

Chapter 6

Collaborating with Your Local Public Library

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In 2006, the University of North Texas (UNT) Libraries began a more conscious effort to collaborate with the local Denton Public Library. This effort developed into three distinct programs: a seamless service for delivery of government information, a cooperative one-book one-community program, and public library workshops led by UNT librarians. These efforts keep all of the libraries in town strong as we share resources and knowledge and present a unified front to our citizenry. This chapter focuses on the dynamics of these three distinct programs, and identifies the pros and cons of such a collaboration. It also includes the procedures and timeline for establishing this partnership and identifies some of the key decision-makers to include in the planning process.

Seamless Service for Government Information

The UNT Libraries have been a federal depository library since 1948 and a state depository since 1963. Depository libraries are mandated by law to receive government information and provide permanent, free public access to that information. The Federal Depository Library Program was formed by Congress over 140 years ago to ensure that our government's information was accessible to the public. This is imperative not only because of the value of this information that is made available at no cost, but also because our government must be kept accountable to its people in order to uphold the democratic ideals upon which it was formed.

However, sometimes it is difficult to ensure and encourage this kind of public access to government information. Like UNT, many depository libraries are also academic libraries, which can create obstacles to public access. The first obstacle is visitor parking, which can be difficult on university campuses. At UNT, all visitors must obtain a visitor parking permit for their vehicle and must then locate appropriate visitor parking spots. The parking office and visitor parking spaces are often difficult to locate for those unfamiliar with the campus. Members of the general public may feel too intimidated to use the campus library, or may not realize that they are allowed to use it even if they have no affiliation with the university. In addition, some universities are dealing with security issues that arise from non-student access to their general library collections.

In August 2007, the UNT Libraries began to seek alternatives for facilitating public access to the depository collection. Our Government Documents Department generated the idea to provide a “seamless service” for our depository items in cooperation with the Denton Public Libraries (DPL), since the public library is not a depository. The goal we had in mind was that a customer should be able to use a service desk at the public library to gain access to the UNT depository collection. Through discussion among our department staff, we determined that this service would deliver materials from the UNT collection to the public library by a variety of means: fax, email, or by courier delivery. Patrons may call the UNT Libraries Government Documents Department directly or request material from the service desk at any of the three public library branches. If a patron requests information from the public library branch, then a public librarian contacts the UNT Government Documents Department on the patron’s behalf.

After receiving an information request, the documents staff searches for the appropriate material and determines the best method of delivery to the patron. If the item is less than twenty-five pages, then it is scanned into a PDF file and emailed directly to the patron. (Since the majority of government

documents are in the public domain, copyright is not an issue.) If the patron does not have an email account, the scanned document is emailed or faxed to the branch library of their choice. The majority of these requests may be filled out within moments of receiving the initial call, so that the information is delivered to the patron while they are still standing at the public library reference desk. If the document is too long to scan in an efficient and timely manner, or is not a standard size, then it is delivered to the branch library specified by the patron. First, the document is checked out to the public library's account then a documents staff member delivers the item to the branch library. The patron is then allowed to use the document at that branch; the item is specified as in-library use only. When the patron is finished with the material, the branch library staff contacts the Government Documents Department to let them know the item is ready to be picked up and returned to the UNT collection. If the item is non-circulating, every attempt is made to scan the appropriate information from the document even if it exceeds twenty-five pages.

Planning for the Service

To transform the idea of this “seamless service” into reality, the Government Documents Department consulted several key players. First, the idea was thoroughly discussed in the department to develop the plan fully and allow staff input. Once the staff was behind the idea, the department head met with the administration of the UNT Libraries and presented the idea to the Dean and Assistant Dean. Her presentation included information on how the new service would help fulfill the depository guidelines for public access, particularly in light of the current difficulties that some of the public experiences accessing the collection. In addition, she mentioned the potential benefit of this service to distance learner students, a growing population at many colleges and universities, and at UNT

specifically. A full twenty-nine percent of UNT's student body now takes online courses, and in order to support those students, the library must provide materials online whenever possible. Finally, the department head demonstrated how this service fulfills the UNT Libraries' mission to "acquire, preserve, provide access to, and disseminate recorded knowledge in all its forms" and also its stipulation that this access "will be provided increasingly through electronic networks and consortial arrangements." The presentation convinced the administration that this would be a beneficial service and the initial investigation into the cost and procedures of such a service was approved.

Next, the documents department head contacted Eva Poole, Director of Denton Public Libraries (DPL), to see if the public library was interested in such a collaboration. She and her staff responded enthusiastically to this possibility and discussion began. A draft set of guidelines were developed and sent to the DPL director and senior-level managers for review. This document underwent revision and review between DPL and UNT administrators.

