Wonder Media: A Public Library Professional Development & Outreach Project focused on Media and News Literacy

Project Justification: In response to the urgent need for media literacy and news literacy, Western Michigan University (WMU) in collaboration with the Library of Michigan (LM) respectfully requests $138,166 for a two-year Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Planning Grant to create and pilot professional development curriculum, and library programming, for the public library workforce. This collaborative project offers youth public library staff training and professional development (PD) in media literacy and news literacy through a unique digital asset designed for middle schoolers. Our project team will design a professional development (PD) program that addresses the need for education in these literacies. In a unique benefit of this project, the PD is organized around a digital asset designed for middle school library use, called *Wonder Media,* which has received positive evaluation and has proven effectiveness in pre-/post-test assessments. The digital iteration of *Wonder Media* will be **co-created with public library staff** (the project Target Group) from pre-digitization phase through application in communities, followed by adjustments and improvements as needed before offering the extension to other libraries. Examples of the exhibition content can be found at https://bit.ly/WonderMedia1 and https://bit.ly/WonderMedia2. After participating in the 1 ½-day in-person workshop on media literacy and news literacy training, the public library cohort will work closely with the interdisciplinary project team to enhance the professional development curriculum and co-create library programming for middle schoolers. To build this team of co-creators, who are on the frontlines of dispelling misinformation and championing critical consumption of information to the public, the project team has recruited participants from six public libraries throughout the state of Michigan to inform the design, testing and implementation of media literacy and news literacy PD and programming. Although currently focused on Michigan libraries, **the adaptable training modules, resources and programming derived from the Planning Grant will be available nationwide in future phases.**

Media literacy education is urgently needed. The United States is challenged by rampant disinformation and misinformation that threatens our democracy. The ability to determine the credibility of news and other information, as well as recognizing the standards of fact-based journalism in determining what to trust, share and act on, is essential to developing and maintaining an informed citizenry (News Literacy Project, 2023). This ability is **news literacy** and it is a skillset that must be taught. Equally vital to a society that is inclusive and equitable is **media literacy**, which is the ability to access, assess, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms (Center for Media Literacy, 2022). A September 2022 survey by Media Literacy Now, a nonprofit group that advocates for teaching media literacy skills in schools, reported nearly half of adults ages 19 to 81 did not learn media literacy skills in high school. When asked, "In high school, did you have an opportunity in class to reflect on media messages, such as advertising or on TV programs, & how they might affect people's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, or actions?" only 38% of the adults surveyed said yes (Media Literacy Now, 2022). The survey, conducted in partnership with a Reboot Foundation study (2022) on belief in conspiracy theories, also found that the respondents who said they had participated in media literacy education in high school were among the *least* likely to believe in conspiracy theories. "Participants who reported having studied critical thinking activities and media literacy while in school were 26 percent less likely to believe in a conspiracy." In a Media Literacy Now survey (2023), a significant majority of the people – 84% – said they are in favor of state policies that require schools to teach media literacy skills. Half of the adults in the U.S. get at least some of their news from social media, and about one-third regularly do from Facebook (Pew, 2022).

Our project fulfills the **LB21 Program Goal 3 – to enhance the training and professional development of the library and archival workforce to meet the needs of their communities.** In particular, the project objectives include: Objective 3.3: Create and/or refine training programs to build library and archival workforce skills and expertise in developing engaging lifelong learning opportunities, fostering attitudes of discovery, cultivating critical and creative thinking skills, and facilitating experiential and self-directed learning opportunities for all; and Objective 3.4: Support training of the library and archival workforce to advance digital inclusion for the benefit of community members through an interactive online educational resource focused on media literacy and news literacy. To obtain these objectives and fulfill the mission of the LB21 Program, the specific goals of this project are to: 1.) develop a media literacy and news literacy curriculum to train public library staff to increase confidence and knowledge in media literacy and news literacy skills and processing,

1   *Narrative*

specifically as it relates to serving tweens and teens; 2.) work with diverse library staff to co-create an online version of a successful 14-element media literacy and news literacy museum exhibition and develop programming for use of the asset in youth library services; 3.) develop a scalable model with the goal of a national rollout for library staff PD focused on middle school-age students utilizing this digital asset.

Wonder Media as a Library Extension. This project would capitalize on the planning, design, formatting, fabrication, testing and execution that has already occurred for the museum exhibition, which has resulted in an overwhelmingly positive impact as evidenced by a five-pronged assessment protocol approved by WMU's research office. A public school teacher offered this comment on a survey: *"Excellent, intelligent, eye-catching and compelling exhibit! Can't wait to bring more young people here."* See **Appendix B** for details on the exhibition assessment. *Wonder Media: Ask the Questions!* was created by a robust team (see **Appendix A** for a list of exhibition design and advisory team members) and beta tested with 31 middle school students from a variety of economic, racial/ethnic and social backgrounds in Michigan. The initial museum exhibition was informed by the latest scholarship in the areas of media literacy and news literacy (two distinct academic fields that for lay people are often seen as blending or co-occurring), a national team of media literacy and news literacy experts, faculty in education and technology, middle school educators and middle school students. The project as a Planning Grant would allow access to all the components of the exhibition, which has proven to be effective in communicating media literacy and news literacy concepts and skills to a middle school audience through gamification, play, critical questions and popular media. Examples of the exhibition content can be found at https://bit.ly/WonderMedia1 and https://bit.ly/WonderMedia2.

Careful attention was given to ethnic and racial diversity in character appearance, roles and voice overs. Content that addresses media representation of people of color, LGBTQ+, and people with mental disabilities is included in the exhibit, as are invitations to consider the hegemony of media conglomerate leaders on media content. Reflection stations in which users write or draw on provided cards have generated more than 1,500 contributions about media representation, media ownership and media narratives. The digital iteration of *Wonder Media* will be informed by the input of our Target Group from pre-digitization phase through application in communities, followed by adjustments and improvements as needed before offering the extension to other libraries.

