



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-260725-OLS-26
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

Prince William Public Library System

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$71,800
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The Prince William Public Library System in Woodbridge, Virginia will expand its established adult literacy and career certification program to serve more adults and enhance it with an apprenticeship to strengthen its impact. This project seeks to improve participants' economic mobility, meet labor market needs, and contribute to the region's long-term prosperity. This project views itself as an alternative to a four-year college and enables participants to meet employer needs more quickly, efficiently, and effectively. The target group for this project, adults who lack a high school diploma or adequate workforce skills, will hopefully gain new career pathways, improve their financial stability, and better their life and their family's life. Prince William Public Libraries will partner with Smart Horizons, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce and its member businesses to identify and coordinate apprenticeships.

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 lead applicant, Prince William County Government, requests \$71,800 in IMLS funding to expand the capacity of its organizational unit, Prince William Public Libraries, to address the region's high number of adults who lack workforce education and skills. William Public Libraries will expand its established adult literacy and career certification program to serve more adults and enhance it with an apprenticeship to strengthen its impact. Prince William Public Libraries will partner with Smart Horizons, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce, and local employers to reach these goals. This project will improve participants' economic mobility, meet labor market needs, and contribute to the region's long-term prosperity.

Project Justification

In Prince William County (County), more than 56,600 adults, approximately 17% of the adult population, lack a high school diploma (U.S. Census estimates for 2020-2024). In comparison, the national average is 10%, and in neighboring Fairfax and Loudoun counties, it is below 7%.

Limited education leads to low-paying jobs, makes further education inaccessible, restricts career mobility, and creates financial instability for families. These individual challenges create broader ripple effects on employers, the local economy, and the community as a whole.

The data underscores the need for lifelong learning and workforce development programs that improve residents' lives and help them fully participate in the County's economy. As a trusted public institution with more than two million annual visits, Prince William Public Libraries plays a critical role in addressing this need. It provides free, accessible skills training and education opportunities, serving low-income residents as well as those who may not otherwise engage with education or employment services.

Prince William Public Libraries recognized its potential to help meet workforce development needs. In 2020, it launched an Adult Online High School and Career Certification Program (Program) to help adults earn a high school diploma and industry-recognized credentials in high-demand skilled trades. However, due to limited funding, Prince William Public Libraries serves fewer than 20 students annually—far below the documented community demand. Even marketing efforts had to be limited to avoid exceeding capacity.

Prince William Public Libraries offers the Program in partnership with Smart Horizons, a recognized and accredited online career education provider serving public libraries nationwide. The Program is free, online, and self-paced—a prerequisite for adults with full-time, low-paying jobs and families to support. Participants study through an online school portal that includes an eLibrary, a calendar, a grade book, and learning resources. They also receive academic and technical support, as well as instant feedback on lessons and exams. In addition to the core academic curriculum required for high school diplomas, participants complete workforce training and earn credentialed certificates in fields such as childcare and education, security, office administration, commercial driving, hospitality, and manufacturing. They also prepare a cover letter, resume, and professional profile.

Prince William Public Libraries provides critical wraparound support, including enrollment assistance, encouragement along the way, public computers and internet access, laptop and hotspot lending, and extensive Digital Library resources for academic and vocational training. Prince William Public Libraries also covers students' tuition, as many adults could not participate in this Program without financial assistance.

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Prince William Public Libraries does not have the capacity to meet the increasing demand for this Program. Despite being a publicly funded County government department, it relies heavily on grants and donations to sustain specialized programs such as this one. Securing funding for this Program is challenging because many funders classify aid to individuals as an ineligible expense. However, the Program's impact extends well beyond personal advancement. Graduates gain access to higher-paying employment, strengthen the local workforce, and contribute more robustly to the tax base and local economy, benefiting all.

Prince William Public Libraries did not receive federal funding in the past. While it will be possible to continue the Program without this grant, the participation and impact will be limited. With IMLS support, Prince William Public Libraries will expand the existing Program to serve more adults and enhance it by adding an apprenticeship with local businesses. This practice-based component adapts a proven model used by County high schools. While internships are common for high school and college students, they are rarely available to adults. Current Program participants expressed a strong interest in this additional opportunity, as it would improve their experience with the Program and increase their competitiveness in securing better employment.

