



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-259769-OLS-26
Project Category: Planning

Boise Public Library

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$198,950
Amount of cost share: \$0

Boise Public Library in Idaho will plan to develop a replicable national model for public libraries to strengthen teen belonging and improve access to behavioral health resources. The plan is to develop a replicable national model positioning public libraries as youth-centered wellness hubs. This project responds to documented declines in teen library participation during adolescence, rising behavioral health needs, and structural barriers to access including transportation, language, and neighborhood disparities. The project will focus on youth-centered research, trauma-informed design, and public-sector planning to conduct technical analyses and prepare planning deliverables in collaboration with library staff and community health and youth-serving partners. The intended result is a scalable Youth Library Wellness Hub Framework, including teen space design standards, behavioral health navigation strategies, and access assessment tools that can be adopted by public libraries nationwide to strengthen teen belonging and community wellbeing.

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.

Project Narrative

**Libraries as Youth Wellness Hubs: A National Model
for Teen Belonging and Behavioral Health Access**



Introduction

The Boise Public Library (BPL), embedded within the City of Boise (the City), seeks \$198,950 in IMLS National Leadership Grants for Libraries Planning funds to develop a replicable national model positioning public libraries as youth-centered wellness hubs. This project responds to documented declines in teen library participation during adolescence, rising behavioral health needs, and structural barriers to access including transportation, language, and neighborhood inequity. BPL will serve as lead applicant and grant administrator and will competitively procure qualified consultants with demonstrated expertise in youth-centered research, trauma-informed design, and public-sector planning to conduct technical analyses and prepare planning deliverables in collaboration with library staff and community health and youth-serving partners. The intended result is a scalable Youth Library Wellness Hub Framework, including teen space design standards, behavioral health navigation strategies, and access assessment tools that can be adopted by public libraries nationwide to strengthen teen belonging and community wellbeing.



Project Justification

Idaho has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the nation. At the same time, public libraries across the state and country are grappling with the quiet but urgent challenge of teen engagement dropping off sharply during the middle and high school years, which is precisely when young people's need for connection, belonging, and behavioral health support is rising. Adolescence is a time of heightened stress, social pressure, and identity formation, yet many teens disengage from the very civic spaces designed to support lifelong learning and community connection.

In Boise, this pattern emerged clearly during the development of the City's Youth Roadmap, which engaged over 1,000 youth, parents, and community stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, and interviews in 2025. While families consistently praised Boise's strong programming and assets for younger children, they also described a noticeable gap in engagement as youth enter their teen years. At the same time, concerns intensify around mental health, transportation barriers, language access, and the absence of welcoming, teen-centered "third spaces" where adolescents can gather, create, and simply belong.

This convergence of disengagement and rising need creates a critical opportunity to reimagine how libraries and other civic spaces show up for teens at the very moment they need them most.

Only 34.3 percent of Boise youth report feeling mentally healthy every day, and 51 percent identified calming spaces as a priority for improving wellbeing. Nearly half of surveyed teens cited transportation and mobility barriers as limiting their access to programs and services. These findings demonstrate that teen disengagement and behavioral health concerns are not isolated issues. They are interrelated structural challenges that require a coordinated civic response.

In response to these findings, Valley Regional Transit (VRT), the Treasure Valley's regional public transportation authority, is partnering with the City of Boise to provide free bus passes to youth ages 18 and under during the summers of 2026 and 2027. The City is providing pilot funding to reduce transportation barriers to youth programs and services, reflecting priorities identified in the 2025 Youth Roadmap. This initiative illustrates how local institutions are beginning to address the structural barriers that limit youth participation.

Youth consistently expressed the need for calming spaces, trusted adults, and places to gather that feel safe without being overly structured. Families also identified mobility and geographic inequities as limiting access to programs and services. Together, these findings point to a systems-level opportunity to support libraries as wellness hubs. Libraries are trusted, free civic institutions embedded in neighborhoods. They provide spaces where teens can find community and belonging, connect with adult mentors, explore interests, and develop skills that promote independence and self-efficacy, all protective factors for youth behavioral health. Yet libraries currently lack a structured and field-tested framework to guide intentional teen-centered planning at scale.

The project also aligns with regional Community Health Needs Assessments, which identify behavioral health, housing stability, and access to care as the top three health priorities in our community. By aligning library planning with established health system goals, this initiative positions public libraries as low-barrier, community-embedded access points within a broader civic health ecosystem. It expands their role from information hubs to distributed wellness infrastructure.

This project builds upon established scholarship and practice in trauma-informed design, positive youth development, and library-based service innovation while advancing the field in important ways. While prior initiatives have often focused either on improving transportation access to libraries or embedding clinical mental health services within library settings, this project integrates youth-centered space design, behavioral health navigation strategies, and structural access analysis into a unified planning framework tailored specifically to public libraries. By addressing belonging, mobility, and access simultaneously rather than as isolated interventions, the project reframes libraries as civic wellness anchors that operate at both neighborhood and systems levels.

