

BREAKING BARRIERS: NATIONAL FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF BLACK LIBRARIANSHIP

Black Caucus of the American Library Association

2019 IMLS LB21 National Forum Grant Pre-proposal

PURPOSE: To commemorate the [Black Caucus of the American Library Association](#)'s 50th anniversary, a Working Group is proposing to host the "Breaking Barriers: The Future of Black librarianship" National Forum, a one-day pre-conference event to strengthen support for Black/African American MLIS students. Funding from IMLS in the amount of \$50,000 under the LB21 National Forum category will allow up to 45 LIS students, professionals, and educators to convene to distill approaches for increasing BCALA's outreach to emerging librarians. The forum will precede the 2020 National Conference for African American Librarians (NCAAL), the theme of which is "Inspired by our Past, Igniting our Future" and will culminate in 1.) the design of a toolkit of resources for librarians and educators to recruit Black/African American librarians and 2.) the launch of an online, program-independent iBlackCaucus student group.

HISTORY: BCALA was established in 1970 at the urging of E.J. Josey, an activist librarian who, among other activities, addressed the concerns of Black librarians. A 501(c)3 non-profit, BCALA became affiliated with ALA in 1992. BCALA serves as an advocate for the development, promotion, and improvement of library services and resources to the nation's African American community. It also provides leadership for the recruitment and professional development of African American librarians. BCALA is the oldest of the five ethnic affiliates of the American Library Association. In its 49-year history, the caucus has served as a conscience for the library profession, speaking out on issues that affect librarians and communities of color. For example, BCALA recently spearheaded [a joint-statement among all ethnic caucuses](#) that decried the increase in racial violence and abuse in U.S. communities.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: There is a need for community-building along with culturally-relevant recruitment tools and pedagogy to engage with Black/African American MLIS students. This limitation is captured in BCALA's current 2020 Strategic Plan:

- a. GOAL 5: BCALA provides an environment, experiences, and opportunities for new and existing members.
 - i. Key Strategy: Continuously expand BCALA activities such as programs, publications, and events to meet the needs of a growing and diverse membership
 - ii. Key Strategy: Partner with other professional organizations and organizations/institutions to actively promote librarianship among Blacks and/or African Americans

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: The *Breaking Barriers* Working Group conducted a Needs Assessment to establish coherent goals. From this assessment, it was apparent that launching iBlackCaucus and designing resources would require collective deliberation and external support. Several factors - for instance, the largely solitary and distance-learning nature of LIS education - have resulted in fewer affinity student groups across MLIS programs¹. Peer or near-peer socializing supports librarian professionalization. For example, Dow² found that social presence and interactivity are predictors of LIS student satisfaction. In their extensive work on LIS student experiences and motivations, Caidi and Dali³ suggest that "people-related factors" such as "sense of community, inclusivity and community" greatly influenced LIS students outcomes. Creating "robust networks of educational resources and technological platforms" is one of their recommendations.

In addition, the shift in LIS education from the on-campus template to a largely distance-learning model means that student involvement must also change.⁴ Online student organizations can bolster connections that can last beyond their graduate study. For instance, Al-Daihani's study⁵ on the use of social media by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee LIS students indicate that social networking is favorable for student professional growth and social inclusion. Examples of non-traditional, technology-enhanced LIS student organizations include the University of Maryland's iDiversity student group.⁶

BCALA can replicate the online student organization model. Results from the BCALA Comprehensive Membership Report point to several gaps pertaining to meeting student members' needs. The survey was disseminated among BCALA members between in 2018. Of the 248 respondents, 12.93% (n=30) student members. This segment represents .05% of all current BCALA members (N=600). Student members indicated that they joined BCALA for the following reasons: to advance my career (53.3%; n=16); to find a mentor (43.3%; n=13); to network and build relationships with other African American librarians (83.3%; n=25); and to stay abreast of information about the profession (63%; n=18). Current BCALA student members indicated that they are interested in training on: leadership (86%; n=26); mentoring/coaching (83%; n=25); programming (86%; n=26); community outreach (90%;

¹ Ndumu, A., & Betts-Green, C. (2018). First Impressions: A Review of Diversity-related Content on North American LIS Program Websites. *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (IJIDI)*, 2(3).

² Dali, K., & Caidi, N. (2017). Diversity by design. *The Library Quarterly*, 87(2), 88-98.

³ Dow, M. J. (2008). Implications of social presence for online learning: A case study of MLIS students. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 231-242.

