3. Proposal Narrative

Project Justification

This project will document how residents in the Harvard Park (HP) area of South LA, which the Southern California Library (SCL) is located in, experience violence and harm, as well as their related cultural practices of survival and living.

The HP neighborhood has been identified by the *Los Angeles Times* as the most dangerous place in LA County for Black people to live. This vulnerability is attributed to acts of interpersonal violence most closely associated with gangs. This assessment is generally shared across city agencies, police, and community organizations. This has myriad policy implications, most directly with an influx of millions of dollars spent on policing as a direct solution.

This project will document how people in this neighborhood identify, experience, and articulate what is harmful, for themselves. This area faces some of the worst conditions of extreme poverty, homelessness, hunger, incarceration, infant mortality, environmental toxicity, and more, in the nation.[1] This project will expand the frame of what constitutes harm from a limited focus on local interpersonal violence to include other issues that community residents are faced with, and document existing strategies for survival and co-living that are not always legible to state actors.

SCL is a community library/archive that documents histories of grassroots struggles for justice. Our collections bear witness to the historically constituted nature of vulnerabilities that residents are suffering and surviving through. With this project, we will increase our capacity to ethically document these experiences and engage residents in using these experiences and knowledges as tools for civic participation, public awareness, and ultimately community betterment.

As a small library, with a current staff of two, this grant will enable us to engage in an intentional and sustained documentation project with our community. We will also draw upon our current partnerships within the archival/scholarly world and with local residents and schools:

- We are currently partnering with Documenting the Now, which builds community practices that support the ethical collection, use, and preservation of social media content. They will train us in March 2019 on the IMLS-funded open source platform Mukurtu, which will aid us in managing and sharing digital content in culturally relevant and ethical ways. We will also work with an archivist, Shani Miller, who has worked with the Library for over three years, and consult with additional archival professionals as appropriate to ensure best practices in documentation, digitization, and description.
- We will apply a participatory documenting approach, engaging collaboratively with local residents in knowledge production, documentation, and descriptive practices. This effort will be

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[1] The service planning area for South LA has the highest percentage of people of color and the highest percentage of Blacks in L.A. County. The population of this area has the lowest average per capita income in the County, with 56% having income less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. The area has the highest percentage of children without health insurance in the County. Young Black men in the County, who predominantly reside in South L.A., have a felony arrest rate that is 16 times higher than for white youth. The infant mortality rate is 20% higher in South L.A. than the County as a whole. Statistics from SPA 6 data.

strengthened by our partnership with Augustus Hawkins High School, located around the corner from the Library, as well as our long-standing relationships with local residents, businesses, and organizations, including the local branch of the LA public library.

- Our project will be informed by scholarly research and data concerning topics of poverty, health, environmental justice, and criminalization, drawing on our relationships with educators particularly at UCLA, UC Irvine, UC Riverside and Cal State LA.

The primary audience for this project are the local residents of HP, who will benefit from an increased ability to preserve their memories and connect to shared experiences in their neighborhood and across LA; an increased ability to analyze community conditions and place them in a historical context; and an increased capacity to be more effective civic participants in addressing these conditions.

The Library has been located in the HP neighborhood for over 45 years, resulting in strong relationships with residents. The development of this project proposal has been informed with their participation and views. A core group of primarily young Black men ages 19–25, who have participated in a weekly education group at the Library, conducted a community needs assessment, surveying over 200 residents in the HP neighborhood about their concerns, and organized a community BBQ at the Library, attended by over 100 people, including families, youth, and seniors, Black and Latinx, to share out their findings. We have drawn heavily on this needs assessment in the planning of this project.

The design for this project has also been informed by previous Library initiatives and the planning we did with community stakeholders:

- **Generations Locked Down:** This collection was created by people directly impacted by incarceration, including items brought in by family members and peer interviews of youth in juvenile detention. We worked with key stakeholders, including community groups working on related issues, to develop a plan for collection development and community engagement, resulting in a day of materials collection, story circles, and dialogue, as part of a project funded by a 2-year Cal Humanities grant.

