



**STATEMENT OF JULIA M. STASCH
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JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record for the IMLS Public Hearing on Libraries and Broadband: Urgency and Impact.

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is one of the nation's largest private philanthropies, awarding more than \$220 million in grants each year to organizations in the U.S. and abroad. One of MacArthur's grantmaking priorities – the Digital Media and Learning Program – is dedicated to reimagining the future of learning to meet the needs of youth growing up in the digital age. Over the past 10 years, the Digital Media and Learning program has awarded more than \$100 million in grants for research to better understand how young people learn today, especially with digital media, and for design experiments to push past the boundaries of the classroom to re-imagine learning spaces and to develop new learning tools for the 21st Century. The investment in research and design has led to additional grantmaking to scale effective practices that reach and engage young people in ways that will strengthen their social, emotional and academic capacities.

Libraries have played a critical role in the Digital Media and Learning program. The main public library in downtown Chicago served as the home for YOUmedia, a 5,500 square foot teen learning space whose design is based on MacArthur research about how best to engage youth in learning. It led to a national effort carried out in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services to support 30 other YOUmedia-like teen learning labs in museums and libraries across the country.

Libraries continue to play a role in our latest investments that are bringing cutting-edge learning innovations to cities across the country and opening doors for learning anytime, anywhere for individuals of all ages.

Cities of Learning: Making all learning count

Building on the relationships and knowledge gained through the joint MacArthur-IMLS initiative, libraries now form the backbone of a new MacArthur-supported effort to use an innovative online alternative credentialing tool – digital badges – to help combat summer learning loss and connect youth to city resources and opportunities. A pilot was carried out in Chicago last summer. More than 100 city agencies and nonprofits participated to award more than 100,000 badges to 30,000 youth.

This summer six other cities and states – Columbus, Dallas, the state of Idaho, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Washington, DC, – are joining the effort and will award badges to more than 300,000 youth. Many more locations across the country have expressed interest and will join the Cities of Learning effort in the coming year.

Digital Badges: An innovative tool to connect in and out of school learning

Digital badges hold great promise to transform learning. They are portable representations of achievements, skills, and participation that can be earned in any learning environment. They help to connect in and out of school learning and bring visibility to important skills and competencies not captured well through traditional credentialing means, such as grades and transcripts. Like a badge earned in scouting, digital badges mark the mastery of a new skill. But digital badges are far more sophisticated, creating in-depth portfolios of skills and knowledge that can be shared electronically with schools, or employers, as well as family and friends. Leadership in participating Cities of Learning locations view badges as a tool to align city resources, build their workforce, and make learning opportunities across their cities more transparent and equitable

Libraries: Delivering equitable access to online learning innovations

During the Chicago pilot last year, the public library was the single largest issuer of digital badges in the city. Libraries continue to play a pivotal role in the Cities of Learning. They provide free and open space for youth to gather and engage in learning together and connect them to learning opportunities across the city and online. Even youth who do not live in a Cities of Learning location can participate in online learning experiences and earn badges along the way, and in disadvantaged and rural communities, libraries are often the only source of free web access.

As the Cities of Learning gains momentum and more and more badges are used to capture and reward learning that takes place outside of school, youth who do not have access to broadband internet connections will be at a disadvantage. They will not be able to engage in online learning experiences that connect them to youth and programming in other parts of the country. They will not be able to open badge accounts and accrue badges to demonstrate skills and competencies they gain outside of school. They will be left behind because many of today's most innovative solutions to delivering more equitable and engaging learning experiences require access to broadband Internet connections.

Broadband in libraries across the country is essential to meet the needs of learners in the digital age. Fast fiber and transformative learning opportunities in every library will help connect our youth to digital learning opportunities, such as the Cities of Learning, that will help them gain the skills they need for success in the knowledge economy.