



LAURA BUSH 21st CENTURY LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

Sample Application RE-259020-OLS-25
Project Category: Applied Research

Louisiana State University, A&M (Louisiana State University,
School of Information Studies)

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$389,974

Louisiana State University's School of Information Studies investigates the facilitators and barriers within rural librarianship across Louisiana. This research will address three primary questions: (1) How do rural librarians in Louisiana perceive and assess the value of their libraries' services to their communities? (2) In what ways does rurality impact the challenges and opportunities faced by rural librarians in Louisiana? (3) How do rural librarians sustain the impact of their libraries? To investigate these questions, the project will employ a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth, semi-structured interviews with rural librarians across the state. The anticipated outcomes include a more nuanced understanding of rural librarians' roles as changemakers, a framework for sustainable collaboration through a network, actionable recommendations to strengthen rural libraries in Louisiana and beyond, as well as contributions to the academic discourse through peer-reviewed manuscripts and conference presentations. This research will serve as a model for national efforts to support rural libraries, ensuring their continued role as indispensable community resources for future generations.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

The Impact of Rural Libraries in Louisiana: Driving Systemic Change and Building Collaborative Networks

Narrative

In this three-year **Early Career Research Development** proposal, Dr. Kristina Shiroma, an untenured, tenure-track assistant professor at Louisiana State University's School of Information Studies (LSU-SIS), requests **\$389,974** to: (1) investigate facilitators and barriers within rural librarianship across the state of Louisiana and (2) facilitate a support network for rural librarians. This research study aligns with the **Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program Goal/Objective 2.2**, as it will serve as a foundation for a long-term research agenda, career trajectory, and professional development of a tenure-track information science faculty focused on advancing information literacy and equity for marginalized populations. By understanding the unique challenges and opportunities within rural library settings, this study aims to advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of an underrepresented demographic (both in terms of librarians and their communities) and offer practical resources for rural Louisiana librarians, serving as a model for libraries nationwide.

Research Questions

Key research questions for this study include:

1. How do rural librarians in Louisiana perceive and assess the value of their libraries' services to their communities?
2. In what ways does rurality impact the challenges and opportunities faced by rural librarians in Louisiana?
3. How do rural librarians in Louisiana sustain the impact of their libraries?

To answer these research questions, the project will utilize in-depth, semi-structured interview questions. Findings from these analyses will directly inform the design of a rural library support network

Project Justification

Rural libraries are essential hubs for often underserved communities, providing critical access to information, technology, and social services. They play a key role in bridging the digital divide, fostering community engagement, and supporting lifelong learning. Despite their significance, rural libraries can face significant challenges, such as limited resources and funding, which can hinder their effectiveness and sustainability. However, these very challenges present opportunities for innovation and resilience. Rather than viewing these challenges from a deficit perspective, this research adopts an asset-based approach, focusing on the unique strategies and solutions rural libraries employ to overcome obstacles. As changemakers, rural libraries have the potential to drive systemic change within broader information ecosystems. By examining the experiences of rural librarians, we can gain valuable insights into the distinctive benefits, challenges, and solutions they encounter, revealing their resilience and innovation to meet their communities' needs.

Nationally, there is a growing recognition of the need to support rural libraries. Reports from Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)¹ and the Pew Research Center² emphasize the critical role of information equity within rural communities. Additionally, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NNLM)³ and the American Library Association (ALA)⁴ advocate for increased investment in rural libraries to address digital literacy. The development of a collaborative network among rural libraries can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources, ultimately empowering these institutions to better address their communities' needs and contribute to larger library systems.

¹ Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2021). *2021 Public Libraries Survey*. Institute of Museum and Library Services. Retrieved from [IMLS website](#)

² Pew Research Center. (2019). Some digital divides persist between rural, urban, and suburban America. Retrieved from [Pew Research Center website](#).

