

Applicants: (1) LIS program, U of Denver (Project Director); Partners: (2) Brooklyn PL, (3) New York PL, (4) Pueblo City-County Library District

## **Enhancing the Capacity of Public Library Staff to Serve Multilingual Communities**

**Summary:** The LIS program at DU, in collaboration with BPL, NYPL, and PCCLD<sup>1</sup>, respectfully seeks the funding of \$254,733 for 2 years (8/1/22-7/31/24) to complete an Early Career Development project with Dr. Keren Dali, tenure-track assistant professor, as a Project Director. The proposed project will contribute to enhancing the capacity of public library staff to serve multilingual (ML) communities in culturally and linguistically sensitive areas and beyond information provision. This research goal is two-fold and addressed through the following research questions (RQs): RQ1: What are the characteristics, professional development (PD) needs, and experiences of library staff providing culturally and linguistically sensitive services, such as reading and leisure services, to ML patrons? RQ2: What are the cultural<sup>2</sup>, leisure, and reading practices of ML library patrons from the largest language groups? The study will contribute to (1) the development of a framework (“research blueprint”) for library staff to study ML communities effectively and efficiently; (2) additions to the existing open access (OA) resource on cultural practices of immigrant communities “[Reading Experience Librarianship in World Languages](#)”<sup>3</sup>; (3) evidence-based recommendations for library managers on the diversity audit of ML collections; and (4) evidence-based recommendations for developing a staff training certificate that enhances cultural knowledge of every staff member, irrespective of their language proficiency.

**Project Justification:** The lingering pandemic has underscored *inequities in access* to public libraries. This is especially noticeable in such culturally and linguistically dependent areas as *reading and leisure services and cultural programming*, which remain largely oriented toward English-speaking patrons both onsite and online. While libraries have developed robust information services for ML patrons and built vast ML collections, their capacity to actively help patrons with leisure reading or other types of cultural enrichment is more limited. Effective service delivery and ML cultural programming depend on the availability of staff proficient in world languages. ML communities represented in the library workforce enjoy greater access to leisure, culture, and entertainment opportunities, while options for underrepresented ML groups are fewer; thus, the quality and scope of ML services is uneven across the board. Some libraries have low capacity for serving ML populations in general due to the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity among staff members. In all of these cases, libraries need a path to becoming more inclusive and equitable in their services beyond information provision. This project will address the aforementioned gaps by focusing on developing capacity of staff members to serve ML library patrons, including *immigrants, refugees, seasonal workers, international students, and American-born patrons* who prefer to access library resources and services in languages other than English (LB21 program goal 3, objective 3.2). At the foundation of this project is the concept of *leisure, reading, and cultural enrichment as key to well-being, social inclusion, societal participation, belonging, and migrant acculturation*.

**Project Work Plan:** In order to address the aforementioned gaps, the project will pursue two directions simultaneously: first, research on the experiences of staff serving ML communities to identify their unique skillsets and successes, as well as barriers to service and PD needs (RQ1); and second, research on the largest ML communities served by partner libraries (RQ2). As a result, the project will target two research populations: a convenience purposeful sample of 75-100 library staff from three library systems (compensated at \$50 per person); and a convenience sample of ML patrons who use public libraries for leisure, reading, and cultural enrichment, not only information; as the size of the latter research population is unknown, based on the previous research experience, the sample is estimated at about 200 patrons in total recruited from the three largest ML groups in partner libraries: Chinese, Haitian Creole, and French speakers. The other largest ML groups in partner libraries are Spanish and Russian speakers; however, research on these groups has already been done and published<sup>4</sup> by Dr. Dali and will be used to guide the current project. The dual approach of examining staff experiences and learning about ML communities with whom they work was tested in Dali’s 2014-2016 postdoctoral study of Spanish-speaking immigrants<sup>4</sup>. **Theoretical Framing:** Guided by hermeneutic phenomenology ([Lopez and Willis, 2004](#)), the study will seek to understand both lived professional experiences of library staff and lived experiences of ML library patrons through their own narratives. It will also build on [Dr. Dali’s previously published work](#), including the model of acculturation stress in the leisure life domain experienced by ML speakers and Dali’s framework of the roles of reading and leisure in immigrant

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations: University of Denver [DU] Brooklyn Public Library [BPL]; New York Public Library [NYPL]; Pueblo City-County Library District [PCCLD]; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Accessibility (DEIA); Partner representatives: A. Mikel, Dir. of Customer Experience; E. Raison, Dir., Outreach; J. Peterson, Immigrant Services Coordinator [BPL]; A. Blancarte-Hayward, Manager, Outreach Services; L. Lobash, Assoc. Dir. Reader Services; S. Anderson, Assist. Dir., Selection [NYPL]; M. Smyer, Hispanic Resources Coordinator; R.R. Ward, Manager, Ref. & Readers’ Advisory [PCCLD]; <sup>2</sup> In this proposal, “culture” is used in a narrow sense of leisure activities, artistic and aesthetic preferences, and personal enrichment and entertainment; not as a totality of cultural practices.

