



**2021 Small Federal Library or
Information Center of the Year**

The Andrew W. Breidenbach
Environmental Research Center Library
Cincinnati, Ohio



FEDLINK Library/Information Center of the Year Award

Selection Criteria Statement (500 words or Less): (covering achievements completed during Fiscal Year 2021; cite specific examples and any supporting quantifiable data.)

1. Mission Support: the extent to which the federal library or information center assisted in fulfilling its organization’s mission during Fiscal Year 2021. (Include brief statements of both the agency and the library/information center missions, number and needs of library users, and an overview of how the library/information center has fulfilled mission-centered efforts.)

The EPA's mission is to protect human health and the environment.
EPA Library Network Mission: The Library Network provides essential resources, services and information management to support the EPA community.

AWBERC Library in Cincinnati, OH, is one of EPA's 24 libraries that work locally and collaboratively to ensure that all EPA staff have access to professional library services.

AWBERC Library provides research, reference and interlibrary loan services to 800 Cincinnati-area customers. AWBERC Library also serves as a Lead Service Center Library within the EPA Library Network, ensuring that AWBERC maintains adequate staff capacity and expertise to provide library services to other locations. AWBERC's remote customers include the Athens, GA, laboratory (25 staff), Region 4 (875 staff + general public), and supplemental support to the Region 5 library. AWBERC has successfully provided remote services for over fifteen years. This experience allowed AWBERC Library to seamlessly transition to full remote work at the start of COVID-19.

Within the EPA Library Network, AWBERC Library is the most frequent leader of training webinars via the National Training Program (NTP). AWBERC leads 4 national webinars each year, providing training to EPA on environmental and scientific research databases, journals, and information resources. AWBERC also provides cataloging support to any EPA library requiring assistance via an agencywide cataloging initiative. Over 15 years, AWBERC has completed over 58,000 cataloging actions for EPA libraries.

Local outreach includes a popular scientific book club designed for those who are interested in environmental sciences and new ways to learn about it. With the start of COVID-19, AWBERC quickly pivoted from in-person brown bag discussions to virtual discussions while maintaining the book club schedule to keep customers active and engaged in library programming even while working from home.

The library supports the country's largest water research laboratory and many laboratory tasks cannot be completed outside the lab. AWBERC Library was responsive to customer needs and reopened the library space in late FY20, staggering staff schedules to accommodate social distancing and other COVID safety requirements. AWBERC Library has remained open throughout FY21, providing services to onsite researchers as well as remotely to customers working from home or at other locations.

Reopening the physical library also allowed library staff to dig into the primary goal for FY21: RFID tagging the entire collection.

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2. Creativity/Innovation: the extent the federal library/information center demonstrated creativity or innovation to meet the agency mission by developing and/or enhancing existing service(s) in Fiscal Year 2021. (Please define the program challenge, describe the resolution, and explain the impact.)

Library inventories are an annual requirement which can put pressure on libraries with large collections. AWBERC Library has the second largest collection in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In order to comply with the National Library Network Cataloging Procedures a full inventory is required every three years, translating to roughly one third of the collection being inventoried in any given year. With a collection of 48,000 items, the annual inventory dominates the effort of one librarian for a significant portion of time.

Library inventories are very physical. Staff get cut hands from EPA publications that are stapled or in binders. Back muscles are sore from repeatedly lifting heavy objects from lower shelves. Shoulder muscles ache from repeatedly removing heavy objects from upper shelves. Additionally, older documents see wear and tear from repeated opening and reshelving, leaving these historically-important publications even more fragile.

AWBERC Library implemented RFID technology in order to solve these issues as well as increase the efficiency of the inventory process. With a mobile inventory device, library staff will be able to conduct an inventory by scanning RFID tags without pulling items off the shelves.

Tagging efforts began in late June 2021 and within weeks the staff had tagged enough items to test the mobile inventory device and conduct two sample mobile inventories. Library staff quickly realized that they were not obtaining consistent "read rates" with the mobile RFID reader. Through some research, library staff found a study by a library in the Netherlands that helped AWBERC adjust their RFID tag placement. The read rates jumped from 85.1% to 99.6%. Over 90% of AWBERC Library's collection is tagged at the higher read rate due to this early testing and intervention.

With the data collected during the two sample inventories, AWBERC Library was able to calculate the effort an annual inventory will require and compare it to the standard physical inventory process. Data determined that implementing RFID technology eliminated some inventory steps entirely - including a step that required printing 500+ pages annually. The RFID mobile inventory increased the efficiency of an annual inventory by 93%, in addition to saving hundreds of printed pages each year.

RFID technology will show continued benefits as AWBERC Library recently took on management of the EPA Library Network Dark Archive, an archive of unique EPA publications designed to preserve EPA's publication and scientific history. This collection will effectively double AWBERC's collection size and make it the largest EPA library. Managing this collection would normally require additional staff, but RFID technology will allow existing staff to conduct annual inventories in days instead of months. This saves taxpayer funding, is less physically demanding for staff and protect EPA publications for long term retention.

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3. Demonstrated Outcomes: the extent to which the federal library or information center served the needs of its defined user group(s) in Fiscal Year 2021. (Include impact statements and/or quantifiable data such as statistics, testimonials, cost savings to the institution, program changes, projects completed, etc.).

AWBERC Library's extensive experience with providing remote library services allowed an easy pivot during COVID-19 to a completely remote workforce. AWBERC Library was prepared to safely reopen to support researchers returning to the laboratory. When the Region 4 Library could not retain contractor staff, management turned to AWBERC Library to see if it was possible to take on full support of Region 4 customers. AWBERC Library managed the effort in a manner seamless to the customer. AWBERC Library continues to provide full levels of remote services to all Region 4 staff and the general public.

AWBERC spent much of FY21 implementing RFID technology in their general collection. The effort was worth it: RFID technology will improve the efficiency of annual inventories by 93%. RFID implementation will ultimately protect aging EPA publications from additional wear and tear, preserving them for the future. In late summer, AWBERC Library took on management of the EPA Dark Archive, the Agency's primary repository for EPA publications, thus doubling the size of their collection. RFID will allow AWBERC Library to effectively manage this larger collection without the need to add staff. This saves the EPA \$100K+ per year.

Even as AWBERC Library staff dedicated many hours each week to RFID tagging, customer requests for reference and research assistance didn't slow. AWBERC librarians continued to provide reliable and quick service to customers. 82% of all incoming requests were handled the very same day, with 97% of requests being returned with results by the next business day. Customer surveys reflect the quality services provided. AWBERC customers rated services as "excellent" or "good" in three categories: quality/relevance (100%), timeliness of response (100%), and overall satisfaction (100%).

In the midst of a pandemic, AWBERC Library continued outreach efforts. AWBERC led four agencywide training webinars, reaching 323 customers across 21 different locations. Additionally, AWBERC continued its popular scientific book club, conducting discussion sessions virtually. Even National Library Week events became a virtual "book display" highlighting information about cicadas and the coming emergence (electronic articles from subscribed journals, suggested online sites, maps, etc.) displaying what kind of information libraries can find for customers. AWBERC Library used a local issue of interest to Cincinnati staff to promote the library as a resource for all kinds of scientific information.

"I just wanted to let you know that I love your book selections. I have been reading and really enjoying these books that I normally would never pick up." -Office of Research & Development Customer, about AWBERC Library Scientific Book Club

"I love these webinars! As a newer employee they are invaluable not only for learning how to use a program, but to see what EPA has to make research a little smoother and organized." -Feedback from Agencywide Training Webinar