

Memo

To: Commission Members
From: Christie Briggs, Regional Librarian, Montana Talking Book Library
Darlene Staffeldt, State Librarian
Date: April 5, 2007
Re: Montana Talking Book (TBL) request to use Trust funds if necessary

Request for Second Year NFB-Newsline® Funding – April, 2007

In December, 2005, the Library Commission approved \$5,000 as partial payment to the National Federation of the Blind for a subscription to Newsline® services for Montana Talking Book Library patrons. This represented 13% of the total annual cost of \$26,500. The Montana Association for the Blind (a state affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind) paid the difference of \$21,500.

At that time, there were 48 Talking Book Library patrons subscribed to Newsline®.

Background information on Newsline®:

Newsline® is an electronic newspaper and magazine product created by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB-Newsline®). NFB designed this system to convert digital transmissions from publishers on the morning of the publication, reformat the data for conversion to synthetic speech and upload to the NFB-Newsline® servers. By dialing a toll-free number, dozens of newspapers, magazines and more, are available over any touch-tone telephone twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Anyone who cannot read conventional newsprint could qualify for this “free” to subscribers service.

Evaluation of NFB-Newsline® Services:

Initial funds allowed us to evaluate the reliability of the NFB-Newsline® service, the interest and practical use for our patrons and the viability of developing this service as an on-going part of the Montana Talking Book Library budget for direct patron service.

A Survey showed that the service is 85-95% reliable with occasional minor glitches that are quickly addressed by NFB staff. The practical use for our patrons was given high marks by 91% of patron subscribers. Majority of responses received from patrons ages 75 and younger said they use it in conjunction with their professional careers. A consistent response from patrons 80 years and older was that this service kept them up with current events around the state and world.

Ages represented include:

17-39 years: 4 patrons

40-64 years: 29 patrons

65-79 years: 17 patrons

80 years and older: 32 patrons

7 are over the age of 90 years and one patron is 96 years “young”

Changes in NFB-Newsline® since 2005:

The annual cost of the NFB-Newsline® service has increased to \$28,000 (newspapers, magazines and some television schedules have been added to the service. Some of the federal funding for the cost was lost). This represents a 7% increase in cost.

We now have 82 Talking Book Library patrons subscribed to NFB-Newsline®. This represents a 79% increase in patron enrollment over 2005.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Our survey concludes that NFB-Newsline® is a worthwhile service to our patrons of all ages. The Montana Talking Book Library should continue to fund a portion of the Newsline® services. It is the recommendation of the Montana Talking Book Library to increase the amount paid for Newsline® to \$5,600 which represents 20% of the total annual amount. It is also recommended that the Montana Talking Book Library include partial Newsline® funding for patrons (working up to no more than 50% of the total cost) in the executive planning process for the next biennium (2010-2011).

Request:

It is the request of the Montana Talking Book Library that \$5,600. be paid to the National Federation of the Blind for partial 2007 funding of NFB-Newsline® services for Montana in support of the services used by TBL's patron subscribers.

We are currently carefully reviewing the FY'2007 operations budget and expenditures of the State Library. Due to savings generated by staff being very careful with spending to save funds in order to help cover the broad band pay plan, we feel there will be enough monies to fund this project from existing FY2007 monies. If enough funds are not available in the FY'2007 budget we are requesting permission to fund this project with monies from the TBL trust. The current trust balance is approximately \$163,000.