- **South L.A. Documentation Collection:** In the 1990s, the Library facilitated a collection of local history, which involved community members bringing in old yearbooks, civil rights era ephemera, documentation of housing segregation, and more. We subsequently added to this collection by conducting oral histories with some 30 young people from the neighborhood in 2007. Through that project, we built a foundation of trust and relationship that has continued to this day. This collection have been invaluable to researchers and other Library users, who have been able to access historical materials they have not been able to find anywhere else.

- **V-Map**: In this neighborhood mapping project, funded through the Library Sciences and Technology Act and evaluated by Harder and Co., high school participants collected oral histories and other community documentation representing South L.A. history, and then designed and conducted a walking tour of Vermont Avenue, written up in the *LA Times.*

The challenge we face in this effort is that the communities we work with are not stable. Most of the folks involved in our projects face extreme poverty and unstable housing situations. Many have experienced incarceration and some are still locked up. These are the pervasive material conditions in our neighborhood that make participation, much less daily life difficult.

However, the lived experiences in our neighborhood also involve strategies for survival and practices of living and loving. These stories are also too often overlooked, and having the resources to engage in a more intentional documentation project over time will help us gather and share them.

Having access to the resources provided by this grant will enable us to conduct a more intentional project informed by best practices, and, most importantly, make it more viable for local residents to participate.

Project Work Plan
We will 1) conduct oral histories, (2) collect documentation to create a community archive, and (3) create a graphic novel and hold a community event to engage community members in dialogue around the findings. Residents will work closely with Library staff in planning, implementing, and evaluating the project. We will also work with school and community partners, including Augustus Hawkins High School, educators at UC Riverside and Cal State LA, and library/archival professionals.

Conduct Oral Histories (September 2019 – May 2020). We will collect a total of approximately 30 oral histories of HP residents' experiences with harm and violence, and their survival strategies, networks of support, and cultural practices gained across generations. Financial resources: approximately $25,000.

Objective: Hold initial gathering of community leadership group to inform documentation process, including consulting with Teresa Barnett, Head, Center for Oral History Research, UCLA Library, who has assisted the Library on previous oral history projects, on best practices and protocols for conducting interviews. Purchase equipment necessary to conduct both indoor and outdoor interviews. Resources needed: Recording equipment/camera.

Objective: Identify and work with approximately 5–7 community participants to plan and collect in-depth "walking" oral histories, 30–60 minutes in length, where participants will identify key geographic locations in the neighborhood and share stories related to those spaces. Collect an additional 25 shorter oral histories, 15–20 minutes in length, from residents, as follow-up to issues raised in the more in-depth interviews. Resources needed: Community stipends and fellowships.

Objective: Transcribe a selection of the interviews, in partnership with an undergraduate or graduate class at UC Riverside or Cal State Los Angeles. Resources needed: Transcription software service such as transcribe.wreally.

Create a Community Archive (November 2019 – June 2021). We will build a community archive that compliments the oral histories we collect. Collection will be ongoing throughout the project and we will also hold approximately 3 community collection days at the Library, where original items may either be scanned and returned, or kept for the archives. We will also acquire current books, films,

and periodicals that provide a broader context for the collection, available for checkout by local residents and others. Financial resources: approximately $35,000. **Resources needed**: Purchase of books, films, and periodical subscriptions; Event costs; Equipment costs (scanners). Supplies.

Objective: Work with an archivist, Shani Miller, to process the collected materials and, working with local residents, create a finding aid that will be user friendly for community use. Resources needed: Professional fees; Archival supplies; Community stipends and fellowships.

Objective: Work with an archivist, Shani Miller, to digitize and, working with local residents, create metadata for curated items using nationally accepted standards such as the Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Cultural Heritage Materials, and upload them to the Mukurtu content management system for wider access, in partnership with Documenting the Now Co-founder Bergis Jules, and UC Riverside Library Digitization Services Program Manager Eric Milenkiewicz. Resources needed: Professional fees; Community stipends and fellowships; Equipment and storage costs; Mukurtu hosting/support costs.

