County Library
Los Angeles

County of Los Angeles Public Library ■ www.colapublib.org
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December 7, 2015

To: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Don Knabe

From: Yolanda De Ramus
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MOTION ON LANCASTER PUBLIC LIBRARY PILOT AND FEASIBILITY OF IMPLEMENTING VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER MODELS IN OTHER COUNTY LIBRARIES (ITEM NO. 21, AGENDA OF MARCH 17, 2015)

On March 17, 2015, the County Board of Supervisors approved a motion presented by Supervisor Kuehl to direct the County Librarian to: 1) evaluate the success of the Lancaster Public Library pilot program to determine the feasibility of replicating sustainable Veteran's Resource Center models in other County libraries; and 2) report back in writing its findings to the Board six months after the start of the Veteran's Connect program pilot.

This memorandum contains the background and analysis of this Board motion directive.

BACKGROUND

In May, 2014 two Lancaster Library staff members applied for a Staff Innovation Fund grant, administered by the California State Library. This original grant application proposed serving area veterans through the creation of a resource center and providing space for County departments that serve veterans to conduct office hours. Instead of funding this grant, the California State Library offered the Lancaster Library support and funding to join an existing statewide project entitled "Veterans Connect @ the Library." The special focus of this project is to provide information to reintegrate California veterans into the workforce and community through a partnership with the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), the California State Library, and local library jurisdictions.

The specific goals of *Veterans Connect @ the Library* are to:

- Provide veteran benefits and local service information to veterans and family members, and links to other organizations serving veterans, especially local County Veteran Service Offices, CalVet and the Federal VA.
- Increase the number of registered veterans in the CalVet Reintegration system.
- Increase California veteran benefit claims.
- Connect veterans and their families to library resources.

To meet these goals, participating libraries are required to create a Veterans Resource Center (VRC) in the library with regular open hours, collections of books and other materials for veterans, websites with links to local resources for veterans, and access to computer equipment for extended periods in order to complete online applications and do research. According to the model created by the *Veterans Connect @ the Library* program, each VRC is to be staffed by specialized trained volunteers whom the program provides advice and resources for selecting and training these volunteers.

Lancaster Library's Veterans Resource Center

On March 17, 2015, the Board approved acceptance of the Veterans Connect @ the Library grant award from the California State Library to create a Veterans Resource Center at the Lancaster Public Library (Lancaster Library VRC). Subsequently, the County Public Library began the planning and implementation stages for the center and was fully operational in May, 2015.

The Lancaster Library VRC is comprised of two tables and a print station which occupies a fixed space in the back of the library. This space functions as both an office for VRC volunteers and a resource center with forms, announcements, and pamphlets of relevance to veterans. Even when the VRC is not staffed with volunteers, the resource center remains stocked with materials for customers to browse and take. VRC volunteers have a dedicated phone line and they, as well as VRC customers, utilize the library's spare laptops in order to connect to veteran and consumer resources online.

Lancaster Library VRC volunteers are typically available on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, and they see customers on a drop-in basis on those days. Additionally, VRC volunteers are available to assist customers who make appointments in advance.

Lancaster Library VRC Statistics (May 2015 – November 2015)

Program Staffing	
Volunteers:	3
Total Volunteer Hours:	201
Lancaster Staff Hours:	160

Resources	
Veterans Titles Added:	115
Appointments with Veterans & Family:	85

Lancaster Library VRC Successes

VRC volunteers have had over seventy meaningful interactions with Veterans or family members and have disseminated information to assist these customers with securing benefits or housing. Frequent topics addressed by VRC volunteers include: *DD-214 form assistance, disability benefits, homelessness/housing assistance, access to medical care, and legal aid.*

The Veterans-specific materials purchased by the center have been checked out by local veterans or family members over eighty times. The center itself is a point of pride for the Lancaster community. Library staff frequently receives compliments from members of the public (veterans and non-veterans alike) about the center and its positive impact in the community.

Lancaster Library VRC Challenges

Recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers to staff the Lancaster Library VRC on a consistent basis is the primary challenge of this project. Per the rules of the Veterans Connect @ Your Library program, volunteers are asked to commit to periods of six months and one weekly shift staffing the VRC desk and answering questions from customers. Retaining volunteers for the duration of this commitment has proven difficult for Lancaster as well as many other public library participants in the *Veterans Connect @ Your Library* program.