This proposal promotes adult literacy and leverages libraries' roles in connecting workers to employers, apprenticeship programs, and skills training. This proposal helps achieve the IMLS Agency-Level Goal 1, Champion Lifelong Learning, and Objective 1.1, Advance shared knowledge and learning opportunities for all. The proposal supports the NLG-L Program Goal of enhancing replicable programs to strengthen library services for the American public, and the NLG-L Program Objective 1.2, to improve community prosperity through workforce development at libraries. This project also advances Objective 1.1, to serve the public's learning needs through libraries. The proposed project is available to all, and therefore, aligns with the IMLS Equal Opportunity statute. It is a Community-Centered Implementation project type that enhances an existing program model and adapts it to a specific need. In addition to IMLS goals and objectives, this project advances Prince William Public Libraries' mission and vision of transforming the lives of its community members through access to resources and opportunities.

Prince William Public Libraries proposes an accessible upskilling initiative that helps unlock workers' potential. This aligns with the Executive Order 14278, "Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future," by equipping them with pathways to family-sustaining careers in trades such as electrical work, mechanical technology, automation, and construction.

This project is an alternative to a four-year college and enables participants to meet employer needs more quickly, efficiently, and effectively. This directly addresses the findings and recommendations from the County's 2025 Workforce Development Study, which found growing demand for technical skills and increased opportunities in middle-skill positions that typically require less than a four-year degree.

The target group for this project, adults who lack a high school diploma or adequate workforce skills, will gain new career pathways, improve their financial stability, and better their life and their family's life.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, high school graduates earn about 25% more per week than those who did not finish high school, which enables them to contribute more to the local economy. This project also benefits local employers, the County's economic participation, state prosperity, and eventually national economic success.

Project Work Plan

Prince William Public Libraries has experience, a work plan, established procedures, staff expertise, and community partnerships to successfully and efficiently execute the proposed project. In addition, Prince William Public Libraries reviewed the post-award requirements to make sure it can meet them.

This proposal has two components.

Component 1: Program Expansion

Prince William Public Libraries will continue the existing Program and expand it by enrolling 40 additional adults throughout the grant period.

Since launching the Program in 2020, Prince William Public Libraries has demonstrated strong outcomes and effective management. To date, 50 adults have graduated, and 33 are currently studying. Prince William Public Libraries has an 87% graduation rate—well above the 50–65% national average reported by Smart Horizons.

Component 2: Apprenticeship Integration

Prince William Public Libraries will integrate an apprenticeship into the Program to strengthen workforce preparation.

Prince William Public Libraries will partner with the Prince William Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) and its member businesses to identify and coordinate the apprenticeships. The Chamber has committed to supporting this initiative.

Prince William Public Libraries will offer a monetary incentive to businesses that provide apprenticeships. Should businesses decline the incentive, Prince William Public Libraries will use the remaining funds to cover tuition for additional adults.

Leadership and Staffing

Senior Library Manager, Lena Gonzalez Berrios, will serve as Project Director. She has managed the Program since its launch and brings more than 30 years of experience in library leadership and adult services. She also has 10 years of experience as an ESOL educator.

To ensure the Program's high completion rate, Prince William Public Libraries has seven experienced project-dedicated librarians who assist with enrollment, monitor progress, and support students. Three more librarians will join the team to better manage the increased number of participants.

These staff members have experience in adult literacy, education, and human services, and several of them bring lived experiences of overcoming financial barriers to higher education, enabling them to build meaningful connections with participants and provide empathetic support.

Marketing and Public Relations Specialist, Michaela H. Janotova, will coordinate the apprenticeships with the Chamber and ensure compliance with grant requirements. She brings over 15 years of experience in public relations, community engagement, and grant writing, and represents Prince William Public Libraries on the Chamber's Education and Workforce Council.

Fiscal Manager, Erika Bukva, will ensure strong stewardship of grant funds. She has more than seven years of experience in procurement and grant financial management and oversees all Prince William Public Libraries' grant financials. Prince William Public Libraries will use IMLS funding for participant

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support costs and third-party (non-federal agency) costs, as allowable under IMLS and the Office of Management and Budget government-wide cost principles.

Communications Director, Rachel Johnson, with 18 years of experience in marketing and branding, will oversee project promotion and grantor recognition.