Objective: Create a graphic novel and hold a community event to share out findings (June 2020 – August 2021). We will create a print- and web-based graphic novel, based on the oral histories, archives, and data we collect. The graphic novel will be rooted in material and knowledge gained from the documentation project to paint a dynamic picture of the Harvard Park neighborhood, showing how a community of marginalized people navigate conflict and violence to live full lives, drawing on their wisdom, survival strategies, and cultural heritage. We will also hold a community event to engage local residents in deeper discussion and analysis of the issues raised through this project. Financial resources: approximately $20,000.

Objective: Produce and print a limited run of 200 copies of the graphic novel for community residents who may lack easy access to or familiarity with computers and create a web version of the novel for broader access. Create a companion Educator Resource Guide. Resources needed: Design/layout costs; Print costs; Web development costs.

Objective: In partnership with school, university, and organizational partners hold a community event to discuss the issues raised by the oral histories, community archive, and the graphic novel. Resources needed: Honorariums for panel members; Event costs.

The activities involved in this project are ones that we have a long track record of effectively completing. This includes production of a graphic novel, *South Central Rhapsody*, funded by the Irvine Foundation, which told the stories of four high school students growing up in South LA during the 1980s, as a tool to engage people in understanding how conditions they face in their community are historically determined. We quickly ran out of the 1,000 copies we printed because of the strong demand from teachers and youth, and a local high school paid to reprint 2,500 copies in English and Spanish, making it required reading for the incoming 9th grade class.

The main risk we see to the project is the precariousness of the conditions that participants are living in. Being able to offer stipends will help greatly to mitigate this issue in terms of participation in project—if not actual living. We believe it is important to do this project now, as the neighborhood is

rapidly changing along with development projects that are slated for completion in the next five years, including a new Metro Expo line, renovation of the Coliseum sports arena, and construction of the new Lucas Museum of Narrative Art. The Library's primary strength is the relationships we have built over time to engage folks in a unique way built on trust, but as more and more people are pushed out, incarcerated, or killed, it will become increasingly difficult to tell the story of what this neighborhood has been.

We will measure our progress through a multistage process that relies on a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods and data sources to assess our progress on project outcomes. Our numerical standard for percentage of participants who must achieve identified outcomes for project success is 75 percent.

Project Outcomes

We will have succeeded with this project if we have:

1. Accurately and ethically documented community understandings of harm and violence, as well as practices of survival and living, in the Harvard Park neighborhood;

2. Effectively engaged local residents in a deeper understanding and analysis of their lived experiences in the context of community conditions;

3. Increased our capacity to conduct such documentation and engagement activities in accord with best practices and protocols.

To aid in the assessment of whether we have reached these goals, we have identified the following outputs and project outcomes, as well as how we plan to collect data to measure achievement of those outcomes.

Outputs/Indicators:

- 5–7 in-depth "walking" oral histories with community members, 30–60 minutes in length

- 25 on-site oral histories with community members, 15–20 minutes in length

- Transcriptions of selected interviews

- 3 community collection days

- Purchase of books, films, etc.

