

Memo

To: Commission Members
From: Christie Briggs, Regional Librarian, Montana Talking Book Library
Darlene Staffeldt, State Librarian
Date: April 5, 2007
Re: Montana Talking Book (TBL) request to use Trust funds if necessary

Request for Second Year Low Vision Montana Funding – April, 2007

The Library Commission approved \$5,000. in December, 2005, to assist in the development of Low Vision Montana's Information and Referral service for all Montanans with low vision needs.

Background information on Low Vision Montana:

In 2005, Low Vision Montana (LVM) was just being established as a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization whose mission is to "promote independence for Montanans with Low Vision", especially in rural areas. An assessment study of individuals at Senior Centers, Schools, Libraries, Ophthalmology and Optometry offices, etc., had just been completed that verified the need for such a service statewide. Although Low Vision Montana established four specific goals to accomplish, the Information and Referral was the first objective and the most important one to Montana Talking Book Library. Included in this objective was to establish 1) A 1-800 # and 2) Develop a website with current and on-going updated resource information.

Additional Development:

In order to sustain this service on-going, it is necessary to develop and implement a volunteer recruitment plan. This requires a volunteer training program be established and fine tuned. Once established, an on-going program of recruitment and training needs to be developed.

Evaluation of Low Vision Montana services:

- 1) As of November, 2006, Low Vision Montana has an operating 1-800-501-5004 telephone line in use for those in need of low vision resources and referrals.
- 2) By February, 2007, Low Vision Montana created a robust website of current resources and information to help Montanans with low vision needs. This service is valued at \$30,000 for a cost of \$2,500.

Since November, 2006, Montana Talking Book Library has received (to date) ten referrals from the Low Vision Montana toll-free number. We have also had seven patron applications sent to us directly from Ophthalmologists and Optometrists as a result of Low Vision Montana's outreach education to eye-care professionals.

Since being awarded an AmeriCorps*VISTA member in January, 2007, progress has increased in the Information and Referral area of Low Vision Montana services.

Other long range objectives include Peer Support and the development of a Mobile Unit that would travel the state and coordinate with eye-care professionals. These other objectives are the focus of additional partners with Low Vision Montana.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

Our phone survey of the seven applicants that are now patrons has revealed that these patrons were not aware of our services had it not been for the Low Vision Montana information given them. A consistent phrase echoed among many new patrons is "We never knew you existed".

Montana Talking Book Library supports the important role and partnership of Low Vision Montana in casting a wider net to reach Montana citizens with low vision needs.

Montana Talking Book Library encourages Low Vision Montana to secure other funding resources for Peer Support and Mobile Unit objectives. Montana Talking Book Library recommends that it is appropriate to continue working closely with Low Vision Montana to further develop its Information and Referral service.

Request:

It is recommended by the Montana Talking Book Library that \$5,000 be paid to Low Vision Montana to assist in development of the Information and Referral long term plans of recruiting and training volunteers in this valuable service, and to utilize the AmeriCorps*VISTA member to establish an effective statewide Information and Referral program for both Montana Talking Book Library and Low Vision Montana assisting citizens who need our services.

We are currently carefully reviewing the FY'2007 operations budget and expenditures of the State Library. Due to savings generated by staff being very careful with spending to save funds in order to help cover the broad band pay plan, we feel there will be enough monies to fund this project from existing FY2007 monies. If enough funds are not available in the FY'2007 budget we are requesting permission to fund this project with monies from the TBL trust. The current trust balance is approximately \$163,000.