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Civic Engagement for Racial Justice in Public Libraries (*RJ@P*L)
Narrative

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Project Summary: "Civic Engagement for Racial Justice in Public Libraries" (*RJ@P*L) is a three-year proposal (Implementation – Project Type) that meets the requirements specified in IMLS' National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG-L) – FY 2022 Guidelines to achieve its Goal 2 (Objective 2.1 and Objective 2.2). This proposed project will build the capabilities of public librarians and selected communities to lead civic engagement and promote positive social change by advancing racial justice in their environments and within their work settings. The University of Alabama's (UA) School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) and Chicago State University's (CSU) Department of Computer, Information and Mathematical Science and Technology (CIMST) in partnership with multiple state and public libraries, including Alabama Public Library Service (AL), Athens Regional Library System (GA), Austin Public Library (TX), Birmingham Public Library (AL), Georgia Public Library Service, Howard County Library System (MD), Kentucky Department for Libraries & Archives, Library of Virginia, Louisville Free Public Library (KY), Maryland State Library Agency (MD), Northwestern Library System (NC), Richland Library (SC), Richmond Public Library and Suffolk Public Library (VA), Tennessee State Library and Archives (TN), and others request $332,939 IMLS funds (with an additional $333,149 cost shared). The *RJ@PL* team will collaborate to meet the following project goals: 1) Assessment of public library efforts to promote racial justice and civic engagement externally as a community agency and internally as a workplace; 2) Operationalization of a responsive and participatory strategic planning process using a theory of change to develop action plans that further racial justice; 3) Implementation of key strategic components that support racial justice in select domains of community life (e.g., agriculture, economy, education, environment, public policy, health, information technology, law and justice, manufacturing/retail, social welfare, and youth/family learning). In the process, alliances between public libraries (local/county/regional/state) with external stakeholders (e.g., farming communities; chambers of commerce/economic councils; schools, colleges, and universities; medical/health centers; criminal justice systems; businesses/corporations, etc.) will facilitate the development and implementation of information-based offerings in six/eight library settings to promote racial equity and civic engagement initiatives. The intended impact of increased community wellbeing resulting from improved racial climate are anticipated using a theory of change. If funded, *RJ@PL* will begin August 1, 2022, and be completed by July 31, 2025.

Assessment of Need: Racism is a human rights issue. Racism has been defined as "a system of advantage and disadvantage based on social, historical, and cultural constructions of race and ethnicity" [1]. There is a common conceptualization of racism that equates it with individual bias of a dominant group over another societal group, however, a more comprehensive understanding of racism (structural racism) is that it is a set of social, economic, cultural, political and economic relationships that are built into the structure of society and everyday life and that can exist independently of individual bias [1]. A broader awareness of this structural definition of racism in the United States (U.S.) came to light in the unfolding of events in 2020 and 2021. The nation experienced racial trauma in the recent killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey, Rayshard Brooks, Walter Wallace Jr., and other racial/ethnic minorities [2, 3, 4, 5]. A June 2021 report by the United Nations (U.N.) described U.S. shortcomings related to racism and racial justice [6]. The U.S. Department of State confirmed the U.N.'s finding and reiterated a renewed national commitment towards promoting racial justice and equality in the U.S. [7]. The Public Library Association (PLA) issued a recent "Statement Condemning Systemic Racism and Violence Against BIPOC People" that "acknowledge[s] that public libraries have been—and still are—complicit in systems that oppress, exclude, and harm Black people, indigenous people, and people of color" (BIPOC) [8]. This statement illustrates a need to move forward in bringing progressive changes and civic engagement to redress the social injustices toward minorities as libraries historically espoused (and recently discarded) dated practices of neutrality, passivity, and internalized focus as bystanders to community-centered dynamics s [9, 10, 11]. As a result, more recently, on June 29, 2021 the American Library Association (ALA) Council officially approved a ninth principle to be added to the ALA Code of Ethics. The principle reads, "We affirm the inherent dignity and rights of every person. We work to recognize and dismantle systemic and individual biases; to confront inequity and oppression; to enhance diversity and inclusion; and to advance racial and social justice in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces" [12]. This project will address and implement select solutions to the call for transformative change and racial justice put forward by the U.N., U.S. government, and library associations. *RJ@PL* is a multipronged action research project that analyzes professional experiences and behaviors in selected library communities and workplace and operationalizes tangible deliverables while implementing select externally/internally centered components of strategic action plans and programs.

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Scope and Context [Target Group and Beneficiaries]: *RJ@PL* will serve as a testbed focusing on the southern public libraries and their selected communities located in its seventeen regions[1] as a pilot with implications for national-level impact. *RJ@PL* will develop "promising practices" of civic engagement for racial justice that integrate the concept of equity (as compared to equality) in representing the uniquely rich and varied contextualization within broad frameworks of praxis (i.e., critical, reflective, and action-oriented). Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of communities by creating intellectual spaces (physical and virtual) or "civic commons" for communities to engage and work together for what they perceive as the public good [17, 18]. It is linked to community engagement where public institutions collaborate with their external and internal stakeholders to find mutually acceptable solutions to contemporary concerns [19, 20]; in the RJ@PL southern public librarians and their select communities assess, plan, and implement information-based offerings to promote racial justice. The project participants and the primary target group are public library stakeholders (i.e., staff, paraprofessionals and professionals, friends of the library, volunteers, domain experts, etc.). The secondary target group includes external community stakeholders associated with the participating public libraries representing the southern seventeen regions. Beneficiaries are both libraries as an institution and workplace (including the staff) and their external service communities. Characteristics of the beneficiaries include the libraries and their service communities that are participating in the *RJ@PL* project. Even though the *RJ@PL* is focused on the southern region, it has much relevance, value, and implications for all public libraries.

The scope and context of the *RJ@PL* project is intentionally focused at the regional level instead of emerging as a national project for various reasons. First, the location of the geographic southern region in the U.S. has drawn historical and ongoing controversial attention solely based on stereotypes and marginalization that paints a broad sweep of the area in its entirety only in a deficit and negative light [21, 22]. The *RJ@PL* challenges such limited notions in public perceptions, scholarly discourse, political networks, and new media coverage [23, 24]. The project focuses on the constructive aspects of asset management and strengths planning in the region to advance positive directions that its public libraries are pursuing, and can continue to promote, in presenting a fair and balanced picture of the region [25, 26]. It will spotlight the affirming stories of impact, leadership, civic engagement, and racial justice that have been overlooked in the past. Second, the nation can make significant progress in its recoveries from its racialized wounds when solutions respond to its unique regional forms that are situated in the varied cultural circumstances and differences across the country [1]. Contemporary race-relations can be strengthened when there is an acknowledgement of their specificities connected to their very particular sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic conditions [27]. Hence, *RJ@PL's* experiences will provide localized solutions tailored (and responsive) to the regional contexts recognizing the need to develop real solutions based on authentic ground-zero cultural differences [28]. Third, we believe a standardized "cookie-cutter" approach is a fallacy based on homogenization that will be limited in this project since it lacks specific applications to local conditions. Such an approach will potentially lead to scattered and isolated solutions since they will not reflect the complexities and realities of each case condition. *RJ@PL* develops a bottoms-up instead of top down strategy. Having said that, the flavor and regional characteristics integrated in the *RJ@PL* does have strong national relevance. The project structure can be replicated around the country and is generalizable. Its approach of linking needs assessment, strategic planning using a theory of change, to implementation is pertinent to promote racial justice praxis anywhere in the nation (or the world). *RJ@PL* will serve as a testbed pilot with implications for national-level impact to develop "promising practices" that integrate the concept of equity (as compared to equality) in representing the uniquely rich and varied contextualization within broad frameworks of praxis (i.e., critical, reflective, and action-oriented).

