



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-260196-OLS-26
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

University of Illinois, School of Information Sciences

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$99,996
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The University of Illinois, School of Information Sciences at Urbana-Champaign and the iSchool's Center for Children's Books, in partnership with the University of Illinois Library, Skeuomorph Press & BookLab and community partner the Champaign County Forest Preserve will implement a project based on the exhibit + field trip model. The project will develop an interpretive and digital exhibit drawing on The University of Illinois Library collections including Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, and Social Sciences, Health, and Education Library's School Collection. The project will develop a digital collection development and readers' advisory guide prepared by the editorial board of The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, with supplemental materials developed by the staff of the Center for Children's Books and "Reading the Revolution" Scholars Council. Materials will include American history-themed storytimes, and school-aged library programming.

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.

Reading the Revolution: Telling the Story of the Nation's Founding to American Youth

Introduction

The School of Information Sciences (iSchool) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and the iSchool's Center for Children's Books, in partnership with the University of Illinois Library, UIUC's Skeuomorph Press & BookLab and unfunded community partner the Champaign County Forest Preserve, are requesting \$99,996 for a National Leadership Community-Centered Implementation Grant project to be conducted between September 1st 2026 and August 31st 2027. "Reading the Revolution: Telling the Story of the Nation's Founding to American Youth" uses the established exhibit + field trip model to address two current needs: 1) providing high-quality youth engagement activities for the nation's 250th celebration and 2) increasing rural schoolchildren's access to human and material resources housed in one of the nation's cultural institutions. The project is focused on a regional community but, through two key open access digital deliverables, will extend impact nationally. The project addresses NLG-L program goal through objective 1.1 (*Serve the learning needs of the public through libraries and archives*) and matches IMLS's 2026 call to "meaningfully engage and educate communities about our nation's great history and the incredible story of America's founding, in fitting commemoration of the 250th anniversary of American independence." The project does so by developing an exhibit + field trip centered on the American Revolution and by publishing for national dissemination materials that support the Office of Library Services' program priority to "[f]acilitate regular and family-friendly programming that is of social and educational benefit to children and parents alike." The intended results are 1) enhanced engagement with the Semiquincentennial and appreciation for United States history throughout the Central Illinois region and 2) the national dissemination of adaptable, generalizable, and usable strategies and materials for engagement, collection development, and K-12 experiential education.

Project Justification

Schools throughout the United States will be celebrating the nation's birth during the 250th celebration year. However, preparations for the anniversary have lagged, particularly in comparison to the Bicentennial (Kurutz). This leaves school and public librarians with fewer professional resources to tap for their constituency. "Reading the Revolution: Telling the Story of the Nation's Founding to American Youth" addresses this need. At a time when the nation is divided, the project aims to bring people together around the history of ideas and principles that shaped the nation's birth and that have inspired subsequent generations to strive for a "more perfect union."

"Reading the Revolution" will bring 1,500 fifth through eighth grade students to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for a day of experiential learning, and it will share the resources created with libraries and museums nationwide. Specific deliverables include:

- **An interpretive exhibit** drawing on The University of Illinois Library collections including Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, and Social Sciences, Health, and Education Library's School Collection. Materials will include archival documents (e.g. The Declaration of the United Colonies of North

America, 1775), biographies (e.g. *Poor Richard's Story: A Young Folks' Life of Benjamin Franklin*, 1798 and *The Life of George Washington in Words of One Syllable*, 1893), historical fiction (e.g. *The American Twins of the Revolution*, 1926, Johnny Tremain, 1943), primers and textbooks (e.g. *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking*, 1793, *Lights and Shadows of American History*, 1858), adventure stories (e.g. *True to the Old Flag: A Tale of the American War of Independence*, 1893), and replica musical instruments.

- **Digital exhibit** of the above, to be published on the Illinois Open Publishing Network (IOPN), linked to the Center for Children's Books website, and promoted nationally.
- **"Reading the Revolution: A Guide to Youth Resources,"** a digital collection development and readers' advisory guide prepared by the editorial board of *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, with supplemental materials developed by the staff of the Center for Children's Books and "Reading the Revolution" Scholars Council. Materials will include American history-themed storytimes, school-aged library programming, and a 250th Bucket List Book Challenge, adaptable for various environments.
- **Online, recorded roundtable with Scholars Council.** Topic: "What Has Changed, What Has Stayed the Same, and What Matters Today: Telling the Story of the Nation's Birth to Generation Alpha."
- **Professional development workshop for school and public librarians** that supports the field trip experience and introduces extension activities.
- **250th Bucket List Book Challenge** developed by the Center for Children's Books, with contributions from the Scholars Council. This activity will be promoted at local and regional libraries, museums, and schools with assistance from the Champaign County Forest Preserves.
- **Experiential field trip** including a) pre- and post-field trip classroom materials, tied to state and national learning standards that emphasize historical thinking and civic literacy, b) guided tour of the "Reading the Revolution" exhibit led by docents who will help students connect the library objects on display to meaningful questions and interactive learning, c) presentation and hands-on workshop at UIUC's Skeuomorph Press & BookLab (located in the CU [Champaign Urbana] Community Fab Lab) with reproduction eighteenth-century presses.

