Montana Talking Books Library

The mission of the Montana Talking Book Library (MTBL) is to insure that all eligible blind, low vision, physical or reading disabled Montana residents who cannot use standard print have free and easy access to reading materials.

MTBL receives the majority of books and all playback equipment from the National Library Service (NLS). The MSL Commission allocates federal funds, through the Library Services and Technology Act, (LSTA), to support staff and operations.

Issue 1: MTBL patrons represent a small percentage of eligible Montana citizens.

Needs Assessment Summary: Access to audio and Braille reading materials significantly increases the quality of life for those who cannot read standard printed materials. Montana has approximately 32,100 citizens eligible for this service; 3,434 are "registered" patrons of the TBL program, representing 11% of potential population served.

*Goal #6: To ensure that all eligible clients know about the availability of services from MTBL and to make enrollment and use of the service easy for users.

LSTA Purpose: To provide library services to those who have difficulty using standard printed or traditional library services.

Key Output Target: The number of MTBL clients will increase by 2% in 2002, 3% in 2003, and 4% in each year from 2004-2007.

The number of TBL clients decreases each year because clients transfer out of state, die, or are unable to use the service. The number of new clients usually is near the number of clients that drop from the program.

We discussed whether the new digital formats would increase or decrease the number of patrons. Staff members agreed that it is best to focus on patron satisfaction rather than be overly concerned with increasing the number of patrons. However, we want to ensure that all potential clients know about the program. Therefore, we have increased the number of presentations and site visit throughout the state and will continue to explore additional ways to promote widespread awareness of our services.

Key Outcome Target: As measured through an annual survey, MTBL's new and current clients report a high degree of patron satisfaction with MTBL services (90+%) and report that MTBL services result in a higher quality of life.

Programs:

MTBL will use National Library Services (NLS) publicity materials to promote the services yearly, beginning in 2002. MTBL will measure the success of this program by ascertaining how many new clients have signed up due to the campaign's influence.

Evaluation: We will begin in 2004 to use the NLS program. MTBL is also developing a brochure to use for estate planning.

MTBL will make presentations and exhibit at five conferences per year. MTBL will evaluate annually the influence of these activities on user increases. Time frame: Starting in 2002 and ongoing.

Evaluation: The practice of sending "free" materials to schools is not as effective as anticipated. Therefore, in addition to sending materials to schools, we will encourage on-site visits by classes. Presentations at Montana Health Care Association for Activity Directors are an effective use of time as well as our involvement with the Montana Association for the Blind.

MTBL will expand its current program of encouraging users in Montana to act as ambassadors for the program. MTBL will select appropriate users to visit health care offices, schools, and other local sites to promote MTBL services by the end of 2004.

Evaluation: Ongoing Success with excellent results. The ambassadors program works well.

MTBL will ask other agencies and organizations to promote MTBL services through their newsletters and placement of a link to MTBL on their web pages. Timeframe: Ongoing.

Other comments: The staff agreed that clients should find registration easy. The eight-page web-based application form has been reduced to four pages. The group agreed to place the application online and initially not require an original certification signature for a client to register. This is to get the client started sooner on the service. The client will then mail the original certification signature to MTBL. Telephone or faxed applications will be also be initially accepted (with approval by the Regional Librarian), with a follow up request for the original certification signature.

The automated system continues to improve the ease of use and the Web-based catalog is improving. WebOpac requests have increased from 1% to 17% of all requests received.

Issue 2: NLS is planning a transition from analog to digital formats for its recordings within the next six years. This transition will require a change in the playback equipment. These changes will require different recording and storage systems and therefore, require training for staff members, and volunteers.

Needs Assessment Summary: NLS has not yet decided on the media or the timeline of a transition to digital. MTBL does not control these decisions and the pace of transition. Therefore, MTBL will continue to closely monitor NLS's plans, convert its local recording studio to a digital format, and devote staff time to learning about the digital future.

*Goal #7: MTBL will plan and implement a smooth transition to a digital format to ensure that the potential for expanded services are available to MTBL patrons.

LSTA Purpose: To provide library services to those who have difficulty using library services.

Key Outcome Targets:

1. To complete the transition with little disruption in service, as measured by circulation rates.
2. To adopt digital recording technologies in Montana's recording program synchronous with NLS's standards and plans.