Unique Relevance: The focus on "promising practices" in the *RJ@PL* represents a shift that is more appropriate and contemporary for the need addressed by the proposed project [29]. This new way of thinking is not prescriptive and instead encourages contesting some of the assumptions and biases built into the "best practices" framework that might be envisioned as "a one-size-fits-all" model [30]. In the past, national-level library associations and others (e.g., ALA, PLA, etc.), and library funding agencies (e.g., IMLS) considered the development of a set of best practices as a high priority. These practices were premised on a "normative" library services outlook that is now considered problematic and dated [31]. The "promising practices" framework will provide a progressive and novel approach in extending the concept of

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[1] The United States Census Bureau's [13] demarcation of the southern region and its three divisions include groupings of sixteen states (i.e., Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia) and the District of Columbia. This proposal adopts the definitional scope of the region based on geography following the national classification, while acknowledging the diversity in their varied history, dissimilar environmental conditions, and diverse cultural characteristics of political and economic conditions, among other aspects [14, 15, 16].

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"best practices" with its limitations surrounding the "cookie-cutter" standardization and homogenization of practices, resource design, etc. that seemingly treat all as the same, erasing their diverse realities and variations.

RJ@PL is a proposed project that differs from other more traditional studies. It is a unique example of an extended action research as defined in terms of intense collaborations between a "professional action researcher and members of an organization or community seeking to improve a situation" [32]. It makes a taboo topic the center of its focus different from past work that avoided or engaged in a limited manner (namely, the actions to be taken in response to racism). The *RJ@PL* research team in collaboration with southern public libraries will use the assessment data to develop an understanding of civic engagement (existing/future) in response to racism in public libraries, engage in strategic planning using a theory of change to develop tangible external and internally relevant deliverables (e.g., community engagement roadmaps in various domains), and operationalize and implement select racial justice civic engagement initiatives in public library contexts of work and their communities. The project rolls many aspects together as compared to a fragmented and isolated approach where systematic, explanatory, and analytical work was only conducted at the level of individual agencies [33]. The agenda is to collaborate with the professional public library community to apply strategic planning towards design and development of forward-looking progressive practices. *RJ@PL* will provide much-needed assistance and tangible solutions via extending the role of public libraries in addressing extremely difficult and traumatic race-related conditions the country has recently experienced. Public libraries will be able to generate greater social justice impacts and provide information offerings that promote justice, fairness, equity, and dialogue contributing in a healing process as they implement community engagement efforts in the southern region. Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart [34] identified the object of action research as social practice and its transformations along with the changes that occur in the social institutions and relationships that support it. Action research characteristics in *RJ@PL* are fitting in this proposal since they include varied levels of public librarian participation in research and action, learning in collaboration, community inquiry into everyday experiences and potential impact, use of mixed methods, and the situated nature of applications and concrete outcomes [35, 36, 37]. *RJ@PL* is potentially transformational at the level of positive social change and an implementation project even though research is happening across multiple libraries involved in the project.

The lead institutions are strategic because of their unique relevance to the project. The selection of lead institutions assures a diversity of thought in the conception and execution of *RJ@PL*. The inclusion of one university from the southern region (UA) and one from the midwestern region (CSU) will mitigate the potential negative effects of regionalism such as insularity in ideology/thought and will ensure that the model set forth in the project can be applied to other regions. Both institutions contain ALA-accredited graduate programs in library and information science that serve as an intellectual frame for the work with public libraries; one lead institution, UA, is a predominantly white institution (PWI) and one institution, CSU is a predominantly black institution (PBI). Both institutions are public, however, one institution is large and is focused on serving an entire state that is largely rural (UA) and the other is small and focused on serving a large community that is urban (CSU). The UA is well positioned to lead the *RJ@PL's* racial justice approach in public libraries to strengthen local and regional communities in identifying concrete strategies, policies, and initiatives to help the state move forward from its troubled racial history. CSU brings a very strong contribution to the partnership as a unique institution because of its explicit historical and contemporary commitment to social justice and social change through the education of its community's most marginalized groups (which has changed over the centuries). For information about the unique relevance of the project team see the Key Personnel & Strategic Collaborations section.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

Libraries have the potential to serve as community catalysts and create, develop, and advance racial justice in their communities. This includes furthering racially just library collections, spaces, programs and services in support of their communities. It also means that libraries as workplaces need to become more racially just.

Project Goal(s): The project goal is to extend the capabilities of the southern public libraries and strategically operationalize positive social change by advancing racial justice in their communities and within their work settings. The overall project design includes the following phases over the three-year period: **Phase I (Year 1):** [Assessment] During this time RJ@PL will involve collecting quantitative feedback with surveys for 60-100 public librarians and their service communities as well as qualitative feedback through focus groups/interviews in each region with 50 library staff [white and BIPOC]) about civic engagement for racial justice (existing/future) within and beyond the public library. **Phase II (Year 2):** [Strategic planning] During this time the RJ@PL will develop external and internal community engagement frameworks, strategic action plans, and roadmaps for each domain based on the above analysis and from feedback with public librarians and others in 12 monthly strategic planning workshops. These domains (e.g., commerce, health, education, public policy, etc.) represent various facets of community life and in order for meaningful civic engagement for racial justice to happen it has to be tied to the specificities in particular community activities of impact. **Phase III (Year**