Various issues had to be considered when forming policies for this new service. Some of the concerns were:

- How should non-circulating items be handled?
- How will materials be delivered from UNT to the public library branches?
- What is the expected turn-around time when requests are received from the public library?
- How will the service operate when the UNT Libraries are closed or have shortened hours (due to the academic calendar)?
- How many items can be scanned at one time?
- Are there limits on the number of pages to be scanned for one patron?
- What level of research can be performed by the UNT Libraries staff?
- What kind of training will the DPL staff receive?

- What kind of publicity will be generated for the service and who is responsible for it?
- How will lost items be dealt with?
- Will patrons be required to have valid public library cards to use the service?
- How will the DPL library staff know when to call the UNT Documents Department?

These issues continue to be addressed as the planning documents and the service itself are revised. Each issue is considered from the standpoint of both the UNT Libraries and DPL. However, the focus during this entire process is that the ultimate goal is better service for the patron. Each decision is made by first considering how to best serve the patron, and next how best to utilize the resources of both UNT and DPL. The initial passion for this service, as revealed in the enthusiastic responses by the documents staff and the administration of both libraries, is grounded in its purpose of providing better access for all patrons.

The planning period also brought up the issue of what this service would cost the UNT Libraries. After some initial conversation with the public library, it was determined that the cost of in-person delivery would likely be minimal. These deliveries are to be performed primarily during hours that staff leave the UNT Libraries, dropping off items on their way home and thus entailing little extra time or expense in that delivery. The major piece of equipment that was purchased was an all-in-one scanner/fax/copy machine. Although there are already scanners and fax machines in the library building, most are not accessible after 6:00 p. m. Additionally, on nights and weekends only one person staffs the documents department and must remain on duty at the third floor reference desk. During this time, the staff is unable to leave the reference desk or the department to scan and email items. Thus, it was deemed that the purchase of a scanner/fax/copier for the Government Documents Department was warranted. Purchase of this equipment was the majority of the cost outlay for the service.

The service is anticipated to begin in fall 2008. Thus far, preparing the procedural guidelines and getting approval of them from both libraries' administration has been the most time-consuming part of setting up the service. Our hope is that the service will increase awareness and usage of the documents collection and reference service at the UNT Libraries. The public library also benefits by expanding their ability to answer government-related reference questions without collecting more materials or taking up shelf space. And of course the primary purpose for the service is that public benefits by being able to have quick access to this valuable information without having to travel to an unfamiliar library or obtain a visitor parking permit. We want the public to see their local libraries as cooperative gateways to access so that they are encouraged to make use of our resources and our services.

Future plans are to extend the service to the surrounding public library systems and initial discussions have begun with the Decatur Public Library. They are very interested in not only the "seamless service" possibilities, but also in the public and staff workshops mentioned later in this chapter. This service was envisioned by the UNT Libraries Government Documents Department but, ultimately, it was made possible by the existing communication and collaboration between UNT and DPL that had begun a year earlier during the One Book, One Community project called Denton Reads.

Cooperative One-Book, One-Community

Denton Reads is a collaborative effort between the libraries of two public universities, the public school district, and the public libraries. It is a month-long program with activities and events for all age groups and designed to attract people of differing interests. Planning for Denton Reads begins a year in

advance and every committee has at least one employee from each library system to ensure that all of the libraries' constituencies are being served.

This work has opened up lines of communication between the libraries that did not previously exist. We know more about one another's specialties, expertise, and collections. We can now easily and with confidence refer patrons to the other libraries when necessary. For example, the public libraries know to send patrons to us when they need help with in-depth business research and we know to direct many reader's advisory questions to them.

Denton Reads began in November 2006 when Melody Kelly, Assistant Dean of the UNT Libraries, and Eva Poole, Director of Denton Public Libraries (DPL), decided the time was ripe for the two library systems along with their colleagues in town to begin collaboration on a city-wide reading program. Melody and Eva put together a team of two librarians to work on the project and began contacting Texas Woman's University (TWU) Library and the Denton Independent School District (DISD) Libraries to ask for their collaboration as well.

After a small team was established, we set up some basic guidelines for the program that have guided us throughout all phases of planning. First, we strive to reach out to all members of the community regardless of age, race, religion, class, etc. Second, all events are free. This enables broad community participation and fulfills our libraries' missions to provide public services at no cost. Third, it is an equal partnership of all of the libraries and each will be fairly represented. And finally, our overall goal for all programs and events is to promote a love of reading.

