Proposal Narrative

Project Justification

The Pioneer Library System is located in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. We are a cooperative library system serving the 42 small and rural public libraries in Ontario, Wayne, Wyoming, and Livingston counties. According to IMLS State of Small and Rural Libraries, each of the 42 libraries in the Pioneer Library System are considered small as their populations are less than 25,000. Over 90% of libraries in the Pioneer Library System are also considered "rural" according to the urban and rural status used to calculate system-wide e-rate through Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC).

Data available through the FCC and Census American Community Survey indicates that at least one in five residents of the Pioneer Library System's region lacks household internet access. Across the region, there has been considerable attention drawn the "rural broadband problem," but not much focus on the fact that many residents are unable to afford or access internet in their homes even when the broadband infrastructure exists.

Most of the small cities and villages in the area now have nominal Internet speeds of 100 mb or more available to every household, usually from the cable provider. That is the urban-quality broadband access that rural broadband advocates often say is their goal. But almost half of sub-$20,000 households in the Pioneer Library System's region, even in municipalities where the infrastructure exists, do not share that level of access. This figure is so skewed to household income we can assume that the disparity is driven mostly by cost.

The data indicates that although the "rural broadband problem" and the "digital inclusion problem" are related in some ways, they are not the same problem. We also know that we that solving the rural broadband problem won't automatically solve the digital inclusion problem. Even as the broadband infrastructure continues to grow, community members with lower incomes are still unable to afford Internet access in their homes.

Libraries believe that every resident of the region deserves reliable access to the internet, the equipment needed to use the internet, and the skills needed to use the internet safely and effectively. However, internet access and adoption are not currently equitable. Libraries across the Pioneer Library System are taking a variety of approaches to address digital inclusion. For example, Wood Library and the Geneva Public Library are partnering with school districts and community-based organizations to loan WiFi hotspots to families who cannot afford internet access. The Phelps Library has developed a state-of-the art Makerspaces to make technology available to its rural community. Twenty-six libraries are taking advantage of the Pioneer Library System's new Digital Inclusion Intern to bring digital literacy instruction to their communities. Although each of these services brings positive outcomes to many community members, we have discovered that it is impossible to scale these isolated projects to a level that could begin to address the immensity of the digital inclusion problem in the region.

This is why the Pioneer Library System and its member libraries, along with community stakeholders decided to form the Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition, the first rural-suburban model based on the model recommended by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA). One goal of the Coalition is to allow small libraries to participate in digital inclusion work at the holistic level necessary to affect meaningful change. It also creates opportunities for partnership, awareness, and funding that cannot be achieved at an individual library while at the same time creating a movement around an issue that affects an entire region.

We continue to develop our digital inclusion approach by building on the best practices identified by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, "Digital Inclusion Handbook" and the IMLS, specifically the "Building Digital Communities" report which notes that the first step in achieving collective impact in the area of digital inclusion is to create the infrastructure to support community-wide vision and action. Although coalitions may have slightly different structures and goals, they all follow the basic steps recommended in the IMLS "Building Digital Communities" framework: to convene stakeholders, develop a shared community understanding of digital inclusion, create a community action plan, implement the plan, and evaluate and revise the plan.

In 2018, we received small grants from the Rochester Regional Library Council and Senator Helming which allowed us to contract with the National Digital Inclusion Alliance to begin official process of forming the Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Alliance. In September 2018 the Pioneer Library System organized a kick-off meeting with many libraries and community stakeholders in attendance (see Supporting Document 5 for complete attendance list). As the Coalition has continued to grow, Pioneer Library System staff have been building relationships on behalf of the Coalition with stakeholders who are invested in doing and supporting digital inclusion work including, libraries across the region, direct service providers (especially those serving individuals who are low-income, under-educated, or older adults), policymakers, and community anchor institutions, such as libraries, schools, higher education institutions, hospitals, community leaders and local businesses.