At its core, this project recognizes that engagement does not happen by accident. When libraries are intentionally designed to feel welcoming to teens, when transportation and access barriers are reduced, and when trusted pathways to care are clearly visible, young people are far more likely to participate. Increased participation strengthens peer and adult relationships, improves service access, and contributes to individual wellbeing and long-term community resilience.

The primary beneficiaries of this work are public libraries and the teens they serve. In the short term, Boise youth will benefit from intentional planning for welcoming, developmentally responsive library environments and clearer pathways to behavioral health resources. Library staff will gain practical tools to assess participation gaps, design inclusive spaces, and strengthen partnerships with health and youth-serving organizations. In the long term, public libraries nationwide will benefit from access to a tested Youth Library Wellness Hub Framework that strengthens teen belonging, equitable access, and community wellbeing.

Project Work Plan

Boise reflects many characteristics common to mid-sized American cities, including auto-dependent neighborhoods, rapid population growth, and uneven distribution of youth-serving infrastructure. These conditions create both challenges and opportunities for strengthening youth access to safe, welcoming, and connected civic spaces. By developing and testing solutions in this context, Boise Public Library will generate practical, scalable strategies that can be adapted by peer communities nationwide facing similar demographic, transportation, and infrastructure dynamics. Lessons learned will inform a replicable national framework for mid-sized library systems seeking to strengthen teen engagement and connect youth to behavioral health resources.

This 24-month planning project will unfold in six structured phases designed to produce a replicable Youth Library Wellness Hub Framework. Each phase builds toward a clearly defined outcome: a nationally adaptable model that aligns libraries with behavioral health promotion, safe access infrastructure, and cross-sector youth engagement strategies. Together, these phases will ensure rigorous planning, stakeholder alignment, youth voice integration, and dissemination of tools that other library systems can readily implement.

YOUTH LIBRARY WELLNESS HUB PLANNING WORK PLAN

Phase	Key Activities	
1	PROJECT INITIATION AND ALIGNMENT	
Months 1–4	• Finalize consultant procurement and contracts • Convene Project Steering Committee (Library, Mayor’s Office, CE, youth advisors, behavioral health and youth-serving partners) that will transition into an ongoing Youth Library Wellness Advisory Council • Establish inclusive outreach protocols • Confirm scope, deliverables, and evaluation metrics • Translate Youth Roadmap findings into library planning priorities	Deliverables: Project charter and finalized scope Evaluation framework
2	YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND DATA TRANSLATION	
Months 4–9	• Conduct teen focus groups, co-design workshops, and participatory mapping • Engage caregivers and community partners • Analyze participation and neighborhood access data • Ensure multilingual and neighborhood-based outreach to underserved youth	Deliverables: Youth Needs and Library Gap Analysis Report
3	FRAMEWORK AND TOOL DEVELOPMENT	
Months 8–15	• Develop core toolkit components: • Teen Space Design Standards • Youth Engagement Assessment Tool • Behavioral Health Navigation Guide • Access and Mobility Assessment Guide • Structured review with youth advisors, staff, and partners	Deliverables: Draft Youth Library Wellness Hub Toolkit

4	PILOT TESTING AND ITERATION	
Months 14–19	• Pilot toolkit in one or more branches • Conduct staff training sessions • Host teen engagement activities • Collect structured youth and staff feedback • Revise toolkit based on pilot findings	Deliverables: Pilot evaluation summary Revised toolkit
5	EVALUATION AND FINALIZATION	
Months 18–22	• Conduct formal process evaluation • Administer pre/post engagement surveys • Document stakeholder feedback • Assess feasibility and scalability • Final revisions for clarity and adaptability	Deliverables: Final Youth Library Wellness Hub Framework
6	DISSEMINATION AND DIGITAL PREPARATION	
Months 20–24	• Format toolkit to meet IMLS digital access standards • Prepare accessible digital products • Develop national dissemination strategy (webinars, professional networks, peer learning)	Deliverables: Public digital toolkit Dissemination plan Final project report

PROJECT LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Boise Public Library will serve as lead applicant and grant administrator, providing fiscal oversight, procurement compliance, reporting, and overall project coordination.

Project leadership includes:

- Emily Johnson, Library Chief Administrative Officer and Project Lead, responsible for project management and coordination.
- Haley Shillito, Library Community Resource Coordinator, supporting community partnerships and coordination of youth-focused resource connections.
- Kate Radford, Youth Services Manager and Librarian, leading youth programming strategy and ensuring alignment with teen engagement goals.

- Mayor's Office, ensuring alignment with broader youth and community health priorities.
- Office of Community Engagement, responsible for equitable outreach, stakeholder facilitation, and integration of community input.
- Finance Department, responsible for fiscal management and compliance.

BPL will retain qualified consultants with demonstrated expertise in youth engagement research, trauma-informed design, and public sector planning to conduct technical analyses and prepare deliverables.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement is foundational and ongoing throughout the 24-month period. Boise's Office of Community Engagement will lead equitable outreach and ensure youth voice remains central through advisory participation, facilitated workshops, and iterative review cycles.

Stakeholders will include youth advisors, library staff, behavioral health providers, youth-serving nonprofits, school district partners, transportation partners, and representatives from underserved neighborhoods. Input will be incorporated at each development stage and during pilot testing.