- Collection of donated material from community residents

- Finding aid informed by community input

- Digitization of selected donated items

- Digitized items and associated metadata available through Mukurtu

- 200 printed copies of graphic novel

- Website version of graphic novel

- Educator resource guide as a companion to the graphic novel
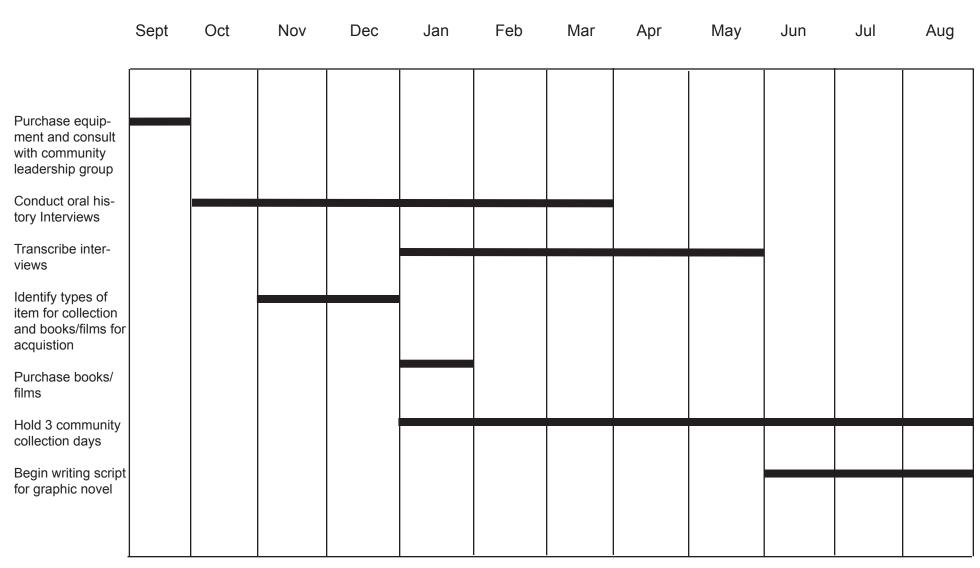
- Community event

Outcomes:

(1) Residents will strengthen their connection to community history, and their place within it.

(2) Residents, scholars, and policy-makers will have access to previously unavailable histories and perspectives, both digitally and at the Library.

(3) Young people and other residents will have increased capacity for civic participation through exposure to contemporary community issues and their historical context.

(4) Community residents will have increased access to books, films, etc. that reflect and situate their lived experiences.

(5) Residents, scholars, and policy-makers will gain a greater understanding of the neighborhood and have increased ability to understand and analyze community conditions.

(6) The Library will have increased capacity to conduct oral histories tied to place and connected with specific community conditions.

(7) The Library will gain experience and knowledge in creating community-informed finding aids.

(8) The Library will gain experience and knowledge in using open source platforms for community digitization projects.

(9) The Library will strengthen its relationships and place as an anchor institution within the community, building its capacity for future community projects.

Data Collection Methods:

• Signed oral history agreements

• Brief survey forms for selected community participants

• Documentation of oral history protocols and training

• Attendance records for events

• Receipts for all purchases

• Documentation of process to create finding aid

• Logs for on-site research use of materials

• Web statistics on access to digitized materials

• Documentation of process and training on using Mukurtu

• Distribution of printed copies of graphic novel

• Web statistics on access of online version of graphic novel and educator resource guide

• Staff self-reporting on changes in organizational capacity to prepare for programs that serve the community and ability to engage community

Southern California Library: South Los Angeles Documentation Project
Schedule of Completion

Year One: 2019/2020

Task	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Purchase equipment and consult with community leadership group	█											
Conduct oral history Interviews		█	█	█	█	█	█					
Transcribe interviews					█	█	█	█	█			
Identify types of item for collection and books/films for acquistion			█	█								
Purchase books/films					█							
Hold 3 community collection days					█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Begin writing script for graphic novel										█	█	█

Southern California Library: South Los Angeles Documentation Project
4. Schedule of Completion

Year Two: 2020/2021

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Finish script for graphic novel	███	███										
Process the collection and create finding aid	███	███	███	███	███							
Create art/lettering for graphic novel			███	███	███	███	███					
Produce/print graphic novel								███	███	███		
Create website for graphic novel								███	███	███		
Create Educator Resource Guide as companion to graphic novel			███	███	███							
Create metadata for curated items and upload to Mukurtu						███	███	███	███	███		
Hold community dialogue event										███		
Evaluation/ documentation activities											███	███