Several staff members, including the Project Director, Communications Director, and Marketing and Public Relations Specialist, will collaborate to produce a comprehensive evaluation report, model guide, and presentations to share with the grantor, the public, and other libraries.

Stakeholder Support

Prince William Public Libraries Director, Jenniffer Patterson, contributed to project planning and strongly supports this proposal as it advances its 2024-2028 Strategic Plan implementation and reinforces the organization's mission to enrich lives and help build a prosperous community.

County Executive Christopher Shorter, Workforce Development Manager Michele Weatherly, and Small Business Development Manager Eva Gunia, a former library employee, have recognized the project's value to the local workforce and economy.

Throughout the project, Prince William Public Libraries will inform these stakeholders about the progress and collect their feedback. Prince William Public Libraries will implement their suggestions for improvements when possible and in line with grant terms.

Implementation Activities

The following activities will occur in the sequence as listed.

Activity 1: Tuition Purchase (Month 1)

Prince William Public Libraries will purchase Program tuition for 40 adults from Smart Horizons. Prospective participants balance jobs, family responsibilities, and limited incomes, making paid education inaccessible without financial assistance. Grant funding ensures equitable and ongoing access to this opportunity.

Activity 2: Outreach and Promotion (Month 2 until cohort filled)

Prince William Public Libraries will promote the project through a comprehensive communication strategy, including posters and handouts at all 12 library branches and the Mobile Library, outreach visits to community organizations, and digital advertising on the Prince William Public Libraries website and social media.

Activity 3: Enrollment (Years 1 and 2)

Librarians will enroll 40 additional adults in the Program: 20 in Year 1 and 20 in Year 2. This will double the number of adults studying, as Prince William Public Libraries currently serves approximately 20 adults annually.

Residents can inquire at any of Prince William Public Libraries' 12 libraries, the Mobile Library, or via a dedicated email address. They must be at least 20 years old, not have a high school diploma, and reside in the County or the City of Manassas. Prior completion of 9th grade is recommended.

Interested adults complete an online self-assessment survey to confirm eligibility and to determine whether the Program is a good choice for them. The online survey also ensures efficient intake and

confirms baseline digital literacy skills necessary for online study. Librarians then discuss details and expectations with potential participants and help enroll those who are interested and eligible.

Activity 4: Support (Throughout Grant Period)

Librarians help participants get started with the coursework, monitor their progress via the online portal, and regularly check in with them. Encouragement and support are critical and often determine whether a busy adult can persevere and complete the Program.

Students also participate in quarterly networking events at library branches, where they share experiences and explore Prince William Public Libraries' resources for professional development and career readiness.

Activity 5: Online School Completion (Throughout Grant Period and Post-Grant)

Program participants will complete academic coursework and workforce training, earning an accredited high school diploma and career certificate. The average completion time is 12 months, meaning the adults enrolled later in Year 2 will complete the Program within 12 months post-grant.

Activity 6: Recognition (November 2027)

In November, librarians will host a Graduation Ceremony to celebrate participants' achievements and reinforce community support for adult learners. County Deputy Executive, a respected local entrepreneur, and the Smart Horizons Superintendent attended the 2024 and 2025 ceremonies.

Activity 7: Apprenticeship Placement (Year 2 and Post-Grant)

Prince William Public Libraries will partner with the Chamber and connect graduates with apprenticeship opportunities. The Chamber has over 3,000 members in businesses from home care to chip manufacturing. Adults typically complete the online school in 12 months, which will provide enough time to coordinate the apprenticeships.

Prince William Public Libraries and Chamber already have a list of prospective practicum providers. In addition, Prince William Public Libraries has existing relationships with some of them. To mention only a few examples, people interested in hospitality can apprentice at the local Tru by Hilton hotel, Prince William Public Libraries' strong supporter and donor, and people interested in the automotive industry can collaborate with a local Kia dealership, whose community relations manager is a former Chamber employee, where he led the Education and Workforce Council. These established relationships guarantee straightforward and successful implementation.

Activity 8: Evaluation (Throughout Grant Period; Mainly Year 2)

Prince William Public Libraries will evaluate success using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Librarians will track the number of applicants, accepted students, graduation rate, and apprenticeship placements. They will also seek participant, partner, and stakeholder feedback and testimonials through conversations and a brief written survey.

In addition, Prince William Public Libraries will invite successful project participants to share their experiences in a video interview. These personal narratives will inspire prospective participants and libraries and organizations that consider offering similar programs.