RECOMMENDATION/PROGRAM SUCCESS

One particularly successful Veterans Connect program model relies on a paid staff member to manage the program, perform community outreach, recruit and train volunteers. This position is vital to the program as the VRC's success relies upon retaining enough qualified volunteers to keep the center staffed on a regular basis.

Therefore, it should be noted that in order to successfully expand the Veterans Resource Centers in other County Libraries, it is recommended that each center have a staff member dedicated to performing community outreach, recruiting, and retaining volunteers. This position would be particularly well-suited to a participant in the County Veterans' Internship Program, and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has agreed to train any prospective new hire for a Library Veterans Resource Center. Estimated costs for additional VRC Staffing (per center) are as follows:

Option 1 (Lancaster and Norwalk)	
Veteran Intern	$55,000 - $70,000*
Option 2 (Lancaster and Norwalk)	
Library Assistant I	$70,000*

Pop-Up VRC Staff (West Hollywood HQ)	
Librarian I	**$100,000***

** Annual salary and employee benefits*

Estimated additional costs for new Pop-Up VRC Model:

Third Supervisorial District Pop-Up VRC	
Materials, Supplies, Mobile Furniture and Technology	$15,000

It is further recommended that additional VRC sites are piloted on a phased-in basis and as necessary by Public Library location need. As such, we have identified the following two expansion-pilot sites for consideration: a "Pop-Up VRC", headquartered at the West Hollywood Library and the Norwalk Library.

West Hollywood

The West Hollywood Library is the largest library site in the Third Supervisorial District. It is suggested that this site would be a key location to serve as the headquarters for a new mobile Veterans Resource Center concept called a "Pop-Up VRC." The Pop-Up service model is relatively new to libraries, and it is part of a trend that the Pew Research Center has called "innovative library services 'In the Wild'." Instead of staffing an in-library Veterans Resource Center, Pop-Up VRC staff would work with Board Offices, City Council Offices, Community Colleges, and other local service providers to arrange visits from Pop-Up VRC staff in order to bring Veterans Connect resources to the wider community and expanded locations. In addition to providing literature and referrals, Pop-Up VRC staff would create a real time connection zone where veterans and family members would be able to speak directly with a library-based VRC staff member, via the web, for in-depth assistance and form walkthroughs.

In order to accommodate the increased amount of information requests from visitors to the Pop-Up VRC, the Library will work with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to develop a veteran's benefits and resource referral training curriculum for a select group of library staff.

It should be noted that library site selection is a challenge due to limited available space at many of the libraries located in the Third Supervisorial District. Furthermore, with the West Hollywood Library identified as the headquarters of the Pop-Up VRC service, it will be easier to disseminate Veterans' informational resources throughout the Third Supervisorial District.

Norwalk

The Norwalk Library is an ideal expansion site for a variety of factors. As the location of the South Regional Office, Norwalk Library has ample space to house a fixed VRC and store supplies. This site could also serve as an additional storage and information hub for the Pop-Up VRC. Due to existing community organizations serving area veterans, such as the active Norwalk Veterans Memorial Committee and the Cerritos College Veterans Resource Center, Norwalk Library staff have already identified potential collaborative partners. The goal of the Norwalk Library VRC would be to leverage these partnerships and municipal support to create a centralized clearinghouse of information for veterans at the library, and to act as the MVA training site for library staff selected to participate in this program.

The Library proposes two program expansion models for your consideration:

1. Create VRC sites at the West Hollywood and Norwalk sites.

2. Implement a VRC pop-up programming model in collaboration with the County Department of Military and Veterans Affair that leverages a shared staffing approach and enables the Library and MVA to provide services and programs to veterans and their families throughout each supervisorial district.

Both models may require additional resources; more specific details can be discussed with your respective offices.

We can arrange to meet with your staff to discuss the specifics of this proposal. Please contact me at (562) 940-8412 or e-mail at yderamus@library.lacounty.gov.

YDR:BC:VC:dk

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
Chief Executive Office