³ National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NNLM). (2022). *Rural Health and Libraries*. Retrieved from [NNLM website](#)

⁴ American Library Association (ALA). (2022). *Digital literacy*. Retrieved from [ALA website](#)

Several initiatives have successfully built networks to strengthen rural libraries, demonstrating the power of collaboration in overcoming common challenges. The Rural Library Network, launched by the Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL), connects small libraries across the country to share best practices, training, and funding opportunities. In Texas, the Small Library Management Training Program has provided rural library staff with professional development resources, while the Washington Rural Heritage Project hosted by the Washington State Library has fostered statewide collaboration in preserving local history. Similarly, the Colorado Library Consortium (CLiC) has created a cooperative system that enables resource sharing, group purchasing, and continuing education for rural libraries. These models highlight the potential benefits of a Louisiana-focused network by pooling resources, increasing professional support, and enhancing digital access. In this way, Louisiana's rural libraries can become stronger, more resilient, and better equipped to serve their communities.

Louisiana Rural Libraries

Louisiana's rural libraries serve as essential community resources in the state's 44 non-metropolitan parishes, where access to educational and digital resources can be limited⁵. These libraries provide crucial services to populations that are predominantly low-income, geographically isolated and often lack reliable broadband access as Louisiana ranks among the lowest in the nation for household internet connectivity⁶. Many rural libraries operate with small staff, often fewer than five employees per branch, and rely on limited funding streams, with some parishes allocating less than \$10 per capita for library services⁵. Despite these challenges, rural libraries offer essential programming, including early literacy initiatives, workforce training, and disaster response support, particularly in areas frequently impacted by hurricanes and flooding. However, these libraries often function in silos, with little opportunity for resource sharing, professional development, or statewide advocacy. Establishing a collaborative network would strengthen these institutions, allowing them to leverage collective expertise, expand digital access, and create sustainable, community-driven programs tailored to the unique needs of rural Louisiana.

Louisiana can benefit from a formalized system to connect and support its rural libraries. Many rural library staff members work in isolation, without professional development programs tailored to their unique challenges, and struggle to keep up with the increasing demand for digital literacy, workforce training, and disaster resilience services. Additionally, disparities in broadband access further widen the gap, preventing rural communities from fully benefiting from modern library services. Without a structured network, these libraries miss opportunities for collaboration, collective advocacy, and cost-effective resource sharing. A dedicated Louisiana rural library network is essential to bridge this gap, providing a framework for sustainable partnerships, shared knowledge, and enhanced community impact.

Asset-based Approach to Supporting and Amplifying Louisiana Rural Libraries

This project adopts an asset-based approach to understanding and communicating the role of rural libraries, positioning them as essential, resourceful, and innovative institutions that contribute significantly not only to their communities but to the broader library field. Rather than focusing solely on challenges or deficits, this perspective highlights the strengths, expertise, and adaptability of rural librarians, emphasizing their deep community connections, ability to meet diverse local needs, and commitment to providing equitable access to information. Asset-based community development (ABCD) frameworks emphasize the importance of identifying and mobilizing existing strengths within communities rather than addressing only deficiencies⁷. By documenting and amplifying

⁵ Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2016). *Louisiana 5-year evaluation report*. Institute of Museum and Library Services. Retrieved March 6, 2025, from <https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/state-profiles/evals/louisiana5yearevaluation.pdf>

⁶ Live Healthy State. (n.d.). *Broadband*. Live Healthy State. Retrieved March 6, 2025, from [http://www.livehealthystate.org/priority-area/broadband#:~:text=Louisiana%20\(89%25%20coverage\)%20lags,400%2C000%20households%20still%20lacking%20access.](http://www.livehealthystate.org/priority-area/broadband#:~:text=Louisiana%20(89%25%20coverage)%20lags,400%2C000%20households%20still%20lacking%20access.)

⁷ Kretzmann, J., & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path towards finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Asset-Based Community Development Institute.

these strengths, this project will inform larger library systems, demonstrating the unique value rural libraries bring to the profession and advocating for more inclusive policies and partnerships.

Rural libraries serve as critical access points for information, digital literacy, health resources, and lifelong learning, often operating with limited staff and budgets. Despite these constraints, they excel at developing creative solutions to support their patrons, leveraging partnerships, local knowledge, and strong relationships to provide essential services. Research has demonstrated that rural libraries play a key role in digital inclusion and community engagement, offering services that go beyond traditional library functions⁸. Additionally, rural libraries actively contribute to local economic and workforce development, further solidifying their role as community anchor⁹. This project will capture and analyze these strategies through interviews and thematic analysis, ensuring that the voices of rural librarians shape the development of their own network and inform the larger library ecosystem. By focusing on what is working well rather than what is lacking, this approach highlights rural libraries as models of resilience, leadership, and innovation.

