

Summary: The Denver Public Library (DPL), in collaboration with a national steering committee, seeks an \$89,100 Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program Grant in the Planning/Continuing Education/Community Catalyst Category. This project will explore how libraries in mid-size cities can build and support internal cultures representative of the communities they serve, creating replicable staffing models that foster diversity, equity and inclusion and value lived experience and authentic community relationships as qualifications. Project activities will include engaging a research and evaluation consultant, convening a national symposium and ultimately, creating a report establishing recommendations for this work in the library community.

Statement of National Need: According to the U.S. Census, by 2044, no single racial or ethnic group will be in the majority in America. Yet, the 2017 American Library Association Demographic Study found that 86.7% of members identify as white, only a 4% decrease from 2014. To promote more diversity in the field, the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) recommended in its 2017 report, “Positioning Library and Information Science Graduate Programs for 21st Century Practice” that libraries “need staff who are more community-focused and who reflect the communities’ diversity,” also calling out the importance of representative diversity by socioeconomic status. DPL has made some strides in this area; for example, its social work team employs peer navigators with lived experience of homelessness and substance abuse disorder and worked with the City and County of Denver’s Human Resources department to allow lived experience to be used as a qualification in hiring these positions. DPL’s New Americans Project, which supports immigrants and refugees, hires many diverse community members as activity leaders to carry out the program; however, turnover is extremely high as those in these roles leave to take more permanent, benefited positions within DPL (27% in the last year) that, while offering security, provide limited pathways for growth in the field of librarianship. Multnomah County Library and Hennepin County Library, both libraries working with the Government Alliance for Racial Equity (GARE), have been experimenting with models to address these issues. Multnomah County has created positions known as Black Cultural Library Advocates to specifically connect with specific communities, recognizing the unique value of black lived experience in America. In Hennepin County, IMLS supported the creation of a cultural liaison position and volunteer community advocate program to strengthen connections with the Somali community. Further, the community navigator or *promotora* model, centered on building relationships and trust, has been used effectively in health organizations and could offer lessons to the library field. Addressing these issues will help libraries remain relevant to customers and build positive relationships while also engaging new perspectives both internally and externally.

Project Design: In implementing *Building a Pipeline of Community Connection*, DPL will **establish a national steering committee of peer libraries**; Hennepin County Library and Multnomah County Library have expressed initial interest (other leaders in this field and peer organizations will join). The steering committee will hold virtual meetings every other month, **conduct a national environmental scan of libraries and other nonprofit/government organizations** and **convene a symposium of community and professional partners**, leveraging professional networks across health, immigrant and refugee services, workforce development and library fields to discuss initial findings, share best practices and provide the building blocks for a successful pipeline plan. Possible partners include: Colorado Health Foundation, Donnell-Kay Foundation, Colorado State Library, Centura Health, Government Alliance on Race and Equity, Los Angeles Public Library, the Bremen Public Library (using an apprenticeship model in Germany) and other organizations experimenting with community navigator-style models and lived experience as a qualification. DPL will also **engage a consultant** who will **interview current and past employees** from underserved communities (immigrants and refugees,

communities of color, those of lower socio-economic and educational attainment status) to understand barriers to continuing on a career track in the library field. The process will include interviews with 15-20 current employees and 15-20 interviews with past employees, with current staff paid for their time and translation services available. The consultant will also **provide facilitation at the symposium** and **present findings and recommendations** from the interview process. Further, the consultant will **develop potential evaluation models** for programs that might be implemented, including theories of change, data collection tools and data collection protocols. A part-time staff member will be employed to coordinate the project, serving as liaison between the consultant, steering committee and internal staff. The project will culminate in a **report summarizing findings, the process and recommended models** for library systems in mid-size cities to be shared nationally through written articles, presentations at conferences and via our online presence with community and professional partners, including the Colorado Association of Libraries, the American Library Association, the Public Library Association and the Urban Libraries Council, as well as with those who attended the summit and partners in fields of health and workforce development.

Diversity Impact: This project seeks to identify effective models to build a pipeline of support for those underrepresented in the field of librarianship, including immigrants and refugees, communities of color and those of lower socio-economic and educational attainment status. These populations were identified based on DPL's experience serving these communities and observations about internal staff culture. As mentioned above, this project will include interviews conducted by a professional research and evaluation consultant with current and past employees from these groups to understand barriers to continuing on a library career track, ensuring community input on defining these needs and opportunities. The project will also incorporate work done by members of the steering committee in this vein and the symposium will strive to incorporate speakers and viewpoints of those with these lived experiences.

National Impact: This project offers an opportunity to build a model of community impact through responsive staffing that can be replicated in libraries, particularly those in mid-size cities. Ultimately, the goal is to determine practical, effective models that libraries in mid-size cities can implement to ensure those from populations historically underrepresented in librarianship can both join and grow in the field, with a supportive institutional culture. Building a staffing model that fosters diversity, equity and inclusion and values lived experience and authentic community relationships is valuable to all library systems in mid-size cities, as well as cultural institutions, service organizations and community focused businesses. In engaging a professional research and evaluation consultant, national and community partners, and internal staff teams, DPL will be able to share deliverables that are thoughtfully vetted and collaboratively achieved.

Budget Summary: Project Budget: \$114,100, Cost Share: \$25,000 (Staff time + in-kind symposium support),
IMLS request: \$89,100

- Consultant: \$30,000
- Part-time (20 hours) Library Program Associate (LPA) - \$35,000
- Five hours of interview/focus group time for 15-20 current staff members - \$500
- Symposium costs: 12 stipends of \$300 each = \$3,600 + travel costs for 12 at 1,500 each = \$18,000, \$2,000 in food and supplies = \$23,600