

Background to the Lifelong Access Libraries Evaluation

The School of Information and Library Science (SILS) and the UNC Institute on Aging (IOA) received several contracts from the Libraries for the Future (LFF) for the evaluation of two aspects of LFF's Lifelong Access Libraries (LAL) program funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies. These aspects were: 1) the Centers of Excellence Initiative and 2) the Lifelong Access Libraries Leadership Institutes.

Centers of Excellence Initiative

LFF identified five Centers of Excellence that were intended to serve as models for redefining public library services to active, engaged older adults. The evaluation of the first three Centers of Excellence identified by LFF in 2007 took the form of in-depth case studies employing a mixed-methods approach to data collection using semi-structured interviews, focus groups and surveys. Two day visits were conducted by UNC evaluators at Phoenix Public Library (June 18-19, 2007), Allegheny County Library Association (August 27-28, 2007) and New Haven Free Public Library (December 13-14, 2007). Key informant interviews were done with library staff and community collaborators and focus groups were conducted with library staff and library users. Interviews and focus groups from the visits have been transcribed and coded for themes. NVivo 7.0 was used for thematic analysis.

The remaining two Centers of Excellence identified by LFF in March 2008 were the Northeast Massachusetts Regional Library System (NMRLS) and the North Carolina Collaboration on Lifelong Learning and Engagement (NCCoLLE). Since NMRLS provides support services to the entire northeastern part of Massachusetts, data collection involved a series of telephone interviews with NMRLS staff as well as public library staff throughout the region and their community partners. As the evaluation of the Centers of Excellence continued, it became clear that innovations in older adult services in public libraries were more likely to be developed and sustained in consortial systems such as Allegheny County and NMRLS. The learnings from the evaluation were used as a basis for creating a Development Plan for the fifth Center of Excellence, the NC Collaboration on Lifelong Learning and Engagement, which aims to involve public libraries across the state. A development plan for NCCoLLE was submitted to LFF in February 2009.

Leadership Institutes

The second part of the LAL evaluation involved the three national Leadership Institutes hosted in Chapel Hill, NC between 2006 and 2008. A preliminary report and a final report for each Institute were submitted to LFF. The preliminary report included more detail related to the on site evaluation of the Institute, whereas the final report included the results of a six month follow up survey sent to Institute Fellows. For the 2006 Institute, the preliminary report was submitted to LFF in November 2006 and final report in August 2007. For the 2007 Institute, the preliminary report was submitted to LFF in August 2008 and the final report in February 2009. For the 2008 Institute, the preliminary report was submitted in February 2009 and the final report in May 2009.

UNC evaluation support for the Lifelong Access Libraries program funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies has involved multiple investigators, project managers and research assistants over a four year period (2006-2009). UNC faculty members have also served as speakers for the Institutes and consultants on various aspects of the evaluation. We have also benefitted from the support of the deans of the LIS programs at UNC Chapel Hill and North Carolina Central University, the State Librarian, and the Director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services. We would like to thank all those involved for their continuing interest and dedication.

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