Rural libraries are not just recipients of external support but leaders in information access, digital literacy, and community engagement. This project seeks to change that narrative by demonstrating how rural libraries effectively address challenges such as digital access, community engagement, and service delivery with limited resources. Rural libraries serve as natural leaders in their communities, often filling gaps in services where other institutions may be absent. Through workshops, presentations, and dissemination efforts, this project will share findings with professional organizations, library consortia, and other key stakeholders, advocating for stronger integration of rural libraries into statewide and national initiatives. By positioning rural librarians as leaders in community-driven services, this project will help bridge the gap between rural and larger library systems, fostering reciprocal learning and collaboration that benefits the entire profession.

This study will provide critical insights into the contributions and challenges of rural Louisiana libraries while aligning with national priorities set by the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program. By highlighting rural librarians' leadership in community-responsive solutions, this project will help shift how they are recognized within the profession, ensuring they are seen as key voices in shaping library policy, funding, and professional development. Establishing a targeted support network will strengthen rural libraries' role in shaping broader library systems. Additionally, this research will advance academic discourse by applying an asset-based framework to rural librarianship, generating empirical data to inform best practices. While addressing local needs, the findings will also contribute to national conversations, positioning rural libraries as essential drivers of systemic change in the library and information science field.

Project Work Plan: Dr. Kristina Shiroma, with expertise in community-based research will plan, implement, and manage this project. To answer the research questions, the research team will recruit and interview 40 (N=40) rural librarians and library staff in Louisiana. The designation of "rural" varies significantly among different government agencies, research institutions, and other funding entities, leading to inconsistent policies and programs that may not effectively address the needs of rural communities. For this project, we will utilize the IMLS Search and Compare tool to identify eligible Louisiana library systems. The 46 designated rural and town¹⁰ library systems, comprising 100 individual library entities, will serve as our initial recruitment pool. Interviews will be conducted in-person, by telephone, or via Zoom, based on participant preference. Semi-structured, in-depth interview questions will explore

⁸ Strover, S., Whitacre, B., Rhinesmith, C., & Schrubbe, A. (2020). The digital inclusion role of rural libraries: social inequalities through space and place. *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(2), 242-259.

⁹ Gustina, M., Guinnee, E., Bonney, R., & Decker, H. (2022). Pathways to Wellbeing: Public Library Service in Rural Communities. *Journal of New Librarianship*, 7(1), 159–189. <https://doi.org/10.33011/newlibs/11/14>

¹⁰ Town designations include parishes with similar population counts as rural designated parishes.

rich, detailed experiences. Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis¹¹ in order identify salient themes to serve as touchpoints within the data. All data will be securely housed in LSU’s Scholarly Repository. The outcomes of this project will extend our theoretical and empirical knowledge in the academic literature through peer-reviewed journal articles and will have a direct impact on rural libraries in Louisiana and beyond. This project also seeks to establish reciprocal relationships among Louisiana State University School of Information Studies (LSU-SIS), the Collaborative Institute for Rural Communities & Librarianship (CIRCL), and rural libraries in Louisiana, creating a network for research, engagement, and information organization.

Dr. Shiroma will monitor grant and project progress according to a timeline summarized below:

Year 1: August 2025 to July 2026	Recruitment of GRA
	IRB Approval
	Begin Recruitment of Library Partners
	Begin Data Collection and Analysis
Year 2: August 2026 to July 2027	Continue Recruitment
	Complete Data Collection and Analysis
	Draft Deliverables
	Share Early Findings with Library Partners and Peer-Reviewed Venues
Year 3: August 2027 to July 2028	Complete Network Development
	Host Workshop to Share Findings with Library Partners
	Finalize Deliverables
	Share Findings in Peer-Reviewed Venues

Pre-study preparations are currently underway. Dr. Shiroma has drafted an IRB proposal, developed recruitment and interview materials, and curated a list of potential rural library partners in Louisiana. Completing this three-year project will require three months of summer salary, 6 course releases for Dr. Shiroma, and the hiring of a graduate research assistant to support recruitment, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings. Other expenses will include travel for research and conference participation including an IMLS-designated meeting, publication fees, and network development costs.

