

Project Title: Leveraging Use of Open Data by Public Library Staff for Community Benefit

Project Summary | The University of Washington Information School (Principal Investigator: Chris Jowaisas) requests \$100,000 for a National Leadership Grant for Libraries to investigate ways in which public library staff can gain a better understanding of their local community using open data. By conducting interviews, surveys, and a workshop, we seek to uncover the current barriers among librarians to using open data for planning and decision-making. With a future goal of developing an open-source data platform, we will create a Plan of Work detailing use cases, technical requirements, and vetted open data.

Statement of National Need | President Obama’s 2013 Executive Order “Making Open and Machine Readable the New Default for Government Information”¹ paved the way for many state and city governments to implement open data policies.² Today library staff have the potential to access large amounts of federal, state, and local data to aid them in understanding the needs of their communities. However, the process of finding, curating, and utilizing the data, alone or in combination with internal operational data, is complex and prevents many public library staff from taking advantage of this information³. Proprietary solutions that exist to serve this need are out of reach financially to many public library systems. Other data focused projects, such as [Measures that Matter](#),⁴ [Open Data Literacy](#),⁵ [Civic Switchboard](#),⁶ and [STEAM-GIS](#),⁷ have focused on different aspects of public library involvement in open data, but have not focused on the use of open data by public library staff for this purpose. Working in collaboration with a cross-section of public libraries in Washington state we will investigate the feasibility of library staff using open data to inform the planning of programs, services, and partnerships that relate specifically to the needs of their communities. Research activities will focus on understanding the data needs of public library staff, identifying how and which open data could address those needs, and determining potential formats that the data could be accessed, displayed, and interacted with in a data platform. The potential impact of utilizing open data in this manner can be seen in prototypes developed as part of the Open Data Literacy project in partnership with Seattle Public Library.⁸

Project Design | To understand how public library staff can address the needs of their local community using open data we will gather information from library staff and others involved in open data efforts, host a workshop with library staff to co-design preliminary solutions, and build a project plan. Our team has extensive experience in working with public libraries on data initiatives, including serving on the Public Library Association’s Measurement, Evaluation, and Assessment Committee and with open data through the Open Data Literacy project; the PI has over 15 years of experience in managing state, national, and international grant-funded projects focused on technology implementation within public libraries. We will work with MLIS students at the University of Washington, state library staff, and public library staff from urban, suburban, and rural locations. The phases of the project are as follows:

¹ Exec. Order No. 13642, 3 C.F.R. 28111-28113 (May 9, 2013), <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2013-11533>

² Sunlight Foundation. (n.d.). Open Data Policy Collection. <https://opendatapolicyhub.sunlightfoundation.com/collection/>

³ Ostler, Karalyn. (2019). “Beyond the Census: Using Census Data in Public Libraries”, <https://medium.com/open-data-literacy/beyond-the-census-using-census-data-in-public-libraries-333e2643fd21>

⁴ <https://www.cosla.org/MtM>

⁵ <https://odl.ischool.uw.edu/>

⁶ <https://civic-switchboard.github.io/>

⁷ <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/lg-11-19-0127-19>

⁸ Ostler, Karalyn. (2019). “Using Open Data to Understand Communities Around Seattle Public Libraries”, <https://medium.com/open-data-literacy/using-open-data-to-understand-communities-around-seattle-public-libraries-fa3f9a96f3be>

1. Determine public library staff needs

We will gather information from public library staff, state data coordinators, and project personnel from other open data initiatives. We will do this through structured interviews (phone / virtual) with approximately 25 individuals. The interviews will focus on gathering information about how the interviewee currently uses data in their role or project; barriers and challenges to using data in public libraries; and what needs could be addressed through a data platform. We will also administer an online survey to library staff who will be participants in an in-person workshop. The survey will help us understand specific challenges related to the participant's communities, how data could be utilized in their setting, and what skills staff would need to utilize the data. Using the interview and survey responses the research team will use qualitative coding to categorize areas of interest to public libraries (e.g. health, education, digital equity, economic vitality) and assess open datasets for relevance to those areas. The information gathering and dataset assessment activities will also be used as a basis for developing the agenda for the in-person workshop.

2. Host a workshop

We will hold an in-person workshop with representatives from a cross-section of Washington public libraries. The research team will share results from the first phase and then facilitate a co-development activity to create use cases for open data in the public library setting. The activity will focus on answering key questions about the types of data needed for program, service, or partnership development; uses for datasets; the form in which data would be useful; and what types of functionality are desired to utilize the data. This information will be used to guide the prioritization of the development activities that take place in the next phase of the project.

3. Develop roadmap

As a final deliverable, the research team will develop a roadmap for the future development of a data platform. The roadmap will include technical, organizational, and cultural considerations that would enable the platform to serve the interests of public libraries nationwide. It will include wireframes for the use cases identified as a priority by the workshop participants to serve as a resource for interested parties to understand the potential applicability and usability of the data platform. It is anticipated that the roadmap will be detailed enough to guide the development of a project proposal seeking funding for its development.

Diversity Plan | The project is committed to building use cases with datasets that address areas in which communities facing economic or social hardships are represented. One or more of the use cases will explicitly address issues that are important to communities facing economic or social hardships (e.g. digital equity, food security, health inequities, etc.).

National Impact | The project will produce important findings on the potential scale, use, and adaptation of open data in a public library setting. The project will address a gap in current data projects by focusing on the utilization of open data by public library staff to address challenges faced in aligning library services and community needs. It will gather important preliminary information on these needs and the potential for a future data platform to address them. A project work plan with detailed use cases, dashboard blueprints, and preliminary technical requirements will be produced.

Budget Summary | The project budget is \$99,917, including \$43,993 for research coordinator & PI support, \$27,776 for participant travel which includes \$6,500 for honoraria for workshop and project participation, \$1,500 for space rental to host workshops, \$900 in materials and supplies, and indirect costs of \$25,748.