The initial team that met to begin discussions on the project chose an environmental theme for the first year because the Denton community has a strong interest in environmental issues. We felt that this theme would guarantee support for the inaugural program from many in the community and its semi-controversial nature would allow for good discussion and dialogue to open up. We chose April for

the first program because Earth Day is April 22, Texas often has perfect weather that time of year, and it is before the university semesters and the K-12 school year begin to wrap up. We chose our first book *The Legacy of Luna* by Julia Butterfly Hill, based on the theme, our timeline, budget, because the author is a great public speaker, and most importantly because it is a book that is compelling for readers from high school age to senior citizens.

The preliminary planning stage brought to light several issues that have proven to be the central challenges at every stage of the process. One of the most important strategies in planning such a program is making sure that there are representatives from each library system at every meeting where crucial decisions are made. We planned our April date and set everything in motion along that timeline before the representative from the DISD Libraries was able to join us and enlighten us that April is when Texas schools do their annual testing. Not only did this severely limit the amount of time the school librarians were able to dedicate to the program, it also had a negative effect on participation from the teachers and K-12 students. Future Denton Reads will be held in October when we have the same weather benefits and hit a similar window of time in the university semesters, but will not conflict with public school testing.

A second challenge we have confronted over and over is that of understanding the audience. We are trying to create a program that will appeal to a very wide audience that includes all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, races, religious beliefs, education levels, etc. We all have areas of the audience that we know very well and it is imperative that all of these varied interest and ability levels are taken into account. This is not always easy and has pointed to the necessity of offering a wide variety of events and compromising on the book and theme selection.

One of the reasons we chose to do a month-long program rather than just focusing on the author event is so that we can offer many different programs aimed at the different audiences. The final author

event targets everyone and brings the whole community together. The major events we planned for 2007 were a children's festival, a film festival, a xeriscaping program, and many book clubs. The children's festival was for young children and their parents and included several environmentally themed games, activities, and special story times. This festival had a number of booths sponsored by community groups and schools, many of which were educational. The film festival was held at a local Movie Tavern and was open to the whole community, but had special interest for college students. The films included *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Who Killed the Electric Car?* We were able to keep the film festival free by contracting with the theater and guaranteeing to bring in a certain number of people who would presumably buy food and drinks. Additional related films were also shown for free at each library location throughout the month of April, many of which were oriented toward family audiences. The xeriscaping program was also open to the whole community but it had special appeal to older citizens. Finally, we offered both intensive three-week book clubs and one-time book discussion groups at every library at several times. We also offered book clubs at a local coffee shop, a natural foods café, and the local Barnes and Noble.

When it comes to choosing the book and theme, again all of the libraries must have input. The different libraries have users that often have vastly different interests. We are in the middle of planning our second Denton Reads program and have selected *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card. This book selection is very different from the 2007 selection, particularly in that it is fiction rather than non-fiction. This was designed specifically so we can pull in community members we may have missed the previous year. In some ways it is probably a bit more appealing to the public library and school library constituents than to the university users. But the previous year's program was a little more appealing to the university faculty and students. Our hope is to select books and themes with wide appeal each year, but also to reach a balance from year to year.

Establishing the basic guidelines at the outset has helped us keep on task and provided the guidance necessary when challenges pop up. Working together with librarians from several different libraries with different responsibilities and schedules can be difficult, but it is also tremendously rewarding. As one committee member said: “The author event and the film festival and everything else were nice and all, but what I have enjoyed most about Denton Reads is getting to know all of the other librarians and finding out what they do. Our jobs are so different and we all know such different things; it has been really fun and good for our work [at our own libraries].” This sums up the experience for most of us who have worked on Denton Reads. The lines of communication between the libraries that this program has opened up are remarkable. We actually know one another by name and face now and know who to refer patrons to when one of the other libraries and or librarians could be more helpful. Not only are we offering community members the chance to have memorable experiences with books, libraries, and each other, we are also creating fantastic experiences for ourselves.

Public Workshops

In an effort to reach out for the greater good of the community, UNT librarians are also providing a variety of programming for both public library patrons and public library staff. The contacts made from the Denton Reads campaign have been instrumental in opening the lines of communication between the staff of the two libraries regarding collaboration on programming. Individual discussions among the DPL and UNT staff have led to many opportunities to partner on public programming.

The UNT Government Documents Department has made a concentrated effort to provide informational sessions several times a year at the DPL branch libraries for the general public. This service is part of the overall guidelines for depository libraries to participate in marketing and outreach

of the collection. Public workshops on genealogical resources in the documents collection, military history resources for a Veteran's Day program, and government information on the web and censorship issues related to that information have been presented by UNT staff. These workshops were publicized by both the UNT libraries and the Denton Public Libraries. UNT librarians have also presented during DPL's dedicated training times for their reference staff. These training sessions have included topics such as accessing government information sources on the Internet.

