

Community Needs Assessment for the Red Cliff Tribal Library

Abstract

We propose to undertake a needs assessment of the Red Cliff Tribal Library near Bayfield, Wisconsin. By partnering with the Northern Waters Library Service, the Bayfield County Library System, and other concerned parties from both the Red Cliff community and the broader tribal and library communities in Wisconsin, we plan to develop a program for community survey and analysis that will allow us to evaluate the needs of the Red Cliff community and develop proposals for how a community-based culturally-aware tribal library might best meet those needs. We will focus on both the short-term survival and the long-term sustainability of the Red Cliff library by researching funding opportunities and by helping to create networks of support and lasting relationships between the Red Cliff library, other local and tribal libraries and universities. The work for our project would take place primarily in Madison with extended visits to Red Cliff for community discussion and self-education approximately once a month between May and November 2008. At the end of this time period, we will present a proposal to Red Cliff and other interested parties summarizing our assessment process and outlining our suggestions for maintaining the growth and support of this community tribal library.

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Purpose of the Project

In collaboration with contacts from Bayfield and Ashland Counties, Wisconsin, we have identified the development of the tribal libraries of the Northern Waters Library Service as a priority area in the growth of tribal communities and the health of Wisconsin as a whole. Facing possible closure in the coming year, the Red Cliff Tribal Library currently stands as the tribal library within the Northern Waters Library Service area in most need of assistance.

Created through a series of treaties between the U.S. Government and the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, the Red Cliff Reservation is located on the shores of Lake Superior in northern Wisconsin. Tribal offices and business are located in the village of Red Cliff which is situated three miles north of Bayfield. As with many tribal libraries (Dunn, 2004, Kline, 2006, Patterson, 2002), the Red Cliff Tribal Library suffers from disorganization and neglect stemming from lack of funding. There is no cash flow for staff and the aging building has a high cost of maintenance. Joe Bresette, Director of Tribal Operations in Red Cliff, has made known the danger the library faces and yet he has not seen community support for the library emerge. Mr. Bresette has described the current library as a “cookie cutter model” providing “stereotypical services” that do not meet the needs of community members. As indicated as far back as 1975 in Wisconsin's *Statewide Plan for the Development of Indian Library Services*, designing library services for American Indians must include considerations that fall outside the “cookie cutter model” such as cultural sensitivity, community participation and leadership, assessment of local needs, culturally appropriate collections and information delivery, and services specialized for the American Indian communities. Mr. Bresette believes that interest could be re-established in the community if the library offered more resources and services that spoke to the specific interests of the community.

In light of the current status of the Red Cliff Tribal Library, we will be working together with

community leaders and members in taking immediate action to ensure the survival of the existing library and to develop a plan to transform the library into a community-based, sustainable, economically-viable resource center in Red Cliff offering collections and services that grow out of the community's needs. A successful library can provide the educational and informational support needed in a community to assist in social and economic development, thus improving the quality of life for the community in which it serves. The short-term goal of the project is to preserve the existing library. We also will complete an assessment and analysis of the community's needs and how the library can address those needs. The assessment will also include an examination of the physical problems with the current library facility and suggestions for a new layout of the building. Long-term goals include engaging community leaders to play an active role in the ongoing development of the library and its services, generating interest and creating positive energy within the community to provide sustainable support for the library as an important resource for Red Cliff and building long-lasting, healthy relationships between the tribal communities and the universities and other agencies ensuring the community's access to knowledge and resources.

Measurable outcomes of the project will include the identification and acquirement of funds to ensure the survival of the existing library; the identification of funding sources that can be used for the sustainability of the library in the long-term; a comprehensive report on the findings of community needs assessment research in relation to the collections and services of the library including a proposed layout plan for the physical facility; and the identification and linking of the tribe to agencies, organizations and advocates interested in ongoing collaboration, networking and partnerships with the tribal community.