In January 2019, the Coalition organized a Digital Inclusion Summit with over 130 participants from all across New York State. As a part of the day, participants were asked for their input on how digital inclusion efforts (or lack thereof) have impacted their work and lives. The data collected from the Summit, in addition to that from a focus group of member library staff held in February 2019 to discuss the impact of digital inclusion on their communities, is being used to guide the planning and future work of the Coalition. (See Supporting Documents 4 & 6 for a summary of the two events).

In the first few months of the project, we have already learned the challenges unique to this type of coalition - without a government mandate, support, and resources, building a strong organizational backbone is essential. We intend to use this funding opportunity to build the capacity of the Coalition and ensure that it has a strong, sustainable organizational structure. The infrastructure will allow for a larger scale approach, involving multiple partners and sectors that will allow for a continued shared vision for change.

Project Work Plan

The first year of the grant will be focused on building the infrastructure of the Coalition. The first step will be to hire and train a part-time Coalition Coordinator who will be paid using grant funds. This individual, under the primary supervision of the Pioneer Library System's Outreach & Training Coordinator, will be responsible for steering the direction and strategic plan of the organization. We anticipate 20% of our Outreach & Training Coordinator's time to be focused on supporting the work of the Coordinator and the grant.

The the first quarter of the grant year, the Coordinator will be working with the Coalition's steering committee to establish bylaws for the Coalition. This will be done with support from Causewave Community Partners, a local organization that works with organizations to build up their capacity. During this time, the Coordinator will also be conducting a pre-project evaluation through interviews and surveys of current and potential Coalition members. This will allow us to have a strong baseline to effectively measure the changes that occur by the conclusion of the grant period.

During the first year, the Coordinator will research and prepare an ecosystem scan; a research activity that will collect data on actions and initiatives that are already underway in the area related to digital inclusion. This research will also include what libraries' role in the ecosystem is, and who else is collecting relevant data (i.e. the FCC and the Census Bureau). Data mapping will be used to fill in the gaps where cooperative data collecting could be helpful. The ultimate goal is to have an intricate understanding of how information could be used more efficiently to inform the general public and drive meaningful change. The Coordinator will update the report before the end of the second grant year.

Information and knowledge sharing is very important to us and to the Coalition. The Coordinator will be responsible for organizing and facilitating monthly Coalition meetings. The Outreach & Training Coordinator will be providing support in the early stages of this as she has organized the previous Coalition meetings. These meetings will be held throughout the region and will provide professional development opportunities for members as well as opportunities for attendees to share their work. To maintain the knowledge sharing and conversations between meetings, the Coordinator will also be responsible for sending out a quarterly e-newsletter. During the second year of the grant, the Coordinator will put together the second Digital Inclusion Summit, a day-long event for stakeholders from across the region to come together to learn best practices, current trends, and what is already being done in the region and beyond to support digital inclusion work. The Summit will be paid for through registration fees and sponsorships from local and national organizations.

The Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition Steering Committee members are an integral part of building up the Coalition's capacity. In addition to helping write the organizational bylaws, they will also be actively involved in the strategic planning process. Strategic planning conversations and focus groups will be facilitated by members of the committee, the Coordinator and System staff during the last quarter of the first grant year. By the end of the first quarter of the second grant year, a 3-year strategic plan will be developed that is made up of a shared vision, clear objectives and coordinated activities that are regularly measured and evaluated. In

the first half of the second grant year, the Committee, Coordinator and System staff will also work together to develop a sustainability proposal to support the strategic plan past the two- year grant period.

As the Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition is the first rural/suburban Coalition, we plan to share our experiences and lessons learned through a Small/Rural Digital Inclusion Coalition Toolkit that will be written by the Coordinator. It will be based on the Digital Inclusion Handbook put out by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance. The Coalition Coordinator, and Pioneer Library System's Executive Director and Outreach & Training Coordinator plan on attending the National Digital Inclusion Alliance's conference both years and the Association for Rural and Small Libraries conference the second grant-year. The Pioneer Library System will also offer scholarships to two member library representatives to attend each of these conferences. Grant funds will be used to pay for the Coordinators attendance and Pioneer Library System will pay the rest. Attendance at these conferences will also allow us to learn and network with others to learn about their work.

