Libraries and Veterans National Forum

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The Texas A&M University Libraries is seeking an IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian National Forum Grant in the Lifelong Learning category of $150,000 in order to hold a forum on the topic of libraries and veterans and develop a toolkit to support library workers developing services for members of the veteran and military communities. This grant also includes identified collaborators who are both librarians and military veterans from the Connecticut State Library and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville Library.

Statement of National Need

The veteran and military communities, which include veterans, service members, and their families, are a population that can be found in virtually any library. Military families ease the difficulty of a parent's deployment by visiting library story time. Student veterans search for a place where they can study without distractions and find their home-away-from-home in the college library. Military families visit the public library to look for information and resources to support a veteran family member experiencing declining health. These are only a few of the ways that members of the veteran and military communities use libraries every day.

Although virtually all libraries have veteran and military patrons, most libraries are only just beginning to identify this patron group and develop policies, services, and programming that meet the unique needs and strengths of the veteran and military communities and support lifelong learning (LeMire & Mulvihill, 2017). There is an opportunity for libraries to begin to capitalize upon burgeoning interest in supporting the veteran and military communities. Libraries are beginning to recognize that veteran and military-affiliated patrons need to be treated as a unique patron group. For example, in 2017, the Association of Research Libraries explored issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in research libraries. Fewer than half of ARL directors described their libraries and the academic library community as equitable for veterans – lower than their perceptions for all other surveyed categories (Schonfeld & Sweeney, 2017, p. 24). Library workers are beginning to express interest in supporting their veteran and military-affiliated patrons. For example, the ongoing petition to create a Veteran Caucus Member Initiative Group within the American Library Association, led in part by participants in this grant proposal, garnered the requisite 100 signatures in less than 24 hours in July 2018.

The Libraries and Veterans National Forum intends to capitalize upon growing momentum in the effort to support veterans in libraries by providing a space for library workers from all types of libraries to come together and share their successes, their lessons learned, and best practices for working with the veteran and military communities. The Forum will conclude with the creation of an online toolkit for library workers to use in their programming for veteran and military-affiliated patrons.

Project Design

The Libraries and Veterans National Forum will be a two-day symposium held in the Texas A&M University Libraries. Texas A&M University is an ideal host for a few reasons. First, Texas A&M is located in the heart of Texas, which has the second-largest population of military veterans in the U.S. Texas A&M is also a Senior Military College and also enrolls over 1,200 student veterans. Finally, the Texas A&M University Libraries has taken a leadership role in developing programs, services, and policies for veterans. The Libraries' veteran liaison and PI of this grant has literally written the book on this topic, as coauthor of *Serving Those Who Served: Librarian's Guide to Working with Veteran and Military Communities* (LeMire & Mulvihill, 2017).

Phase 1: Planning

The planning phase of the project will begin as soon as the project is funded and will run concurrently with other phases the project. This phase includes logistics, facilities, travel, catering, and coordination of speakers.

Phase 2: Recruitment

The Forum is aimed at library workers currently provide programming and services to veteran and military-affiliated patrons. In order to fit into existing facilities, the audience will be limited to approximately 50 participants. Participants will be asked to write a statement of purpose for attending and the forum organizers will use the information to select library workers who will benefit from the forum, add to the diversity of

conversation, and contribute to the toolkit. Specifically, the Forum aims to include library workers from academic libraries, public, military, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and school libraries.

Phase 3: Event

The Forum will be a two-day symposium. Day 1 will be focused on learning. The event will include multiple sessions, all of which will be aimed at the diverse audience. For example, event organizers will invite members of Veteran Service Organizations (e.g. Student Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion) for a panel about library partnerships. Event organizers will also create a Call for Proposals in order to identify and feature library workers doing unique work to support the veteran and military communities in their libraries. This part of the symposium will be recorded for the toolkit website. Day 2 of the symposium will be focused on creating the toolkit. Event participants will be divided into affinity groups based upon library type and tasked with creating documents that will be uploaded into the publicly-available toolkit. Participants will also be asked to brainstorm strategies for disseminating the toolkit among the larger library community in order to ensure broad awareness and facilitate toolkit usage.

Phase 4: Deliverables

The Forum deliverable will be a toolkit for library workers in all types of libraries. This toolkit will provide resources to help libraries get started working with the veteran and military communities. In preparation for the Forum, event planners will create a website that will house toolkit resources at the end of the event. This stage will also include a robust marketing campaign to raise awareness of the toolkit and encourage usage.

National Impact

The Libraries and Veterans National Forum has the potential to make broad national impact through the creation and promotion of the toolkit. The toolkit may include resources such as lesson plans, case studies, presentation slides from the Forum, bibliographies, service model documents, best practices, FAQ, links to resources, cultural competency resources, and Veteran Caucus Membership Initiative Group contact information. Based upon strategies brainstormed during the symposium, the investigators will engage interested volunteers from the symposium to disseminate information about the toolkit on national, regional, and local listservs, via social media, and at library conferences.

Diversity Plan

Although libraries of all types are likely to have patrons who are veterans, library literature about the veteran populations focuses heavily on academic libraries. This project aims to diversify the conversation about libraries and veterans by specifically including library workers from school libraries, public libraries, military libraries, and other types of libraries. Further, the project will make a concerted effort to identify and invite library workers from traditionally underrepresented groups and library workers who have developed programming to serve veterans and service members from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Budget and Justification

The proposal includes a budget of $150,000. In order to facilitate a diverse group of library workers from all types of libraries, the Forum will be free to as many participants as possible. Accordingly, the majority of grant funding will be used to cover travel and accommodations for participants. Budget estimates include $88,500 for participant travel, $26,500 for catering, honoraria, event facilitator, and event marketing, $9,977 for administrative support, $10,000 for IT support to create and maintain the toolkit, and $15,023 for indirect costs. Texas A&M University Libraries will be contributing a cost share of $25,215 in salaries for investigators as well as facilities for the Forum.

References

American Library Association. (2018). Veteran Caucus Member Initiative Group petition. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/CFApps/epetition/index.cfm?pid=16574A8B12B3CC01

LeMire, S. & Mulvihill, K. (2017). *Serving those who served: Librarian's guide to working with veteran and military communities.* Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

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