EVALUATION AND IMPACT DEMONSTRATION

As a Planning project, evaluation will focus on process effectiveness, stakeholder engagement depth, tool usability, and readiness for national replication.

Success indicators include:

- Completion of a validated Youth Library Wellness Hub Framework
- Demonstrated pilot feasibility in Boise Public Library
- Positive stakeholder validation of design and navigation tools
- Digital products prepared for national dissemination

The extended 24-month period ensures robust engagement, iterative refinement, and strong preparation for future implementation funding.

**Boise Public Library
is where everyone in
Boise goes to Grow!**



Project Results

INTENDED RESULTS AND DELIVERABLES

The primary result of this 24-month Planning project will be the development of a validated and replicable Youth Library Wellness Hub Framework designed to help public libraries strengthen teen belonging and improve access to behavioral health supports. The project will produce the following deliverables:

- Youth Engagement Assessment Tool to help libraries identify participation gaps and structural barriers affecting teens
- Teen Space Design Standards grounded in trauma-informed and culturally responsive principles
- Library-Based Behavioral Health Navigation and Referral Guide
- Access and Mobility Assessment Guide for evaluating geographic and transportation-related barriers
- Implementation Roadmap outlining phased adoption strategies for diverse library contexts
- Publicly accessible digital toolkit suitable for national dissemination

These deliverables will be made available as accessible digital products in accordance with IMLS digital access requirements.

HOW RESULTS ADDRESS THE IDENTIFIED NEED

This project directly addresses documented declines in teen library participation, rising behavioral health needs during adolescence, and structural barriers to equitable access. By integrating youth-informed space design, engagement strategies, behavioral health navigation pathways, and access analysis into a cohesive planning framework, the project equips libraries with practical tools to function as welcoming, youth-centered community anchors.

Rather than focusing solely on programming or transportation, the framework responds to the systems-level opportunity identified through the Youth Roadmap process: libraries are trusted civic institutions but lack structured guidance for intentionally serving teens during a critical developmental period. The resulting model provides that structure.

ADAPTABILITY, GENERALIZABILITY, AND USABILITY

The Youth Library Wellness Hub Framework will be intentionally designed for adaptability across communities of varying size, geography, and demographic composition. To ensure broad usability:

- Tools will be modular, allowing libraries to implement individual components independently or as a complete model.
- Design standards will focus on principles rather than prescriptive architectural requirements, making them feasible for libraries with limited capital resources.
- The Access and Mobility Guide will account for both urban and auto-dependent contexts.

- Case examples and implementation scenarios will illustrate application in different library systems.
- Materials will be written in clear, practitioner-focused language rather than academic terminology.

Throughout development, feedback from diverse stakeholders and pilot testing within Boise Public Library will ensure materials are practical, clear, and transferable. The toolkit will include step-by-step implementation guidance enabling libraries of varying sizes to adapt the framework using existing staffing and community partnerships.

DISSEMINATION STRATEGY

To reach the intended beneficiaries, public libraries and youth-serving institutions nationwide, Boise Public Library will implement a multi-channel dissemination strategy:

- Presentation proposals submitted to national and regional library conferences
- Webinars and peer learning sessions hosted in collaboration with professional associations
- Distribution through library networks and state library agencies
- Publication of toolkit materials on publicly accessible City and Library web platforms
- Outreach through youth development and community engagement networks

Digital products will be freely accessible and formatted for ease of download and sharing. Dissemination efforts will emphasize applicability for small and mid-sized library systems as well as larger urban institutions.

SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND THE PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

The benefits of this project will extend beyond the grant period in several ways. First, Boise Public Library will retain and apply the framework within its own system, integrating findings into ongoing teen space planning, programming, and partnership development. The project will also help inform City priorities for improving safe access to libraries, including pathways that connect schools, neighborhoods, and library locations and remove transportation barriers that limit youth participation.

Second, the modular toolkit structure allows other libraries to adopt components incrementally without requiring significant new funding. While designed to be nationally adaptable, the framework is particularly relevant for communities across the Mountain West, where youth mental health challenges are especially acute and suicide rates are significantly higher than the national average. Libraries in neighboring states face similar geographic, transportation, and service access barriers; the toolkit will provide a practical model that regional library systems can adapt to strengthen youth engagement, belonging, and prevention-oriented supports.

Together, BPL and the City of Boise will pursue future implementation funding opportunities to operationalize and expand the model locally, including infrastructure and access improvements that strengthen youth connectivity to libraries and other community learning hubs. The cross-sector Project Steering Committee convened during the planning phase will transition into an

ongoing Youth Library Wellness Advisory Council to guide continued collaboration among the Library, City leadership, youth advisors, and community partners. Additionally, the Office of Community Engagement and Library leadership will incorporate lessons learned into ongoing youth engagement and planning efforts, ensuring that the framework informs future policy, service design, and youth access initiatives.

By embedding the framework in municipal planning and library operations and disseminating adaptable tools nationally, while also offering a particularly relevant model for Mountain West communities, the project's impact will extend well beyond the 24-month period of performance.



YEAR 1

[illegible]

YEAR 2

[illegible]