Key Outcome Target: MTBL users will report through annual surveys that the transition has led to improved services.

Programs:
MTBL, in conjunction with NLS recommendations and specifications, will launch a digital recording project, to expand staff and volunteer knowledge and abilities regarding digital technologies. MTBL will purchase and deploy digital recording equipment in the Helena recording studio and use this to record local Montana books. MTBL will explore different delivery systems in accordance with NLS recommended specifications and standards. Timeframe: 2003-2008.

MTBL will be prepared to transition to digital books and convert locally recorded books to a digital format as NLS transitions. Timeframe: 2003-2007.

Evaluation: The transition to a digital based recording studio has been completed. This success is due to all staff members and volunteer hard work and cooperation. Montana is the first of three states that have converted their TBL recording program. Staff members suggest that the vendor create an installation and a user manual for laypersons.

MTBL also is participating in the Lobe Library Digital Study, using Otis digital players this allows patrons to borrow digital players have books already downloaded from "Audible.com" an Internet Company. This study is only beginning and will be evaluated in 2004.

Issue 3: By 2003, MSL will not have enough space to shelve new NLS additions to the MTBL collection.
Needs Assessment Summary: NLS requires that MTBL keep two copies of every NLS recorded book received. MTBL thoroughly weeds its collection every year; however, we must store this "excess" material for a year before returning to NLS, or sending to other network libraries. We estimate that we need 58 more sections of shelving with six shelves per section.

*Goal #8: Allow service to the patrons to be provided more efficiently and effectively by providing enough space for the collection.

LSTA Purpose: To provide library services to those who have difficulty using printed or traditional library services.

Key Output Target: Move sufficient portion of MTBL's oldest and least circulated collection (RC 6,000-RC19, 999) to the first floor of the library to allow for a five-year growth in this collection.
Key Outcome Target: MTBL staff members and volunteers rate the changes as enhancing their productivity.

Program: TBL will complete an extensive space needs survey by August 2002. Managers will review the study and make necessary arrangements for first floor storage by October 2002. The collection will be moved by the end of 2002.

Evaluation: All of the targets were met by the summer of 2003, due to the work of staff members and volunteers. Many older books were moved to the lower level of the library.

Issue 4: The staff and volunteer work areas are noisy and congested causing dips in productivity and low morale for staff and volunteers.
Needs Assessment Summary: MTBL staff members chose this issue as their priority concern. Although the staff and volunteer work area(s) were rearranged in 1998, problems remain, including the need for staff privacy to conduct work with patrons in an area that is used for volunteers. Staff and volunteers wish to share the same space, but some type of division is necessary for both entities to complete their work.

*Goal #9: Increase productivity and satisfaction of staff members and volunteers.

LSTA Purpose: To provide library services to those who have difficulty using printed or traditional library services.

Key Output Targets:

1. Provide staff members with adequate and quiet work areas and at the same time provide volunteers with adequate and socially interactive work areas.
2. Provide walk-in patrons with an area containing appropriate equipment so that they may use TBL services.

Key Outcome Target: MTBL staff and volunteers rate their workspace as conducive to productivity.

Programs:
Identify space needs. Plan and implement needed changes. Research solutions, including visiting other work areas, and select among alternatives, using the criteria of cost, feasibility, length of disruption in work flow, and ability to meet the five year needs of staff and volunteers. Time frame: Suggestions finalized by the beginning of 2003. Changes made by the end of 2003.

Evaluation: The staff members and volunteers used new panel dividers to create new, more private and efficient workspaces for staff and volunteers.

Improve on-site services to patrons. Create a dedicated computer workstation area complete with privacy, appropriate assistive software, and devises for walk-in patrons to be able to do online searches. Offer appropriate training for staff on the use of assistive software/devices in order to be able to assist walk-in patrons who may need staff assistance. Time frame: Completed by January 2004.

Evaluation: At the same time, the staff work areas were remodeled, MTBL created a more private and dedicated workstation for walk-in patrons.

New activities to reach goals.

To ensure that patron has received the most accurate and timely delivery of materials, the upgrade of the Keystone automated system is a high priority in the next year. This upgrade is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2004.

The Lobe Library Digital Study in 2004 will give MTBL an opportunity to evaluate new methods of distributing materials. MTBL plans to evaluate this service at the end of the year.