

Project LOCAL: Library Outreach as a Community Anchor in Learning

Project Abstract: A research team from the University of Washington Information School is applying for a one-year planning grant of \$50,000 to perform a needs analysis that will provide a deeper understanding of what public libraries need to be more effective community anchors for families with children ages 0-12, in underserved communities, who do not utilize the library. While this planning grant itself will generate crucial findings for the library field, it will also inform the development of a larger research grant to further explore models of how libraries can be more effective community anchors for families with children ages 0-12, in underserved communities.

Project: The public library has been recognized as an integral resource for supporting families in underserved communities (Neuman & Celano, 2012). However, libraries have begun to realize that many of these families, who could benefit from library services, do not come into the library to take advantage of programs and services. How then can libraries evolve their traditional programs and services to reach these families? Additionally, given that libraries are not recognized as fulfilling the role of community anchor (Hildreth, 2013), how can libraries be more effective as community anchors for these families and help them to support their children's learning and development?

In 2015, Mills and Campana, two of the researchers on this proposed planning grant, conducted focus groups with prominent librarians and library administrators in the children and youth services field to uncover their essential research needs. These leaders consistently requested effective practices for reaching families who are not coming into the library. Some libraries have found ways to reach these families by offering relevant services and programs out in the community, based on needs assessments, instead of waiting for these families to come into the library. To gain a better understanding of these libraries' efforts and their needs in relation to their efforts, we are requesting a one-year planning grant to conduct a needs analysis of these libraries to understand how they can anchor themselves in these communities and what they need to be more effective with their proactive efforts to serve these families where they are located, out in the community. We intend to collaborate with these libraries to discover effective practices in their programs and services by addressing the following research questions:

What do public libraries need to better serve as community anchors for families with children ages 0-12, in underserved communities, who do not utilize the library?

1. What types of services/programs are libraries offering to reach families with children ages 0-12 who do not utilize the library?
 - a. How are these programs supporting libraries in their role as community anchor?
2. How are libraries assessing the needs of families with children ages 0-12 who do not utilize the library?
 - a. How, if at all, are libraries using the results of these needs assessments to develop services/programs based on the needs of families with children ages 0-12 who do not utilize the library?
3. What challenges do libraries face in reaching families with children ages 0-12 who do not utilize the library?
 - a. How can these challenges inform other libraries wanting to serve these communities?

Proposed work plan: To answer our research questions, we plan to perform a needs analysis that incorporates focus groups, interviews, and a national survey. We will conduct 2-4 in-person focus groups at the American Library Association Annual Conference in Chicago, IL in June 2017. These focus groups will be used to gather top-level information on the libraries' current practices, challenges, and needs in working to be more effective community anchors for families in underserved communities. Following the analysis of the focus group data, the researchers will conduct 10-15 open-ended phone interviews in the fall with youth consultants in state libraries, library administrators, and librarians at various large public library systems around the country to gain a deeper understanding of current practices and needs assessment strategies. The interview data combined with the focus group data will inform the development of a nationwide survey to be administered in the spring

through the Association of Library Service to Children and the Public Library Association. The survey will enable the researchers to gain a broad understanding of current practices, challenges, and needs regarding the development of services and programs to reach families with children ages 0-12, in underserved communities, who do not utilize the library.

Relevance to Libraries as Community Anchors: This project aligns with the Community Anchor project category in three ways. By *exploring current replicable and responsive programming models*, this planning grant will provide the library profession with a broad, multi-faceted understanding of effective practices they can employ to reach families with children ages 0-12 who are not utilizing the library. By *investigating how libraries are addressing widespread community challenges*, this project will advance the role of the library as a crucial community anchor for families with children ages 0-12 in underserved communities. By sharing our findings with the broader library field throughout the lifecycle of the grant, we are *improving the development of programs and services contextualized to community issues*.

Potential impact: Our findings will establish a baseline understanding of current practice, in this largely unexplored area of research. This will help the broader library community to increase their reach and service to families in underserved communities who do not utilize the library; advance the recognition of the library as a community anchor for families in underserved communities; and provide a foundation for future research studies that will enable libraries to better understand how they can act as community anchors.

Projected performance goals and outcomes: We plan to publish our findings both in relevant academic and practitioner journals to maximize the dissemination of our findings. We also plan to present at relevant academic and practitioner conferences, such as ALISE, PLA, ALA, WLA, and others. Our final report will provide profiles of current successful programs and services and practical guidelines to support libraries in their outreach efforts with families who do not utilize the library. Results of the study will be disseminated throughout the grant cycle with the goal of impacting practice. We plan to build on the findings from this planning grant by developing a larger research grant that will enable a closer study of these libraries and their services to work toward developing a toolkit for libraries that will help them reach underserved families.

Project Team and Participants: Dr. Michelle Martin (Project Director), Beverly Cleary Professor of Children and Youth Services, University of Washington Information School; Kathleen Campana and J. Elizabeth Mills, doctoral candidates, University of Washington Information School.¹

Participants: Based on preliminary conversations and existing relationships, anticipated library participants include (among others): Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, North Carolina; San Francisco Public Library, California; Arapahoe Library District, Colorado; Carroll County Public Library, Maryland; Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and King County Library System, Washington.

Estimated budget: For the proposed project, our estimated budget is \$50,000, divided as follows: \$3,000 for transcription services; \$11,700 for travel for data collection and research dissemination; \$15,600 for researchers; \$2,000 to support library participation; \$17,700 for indirect costs.

References

Hildreth, S. (2013). Inspiring Libraries as Community Anchors. *National Civic Review*, 101(4), 44-47.
Neuman, S., & Celano, D. (2012). *Giving our children a fighting chance: Poverty, literacy, and the development of information capital*. New York: Teachers College Press.

¹ Campana and Mills have previous experience with working on and managing IMLS grants, having served as researchers on the award-winning, four-year IMLS National Leadership Grant, Project VIEWS2 (Valuable Initiative in Early Learning that Work Successfully).