Year 1: August 2025 to July 2026

In Year 1, the research team will be formed through the recruitment of a graduate research assistant (GRA); IRB approval for the project will be gained; and recruitment of library partners will begin. Each of these steps is discussed in more detail below. Depending on the success of recruitment, data collection and analysis may also begin, however, details for this is presented later in the Year 2 section of this proposal.

Recruitment of GRA

GRA recruitment will include social media posts on LSU’s School of Information Studies social media accounts, an email sent to student Listservs, as well as through recruitment channels at the college and university level. The recruitment will solicit and prioritize students who have an interest in community-based research and qualitative

¹¹ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.

methods, who have familiarity with or are from rural Louisiana, and who have experience or interest in working with rural communities. The graduate research assistant will be responsible for assisting with all stages of the research process, including but not limited to participant recruitment, conducting and transcribing interviews, managing and analyzing qualitative data, and contributing to the writing and dissemination of project deliverables. Additional responsibilities will include assisting with community outreach efforts, member checking processes with participants, and maintaining detailed research notes and records. The GRA will also help prepare presentations for academic and community stakeholders. This level of involvement will support the development of a diverse library workforce, aligning with Agency Goal 1 and Objective 1.2.

To support the graduate research assistant in successfully carrying out these responsibilities, the project director (PD) will provide comprehensive training in key areas. This will include community engagement strategies, qualitative research methods (with a focus on thematic analysis), interviewing techniques, and ethical considerations when working with marginalized populations. The PD will also offer resources and guidance for self-care and mental health support, recognizing the potential emotional labor involved in qualitative research. The GRA will have regular, weekly check-ins with the PD to ensure ongoing professional development and emotional well-being throughout the project. Dr. Shiroma will approach this project with a team mentality, closely working to mentor and support the GRA in community-engaged research practices and in navigating library and information science research.

IRB Approval

This research project will require approval from Louisiana State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB application and participant consent form has been drafted and will be submitted for approval as soon as the grant notification is received from IMLS.

Participant Recruitment

The primary recruitment goal of this project is to engage a representative sample of 40 (N=40) rural Louisiana librarians and librarian staff. To ensure a grounded and consistent definition of "rural" the project will utilize the IMLS Search and Compare tool, which provides a classification of rurality for Louisiana parishes. This approach ensures that each selected parish has an existing library. Given the scope of this three-year early-career grant, conducting interviews across all rural communities in Louisiana would be impractical. Instead, the project will employ a purposive sampling strategy. We will select a subset of parishes from the IMLS Search and Compare tool's classification. Filtering the tool by state and locale identifies 13 rural parishes and 34 town parishes across the state. From these, the research team will recruit participants from a representative sample of 40 librarians and librarian staff of rural and town parishes. This sampling approach balances feasibility with broad representation of Louisiana's rural libraries including factors such as parish size (population), geography (i.e., north, south, east, and west), and demographics (i.e., average salary, education). See descriptions of identified preliminary parishes below:

Examples of rural parishes and their library systems which will be sought for participation include¹²:

1. Natchitoches, Louisiana. This western Louisiana parish has a population of 37,515¹³ which could be considered as mid-sized in comparison to other rural communities. The Natchitoches Parish Library system features 1 central library, 1 branch library, and 2 bookmobiles.
2. Catahoula, Louisiana. This central Louisiana parish has a population of 8,906 which could be considered as small in comparison to other rural communities. The Catahoula Parish Library system features 1 central library, 2 branch libraries, and 1 bookmobile.
3. Livingston, Louisiana. This southeastern Louisiana parish has a population of 142,282 which could be considered large in comparison to other rural communities. Livingston Parish Library system features 1 central library, 4 branch libraries, and 1 bookmobile.
4. Beauregard, Louisiana. This southwestern Louisiana parish has a population of 36,549 which could be considered mid-sized in comparison to other rural communities. The Beauregard Parish Library system features 1 central library and 4 branch libraries.
5. Lincoln, Louisiana. This northern Louisiana parish has a population of 48,396 which could be considered as mid-sized in comparison to other rural communities. The Lincoln Parish Library system features 1 central library.



