

IMLS NLG: Developing Practices for Authentic Engagement of Spanish-Speaking Families

**Overview:** The Public Library Association (PLA) in partnership with the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) will apply the findings from their IMLS Planning Grant, *Exploring a Program Co-Design Approach to Better Serve and Engage Low Income, Latinx Communities* (Award Number LG-246412-OLS-20, Period: 9/1/2020 - 8/31/2022) through a two-year National Leadership Grant for Libraries, supporting **Goal 2 through a program that contributes to efforts to improve community well-being and strengthen civic engagement by promoting inclusive engagement across audiences.** If awarded, PLA and NCFL will develop a scalable approach to training public library workers to engage Spanish-speaking families to understand need as a precursor to co-design of programs and services. The planning grant incorporated a co-design approach with participation from library practitioners and low-income Spanish-speaking families across three geographically diverse communities. The goal was to identify barriers and create solutions to engagement. With this program grant, PLA and NCFL will operationalize these learnings by working with three state library systems (California, Georgia, and Massachusetts) and local public libraries to implement replicable models and tools that facilitate engagement between library workers and Spanish-speaking families. This project will engage an advisory group composed of members such as the National Association of Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE), REFORMA, and the Global Family Research Project (GFRP). Critical parent voices, drawn from the pilot, will also be included as advisors. This project will build the workforce and institutional capacity for serving the information and educational needs of Spanish-speakers and promote long-term sustainability at a systemic level. PLA requests \$249,637. There is no cost share.

**Project Justification:** The nation's Spanish-speaking population is an estimated 58.9 million people and is predicted to comprise 29% of the U.S. population by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). This growing demographic represents a diverse range of experiences, languages, and economic backgrounds that contribute to community vibrancy. Yet, disparities persist across the academic continuum for the nation's Spanish-speaking population. As community anchors, libraries have valuable opportunities to support the lifelong learning and enrichment of Spanish-speaking families to help ease these disparities; when Latinos are engaged with libraries, they are more likely than other groups to voice their appreciation for library offerings (Pew Research Center, 2015). This suggests that increased awareness, improved access to resources, and responsive library programs are critical to increased use by Spanish-speaking communities. Participants in all three pilot communities identified lack of knowledge about library programs and services as a major barrier. Lack of Spanish speaking staff and materials were also identified as impediments. These findings point to a need to further develop library staff skills in engaging Spanish-speaking populations in working together to identify and overcome common barriers. This project develops an approach that is replicable across geographies, with future applicability to other language groups.

**Project Work Plan: Project Design**

The Family Engagement in Public Libraries framework includes three core elements: Leadership, Engagement, and Support Services. Pilot activities indicated that staff training in

engaging Spanish-speaking communities in authentic conversations was the necessary precursor to co-designing programs, relating back to the leadership lever of the Framework. For this implementation grant, PLA and its partners will focus on building these professional skills and capacities. With NCFL and state library partners, PLA will engage up to 10 public libraries in year 1 (2023-2024) in preparing staff to engage Spanish-speaking families in conversation, including identifying co-facilitators from the community. In year 2 (2024-2025) up to five additional libraries from one additional state will join the group. All libraries will apply the tools and practices developed in Year 1 to host robust conversations with local communities. Staff training content will be drawn from existing, proven sources including content on hosting culturally sensitive conversations developed during the pilot phase. Additional topics will include asset-based community development, engaging community partners, and collecting and understanding meeting outputs, all drawn from existing IMLS, PLA, and NCFL content. All content and approaches will filter through and refer back to the family engagement model. As a result of this activity, PLA will develop a unique and specific suite of adaptable materials to guide public library workers in cross-cultural family engagement, combining core practices of family engagement in involving under-served populations. PLA will also publicize any replicable library program models that result from these conversations. **Project Goals:** 1) Build the workforce and institutional capacity of local library systems to engage Spanish-speaking families in understanding need and co-designing approaches to meet those needs. 2) Build awareness and modeling at the state library level to support sustained adoption.

**Diversity Plan:** The project goals are focused specifically on creating new practices, models, and systems that directly support increased library worker skills and ability to serve Spanish-speaking families. This work is informed by the pilot engagement of Spanish-speaking communities. The project's advisory group will include representation from REFORMA, as well as Spanish-speaking parent voices, as community representatives.

**Project Results:** Project leaders will develop a collection of training materials based on the Family Engagement framework and pilot findings to develop skills in engaging Spanish-speaking families. Replicable and adaptable materials will be refined and made available to coach library workers through successful engagements. Involvement of the state library agencies as partners will yield models and benefits to state libraries, making the case for other state libraries to dedicate resources and prioritize this work. NCFL will serve as a primary distribution partner, engaging allied educational fields as key partners. As a result, an expanding group of library workers will develop greater competencies for designing culturally relevant family engagement programs for Spanish-speaking families, ultimately increasing library usage and its related benefits for this underserved population.

**Budget Summary:** The total cost of the project is \$249,637, of which PLA is requesting the full amount IMLS. The budget will support 1) PLA personnel and benefits for two years (\$36,575); partner support for NCFL (\$104,000) participant support (\$45,000); consultant and translation fees (\$15,500); advisor stipends (\$1,500) and promotional costs (\$4,000) and ALA indirect costs at 23.08% of non-pass-through costs (\$43,062).