

Recommendations to the Gates Global Library Project in Ukraine based on the successful ABLE project in Bulgaria

A Change Model for Libraries

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Introduction

This model is based on a US State Department Project in Bulgaria, the American Bulgarian Library Exchange (ABLE) Project. It was a 3-year funded project implemented over 4 years.

It began with the creation of Partner Libraries created by a cooperative agreement between the Union of Librarian and Information Science Officers (ULISO – basically the Bulgarian Library Association) and the Colorado Library Association. The project began with eight partner libraries and in each country who were encouraged to be in touch with each other on regular basis. The ABLE project expanded this from eight partnerships

Goals and summary results

The successful partnerships were recognized by the US Department of State, Cultural Exchange office. They provided a one-country grant to a cooperative formed by an Iowa non-profit (the Iowa Resource for International Service), the Colorado Library Association, and ULISO. The first two-year grant was for \$200,000 with a follow-up one-year grant of \$100,000.

The goals of the ABLE project were to:

- Build and sustain partnerships between Iowa and Colorado libraries with Bulgarian Partner Libraries
- Increase the visibility and image of public libraries in Bulgaria libraries
- Provide technical assistance and training to help Bulgarian participating libraries become Community Information Centers using technology where possible
- Disseminate information about the ABLE project widely throughout Bulgaria and impact Bulgarian public libraries not part of the project.

While Ukraine might not want to form and support partnerships, the activity of the ABLE grant might still be of interest. In summary the direct results were:

- Positive benefits to the participating libraries
- Extensive publicity throughout Bulgaria about the success of the participating libraries and their value to a democratic society
- The initiation of national advocacy projects such as National Library Week and National Parliament Day
- Adoption of the ABLE project ideas in non-participating libraries

In addition, indirect results included, several years later:

- A positive influence on the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as one factor in their selection of Bulgaria for the Global Libraries Project
- Revision of national library laws to give more power and recognition to libraries, including a raise in librarian's salaries.

ABLE Activities

Selecting participants

We selected the libraries that participated in several ways. We used recommendations from the American Embassy and other sources to identify Bulgarian librarians who had already shown a history of innovative development in their libraries. We also publicized the project and asked for volunteers from libraries that were interested. They had to agree in advance that they would fully participate in the program and establish a community information center. Of the 18 libraries that were chosen, some were large regional libraries with large staff; some were small rural libraries with less than five staff. One was a very poor selection and did almost no activities related to the project. Over the three years, there were some other drop outs, usually because the English speaking librarian in the Bulgaria library left to get another job. By the end of the project, however, all of the libraries except one had established a web site and some level of a community information center. We were very pleased with the libraries we chose because they were indeed opinion leaders within the Bulgarian library community. Both the library directors and their staff who visited the United States repeatedly made presentations about what they learned and about a new role of libraries in communities. After the initial training, the Americans stepped out and all the advocacy and internal organization was done by ULISO and the librarians who had visited the US.

Recommendation

Seek opinion leaders who have already shown an interest in improving their libraries. Allow both library directors and middle/upper managers to visit the US to increase the number of Ukrainian librarians who are exposed to new ideas and might implement them upon return to Ukraine. Encourage multiple opportunities for the Ukrainian librarians who visit the US to speak to their peers in Ukraine.

Partnerships visits: Bulgarian librarians to the U.S.

In addition to the eight original partnerships, 10 additional partnerships were formed with American libraries in Colorado and Iowa and Bulgaria. A major activity was to bring one Bulgarian librarian from each partnership to visit their American partner and to also send the American partner to visit their Bulgarian partner. Since the Bulgarian librarian was going to spend 5 weeks in the American library, we required that they speak English. Only one of the Bulgarian librarians was a library director, however, the Bulgarian librarian had to have the approval of their library director in order to be accepted.

The Bulgarian spent most of their visit in their partner library but we also made sure they were exposed to other aspects of library service. If their partner was an urban library, we

tried to arrange for them to spend some time in a small rural library; if their partner was a small rural library, we tried to arrange time in a larger urban library.

To increase the likelihood that the Bulgarian librarian would be able to implement what they learned when they went back to Bulgaria, we worked with the American Embassy to also bring the Bulgarian library directors to the U.S., usually to attend a library conference. Most, if any, did not speak English so we had translators. These trips were usually fairly short, about a week. However, it was an important visit to show them the possibilities of what a modern library could be and do.

When the Bulgarian librarians who spent five weeks in American returned to their local libraries, most were encouraged to implement some of the new ideas they had gained in the U.S. But not all.

Because we wanted Bulgarian librarians who spoke English, to some extent we had to take the luck of the draw. Where the Bulgarian librarian was a middle manager or above, they tended to already have credibility within the library and with the library director and thus their ideas were more likely to be implemented. Where the Bulgarian librarian was a beginning librarian or at a lower level in the library, their ideas were less likely to be implemented.