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Figure 1. RJ@PL Project Design
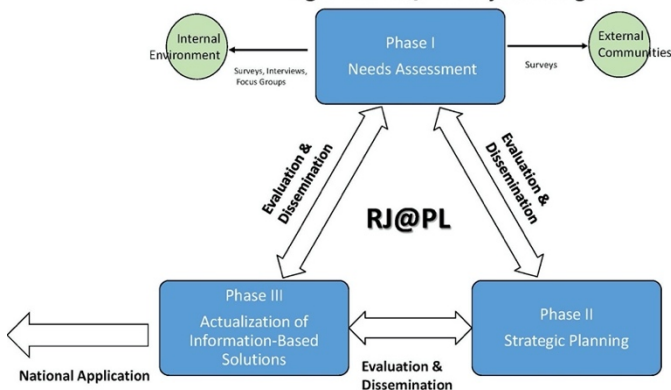
3): [Actualization of information-based solutions] During this phase, RJ@PL will implement social justice actions (external and internal) in support of racially just communities in the various domains proposed at six/eight exemplar libraries through library-enabled civic engagement activities, dialogues, and offerings that further racial justice and support community mobilization around relevant concerns and issues. For example, addressing racial justice in the health sphere of community life for meaningful solutions might involve the public library developing relevant partnerships with local hospitals and Black churches to organize health fairs and workshops for intergroup dialogue and distribution of tailored handouts summarizing their collection materials in helping to overcome race-specific health barriers experienced in the community. The exemplar libraries that will be showcased in Phase III are those libraries that are willing to implement such information-related solutions in ways that are fair, just, equitable, and promote civic engagement for racial justice. These exemplar libraries were chosen as partners based on their self-identification and self-selection in seeking to play such a critical role to advance racial justice in their community and tell their story of positive directions to pursue. State leadership in each of the 17 regions took the opportunity to identify and help select the exemplar libraries in their geographic areas. RJ@PL experiences will serve as a pilot testbed for developing national-level strategic planning promising praxis (e.g., action plans and resources) to be disseminated via professional conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications throughout the grant duration.

Project Objectives and Outcomes: RJ@PL includes various objectives. Objective 1: To implement two quantitative online surveys and collect feedback from library staff about race-based concerns in their communities (1A) and within their work settings (1B). A third online survey will collect feedback from library community stakeholders in the 17 regions about race-relations in their environments (1C). Objective 2: To conduct qualitative focus groups/interviews with library staff from each region about their challenges to further racial justice in their external communities and in their internal work settings. Objective 3: To develop and refine community engagement frameworks and strategic action plans using a theory of change for external and internal relationship building during 12 strategic planning workshops (online and in person) that will include prototype designs for particular domains with potential actions, resources, and promising practices. Objective 4: To implement select information-based solutions and programming that furthers civic engagement for racial justice in external and internal constituencies at six/eight exemplar libraries. The project outcomes will help develop the public library as a community anchoring institution that promotes racially just community development by addressing racialized experiences in the southern U.S. See Theory of Change in the "Project Design" for specific project outcomes.

Project Design: RJ@PL has been conceptualized in terms of five interrelated components (see Figure 1): (1) Assessment; (2) Strategic planning; (3) Actualization of information-based solutions; (4) Evaluation; (5) Dissemination. Assessment (needs assessment) is the first component in *RJ@PL* where studies of civic engagement for racial justice and social change in public library workplaces and their service communities are performed. Needs assessment data informs the strategic planning component where project PI/co-PI work in concert with public librarians and their communities to develop community engagement frameworks and community action plans of locally-embedded actions that foster civic engagement and promote positive social change. RJ@PL adopts civic engagement defined in terms of engaging "the citizens in their communities" and expanding access to information related to topics such as civic education, educational programs about democracy, and offering opportunities for dialog and discussion around race-relations [38] Systemic racism is difficult to conceptualize as an abstract idea and consequently will be conceptualized through the consideration of how race influences a specific domain/facet of community life (such as differences of experiences of racial groups with respect to the domains of education, health, the environment, economics, etc). The community engagement frameworks and action plans are implemented in six to eight exemplar public libraries. The implemented action plans are evaluated and the results of work are disseminated broadly. Dissemination also includes an invitation of other libraries to use the *RJ@PL* process in their own institutions and communities (national application). *RJ@PL* will develop and use a theory of change model as the organizing framework to drive the social change for racial justice by public libraries. Theory of change (ToC) will be used to develop the community engagement frameworks and strategic action plans. ToC is an approach to creating change that emerged from the efforts of philanthropic associations that funded comprehensive community change initiatives; it was developed as a way to measure philanthropically funded projects' progress and

University of Alabama and Chicago State University determine their efficacy in meeting their goals [39, 40]. ToC is "a particular approach for making underlying assumptions in a change project explicit, and using the desired outcomes of the project as a mechanism to guide project planning, implementation, and evaluation" [41]. More simply, a ToC is "an explanation of how a group of stakeholders expects to reach a commonly understood long-term goal" [42]. ToCs are typically depicted in a diagram - often a logic model - that indicates the linkages between the preconditions for change, indicators, interventions, and outcomes for the desired change. The diagram, or pathway of change "illustrates the relationship between actions and outcomes and also shows how outcomes are related to each other over the lifespan of the initiative" [43]. The logic model for *RJ@PL* is Figure 2.

Figure 2 RJ@PL Logic Model
(2022 – 2025)
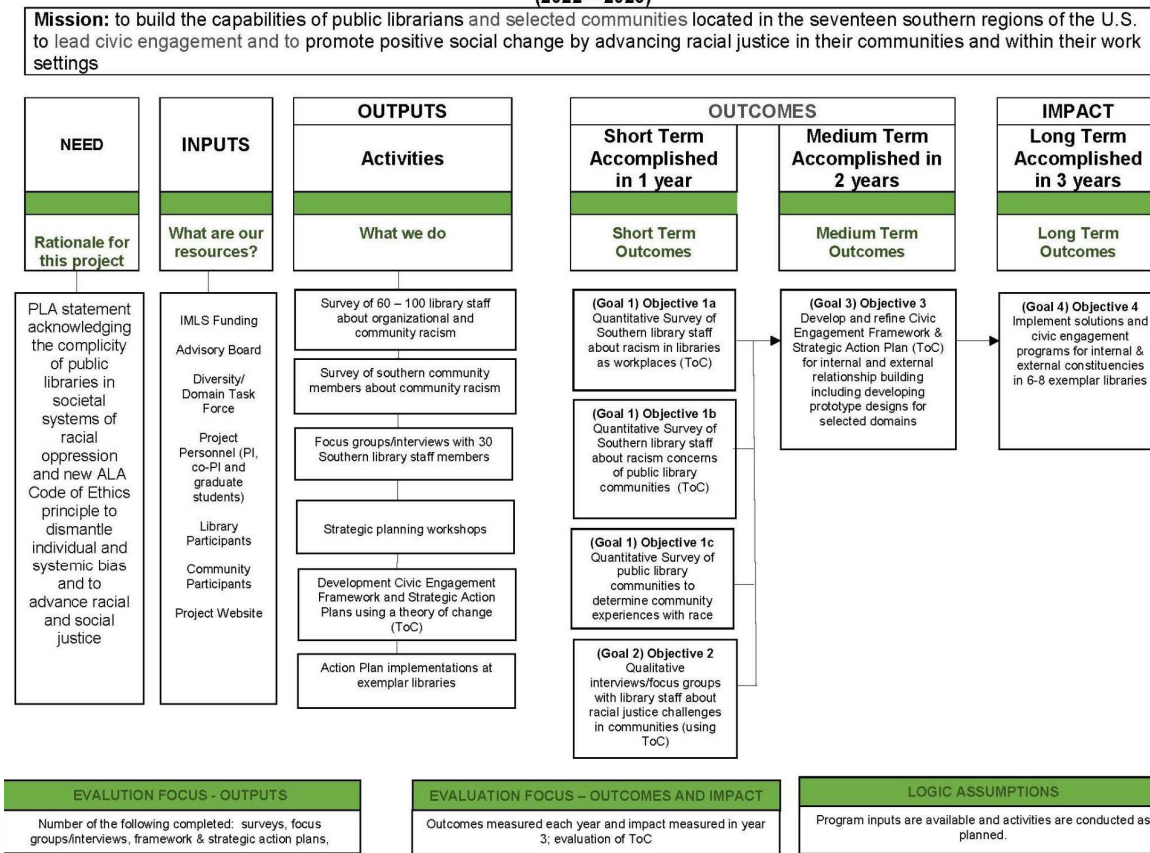
The nature of the desired social change with respect to race can be anticipated by what is found in the ToC literature. Expected changes in both libraries as workplaces and in the communities served by the libraries includes the following examples of change: changes in attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about race; changes in knowledge about race; changes in awareness of race as a structural factor that organizes life in the community; changes in skills managing race in everyday life/practice; changes in behavior in matters where race is a factor; changes in social conditions around race. Several broad outcomes anticipated as endpoints from this project include: changes in visibility of race as a community, societal/workplace issue; changes in community norms regarding race; changes in partnerships to solve problems of racism; changes in public will in specific domains where race is a factor; changes in political will in specific domains where race is a factor; changes in policies to achieve antiracism; and, changes in business practices to achieve antiracism.

