

## ***Lessons Learned from the Connecting Learners to Libraries Project***

In their grant report narratives and post-project interviews, many grant recipients made observations of where they encountered obstacles and challenges, and where they would have done things differently. Lessons learned from their experiences include:

- Keep your primary focus on the initial purpose and scope of the grant project; don't attempt to expand beyond your means.
- Keep your eye on short-term accomplishments with a high return in terms of participation and student engagement. Remember that you only have a small amount of money to work with and a relatively short time frame.
- Consider how to sustain the work you've accomplished in terms of maintaining a collaborative relationship, seeking support for planning future projects, and re-using resources of materials that you prepared for this project. In several cases, nurturing a collaborative relationship was just as important for the long run as the project itself.
- Time to meet is often difficult to schedule; make meeting time effective by setting an agenda or a checklist of things to discuss.
- Transportation and safety considerations for minors require planning and approval from school authorities; many public librarians may be unfamiliar with the processes involved in planning school visits.
- Investment in the work is correlated with understanding of the benefits of this work by all. Librarians need to make sure that all staff members in both institutions know what the project is trying to achieve.

Several successful techniques for implementing small scale, grass-roots projects were repeatedly observed in the grant narratives and interviews. First, working collaboratively is not necessarily expensive nor requires excessive amounts of time. Successful grant recipients kept their project simple with immediate results. Planning to account for travel time, rigid schedules, and getting organized at the beginning avoided problems later on.

The shared knowledge of state standards and learning needs of students allows for a deeper, more empathetic understanding about the challenges involved in working with the student population. Concerns over the AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) reports as well as annual state mandated testing need to be considered for all projects. Explaining how the outcomes of the project contribute to improved skills for meeting these standards generates more support for the project.

Future grant recipients should observe the following recommendations:

- Keep it simple and keep it small.
- Keep it understandable for all invested parties.

- Money doesn't always mean success.
- Time can be the enemy to successful collaborations as much as money.
- Collaboration is a skill you can learn; it doesn't just happen.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate!

First, design a project that matches the needs of all parties yet is simple and straightforward. The size of the project needs to be equivalent to the money and time needed to do it. Interestingly, some of the projects accomplished much without lots of money; some were constrained more by time than money and actually returned portions of the small grant allocation. The investment of the various parties in the project is important. Know the partners to the grant work well, and realize that the value of the project will not be perceived identically by all working on it. There are priorities and needs of all parties that will need exploring and understanding as they relate to the work of the project.

Most of all, the level of communication between the different agencies and the involved parties is paramount to the success of the project. Something good can come out of the most basic understanding of each other's challenges with this population and have significant impact on actions with this population.