We were sending so many Bulgarian librarians to the US, the returning librarians created their own subunit within ULISO. It consisted of every Bulgarian librarian who had ever been to the US, both those who came through the ABLE project and those who had visited sponsored by other groups. The group still meets regularly. It gave them an opportunity to share what they had learned and discuss how it might be implemented in a Bulgarian library.

Recommendation

As mentioned above, to the extent you have the funding; IREX might consider sending not only library directors but also middle and upper management librarians to the U.S. The library directors' visit is important because it gives them a broader perspective on what library service can become and the Mortensen Center is an excellent venue to do this. Bringing other staff, however, is also important because they are often the ones who actually develop and implement new programs within a library.

Partnership Visits: American Librarians to the Bulgaria

The purpose of the visits of American librarians to Bulgaria was primarily image building. The Americans met with library staff, library governing authorities, and in some cases, community members as well. They were specifically directed to meet with the mayor or city council and discuss the role of libraries in a democratic society. They delivered a nice present to the mayor and praised the Bulgarian library and librarian for their quality service and made suggestions for new programs. They described how the library had to be more than "a museum of books" and how important community, regional, and national information was to local citizens. These visits were always covered by the press: print, radio, and television. This press was arranged in advance by

the local librarian or the ABLE project coordinators. Thus we gave recognition to the local library staff; a photo op to the mayor or other authority; and demonstrated to other libraries in the area the potential value of developing their own library.

Recommendation

As you bring American librarians to Ukraine for training or other visits, you might consider ensuring that they visit a local library that you feel could be an innovative library and making sure they meet with local authorities; deliver a prepared message about the library and the opportunity that Global Libraries presents; and receives press coverage for the local library.

Training

We had already chosen the key topic to build the project around: establishing a community information center (CIC). We invited two people from each of the 18 participating libraries to attend a two-day training session specifically on the aspects of establishing a CIC. It was very practical. The Americans did the training and we wrote a book that was translated into and published only in Bulgarian. It covered:

- New role of libraries and importance of a CIC
- Practical techniques for establishing a CIC
- Role of staff and general organization and administration
- Advocating and working with local government
- Marketing an CIC
- Evaluating a CIC

We had also hand-picked 12 librarians (both from participating librarians and also people we new were experienced trainers) and on Day 3, we did a specific “train the trainers” workshop on how to teach librarians that were not part of ABLE how to become a CIC. Then we sent them on the road. They did one day workshops all over Bulgarian on creating a CIC. By the end of 3 years approximately 1500 librarians had been exposed to this concept. To be honest, the goal was more increased awareness of a new role for libraries than enough information to actually create a CIC. These librarians trained by our cadre of trainers were able to use the training manual to establish their own CIC if they were sufficiently motivated and many did. To reemphasize, all the training was done by Bulgarian librarians; after the initial training, no Americans presented or even attended any of the subsequent workshops.

One other activity was to contract with one of the participating libraries to create a national CIC with information about Bulgarian government, health, tourism, education, etc. at the national level. We tried to impress on local libraries that they could be a CIC if all they did was link to the national ABLE database.

Recommendation

Consider picking a topic that focuses on one of the goals of the BiblioMist program. Select model libraries to demonstrate the goal. Develop a training program for key opinion leaders (who are also good trainers), create training materials, train the trainers, and send them on the road.

National Advocacy

Early on the ABLE American project directors recommended national advocacy activities such as a National Honorary Advisory Committee, a National Library Week initiative, and National Legislative Day. This turned out to be a hard sell. The Bulgarian leaders were very timid and said they did not believe any national leaders would be on an Honorary Advisory Committee and that librarians would not participate in a national legislative day or national library week. It took one year to convince them about the National Honorary Committee but eventually the one created at a prominent national Senator, the Bulgarian President's wife, the Bulgarian Ambassador to America, the wife of the Governor of Iowa, and the son of a leading Bulgarian technology innovator.

It took two years to convince them to try the national library week and legislative day. However, when they tried it they had a poster distributed nation wide, an exhibition about libraries in the Parliament Building, and a meeting with the Head of Parliament who said he would be open to national legislation about libraries.

It was so successful they decided to hold a National Library Week every year but assumed that having sent a poster and activity guidelines in year one, they need not do that again. Thus in the second year, there was not as much participation. They are now back to promoting this every year.

Recommendation

ULA and Ukrainian librarians already understand the importance of national advocacy so they do not need to be convinced. They could consider a National Library Week with a poster, guidelines, and focus on a central theme.

Results

An evaluation of the results of the ABLE project in the 18 participating libraries showed that (specific details are available upon request)

- Local library operating budgets had been increased
- More computers had been purchased
- More staff had been hired
- More publicity came to the library
- New programs were created (many from ideas from US visits)
- CIC's were created in all but one library
- National Library Week is established as an annual event

Summary

In summary, the key aspects of the ABLE model are:

- Selecting key librarians as opinion leaders
- Establishing a theme around which to build an advocacy campaign
- Train the trainers so they are teaching their peers
- Never missing an opportunity for publicity
- Visits to the US to inspire and inform
- Visits from Americans to emphasize the value of libraries

Please let me know if you would like any additional information.