Research and Action Plan: As an action research project, the following are select details and concrete planning for some of the main actualization activities during the *RJ@PL* phases:

Phase I (Year 1) [Assessment]: During Year 1 (Months 1-2) the team will be involved in set-up activities, including (not limited to) consolidation of ties with collaborating stakeholders for moving forward; organization of planning, human resources, and infrastructure; and configuration of communication channels and technologies (e.g., website design). In Year 1 (Months 3-7), two online surveys (with open-ended, closed/rated, and demographic questions) will be distributed to all library staff in all 17 regions. Survey one will be about staff experiences related to race within the workplace. Survey two will query staff about race-relations in their external communities. Questions in both surveys will be related to: incidents of racism encountered within the past five years; existing and future civic engagement initiatives; and, prioritization of racial justice goals and objectives. Both the surveys for library staff will be distributed to members of the state library agencies and associations and other librarians through various state listservs and library social media outlets. They will be asked to forward the message to all others working in libraries in their region to encourage equal distribution.

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The researchers anticipate receiving approximately 60-100 responses based on research experiences in other IMLS grants. We will follow all the protocols required by the lead institution's review board for human subjects with respect to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of responses. All staff in the 17 regions will receive the same surveys and data will be collected at the same time from all respondents. During the same time, library staff representatives from all the 17 regions will be requested to distribute a third survey to members in their community asking about race-relations in their community. We anticipate receiving approximately 60-100 responses from the libraries' community members (e.g., patrons, collaborators, friends of the library, etc.). We will follow all the protocols required by the lead institution's review board for human subjects with respect to privacy, anonymity of participants, and confidentiality of responses. We will poll each state librarian to share the top three most spoken languages in their state. We will make efforts to provide a translation of the survey tailored to the most spoken languages in each state.

During Year 1 (Months 8-12), at least 50 librarian staff stakeholders from across the 17 regions will be invited to participate in a focus group or an interview (face-to-face, phone, or virtual synchronous via voice-over-Internet-protocols). Respondents will be recruited from all 17 regions based on an equitable basis (i.e., the state librarian (or designee) from each of the 17 regions will be requested to distribute our recruitment materials). Selection will be made based on first come-first served. We will initially invite respondents to participate in a mixed-race focus group for their state. If any respondent does not feel comfortable to share information within a focus group setting then we will try to set up an individual interview to capture their response in a private interview. We will follow all the protocols required by the lead institution's review board for human subjects with respect to privacy, anonymity of participants, and confidentiality of responses. To establish a safe space within the focus group setting, we will ensure the correct application of the focus group method. Topics in the focus group will include strategic objectives, actions and activities, and resources needed within and outside the library to operationalize and implement civic engagement initiatives in various domains. The use of quantitative and qualitative data with librarian staff will provide complementary datasets: the former will help with identifying broader patterns and trends, while the latter will give insights into detailed and nuanced experiences and complexities associated with those experiences focused on strategic planning (i.e., goals and objectives). Gap analysis will be on-going throughout the grant period, in terms of a domino effect where analysis of feedback during Phase 1 will inform developments in Phase 2 and subsequent analysis will inform the future *RJ@PL* developments.

Phase II (Year 2) [Strategic planning]: During Year 2 (Months 13-24), library staff and other experts across the 17 regions will be elicited to participate in 12 monthly online workshops in real time to develop external and internal community engagement frameworks, strategic action plans, and roadmaps for each of the 11 domains (one domain per month) based on the data collected in Year 1. In each strategic workshop, participants will develop community engagement frameworks, strategic action plans, and roadmaps for one of the 11 domains. The monthly meetings are justified in order to make significant progress for each of the 11 domains. Members in each workshop might not be the same based on their experience and interest in the domain topic (e.g., health, education, etc.). The PI/co-PI in coordination with members of the Diversity + Domain Taskforce will develop and organize the workshops for each domain. Results of analyzed data collected during Phase 1 will guide the community engagement frameworks and strategic action plans in terms of content, organization, findings, and actions to pursue.

Phase III (Year 3) [Actualization of information-based solutions]: During Year 3 (Months 25-36), six/eight partnering libraries (across rural/semi-rural and urban/semi-urban settings) and others will implement social justice actions internally within the workplace and applied in supporting their external stakeholders to strengthen racially just communities in various domains of activity (e.g., commerce, health, education, public policy, etc.). These actions have been developed in Phase II. Each of six/eight library partners will operationalize key aspects of social justice plans to further racial civic engagement offerings in a specific domain critical to that community.