Throughout the two year grant period, we will be regularly evaluating our progress towards completing all the stated goals and objectives. There will be a consistent dialogue between the Coordinator, Pioneer staff and the Steering Committee so that everyone knows the status of all projects. We recognize there is a possibility that portions of the plan may get delayed due to specific objectives taking longer than expected or because of factors outside of our control. If delays do occur, we will revise the expected completion dates as necessary. See attached Schedule of Completion document for a complete timeline and list of activities.

Project Outcomes

Outcomes/Measurement/Assessment

In its research on digital inclusion coalitions, the National Digital Inclusion Alliance has found that successful Digital Inclusion Coalitions have the following three effects: 1) an advocacy effect of bringing public attention to its shared vision around digital inclusion and digital equity; 2) an alignment effect of increasing the ability of its participants to "push in the same direction"; and 3) a network effect of creating the opportunity for subgroups of participants to form new working relationships.   The expected effects serve as the foundation for the goals of the Finger Lakes Region Digital Inclusion Alliance. We believe that by first building this infrastructure, we can ultimately achieve the goals outlined in the IMLS' Building Digital Communities Framework of digital access, adoption, and application.

Goal #1: Decision-makers will develop a deeper understanding of the challenges to digital equity in the region and the solutions to increase digital inclusion.

Outcomes	Measurement	Timeline	Target
State, county, and local elected and appointed officials will report 1) a deeper understanding of the challenges to digital equity, 2) an increased awareness of digital	We will distribute an online survey to state legislators, county administrators, town supervisors, and village mayors serving Ontario, Wayne,	Pre-survey: 10/2019	Overall ratings of understanding the problem, awareness of digital inclusion work, urgency, and awareness of possible

inclusion work occurring in the community, 3) greater sense of urgency to address the issue, and 4) awareness of possible solutions, and 5) interest in pursuing a solution.	Wyoming, and Livingston counties to measure their perceptions/understanding of digital equity and digital inclusion.	Post-survey: 7/2021	solutions, and interest in pursuing a solution will increase by 25%.
State, county, and local elected and appointed officials will report a greater awareness of the role of libraries in increasing digital inclusion and digital equity.	The online survey to state legislators, county administrators, town supervisors, and village mayors will measure awareness of the roles public libraries play in increasing digital inclusion and digital equity.	Pre-survey: 10/2019 Post-survey: 7/2021	Overall ratings of participants' understanding awareness of public libraries' role in digital inclusion efforts will increase by 25%.
Coalition members will have access to the information they need to advocate for digital inclusion and digital equity in the region.	Focus groups, interviews, and surveys of Coalition members.	Post-project data collection: 5/2021-8/2021	80% of Coalition Members will report that as a result of the work of the Coalition, they have access to the data they need to advocate, make funding requests, or make policy recommendations.

Goal #2: Members of the Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition, including Pioneer Library System's small and rural libraries, will benefit from new strategic partnership alignments. As a result of these strategic partnership alignments, communities will have increased access to information, ideas, and networks.

Outcomes	Measurement	Timeline	Target
Coalition members will form new partnerships and develop new collaborative programs that improve digital inclusion.	Focus groups, interviews, and surveys of Coalition members at the completion of the grant timeline will ask Coalition members to report the numbers of partners and collaborations they are engaging in to support their digital inclusion work. The digital inclusion ecosystem scan will document these partnerships and collaborations.	Post-project data collection: 5/2021-8/2021 Ecosystem Scan 12/2019-5/2020 Scan Update: 6/21-8/21	By 8/2021, 20% of Coalition Members will report that they have formed a new partnership or developed a new collaborative program as a result of their participation in the Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition.
Libraries will leverage partnerships to increase access to	Focus groups, interviews, and surveys of Coalition members at the completion of the grant timeline will ask Coalition members to report the numbers of partners and	Post-project data collection: 5/2021-8/2021	By 8/2021, 70% of Pioneer Library System's member libraries will report that they have increased access

information, ideas, and networks to digitally underrepresented community members.	collaborations they are engaging in to support their digital inclusion work. The digital inclusion ecosystem scan will document these partnerships and collaborations.	Ecosystem Scan 12/2019-5/2020 Scan Update: 6/21-8/21	to information, ideas, and/or networks to community members as a result of the Coalition.