Summary of Major Activities

We have conducted several meetings and have maintained continued correspondence with both Jim Trojanowski, Director of the Northern Waters Library Service, and Joe Bresette, Director of Tribal

Operations in Red Cliff. Working with them, as well as UW-Extension educator Tim Kane, President of the American Indian Library Association Janice Rice, and with Red Cliff community leaders, the proposed project will focus on assessing the needs of Red Cliff through a social and physical mapping of the community, and developing proposals for how a community library could best meet those needs. We will begin with extensive research into the background of the tribal library system in Wisconsin, including evaluation of other tribal libraries, their successes and their struggles. We will then work with Red Cliff community leaders and others familiar with Red Cliff's situation to develop a program for community survey and discussion aimed at collecting data on community needs, community perception of the library, and ways in which the library could better serve the community. We will also focus on both the long-term and short-term needs of a community library by identifying sources of funding for the immediate preservation and survival of the existing library while building relationships for long-lasting support between tribal communities and local universities. We will also assist with networking that is aimed at the Red Cliff Library's survival and sustainability, and that is aware of the need to link all the tribal libraries horizontally for a healthy future.

Our timeline for completion extends from mid-May 2008 to late November 2008. Most of the planning and analysis for this project will be done in Madison in addition to our other academic activities. However, the process of survey and discussion will be implemented in three extended visits to the Red Cliff community over the course of the summer, and three more in the fall with perhaps one additional visit in early summer in order for us to become more familiar with and educated about the culture and community of Red Cliff. Between visits, we will analyze the results of our interactions with the community, and begin to develop proposals for the future of the library based on community response. We will then deliver a summary of our assessment process, along with our findings and suggestions for the future of the Red Cliff Tribal Library to the Red Cliff community and to other involved parties, such as representatives of the Northern Waters Library Service and the surrounding tribal libraries, sometime around Thanksgiving.

Timeline

May 2008:

Begin developing plan for community assessment
Continue networking with local contacts and other interested parties
Schedule dates for Red Cliff visits
Begin research into tribal libraries and self-education on Red Cliff community history and character

June 2008:

Continue developing community survey plan and research into tribal libraries
First extended visit to Red Cliff for group education and introductory dialogue with the community
Tour and begin physical mapping of area and library facility
Begin analyzing mapping and discussion results

July 2008:

Visit to Red Cliff to learn more about the community (tentatively scheduled for July 4)
Second visit to Red Cliff for community survey and discussion
Begin analyzing community survey and discussion results

August 2008:

Third visit to Red Cliff for community survey and discussion; begin focus group discussions
Continue analyzing and transcribing community survey, discussion and focus group results
Begin developing proposals for library growth and sustainability

September 2008:

Fourth visit to Red Cliff for focus group discussions and interviews
Continue data analysis and transcription and developing proposals for library growth and sustainability

October 2008:

Fifth visit to Red Cliff for follow-up discussions, finalization of physical mapping process
Continue data analysis and transcription and developing proposals for library growth and sustainability

November 2008:

Finalize report and proposals for library growth and sustainability and review of community assessment process
Present findings and suggestions at final community meeting

Discussion of Project Benefits

The Red Cliff Tribal Library project will yield a number of benefits for both the community and the students involved. The project will accomplish the priority objectives of the community by, first, safeguarding the survival of the library, and second, the completion of a community needs assessment and analysis that will serve as the basis for the re-development and re-design of the library and its services to better serve the community. Red Cliff will also benefit from the establishment of ties

between the tribal and the university communities. Moreover, the success and viability of the library as a central resource for Red Cliff will contribute to the social and economic development of the community and improvement of the quality of life. For the students, the opportunity to apply classroom knowledge to a valuable community project will provide the real-life experience necessary to develop leadership, communication and collaborative working skills. The applied research experience will be valuable in any library or information environment. Much of the library and information studies academic coursework covers relevant subjects such as analysis of information needs, behavior, use and barriers, and how libraries address these issues. Students will also gain credit through independent study coursework under the supervision of Professor Louise Robbins. In addition, increasing our understanding and knowledge of Wisconsin's tribal libraries in general, the Red Cliff community, and project-related issues such as tribal politics, and an historical perspective on the overall treatment of tribes will assist us in our professional development and the establishment of healthy relationships with members of diverse communities.

References

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