

Enoch Pratt Free Library Application for the IMLS National Leadership Grant

Project Grant Application: Community Anchors

Project Title: Programming with an Equity Lens

Enoch Pratt Free Library respectfully requests a grant in the amount of \$510,000 with a cost share of \$255,000 to support a partnership with Associated Black Charities (ABC) to develop and implement an evaluation tool that will measure programming through an equity lens. This tool will be published and shared nationally in order to ensure that libraries continue to be safe and productive spaces for all and that they are at the forefront of working toward social justice. Of this, \$100,000 will support staff salary and fringe benefits; \$75,000 will support a contract with ABC; \$25,000 will cover publication; \$250,000 will support program costs; \$25,000 will support staff training; \$25,000 will support marketing; and \$10,000 will support presentation of findings.

At a time when Baltimore City's homicide rate reached 343 in 2017, the highest it has been since 1993, Mayor Catherine Pugh brought together all city agencies to create a new Violence Reduction Initiative. The Pratt, as a quasi-public institution, is a part of this initiative, which has given the Library the opportunity to seriously consider its role in the civic life of Baltimore. Violence is the inevitable outcome of a community that has suffered due to insufficient care, support and the impact of systemic biases. Since violence is predictable, it is also avoidable if networks of care, support and accountability are built into our systems, structures, and organizations. It is for this reason that the Pratt's mission is "to provide equal access to information, services and opportunities that empower, enrich, and enhance the quality of life for all." The Pratt Library system exists to provide access to resources necessary to address the root and symptoms of violence and poverty.

Successfully administering our mission has meant different things at different times. In FY19, the Pratt will be focusing on the library's systemic impact on communities and how better to serve our customers in increasingly complicated and challenging environments. Due to the underlying complexity of the issues facing our customers, the Pratt is dedicated to becoming a holistic resource to address issues related to both the causes and symptoms of violence and poverty. The Pratt understands that these issues are deeply rooted in history and systemic racism and in a city like Baltimore, the first city to introduce redlining and other discriminatory practices, the addressing of poverty means facing that history.

The Pratt serves a diverse multiracial and multiethnic constituency that represents varying socio-economic levels. U.S. Census Bureau projections for 2016 show the Baltimore City population at 620,691 (63 percent African-American, 31 percent White, and 8 percent Hispanic and Asian). 23 percent of the population lives below the poverty level, and 35 percent of households earn less than \$25,700 per year (well below the median household income of \$42,241). Nearly 22 percent of the Baltimore City population is under 18 years of age, and 85 percent of Baltimore City public school students receive free or reduced price meals, a measure of poverty. Pratt's 22 Library locations predominantly serve a low or moderate income population, as measured by their proximity to title one public schools where the majority of students qualify free or reduced price meals. This places the Pratt in an ideal position to provide services to the most vulnerable members of Baltimore society.

In order to ensure that the Pratt's branches serve as community anchors and that programs are meeting community needs, the Pratt requests funding through the IMLS Leadership Grant, to develop an evaluation tool that will be used to assess all our services and partnerships through the lens of equity and community responsiveness. Through partnership with Associated Black Charities, who has already developed a tool for evaluating through a racial equity lens, the Pratt will measure the effectiveness of programming in the following areas: Literacy, STEM, Arts & Culture, Health & Wellness, Peace & Community Building, and Workforce Development.

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The Pratt utilizes an innovative model of compassionate service in the creation of programming for the community. Local branch managers develop unique partnerships with organizations and individuals in response to direct feedback from customers. Administrative staff in the Central branch diligently collect information on state and national trends in the delivery of service and design programs to be implemented system-wide. The internal collaboration between these two groups means that the residents of Baltimore receive the absolute best service possible while maintaining agency in their own lives. An evaluation tool that is designed to determine the effectiveness of our programs in providing care, challenging the status quo and furthering Baltimore's drive toward peace will allow the library to make any necessary adjustments in the programs it provides.

Several new initiatives to address the issues our customers are experiencing have been implemented in the last several years. In April 2015, during the unrest that followed the death of Freddie Gray, the Enoch Pratt Free Library chose to remain open, and as a result the Pratt received additional state funding to expand its hours. The expansion of hours resulted in a more than 30% increase with the largest increases being in areas of the city with high poverty and that are also identified as key areas by the Mayor's Violence Reduction Initiative. The expansion was implemented in January of 2018 and as result, the possibilities for programmatic offerings has expended. In 2017, the Pratt partnered with BGE/Exelon to bring the Mobile Job Center to neighborhoods that had no access to workforce development programs and no library branch. In the fall of 2017 the Pratt launched a new partnership with University of Maryland School of Social Work, *Social Worker in the Library* bringing much needed social services to library patrons onsite in branches. These measures are in addition to our long standing services and programs that have been utilized by all the public for years.

The Pratt knew that it needed a strong partner to evaluate current program offerings. Associated Black Charities (ABC) is a public foundation that advocates and facilitates the creation of measurably healthier and more prosperous communities through responsible leadership and philanthropic investment throughout the State of Maryland. Through its More in the Middle Initiative and its health disparities work, ABC acts as a convener, advocate and grantmaker to address issues impacting Maryland communities.

In 2015 ABC launched "Ten Essential Questions for Policy Development, Review and Evaluation" that provides a racial equity lens to policy and organizational decision making. Using this as a model, the partnership will develop a tool, use it to evaluate current Pratt programs, make adjustments to these programs and share nationally with other library systems across the country. In ABC's own words, their "goal is to dismantle the institutional barriers and biases that prevent people from realizing their full potential by addressing broken systems, not broken people. Informed by data and leading through innovative and research-based approaches, we will ensure that economic opportunities are extended to, and see to advance, ALL people. We are committed to transformative change. We are educating policymakers, civic leaders, corporate/business leaders, community activists and advocates about the root causes of the detrimental economic and workforce outcomes that disproportionately exist for African Americans. We are sharing research and other tools to help address and resolve the issues birthed from many years of intentional (as well as unintentional) institutional and structural racism."

Through this project the Pratt will strengthen its reputation as a leader in urban libraries, ensure that it is best supporting those that the 22 library branches across Baltimore City and develop a sharable resource to support others in the work toward equity. It is only by ensuring that our libraries are safe and productive spaces for all that we can further our mission and provide equal access to empower and enhance the lives of all.