

Association for Library Service to Children: Welcoming Spaces National Forum
National Leadership Grants for Libraries: Community Catalysts
Period: Sept. 1, 2019 – Aug. 31, 2021

Statement of National Need - The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of ALA, seeks a two-year \$150,000 grant to host a one-day Welcoming Spaces National Forum with the Association of Children’s Museums (ACM) to discuss and improve experiences for marginalized patrons. This proposal would directly fulfill the IMLS strategic objectives to, “promote the ability of museums and libraries to serve as trusted spaces for community engagement and dialogue”, and “invest in policies and partnerships that address barriers to accessing museum and library collections, programs, and information.”

Intentional actions on behalf of institutions will ensure that anyone entering an unfamiliar space receives both subtle and overt cues that their presence is welcome and that they are invited to access the staff and resources therein. Funded participants of the forum will represent: libraries and children’s museums that excel and those struggling with outreach; patrons, staff and stakeholders of these institutions; and organizations serving vulnerable populations and marginalized communities.

Libraries serve as community catalysts by connecting marginalized individuals to community resources. Research shows that local libraries help bridge the equity gap in resources for families living in low-income neighborhoods¹. Children’s museums welcome community members through exhibits and programs that support young children’s healthy development through playful learning in spaces designed for that purpose. In 2016, children’s museums welcomed 500,000 low-income visitors who receive food assistance benefits. Through this forum, ALSC and ACM will identify and share scalable methods of establishing welcoming spaces to improve access to library and museum resources for vulnerable community members including, but not limited to: indigenous and people of color, visitors with special needs, the LGBTQIA community, children of the incarcerated, immigrant families, and those whose primary language is not English. Structured breakout sessions will provide opportunities to explore areas of specific interest more deeply.

With this grant, ALSC seeks to strengthen connections between libraries and children’s museums because access to both institutions can greatly improve the life outcomes of young children facing barriers to learning like inequity, poverty, isolation, bullying and institutionalized racism. ACM and its members have worked to eliminate the financial barriers of visiting children’s museums through the cooperative initiative with IMLS, Museums for All. Additional discussion topics will include: Offsite mobile programming, virtual visits, staff training, the use of inclusive language in signage and communication; and the physical arrangement of furniture, exhibits and materials to encourage interaction. Forum participants will share successes, challenges, and methods for engaging with communities beyond the institution.

Project Design - Through the Welcoming Spaces National Forum, ALSC and ACM will learn how to make the process of creating welcoming spaces less intimidating and more effective. The forum will result in a structure that can be replicated by libraries and museums across the country, a set of recommendations, examples of success, and contact information of museums and libraries who wish to serve as peer resources. ALSC will convene an advisory panel of representatives from ALSC, ACM, staff and patrons of successful and struggling libraries and children’s museums identified within our networks, and stakeholder organizations like Heartland Alliance and New America who will assist in outreach to potential attendees and panelists. The members of

¹ Celano, D. C. & Neuman, S. B. (2016). Libraries at the Ready. *Educational Leadership*, 73(5), 74-77.

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ALSC and ACM will tap their social networks to inform outreach to participants through surveys and referral requests.

ALSC will secure a venue in the Chicago Loop to accommodate about 110 people. The advisory panel will co-develop a robust agenda of panels and breakout sessions for the one-day forum, which will be convened around ALA's Annual Conference in Chicago. They will also identify facilitators and moderators for the sessions. To mitigate some barriers to participation, grant funds will be used to provide travel and lodging stipends for invited participants. A limited number of seats will be available for interested registrants. Lunch will be catered for all participants. Those registering on-site will be responsible for their travel and lodging.

ALSC and ACM will present preliminary information from the forum in webinars, conference presentations and direct communication to encourage ongoing dialogue and feedback. Once compiled, the information gained will be used to develop a set of recommendations and a white paper for broad dissemination. These resources will be presented to national audiences virtually and in-person. ALSC's 2020 National Institute, ALA's 2021 Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference, and ACM's 2021 Interactivity are a few possible venues. ALSC will contract with an external evaluator to help structure the full proposal and evaluation process. Participants will be required to engage in the evaluation process before and after the forum experience through surveys and direct communication. The external evaluator will analyze survey and interview data to report on the degree to which forum invitees feel their participation resulted in positive change for their communities.

Performance Goals – ALSC, with the help of an external evaluator, will document progress toward the following goals: 1) Cultivate connections between libraries, children's museums, and stakeholder organizations that enhance service to shared populations. 2) Identify a set of recommendations for creating welcoming spaces in libraries, children's museums and similar spaces that consider the perspectives of vulnerable community members. 3) Create and broadly disseminate accessible resources for libraries and museums to create welcoming spaces and host similar cross-sector gatherings in their communities.

National Impact - ALSC members have noted a need to provide a reassuring presence within their communities. By discussing visitor and provider perspectives and sharing successful strategies, ALSC and ACM will encourage ongoing dialogue and suggestions for participants to replicate the forum experience in their respective towns and cities. ALSC and ACM will help libraries and children's museums connect more effectively with their visitors through distribution of shareable resources, and infuse welcoming practices in library and museum systems throughout the nation.

Key Personnel - ALSC Executive Director, Aimee Strittmatter and ACM Executive Director, Laura Huerta Migus will lead the project with staff support.

Budget Summary

The budget request of \$150,000 accounts for all anticipated cost and includes grant-funded staff salaries and benefits (\$30,430), travel (\$37,750), supplies, materials and equipment (\$8,069), contracts and subawards (\$21,000), meeting costs (\$25,280), and federally negotiated indirect rate of 22.42% (\$27,471).