# History and Evolution of the Embedding Program at the State Library of Oregon

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## Introduction

This article will describe what the embedding program does, its history at the State Library, and how it has evolved over time—including how important it has been for connecting with state agencies and offering our services and resources within our new reality of remote work. I will outline how the embedding program came to be, how it was developed, describe how it creates stronger connections with our state agency patrons and the various outreach programs we have developed to promote the program. I will also provide some examples of what has worked, and what has not, in the program.

## History

The "embedded" librarian program was developed as part of the 2015–2017 biennium outreach plan for the Government Information and Library Services (GILS) Division of the State Library. The idea being that each reference librarian would "embed" or become a liaison with specific agencies that fell under their areas of expertise, with each agency being assigned a librarian. This would help develop deeper research focused relationships with state employees and their "embedded" librarian. It would also allow the librarians to focus more specifically on outreach for their agencies. The plan involved a number of activities to help library staff become more familiar with agency goals, initiatives, legislative issues, and staff needs. Embedding includes both internal & external outreach where librarians visit with agencies "in-person" or build specific resources relevant to agency needs. The original plan for how this process would take place was very detailed and involved different processes for agencies of varying sizes. It included having the librarians closely track all of the policy bills and budgets their agencies submitted to the Legislature, attending agency board and policy meetings, and following mentions of their agencies in the media. The State Library generally has four or five reference librarians on staff at one time—meaning that each librarian would be embedded with 20–25 agencies at once. It quickly became clear that this extremely time-consuming work plan was not going to be possible.

Reference Librarian Jerry Curry doing instruction for one of his embedded agencies.

## Evolution of the Embedding Program

I joined the State Library as Reference Coordinator for the GILS Division in the summer of 2017. The reference staff had been embedded for a few years and had learned that the relationships with their agencies had evolved much more organically than the original plan outline had dictated. The most effective way to build these relationships was connecting in person (in-person library resource trainings tailored for the agency) as well as doing immediate introductions with new agency patrons, so they knew right away who their embedded librarian was and would feel comfortable reaching out to an individual for research assistance. As Reference Coordinator, one of my tasks was to track the success of the embedding program as well as work with the Outreach Coordinator (Jerry Curry) on its continued development. We do this in two ways. Our quantitative measure of success comes from tracking how much time we spend specifically on reference transactions resulting directly from our embedding efforts. Our qualitative measure of success is tracked in bimonthly summaries of the embedding work we have done and discussed in reference and outreach meetings.

## Outreach and Promotion of the Embedding Program

One big hurdle that we wanted to get past was to share our embedding program with state agency employees that work outside Salem, and encourage them to start using our services. The embedding team decided that we would go on the road and visit agency offices in more far-flung parts of Oregon. We have done road trips to Eugene, Hermiston, Newport, Bend,

Roseburg and Medford in the last two years. The librarians set up trainings with their embedded agency offices in the area, and then send out invites for any state agency employees who work nearby to attend as well. This has helped the state employees outside Salem gain awareness about everything the State Library can do for them, even from afar.

Every week, we scan the list of new registrants to the State Library, and the embedded librarian sends an outreach email introducing themselves and the services we provide. This allows new patrons to immediately have the name of the librarian embedded with their agency and have a better understanding of what the State Library offers. This has been a successful way to get embedded in research projects right away, as well as set up training at specific agencies.

Embedded librarians make a point to attend meetings, within their agencies, to stay informed on new policy research that is being done to be better able to offer assistance. This enables us to be more proactive and also put names with faces at the agencies.

The embedded librarians also reach out to agencies to give in-person customized training to smaller workgroups, divisions, and research teams within them on how the State Library's resources can assist them in their work. These in-person trainings have probably been the most successful aspect of the embedding program. The feedback we receive has been fantastic and the trainings quite often result in follow up reference work or scheduling further training sessions at an agency.

For lack of a better word, "colder" or more general outreach attempts have been less successful. Cold calls and emails to agency staff rarely get much traction. Also, sending out communications on general topics have tended to illicit less response compared to specific topics. For example, sharing information about resources on specific topics (remote work skills, DEI/EDI resources, leadership, software training) is much more successful.

## LibGuide Collaborations with State Agencies Developed from Embedding

The goal of the embedding program was to create closer collaborative relationships with state agency employees.

One service we began to offer through embedding is creating information guides (LibGuides) that agencies can use to share important information with their colleagues or the populations they serve. Some examples of LibGuides that have been or are being developed collaboratively since the embedding program began are:

- Oregon Foster Parent Resource Guide—developed with the Child Welfare Division at the Department of Humans Services (DHS). Used to give resource guidance to foster parents in Oregon (private guide).

- Health Equity Measurement LibGuide—developed with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) Office of Equity and Inclusion.

- The Vocational Rehabilitation Library Toolkit—developed with the DHS Vocational Rehabilitation Services division.

- Census 2020 Resources for Oregon Libraries—developed with the Governor's Office to give guidance on the 2020 Census.

- Trauma-Informed Practices LibGuide—developed with OHA and Department of Corrections

## Embedding During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the stay at home order due to the COVID-19 pandemic was issued by Governor Kate Brown in mid-March 2020, many state agency employees have found themselves suddenly working remotely from home, often for the first time. The State Library has tried to use these unusual times as an opportunity to both expand our embedding reach, as well as inform state employees about the resources they still have access to remotely. Some interesting collaborative projects have arisen from these efforts:

- The Department of Human Services (DHS) has been collaborating with their embedded librarians to create database training tailored to the agency. These have been very well attended and have also resulted in requests for more specific training by individual teams at DHS.

- Some of the embedded librarians have started holding virtual "office hours" for their agencies, based on need. The Vocational Rehabilitation Services division at DHS as well as the Department of Environmental Quality are two agencies currently participating in these office hours.

- The Oregon Advocacy Commissions have taken this time to connect with their embedded librarian about making sure publications from all the commissions are cataloged at the State Library. They have also asked the embedded librarian to start joining virtual commission meetings to discuss resources at the State Library that can assist them in doing their policy work remotely.

## Conclusion

The embedding program has been a great way to develop more collaborative relationships with the state agencies served by the State Library. It has resulted in much more in-depth research and reference projects, the development of more nuanced training, and it has brought in patrons from more diverse agencies and work regions than in the past. It has also been valuable during the pandemic as it gives state agency employees individual librarians to reach out to in order to learn what resources are available to assist them in their remote work.