Public Library Partners. **With an eye to diversity, inclusivity, and equitable access to information, the Michigan libraries cohort members represent a wide-range of populations served and geographic areas throughout the state.** More about the cohort is offered below in the Diversity Plan section. While the Target Group of this project is public librarians, the direct beneficiaries of the work will be the library patrons of middle school age and older with whom they interface. According to the Common Sense Media Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens (Rideout et al, 2022), media use among tweens continues to increase. Between 2019 and 2021, the total amount of daily screen media use rose from 4:44 to 5:33 among tweens, and to 8:39 from 7:22 among teens. Thirty-eight percent of tweens have used social media (up from 31% in 2019), and nearly one in five (18%) now say they use social media "every day" (up 5 percentage points since 2019). On average, teens spend 1:27 a day using social media, up from 1:10 in 2019. Among the social media platforms preferred by teens, a Pew study found that YouTube is used by 95% of teens with 67% using TikTok, followed by Instagram and Snapchat, which are both used by about six-in-ten teens (Vogels et al, 2022). Researchers indicate that misinformation spreads quickly and effectively on social media platforms, notably YouTube and TikTok (Milmo, 2022; Alonso López et al, 2021). **The sequence of increasing media use by tweens and teens, notably social media use, coupled with the dissemination of misinformation through these social networks, means that youth library staff have an essential role to play in building critical thinking skills regarding media use and content.**

Additionally, the Common Sense Media census (Rideout et al, 2022) indicated Black and Hispanic/Latino children use more screen media than their white peers (for example, a difference of about two hours (1:57) a day between Black and white tweens and two and a half hours (2:31) a day between Hispanic/Latino and white tweens). Tweens and teens from lower-income families engage with substantially more screen media than their peers from higher-income households (a difference of 3:11 a day among tweens and 2:03 among teens). Compounding the statistics gathered by Common Sense Media, the IMLS-funded project "SLIDE: School Librarians Investigation–Decline or Evolution?" found that there was a clear equity issue when it came to access to school libraries/librarians. During the 2018-19 school year, 7.5 million

students were without school librarians . . . over 64% of those students lived in a majority non-white geographic area with a 58.7% rate of poverty (Kachel & Lance, 2021).

Broad Need: Media usage, and access to media devices, has grown exponentially among all U.S. residents, including middle school students (Rideout et al, 2022). Tweens and young teens rely on media for social connection, education, entertainment and information. Despite the increasing and ubiquitous use of media, the vast majority of U.S. public school districts do not mandate media literacy and news literacy in their curricula (McNeill, 2023). Informal learning spaces such as libraries and museums are natural places to fill this gap in knowledge and skill-building in media literacy and news literacy. The Knight Commission's 2009 report, "Information Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age," asserted that media and digital literacy education is essential to citizenship. One of the Knight Commission recommendations included: "Fund and support public libraries and other community institutions as centers of digital and media training" (Hobbs, 2010, p. 16), "Librarians often model critical thinking skills in finding and evaluating information" (Hobbs, 2010, p. 22).

As Hobbs notes, libraries typically provide one-on-one support to patrons; "this is the most personalized and effective form of education" (2010, p. 22). Recognizing the critical need for professional development in media literacy for public librarians to best serve their changing patronage, the American Library Association (ALA) launched the *Media Literacy @ Your Library* campaign. Five public libraries attended a one-day training in Chicago in 2017 taught by the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University; the training was intended to teach librarians how to teach their adult patrons to be critical and responsible new consumers. Additionally, the ALA in 2020 released a digital guide and webinar series to help library staff "meet patrons where they are" by integrating media literacy into reference interactions and existing programs (Calvert, 2020, p. 4).

Social Media and Misinformation. Moreover, media consumers, including young people, often place trust in the information they get from social media. A 2022 Pew Research Center survey found that half of 18- to 29-year-olds in the U.S. say they have "some" or "a lot of trust" in the information they get from social media sites, while about 56% indicate that same trust regarding information from national news organizations (Liedke & Gottfried, 2022). Belief in conspiracy theories about topics as varied as the moon landing in 1969, whether the earth is flat, the assassination of JFK, the COVID-19 vaccine's safety and the legality of the 2016 election persist in our society. For example, 25% of respondents in a study of 541 adults in the U.S. said it was certainly true or probably true that "COVID-19 is a biological weapon released intentionally by China" (Reboot, 2022). **Most critically, the belief in disinformation and misinformation has real-life consequences.** More than three quarters (78%) of U.S. adults either believe or aren't sure about at least one of eight false statements about the COVID-19 pandemic or COVID-19 vaccines, a Kaiser Family Foundation COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor report shows (Hamel et al, 2021).

The Brennan Center for Justice, an independent, nonpartisan law and policy organization, recommends that *community-based organizations in part "provide accurate election information and tools to identify misinformation to community constituencies in preferred languages and formats" and "develop partnerships with trusted messengers to ensure community education efforts travel further"* (Panditharatne et al, 2022, "Key Recommendations"). Additionally, the organization recommends that members of the public "learn how to recognize online misinformation and build news literacy." This project seeks to advance these recommendations, which are echoed by numerous other non-partisan, non-profit entities in the U.S. and globally (e.g. The American Library Association, states such as Washington, Connecticut, Rhode Island and others, The Council of Europe). Our project approach directly fulfills the Brennan Center's call for "tools to identify misinformation to community constituencies" by creating a website and programming to help youth recognize online misinformation and build news literacy. Further, the project partners with public library staff to offer them critical education in media mentorship such that as a community-based organization, public libraries are equipped to address the challenges of misinformation.

The news literacy and media literacy knowledge and skills taught through public library staff in this project are especially critical for middle school youth to learn due to the rising media consumption at this age, coupled with a deficit of school-mandated media literacy curricula and a severe lack of in-school librarians. As the statistics above

show, for tweens (ages 8 -12) and teens (13-18), smartphone use and screen time are increasing every year, with online videos and social media among their leading forms of entertainment. The middle school age range is the time to intervene with media literacy and news literacy programming, as this is the time in life that youth media use is escalating most precipitously. Youth are not consistently taught media literacy and news literacy in formal educational settings; only a few states require some kind of media literacy education in public schools. Just 18 states address media literacy in some way in education law, according to Media Literacy Now (2023). States do this either by requiring schools teach the subject, and allowing media literacy courses to count toward certain requirements, making resources available to teachers, or developing a media literacy committee.