The ongoing activity during all phases will involve analyzing, "doing" of the work, evaluating, writing, publishing, presenting, and disseminating the results of the research. Flexibility and adjustment is written into the *RJ@PL* expectations in case of health contingency owing to local, regional, or national policies regarding COVID-19 circumstances. Table 1 shows a timeline of select activities and expected results flexibly designed for further adjustment. The entirety of *RJ@PL* experiences will be presented during different times (based on the progress made) delivered at various professional events, webinars, conferences, etc. and disseminated through scholarly peer-reviewed and other publications. The PI/co-PI are experienced scholars and they will present project results at professional conferences of agencies like the ALISE, ASIS&T, and the ALA, PLA, state library associations, ARSL, amongst others. In addition to the reports for IMLS, principals will prepare articles for reputed LIS journals. Further, the UA college information officer will prepare press releases and feature stories for the news media. A doctoral and master's graduate assistant will be hired to develop a *RJ@PL* web page and keep it updated amongst other efforts, including all aspects of *RJ@PL* planning and

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implementation, data collection and data analysis, etc. The project website will contain information about the program progress during various phases and will grow as *RJ@PL* progresses.

Evaluation: *RJ@PL* evaluation consists of three elements: (1) evaluation questions (judgment criteria); (2) intervention logic; and (3) indicators.

Evaluation Questions. *RJ@PL*'s evaluation questions are the following:

    (1) What is the *RJ@PL* theory of change and program logic? How and in what ways does it vary across stakeholders and sites, and evolve over time?

    (2) How and to what extent are *RJ@PL*'s activities being implemented as planned?

    (3) Are key components of the project operating effectively? What is working well and for whom?

    (4) To what extent is the project making progress to meet its objectives?

    (5) What outcomes are associated with the project? To what extent have the outcomes been realized?

Intervention Logic. *RJ@PL*'s design and elements have been depicted in the logic model presented in Figure 2. The logic model depicts the project's need/purpose, its mission, its inputs, its outputs and its short-term, medium term and long-term outcomes. *RJ@PL* will primarily employ outcomes-based evaluation with the key outcomes being delivered in Year 2 (i.e., development of civic engagement frameworks and strategic action plans) and Year 3 (i.e., implementation of select strategic action plans and racial justice solutions in six to eight exemplar libraries). The target group (public library stakeholders i.e., library staff, paraprofessionals and professionals, friends of the library, volunteers, domain experts, etc. and external community members) are the participants and will be deeply involved in the planning and implementation of the civic engagement frameworks/strategic action plans and they are the sources of the change in the localized settings.

Indicators: The indicators include the program outputs as well as the program outcomes. The project outputs and outcomes will be measured to ensure that *RJ@PL* achieves its goals. Output metrics include the number of surveys sent to library staff and to community members (both target groups of the project), the number of focus groups/interviews conducted, the number of civic engagement frameworks and action plans developed in collaboration with primary and secondary target groups using a theory of change. Outcome metrics include an evaluation of the civic engagement frameworks and action plans by the Advisory Board and evaluation (document analysis, impact analysis, etc.) of the impact of the implemented action plans in the six/eight exemplar libraries. *RJ@PL*'s logic model will help track progress towards achieving intended results.

Key Personnel & Strategic Collaborations—*RJ@PL* has the capacity to successfully conduct this research. PIs: UA SLIS [Bharat Mehra (Professor & EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice] and CSU CIMST [Kimberly Black (Associate Professor)] will strategically collaborate with state and public libraries from all the 16 southern states (and Washington, D. C.) to facilitate all grant activities. Library representatives will serve on the *RJ@PL* Advisory Board (15 members) and Diversity + Domain Taskforce (10 + 10 members) to assist in work plan success and implementation. The PIs are co-editing a forthcoming book entitled *Antiracist Library and Information Science: Racial Justice and Community* as part of the Advances in Librarianship series. Chapter contributors have provided informal commitment (if proposal is funded) to serve in various project management roles. The PI/co-PI have collaborated effectively on multiple IMLS-funded projects in the southern region; we will select personnel from our networks based on past demonstrated expertise. PI: Dr. Bharat Mehra brings experience of multiple externally funded grants of more than a million dollars awarded by the IMLS to further social justice, community development, and economic growth in the rural Southern and Central Appalachian region [44]. This grant proposal builds on these efforts in following a similar structure that applied methodologies in research design similar to *RJ@PL* of strengthening ties between assessment and evaluation, strategic planning, and action-oriented information implementations in public libraries to further social justice in those communities (i.e., fairness, justice, equity/equality, change agency, community empowerment, etc.) [45, 46]. Co-PI: Dr. Kimberly Black has strong experience in equity and inclusion of diverse populations and community development from post-secondary educational programs. She has conducted her work supporting underserved communities in south and central Appalachia and the Southside of Chicago. Her work has been funded by IMLS, DoD and NSF. Partners include state library agencies and individual public libraries (or systems) whose representatives have agreed to serve on the *RJ@PL* Advisory Board. Project partners and others have been selected to participate in *RJ@PL* based on their leadership, role, knowledge, networks, experience, and interests to participate in promoting social justice-based engagement initiatives in their southern communities. They are located across the region, and if the proposal is funded, additional representatives from other regional/county public library systems will be contacted to elicit their participation in the various activities identified in the grant proposal. [See "List of Key Project Staff and Consultants"]. Based on reviewers' feedback, the team decided to combine the organizational units for the members related to diversity and domain-specific expertise into the *RJ@PL* Diversity + Domain Task Force owing to interweaving and intersections of their expertise during Year 2 and Year 3. The

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thoroughness and vision of potential outcomes justifies the inclusion of various categorized stakeholder groups, sometimes with individuals in multiple roles and responsibilities that are summarized in Table 2.

