

The Urban Libraries Council, as lead agency, is requesting a National Leadership Planning Grant for **Leaders in Equity** to build capacity for libraries as community catalyts. This work will explore an equity framework for public libraries and local government efforts to advance partnerships, services, and resources for disadvantage and underserved communities. The 12-month planning initiative will start September 2020 and includes an IMLS request of \$88,550.

Statement of National Need

Racial and ethnic disparities in health, education and income remain persistent in the United States¹. These divides impact members of disadvantaged populations from the outset of their lives, and there are limited opportunities to break the cycle of inequity². Further, this cycle and racial disparities lead to lifelong consequences for our country, communities, families and individuals³. Every library in every neighborhood is on the front lines of equity issues which are framed by city and county leaders⁴.

The National League of Cities ([NLC](#)) created the Race, Equity and Leadership ([REAL](#)) initiative to strengthen local leaders' knowledge and capacity to eliminate racial disparities and build more equitable communities. The National Association of Counties ([NACo](#)) has dedicated its last two presidential initiatives to reduce inequity. *Serving the Underserved* identified actions counties could take to break the multi-generational cycle of poverty. *Connecting the Unconnected* explores how county governments can ensure all residents have access to equal services. [The U.S. Conference of Mayors](#), has created a [written compact](#) for mayors to pledge their commitment to enhance equity in the jurisdictions they serve.

There is a critical need align the work of the public library with local government efforts to advance equity. Today, there is an opportunity to understand prototype models, test equity methodologies, and assess public library efforts in alignment with recognized equity partners, frameworks and metrics. Leading library field examples include:

- **Houston Peace:** The Houston Public Library is working in partnership with Houston Peace to address youth violence. Led by the Houston Health Department and the Mayor's Office this work is based on the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) four step socio-ecological model to reduce violence and develop goals and objectives that address prominent forms of youth violence in Houston.
- **One Fairfax:** Fairfax County Government and Fairfax County Public Schools jointly issued the "One Fairfax" policy on social and racial equity in late 2017. Beginning in 2018, FCPL initiated its own One Fairfax task team, focusing on updating policies, procedures and programs using an equity lens.

ULC is exploring a **Leaders in Equity initiative** to strengthen the capacity of libraries to:

- Engage local government leaders and equity experts and understand their equity frameworks.
- Frame, design and assess public library efforts to increase equity and reach disenfranchised people.
- Communicate with local government leaders about the library's role as an equity leader.

The program builds on [ULC's Statement on Race Social Equity](#), the Leaders Library Card Challenge with the fine free library movement and field knowledge being gained in PLA and ALA equity training for librarians using the [GARE model](#). Further, the program leverages ULC's knowledge of the power of the mayor in local partnership with the public library as an equity leader and community catalyst.

¹ Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, ed. 2017. "State of the Union: The Poverty and Inequality Report." Special issue, Pathways Magazine.

² Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Maggie R. Jones, and Sonya R. Porter NBER Working Paper No. 24441 March 2018, Revised June 2019

³ A Shared Future: Consequences of Segregation for Children's Opportunity and Wellbeing. Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University

⁴ A Focus on Gnarly Issues. Public Management Magazine, August 2019

Program Design

- **National Scan and Leadership Brief**

ULC will conduct a national scan of the library field's practice including how individual libraries are framing their equity role and equity frameworks used by local government leaders. This work will include a working group of library leaders and equity organizations who will identify library assets in equity initiatives and metrics to assess and advance equity). This work will also be shared in a national Leadership Brief publication to be used by library leaders with local government partners and other leaders.

- **Partnerships, Evaluation and Equity Methodologies Development**

ULC will leverage existing partnerships with equity and local government organizations (NLC, NACo, US Conference of Mayors, United Way, Cities United and Anti-Defamation League) to conduct a series of conversations to share the concept, results of the national scan and identify leading equity partners for public libraries. Finally, ULC will engage equity experts (working with local government on methodologies and frameworks) to understand the opportunity to adapt and apply multiple models to public libraries.

- **Leaders in Equity – Pilot Concept Learning Cohort**

ULC will issue an invite for all libraries to join a learning cohort to identify and create a pilot concept on a key equity issue in their community (e.g., health, employment, high school completion rate, racial bias, violence). The online cohort will include a kickoff webinar, resource sharing site, peer to peer e-discussions and planning calls. This work can be used locally and during a subsequent call for applications for a national pilot cohort. Concepts will be shared on social media and ULC's website.

Statement of National Impact

Libraries have an immense capacity to create societal change which is strengthened when they work effectively with partners on equity issues that are essential in their communities. The knowledge and expertise developed in this grant will lead into a future phase of this work to development an equity framework with assessment metrics for the library field. This will build the public library field's recognition and capacity to address race, social and income-based inequity in communities.

Lead Agency and Key Project Staff

The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America's leading public library systems. We drive cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions for the 21st-century. We identify significant challenges facing today's communities and develop new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, workforce and economic development, digital inclusion and race and social equity.

This initiative will be led by Susan Benton, President and CEO (120 hours) and Jen Blenkle, Director of Strategic Initiatives will serve as Project Director (.15 FTE). Susan has worked with libraries and local governments for over 30 years. Her professional career has been dedicated to assisting city and county executives initiate and manage change in their organizations.

Budget Request: The 12-month budget requested from IMLS is \$88,550. This includes Personnel (\$39,000), Benefits (\$11,700), Travel (\$10,800) for library leaders participating in a working group in person meeting (12 leaders). Resources include a publication with professional writer and printing (\$15,000), online community technology and webinar fees (\$4,000). Indirect cost rate of 10% (\$8,050).