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acculturation. **Data Collection & Management:** Data about experiences of library staff and ML patrons will be collected through two qualitative surveys that generate rich narrative data ([Jansen, 2010](#)), using DU-based Qualtrics software, which will also assist in data analysis. The survey instrument for ML patrons will be modelled after the survey instrument that [Dr. Dali has tested twice](#). The patron survey will be available both in the languages of communities and in English; both in hard copy and electronically; and distributed through libraries. It will include sections on demographic information; reading, culture, and leisure practices in countries of origin, if relevant; changes in said practices after migration, if relevant; the use of libraries for leisure, cultural enrichment, and reading; alternative ways of accessing cultural production, reading, and leisure, including ML community resources and the online environment; and suggestions for improving the roles of public libraries in cultural, social, and leisure life of ML communities, beyond information provision. The qualitative survey of staff will be modelled after [the interview guide that Dr. Dali developed previously](#) for studying public librarians who serve immigrants and feature sections with demographic information; professional experience; motivation for working with ML communities; systemic and personal barriers for excellent service and engagement; professional readiness for serving ML communities, training gaps, and PD needs. The IRB approval at DU will be obtained, and participants' confidentiality and data security and storage will be ensured based on the DU ethics guidelines. **Reporting:** Findings will be reported through peer-reviewed publications, prioritizing OA venues; professional conferences (ALA and state) and online workshops; and the project OA website. Research instruments will be openly shared; data that may identify participants will be kept confidential. **Relevance to the Current Practice:** Project partners come from the researcher's home state of Colorado and the state of NY with one of highest numbers of ML speakers in the country ([PRC, 2020](#)). The partners will strategically address the needs of both smaller rural libraries and large urban libraries, and the project will rely on their extensive expertise, experience, and community connections. NYPL collects materials in 21 languages and BPL in 20 languages in various formats, while offering a variety of *information* services for ML patrons; PCCLD actively collects materials in seven world languages, with the largest collection in Spanish surpassing 5,000 items. All libraries offer a variety of programming to ML patrons; however, the availability of programs is uneven from one ML group to another, and offering cultural programming is significantly more challenging than providing information and learning opportunities. Despite existing PD options, further evidence-based guidance on *culturally competent leisure, culture, and reading services and programming* would be eagerly welcomed; similarly, an OA resource to facilitate this PD would be an asset. The project director has 20 years of research experience in reading practices of immigrants and multiple research publications on the topic. As such, the team is well positioned to serve as leaders in this area and provide modeling for the rest of the LIS community. **Timeline:** Y1: study design; IRB approval; survey implementation for both staff and ML patrons; Y2: data analysis and the development of the framework and recommendations. **Diversity Plan:** The project is entirely DEIA-driven and focused on diverse ML communities, including immigrants and refugees, and different categories of staff members, which is important for workforce inclusion and equity. Team members are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, country of origin, age, native language, and disability, which accounts for multiple perspectives and allows for bias control. Partners are located in various U.S. regions, in rural and urban settings, and bring both practitioner and academic perspectives on the matter. **Project Results:** The DU LIS program and three partners will take the lead on generating practice models that can benefit the entire LIS community and be adopted by other libraries working with ML patrons, namely: a "research blueprint" for studying ML communities; additions to the existing OA repository on leisure practices of ML communities; and evidence-based recommendations for the diversity audit of ML collections and a future training certificate for library staff; all these steps will enhance the staff capacity for providing competent services in culturally and linguistically sensitive areas and contribute to community well-being, acculturation, adaptation, social inclusion, and long-term relationships with libraries beyond information provision. **Budget Summary:** Dr. Dali's time commitment (25% in year 1-2): \$50,768; one graduate assistant with the \$42,802 tuition stipend (80% paid by DU and 20% from this grant); one hourly research assistant: total salary \$19,392. Fringe: \$7,874. Travel: years 1-2 conference attendance for 8 public librarians/partners: \$12,000. Consulting (web design & translation services): \$22,000. Survey participant costs: \$6,000. F&A has been calculated based on the DHHS approved rate of 50.7% MTDC. Total project costs: \$254,733.