

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on May 27, 2024.

Grant Season: Spring Planting

Spring is a time for sprouting onion bulbs and lettuce seeds. It seems also to be the time to write grant applications for Libraries. How important grants are to Libraries is reflected in both visible capital needs met and enriched program offerings, and even many times in less appreciated bulwarking of an annual operating budget. Successful grant applications can serve all of those purposes.

What does it mean to say “free public Library” without accounting for this infusion of monies above and beyond annual operating budget needs? Public Libraries, like any other non-profit entity, are obviously not free under any circumstance. Yet, you the patron get to enjoy the collection, programs, and other services with simply a scan of The Magic Library Card, rather than a credit card. Certainly, many of the benefits will be there whether or not there are grants, but what will be harder to sustain is adaptation and growth. Even, one might argue, as for any corporate entity, survival!

Think of the on-line Polaris Integrated Library System (ILS) that serves you today as a user of the WLN’s 24/7 countywide access, from home or anywhere else. Implementation and upkeep of that alone has taken a few grants, with capital expenses totaling well over a million dollars. It has taken a lot of collaboration and integration among WLN member Libraries to get both the grant applications and project/upgrades done successfully. That began more than fifteen years ago, and if your Library Board is not thinking that way now, well.....

Sometimes the need is more technologically basic than a Westmoreland Information Network™ (Polaris ILS). For example, with one WLN Library, this one owning its own building, there is an urgent need to replace the leaky roof and leaky and non-insulating windows. With another, its old building recently became water-damaged beyond repair, and the need is for a wholly new facility. Who pays for those capital needs? Capital grants are a must in these cases just to function at a basic level, let alone to serve creatively and boldly.

There are or have been grant opportunities in 2024 both capital and programming. With respect to the former, Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund grants are administered annually since 1993 by the Office of Commonwealth Libraries (OCL), Bureau of Library Development, funded by realty transfer taxes. Maximum grant amount is usually \$750,000 contingent on an assured 1:1 match. In 2023 the application round opened on July 17, but it is important to start the very complex preparations in Spring. In addition, for only a second time, COVID-19 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant applications opened, due on April 27, with awards (unmatched) bracketed for \$250,000 to \$2 million.

For programming, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry’s third round of funding since 2022 required applications be submitted by April 4. Maximum awards are \$100,000. The funding pool is \$5 million proportioned \$3 million to continuing program participants and \$2 million to new applicants. Successful applicants’ projects start on

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on May 27, 2024.

July 1, 2024, and end April 30, 2026. Also opened in 2024 was annual Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding, federally sourced from the Institute of Library and Museum Services and administered by the OCL. Grant size varies and has not been fully defined yet. Awards will be for programs and training, meant to serve both statewide and local purposes; applications were due either May 15 or 20, respectively.

In coming articles, I will report about WLN grant application successes and what that means for you.

Charles B. Greenberg
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation