

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Libraries (lead applicant, and consortium host), in partnership with other institutions of the Carolina Consortium¹ and the Educopia Institute², seeks to create a consortial network for digital library services in the Carolinas. The Carolina Digital Library Network will increase the shared infrastructural capacity of libraries throughout the regions of North Carolina, South Carolina, and (optionally) portions of adjoining states in order to improve access to digital content, collections, and services for a wide range of users. This project will build on previous success of UNC Greensboro in negotiating group discounts, repository services, and other innovations for large numbers of libraries. This proposal is submitted as a Project Grant application, with the project category of National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives. The project duration is two years; we seek \$218,515 in funding from IMLS to undertake this project.

STATEMENT OF NATIONAL NEED

The effectiveness of library consortia is a well-documented strategy for maximizing the spending power of libraries. A recent retrospective study³ by Horton and Pronevitz examined the characteristics and accomplishments of more than two hundred U.S. library consortia and their organizational models, in the process identifying advantages in larger-scale, multi-type consortia. Some of the most popular new services offered by library consortia include shared repositories, digitization of analog materials, and digital scholarship services. Conversely, sixty-five examples of consortia closures in the past decade are discussed, which highlights the need to employ new strategies and models for successfully cultivating new collaborations of the kind proposed here. The recent IMLS report⁴ on progress in advancing the national digital infrastructure explores these issues and opportunities at length, stating "...radically diverse collaborations are offering opportunities for greater access to new tools and innovation, breaking down information silos, and building ethical partnership models." (p. 14) This highlights the need for practical research concerning effective strategies for forming and sustaining new digital library (DL) communities of mixed organizational types. This national need has been a topic of practical research by the principals of this project for the past decade.⁵ Having created several successful DL organizations, the principals developed a robust community cultivation model⁶ which will be deployed and evaluated in this project.

The specific regional needs driving this consortial formation project were extensively explored in a series of preparatory meetings, and we feel that the organizations represented in this project are well-prepared for this effort. UNC Greensboro has led regional collaborative efforts in the Carolinas for 15 years as the organizational host of the Carolina Consortium (CC). Now comprised of 190 academic and public libraries across both North and South Carolina, the consortium regularly negotiates and manages over one thousand ongoing group subscription agreements, with documented savings of millions of dollars each year. UNC Greensboro also serves as the host of the NC Digital Online Collection of Knowledge and Scholarship (DOCKS) shared repository for eleven universities. Building on the success of these collaborative alliances, a series of planning meetings were held in the 2017-18 period to discuss new collaborative directions. Meetings attended by ten NC university and public libraries held on 10/20/17 and 10/27/17 discussed many needs and opportunities for shared DL services that could be addressed through a collaborative pilot project, especially with grant funding. Broader exploratory discussions concerning shared services were held with 175 attending CC members on 5/8/18, and again with a smaller group of NC DOCKS institutions on 6/7/18. The ideas concerning shared services which emerged from these meetings led to this proposal to form a new DL collaborative network.

¹ For information on the membership of the Carolina Consortium, see URL: <https://library.uncg.edu/carolinaconsortium/>

² For information on the activities and organizations hosted by the Educopia Institute, see URL: <https://educopia.org/>

³ Horton, V., and Pronevitz, G. (2015) *Library Consortia: Models for Collaboration and Sustainability*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions.

⁴ Rudersdorf, A. et al. (2018). *National Digital Infrastructure and Initiatives: A Report on the 2017 National Digital Platform at Three Forum*. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, Office of Library Services.

⁵ Skinner, K., and Halbert, M. (ed.) (2008) *Strategies for Sustaining Digital Libraries*. Atlanta, GA: Emory University DL Pubs.

⁶ For examples of emerging communities and documentation on this model, see URL: <https://educopia.org/research/incubating-ideas>

PROJECT DESIGN

This project is focused on the IMLS priorities in building capacity through National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives. The project has three goals, as follows.

A. Pilot the Carolina Digital Library Network (CDLN): Our primary aim is to create an organization to significantly improve the capacity of libraries to provide access to digital content, collections, and services to a wide range of users in a broad swath of the country. The initial shared services to be piloted will include (but not limited to) repository functions, digitization of analog materials, and digital scholarship services. Preference will be given to cost-effective services that can be provided through negotiated group licenses and contracts. This pilot project will explicitly engage libraries in sustainability planning from the beginning, with the goal of transitioning at the end of the project to either long term operations funded by joint investments or a sunseting process. While all CC members will be invited to participate, we also welcome participation by other libraries in the Carolinas and adjoining states, requiring only a commitment to engage in substantive planning efforts.

B. Evaluate Inclusive DL Community Formation Strategies: A secondary goal is to explicitly evaluate mechanisms for direct inclusion of users and other community stakeholders in the process of organizing a collaborative network of libraries to address their information needs.

C. Foster National Discussion of Community Formation Models. In addition to organizing the CDLN, the project will host an annual symposium of regional consortia and collaborative groups to document successful practices in engaging users in providing external input and consensus building for DL services. Symposium proceedings will be archived and disseminated publicly to share findings nationally.

Schedule of Completion: The project will be accomplished in three phases. During the *Convening Phase* (9/1/19 – 4/30/20) participating libraries and external stakeholder groups will convene to agree on 1) a selection process for group DL services and projects to undertake during the project, 2) bylaws and other basic organizational documents, 3) planning for the first symposium, and 4) a long-term sustainability analysis regarding membership fees, as well as a sunset option process. During the *Implementation Phase* (5/1/20 – 12/31/20) institutions will implement initial group licenses, digitization projects, membership agreements/fees, and the first symposium. During the *Evaluation Phase* (1/1/21 – 8/31/21) the nascent CDLN will implement a second round of group contracts, evaluate results of the project, conduct a second symposium and decide on next steps.

DIVERSITY PLAN

The selection process developed in the convening phase will give explicit attention to identifying underserved communities to be served through digitization and digital scholarship activities. External stakeholders such as scholars and community groups will be directly engaged in selection committee mechanisms.

NATIONAL IMPACT

Key aspects of this project that differentiate it in terms of national impact include the fact that in addition to increasing the fundamental national capacity of libraries to provide access to digital content, collections, and services, it also seeks to document transformative practices to engage external stakeholders in DL community formation that may lead to systemic change more broadly. The symposium proceedings will be solicited and produced in forms designed to be readily adaptable by other institutions and communities. Finally, we will undertake planning from the beginning to sustain the CDLN beyond the grant funding period,

PROJECT BUDGET

We seek \$218,515 in funding from IMLS to undertake this project. \$50K will go for Educopia project consultation and staffing, \$50K for digitization, \$40K for digital scholarship services, \$10K for repository contracts, \$6K for project related travel, and the remainder for federally negotiated institutional indirect costs.