Loss of School Librarians. This project is an important outreach area for public libraries as school library media specialists are not widespread in Michigan. **The public library is the most obvious resource to fill this gap, since the vast majority of schools in Michigan do <u>not</u> have school librarians.** In 2021-2022, out of over 3,800 instructional buildings, there were only 490 schools with a school librarian on staff at least half time (Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2021). This is not a problem unique to Michigan, nationwide there has been a steady decrease in school librarians/media specialists. According to the IMLS funded "SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation–Decline or Evolution?" in the 2018-19 school year, 3 out of 10 school districts reported having no school librarians. (SLIDE Perspectives on School Librarian Employment, pg, 83). Furthermore, the average reading level for more than half of Americans is at the 6th grade level, according to a report from the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy (Rothwell, 2020). Gearing the materials in this project to a middle school audience makes the content accessible for whole families, including adults who do not have the opportunity to learn media literacy and news literacy in school settings.

The need for media literacy and news literacy for tweens and teens is evident in research findings, and has long been on the radar of public librarians as a place for service and programming. High schoolers participating in a Stanford University study struggled to distinguish "fake news" from real news (Breakstone et al, 2019). In the study, of the 3,446 students in grades 9-12 who completed six tasks in critical evaluation, 90% failed four of the six tasks. For example, according to the report, "two-thirds of students couldn't tell the difference between news stories and ads (set off by the words "Sponsored Content") on Slate's homepage. Ninety-six percent of students did not consider why ties between a climate change website and the fossil fuel industry might lessen that website's credibility." More generally, the lack of critical thinking regarding news and information is pervasive and concerning. For example, a 2018 Pew Research Study of more than 5,000 adults found that only 26% of adults correctly classified a factual statement and only 35% an opinion statement (Mitchell et al, 2018). The ability to correctly classify statements as fact or opinion varied widely. Respondents with high political awareness who are digitally savvy and who place high levels of trust in the news media were most able to accurately identify news-related statements as factual or opinion, the study found. **These examples, and more, illustrate the critical importance of news literacy and media literacy knowledge and skills among the general public - a need that could naturally be met by public libraries and their staff.**

<u>**Public Librarians as Access Points for Media Literacy and News Literacy:**</u> This project will address the broad need to support public library staff with the knowledge and skills in media literacy and news literacy, which they in turn can provide to middle school youth in the library setting. This project builds upon previous IMLS-funded grant work in libraries through the Technology in Early Childhood Center at Erikson Institute (RE-250096-OLS-21), which aimed to increase "librarians' knowledge of and confidence in supporting children's and families' media literacy skills" and to develop "a scalable model of librarian PD focused on media literacy in early childhood" (Supporting 21st Century Librarians: Media Literacy Professional Development for Youth Librarians, 2021, p. 1). Another IMLS funded project, the University of Wisconsin-Madison's "Navigating Screens" (LG-96-17-0220-17) developed training modules to aid public librarians to work with the parents/caregivers of 5-11 year olds to develop digital literacy and media mentorship skills to implement in their families (Navigating Screens: Libraries as Community Hubs for Teaching Positive Screen Media Practices, 2017, pg.1). The output of both these initiatives have focused on creating PD and resources for library staff to aid in educating the whole family about media literacy, while emphasizing the important role caretakers have in media mentorship. This project is unique in its offering in two ways: First, it focuses on middle school age learners, and secondly, it provides library staff with the vehicle by and through which to mentor youth. The project offers PD as well as

the toolkit to implement that PD learning within the library space. Accounting for the growing digital independence tweens/teens that oftentimes enjoy, *Wonder Media* will help public librarians to develop the skills and programming needed to assist the 10+ age group in independently navigating online media with critical consciousness.

Library Staff Provide Key Context. Public library staff are on the frontlines of today's modern information warfare. As the bulwark of fact-based information and resources in communities nationwide, public library staff would benefit from targeted professional development and training in the knowledge and skills of news literacy and media literacy. Attuned to the complete immersion in digital media culture in the U.S., libraries in the 21st century continue to evolve and adapt in a media-saturated world that derives meaning about cultures, peoples and lifestyles from media representation. Through *Wonder Media* curriculum and programming, frontline public library staff will be equipped to serve their community members in the development of critical media autonomy. Critical autonomy in one's media use promotes intentional, thoughtful consumption as a lifelong skill (Aufderheide, 1997).

The Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study found that more than 62 percent of libraries report offering the only free Internet access in their community (ALA, 2012). As noted by the 2014 Digital Inclusion Survey Report by the ALA: "Over the last twenty years of Public Libraries and Internet research, libraries have constantly evolved in tandem with advances in technology. Just as libraries offered word processing software before personal computers were commonplace in homes and offered many people their first chance to try the Internet, public libraries now enable patrons to explore e-readers, tablets and maker spaces." (ALA, 2014). **As a space to connect youth to media devices and the Internet, public libraries are well positioned to offer media literacy and news literacy mentorship as well.**

