



# NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-260209-OLS-26  
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

## Cambria Library Association

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|-------------------------|-----------|
| Amount awarded by IMLS: | \$100,000 |
| Amount of cost share:   | \$82,450  |

Cambria County Library in Pennsylvania will partner with local organizations, including the Center for Population Health, Beginnings Inc, and The United Way of the Southern Alleghenies to help families learn about growing their own food and improving nutrition on a budget. The project will provide programs and snacks to children weekly; assess the programming needs of patrons, local schools, and community organizations; create a Resource Library of local organizations; and create a Snack and Learn Program toolkit for libraries. The project will be sustained through the publication of a resource video library and Snack and Learn toolkit. The goal of the project is to create programs that implement nutrition, education, and community resources will provide residents with a stronger community and improved literacy and health outcomes.

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.

Cambria County Library  
Snack and Learn Project  
Narrative

## **Introduction**

Cambria County Library is requesting \$100,000 in funds through the IMLS National Leadership Grant opportunity for our Snack and Learn Project. CCL will partner with local organizations, including the Center for Population Health, Beginnings Inc, and The United Way of the Southern Alleghenies. Residents struggle to find informal learning opportunities and lack awareness of organizations in our region that can provide support for a variety of needs. The small and rural libraries that support our community struggle to find accessible programs that can improve literacy and STEM education. Our Snack and Learn project will improve upon our current Snack program, assess community needs, and create resources that can be used both locally and by libraries across the US to build youth programs and community partnerships that address critical health and literacy needs.

## **Project Justification**

Cambria County Library serves as the System Headquarters for the 14 libraries in the Cambria County Library System, and District Headquarters for 21 libraries in Cambria, Somerset, and Indiana counties. All libraries in Cambria County are 501 (c)3 nonprofit organizations and located in rural municipalities. Libraries in the county have as few as 879 residents in their service areas. Cambria County Library is in Johnstown, PA, which is the largest municipality in the County. The city only has 18,411 residents, which qualifies it as a rural area. The city has a 31.9% poverty level and FutureReadyPA indicates that only 8.8% of Elementary students at the Greater Johnstown School District are proficient in math, and only 11.3% are proficient in English. Johnstown residents also have a higher digital divide, with 16.6% of residents lacking broadband internet and 12.1% lacking computers in the home. The city is also a food desert, and 14% of people are considered food insecure. As a

community hub, the library is uniquely suited to help residents meet several needs and provide access to education, nutrition, and workforce support.

Directors in the Cambria County Library System report hesitancy to engage in programs that require higher levels of specific knowledge. Programs at the system's smaller libraries are primarily focused on Storytimes and book clubs, while topics like math and science are underrepresented. Each year the libraries are invited to participate in the National Remake Learning Days, but few in the Cambria County Library System participate because they are unable to execute relevant programs. Because directors are not subject matter experts and most libraries rely on part-time employees, it is difficult for the libraries to offer resources and programs that align with the needs of their community.

As a PA Forward Gold Star Library, Cambria County Library is recognized by the state for providing quality programs for all ages in five literacies: Basic, Information, Health and Wellness, Financial, and Civic/Social literacies. Even if one of the system-member libraries is willing to put on a program, additional barriers like finding volunteers or purchasing materials can be a challenge. Directors in the system frequently connect with CCL staff for assistance in finding program support and resources. As a member of the Youth Services Committee for the Pennsylvania Library Association, our Children's Supervisor sees similar struggles replicated across Pennsylvania libraries.

Our region faces considerable challenges that impact the social determinates of health, including high poverty rates, low literacy rates, and lack of access to food. The Center for Population Health's 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment notes several factors that are higher than the state average, including increased food insecurity, poverty, and drug overdose deaths. To meet the challenges impacting the Johnstown region, Cambria County Library launched an Afternoon Snack program in 2023, using ARPA funds to address food insecurity. Since its inception, the Afternoon Snack program has combined healthy snacks with educational programs that emphasize STEM skills.

Cambria County Library's current Afternoon Snack project has been successful and has helped families learn about growing their own food and improving nutrition on a budget.

Programs like “Adventurous Eating with Chef Nan” have helped children try new foods, and “Growing Readers” introduces STEM topics. Our Education Garden is an important tool for teaching families about growing their own food, helping to supplement budgets while increasing nutrition. Program attendees report that getting snacks while attending library programs has helped to reduce the stigma related to food insecurity and made them more aware of the programs offered by the library. Through our program, families have already learned about housing resources, including access to baby diapers, victim’s services, and emergency housing. Attendees also report better knowledge of local resources, including United Way’s 211 program. Pairing the educational programs with community resources and the Snack program has had a compounding effect: not only are families feeding their kids at the library, but they are also learning about local resources and about improving their own quality of life. Obtaining library cards has also helped families get additional access to kid-friendly education sources, including online resources like ABCMouse and Britannica School. Adults are also able to access Snack bags and learn more about library services and community resources; in addition to families, seniors are particularly supported by the program.

The Cambria County Library leadership team sees an opportunity to expand upon our current success, build better partnerships with local organizations, and create replicable programming that libraries across the U.S. can implement. The proposed Snack and Learn project will meet the IMLS Agency Goals 1 and 2 by building the knowledge of our patrons, by providing developmental tools for other libraires, and strengthening community engagement through quality programs. The project will introduce Citizen Science and STEM skills to families, while helping bridge the digital divide that impedes many residents from learning about local organizations that can improve health, housing, and literacy.