We know that children learn best when they are deeply engaged in the subject matter taught. This project uses two well-documented methods of engagement with history: experiential learning and children's literature (Halverson and Sheridan; Tomlinson et. al; Schwebel). Students attending the field trip will not only *hear* about the important role of printing presses, job printing, and pamphlets in the American Revolution but also try their hand at working a (reproduction) eighteenth-century press, with period appropriate paper and ink (Bailyn; Loughran). They will not only read *about* the way nineteenth- and twentieth-century children engaged with the American Revolution in school and popular culture but will see the books and toys those children held in their hands. Field trips spark intellectual curiosity, foster authentic questions, and inspire self-directed research; all lie at the heart of historical inquiry and civic engagement.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign owns the largest collection of children's books in the United States outside the Library of Congress. Subsidized transportation makes accessible access to the "Reading the Revolution" exhibit built from this collection, as well as to a bookmaking lab, a pedagogical resource unique to university campuses. Students living in rural areas far from major cultural institutions rarely have opportunities to engage with primary source materials from museum and library collections (Badger and Harker), and the librarians and educators who support them have fewer opportunities to access professional development with such materials. Grant funding will subsidize the cost of travel for both the field trips and pre-field trip professional development workshop.

A review of IMLS funded projects from 2018 to 2025 reveals at least six initiatives featuring collaborations between cultural institutions and public schools that focus on engaging students in history and civic discourse via a field trip + exhibit model. Our project builds on these successful project proposals. It is distinctive in targeting rural school districts situated within 120-miles of a large academic research library.

The field trip + exhibit addresses the need for high-quality 250th anniversary curriculum both through experiential learning and a "flipped museum" approach (Gilgore). We enrich the field trip experience via pre- and post- field trip materials that maximize engagement with historical materials, objects, and documents on exhibit at the University of Illinois. These curriculum materials also encourage participating educators to utilize contemporary youth literature as an engagement strategy. "Reading the Revolution: A Guide" provides librarians and teachers with professional reviews of contemporary children's and middle grade books about the Revolution and Early Republic, aiding the selection process. Additionally, it offers extension activities that utilize these books, including effective classroom readalouds, novel pairing assignments to stimulate historical and historiographical thinking, and research and information literacy challenges using contemporary nonfiction titles.

This project has two distinct audiences, one regional (primary) and one national. The regional audience will be served by a) school field trips, b) professional development workshop for librarians and educators, c) "Reading the Revolution: A Guide to Youth Resources," and d) a regionally-focused 250th Bucket List Book Challenge, promoted in partnership with area libraries, museums, and schools. The project reaches national audiences through a) promotion of a digital "Reading the Revolution" exhibit and b) the digital "Reading the Revolution: A Guide to Youth Resources." Additionally, we will record and publish the roundtable discussion with the "Reading the Revolution" Scholars Council in an open access format. These resources will be promoted through the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* (reaching all individual and institutional subscribers), the Center of Children's Books website and listserv, and by means of presentations at area and national professional conferences.

Expected project results include enhanced engagement with the Semiquincentennial in school and public libraries across Central Illinois, strengthened community collaborations that foster civic discourse, and professional resources that will advance shared knowledge and learning opportunities and be of immediate, practical use to librarians, teachers, and families during the 250th anniversary and for years afterward.

Project Work Plan

The work plan follows a sequence of research, planning, consultation, implementation, and evaluation. The sequenced timing of activities, with a librarian and teacher professional development workshop offered two months prior to the exhibit unveiling and field trips and five months prior to national distribution of the "Reading the Revolution: A Guide to Resources" provides a robust window for stakeholder feedback. Expertise from a Scholars Council comprised of Early American and Public History humanities scholars will be tapped through the project's planning and implementation. Their knowledge of the American Revolution's historiography, the way the Revolutionary has figured in American memory and myth, and the development and priorities of patriotic and history-focused American children's literature will be essential in closing the gap between K-12 schools and the academy and working toward shared knowledge that fosters respectful civil dialogue. During the last quarter of the project period, we will evaluate the success of the field trip + exhibit model through surveys, focus groups, and reflections from student participants.

