FAQ: SMART Reading & The Children’s Book Bank Merger

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Rationale

Why did you merge? What's in it for young readers and our community?
SMART Reading and the Children’s Book Bank merged because our collective whole is greater than the sum of our parts. By partnering intentionally as one organization, we’re poised to better serve Oregon kids with reading support and access to books.

What's in it for each organization?
For the Children’s Book Bank, based in the Portland-Metro area, the merger presents an opportunity to expand scope and scale by utilizing SMART Reading’s established statewide infrastructure.

For SMART Reading, the merger extends the organization’s mission by getting more books into kids' hands and supporting early literacy development for students. Both organizations have worked closely together in the past so this is a natural evolution of their ongoing relationship.

Is this happening because one or both organizations are in a financial crisis?
This is not a merger driven by crisis; both organizations are financially secure and have successfully adapted their programming during COVID. This is an opportunity for two strong organizations that have worked together seamlessly for years to be better, together.

Are both organizations and their boards supportive of the merger?
Yes. We both recognize that, by joining forces, we’ll put more kids across Oregon on the path to success through the transformative power of books and reading. Both staff teams and Boards of Directors are supportive of the partnership and are actively engaged in its planning.

**Why now?**
The last two years have brought unimaginable hardship for communities and families across Oregon; from devastating wildfires to the impacts of COVID-19 and related interruptions in learning, kids need support more than ever. As both nonprofits experienced recent inflection points due to organizational and pandemic-related change, we capitalized upon the opportunity to reinvent, enhance and extend our missions.

By leveraging our collective resources and this moment in time, we can rise to the challenge and provide much-needed early literacy services for our state’s youngest readers.

**Is this because of the pandemic?**
No, this merger is not because of the coronavirus pandemic -- but, it has presented opportunities to rethink how we can serve even more young readers in our community through our longstanding partnership. In a year of incredible need, we know there are more children than ever who could benefit from our programs. With the help of our community, we will be ready to help students become excited, confident readers all the better prepared to succeed.

**Impact**

**What does this mean for each organization’s donors and volunteers?**
The work of SMART Reading and The Children’s Book Bank is possible because of our incredible community investing their time, talent, and treasure to support young readers. As we move our work forward, our need for volunteers and donors will only increase as we strive to serve more and more kids.

Volunteers will have more options to plug in, from a one-time shift cleaning books to an ongoing weekly commitment providing reading support. Plus, their support will go even further than before since, united, the programs will have a larger impact.

**What does this mean for the community?**
By coming together intentionally as one organization, we’ll be poised to better serve Oregon kids with reading support and access to books. Specifically, we expect this merger to provide:
● A deeper and broader impact for preschool families and school age students at current partner organizations and programs, both in Portland and throughout the state;
● A wider variety of volunteer opportunities that will support deeper corporate, civic, and community engagement in early literacy efforts; and
● Cost savings in shared administration, which allows for more resources to be diverted to programming.

Programmatic Changes & Impact

How will each organization's work change (or not)?
Over the course of the next year, each organization will continue to offer programming and operate as it has done in the past, with a focus on re-establishing programming as schools reopen and COVID concerns are reduced. We’ll be focused on learning about one another’s work and intentionally merging our two organizations, while looking for natural opportunities to expand the work of the Book Bank into the greater Metro area and across Oregon.

How does the work of SMART Reading and the Children's Book Bank differ?
The Children’s Book Bank emphasizes access to books through book ownership and fulfills its mission by providing free books for children ages birth to eighth grade. SMART Reading emphasizes access to books (through book ownership) and shared reading and fulfills its mission by serving PreK through third-grade children with one-on-one reading engagement and new books to keep.

Will The Children’s Book Bank now be working/serving statewide?
Given SMART’s statewide infrastructure, we have the opportunity to expand The Children’s Book Bank service and increase impact statewide through that established network. In the first year of the merger, we hope to explore needs and opportunities in communities across Oregon to identify how, where and when we can begin to bring the work of the Book Bank statewide.

How has the coronavirus pandemic impacted your program offerings?
Both organizations have successfully adapted their programming during the pandemic through new virtual program offerings and innovative ways to ensure books can be delivered to kids. We’re learning from our program adaptations and expect that some adjustments we’ve made will withstand the pandemic and help us better serve young readers together into the future.
What about volunteering? Can Children's Book Bank volunteers volunteer with SMART Reading and vice versa? What do they need to do?
The merger offers volunteers from both organizations new and exciting ways to contribute and help share a love of reading and learning with kids. Volunteers are welcome and encouraged to get involved in a variety of ways! In the short-term, the processes for volunteering with both SMART Reading and the Children's Book Bank will remain unchanged. This means that:

- **For Children's Book Bank volunteers:** You'll be able to continue volunteering at the Book Bank in the ways you've always done! If you're also interested in becoming a SMART Reading Volunteer Reader or Site Coordinator, you can fill out [this application on the SMART Reading website](#).
- **For SMART Reading volunteers:** You can also continue to volunteer with SMART as usual. For volunteers in the Portland Metro area who want to get involved with Book Bank activities, learn more and sign up for a book cleaning session or other opportunities [here](#).