⁴ Dare, L. A., Zapata, L. P., & Thomas, A. G. (2005). Assessing the needs of distance learners: A student affairs perspective. *New Directions for student services*, 2005(112).

⁵ Al-Daihani, S. (2009). The knowledge of Web 2.0 by library and information science academics. *Education for Information*, 27(1), 39-55.

⁶ Jardine, F. M., & Zerhusen, E. K. (2015). Charting the Course of Equity and Inclusion in LIS through iDiversity. *The Library Quarterly*, 85(2), 185-192.

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n=27); and advocacy (93%; n=28). Open-ended responses on the types of events/programs that student members would like for BCALA to host in the future include: "Events for new librarians/library school students"; "New student fellowships and welcoming activities"; "Professional webinar/how to get more involved"; "Events for young, aspiring Black librarians such as myself"; "Mixers, e-workshops, networking seminars". Student responses reify what has been established through literature: in the 21st century LIS education context, emerging librarians seek virtual and community-based professional involvement that supports social justice, personal development, networking, and broader awareness of trends in our field.

PLAN OF ACTION:

Guiding question: How can BCALA better serve current LIS students of color? Our strategy is to:

Objective 1: Assess the needs of students of color enrolled in MLIS programs

Activity 1: Prior to the forum, MLIS students of color across the U.S. will be surveyed on their educational and professional needs

Objective 2: Explore best practices for national, virtual student group

Activity 2: The forum will consist of about 25 students, 10 librarians, 5 professors, 3 committee members, and 2 speakers. In the first half of the forum, participants will synthesize ideas for a sustainable, online and program-independent student group.

Guiding question: How can BCALA support the recruitment and training of LIS students of color? Our strategy is to:

Objective 3: Provide freely-accessible guidelines for LIS educators

Activity 3: Prior to the forum, participants will crowd-source evidence-based resources for educating LIS students of color

Objective 4: Provide freely-accessible recruitment tools for librarians

Activity 4: In part two of the forum, participants will share ideas for designing high-quality digital material (i.e., flyers, brochures, video) for recruiting students to the LIS profession

Desired Aim: As a result of the forum, we will accomplish the following:

Outcome 1: Participants will contribute toward the development of iBlackCaucus, a national, virtual student group

Deliverable 1: Launch iBlackCaucus portal that will contain student resources and a calendar of activities

Outcome 2: Participants will contribute toward educational resources and recruitment material to recruit Black MLIS students

Deliverable 2: Launch a toolkit for LIS professionals and educators, which will be a subsection of the iBlackCaucus portal

POTENTIAL PROGRAM ITINERARY:

9:00 am - Welcome

9:30 am - Introductions

9:45 am - Keynote 1: TBA

11:00 am - Design Workshop: "Envisioning iBCALA"

12:00 pm - Panel/Working Lunch

1:15 pm - Keynote 2: TBA

2:15 pm - Design Workshop: "Attracting and training Black librarians"

4:00 pm - Concluding Thoughts

4:30 pm - Adjournment

BUDGET: The requested IMLS funds of \$50,000 will support a \$600 travel stipend for up to 45 participants (\$27,000); forum function expenses (\$5,000) and materials (\$1,000); website/graphic design consultant (\$6,000); keynote speaker honorariums (\$1,000) and travel/accommodations (\$1,000); \$500 Working Group and Advisory Board stipend (\$4000), and our organization's Direct Rate of (10%)=\$5,000.

IMPACT & DIVERSITY PLAN: BCALA champions equity, diversity, and inclusion. This project not only furthers our mission of advocating for the development, promotion, and improvement of library services and resources to the nation's African American or Black community. It also furthers IMLS's recommendations of 1.) going where the diversity is; 2.) rebranding for community-based librarianship; and 3.) building relationships between practitioners and educators.⁷

WORKING COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS: The Working Committee is co-chaired by [Dr. Ana Ndumu](#) (University of Maryland, College Park iSchool; BCALA Executive Board member); [Dr. Shaundra Walker](#) (Director & Professor, Georgia College Russell Library & BCALA Executive Director); and [Jina Duvernay](#) (Visiting Archivist for African American Collections, Emory University Rose Library & BCALA Executive Board member).

⁷ Sands, A.E.; Toro, S.; DeVoe, T., Fuller, S., & Wolff-Eisenberg, C. (2018). *Positioning library and information science graduate programs for 21st century practice*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Museum and Library Services.