The overall project team includes considerable interdisciplinary expertise and experience in librarianship, exhibitions, children's literature, history, and youth programs. The UIUC team will lead exhibit curation and execution, creation and dissemination of the "Reading the Revolution: A Guide to Youth Resources," and assessment of project activities and outcomes. The UIUC team will collaborate with our unfunded community partner, the Champaign County Forest Preserve (CCFP), to create, develop, and run the field trip experience. The CCFP are leaders in running successful K-12 community and school programs throughout Central Illinois.

PI Sara Schwebel is an internationally recognized scholar of children's literature who has produced three major digital humanities projects in collaboration with the National Park Service, two of which received the Organization of American Historians' Stanton-Horton Award. She has published widely on the use of children's historical fiction in the K-12 classroom. Co-PI Suzan Alteri has 20+ years' experience as a librarian, including curating physical and digital exhibits and creating digital humanities projects. Both Schwebel and Alteri have used experiential pedagogy in learning. Other strengths of project personnel also include education librarianship (Nancy O'Brien), editing and writing book reviews for an internationally recognized children's literature review periodical (Kate Quealy-Gainer), and public programming. Our unfunded community partner lead, Stacey Clementz from the Champaign County Forest Preserve, has extensive experience running public youth programs geared towards a K-12 audience, as well as a proven track record of training and supervising program volunteers. The academics who are members of the "Reading the Revolution" Scholars Council are nationally recognized historians and literary scholars with expertise in the Revolution and early American republic, history and memory, and public humanities. Additional information regarding qualifications and research expertise is located in the resumes of key project staff and in their letters of commitment.

At UIUC, two Graduate Research Assistants will be hired to assist with project activities. Owen Monroe, a PhD candidate and former K-12 educator with digital humanities experience, will contribute to the exhibit and guide and assist with the development of the digital exhibit. The second graduate assistant will assist with the development, planning, and presentation of the UIUC Skeuomorph Press & BookLab field trip experience. In addition, a master's student in the

Library and Information Science program will be offered a practicum to assist with outreach and exhibit tours. All three students will receive real-world experience in different aspects of librarianship, including public programming and exhibitions.

The outline below details the sequence of specific activities and the people leading the effort for each.

September 2026:

Finalize items from University Library collections for media exhibit. Key staff: Nancy O'Brien, Suzan Alteri, Sara L. Schwebel, graduate research assistant Owen Monroe.

Finalize selection of the highest quality titles for review in the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* and the "Reading the Revolution: A Guide to Youth Resources." Organize published books by theme, age level, and genre. Key staff: Suzan Alteri, Kate Quealy-Gainer (unfunded contributor), graduate research assistant Owen Monroe.

UIUC and Champaign County Forest Preserve (CCFP) collaborate on marketing and Promoting field trip opportunity to local and regional schools. Key staff: Suzan Alteri, Stacey Clementz (unfunded collaborator).

October – November 2026:

Write exhibit text and labels. Solicit feedback on exhibit content, including narrative themes, from "Reading the Revolution" Scholars Council. Key staff: Sara L. Schwebel, Nancy O'Brien, Suzan Alteri, Johann Neem, Judy Kertész, Margot Minardi, Ivy Linton Stabell.

Develop pre- and post- field trip resources and onsite programming in collaboration with CCFP and with guidance from Scholars Council. Key staff: Nancy O'Brien, Sara L. Schwebel, Stacey Clementz, Johann Neem, Judy Kertész, Margot Minardi, Ivy Linton Stabell.

November 2026:

Convene librarian workshop for the 250th at the Center for Children's Books. Workshop will include overview of youth media related to the 250th anniversary, opportunities to draft information literacy plans and other programming, and how to mount mini-exhibits in schools. Key staff: Sara L. Schwebel, Kate Quealy-Gainer, Suzan Alteri.

Historian roundtable discussion, "What Has Changed, What Has Stayed the Same, and What Matters Today: Telling the Story of the Nation's Birth to Generation Alpha." with members of Scholars Council (online). Key staff: Sara L. Schwebel, Johann Neem, Judy Kertész, Margot Minardi, Ivy Linton Stabell.

November – December 2026:

Development of "Reading the Revolution: A Guide to Youth Resources," engagement activities, and Bucket List Reading Challenge. Key Staff: Kate Quealy-Gainer, Sara L. Schwebel, Suzan Alteri, graduate research assistant Owen Monroe, Johann Neem, Judy Kertész, Margot Minardi, Ivy Linton Stabell

Reading the Revolution: Telling the Story of the Nation's Founding to American Youth

Publication of "Reading the Revolution" supplement in the December issue of *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. Key staff: Kate Quealy-Gainer.

