

Decolonizing Libraries to Foster Community Well-being

The Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Libraries, in collaboration with community partners, propose a three-year project grant to: 1) **Assess** the cataloging and classification systems currently in place through a decolonizing lens, 2) **Create** a system of organization for cataloging and classifying library materials according to Anishinaabe ways of knowing and being, and 3) **Implement** this system to decolonize and indigenize the Tribal Libraries collections. This project will require \$221,108 in IMLS grant funds.

Background: Need and Impact

This grant will address the question: How can tribal libraries use traditional ways of knowing and being to break free of the colonialist epistemology of existing library organizational systems that reinforce a damaging worldview?

The Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Libraries include one public Tribal Library, one preK-5th grade Tribal Academy library, and one Tribal College library. Currently, the former two use the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), the latter uses Library of Congress Classification (LCC), and both of these systems employ colonialist logic to classify items relating to Indigenous people. These problematic classifications take various forms, such as locating materials related to Indigenous people in the history section as if Indigenous people do not exist today. Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) are also problematic, such as describing Indigenous religious practice as folklore rather than religion.

As part of the dominant power structure, libraries carry symbolic weight, even for those who do not use them. In order to benefit from and use a library, one must feel comfortable and know the protocols; when those protocols contain derogatory nomenclature and logic, how can it be possible for the target of that disrespect to feel comfortable? Taking into account the ways in which libraries have been complicit in marginalizing Indigenous people, it is incumbent on us to make positive change, to be a place of community recovery, restoration, and resurgence. Continuing to use colonialist systems only maintains the power structure, and this project is an opportunity to, through a community-driven process, elect not to maintain that structure but instead deepen community commitment, investment, and engagement in the libraries. Throughout Tribal Operations we are often reminded that embrace of traditional culture leads to resilience, and this project is a way for the libraries to put that into action.

This project is scalable and of national significance to libraries and information science. What is now known as the United States sits on traditional Indigenous land, land which holds all libraries located in the U.S. Members and descendants of the over 500 federally recognized Indian Nations located throughout the U.S. are users of these libraries, the majority of which use DDC, LCC, and LCSH. The process and outcomes of this project will be shared and may be used as a template or example for how other libraries might take on their own decolonization projects. While this project will focus on Anishinaabe lifeways specific to this community, the project structure and lessons learned may translate to other communities. Information will be disseminated throughout the project through articles, conference presentations, and other opportunities. Because it will involve three types of libraries (public, K-12, and academic), it will be useful to many.

This project aligns directly to the IMLS agency-level goal to *build capacity* by making the Tribal Libraries a community catalyst to improve the well-being of the community. The projected outcomes of this project are that community members are more invested in the libraries, library materials are easier to find, the systems are easier to learn and navigate, and the libraries are used more and are known as a trusted, respectful source for quality resources.

Project Design

The *Decolonizing Libraries to Foster Community Well-being* team is comprised of Tribal Librarian Anne Heidemann; Melissa Isaac (Anishnaabe), Director of Education at the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan; Dr. Adam Haviland, Professor of Native American Studies at Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College; and Dr. Benjamin Ramirez-Shkwegnaabi (Saginaw Chippewa), Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at Central Michigan University.

This project will include four phases: **Phase 1** (July – December 2019) – **Assess** the cataloging and classification systems currently in place through a decolonizing lens. This phase will begin by assembling a core work group including representatives from the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribal community, library and information professionals, and a consultant who will lead the group using Anishinaabe-informed facilitation techniques. This work group will contextualize the project using current research and practice in combination with traditional ways of knowing, including visits with experts (both in person and via remote conferencing). **Phase 2** (January – December 2020) – **Create** a system of organization for cataloging and classifying library materials according to Anishinaabe ways of knowing and being. This new system will be implemented while maintaining use of the Library Solution automation system using MARC records in the IC More Shared Catalog in order to maintain existing local partnerships. This system will include and unify the organization of the three libraries: one public Tribal Library, one preK-5th grade Tribal Academy library, and one Tribal College library. **Phase 3** (January – December 2021) – **Implement** this system to decolonize and indigenize the Tribal Libraries collections. This will include reclassifying, relabeling, and rearranging library materials. The final element of this phase will be a grand re-opening to celebrate the newly organized Tribal Libraries. **Phase 4** (January – June 2022) – **Analyze** results and share documentation that outlines how this project was conducted, which other libraries could use as a template for decolonizing their collections.

Budget

We request a budget of \$221,108: \$71,240 in salaries, \$22,084 in fringe; \$19,600 in travel, \$62,224 in supplies, \$13,750 in contracts and subawards, and \$32,210 in indirect costs to the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe.