Breaking Down Invisible Barriers:
Using Bookmobiles To Facilitate Library Outreach in Urban and Suburban Communities
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Historical Background

- Mary Titcomb used a horse and cart to bring books to rural residents in Maryland in 1905
- About two thousand bookmobiles in service by the 1970s
- Only about 844 bookmobiles in service by 2004
  - Decline attributed to high costs, advanced technology, and perceived impracticality
- Bookmobiles today:
  - Can be more cost-efficient to run bookmobiles than to build branch libraries
  - Stop at nursing homes, day care centers, prisons, hospitals, mobile home parks, summer camps, and businesses
  - Serve special groups such as homeschooled children and Amish communities
  - Can provide mobile technology resources with small computer labs, printers and internet access

Antelope Lending Library: A Case Study

- Independent bookmobile service based in Iowa City
- Began services summer 2013
- Vehicle is custom-built 1998 International bus with 4,000 book capacity, diesel-powered generator and solar-powered outlets
- Services offered May-October
- Collection built largely through donations and funding from local grants
- Focuses on children's and YA collections and outreach to low-income areas
- Antelope Lending Library by the numbers:
  - Serves over 300 patrons annually
  - Checked out over 2,000 books to date
  - Gifted over 1,000 books to the community
- New services as of summer 2015:
  - Bilingual programming (Spanish and English)
  - Mobile computer lab
  - New sites, including mobile home community

Bookmobiles bridge the informational and digital divide that impedes those who are unable to access library services in traditional ways.

Library Barriers

- Patrons do not have opportunities to access library resources when available due to distance or time restrictions
- Patrons may have transportation issues
- Patrons may need help in specific languages

Bookmobile Solutions

- Bring services to people, instead of people to the services
- Staff is small and can be hired to specialize in languages of need
- Collection can be curated to cater to specific needs of small, identified communities