# Webinar Recording

- Recorded on March 10, 2026
- [Watch the Video](#)
- [ASPeN Event](#)

# Key Messages for Improving Library Outreach Services

Libraries across Montana are expanding their reach and deepening community connections by **meeting people where they are**—both literally and figuratively. This summary synthesizes the core themes, strategies, and practical examples shared in the webinar and chat transcript to help libraries enhance outreach services for patrons of all ages and backgrounds.

## Core Principles of Effective Outreach

- **Meet patrons in their own spaces.**
  Libraries don't need to wait for people to walk through their doors. Schools, parks, senior living centers, workplaces, community centers, and cultural events are all natural venues for library engagement. Patrons often feel more comfortable, have more time, or face fewer logistical barriers when services come to them.
- **Design with the community, not for the community.**
  Outreach is most successful when it's built collaboratively. Gathering community input—especially from underserved or hesitant groups—helps ensure programs are culturally appropriate, accessible, and meaningful. Focus groups with teens, consultations with disability experts, and partnerships with Indigenous communities are examples of co-creation in action.
- **Remove barriers to access.**
  Transportation, geography, time constraints, and unfamiliarity with library services all impede engagement. Outreach programs, bookmobiles, virtual presentations, and partnerships with local organizations help overcome these barriers. Reminding patrons that *"the library is already yours"* builds trust and reduces uncertainty about cost or eligibility.
- **Be present and persistent.**
  Many presenters emphasized that outreach takes time. Communities often need repeated contact before they feel comfortable participating. Consistency—showing up even when attendance is low—eventually builds visibility, trust, and momentum. Word of mouth can become a powerful amplifier over time.

# Outreach Strategies for Different Age Groups

Presented by Jennifer Birnel, Montana History Portal Director

**Children & Preteens**

- Bring programs into schools, childcare facilities, and clubs.
- Teach research skills, introduce digital collections, or partner around contests (LEGO, writing, memes).
- Work with teachers to integrate library content into existing curriculum.

**Teens & Young Adults**

- Engage where teens naturally gather—coffee shops, parks, after-school hangouts.
- Keep programming high-interest, trend-aligned, and joyful.
- Seek teen input to choose topics and formats that resonate.
- Consider hybrid or virtual options for flexibility.

**Adults**

- Outreach through workplace visits, local clubs (Rotary, Lions, Elks), chambers of commerce, or civic organizations.
- Tailor topics to the interests of specific groups (ex: gardening clubs & seed libraries).

**Seniors**

- Provide programs in assisted living facilities, senior centers, nursing homes, and churches.
- Offer rich visual content (photographs, historical stories) that sparks memory and conversation.
- Use virtual "trunks" or prepared presentations (e.g., Montana History Portal exhibits).

# Examples of Successful Outreach Models

Presented by Slaven Lee, Missoula Public Library (MPL) Director, and Dory Athey, MPL Outreach Librarian.

**Bookmobile & Mobile Service**

- Delivers materials to rural communities, senior living centers, and neighborhoods across Missoula County.

- 4,500 patrons served and 7,500 items circulated in FY2025.

- Supported by community donors and integrated with home library service.

**All-under-one-roof partnerships**

- Co-location with nonprofits strengthens program collaboration and extends reach through community partners' networks.

**Outreach at community events**

- Powwows, cultural festivals, Project Community Connect, off-site learning centers.

- Activities include scavenger hunts, crafts, science kits, button making, and library card signup.

**Community-driven space design**

- Teen spaces were redesigned based on youth focus groups, leading to significantly increased teen engagement.

# Key Takeaways for Libraries

- Outreach is not an add-on; it is essential for patron access.

- Relationships matter more than programs—show up consistently and listen intentionally.

- Partner widely and creatively across education, health, cultural, and civic sectors.

- Embrace flexibility and meet community members on their own terms.

- Communicate the value: "Your library is already yours."

# Resources Mentioned in the Webinar & Chat

**Montana History Portal & State Library Resources**

- Montana History Portal Contests: https://www.mtmemory.org/pages/contests
- History Portal LEGO Challenge Virtual Trunk https://msl.mt.gov/libraries/lifelonglearning/Virtual-Trunks/MHP-Lego/page
- History Portal Programming Virtual Trunk https://msl.mt.gov/libraries/lifelonglearning/Virtual-Trunks/MHP-Virtual-Trunk/Montana-History-Portal-Virtual-Trunk

**Accessibility Resources**

- Summit Independent Living: https://www.summitilc.org/

**Professional Outreach Organizations**

- Association of Bookmobile & Outreach Services (ABOS): https://abos-outreach.com/

**Other Community-Based Examples (from chat & transcript)**

- School collaboration: cemetery and historical society tours
- Book bike outreach (Lewis & Clark Library)

Idea share: library programs at pubs or other gathering places

# Questions?

Corey Sloan, MSL Consultant