The Snack and Learn project will have objectives for three audiences. Residents attending the library will benefit from a variety of educational opportunities, including monthly visits from community resource partners. Community Resources Partners will benefit from the library’s program and outreach efforts and from increased connections to consumers through a Resource Library and online highlight videos. Libraries in PA and

across the US will benefit from The Snack and Learn's final goal, to create a toolkit of programs, outreach templates, and other informative materials. With the Snack and Learn project, it is expected that other libraries will be able to adopt the toolkit and expand their own education and resource efforts to improve literacy, nutrition, and health outcomes in their own communities.

## **Project Work Plan**

The Snack and Learn Project will focus on four main activities: provide programs and snacks to children weekly; assess the programming needs of patrons, local schools, and community organizations; create a Resource Library of local organizations; and create a Snack and Learn Program toolkit for libraries.

Programs will be offered for families throughout the length of the project, with seasonal programs offered in our Education Garden. Our Children's Department Supervisor, Leah Johncola, will be responsible for executing the project. Our Children's Department Staff will assist in running programs, creating video content, and developing toolkit materials. Maintenance staff will assist in the set up and cleanup of programs, as well as maintaining the Educational Garden. Marketing and Outreach staff will help advertise and promote the programs. Grant administration will assist in managing the budget and project reporting.

The project has already incorporated indirect feedback from community partners including The United Way of the Southern Alleghenies, Appalachia IU8, Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank, and libraries within the Cambria County Library System. Stakeholder input has helped develop the objectives for the project and ensure the project can benefit the three target audiences: residents, community organizations, and public libraries.

Assessments will be developed and distributed to patrons, community organizations, and schools so that the library can ensure programs align with local educational needs. Each month, the library will feature at least one community organization during a program and if the organization agrees, create a Resource Highlight video to be posted via private

playlist on the Children's YouTube page. Programs will also use STEM materials and Citizen Science elements to expand knowledge of these topics.

Once the programs have demonstrated success in meeting learning objectives and community needs, the Children's Department will develop a Snack and Learn Program Toolkit that will be published and made available to libraries nationwide. Prototype STEM and Program Kits will be sent to system member libraries to assess their ease of use, accessibility, and overall effectiveness. The Toolkit will include a variety of print materials and online resources that can be used to implement their own Snack and Learn programs. The toolkit will be adaptable for libraries of different sizes and address challenges that face libraries.

Project success will be measured through program feedback from patrons and community organizations. Key performance indicators will include the number of programs and attendees, number of video watches for resource videos, and downloads of the Snack and Learn toolkit.

## **Project Results**

Cambria County Library will execute the following activities:

**Provide a Snack Program:** The Snack and Learn program will be offered weekly and connect families with nutritious food, provide informal education on STEM and literacy topics, and increase awareness of community resources. The library will use hands-on learning, Citizen Science initiatives, crafts, and more to introduce children to math, biology, basic literacy, digital literacy, and other topics. The program will also offer Resource programs and introduce families to local organizations that can address needs for housing, food insecurity, and other local needs.

**Assess Community Needs:** Stakeholders will be provided with surveys and an opportunity to provide feedback to Cambria County Library. Establishing the deficits in our community will allow the library to tailor programs to better support learning outcomes.

Surveys will be developed for patrons, local schools, and community organizations. The library will also be attending trainings, local health committee meetings, and other development opportunities.

Create a Resource Library: Organizations will be given a Communication Assessment tool and establish their preferred channels of reaching consumers, which the library will use to support the organizations. Each community resource will have the opportunity to create a brief Resource Highlight video. Resource videos will be hosted on the Children's Department YouTube and made available through a limited access Playlist. Resource information will be shared with schools and promoted at the library.

Create a Snack and Learn Toolkit: The Children's Department will make a Snack and Learn toolkit for public libraries. The toolkit will include "How To" program guides, outreach letter templates, and more. The toolkit will be designed so that programs can be adapted and scaled for different library sizes and take into consideration common library challenges, including funding and staffing deficits. Local libraries will be provided with sample Program and STEM Kits for assessment. Once the toolkit is published, it will be made accessible on the Cambria County Library website, and the library will work in the PA Library Association and other channels to make it available to public libraries across the nation.

Creating programs that implement nutrition, education, and community resources will provide our residents with a stronger community and improved literacy and health outcomes. Outreach opportunities in the community will help to attract new users and programs will be marketed through the library's standard marketing channels, including the CCL website, email newsletter, events calendar, and flyers.

The Resource Library will help to connect additional families with resources even if they are unable to attend programming sessions and will also help to sustain the impact of the Snack and Learn program. The resource library, maintained as a limited-access YouTube playlist, will be promoted at Cambria County Library and shared with local schools, organizations, and libraries in the Cambria County Library System.

Creating a Snack and Learn Toolkit and making it available online will help ease the burden of small and rural libraries who are hesitant to offer STEM and literacy programs. As headquarters for the Cambria County Library System, the CCL team is well-versed in the needs of small and rural libraries, which will help make the toolkit adaptable for different obstacles. The toolkit will address considerations including lack of funding, lack of staff, lack of meeting locations, and other issues that are known to impact programs at small and rural libraries.

The project will be sustained through the publication of the Resource Video Library and Snack and Learn toolkit. The library will continue to make these items available to the public and will ensure they are updated when necessary. Obsolete information will be removed when appropriate, otherwise the digital resources will be retained for at least three years after the project is complete.

The Snack and Learn Program's vision is to further the important work of libraries as community hubs and trusted sources of information. Cambria County residents and organizations will be better connected with local help and high-quality programs. With the Snack and Learn Program's toolkit, small and rural communities across the United States will benefit from increased community collaboration that promotes overall physical excellence and improved educational outcomes.