Libraries as Informal Learning Spaces. The informal learning space of a library offers a rich opportunity for communicating these literacies (e.g., Hobbs & Coiro, 2018; Tripp, 2011). One of the most notable examples of media literacy PD for school library staff is being offered by Project Look Sharp, which is collaborating with school libraries K-12 in New York State on the ML3: Librarians as Leaders for Media Literacy (2023). The Project Look Sharp curriculum director, Chris Sperry, served on the Advisory Board for the *Wonder Media: Ask the Questions!* exhibition design and implementation. However, as a study of libraries nationwide found, the most significant challenge cited by respondents in not developing or continuing media literacy initiatives was due to a lack of staff time (Lapierre & Kitzie, 2019). **This finding underscores the importance of delivering media literacy and news literacy PD in such a way as to allow flexibility and minimal strain on staff time, the researchers noted, as well as offering programming to tween library users.** "A key theme emerging from qualitative responses was passive programming, which can enable the library to reach many customers with a lower investment of staff time" (Lapierre & Kitzie, 2019, p. 445). This project would address this need where people live, as recommended by a U.S. State Department-commissioned report on a national rollout of media literacy education using trusted, established local entities such as public libraries (Social Impact, 2022). The report stated: "The national reach offered by library networks can potentially provide easily accessible, face-to-face support offered by trusted intermediaries to a broad range of citizens with a good multiplier effect," states the report (p. 18). "Once a robust training and professional development program is in place for librarians, it should be relatively straightforward for new ML modules to be rolled out in response to emerging issues, increasing the long-term sustainability of the program." With *Wonder Media,* libraries will be equipped with not only the knowledge of facilitating media literacy and news literacy lessons, but also the tools with which to implement engaging, age-appropriate programming.

Target Group and Project Beneficiaries: The project's target group consists of staff at public libraries throughout Michigan. **This project will directly involve up to 12 library staff members at 6 different public libraries strategically recruited to reflect a diverse range of library locations (urban, suburban and rural), service area size, operating budgets, staff capacity and staff sizes.** Also among the Target Group participants are a school media specialist and a youth services coordinator, from the Maryland State Library. We considered staff time and library capacity to engage in this two-year project, and will be compensating the participating libraries with an honorarium.

The Target Group participants will undergo training in media literacy and news literacy education for middle schoolers in order to develop professional skills and confidence in this area. Library staff will have the option to inform their

respective colleagues on the key principles and concepts that they learned via in-house professional development opportunities. The PD materials will focus on acquisition of skills and knowledge such as: reverse image searches, identifying deep fake technology, recognizing manipulated content, evaluating information sources, sorting fact vs. opinion, why conspiracy theories persist, the history of media inventions, the consolidation of media ownership and its impact on content diversity, and engendering an attitude of inquiry about media and news/information.

The primary beneficiaries are youth in middle school because it is a time in life when many young people have more personal freedom, their own smartphones, and less constant oversight by parents or guardians. The project's content is aimed intellectually and developmentally at the average reading level of the majority of Americans (Rothwell, 2020). The content meets the Common Core Curriculum state standards for 7th grade social studies. Increasingly, schools do not have dedicated librarians, as noted earlier. This project, then, serves to fill a gap in many students' educational experience. Additionally, beneficiaries include entire families and community members, as the project's content is appealing and applicable to age 11 *and older*. A major innovation of this current project is its mode and place of delivery; interactive educational games, informative videos, creative design activities and critical thinking activities are offered in digital and analog forms through Michigan public libraries, for use by a variety of ages dependent on library programming. As all libraries have digital access via public computers, the core curriculum of this intervention will be available to all users at all times, should respective libraries choose. The digital products will be open and accessible as they are equipped with closed captioning for hearing impaired users as well as audio narration for visually impaired users. Further increasing accessibility are dual levels on many of the games, basic and advanced, to accommodate different learners.

PD Training Elements: Particularly exciting for our project is that the active learning, and the opportunities for collaboration and for reflection are integrated into the *Wonder Media* exhibition components, therefore providing a rich foundation for the Target Group library staff engagement and grounding key concepts. Our goal is to create a PD program that welcomes inquiry and questioning, constructive input and feedback, and collaborative creation of library-centric content. The 2015 ALSC White Paper, among others, recommends that **library staff serve as media mentors** to support youth and family development in media use and decisions (Campbell et al, 2015). Our PD would serve to develop confidence in knowledge to perform this needed role as media mentors in our communities. For a specific listing of *Wonder Media* elements incorporated into the PD, see **Appendix C**.

Our project's PD would build upon existing public library materials on media literacy PD for libraries, including online trainings and practitioners' guides. Our training will utilize some content in the ALA's "Media Literacy in the Library: A Guide for Library Practitioners" (2020). Specifically, we will use the terms given on pg. 7 to remain consistent with library terminology in this area. We will also utilize the guide's ideas for particular library programming (pgs. 6, 18 and 21) and evaluation ideas (pgs. 26-28). In terms of *tone and approach* of the PD, we will draw upon the lessons learned from the University of Rhode Island's Summer Institute in Digital Literacy (SIDL), led by media literacy and digital literacy scholar Renee Hobbs. The SIDL model encourages participants to consider their own personal motivations for learning the skills of media literacy and news literacy, and to engage in collaborative and inquiry-centered learning. "For educators to develop competencies in teaching digital literacy, they must first experience this process as learners themselves" (Hobbs & Coiro, 2018, p. 407).

Building on Existing Theory and Practice: This project is based upon existing theory and scholarship in media literacy and news literacy. The foundational principles of the scholarship from which the PD would be rooted in the Center for Media Literacy's five key questions and five key concepts (2023). Media literacy prompts users to not simply accept information on websites or in media as valid, but instead to question the key concepts of authorship, purpose, message construction and representation of people, places, ideas and cultures. The news literacy framework is based on the News Literacy Project's Five Primary Standards (2022) that include knowledge, skills and mindset to assess information, understand honest news gathering processes, identify disinformation and develop responsible online sharing. **An important truth at the heart of the project's PD is to convey to library staff that they do not need to tell library users *what* to think, but instead *how* to think about media, news and information.** Critical thinking and a skeptical mindset are both essential skills in lifelong learning in media and news literacies.

Each of the elements of the PD are rooted in peer-reviewed scholarship. The project training follows the framing by Maksl et al (2017) and Fleming (2014) of creating a "demand for quality journalism by cultivating the ability to recognize quality" (Maksl et al, p. 6). It also adheres to the guidance by Tully et al (2022) of measurement of news literacy knowledge and skills around the creation, content and consumption of news. The PD training is in keeping with the inclusive nature of Mihailidis et al (2021) and De Abreu (2019) to consider how media literacy educational efforts interrogate equity and justice issues. It also takes up the charge in Mason, Krutka, & Stoddard (2018) for contemporary media literacy education efforts to task learners with examining their own media use and how it shapes their worldview. The entire project focuses on development of critical thinking and use of Socratic questioning to learn to assess and evaluate information and media messages as demonstrated in lessons and plans in De Abreu's resource for school and public librarians (2019). For instance, McKernan et al recently (2023) demonstrated that an emphasis on critical thinking as opposed to relying solely on presenting information that counters a conspiracy theory is an effective technique.

