



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-259621-OLS-26
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

Catawba Library

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$100,000
Amount of cost share: \$0

The Catawba Library in Rock Hill, South Carolina will establish The Catawba Nation Little Free Libraries Project. The project will build, install and maintain five no-cost book-sharing boxes to improve literacy rates among tribal citizens, especially children, by increasing access to books, fostering and strengthening a sense of community, and driving greater visitor traffic to the Catawba tribal library. Box locations on the Catawba Reservation will include the Nation's Head Start, Teen Center, Senior Center, and two additional high-traffic, high-visibility locations to be identified based on community need. Each Little Free Library will function as a community- based literacy hub, offering a rotating supply of books for children, youth, and adults, including Native-authored and culturally relevant materials. Primary project deliverables include the installation and stewardship of multiple Little Free Library book-sharing boxes on the Catawba Reservation, the distribution of culturally relevant and Native-authored books for children, youth, and adults, and the development of a community-informed evaluation process to track reading engagement and community impact.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Introduction

The Catawba Indian Nation (CIN) respectfully requests \$100,000 to establish The Catawba Nation Little Free Libraries Project, a Community-Centered Implementation project. With grant support from IMLS and the Little Free Library (LFL) Indigenous Library Program, CIN will build, install and maintain five no-cost book-sharing boxes to improve literacy rates among tribal citizens (especially children) by increasing access to books, fostering and strengthening a sense of community, and driving greater visitor traffic to the Catawba tribal library. This project directly supports the stated NLG-L Program Goal to “develop, enhance, or disseminate replicable practices, programs, models, or tools to strengthen library and archival services for the American public.” It also aligns with two stated program objectives:

- Objective 1.2 - Improve community prosperity through libraries and archives by increasing citizen access to reading materials
- Objective 1.3 - Provide broad access to and preservation of information and collections through libraries and archives by enhancing information infrastructures and supporting collections stewardship.

Box locations on the Catawba Reservation will include the Nation’s Head Start, Teen Center, Senior Center, and two additional high-traffic, high-visibility locations to be identified based on community need. Through the LFL Indigenous Library Program grant program, the CIN will secure one LFL book-sharing box and assembly hardware, along with a starter collection of books written by Indigenous authors and/or books that highlight the Native American experience. Grant funds from this request will be used to purchase and install four additional LFL boxes and hardware, purchase culturally relevant books to supply the boxes, and support ongoing box maintenance and project management.

Project Justification

American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities continue to experience persistent literacy disparities. National data indicates that only about 20% of AI/AN adults reach a proficient level in literacy, while approximately 50% perform at a basic level. By comparison, roughly 76% of White adults perform at a basic level or higher, with 44% reaching proficient levels. These disparities are reflected among AI/AN youth as well. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, only 18% of AI/AN fourth-grade students were reading proficiently in 2022, which is significantly lower than the national average of 32%. Research consistently shows that reading proficiency by fourth grade is a strong predictor of long-term academic success, including high school graduation, postsecondary opportunities, and long-term economic stability.

A key factor contributing to these disparities is limited access to books and reading materials. Research from the National Institutes of Health demonstrates a strong positive relationship between book access and literacy development; households and communities with more books see increased reading frequency and improved cognitive and academic outcomes. Conversely, limited access to reading materials contributes directly to lower literacy rates and educational inequities.

For the Catawba Nation, geographic and structural barriers limit access to books and literacy resources. The Catawba Reservation is located in a rural area of York County, South Carolina, more than ten miles from the nearest public library. While the Catawba Nation operates a tribal library on the reservation that offers Native literature, educational materials, and recreational books, the facility currently experiences low utilization due to limited operating hours, constrained funding, and a general lack of awareness among community members about available resources and programs. To address these barriers, the Catawba Nation will adapt the Indigenous Little Free Libraries (LFL) program model to expand access to books and literacy resources

across the reservation. The Indigenous Little Free Libraries program supports Native communities in establishing small, community-managed book-sharing sites that provide free, 24-hour access to reading materials while also serving as culturally meaningful gathering points. By placing Little Free Libraries in locations where community members already gather—such as community centers, youth program spaces, housing clusters, and cultural sites—the project will bring books directly into the daily lives of Catawba citizens. Each Little Free Library will function as a community-based literacy hub, offering a rotating supply of books for children, youth, and adults, including Native-authored and culturally relevant materials. In addition to increasing book access, the libraries will display information about programs and resources available through the Catawba Nation Library, helping connect community members to additional services such as youth reading programs, cultural programming, and educational resources. The Indigenous Little Free Libraries model has demonstrated strong outcomes in tribal communities. Program data from Little Free Library's Indigenous Library Program shows that installations often increase engagement with local libraries and strengthen community connections. Surveys of Little Free Library stewards indicate that 72% reported meeting more neighbors and 98% felt their neighborhoods became friendlier and more connected after installation. Additionally, 63% of BIPOC users reported reading more frequently when they had access to a Little Free Library. By implementing this model within the Catawba Nation, the project will expand equitable access to books, promote a culture of reading, and strengthen connections between community members and the tribal library. Over time, the initiative is expected to increase reading engagement among Catawba youth and families, contribute to improved literacy outcomes, and support broader community goals related to education, cultural learning, and lifelong literacy.

