Connecting Small and Rural Libraries to Connected Learning

The *Connecting Small and Rural Libraries to Connected Learning* LB21 (Project category: lifelong learning) project proposal **scales** the IMLS-funded ConnectedLib Toolkit developed by University of Washington (UW) and University of Maryland (UMD) researchers and **leverages** the recent IMLS-funded Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Future Ready with the Library (FRwtL) and Transforming Teen Services: A Train the Trainer Approach (T3) initiatives. This project will provide continuing education opportunities to library staff in small and rural libraries on how to embed connected learning (CL) principles into teen programs and services. Although recent CL initiatives and narratives are readily applicable to large and well-resourced libraries, this project will broaden the relevance and importance of CL to all US libraries. UW, as the lead applicant, will collaborate with UMD, YALSA, and the Association of Small and Rural Libraries (ARSL) on all aspects of this initiative. In addition to tailoring the content of the ConnectedLib Toolkit to meet the needs of small and rural library staff to serve their teen population better, the project team will launch a community of practice (CoP) that will empower these staff to support each other in building capacity and skills to implement CL activities. The major outcome of this project will be a scalable approach to increasing the competence, capacity, and confidence of small and rural library staff to integrate CL into their teen services. The total funds requested from IMLS for the project is $400,111 and the total cost share that will be provided by the applicants will be $203,299.

Statement of Broad Need

CL helps prepare youth for life after high school by equipping them with 21st century skills, nurturing the development of new literacies, and connecting their interests and relationships with real-life opportunities. At the heart of CL is the *equity* agenda - to help close the gaps in education and career opportunities that exist across socio-economic backgrounds and geographical locations (Reich & Ito, 2017). Since the release of Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design a decade ago*,* large urban and suburban public library systems such as Chicago Public Library and the Multnomah County Library have been integral players in the movement to bring the CL framework to public library teen services. These examples of CL environments are not fitting models for small and rural library staff who face distinct challenges, including trained staff, limited funding, socio-demographic characteristics of youth, and many more (See Swan, Grimes & Owens, 2013; Davis, 2018).

Through IMLS-funded projects such as FRwtL (focused on middle school college and career readiness in small, rural, and tribal areas), T3 (focused on bringing computational thinking to youth through a CL lens), and ConnectedLib (focused on helping youth library staff implement CL through their libraries), the project team learned of the unique needs and challenges of small and rural library staff. T3 participants sought out small and rural library examples of CL to no avail. Small and rural library participants in FRwtL demonstrated a strong need to build a CoP with those in similar settings so to learn about and successfully practice CL-infused teen services. The ConnectedLib researchers discovered that working with well-resourced library systems (including one rural library system), did not provide an adequate view of what small and rural libraries require to integrate CL into their work. This proposed project fulfills four immediate needs. Need 1: Understand the challenges that small and rural library staff face as they plan, design, implement, and evaluate CL. Need 2: Articulate unique skill sets that small and rural library staff must have to work with community youth. Need 3: Expand the current ConnectedLib Toolkit, a set of free, online continuing education modules, to include examples and voices of these library staff. Need 4: Develop a CoP, to include learning circles, that can serve as a support system for these staff to learn from each other. This project answers these needs by providing continuing education opportunities, materials, and examples specifically for small and rural libraries.

Project Design

The project lead will be Dr. Katie Davis from UW (an expert in working with young people technology practices and the lead PI of ConnectedLib). Co-PIs will be Dr. Mega Subramaniam from UMD (an expert in creating CL learning environments in libraries and co-PI of ConnectedLib), and Kelly Hoffman from UMD (doctoral candidate who was the lead module developer for ConnectedLib). The professional education

coordinator for YALSA who directs the T3 and FRwtL projects, Linda Braun will serve as a consultant. An advisory board (AB) will assist project PIs: Dr. Bill Penuel from UC Boulder (the Capturing Connected Learning in Libraries lead PI), Dr. Mimi Ito from UC Irvine (Director of the Connected Learning Lab), and Gail Sheldon from the Alabama State Library (Youth Services Consultant embedded rural library work). We have pre-commitments from ARSL, YALSA, and all AB members.

Year 1: Library staff from 8 to 10 small and rural libraries will join a community of practice (CoP) to review and provide feedback on the existing ConnectedLib Toolkit. Invited staff will be from libraries involved in FRwtL and suggested by ARSL. Feedback will be elicited through interviews, learning circle discussions, and journaling as staff work through Toolkit modules. This feedback will help identify gaps in and inspire revisions to the existing modules. Staff participants and the project team will then use a co-design process to revise the modules. **Year 2**: Participating staff will incorporate what they learned from the Toolkit into their library practice. The project team will engage with the participants via the CoP and learning circles in order to discover whether and how skills and knowledge gained from the Toolkit translates into day-to-day practice. The project team will document how staff take module insights and apply them to teen services. Using reflections and examples shared via the CoP, and feedback from the AB, YALSA, and ARSL, the project team will further refine the modules. **Year 3**: The third year focus will be nation-wide dissemination of the Toolkit. The project team will host a one-day virtual symposium featuring participating staff that have successfully integrated CL into their work. State library agencies will be encouraged to arrange watching parties of small and rural library staff who will attend and network with nearby colleagues. The energy generated from the symposium will help expand other dissemination efforts such as articles, presentations (i.e. ARSL), webinars, and e-courses.

Diversity Plan
A key strength of the proposed project is its national scale and commitment to obtain the voices of library staff serving small and rural communities, many of whom serve youth living in low-socio-economic-status and/or immigrant and refugee communities. In our recruitment efforts in year 1, through our partners and existing connections, we will recruit and work with library staff from communities that serve diverse underserved youth to ensure that library staff working in small and rural communities will "see themselves" in the revised ConnectedLib Toolkit. In our dissemination efforts, we will provide opportunities for virtual participation that will reach library staff from small and rural libraries who often cannot afford to attend conferences.

Broad Impact
This initiative will propel a national and immediate need in small and rural communities to support youth through CL. Library staff who participate in this project will demonstrate increased competence, capacity, and confidence in integrating CL services for teens in their communities, as they will be able to: 1) articulate the value of CL for teen learning; 2) implement CL programs and services customized to meet the specific needs of their local community's teens; and 3) provide and receive support from a community of small and rural library staff nationwide that are committed to advancing their knowledge in CL. Their engagement with the ConnectedLib Toolkit will position small and rural libraries to enhance teens' academic, civic, and economic participation, facilitate lifelong learning, and promote digital inclusion.

Budget
Total requested funds from IMLS will be $400,111, with a cost share of, $203,299, inclusive of indirect costs. This includes: (1) salary and fringe benefits for the PIs ($130,222) (2) support for graduate students (1 each from UW and UMD) including tuition, stipend, benefits, and fees ($211,646); (3) travel support for PIs ($15,000); (4) stipend for ARSL, YALSA, AB members, and library staff ($31,500); (5) contractual fees ($41,000); and (5) data analysis & supplies ($31,635). The amount indicated in each category above includes a sub-award to UMD. The UW budget total will be $461,004, inclusive of indirect costs at the rate of 55.5%, and providing cost share of $93,238. This includes the subaward to UMD who's total will be $176,422 inclusive of indirect costs at the rate of 56% and providing cost share of $110,061.