Project Work Plan: This project will create a dynamic online PD and training for public library staff that focuses on media literacy and news literacy content aimed at the middle school age. The project capitalizes on an existing and well-received museum exhibition called *Wonder Media: Ask the Questions!* that was created by an interdisciplinary team with diverse expertise. Half of the 14 elements in the exhibition *are already website-ready* and need only to be converted to use on a personal computer or tablet, per library needs. This grant would allow the complete conversion of the project to the website to offer *the full interactive experience* to youth in library spaces. **The project goal is to partner with the Target Group library staff to inform the approach used in the PD materials of learning modules that feature text, examples and short videos for training purposes. Additionally, Target Group members will co-create the library programming materials that complement and extend the *Wonder Media* website.**

Project Budget. The budget for the project reflects the two-pronged approach to a media literacy and news literacy project focused on the middle school age that results in a Wonder Media Library Extension Project toolkit for public libraries. The toolkit is an out-of-the-box resource. It includes library training materials, both online and analog, a ready-to-use *Escape the Fake* news literacy game for use in library programming as well as templates for other library programming initiatives such as bulletin boards, activity sheets, reflection cards and outreach postcards. Major expenses include: Approximately $35,000 for an accessible, easy-to-navigate website for use in public libraries for both PD (password protected) and for teen and tween use. Approximately $7,000 will fund the co-creation of a Wonder Media Library Extension Project toolkit for public libraries. A $7,000 stipend for Target Group participants and approximately $3,400 to travel/lodging for public library staff partners completes the non-salary/fringe portion of the budget request.

Interdisciplinary Project Team. Our team is assembled based on individual team member skill sets and network.
* The PI is <u>Amy Bocko</u>, Associate Professor and Digital Projects Librarian with experience in managing interdisciplinary grants and cross-institutional partnerships. Prof. Bocko will oversee the entire project's many moving parts, ensuring the move of *Wonder Media* to digital is accomplished efficiently, the library staff PD is on track, collecting evaluation data and strategizing our work to maximize a rollout to a national audience. Prof. Bocko, as PI, will oversee the project management across the library staff, educator advisors and digital designers.
* A Project Team Co-Leader is <u>Sue Ellen Christian</u>, the WMU Presidential Innovation Professor in Communication '21-'24 for her work in bringing media literacy into community spaces such as the *Wonder Media* exhibition. Prof. Christian will oversee the move of the museum exhibition to a digital and analog format usable for public library spaces. Prof. Christian will design the new digital elements, update examples and tech tool tips as needed. She is a former Chicago *Tribune* staff writer who continues to work with a local journalism collaborative; she brings contemporary knowledge of news and news literacy to the project. Prof. Christian will co-facilitate the PD and the development of training modules and content; Christian was named Professor of the Year by the Michigan Association of State Universities (2016) for her work bringing higher education learning into experiential community spaces.
* A Project Team Co-Leader is <u>Cathy Lancaster</u>, MLIS, the Youth Services Coordinator at the Library of Michigan, who has organized and facilitated PD workshops with librarians across Michigan for seven years. It is fitting that Ms. Lancaster will co-facilitate the PD and the development of training modules and content. With nearly 20 years of public library service, Ms. Lancaster will also guide the bimonthly check-ins with the project Target Group cohort and co-create the activities for library programming. Ms. Lancaster will be the liaison for library staff partners (Target Group members).

She will also join Dr. Pitts (below) in the analysis of evaluative data on the project in terms of the Target Group and Project Beneficiaries.

* Project Consultant contributing expertise on assessment and on educational programming for middle school library users is Dr. Brianne Pitts, Assistant Professor of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies at WMU, whose speciality is diversity and inclusion in K-8 grades. Dr. Pitts will create training materials for library professionals that carefully consider the intended audience of middle schoolers. She will consult on the educational elements being transitioned to the website and co-create with library staff and Ms. Lancaster the analog program materials for library use. Given her research background, Dr. Pitts will also advise on the measurement tools for project assessment.

Project Workflow
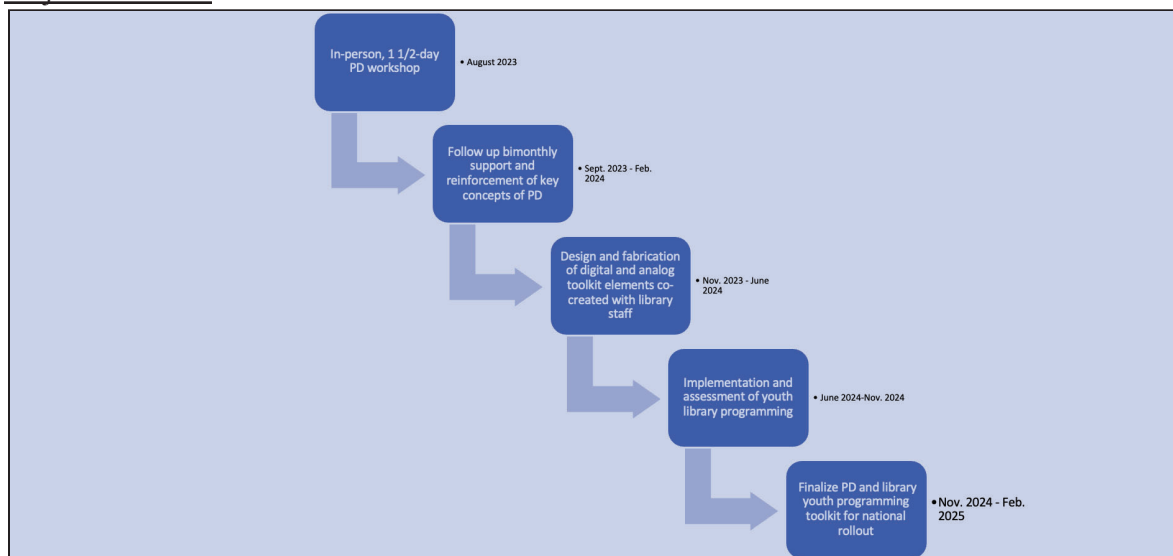
The in-person and virtual sessions with library partners (Target Group members) will have the following components:

A.   *Increase understanding of media literacy or news literacy key concept(s) behind each exhibition element* using presentation slides, discussion, and Q and A.