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Primary success indicators include:

- Enrollment of an additional 40 adults.
- At least 87% graduation rate.
- High apprenticeship participation rate.
- Positive participant and partner feedback.

Prince William Public Libraries will compile findings into a comprehensive evaluation report.

Activity 9: Long-Term Outcomes Evaluation (2–5 Years Post-Grant)

Prince William Public Libraries will maintain contact with participants through newsletters, library networking events, and follow-up surveys to assess employment status, wage growth, and career advancement.

Activity 10: Replication and Field Contribution (Post-Grant)

Prince William Public Libraries will compile data and create a model guide to inform other libraries and encourage them to implement this impactful project. To further support improvements and replication opportunities across the library field, librarians will present at the American Library Association, Virginia Library Association, and Public Library Association conferences.

Project Results

The project will expand access to education and workforce development and reduce the region's high number of adults who lack workforce education and skills. Participants will gain the knowledge, credentials, and industry-relevant skills needed for secure, well-paying, high-demand careers. The project will have a far-reaching regional, state, and national impact by helping employers find skilled trade workers locally and invest in the United States, thereby fostering a competitive American workforce that produces world-class products.

Prince William Public Libraries will become a stronger civic center of learning and opportunities and reaffirm its commitment to serving all residents and promoting adult literacy. In addition, it will further its meaningful, existing partnership with the Chamber.

Project participants will acquire the skills and credentials needed for career advancement. They will build stable, fulfilling careers and become stronger contributors to their families, neighborhoods, and the broader community. They will also gain greater trust, a sense of belonging, and a shared purpose within their community.

By the end of the funding period, 40 adults will:

1. Complete or be enrolled in the Program.
2. Have an opportunity to attend an apprenticeship.
4. Gain the confidence and motivation to pursue career advancement.
5. Be prepared to succeed in high-paying, in-demand skilled trades.
6. Model the importance of education for their children and help cultivate the next generation of skilled American workers.

Although modest in numbers—serving dozens of people while thousands remain in need—this initiative will strengthen the entire community and increase its wealth. A Northeastern University study estimates

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the lifetime taxpayer savings of \$292,000 per high school graduate, underscoring the significant return on investment the Program delivers.

In addition, this project will help the County meet regional labor market needs, foster workforce and small business development, build stronger civic engagement and greater social cohesion, and increase economic participation. A more prosperous County will then contribute more to the state's economy, which will foster national prosperity.

While Prince William Public Libraries will collect short-term and long-term (2–5 Years Post-Grant) outcomes, the project's benefits on the County workforce and economy will be visible several years post grant through lower unemployment rates and improved economic indicators. Future County's workforce development studies, AAA bond rates, and other economic evaluations will demonstrate the project's success and benefits. The County and Prince William Public Libraries will seek additional funding to continue and expand the project beyond the conclusion of this grant period.

This project will also enhance the quality of public library services nationwide. Prince William Public Libraries will share its experiences with peer institutions and help them strengthen their role in advancing workforce and economic development. As a result, the public libraries will be better equipped to support the needs of an evolving workforce and serve as a trusted partners in improving national prosperity.

The project can be shared, duplicated, and adapted to meet the needs and capacity of other public libraries. Prince William Public Libraries will develop a replicable model guide outlining design, implementation strategies, apprenticeship development processes, evaluation findings, lessons learned, and participant success stories. Prince William Public Libraries will respond to peer inquiries and contribute to national library articles and publications to inspire future participants and inform the field.

The powerful testimonials from Program graduates illustrate both the need for and the impact of the Program:

"My parents made me start paying rent when I was 15, so I dropped out of high school to work. Now I have my high school diploma and can do more meaningful work." - Jhonys

"My daughter encouraged me to apply. I want to learn more about the auto industry." - Tadele.

"I thank all who helped me. My goal is to advance in a mechanical engineering career." - Mossi

"I am thrilled to receive my high school diploma and celebrate with my family. This shows my kids the importance of education." - Sarra

Crisian, a 2024 graduate, is so appreciative of this opportunity that she now gives back by covering the cost of caps and gowns for all graduates—an inspiring example of the program's impact. Since graduation, Crisian has earned a contractor's license and started her own business.

Grant Year 1

[illegible]

Grant Year 2

[illegible]