Are there new programs/services as a result of this merger?
Not yet, but there may be! For now it's business as usual and both organizations are continuing to implement existing programs through the duration of the 2022-23 school year. As we further integrate and explore potential opportunities, we'll determine if there are new program opportunities and where and how we'll implement them.

How will this benefit students served by both organizations? Will more students benefit?
For the 2022-23 school year, students served by both organizations will continue to be served by both, receiving the same complementary and richer services as have been historically offered for participants in both programs. Longer term, we anticipate expanded impact for our collective students, and more children across Oregon will get to benefit from the work of the Children's Book Bank.

Finance & Operations

How are the organizations doing financially? Are you merging because of financial problems?
This is not a merger driven by crisis; both organizations are financially secure. This is an opportunity for two strong organizations that have worked together seamlessly for years to be better, together.

Are there operational savings and efficiencies to this merger? How much?
We anticipate savings and efficiencies -- for example, consolidating expenses related to executive leadership, accounting and finance, liability and insurance, payroll and HR management, IT management, etc. -- but we cannot yet quantify this.

**Will any jobs be eliminated as a result of the merger?**
No. All jobs from both organizations will continue post-merger. Both staff teams and Boards of Directors are supportive of the partnership and have been actively engaged in its planning.

**Will you be moving into the same office(s)?**
The Children's Book Bank will keep operating in its warehouse, located in northeast Portland, to receive and recondition books through its volunteer program and house staff. During the integration process, we'll evaluate if there are any additional uses for the warehouse and also if there is benefit to relocating some or all of the Children's Book Bank staff to a single location in the Portland area.

**What is the timeline for integrating the organizations and programs?**
The two staff teams merged into one organization on May 23, 2022; details of the merger legally and administratively became final on July 1. The Children's Book Bank Board members joined the SMART Reading Board on July 1. For 2022-23, both organizations will continue delivering on their respective missions and business will continue as usual, while exploring opportunities to expand services. Wider scale expansion is expected in 2023-24.

**How do I contact the Children's Book Bank team? Will their email addresses or phone numbers change?**
The Children's Book Bank team now has @smartreading.org email addresses. However, any correspondence sent to @childrensbookbank.org email addresses will automatically redirect to their new email addresses. The phone number(s) for the Children's Book Bank will remain the same.

**What's the structure of the new organization (how is the team organized)?**
As the merged organization gets underway, the work of the Children's Book Bank will be offered as a new program of SMART Reading. In the same way SMART has regional Area offices, CBB will essentially function as another Area office.

**Leadership**

**Will there be a joint board? Will they just be combined, or will representatives from each individual board join a new joint board?**
On July 1, The Children’s Book Bank Board members joined the SMART Reading Board. The first meeting of the full new board will be in September.

**Will there be an Executive Director for each organization or one combined role?**
Leadership will be consolidated into one position. The Executive Director of SMART Reading, Jessica Bowersox, will lead the merged organization.

**Fundraising**

**How can I help?**
Make a financial gift! With children in our community facing missed learning because of this pandemic, programs like [SMART Reading & the Children’s Book Bank](#) are more important than ever.

**What will happen to my donation as a result of this merger? Will I still be able to donate specifically to one or the other or will it go into one budget?**
- Your donation will continue to support the work you intended to support. Donors are able to specify if they’d like their gift to go specifically to supporting the work of CBB or SMART. We will always honor a donor’s intent.
- Your gifts will also continue to stay local, supporting kids in your neighborhood.

**What will happen to endowment and reserves?**
SMART Reading endowments will continue to be used according to the purposes set forth by the establishing donors. Going forward, general operations will include the programs originated by both organizations. All operating reserves that are not permanently restricted from both organizations will be combined to become the operating reserve for the combined organization.

**Will you lose fundraising potential because of this merger? Do you have overlapping donors, grants, etc.? Are there funders who might decrease their overall funding?**
We’ve evaluated the overlap with donors and grants and found there is very little overlap. We anticipate new opportunities that will open up to us given the combined organization and the increased number of children served in the new model.
Branding

**Will the organizations or their programs change their names/logos?**
The SMART name will represent the new merged organization. The existing SMART brand, including logo, mission and vision, aligns well with that of CBB, and adjustments are being made to ensure the full scope of the organization is reflected in SMART's messaging and other branding elements. For the first year of the merger, a logo incorporating the CBB name into SMART's existing logo will be used for CBB operations, in order to transition brand equity over to SMART.

**Will we see changes to either the SMART Reading website or the Children's Book Bank website?**
The long-term plan is to do a major redesign of the SMART website to include all information and resources currently located on the Children's Book Bank website. At that time (expected Fall 2022), the CBB website will be taken offline and the domain www.childrensbookbank.org will redirect to www.SMARTReading.org. Until then, a pop-up message on the CBB website will let visitors know about the merge and upcoming redirect.

We recognize that CBB's website is well-optimized for people searching for volunteer opportunities, and we are being intentional with ensuring that good search engine optimization transfers over to SMART's website once the transition is complete.

**Will we see changes to the SMART Reading and Children's Book Bank social media accounts?**
Long-term, the existing Children's Book Bank social media accounts will be taken down, and CBB images/news/stories will be posted on existing SMART social media accounts. We expect this merge to happen in Fall 2022. For several months before that happens, CBB and SMART social media will continue to operate separately -- while cross-promoting one another's content and informing respective audiences about the merged organization.