

Book Bonanza!

Celebrating Ten Years of the Bookapalooza Program

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Got books? The winners of the Association for Library Service to Children's (ALSC) Bookapalooza Program do. But where do all those books come from? Each year, ALSC receives thousands of books, videos, audiobooks, and recordings for the various children's book and media awards. The Chicago office fills up with books—and they all need good homes.

In 2007, ALSC Executive Director Aimee Strittmatter created the Bookapalooza Program to donate each year's award submission materials to three libraries in need across the United States.

A decade later, we celebrate ten years of donating thousands of book and media materials to deserving libraries.

The Bookapalooza Program is administered by ALSC's Grants Administration Committee (GAC), which also selects for three other grants: the Penguin Random House Young Readers Group Award, the Maureen Hayes Author/Illustrator Award, and the Baker and Taylor Summer Reading Program Grant.

However, Bookapalooza is the most intensive grant for the committee because it is the most popular. The committee reviews the applications and consider each library's needs, demographics, and budget, as well as how the libraries would incorporate the materials into the collection. Using these metrics, among others, to score the applicants on a grid, they select the three highest scorers as recipients.

Behind the Scenes: An Intern's Perspective

As the awards intern for ALSC, my largest and most important project was the Bookapalooza Program. When I first arrived



Florence County (SC) Library System staff, 2011 Bookapalooza recipient. Photo courtesy of Paula Childers.

in the office, I did not realize that the massive, floor-to-ceiling bookcases full of books and media would be all mine. I was tasked with splitting the whole collection into three sets of boxes, and I ended up packing roughly forty boxes for each library.

Though I enjoy exercising, the Bookapalooza process was physically tiring. It was quite the task to grab armfuls of books and load them into each box. Because it was such a lengthy process, completing Bookapalooza was a celebration! It felt great to pack up the last box and send off all the boxes to the mailroom.

The most helpful part about the process was determining the specific needs of each library. Judy Card, from the First Regional Library in Hernando, Mississippi, a 2012 Bookapalooza recipient, has a similar recommendation for future applicants: "Be specific about your needs and the impact the books will have on young lives."

Where Are They Now?

As ALSC reflects on a decade of the Bookapalooza Program, the office reached out to past recipients to follow up on how the grant helped their libraries. It was exciting to hear from our oldest recipients because it gave an insight into Bookapalooza's long-term effects.

"I was so excited that I could not contain myself," recalls Dona Helmer from the Anchorage (AK) School District College Gate

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Display of books sent to Maricopa Public Library, 2015 Bookapalooza recipient.

Elementary Library, a 2007 recipient. “The collection was old and did not adequately represent the student population,” Helmer said. Many small libraries like theirs do not have the funds to update their collections. Bookapalooza gives libraries the opportunity to create a “more well-rounded collection,” Helmer noted.

Like Helmer, Card remembered, “It was like Christmas every time some new books arrived.” The First Regional Library was not the only beneficiary of the grant; Card explained that they were able to send titles to other branches in need. One of the branch libraries used the new books to start a summer reading Drop Everything and Read program that continues today.

Commenting on the wider effect of the Bookapalooza Program, Card said it “certainly spiffed up our collections.”

The Talahi Community Elementary School library in St. Cloud, Minnesota, also created a summer reading program with their materials. school employee John Bowden said, “With 96 percent [of students] on free and reduced meals, they are students who come from home settings that are tough and they are in so much need.” He also noted that reading rates went up at the library after receiving the new materials.

In 2011, the Florence County (SC) Library System received the Bookapalooza grant. “Our material budget was limited,” explained Paula Childers. “We knew it would make a difference in our communities.”

Because the winner was a library system, Childers explained that they went through the materials to see which location needed them most. Besides receiving an influx of materials, there was the unexpected benefit of receiving audiovisual materials that helped patrons with learning disabilities. The materials were also used for day cares, schools, and other children's agencies. Childers recommends that everyone apply for the grant: “You have nothing to lose, just lots of materials to gain



Librarian Stephanie Charlefour, Gay-Kimball Library, Troy, New Hampshire; 2017 Bookapalooza recipient. Photo by Bill Ganade, Keene Sentinel Staff.

that will make a difference in your community the way it did in ours.”

David A. Howe Public Library in Wellsville, New York, a 2016 Bookapalooza recipient, was thrilled to receive the grant. “I honestly was flabbergasted, and it took me a few days for me to believe it was true!” Keturah Cappadonia remembered. “The rest of our library staff, being geographically and professionally isolated, did not understand the magnitude and significance of this award until the day when we received the delivery of more than thirty boxes of free brand-new youth materials.”

However, the award also presented a challenge for this small library. “It took an entire year for us to process and catalog the items and put them all into our collection,” Cappadonia said. But that hard work greatly benefitted the library. Cappadonia said that the new materials were featured in topical displays for library programs, including the summer reading program, Banned Books Week, Teen Tech Week, and Picture Book Month.

Another 2016 recipient, Nora Sparks Warren Library in St. Paul's Valley, Oklahoma, reported that the average age of material in its children's collection was more than thirty-six years. “When the boxes came, we felt like it was Christmas. We enjoyed digging in and seeing what came,” said Shari Kendall. Because condition of the collection and the lack of resources, a lot of people stopped coming to the library. Kendall happily reported that the award “definitely impacted the number of patrons that come to the library.”

The most recent Bookapalooza grant was awarded to the Yakama National Library in Toppenish, Washington. ALSC caught up with Merida Kipp to hear how her library is processing the grant.

“We are so happy! Even the boxes get hugs!” Kipp said. “The award has helped our library take a huge leap in expanding our



ALSC awards intern Corinne Demyanovich prepares the 2017 Bookapalooza award for shipment. Photo courtesy of ALSC.

children's collection. It probably could have taken up five years to purchase that many books for our children's collection."

One challenge of small libraries is the lack of space to intake such an enormous collection. Sara Martini of Talahi Community School in St. Cloud, Minnesota, a 2014 winner, said, "The books came in twenty-seven huge boxes and contained more than 1,350 items, worth around \$24,000." That's a lot for a small library to handle!

While Bookapalooza certainly introduces some challenges like this, it solves many more. A very different challenge for small libraries is not having enough books for their patrons. "We physically did not have enough books for every child to check out two books," said Kristal Petruzzi of Northwood Elementary School in Crestview, Florida, which won the grant in 2014. "This will also allow multicultural literature to fill our shelves, which I'm really excited about, and also some modern non-fiction," she said.

Advice for Future Applicants

Some libraries may be hesitant to apply for the grant. But Shari Kendall of Nora Sparks Warren Library said, "Don't be intimidated . . . just because you are a small city library that no one has ever heard of because you may just win."

To make your application stand out, former GAC chairs have the following advice:

"Tell a compelling story," says 2017 GAC chair Susan Poulter. "Paint a picture of your community and library using statistics."

2010 GAC chair Linda Ernst recommends giving yourself time because grant writing is hard. "Be honest in presenting facts and be creative in how this grant would benefit your community," said Ernst.

Once the grant is yours, the committee chairs recommend showcasing your award to your community. For example, you could have an unboxing or launch party, like the 2011 recipient, the Florence County (SC) Library System. Make it fun and include your community!

For application information, visit <http://www.ala.org/alsc/bookapalooza-program>. 