B.   *Offer real-time practice of technical and dialoguing skills as part of the ongoing PD for youth library staff.*

C.   *Group brainstorming to generate ideas and specific changes beneficial to libraries' use to facilitate co-creation of library programming ideas and the Wonder Media toolkit.* For example, one customization for libraries might be concluding each digital element with links to other existing library resources, such as including Gale in Context: Opposing Viewpoints resource link after users play the video featuring the animated, dancing, talking robot, Algo Rhythm, who explains the importance of diversifying information sources to avoid search formulas that only feed users one point of view on key issues.

D.   *Development and implementation of specific library programming around a toolkit element.* An example is creating a message on a t-shirt as a youth services event that mirrors the digital *Construct a Message* virtual t-shirt design that introduces users to the concept that all media messages are constructed, and all messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

E.   *Assessment of library toolkit and library programming.* This component is essential to ensure efficacy of the overall project before steps are made to introduce the entire package nationally to public libraries.

In Person Tour and Workshopping August 2023: Staff from partner libraries will tour *Wonder Media: Ask the Questions!* in exhibition form at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum in Kalamazoo, Michigan; the museum will remain open late for a private exhibition experience. Project team members will lead an after-dinner discussion to hear library staff feedback, reactions, questions and concerns. We will conclude the day by situating the exhibition materials as library PD content. The second day morning session covers key news literacy and media literacy principles that anchor each *Wonder Media* exhibition element. See **Appendix C** for an overview of learning elements of the PD. The second day early afternoon

session is small group and whole group discussion and activities around both areas of literacy to further develop staff education in these concepts, and to demonstrate possibilities for library programming.

Ongoing PD support and training Sept. 2023 - Feb. 2024: Bimonthly support and reinforcement of key concepts of PD via video conference and one-on-one meetings, with online support from Advisory Board members. Public library staff training and professional development materials created through this project will include: Short training videos modeling how library staff can use probing questions to foster critical media literacy in middle school users and manage difficult or sensitive questions around disinformation; a virtual self-paced, asynchronous curriculum for library staff on the concepts of media literacy and the skills of news literacy contained in the *Wonder Media* toolkit; laminated cards with common media literacy and news literacy terms and applications.

Iterative Design Process– Nov. 2023 - June 2024: Design of digital and analog toolkit elements for library youth services use that is **continually informed by library partner input** via bi-monthly video conference calls, email, and one-on-one sessions on specific draft content. The feedback, concerns, suggestions and validation of concepts from **library staff partners will lead the process.**

June 2024 - Nov. 2024: Implementation and assessment of youth library programming: The converted exhibition components will be available in all-digital format via a single website available to public library personnel who have successfully completed the training program provided by the project team of librarians, content specialists and middle school educators. Activities, resources and prepared materials for out-of-the-box public programs for middle schoolers would be included in the website materials, along with opportunities for content customization by region, demographic served and by current media use data.

Nov. 2024 - Feb. 2025: Finalization of PD and programming components for national rollout to public libraries:
Performance Measurement Plan: The efficiency, effectiveness and timeliness of the project will be assessed at two-month intervals over the six month timeline (June 2024-Nov. 2024) through three mechanisms:
1.   Online surveys completed by Target Group members that will focus on ease of use, user engagement, technical concerns and content questions, as well as standard IMLS evaluation questions for SLAAs. These surveys will be applied twice, once after the in-person workshops, and again at the end of the grant period;
2.   Video conference check-ins by the Project Team with Target Group members;
3.   A short survey offered to middle school library patrons (Project Beneficiaries) that seeks to measure key concepts learned and to rate the activities by level of interest, education and utility. To incentivize completion of these forms, the project will offer users who participate the opportunity to enter a raffle at each library for a $50 e-gift card, an incentive funded through the WMU Presidential Innovation Professorship grant.

Diversity Plan: The six libraries selected for the Planning Grant represent diversity of size, budget, location (rural, suburban and urban) and demographics of the population served. As noted earlier, the Michigan libraries cohort members represent a wide-range of populations served and geographic areas throughout the state, and were recruited based on staff capacity and commitment to media literacy. Project participants represent libraries that serve diverse publics, as indicated by this data from the 2019 U.S. Census via the D3 Open Data Portal.

The Ypsilanti District Library, located in the urban/suburban area between Ann Arbor and Detroit, whose population skews younger (25.7 average age compared to 40.2 average age in the state of Michigan) and more foreign-born residents; 9.3% of the population compared to a 6.8% average in Michigan. The Petoskey District Library, which serves a large geographic region that includes rural areas, is mostly white. Only 64% of third-grade students met or exceeded grade level standards in ELA, though this is higher than the state average of 45%. The Bay County Library System serves a diverse region that includes urban, suburban, and rural areas. Its residents are below average in educational attainment, with only 19.9% holding a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 31.7% for the state of Michigan. Rochester Hills Public Library, a metropolitan Detroit suburb, is home to many people of Asian and Pacific Islander descent, with 7% of school-age children (5-17) speaking a language other than English at home, compared to the 1% average in Michigan overall. Grand Rapids Public Library, which serves the second most populated city in Michigan, is home to nearly 6% of all Hispanic and

Latino populations in the state. Nineteen percent of school aged children (5-17) speak Spanish at home, far above the 4% state average. The Kalamazoo Public Library, which serves a diverse mix of rural, suburban and urban areas, also serves patrons with a slightly higher poverty rate (14.1%) than the rest of the state (13.1%). Also participating in the project is a school librarian from the Traverse City Area Public Schools, a district that represents a mix of city and rural students. Though fairly affluent, only 62.5% of third grade students in 2020 met or exceeded grade level standards in ELA. Finally, a Maryland State Library staff member will be joining the project to provide a national perspective on our work.