https://actearlymap.doe.louisiana.gov/Content/img/LA_Map_2020.svg.png

¹²Parish data taken from Institute of Museum and Library Services. (n.d.). *Library search & compare*. Retrieved March 6, 2025, from <https://www.imls.gov/search-compare>

¹³U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). P12: Sex by age [2020 Census Demographic and Housing Characteristics File]. Retrieved February 13, 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALDHC2020.P12>

Dr. Shiroma will monitor recruitment efforts to ensure that a balanced recruitment sample is achieved as best possible. Continuing efforts will also be taken by Dr. Shiroma if expansion of recruitment pool is needed. To promote the project and recruit participants, recruitment strategies will include in-person outreach at libraries and leveraging existing networks of local stakeholders. Participants will be informed about the study's purpose, the intended outcomes of the work, and how their perspectives will contribute to improving rural librarianship. If recruitment challenges arise, additional parishes from the IMLS-identified pool will be contacted to ensure adequate participation. Supporting Document 1 provides a list of key challenges related to recruitment and other potential challenges along with mitigation strategies.

Year 2: August 2026 to July 2027

Year 2 project completion steps are discussed below and will include: interview data collection and data analysis; the drafting of deliverables; and the sharing of early findings.

Interview Data Collection

Once participants are identified and consent obtained, interviews will commence in a manner appropriate and convenient to participants. This will include options for Zoom, in-person, or phone interviews. The interview will have three (3) main sections. The first section will focus on collecting general demographic information of both the participants (e.g., occupation, education, etc.) as well as their communities. The second section will include semi-structured interview questions. The decision to rely primarily on semi-structured questions is based on Dr. Shiroma's prior experience in interviewing for thematic analysis. Semi-structured questions allow for a conversational style of interviewing in which rapport can be built, answers can be explored in greater depth, and participants can express themselves more freely and authentically. Supporting Document 2 provides a sample of the types of questions and, while not exhaustive, is meant as a starting point. The data received from initial interviews as well as feedback solicited from participants and community members will inspire iterative, future questions building. The third section will present an open-ended question meant for participants to provide their free response. An example of an open-ended question would be "Is there anything else you'd like to offer that would benefit you in a network of rural librarians?" or "What is one question you thought I might ask you but haven't?". Finally, each participant will be asked if they will consent to and be available for follow-up questions.

Once complete, each interview will be transcribed and member checked. In the member checking process, the transcript will be shared back with the participants to review and revise. The interviewer will confirm participants' responses as well as intentionality and work to gain full approval from the participant. After receiving approval of the transcript, the recording of their interview will be deleted. Any digital or handwritten notes will be destroyed. The Data Management Plan (DMP) attached to this proposal provides greater detail about data will be stored, maintained, and made available to researchers. The research team will continually examine interview transcripts for any responses that may provide identifying evidence.

Data Analysis

Interview data will be analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following Braun and Clarke's 6-phase framework⁶. Thematic Analysis offers a flexible, qualitative approach that enables an open-ended exploration of participant's perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of both the challenges and strengths of rural librarianship. This analysis method allows for a descriptive rather than prescriptive approach, ensuring that all data points are considered without the constraints of rigid analytical frameworks. Findings will be used to inform key elements of the proposed network.

Analysis will begin with the first cleaned and reviewed transcript, allowing researchers to immerse themselves in the data and develop a deep understanding of participants' insights. This familiarization process starts during the

interview itself and continues through transcription. Analysis will continue iteratively until all interviews are completed, transcribed, and examined. If a participant withdraws their consent, the corresponding transcript and any related data will be removed from the analysis.

Draft Deliverables

Early data collection and analysis will inform the development of journal manuscripts and a development plan for a network of rural Louisiana librarians. These deliverables will be iteratively constructed as data collection progresses, ensuring that all deliverables are directly shaped by participants' perspectives, experiences, and considerations for best practices. In this way, participants will play a direct and pivotal role in developing a tool that is relevant, useful, sustainable, and reproduceable.

