs and interests of community members, FBC students, and school children. Among all survey groups, participants showed high interest in educational programs and learning opportunities that would increase knowledge of, and interest in, Native American culture, specifically Gros Ventre and Assiniboine culture. For example, when college students were asked about their personal interest in a variety of topics for non-credit/personal development workshops, the topics that had the highest level of interest included: Beadwork (46%), Native American Language (42%), Natural Medicine (41%), Quill Work (35%), Native American Sign Language (30%), Tanning Hides (30%), and Native American Cooking (28%). Through increased holdings in Native American culture, history and literature, as well as through outreach programs involving tribal elders, this project will enable the library to remain responsive to these identified community interests.

The project has been designed to address both library goals and community needs, as well as the goals of the Library Services and Technologies Act (LSTA). Specifically, the project addresses the LSTA goals of "expanding services for learning and access to information and educational resources in a variety of formats...for individuals of all ages," "developing library services that provide all users with access to information through local, state, regional, national and international electronic networks," and "targeting library services to help increase access and ability to use information resources for individuals of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, ... individuals with limited functional literacy or information skills...and for underserved urban and rural communities, including children from birth to age 17, from families with incomes below the poverty line."

This project also will address the LSTA goal of enhancing services to those in rural communities living below established Department of Health and Human Services poverty levels. As mentioned earlier, nearly 50% of all families with young children living on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation fall below the poverty level; as such, a library sponsored Tribal Community Circle and community outreach projects described in this proposal will have a significant impact among this LSTA target population.

The overall goal of this project is to enhance the FBCL's outreach programs and services in order to more effectively meet community needs and increase library use. The project will achieve this goal through the successful completion of the following three objectives:

- Increase the variety of outreach opportunities offered by the library through events such as library sponsored Tribal Community Circles and visits by library staff to Hays Community Center;
- Increase the availability of online information resources by expanding and diversifying the library's online database subscriptions; and

- Expand library holdings on topics of local interest, particularly Native American history, culture and literature to accommodate identified community interests and support cultural education programs across the reservation.

By accomplishing these three objectives, FBCL will strengthen its community outreach programs in ways that address identified needs and interests among children and adults in the Fort Belknap community. At the same time, the successful completion of these objectives will allow the library to achieve its goals of improving library services, increasing library usage, providing expanded services to children and families, and fostering knowledge and interest in the cultural heritage of the Fort Belknap Reservation. Finally, project objectives directly promote LSTA goals by increasing the library's linkages with educational and information services, improving access to information through electronic networks, and enhancing the library's programs and services for low-income children and their families.

## II. Project Design and Evaluation Plan

As stated above, the goal of this project is to strengthen the library's outreach programs and services in ways that will address identified community needs and increase library use. The project is designed to achieve this goal over a two year period by (1) increasing the variety of outreach opportunities offered by the library (2) increasing the diversity and availability of online information resources, and (3) expanding library holdings of local interest, particularly Native American history, culture and literature. What follows in the remainder of this section is a description of the approach to be employed in accomplishing these objectives, as well as the specific activities undertaken to implement the project.

The project will be evaluated according to its success in realizing the goal and objectives established in this proposal. Project evaluation will include both formative and summative components, with the successful achievement of the goal and each objective measured in terms of the project's effectiveness in meeting the specific and measurable outcomes presented in this section of the proposal.

Formative evaluation will occur throughout the two-year project period during monthly meetings of the library board. At each meeting, the library director will report on all project activities to date, and board members will have the opportunity to discuss the activities' effectiveness in contributing to the achievement of the project goal and objectives according to the established schedule of completion. This informal project assessment will allow the library board and staff to identify successes and shortcomings in program delivery, develop contingency plans to address unanticipated difficulties, and modify project plans to take advantage of new and unforeseen opportunities. Library board comments and recommendations will be used to inform ongoing project planning and will be included in the director's semi-annual performance and evaluation reports.

Summative evaluation will occur at the conclusion of the project period. At this time, the project director will prepare a comprehensive project performance and evaluation report describing the project's overall effectiveness in meeting its stated goal and objectives. Listed below are the specific activities that will be employed to achieve these objectives, along with the anticipated outcomes that will be used to measure their successful implementation.

### *Objective 1: Increase the variety of outreach opportunities offered by the library*

*Project Design:* Recent outreach efforts have been limited to occasional visits to the Hays Community Center. No funding has been available for these visits making it a strictly volunteer effort. During past visits, several community members have sought assistance from the library staff and have been very appreciative of the service. The FBCL has also hosted an after school reading activity program for approximately three years. The program is for children grades K through 6, providing a safe place for them to spend three afternoons a week reading, learning, and having fun in the library setting.

Through this project, the FBCL staff will schedule semimonthly (twice a month) library sponsored Tribal Community Circles. These will be presented at the FBCL on various days at various times, allowing the greatest number of community members to attend. Programs for the Circles will consist of speakers talking about and demonstrating topics of local interest such as storytelling featuring tribal elders, beadwork, natural medicine, quill work, quilting, tanning hides, Native American cooking, and occasional book discussion series. These, and other, topics will address needs identified by data from the Fort Belknap Reservation-Wide Educational Needs Assessment which indicated interest among both children and adults for learning opportunities that will enhance knowledge of, and interest in, Native American culture, especially those of Fort Belknap's Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes. Facilitators will include tribal elders and other community members who are considered experts in the topic of interest. Participants in 'hands-on' demonstrations such as quill work or beading will be provided with supplies so they may fully take part in the presentation. Book discussion series participants will be provided a copy of the discussion book. Circle discussion and demonstration leaders will be paid an honorarium for their time. Circle times, topics and presenters will be determined through informal discussions with community members as well as formal surveys. Through entertaining and informative gatherings these Circles will promote the FBCL to community members who have not traditionally been library users. The community will be informed about the Circles through a sustained promotional campaign of flyers, posters, print media, radio announcements and presentations by library staff to community groups. The first Circle will be held by November 1, 2006 and continue semimonthly.

A second phase of the outreach project will involve a member of the FBCL staff making monthly visits to the Hays Community Center. By November 1, 2006, a schedule will be set and posted at the Center. The schedule will also be announced through flyers, print media and announcements on the local radio station. During these visits, the staff member will provide instruction on the use of the databases available through the FBCL website, and offer assistance with how to use the internet more efficiently and general computer use such as wordprocessing and spreadsheets.

*Evaluation Plan:*

*Activity A:* Implement schedule of semimonthly library sponsored Tribal Community Circles

*Outcomes:* At least 275 patrons (duplicated count) will participate in one of the forty-eight programs.

*Activity B:* Implement schedule of monthly visits to the Hays Community Center

*Outcomes:* At least 120 (duplicated count) community members will be assisted during one of the twenty-four visits.

*Objective 2: Increase the diversity and availability of online information resources*

*Project Design:* The library will expand and diversify the its existing online database subscriptions. Library staff will use project funds to subscribe to full-text databases (such as JSTOR) covering a range of subjects of interest to local community members. Information from these databases will be available for use by on-site patrons, as well as those accessing library resources through the Internet. By employing this two-pronged approach, the library will maximize the benefits of expanded online access to library information resources. Many full-text databases will be reviewed for possible purchase. Databases will be selected based on the best cost in relation to the interests of and benefits to the community. Subscriptions will be purchased and activated by January 2007.

The purchase of the full-text online database subscriptions will greatly improve access to library resources for all members of the Fort Belknap community. However, the benefits are especially significant for residents of the southern end of the reservation. Currently, residents of Hays and Lodge