Time Period and Select Activities	Expected Results
Phase 0 (Year 1: August-September 2022): Set-up activities between the project team and partnering library agencies and others. Hire and train graduate research assistants. Create/develop website. Obtain IRB permission for all protocols using human subjects.	*Set-up and relations building:* Consolidation of ties with collaborating stakeholders; organization of planning, human resources, and infrastructure; and configuration of communication channels and technologies (e.g., website design).
Phase I (Year 1: October 2022 - February 2023) Distribute quantitative survey (print & online) via help from collaborators and others to collect feedback from 60-100 southern library staff about civic engagement for racial justice in their external community and workplace (Objective 1A + Objective B) and from community stakeholders about race relations in the environment (Objective 1C). Select activities include teleconference with advisory board and Diversity + Domain Taskforce (as needed). Begin analysis of results. Inform content of interviews/focus groups.	*Initial assessment of civic engagement for racial justice offerings (external + internal to the southern public library):* Document incidents of need for racial justice encountered within the past five years in 17 regions and roles of the library; Identify broad patterns and trends from white and BIPOC perspectives about civic engagement for racial justice in the library and beyond (existing/future). This will provide emerging prioritization of racial justice goals and objectives, potential engagement processes, community-centered activities, and needed mobilization efforts. Also, help to identify key challenges, opportunities, outcomes, and impact to further civic engagement efforts.
Phase I (Year 1: March 2023 - July 2023: Objective 2) Conduct online qualitative interviews/focus groups with 50 southern librarian staff about challenges to further racial justice in external and internal environments. Teleconference with advisory board and Diversity + Domain Taskforce, as needed. Begin development of community engagement frameworks and strategic action plans in various domains.	*Better understanding of insights into detailed and nuanced experiences and complexities associated with civic engagement for racial justice experiences from white and BIPOC focused on development of strategic planning (i.e., goals and objectives):* Draft blueprints of community engagement frameworks and strategic action plans in particular community domains for strategic objectives, potential actions and activities, resources, and promising practices needed within and outside the library to operationalize and implement civic engagement for racial justice initiatives in various domains.
Phase II (Year 2: August 2023 – July 2024: Objective 3) Conduct twelve online monthly strategic planning workshops with southern public librarians and others focusing on each of the 11 domains. Revise community engagement frameworks and strategic action plans based on community agency feedback (Objective 3).	*Development of draft community engagement frameworks, strategic action plans, and roadmaps for each of the 11 domains:* Using a theory of change for integrating community engagement activities and external and internal relationship building to develop prototype designs for 11 domains with more specific actions, resources, and promising practices. Refine and finalize design of these information deliverables based on their conceptualization and operationalization tailored to specific settings (e.g., rural, urban, etc.).
Phase III (Year 3: August 2024 – July 2025: Objective 4) Actualization of information-based civic engagement for racial justice solutions in various domains at six/eight exemplar southern libraries.	*Implementing social justice actions (external and internal) in support of racially just communities in various domains (e.g., commerce, health, education, public policy, etc.) proposed at six/eight exemplar libraries:* Library-enabled civic engagement for activities, dialogues, and offerings that support community mobilization around racial justice concerns and issues (across rural/semi-rural and urban/semi-urban settings). These will include within internal southern libraries and applied in supporting their external stakeholders.
Ongoing activity (during all phases) will involve analyzing, "doing" of the work, evaluating, writing, publishing, presenting, and disseminating the results of the research (A) Analysis ongoing through the grant period: (1) Conduct gap analysis based on feedback collected from the two participant groups (white and BIPOC); Identity strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats to assess impact of civic engagement for racial justice offerings in southern libraries. (2) Develop a blueprints/drafts/finalized community engagement frameworks and strategic action plans (with promising practices) for southern libraries to better meet the needs and expectations of all their constituencies and act to strengthen racially just communities. Domino effect analysis will be throughout where feedback during Phase 1 will inform developments in Phase 2 and subsequent analysis will inform the future RJ@PL developments. *(B) Evaluation:* Ongoing evaluation following the logic model (in Figure 2) will integrate formal/informal and formative, summative, and participatory approaches selectively applied with various stakeholders (e.g., library staff and user communities; white and BIPOC staff) to represent multiplicity and plurality of thought and action. Negotiation, intergroup dialogues, and principles of respect and human dignity will shape positive directions of moving the pendulum forward. *(C) Dissemination:* Ongoing dissemination via multiple channels (e.g., presentations, publications, website, social media, etc.) will ensure continuous engagement and feedback from the external communities, (e.g., librarians, educators, practitioners, external communities, others).	

Table 1: Timeline-Select Activities of the RJ@PL.

DIVERSITY PLAN

With its focus on civic engagement and racial justice, the entire *RJ@PL* project is closely aligned to concerns of diversity, social justice, and the role of southern libraries in extending their impact to transform the lives of their communities. *RJ@PL* provides opportunities to be inclusive of all voices, perspectives, and experiences, particularly of people of color. It offers solutions through frameworks and action plans that emerge from a careful analysis of diverse respondents' reported realities and experiences to make a stronger profession and community because of the enactment of antiracist actions. Using a theory of change, all target groups, which include diverse library staff and communities, are engaged in the creation of solutions to domain activities that are influenced by race. The project team is committed to actively fostering diversity, inclusion and cultural competency throughout this project by ensuring that: 1) Individuals from diverse underserved populations serve as participants/respondents and are also well-represented on all project boards; 2) Project deliverables reflect and advance the perspectives of a diverse society for its transformation and liberation in racial justice; 3) Research and project dissemination advances the interests and concerns of diverse and underrepresented populations.

Name of Group	Description of Role
Partner (6 state library agencies)	Help distribute the assessment surveys (Phase I, Objective 1A + 1B + 1C); Identify participants to facilitate qualitative assessment data collection (Phase 1, Objective 2); Assist with strategic planning workshops (Phase II); Provide representatives to serve on the Advisory Board, Diversity + Domain Task Force; Identified select exemplar libraries (semi-completed).
Partner (10 individual libraries/library systems)	Help distribute the assessment surveys (Phase I, Objective 1A + 1B + 1C); Identify participants to facilitate qualitative assessment data collection (Phase 1, Objective 2); Assist with strategic planning workshops (Phase II); Provide representatives to serve on the Advisory Board, Diversity + Domain Task Force; Serve as exemplar library (Phase III).
Advisory Board (15 public library staff members)	Advises project team in accomplishing project goals and objectives (All); Includes attendance at two meetings per year, as needed, as well as being available for brief consultations on aspects of the project as it unfolds; Assist with evaluation activities.
Diversity + Domain Task Force (10 + 10 public library staff and other members)	Participation in assessment surveys (Phase I, Objective 1A + 1B + 1C); Participation in qualitative assessment data collection (Phase 1, Objective 2); Participation in 12 monthly strategic planning workshops (Phase II); Select members will lead actualization of information-based solutions in different domains at the exemplar libraries (Phase III).

Table 2: Roles and responsibilities of various RJ@PL stakeholder groups.

PROJECT RESULTS

The benefits of *RJ@PL* help translate collected data from southern librarians towards development and select implementation of community engagement frameworks and action plans to consolidate their role as community anchors. We will develop valuable information products (e.g., programming, strategies, promising practices) tailored to select regions intersecting with specific domains (e.g., health, economy, etc.). The project outcomes and intended results will help to develop the public library as a racially just community anchoring institution that promotes community development and civic engagement. Grant experiences involve: assessment and evaluation; analyzing existing perspectives, experiences, needs and feasibility; planning and strategizing; solidifying community partnerships; implementing racial justice programming and prototypes; and disseminating findings at national, regional, and local levels. *RJ@PL* will serve as a pilot experience to expand using similar strategies for the entire nation based on availability of additional funding in the future. *RJ@PL* is based on the Gandhian philosophy that progressive change occurs at grassroots local and regional levels, generating impacts that are different from national level agendas. It is connected to the idea that change at the national level emerges from making a difference at the local/regional levels that are a part of it.

