

What YOU Can Do To Support Tribal Libraries: A Tip Sheet

The OLOS Subcommittee on Library Services to American Indians distributed a survey to tribal librarians via electronic lists and print mailings. We also gathered input at an ALA program featuring Carlene Engstrom, library director at Salish Kootenai College, and Jane Kirby, Virtual Library Manager for the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. We have used the results to create this brief tip sheet for librarians who would like to help support tribal libraries. Tribal libraries are often severely underfunded and rely heavily on donations and grants. No matter what kind of library we work in, or where we are located, there are a variety of ways we can show our support. It is important to keep in mind that each library has individual needs that cannot be assumed without a dialogue with the librarian.

Material Donations

- As with any library, current, quality materials are desired. Materials that are outdated, in bad condition, or outside the collection development policy create a burden, especially for libraries lacking the staff/space/time to weed, perform selection, and coordinate disposal for unneeded donations.
- Ask the librarian what is needed or send a list of available items before donating.
- Consider donating additional copies of best-sellers, rather than returning the titles to the vendor.
- If your library is remodeling, notify tribal libraries about the availability of extra furniture. Many tribal libraries only have government-donated furniture.

Monetary Donations

- Contribute to: **Friends of New Mexico Tribal Libraries**, P.O. Box 2484, Espanola, NM 87532 (questions can be directed to the Native American Libraries Special Interest Group at nalsig@yahoogroups.com)
- Donate a portion of your library book sale money to a tribal library. Work with your Friends group to assist in the donation.
- Consider adopting a magazine and subsidize the subscription cost.

Volunteers

- As with any library, volunteer assistance can be a great gift, but the value depends on reliability and dedication of volunteers. Contact individual libraries about current needs.
- Donate time. Time spent assisting with website development, cataloging, programming, etc. could be used as a grant match for a tribal library and increase the library's chances for supplemental funding.
- Sponsor a tribal librarian to come to a conference, including finding a replacement for the time away.
- Help tribal libraries start Friends of the Library groups, or a broader state or region-wide Friends of Tribal Libraries group.

Project/Program Support

- Library faculty coordinating student field work may consider collaborating with tribal libraries on student projects.

- Work with a tribal librarian to build long term partnerships, such as an “adopt a library” program. Most partnerships have geographic limitations. Consider a long distance partnership as well.
- Share your graphics, materials and incentives for summer and youth programming.

Training/Consulting

- Training and professional development opportunities are rare in geographically isolated areas. In addition to inviting tribal library staff to participate, consider offering the program at their site.
- Donate time to assist a tribal library with writing an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Enhancement Grant or other grant, or offer to review the grant once written.
- IMLS maintains a consultant directory. Let IMLS know you are willing to act as a consultant for tribal libraries. Most tribes are eligible for funds to hire a consultant.

Advocacy

- Bring the topic of tribal libraries into planning discussions; make sure they are “on the radar”.
- Help tribal libraries become recognized as public libraries within your state, or assist them in working toward meeting the criteria for public library status. Most tribal libraries are not recognized as a public library in their state, and therefore do not receive state assistance.

Other

- Share your library or consortium database purchases with tribal libraries. Most tribal library communities serve only 2-3,000 or less.
- For most tribal libraries, OCLC is beyond their monetary capacity. Offer OCLC for free or a reduced price through state consortium
- Give tribal library generous interlibrary loan privileges.
- Create an Amazon or Barnes and Noble gift registry or wish list for a tribal library.
- Open up communication with tribal librarians you know, and offer to pass on information about professional development/training opportunities, grants, etc. Report back on conferences when the tribal librarian can’t attend.

Developing a relationship with a tribal library will help generate other ideas for showing your support.

To find out if there are tribal libraries in your area, contact the American Indian Library Association: <http://www.ailanet.org>

Join AILA to stay in touch with people interested in the improvement of library services for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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