In addition, the UNT Libraries host day-long summer workshops for area high-school students. The 2007 workshop was titled "Enemies of History: Murdering the Past," and was hosted by the UNT Libraries' Archives and Rare Books department. On June 16, high school students from area districts spent the day learning how to preserve collections and items that they might have in their own homes. After a quick welcome, the students watched a short film, which consisted of clips from movies showing examples of how not to treat books and other library materials. After the students introduced themselves, a series of fun preservation presentations followed on stamps, comic books and money, and clothing – wedding dresses, specifically. In the afternoon, the students learned how to do an oral history interview and practiced on Dr. Fred Karr, who answered their questions about his memories of the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and one of the other students who recounted memories of 9/11. The last sessions of the day included a presentation [in the Digital Projects Lab on the Portal to Texas History and digitizing photos](#). Finally we returned to the Rare Book Room for a segment on [preserving books in the Digital Projects Lab on the Portal to Texas History and digitizing photos and on how to preserve books](#), followed by a question and answer period. Each student went home with a goody bag that included library promotional materials, cotton gloves to use when handling photos and delicate items, and various other samples of preservation supplies.

A previous workshop was titled “Community in World War II,” also hosted by the Archives and Rare Books department. Fifteen students from the Dallas/Fort Worth area spent a day learning all about community in WWII. They received a timeline glimpse of the war through a tour of the artifacts in the Rare Book Room, making their own posters for a cause, learning about the uses of film and cinematography in propaganda, finding out about German and American soldiers uniforms and lives from UNT student re-enactors, seeing the role of artwork in our comprehension of the lives of Germans prior to the war, and reading real letters to and from an American soldier. At the end of the day, each student was asked to imagine themselves as a person in the war and to write a V-mail letter to someone as that person. Each of these workshops successfully engaged area students and enabled UNT to reach out to a larger community.

The success of these programs has led to discussion of other possible collaborative programs such as information for small businesses and consumer protection programs. In addition, UNT is working with DPL on the 2009 American Library Association sponsored exhibit “Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World.” Several faculty members from UNT are presenting programs in support of the exhibit. In addition, the documents department is providing the public library with pocket U.S. Constitutions to hand out. These Constitutions will be branded with the UNT Libraries logo and the documents department contact information. The cost of the Constitutions is being absorbed by the marketing budget for the documents department. These booklets will not only provide the public with ready access to one of our nation’s most important documents, but we also hope it will familiarize them with the UNT documents department.

Pros and Cons of Collaborating with the Public Library

Before embarking on a similar cooperative effort between your local public and academic libraries, it is imperative that you consider the pros and cons of such a collaboration. Many of the pros are quite obvious, such as your library gaining a stronger place in the community. Individuals who normally would feel intimidated by the idea of using a university library will become familiar with the staff and services available. Holding events and services with the public library will enhance your own library's profile.

You may find that this increased familiarity encourages more members of the public to travel to your academic library location. The increased traffic at the reference desk could potentially have great impact. While it's certainly preferable that the public is encouraged to make greater use of your materials and service, a heavy increase may result in the need for additional staff or additional reference desk hours, thus incurring significant cost.

The public library also benefits from free programming on topics of general interest to their patrons. They receive skilled reference assistance with difficult government information questions and also receive training on those questions. They increase their accessibility to government information without the cost of additional materials, cataloging time, or shelf space.

While the "seamless service" may increase the use of library materials and resources, thus increasing usage statistics, this may also increase some costs for the academic library. In addition to the purchase of the necessary equipment, there is staff time involved in scanning and emailing materials, as well as costs associated with the delivery of the materials in person if scanning is not a viable option. The cost of replacing lost items is also a possible issue for the academic library. Further, there may be policy considerations, which is a good reason to bring your administration in on the plan as soon as possible.

You should also consider whether such a collaboration is supported by your university and library's mission. Being able to show this connection is essential in obtaining support from the various administrators. If this collaboration is not supported in the library mission, this may be an issue for further consideration, as your depository library status ought to be reflected in the library's overall mission. Consider which key players in your administration would be instrumental in identifying possible ways to expand the library's mission to better reflect its depository status.

It is our hope that through the collaborative documents reference service, the Denton Reads events, and the collaborative workshops, Denton residents will come to think of the UNT Libraries not as an academic library, but as another avenue for information. Even the merely visible signs of this collaboration—a UNT logo on a Constitution handed out at the public library, or a flier advertising a collaborative event—will help foster this sense that the various local libraries are not completely separate entities, but cooperative partners whose ultimate goal is to provide the Denton community with valuable information and excellent service.