The reading level of *Wonder Media* is aimed at 6th grade for accessibility, but many of the elements have a basic and advanced level to match a variety of cognitive levels. Closed captioning is used in all digital games. Library professionals will see themselves in the characters and examples of this project, and will be equipped to solicit user input to customize elements of the extension project to their diverse needs. Careful attention will be given to ethnic and racial diversity in character appearance, roles and voice overs in the training materials. Included in all the training will be content that addresses media representation of people of color, LGBTQ and people with mental disabilities as well as an invitation to consider the hegemony of media conglomerate leaders on media content. The PD also includes time for reflection to consider media representation, media ownership and media narratives and their effects on library staff identity formation. In keeping with the equity lens of this project plan, we will recognize the demand on library staff time with an honorarium offered to each Target Group member.

Project Results: The Library of Michigan will offer 3-4 in-person trainings around the state on media and information literacy introducing the *Wonder Media* resources, as well as leading a session at the Michigan Library Association's annual conference. The LM will also collaborate with Maryland State Library (MSL), from the *Wonder Media* project team, to offer an informational webinar to Youth Services Consultants from SLAAs, on how they might offer the resources and trainings to libraries in their states. Finally LM will submit and lead a presentation for an upcoming national library conference, preferably the Public Library Association (PLA). If this planning grant is successful, it will set the *Wonder Media* project up to apply for additional resources in order to offer additional training nationally.

This project aims to pick up where two other IMLS grants (*Navigating Screens*, Erikson Institute) have left off, taking up the development and support of media literacy and news literacy education for middle school age students and their families. Moving away from a media mentorship model that educates the whole family, we are focusing on creating PD and programming for public librarians and libraries that will speak to the independent use of media and technology for the tweens and teens with whom they work. The grant would allow an interdisciplinary team to design, deliver and publish a PD program with and for library staff focusing on media literacy and news literacy utilizing a unique digital asset designed for middle schoolers. In turn, the library staff would co-create library programming via a Wonder Media toolkit for use in youth library spaces. Assessments of both the PD and the toolkit would inform the finalization of both project components at the end of the project cycle. **The goal is that this PD package and accompanying library programming toolkit will be informed by real-time use in libraries and through specific user assessments in geographically diverse Michigan libraries in order to create a final deliverable worth being scaled and used nationally.**

The potential impact of this project is substantial for the Michigan library workforce, as well as for library users throughout the state. It is not a cynical attack on media and news organizations as corrupters or instruments of evil. It is not a partisan-based critique of some outlets or information sources. The project goal is to increase personal efficacy in intentional and critical use of *all* media and news products to the benefit of an accurately-informed, actively-engaged, self-governing citizenry. Public library staff are uniquely positioned to be interrupters of misinformation cycles, and to serve as media mentors regarding critical, informed use of media, news and information. **This project is an acknowledgement of the valuable national asset that is public library staff, and it seeks to provide these community mentors with meaningful, relevant support in the form of research-based PD and youth library programming to help them sustain their work in these media-saturated times.**

Wonder Media: A Public Library Professional Development & Outreach Project focused on Media and News Literacy Schedule of Completion

Activities & Milestones	8/23	9/23	10/23	11/23	12/23	1/24	2/24	3/24	4/24	5/24	6/24	7/24	8/24	9/24	10/24	11/24	12/24	1/25	2/25	3/25	4/25	5/25	6/25	7/25	8/25
Planning and In-person 1 1/2-day workshop for participants	X	X																							
Follow up bimonthly support and reinforcement of key concepts of PD		X		X		X		X		X															
Design and fabrication of digital and analog toolkit elements co-created with library staff				X	X	X	X	X	X	X															
Implementation of youth library programming & evaluation of youth library users											X	X	X	X	X										
Finalize PD and library youth programming toolkit for national rollout																X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Evaluation of workshop participants (end of in-person tour, and end of the project) (fill in for beginning and end of project)	X																								X
Applying for IMLS implementation grant													X							X					
IMLS Notice of Funding																								X	

*Preparedness of PD and activities for a national rollout is anticipated in November 2025.

Digital Products Plan

Type: In your Digital Products Plan, describe the digital content, resources, or assets you will create or collect, the quantities of each type, the digital file format(s), the accompanying metadata, and any relevant standards you will use. If you are developing software, you should also specify the programming languages, platforms, frameworks, software, or other applications you will use to create your software and explain why you chose them.

Digital content, resources and assets we will create:
One website for youth library use with accompany PD for public library staff, both elements with separate password access that includes:
- 1920 x 1080 videos
- 1920 x 1080 mouse-click programs
- Up to 10 short (no more than 4 minutes each) online training videos for PD
- Up to 2 webinars
- 1 downloadable public library staff PD guide
- Up to 20 downloadable PDF document-based activities for public library staff programming use
- Social media posts

We will use the following software/programs, digital platforms and online resources:
- Graphic Design & Multimedia Editing: Canva, Adobe Create Cloud software for photo, video and editing, Audio editing software (i.e. GarageBand, Audacity), iMovie, Unity, Graphics design program selected by Impact Communications, as yet unknown
- Text creation/editing/storage and online access platforms: Microsoft Word, Google Drive, TikTok, WordPress, Website program selected by Impact Communications, as yet unknown
- Digital preservation/persistent access: WMU institutional repository ScholarWorks (bepress)

Availability: In your Digital Products Plan, describe how you will make the digital content, resources, assets, software, and metadata available to the public. Include details such as the delivery strategy (e.g., openly available online, available to specified audiences) and underlying hardware/software platforms and infrastructure (e.g., specific digital repository software or leased services, accessibility via standard web browsers, requirements for special software tools to use the content, delivery enabled by IIIF specifications). Identify and explain the reasons for any limitations in your Digital Products Plan.