Goal #3: Digital literacy practitioners, including the staff of Pioneer Library System's small, rural libraries, will improve their professional skills and enhance their programmatic offerings.

Outcomes	Measurement	Timeline	Target
Coalition members will learn new skills and will learn about new resources to improve their digital inclusion work.	Surveys will be distributed after each Coalition meeting asking participants to report the extent to which they learned new skills and learned about new resources as a result of the meeting. The survey will be based on Project Outcome's Digital Learning survey.	Ongoing	80% of the meeting participants will report that they learned a new skill and learned about new resources to support their digital inclusion work.
Libraries will apply their new skills to expand, enhance, or offer new digital literacy services.	Focus groups, interviews, and surveys of libraries at the completion of the grant timeline will ask Coalition members to report the numbers of digital literacy activities they offer. The digital inclusion ecosystem scan will document these activities throughout the project.	Post-project data collection: 5/2021-8/2021 Ecosystem Scan 12/2019-5/2020 Scan Update: 6/21-8/21	By 8/2021, 70% of Pioneer Library System's member libraries will report that they have expanded, enhanced, or offer new digital literacy services as a result of the work of the Coalition.

Goal #4: Pioneer Library System and its small, rural libraries will have the capacity to implement a framework for community-wide digital inclusion efforts. We will use the required Capacity Building Performance Measurement Statements to measure Pioneer's capacity growth as a result of this project.

Outputs

1. Three Year Strategic Plan including a shared vision, clear priorities, specific objectives, and evaluation metrics for all areas of the plan based on the IMLS Building Digital Communities: A Framework for Action
2. Bylaws including the foundational documents of the Coalition.
3. Small/Rural Libraries Digital Inclusion Coalition Toolkit.

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Schedule of Completion

2019-2020 Activities- Building Infrastructure

Activity	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
Hire Coalition Coordinator	purple	purple										
Train Coalition Coordinator		red	red									
Monthly Coalition Meetings/Professional Development				yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow
NDIA Conference						orange						
Ecosystem Scan Research				yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow				
Prepare Ecosystem Scan Report									yellow			
Establish Steering Committee Bylaws			green	green	green							
Prepare Quarterly Email Newsletter							yellow			yellow		
Recruit 2020-2021 Steering Committee Members									orange	orange	orange	orange
Recruit Coalition Members/Develop Relationships with Existing Members				yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	orange	orange
Faciliate Strategic Plan Conversations										orange	orange	orange
Pre-Project Evaluation: Interview and Surveys		yellow	yellow	yellow								

Responsibility Key:

Color	Responsibility
Blue	Steering Committee
Red	Pioneer Staff
Yellow	Coalition Coordinator
Green	Coordinator/Steering Committee
Purple	Steering Committee/Pioneer
Orange	Pioneer/Steering/Coordinator

2020-2021 Activities- Growing Coalition/Ensuring Sustainability

Activity	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
Finalize 3-Year Strategic Plan	orange	orange										
Monthly Coalition Meetings/Professional Development	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow
Apply to present and attend NDIA Conference							orange					
Prepare Quarterly Email Newsletter	yellow			yellow			yellow			yellow		
Develop Sustainability Proposal to Support Strategic Plan past grant period			orange	orange	orange	orange	orange					
Prepare Small/Rural Digital Inclusion Coalition Toolkit									yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow
Apply to present and attend ARSL Conference	yellow											
Plan Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Summit	orange	orange	orange	orange	orange	orange	orange	orange				
Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Summit								orange				
Post-Project Evaluation: Interviews and Surveys									yellow	yellow	yellow	
Prepare Final Project Evalution Report											orange	
Recruit 2021-2022 Steering Committee Members									blue	blue	blue	blue
Recruit Coalition Members/Develop Relationships with Existing Members	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow	green	green	green	green	blue	blue
Update Ecosystem Report										yellow	yellow	yellow