Impact: *RJ@PL* will utilize participatory assessment datasets (quantitative and qualitative) collected from public librarians of the South and their select communities towards developing strategic planning deliverables that will be selectively implemented in exemplar libraries. Focusing on antiracism collections, policies, practices, and other offerings will address and meet the unique challenges encountered in specific settings. It will identify possible directions needed to respond to the contextually-embedded realities and individually-tailored community needs to propose (and operationalize) select culturally appropriate services/programs in their regional environments. *RJ@PL* reach will have multiple levels of impact (and provide benefits) including: **(1) Regional level (external communities of the South):** Assessment data collected during Phase I will include librarians' and their select community stakeholders' feedback about realities of racism and existing and potential racial justice solutions in response to conditions in external communities. It will provide directions for strategic planning and activities during Phase II tailored specifically to respond to their circumstances in specific domains. (**2**) **Regional/local library level: (external):** Libraries of the South will learn how to provide better tangible outcome-based racial justice responses, offerings, and products of their applications that will make a difference in the lives of members in their local and regional settings. They will illustrate through select examples how they can play significant racial justice engagement roles across various domains to make a difference in their communities (Phase III). **(3) Regional level (internal southern library workplace):** Southern libraries will also find better ways to address racism more effectively in their internal workplace settings. They will address and respond to racism within their ranks in the workplace to move the pendulum forward in becoming better towards positive change. **(4) State level:** Through data assessment (quantitative, qualitative, participatory), strategic planning, and actualization of social justice deliverables (e.g., roadmap, action plans, racial justice civic engagement offerings design and implementation) *RJ@PL* will make a difference in their states to shift the narrative about antiracism in their governments and public constituencies illustrated

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via action instead of solely words. **(5) Regional level:** *RJ@PL* will challenge and change perceptions of the South and how southern libraries are important change agents towards positive antiracism impact. **(6) National level:** *RJ@PL* experiences and data collection as well as strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats regarding the process and design and development of the project will be disseminated to the national level to inform how other libraries and their external communities can apply the lessons and insights learnt that will be relevant to all stakeholders. These will include learning of cultural competencies towards developing services/programs in various southern communities with the applicability of promising practices across the country (and the world). **(7) Educational program level:** *RJ@PL* experiences will be shared in various required and elective courses in library and information science and other disciplines offered at the lead institutions. It will inform the teaching of principles and core missions of the diverse fields of library and information science via education of emerging librarians, archivists, thought leaders, and others. Dissemination of project experiences applied to education will be shared in appropriate publications and professional venues so that other educational programs recognize its value. These non-participating stakeholders will spread knowledge about civic engagement offerings and content in their own settings. (8) **Praxis level:** Similarly, practitioners will be influenced to inform and change practice via critical and self-reflective actions to further racial justice within and external to their workplaces.

Dissemination: The PI/co-PI are experienced scholars, and they will present project results at professional conferences of agencies like the ALISE, ASIS&T, ALA, and PLA, amongst others. They will also share *RJ@PL* experiences and findings at the conferences of the library associations in the 17 southern regions. In addition to the IMLS reports, principals will prepare articles for reputed LIS journals. Further, the UA college information officer will prepare press releases and feature stories for the news media. Two graduate assistants will be hired to assist in all aspects of the project, including developing a project website and keep it updated. This website will contain information about all project aspects (e.g., information about project partners and will grow as *RJ@PL* progresses.

Sustainability: Public libraries assessment of their own civic engagement offerings and actual ways to improve across domains will be developed across 12 monthly strategic planning workshops (Phase II). Select elements will be implemented in Phase III. The PI/co-PI and their academic institutions and collaborating partners (small, medium, large organizations across the rural-urban continuum) will further their reputations and impact as established and highly regarded change agents to leaders and social justice advocates. *RJ@PL* will ensure sustainability based on making and extending professional connections and collaborations across local, regional, and national library professionals and with educators around the country to tackle the growing menace of racism (amongst other outcomes). *RJ@PL* will also be able to provide test-bed experiences in racial justice engagement applications towards meeting the needs, wants, and expectations in various communities around the country. *RJ@PL* is an action project which does not 100% match the traditional academic ways that maintain a clear-cut boundary between research benefits and benefits to society. These benefits are much more deeply intertwined in *RJ@PL* since in action research they are exactly the same. Lasting social change is truly a long-term enterprise that requires sustained effort and thoughtful attention and is built through the accretion of small victories of changes in social relations in localities. A three-year project will only serve to initiate the necessarily lengthy but worthwhile effort among public libraries to transform their communities by improving racial social relations. The project benefits (to society) include: (1) the development of a better understanding of racial problems inherent in public libraries as workplaces; (2) an improvement in working conditions in libraries in terms of racial climate; (3) better understanding of the role that southern public libraries can play in improving community social conditions/social relations in domain areas affected by race; (4) and, an improvement in the social conditions/social relations in local southern community domain areas affected by race. Sustainability will be accomplished in the following ways: (1) Exemplar libraries will continue their efforts to develop racially just workplaces and practice through the discharge of their regular activities. Changes in individual awareness and in formalized workplace practices and policies will continue to drive benefits for years to come. (2) The solicitation of additional funds from philanthropic organizations and from corporate sponsors will be made. This additional project funding will be used to continue to monitor the conditions at the exemplar libraries and their communities as well as to promote and support the adoption of the strategic frameworks and the creation of action plans at additional localities in the U.S. and beyond.

Civic Engagement for Racial Justice in Public Libraries (*RJ@PL*)
Schedule of Completion

Please see Table 1 in the narrative for further details.

Year 1—Phase 1 – Aug. 1, 2022 – July 31, 2023

Activity	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Project Set-up & Relationship Building	■	■										
Confirmation of Partners/ Stakeholders	■	■										
Website/ Communications	■	■										
Administer Survey 1 to Library Staff			■	■	■	■	■					
Administer Survey 2 to Library Staff			■	■	■	■	■					
Administer Survey 3 to Communities			■	■	■	■	■					
Survey 1, 2, 3 Analysis								■	■	■	■	
Focus Groups of Library Staff								■	■	■	■	■
Interviews of Library Staff								■	■	■	■	■
Analysis of Focus Group Data												■
Analysis of Interview data												■
Action Research Analysis	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Project Evaluation								■	■	■	■	■
Dissemination of Findings								■	■	■	■	■
Project Marketing	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

RJ@PL Schedule of Completion

Year 2 – Phase 2 – Aug. 1, 2023 – July 31, 2024

Activity	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Analysis of Focus Group Data	X	X										
Analysis of Interview data	X	X										
Monthly Online Summit/Meetings for Domain Area	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Selection of Exemplar Libraries								X	X	X	X	X
Creation of Strategic Frameworks and Action Plans	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dissemination of Findings from Data Collection				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Action Research Analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Project Marketing Activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Project Evaluation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

RJ@PL Schedule of Completion

Year 3 – Phase 3 –Aug. 1, 2024 – July 31, 2025

Activity	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Set Up for Implementation	�	▓										
Implementation in Exemplar Libraries 1 &2			▓	▓	▓							
Implementation in Exemplar Libraries 3 & 4					▓	▓	▓					
Implementation in Exemplar Libraries 5 & 6							▓	▓	▓			
Implementation in Exemplar Libraries 7 & 8									▓	▓	▓	
Action Research Analysis	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Dissemination of Findings	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Project Marketing Activities	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Project Evaluation	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Sustainability Activities							▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Project Closeout										▓	▓	▓

University of Alabama and Chicago State University
Civic Engagement for Racial Justice in Public Libraries (*RJ@PL*)
Digital Product Form

Type: What types of digital products will you create?

