

Project Title: Training Librarians for Civic Engagement and City Collaboration

The U-M School of Information proposes to invest \$372,965 in IMLS funds and \$281,034 as cost share toward training library students in new forms of civic engagement. Students will partner with cities of Jackson, Ferndale, and Lansing, MI, to apply information tools to civic challenges, preparing to be civic leaders. Those experiences will be captured as content for online learning modules that will be developed to teach librarians about effective collaborations with city governments.

Statement of Need

Libraries have always been aware of their role in the public life of cities, but more recently have articulated that role as being around their expertise and literacy as opposed to their collections. At the same time, local governments report that the combination of emerging digital communication tools and the collapse of local news has created both a new need to interact with citizens through digital communication, data sharing, and design processes that include open data initiatives, modernization and digitization of feedback initiatives. Public librarians could be exceptional partners with local governments to meet these challenges, but they often don't have experience in how to effectively work with city officials and staff. Today's public librarians could and should be leveraging their coursework in database and information management; organization of information; community, family, and individual engagement; and fluidity with social media and web tools to assist in these initiatives -- yet most have very limited interactions with civic government. Public librarians could bring powerful technology and community engagement skills to city governments. However, learning to bridge between information skills and a governmental environment requires explicit training and guided practical experience.

Proposed Solution

We need a new generation of librarians who are mentored, educated, and experienced in leveraging cutting-edge "library skills" in civic settings, and materials that will help educate practicing librarians in their current efforts at civic engagement. The University of Michigan School of Information (UMSI) proposes a two-pronged solution: embedding library graduate students with cities for projects and developing massively open online courses (MOOCs) program to embed library students in city governments where they will work with city staff on community challenges. In the graduate class, masters-level library students will develop skills in community engagement, user research, information management, and IT skills in partnership with local government in order to create new information tools and services that connect people to their local governments. We've established partnerships with the city governments in Jackson, Ferndale, and Lansing, Michigan (see citizeninteraction.org). The proposed solution provides resources to develop new project opportunities that are specifically designed to help library students to engage with city governments, helping both groups to learn from each other. In addition, this grant would fund the recording of these student experiences for broader distribution as online course content. Students will be recruited to participate in this content capture.

Project Design

In the design course, students will work closely with university engagement specialists and city staff to design solutions to civic problems posed by the cities themselves. In addition, cities often work with organizations like local non-profits and neighboring governments to accomplish goals, creating diverse set of potential projects. The proposed program will create opportunities targeted to students intending to work in public libraries or other cultural institutions in the future. Students interested in library careers will:

- **Enroll in an engaged learning class in which they will work with local governments to create new forms of engagement using information and communication technology.** These projects focus on tools and services that are easy for the city to maintain independently after the course concludes and are embedded in problems of engagement the city is facing. Based on previous experiences, cities need considerable guidance to scope and organize a project so that it is maximally suited to the university course time frame.

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- **Extend course-based work in civic contexts.** This includes paid, credit-bearing internships in the summer and co-curricular opportunities throughout the semester, including Alternative Spring Break projects and Data Dives. These opportunities will be supported by the grant by funding internships and travel to work in city governments and field sites.
- **Develop and distribute templates and curricula in order to replicate our students' experiences in other library science and information schools.** Experiences from the local experiences with students will be captured on video, which will become a centerpiece for two MOOCs. The first will be lessons for public librarians who want to learn more about how to engage cities, and the second for city workers who are interested in how to best work with their local libraries.

In these opportunities, library students will also have the chance to work with students from a range of disciplines. Funding is required for two major elements that make the program successful: a dedicated engaged learning specialist and field work support. The dedicated engaged learning specialist maintains relationships with cities, and scopes projects for the maximum benefit of the student team. They also bridge curricular and co-curricular projects and facilitate learning outcomes. Field support includes travel and materials funding necessary to create mature products and services that enhance engaged learning outcomes. In order to make sure this plan is met, and that our goals are objectively measured, we are planning to have an advisory board comprised of professionals from both libraries and government. We also intend to add at least one external member who is involved in library education at the graduate level, but is not at our institution. This role will help us to generalize our educational mission.

Diversity Plan

We plan to promote diversity and inclusion in our work from three directions: admissions, community relationships, and MOOC audience. At the admissions level, UMSI has successfully built a diverse and inclusive student population. In particular, we will offer special internship opportunities for diverse students. At the community level, we have built relationships with cities who have diverse populations and civic needs grounded in that diversity. This includes Rust Belt cities like Jackson and Lansing, which are still recovering from deep changes in their economies. Funding for this program will pay for travel to interact with diverse populations. Working with EdX as a partner to distribute and advertise our MOOCs will leverage their network to reach a diverse set of learners. In previous online courses related to library education, we have found that the people who take MOOC courses are much more diverse than those in our residential program.

Broad Impact

Focusing on training emerging library professionals in civic engagement will help both those students and the cities in which they are working. From the perspective of the students, the effects of our program will be to teach potential leaders to work effectively with city governments by understanding their processes and needs. We will also be teaching emerging library professionals how to specifically address problem-based civic problems. The MOOC content takes these lessons and makes them globally available, allowing working librarians to access the content without having to leave their positions for further education. From the city's perspective, the goal is to show city staff that their local libraries could play a broader role in community engagement than they might have previously considered.

Budget

The estimated budget is \$372,965 in IMLS funds and \$281,034 as Cost Share. IMLS Direct Costs include \$122,189 Salaries/Benefits, \$10,014 Non-Student Travel, \$94,112 Student Support, and \$15,870 Other Costs. (IMLS Direct Costs \$242,185 + \$130,780 IDC @ 54%) The cost share requirement has been met as \$372,965 less \$94,112 in Student Support = \$278,853. The majority of our request is allocated for staff time directly supporting student learning outcomes and the direct funding of students for project needs and co-curricular support.