Project Work Plan

The Catawba Nation Library will apply for a grant from the LFL's Indigenous Program when applications open in April. The grant provides each recipient with one book-sharing box and assembly hardware, along with a starter collection of books written by Indigenous authors and/or books that highlight the Native American experience. We expect to receive the grant, however, in the event we do not, funding from IMLS will be used to purchase all five LFL boxes and books. When we receive the grant, we will begin ordering the LFL boxes and coordinating with the Nation's maintenance team regarding box construction and installation. At this time, we will also begin ordering books to stock the boxes. We will design and distribute promotional information and materials via social media and through the mail to make the community aware of the project. Throughout the project, we will restock or rotate each LFL every 3 months. In addition, we will provide consumer surveys regarding LFL usage to complete and leave in the boxes. These will be collected every other month. We will track book distribution for each box using a spreadsheet and will capture information on which ones are taken and which ones are replaced. The Community Librarian, Rachel Hooper, will serve as the Project Manager and will have overall responsibility for this project. Rachel has over 10 years of experience working in public, academic, and tribal libraries. The Catawba Library has the capacity to complete this project through her in-house expertise and information-sharing partnerships with other tribal organizations. Rachel has worked with the Catawba Nation for six years and has the subject-matter expertise to curate a wide selection of Indigenous books for the community. A running dialog with other tribal programs and staff will help support this endeavor by notifying Rachel of any changes or damage to the boxes as well as providing general status updates and forwarding requests from Catawba citizens.

Project Results

The Catawba Nation Little Free Libraries Project will expand access to books and culturally relevant reading materials while strengthening engagement with the

Catawba Nation Tribal Library. Through the installation and stewardship of Little Free Libraries across the reservation, the project will create community-based literacy hubs that bring books directly to locations where citizens already gather. These installations will serve as both book-sharing sites and outreach points that increase awareness of the tribal library and its programs. Primary project deliverables include the installation and stewardship of multiple LFL book-sharing boxes on the Catawba Reservation, the distribution of culturally relevant and Native-authored books for children, youth, and adults, and the development of a community-informed evaluation process to track reading engagement and community impact. By making reading materials freely available 24 hours a day in highly visible community locations, these deliverables address the key challenges identified in the project justification: limited access to books and underutilization of the tribal library. To evaluate the effectiveness of the project, the Catawba Nation Tribal Library will track monthly visitor counts at the library and conduct anonymous qualitative surveys through the LFL book-sharing boxes. Short surveys will be placed in the boxes periodically and shared through digital channels to gather feedback from users.

Sample survey questions will include:

- “Are you a tribal member?”
- “How many books from the Little Free Library do you take per month?”
- “How many books do you exchange each month?”
- “Are you or your children reading more at home?”
- “Are you or your children learning more about Native life and history?”
- “What types of books would you like to see in the Little Free Library?”
- “Do you feel more connected to your community?”

Survey responses and library visitation data will be compiled and reviewed monthly using simple spreadsheet tracking tools. This information will help the project team

adjust book selections, placement strategies, and outreach efforts to better meet community needs. The data will also be used to create accessible visual summaries that can be shared through tribal social media, newsletters, and print materials to highlight community participation and encourage greater engagement with both the Little Free Libraries and the tribal library. Beyond addressing local needs, this project will generate adaptable practices and lessons learned that can be shared with other Tribal Nations and rural communities interested in using the Indigenous Little Free Libraries model to improve book access. Project documentation will include information on site selection, community engagement strategies, culturally relevant book curation, stewardship practices, and simple evaluation tools. These materials will be organized into a practical implementation summary that other communities can replicate or adapt to their own contexts. Project results and lessons learned will be disseminated through multiple channels to reach a broader audience of tribal libraries, literacy advocates, and Indigenous cultural organizations. The Catawba Nation will share project outcomes through presentations, webinars, and regional or national gatherings focused on tribal libraries, literacy, and Indigenous cultural preservation. Additionally, results will be shared through digital communications, including the Catawba Nation website and social media platforms, and may be contributed to partner networks connected to the Indigenous Little Free Libraries program. The long-term sustainability of the project will be supported through continued stewardship by the Catawba Nation Tribal Library and community volunteers who help monitor and replenish the libraries. Once installed, Little Free Libraries require relatively minimal ongoing costs, allowing them to remain active literacy Resources well beyond the grant period. The tribal library will continue to source books through donations, partnerships, and future funding opportunities, ensuring that the libraries remain stocked with diverse and culturally relevant materials. By establishing a community-driven book-sharing network and strengthening connections with the tribal

library, the project will create lasting benefits for the Catawba Nation. These efforts will promote a culture of reading, increase access to Native literature, and foster stronger connections among community members—contributing to improved literacy engagement for both children and adults long after the project period concludes.

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