The following is a summary of digital content, resources, or assets we will create or collect, the tentative quantities of each type, and the format we will use:

Year 1 (Months 1-2): One website, set up safe/secure password-protected institutional repository on university server.

Year 1 (Months 3-7): two online surveys (with open-ended, closed/rated, and demographic questions) via Qualtrics receiving approximately 60-100 responses each.

Year 1 (Months 3-7): third survey via Qualtrics to members in various communities in 17 regions; receiving approximately 60-100 responses.

Year 1 (Months 8-12): digital recordings of focus group/interviews with at least 50 librarian staff stakeholders from across the 17 regions (face-to-face, phone, or virtual synchronous via voice-over-Internet-protocols).

Year 2 (Months 13-24): digital recordings of select portions of the 12 monthly online workshops in real time; digital copies of external and internal community engagement frameworks, strategic action plans, and roadmaps for each of the 11 domains.

Year 3 (Months 25-36): digital recordings and reports, copies of plans, etc. during implementation of information-related actions at six/eight partnering libraries. Notes will be taken during all sessions (above). [See Research and Action Plan in grant proposal].

The main project products (essentially from action research efforts) can be demarcated into at least three categories: 1) Assessment and evaluation datasets translated into digital format that will be collected and analyzed via surveys, focus groups/interviews. 2) Materials emerging from online strategic planning workshops that will include community engagement frameworks, strategic action plans for different domains, roadmaps for specific domains, etc. 3) Promising implementation practices operationalizing key elements of strategic action plans tailored to specific library environments.

Availability: How will you make your digital products openly available (as appropriate)?

The research content will be presented on a website freely available to the public (open source, Creative Commons license). Research datasets and findings will be published in peer-reviewed journals/books and presented in conferences. We might use a variety of ways to represent these datasets: representing in open access online repositories hosted at the lead project institutions, published in summary or thematic analytical reports in peer-reviewed journals/books, visualized through diagrammatic and GIS-based software, etc. University computers and servers will be utilized with provided software (e.g., Adobe Acrobat, Zoom, Blackboard, etc.) to create, develop, and archive the content. Microsoft products will also be used. Robust digital audio/video recording strategies will help archive the sessions. Some of the formats that will be used and strengthened to maintain integrity of the originally created materials include word, PDF, jpeg, excel, mpeg, mp4, etc. The quality standards will be high to ensure their usability freely available online.

The University of Alabama and the Chicago State University will not assert any ownership rights over the digital products and materials created and developed from the grant activities. There will be no conditions imposed on their access and use as we present the materials on our project website. There will be no prohibitive terms or conditions of use or access and the research content will be presented on a website freely available to the public (open source, Creative Commons license).

The research will follow protocols established by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama for human subjects with respect to privacy, anonymity of participants, cultural sensitivities, and confidentiality of responses. The approvals will be sought as soon as we hear if we have got awarded. For some aspects of the project that we want to carry research asap (funded or unfunded) we will try and getting permissions for human data collection earlier during May-July, if possible. See details in the grant proposal.

Project website will make research materials developed during the grant freely available to the public. Peer-reviewed conference proceedings, books, and journals will document the project experiences and findings. Efforts will be made with publishers of these peer-reviewed venues to make them openly available online after minimum time.

University of Alabama's computers and institutional servers (lead institution) will be utilized to host (store, archive) digital materials created on the project website. We will ensure that the sustainability of the web content is maintained for at least three years (if not more) after the duration of the grant. The publications will be in peer-reviewed journals/conference proceedings that will make the articles reporting on the grant experiences available for as long as possible. We will use software (e.g., Adobe Acrobat, Zoom, Blackboard, etc.) to create documents that have a strong reputation of maintaining integrity of the materials in their original formats, limited corruption of files, etc. The University of Alabama's servers and the university's infrastructure/resources (UA + CSU) will safeguard from cyberattacks and provide mechanisms for strong protection of stored, archived, and hosted research data and website content into the future. Microsoft products and digital audio/video recording strategies will help create and archive the sessions and ensure usability over a sustained period of time.

High quality control plan towards sustainability of the digital products into the future includes ongoing assessment, evaluation, and decision-making during the grant duration itself to ensure excellent quality control. The digital content will be hosted on the University of Alabama server and all data will be collected and stored in a password-protected computer located in the PI's office for at least five years after the grant is over. The research will follow protocols established by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama. The documentation will be stored in password protected computers and servers located in PI's office. The dissemination of research findings will take place throughout the during of the grant and afterwards presented in peer-reviewed conferences and published in peer-reviewed journals and books to have lasting impact on the world.

University of Alabama and Chicago State University

Civic Engagement for Racial Justice in Public Libraries (*RJ@PL*)
Organizational Profile

The University of Alabama's (UA) mission is to advance the intellectual and social condition of the people of the state, the nation and the world through the creation, translation and dissemination of knowledge with an emphasis on quality programs in the areas of teaching, research and service. UA is a strong advocate of promoting collaboration and interdisciplinary research initiatives that involve faculty, students, industry and community from across campus, from across the state and from around the world. The University is committed to:

- Undergraduate education that produces socially-conscious, ethical and well-rounded leaders who are grounded in their subject matter and capable of controlling their own destinies.
- Graduate education that is deeply vested in subject matter knowledge, professional content, research skills and creative activity.
- Public outreach and service that is held in the highest regard and fosters impactful public engagement to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Alabama, the nation and the world.
- Campus life that embodies collaboration, collegiality, respect and a culture of inclusivity.

Located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, UA has an enrollment of 38,320 students. The freshman class includes 281 National Merit Scholars, bringing the total number of currently enrolled National Merit Scholars to 940. UA is recognized by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as an R1: Doctoral University with very high research activity.

The University of Alabama is one of three campuses in The University of Alabama System, all of which are governed by The University of Alabama Board of Trustees. The University of Alabama System includes The University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa), The University of Alabama at Birmingham and The University of Alabama in Huntsville. The System is governed by a self-nominating board of 15 elected and two ex-officio members. The primary function of the board is to determine the major policies of the system.

UA's Division of Community Affairs helps achieve our overall mission to advance the intellectual and social condition of the people of Alabama through innovative programs that connect teaching, research and service in ways that improve the quality of life for individuals and communities. The success of the Division comes from the synergism resulting from a major research University joining forces with communities to address issues of major concerns in such areas as health, education, the environment, race and cultural relations, poverty, religion, science and the economy. Community Affairs provides leadership and opportunities for students and faculty from all over campus to form partnerships that advance the field of community-engaged scholarship in the city, state, nation and the world.