Availability and stewardship of digital assets:
We will host the PD materials in the Library of Michigan's Niche Academy installation. This platform is familiar and has been widely-used for PD for librarians and library staff in Michigan. As the project evolves to include reports, research findings, and additional content to be openly available, we will have a website hosted/maintained by WMU. We will follow the most up-to-date guidelines for accessibility standards, and take measures to compress large files for easy access and retention by users. Our paramount goal for all digital deliverables of Wonder Media PD and programming is to ensure ease of access and implementation. Recognizing the diversity of services, resources and communities served in

public libraries, we will utilize readily available materials and technology to eliminate any barriers to participation.

In addition to providing access to the output of this grant, the Western Michigan University Libraries will host and preserve all materials produced through our institutional repository, ScholarWorks@WMU (hosted bepress install), and ingest materials into our statewide LOCKSS program. Materials will be discoverable, accessible and safeguarded.

Access: What rights will you assert over your digital products, and what limitations, if any, will you place on their use? Will your products implicate privacy concerns or cultural sensitivities, and if so, how will you address them? In your Digital Products Plan, identify any licenses under which digital products will be shared (e.g., Creative Commons licenses, RightsStatements.org statements). Describe what intellectual property rights you will assert over your digital products and explain any limitations or conditions you will place on their use. If your products implicate privacy concerns or cultural sensitivities, describe these issues and how you plan to address them.

Accessibility, licensing and IP rights:
All programming resources will be made available through a password-protected website. Library staff who have completed the PD training via Niche Academy will be given access to the website for general library use, as well as a separate password-protected portion of the website restricted to library staff only.

The materials that would be digitized with the IMLS funding were originally designed and created under sponsorship from Kalamazoo Valley Community College. Both WMU and the Kalamazoo Valley Community College have a dual right of ownership to all materials and the joint intellectual property (i.e., creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce and protected by law such as patent, copyright, trademark).

Our intent would be to utilize Creative Commons licenses to share the materials. There are no known privacy concerns or cultural sensitivities associated with the materials.

Sustainability: How will you address the sustainability of your digital products? In your Digital Products Plan, describe your plan for preserving and maintaining digital products during and after the period of performance and identify the appropriate length of time different digital products should be curated. Address storage systems, shared repositories, technical documentation, migration planning, and commitment of organizational funding for these purposes.

Preservation and maintenance:
The website, both the youth library portion and the PD portion, will be available indefinitely. We are committed to the sustainability and longevity of the project outputs, and they will be maintained with troubleshooting technical issues, software/platform updates as needed and periodically updated content (i.e. data for *The Business of Media*). The website will be added to the WMU Libraries' Archive-It install for periodic crawls of the website and its accompanying materials. As mentioned above, all digital assets and intellectual output of the *Wonder Media* website and PD will be added to the University's institutional repository, LOCKSS program, and web-archiving software. The content of Wonder Media, both digital and analog, will be maintained at WMU's Zhang Legacy Center and Archives. Additionally, all materials will be backed up on Western Michigan University's servers.

Western Michigan University Organizational Profile

Lead applicant of Wonder Media: A Public Library Professional Development & Outreach Project focused on Media and News Literacy

Located in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Western Michigan University is a comprehensive public research university offering undergraduate, graduate and professional degree programs. Committed to the principles of global citizenry, WMU emphasizes learner-centered research and teaching with a commitment to innovation, collaboration, community-engagement (both locally and globally), and creating a place of welcome and belonging.[1] WMU Libraries empowers the community to discover, explore and shape the information universe through user-centered services, support and resources. The Libraries pride themselves on innovation and responsiveness to the evolving needs of our academic community, and for finding/creating opportunities for engagement with both our local and global communities.[2] The mission/vision statements of both the university-at-large and University Libraries were updated last during a 2017-2020 strategic planning initiative at WMU. Western Michigan University, and the University Libraries, is currently undergoing a large-scale strategic planning initiative for the 2022-2023 academic year.

Western Michigan University Libraries is part of WMU's Division of Academic Affairs, and is under the purview of the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig. University Libraries are overseen by Dean Julie Garrison, and divided into three distinct service areas: Research Services (home department of PI), Instruction and Outreach, and User Services. Research Services is home to archives, special collections, data management, digital projects, digital humanities, scholarly communications and GIS services. The department includes a unique mission to support the stewardship of regional history, and has been innovative in their approach to create connections/collaborations between the University Libraries and the greater Kalamazoo community.

Our Libraries support an academic community of 17,000+ students and 1,100+ instructional employees (e.g. faculty, graduate students, instructional technologists, etc.). Our student body is diverse; 24% of the population is made up of racial and ethnically underrepresented students. Additionally, WMU also has numerous programs that offer a gateway for traditionally underserved communities to attain a college degree (i.e. WMU College Assistance Migrant Program[3] and Seita Scholars,[4] a program to support students attending college after leaving foster care). The Libraries' user-centered and adaptive approach to services and resources makes it an invaluable resource for our diverse college community.

The University Libraries' Research Services department was established in 2017 at the conclusion of a library-wide reorganization initiative. The grouping of expertise and services was informed by the role these specializations (archives, special collections, data management, digital projects, digital humanities, scholarly communications and GIS services) play in complementing and augmenting research and scholarship at our university. As the department continues to grow and evolve, the mission to offer value-added services and support to our campus community and beyond has been at the forefront. It is through the service-driven and collaborative mission of the department that the cross-institutional partnership inspired by Prof. Christian's *Wonder Media* exhibition and its potential for transformation to public library programming has taken shape.

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[1] https://wmich.edu/about/mission
[2] https://wmich.edu/library/strategic-plan#mission
[3] https://wmich.edu/camp
[4] https://wmich.edu/fosteringsuccess/seita