

National Forum on Technology-Facilitated Sexual Abuse

Boston College Libraries seeks funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to convene a series of meetings that unite library workers with experts in cyber-related sex crimes. We are applying for \$150,000 in funding through the National Forum Grant program and Community Catalyst category for the duration of this two-year grant. This forum is to be attended by academic and public librarians in addition to a diverse range of academics, attorneys, social workers, and law enforcement officials, and will provide practical resources to develop a toolkit for outreach and instruction. With this toolkit, librarians will be better equipped to help patrons who have been or are at risk of being targeted for crimes such as nonconsensual pornography, cyberstalking, deepfakes, and sexual extortion. We see this area of outreach and instruction in digital privacy as a critical but neglected form of digital literacy that librarians are uniquely poised to direct.

Statement of National Need

Crimes relating to technology-facilitated sexual violence are growing in the United States at a rate that has surpassed our government's ability to pass laws that allow for recourse. This environment is exacerbated by a culture of shaming that pressures victims to remain silent lest they face public disgrace. Since the majority of victims of technology-facilitated sexual abuse come from marginalized groups, it is not difficult to see the parallels between this debate over sexual agency in the digital world and in the physical world.

To foster more self-reporting, law enforcement agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are actively pursuing these cases and publicizing their desire to bring justice to these types of criminals. Increasing outreach about the gravity of cyber-enabled sexual assault will demonstrate to society (including victims) that attackers will be held responsible for this category of crime. Doing so will engender trust, raise awareness for similar crimes, and may eventually lead to more up-to-date laws. However, marginalized communities that are disproportionately targets of these crimes may initially be hesitant to reach out directly to law enforcement for other cultural reasons.

Nonprofits such as the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI), the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), the Library Freedom Project (LFP), and the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) have already developed platforms that provide outreach and resources for victims of these offenses. Public and academic librarians can amplify this work by collaborating on a digital privacy instructional toolkit specialized for technology-facilitated sexual abuse. By leveraging our professional training, ethics, and position of trust in campuses and local communities, we can provide students and the public with instruction and resources to help them protect themselves against these crimes, as well as empower them to fight back if they become victims.

Project Design

The national forum will take place in two phases with two related events over a one-year period. The first forum event will bring together stakeholders in the field of technology-facilitated sexual abuse, including librarians, attorneys, law enforcement officials, and academics. This event will be held at the Boston chapter of the FBI. Forum participants will identify trends in real occurrences of these crimes and determine how victims or potential victims may protect themselves against them. Challenges and trends will be documented, shared among attendees, and revisited during the next meeting.

The second forum event will take place at a Boston-area library, and will focus on incorporating material learned in the first event into the pedagogy of digital literacy. At this session, participants will determine the formats that will shape this instructional toolkit, wireframe them, and contribute to content. In the months

following this second event, the primary forum team will finalize the deliverables, host them on an open access platform, and publicize them through open virtual meetings and library-centric conferences.

Several stakeholders have confirmed interest in participating in these forums. A partial list of prospective attendees includes: Eliza Bettinger, Lead Librarian for Digital Scholarship at Cornell University; Andy Boyles Petersen, Digital Scholarship Librarian at Michigan State University; Amy Burkart, Assistant United States Attorney; Danielle Citron, Professor of Law at Boston University, 2019 MacArthur Fellow; Maty Cropley, Teen Librarian at Boston Public Library; Mary Anne Franks; Professor of Law at the University of Miami School of Law and President of CCRI; Eva Galperin, Director of Cybersecurity at EFF; Kaofeng Lee, Deputy Director of NNDEV's Safety Net; Samantha Lee, Head of Reference Services at Enfield Public Library; Erica Olsen, Director of the NNDEV's Safety Net; Tom Ristenpart, Associate Professor at Cornell Tech; Timothy Russell, Supervisory Special Agent of the Criminal Cyber Squad, FBI Boston; Dorothea Salo, Faculty Associate at the University of Wisconsin; and Yasmeen Shorish, Data Services Coordinator at James Madison University.

Performance Goals and Outcomes

It is our intent that the toolkit resulting from this conference will fill vital gaps in current digital literacy instruction. Namely, this instruction will enable librarians to help known or potential victims of technology-facilitated sexual violence. It will also help university students and the public learn vital digital literacy skills, such as how to protect their privacy when navigating quotidian but potentially hazardous digital landscapes like online dating. The goal of this toolkit is not to discourage victims from using such platforms, but rather to empower them to be conscious of and to protect themselves against related threats.

The toolkit will be made freely available online as a modular curriculum. We plan to present the toolkit at multiple major library conferences and distribute it widely on professional mailing lists. Additionally, we expect that this exploratory grant will facilitate future work in this area, such as regional instructional workshops, that will help to further disseminate the curriculum and build the foundation for a sustainable program.

In addition to providing these critical deliverables, this forum will connect related stakeholders, forming a stronger community to combat cyber-enabled sexual abuse. Connecting librarians to law enforcement officials will be a particularly important benefit of this forum. Although libraries and law enforcement have some history of opposition with respect to privacy, it is paramount that they build bridges and unite as one force against these heinous crimes. It is our hope that this series of events will catalyze the library community to increase outreach and instruction about technology-facilitated sexual abuse, which will empower victims to overcome a culture of victim shaming and pursue protection.

Project Team

Three librarians from Boston College will work to host the grant, including Paige Walker (PI), Adam Jazairi, and Emily Singley. One librarian from Tufts University, Chelcie Juliet Rowell, will provide strategic input on digital literacy instruction. Doug Domin, a special agent with the FBI, will provide firsthand experience of victims' struggles during investigations. Michelle Gonzalez, Executive Director at CCRI, will contribute insight into current outreach programs employed by nonprofits.

Budget

Our budget includes \$40,247 for participant travel and lodging, \$16,100 for event-related fees (e.g., spaces, food, and beverages), \$2,000 for supplies, \$25,000 for consultant costs, \$8,000 for speaker stipends, \$4,500 for post-forum conference registrations, and \$54,153 for Boston College's indirect costs, to total \$150,000.