Complete pre- and post- field trip resources to participating schools. Key staff: Stacey Clementz and Sara L. Schwebel.

Development of digital exhibit. Key Staff: Suzan Alteri, Nancy O'Brien, graduate research assistant Owen Monroe.

January 2027:

Install media exhibit at University Library and publish digital exhibit. Key staff: Nancy O'Brien, Suzan Alteri, MSLIS practicum student.

Finalize school field trip activities and schedule. Key staff: Stacey Clementz, Ryan Cordell (unfunded contributor), Sara L. Schwebel.

Develop feedback mechanisms and evaluation methods. Key staff: Suzan Alteri, Stacey Clementz, and Nancy O'Brien.

Training for exhibit tour guides. Key staff: Nancy O'Brien and Stacey Clementz.

January – March 2027:

Media exhibit opens. K-12 School field trips begin. Key staff: Nancy O'Brien, Suzan Alteri, Sara L. Schwebel, MSLIS practicum student, Ryan Cordell and MSLIS graduate assistant.

March 2027:

Host focus groups and send out survey evaluations about exhibit and field trips to participating schools. Key Staff: Stacey Clementz, Suzan Alteri, Sara L. Schwebel.

April 2027:

Publication and dissemination of "Reading the Revolution: A Guide to Youth Resources" and 250th Bucket List Book Challenge to Central Illinois school and library partners. Key staff: Stacey Clementz, Suzan Alteri, Kate Quealy-Gainer, MSLIS practicum student.

May – June 2027:

Host focus groups and send out survey evaluations about "Reading the Revolution: A Guide." Key staff: Suzan Alteri, Sara L. Schwebel, Kate Quealy-Gainer.

June 2027:

Implement long-term sustainability of digital resources and components. Key Staff: Suzan Alteri.

July 2027:

Review and analysis of surveys and focus group interviews to determine success of project outcomes. Key staff: Sara L. Schwebel and Suzan Alteri.

August – September 2027:

Preparation and dissemination of final grant report and results. Key staff: Sara L. Schwebel and Suzan Alteri.

Project Results

“Reading the Revolution: Telling the Story of the Nation's Founding to American Youth” intends to a) enhance youth engagement with the Semiquincentennial across Central Illinois, with particular focus on youth in school and public libraries, b) strengthen community collaborations that foster civic discourse among youth, and c) create and disseminate professional resources that librarians can utilize nationwide for programming, readers' advisory, and exhibits centered on early American history, with an aim to bolster civic literacy.

Two key project deliverables, the digital “Reading the Revolution” exhibit and “Reading the Revolution: A Guide”—both to be published on the Illinois Open Publishing Network (IOPN)—are immediately adaptable, generalizable, and usable by institutions and communities nationwide. They are also sustainable, as IOPN has committed to preserving its intellectual content in a useable format in perpetuity. (Preservation copies of IOPN publications are also deposited in the University's institutional repository and routed into the library's long-term preservation infrastructure). The digital exhibit and guide will be supplemented by curatorial resources created by professional librarians that include suggestions of how communities can tap materials from their own collections to pair with the digital exhibit; best practices for selecting exhibit materials; tips on how to mount an exhibit with little to no budget; and suggestions for how to launch an exhibit + field trip experience in communities of various sizes.

We will promote “Reading the Revolution” through national, state, and regional professional listservs, Reaching Across Illinois Libraries (RAILS) and the Illinois Heartland Library System, direct emails to regional public libraries and K-12 public schools, and our broad network of alumni of the Illinois iSchool MSLIS program. We will also present the project at our state's premier school library conference, hosted by the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), and at other conferences that might include the American Library Association, Illinois Library Association, National Council of Teachers of English, and the American Association of School Librarians.

The benefits of the project extend beyond the conclusion of the period of performance. In addition to the creation of digital resources on the American Revolution and early republic that will serve libraries and educators nationwide well past the 250th anniversary, the outreach conducted to ensure wide access to project resources regionally will strengthen partnerships in Central Illinois. Our collaboration with the Champaign County Forest Preserve brings K-12 school librarians from multiple counties with large rural districts into direct contact with the professional resources of the Center for Children's Books, creating pathways for them to tap the Center's examination book collection and professional children's book review journal. In sum, “Reading the Revolution” will enable long-lasting partnerships between the University of Illinois, the Center for Children's Books, a regional cultural heritage institution, and K-12 schools.

Schedule of Completion - Reading the Revolution: Telling the Story of the Nation's Founding to American Youth

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