

## **1. PROJECT TITLE *Remote Library Access***

## **2. ABSTRACT**

Chatham County Public Libraries seek to expand library access throughout the county by providing 2 outdoor Library Locker Kiosks. The locker systems will broaden the library's reach and allow for materials to be picked up and returned to locations that are closer proximity to library users than one of our 3 branches. Additionally, the lockers will be accessible outside of regular library hours, providing users with the convenience of accessing materials on their schedule. The goals identified by the library are decreasing barriers and extending equitable access. The locker kiosks would be installed in the Northeast and Southwest regions of the county.

## **3. LIBRARY USERS AND NEED**

- a. The remote locker project will benefit current library users by providing access to materials that may be retrieved at their convenience, including before and after library hours of operation. Potential users include Central Carolina Community College students, low-income housing developments, multi-generational households, older persons, commuters, families with children, and non-English speaking communities. According to 2020 Census data, Chatham County's population is approximately 79,864 and is comprised of 72% White alone, 11% Black or African American, and 12% Hispanic or Latino. People under the age of 18 make up 23.5%, and those 65 years and over represent 26%. Library staff have been collecting requests for remote lockers since their rise in popularity during the pandemic and have noted over 200 users asking for Chatham County Public Libraries to provide this service.
- b. Chatham County is 707 square miles and is expecting a rapid and large population growth outside of the county seat of Pittsboro. It is currently the second fastest growing county in North Carolina. That growth is expected to continue with the announcement of two large manufacturing projects currently underway. With this industry growth, the population has the potential to increase by approximately 23% by 2030. Areas that have been identified as underserved and anticipating this growth are in the Northeast and Southwest regions of the county. Presently, Chatham County Public Libraries do not have branches in these areas. Residents located in these parts of the county are approximately 13 miles and 10 miles from the closest library, respectively. Additionally, the library has received inquiries and requests for library services including a delivery system. We are seeking a cost-effective solution to meet the rising need of providing access, broadening the library's reach, and establishing a presence in these areas of the county.

#### 4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- a. The library wants to address the need to expand access to library materials and resources to both underserved and high growth areas in Chatham County that are not near one of our 3 library branches. We want to accommodate library users by offering flexibility and convenience in picking up library materials. Library staff generated a report that included cancelled, expired, and unclaimed holds for the last two years. There were 4,045 unfulfilled reserved items. In querying library users who had requested these items, approximately 25% of respondents cited time and location as reasons they did not pick up their library materials. The library identified the Northeast and Southwest regions of the county as areas that would benefit from the installation of lockers. There are an estimated 9,000 residents that live in the Northeast region of the county. Lockers installed at Central Carolina Community College Health Science Center would be located near several developments including Nature Trail, Jordan Lake Mobile Home, Farrington, Briar Chapel, and N. Chatham Elementary School. The Southwest region is primarily a rural area of the county and consists of 3 unincorporated towns including Bonlee, Bear Creek, and Benett. There are approximately 8,700 residents located here. Building upon the success of the LSTA funded storywalk installation at Southwest District Park, this project would enable us to expand our collaborative partnership with the Parks, Recreation and Culture Resources department. Lockers installed at the Southwest District Park would be near Chatham County High School, and Bonlee and Benett Schools which serve grades K-8. These locations will provide convenience for families, retirees, students, and commuters.

As a result of receiving this grant and installing remote lockers, more library users would be able to pick up reserved materials at their convenience and hold fulfillment for both current and new users would increase. This would result in improved user satisfaction with library services, reduced access barriers and a decrease in the number of cancelled, expired, and unclaimed holds.

- b. This solution was selected because library users have requested it after hearing about lockers in neighboring areas including Alamance and Chapel Hill. Library staff examined Bibliotheca's Open+ software but concluded that this did not address the issue of proximity and would be prohibitively expensive. It was determined that remote lockers provided the most cost-effective way to furnish access in both underserved and high-growth areas of the county. The lockers will offer users expanded access to materials, flexibility and convenience that accommodate their schedule, at a location closer to them than one of our 3 branches.
- c. The total cost for this project is \$49,670.00. With 2 project partners, the library will provide a 10% match of \$4967 and requested LSTA funding is \$44,703. This

cost estimate was created by querying 3 vendors who manufacture lockers for libraries to determine market value, quality assurance, and industry standards using the Chatham County Procurement policy for cost estimates. The vendors solicited were Bradford Systems, Bibliotheca, D-Tech. The costs listed above were provided in each vendor's quote, making them reasonable and necessary to execute this project.

**Equipment** required for this project includes:

(2) 17 bay locker units, roof, installation and training with a touch screen, patron card barcode reader and receipt printer.

(2) wraps with library logo on locker units for users to identify.

- **Equipment** – 2x \$ 14,335=28,670 Locker Units  
2x\$2500=\$5,000 wraps with library logo on lockers units for users to identify.

**Supplies** needed for this project include concrete pads. The remote lockers will be located outside necessitating the need for (2) concrete pads to provide stability and secure anchoring preventing them from tipping over.

- **Supplies** – The supplies for the project include concrete pads for both locations for stability and anchoring to prevent the units from tipping over.

**2 x \$8,000= \$16,000**

- d. The library will continue and sustain the lockers and their cost of maintenance and supplies through the library system's regular operating budget.
- e. Project partners include Central Carolina Community College and Chatham County Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources. Both partners will serve as locker locations and will assist the library in the installation, maintenance, and promotion of this service. The lockers located in the Northeast region of the county will be housed at the Central Carolina Community College's Health Sciences Center. Chatham County Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources, will provide space at Southwest Park.

It is anticipated that both partners will see an increase in traffic at their locales when locker users pick up their materials. Our partners can expect to benefit from this project by observing an increased awareness of their programs, amenities, and services. Usage of their facilities can also be expected to rise.

## 5. EVALUATION

The library will generate reports and use surveys to measure and document the success of the project. Through POLARIS software we will track holds, the number of cardholders using the lockers, the number of new cards issued, and the number of times the remote lockers are used. This data will help us to understand whether the lockers are effective at expanding access to material. The library will also implement a survey to gather qualitative data including increased knowledge of library services and resources, and what challenges, desires, and perspectives users have of the library system.

- a. Outcomes that the library plans to see include increases in:
  - Awareness of library services and resources.
  - Circulation of library materials.
  - Library usage and issued library cards.
  - User satisfaction with library services in these underserved areas.

The library anticipates that current users will appreciate the convenience of accessing their library materials in locations closer in proximity to their work or home. The project will allow users to save time and money. This will also create a positive attitude as it shows that the library is responsive to community requests for this service. Non-library users will gain awareness of library services and programs increasing the likelihood of them becoming library card holders.

- b. The library will evaluate the outcomes of this project by monitoring locker usage reports, observing the number of holds at the locations, and generating zip code reports for increases in new library cards in these areas. The library will also survey users of the remote lockers throughout the project, including at installation, midpoint through the project, and at the end. The survey will collect data on whether expanded access has allowed them to be more active library users, as well as anecdotal reports on gained knowledge of library services and resources.