Preliminary Proposal: Evaluation Capacity Building for Data Librarians

The Califa Group, in partnership with the Colorado State Library, State Library of North Carolina[1], Rebecca Teasdale & Associates, LLC and consultant Linda Hofschire, will develop and test a professional development model to deepen public libraries' capacity to conduct rigorous evaluation of library programs and services. This project builds on IMLS investments in the Research Institute for Public Libraries (RIPL) by supporting the emerging role of "data librarians", public library staff who are dedicated to evaluation and data use activities.

Statement of Broad Need: Public libraries face increasing pressure to provide data-based evidence of their impact in order to demonstrate their worth and secure sufficient funding. RIPL has responded by initiating a culture shift in public libraries, training nearly 1,370 change agents between 2015 and 2018 who have returned to their libraries with the commitment and basic skills and tools to evaluate programs and services, identify opportunities to improve, and foster data-informed decision-making. This success is accompanied by a pressing need: data librarians/teams and their supervisors require support and enhanced capacity to ensure success. At each RIPL event, data librarians have requested more in-depth training about research methods, evaluation design, and use of evaluation findings. Their supervisors have raised questions about developing evaluation priorities and plans, structuring data librarian positions/teams, and providing data librarians/teams with ongoing training. Both groups have described the challenges they face cultivating buy-in in their libraries. To address these needs, we will engage data librarians/team members and their supervisors in a 10-month professional development process focused on building their capacity to conduct rigorous evaluation and cultivating staff buy-in. By providing in-depth training and coaching, we will develop participants' skills over an extended period of time and maximize the potential for lasting change in their libraries.

<u>Relevance to the Learning in Libraries Priority</u>: IMLS seeks to enhance libraries' ability to provide high-quality, cross-disciplinary, and inquiry-based learning opportunities for users of all ages. This project will build libraries' capacity to evaluate those innovative learning opportunities. Evaluation is essential to understand the quality and effectiveness of these learning opportunities, their relevance and value to the community, and the extent to which they advance equity. This project will help data librarians/teams and their supervisors build capacity to conduct this type of rigorous evaluation. The project will also result in a professional development model that can be used to build librarians' capacity in other areas, such as the design and implementation of innovative learning opportunities for library users.

Project Design: We will engage data librarians/teams and their supervisors in a cohort-based peer learning process that has proven successful in professional development initiatives for museum staff (e.g. the IMLS-funded Cultural Competence Learning Institute and NSF-funded One Sky Institute). Each year of the 3-year project, we will convene a cohort of five public libraries (two to four staff per library including at least one RIPL alumnus). Cohorts will be organized by region to seed an on-going learning community among participants. Cohort 1 will convene in California, Cohort 2 in North Carolina, and Cohort 3 in Colorado. These locations were selected because of their ongoing investments in building public librarians' capacities to conduct evaluation, and because they have large numbers of RIPL alumni working in a variety of public library settings (urban, suburban, small and/or rural), maximizing the possibilities for a wide range of libraries to participate.

Over a 10-month time frame, each library team in the cohort will design and implement a robust evaluation project that supports evidence-based decision making, builds evaluation capacity, and fosters buy-in in their library. To accomplish this, cohorts will receive in-depth training and coaching delivered through:
1. A day-and-a-half in-person kickoff training institute;
2. Eleven group coaching and training sessions (via video chat) on key evaluation topics and emerging needs: 5 for the full cohort, 3 for data librarians/team members, and 3 for supervisors;
3. One day of onsite coaching and training for each library team focused on their unique needs, including activities to cultivate buy-in among the broader library staff; and
4. Peer mentoring by project graduates to future cohorts (e.g., California cohort members may serve as mentors to the North Carolina cohort, etc.).

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[1] State Library of North Carolina participation is tentative, pending full approval.

National dissemination of projects and lessons learned will be accomplished via webinars and conference sessions by project graduates, the project director, and partners. Products developed for this project will be made freely available on the RIPL Community of Practice and Infopeople platforms.

Key Personnel and Partners: Paula MacKinnon, executive director of Califa, will serve as authorizing agent for the project. She will manage project finances and contractors, assist with recruitment and securing scholarships for the California cohort, and oversee dissemination through Infopeople. Linda Hofschire, Director of the Colorado State Library's Library Research Service and project director for the IMLS-funded project RIPL: The Second Wave, will serve as project director. She will manage development of the curriculum and materials, provide coaching and training to the cohorts, and oversee dissemination through the RIPL Community of Practice. She will serve as a contractor for curriculum development and when delivering instruction for the California and North Carolina cohorts. The Colorado State Library will provide her time in-kind for the Colorado cohort. Rebecca Teasdale, principal of Rebecca Teasdale & Associates, LLC, will serve as an instructor. She will participate in development of the curriculum and materials and provide coaching and training to the cohorts. The state library agency partners will assist with recruitment and securing scholarship funds for their respective cohorts. The Public Library Association (PLA), Association of Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL), Urban Libraries Council (ULC), and RIPL will serve as partners for dissemination.

Diversity Plan: This project will support diversity in public librarianship in three ways. First, the three regional cohorts will be located in different areas of the country to maximize the diversity of libraries and library staff who have the opportunity to participate. Second, all RIPL alumni in the selected regions will be invited to apply for the cohort. The project will be promoted through RIPL channels, partner organizations, the five ALA-affiliated associations of librarians of color, ARSL, and ULC. Third, partner organizations will secure scholarships for at least 25% of cohort libraries to support participation by small and/or rural libraries and libraries serving underserved populations.

Broad impact: Fifteen library teams (5 per year) will develop and implement a robust evaluation project that
1. Supports evidence-based decision-making related to a key library program or service;
2. Builds capacity of the library's data librarian/team to conduct rigorous evaluations;
3. Builds capacity of the participating supervisor to position and support the data librarian/team for success;
4. Fosters buy-in among library staff.

The project team and cohort members will also advance the broader culture shift toward evidence-based public library practice through:
1. Webinars, conference presentations, and/or discussions on community of practice threads led by cohort members via PLA, ARSL, ULC, and RIPL;
2. Peer mentoring in which project graduates provide support to future cohorts;
3. The creation of a resource, based on lessons learned across the 3 cohorts, on gaining staff buy-in and developing a workplace culture of evaluation for dissemination via preconferences, standalone trainings, and/or webinars, and
4. Dissemination of products developed for this project via multiple channels including the RIPL Community of Practice and Infopeople; and development of a sustainable professional development model for capacity building in public libraries.

We will engage an external evaluator to examine the quality, value, and impact of this project. Evaluation findings will inform the design and refinement of the professional development model and maximize its sustainability beyond IMLS funding. This evaluation will also serve as a teaching tool, since the majority of cohort members will likely be unfamiliar with the role, process, and contributions of external evaluation.

Estimated Budget: The estimated budget for this project is $800,000, and we request $400,000 in LB21 funding over three years. This includes $160,000 in instructor time to develop curriculum and materials; $60,000 in student support for kickoff institutes; $40,000 for external evaluation; $40,000 in indirect costs for grant administration; $35,000 in instructor expenses for kickoff institutes and in-person coaching and training; $35,000 for instructor time for kickoff institutes and online and in-person coaching and training; $30,000 in instructor and Infopeople time for dissemination. Cost sharing will include $200,000 in cohort libraries' staff time for participation, $150,000 in pro bono instructor time, and $50,000 in tuition paid by cohort libraries or through scholarship funds.