Share Early Findings

We will begin disseminating early findings to support the leveraging phase in Year 3. The results will be shared across multiple academic communities to ensure broad impact. We will target key venues, including conferences in library and information science such as the Association for Library and Information Science Education, American Library Association, Louisiana Library Association, and the Association for Rural and Small Libraries. The findings presented at these conferences will be further developed into manuscripts for submission to peer-reviewed journals like the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *Public Library Quarterly*, and *Journal of Research in Rural Education* among others. We will also reach out to participants to share our early findings and conduct a member check to ensure the accuracy and validity of the results. This multi-disciplinary dissemination strategy will maximize the impact of our findings within the community and informing scholarship across diverse fields.

Year 3: August 2027 to July 2028

In Year 3, the research team will build a network of tools and resources for rural librarians in Louisiana, finalize project deliverables; and share late findings.

Network Development

Thematic analysis of interview data as well as findings from the focus groups will serve as the foundation for developing a strong and sustainable network of and for rural Louisiana librarians, built upon the strengths, expertise, and resourcefulness these libraries already possess. Rather than focusing solely on challenges, this research study recognizes the vital role rural libraries play as trusted community anchors, information hubs, and adaptable service providers. By identifying shared priorities this research will ensure that the emerging network highlights and amplifies the assets of rural libraries. Using community-engaged best practices, the project will emphasize co-design, shared leadership, and reciprocity to ensure that rural librarians are active partners in shaping the network's mission, structure, and programming. Through participatory feedback sessions from focus groups, participants will have a direct role in determining how the network operates (e.g., what resources it offers, how it offers those resources) as well as what the network looks like (e.g. modality, interface, design), fostering a sense of shared ownership and investment in its success.

Promoting the network through professional organizations, regional library associations, and statewide communication channels will help position rural libraries as vital contributors to the broader library ecosystem. Special emphasis will be placed on fostering bidirectional partnerships with larger library system, not only to facilitate mentorship and resource-sharing but also to recognize and integrate the specialized expertise of rural librarians. While the specific ways in which participants will choose to develop their network remain uncertain, exploring potential directions can help establish a vision of possibilities. One potential avenue could involve hosting collaborative events that foster knowledge exchange and professional growth. These might include professional

development workshops on topics such as navigating board meetings, grant writing, and best practices for community-responsive library services. Participants may find value in community engagement forums where rural librarians can share their innovative strategies for addressing local needs, positioning themselves as leaders in community-driven library services. Another possibility is an outreach initiative in which rural libraries co-develop and present informational sessions for both their communities and larger library systems, showcasing their expertise as educators and information specialists. Ultimately, the structure and activities of the network will be guided by participants' insights and priorities, ensuring that it reflects their needs, interests, and aspirations.

The research team will serve as facilitators, helping to amplify the voices of rural librarians, connecting them with external partners, and supporting sustained engagement within the broader library field. This network will not only strengthen individual libraries but also enhance the overall library profession by demonstrating the critical role of rural libraries in advancing resilience, innovation, and lifelong learning. As this initiative grows, it will create a lasting community of practice where rural librarians are recognized as essential contributors to the field, ensuring that their expertise continues to shape future research, policy, and professional development efforts. Ultimately, this project will reinforce the leadership and impact of rural Louisiana librarians, positioning them as key collaborators in the evolving landscape of library services.

Share Findings with Library Partners

To ensure that network development results are meaningfully shared with the communities involved, the project will host virtual workshop(s) designed to bring library partners together to discuss key findings and collaboratively explore next steps. These workshops will provide an opportunity to present insights gained from the data, highlighting themes identified by participants and showcasing the strengths and contributions of rural libraries. Rather than a one-way presentation, these sessions will be interactive to allow librarians to actively reflect on the findings, offer feedback, and discuss how they align with their own experiences and goals. The workshops will serve as a space for participants to co-develop strategies for sustaining and expanding their connections, ensuring that the network evolves in ways that reflect their collective vision.

Finalize Deliverables

Once the findings from the interviews and the resulting network development plan have been reviewed by community partners, the research products and late findings will be drafted and finalized for distribution. The GRA will assist in synthesizing the data, drafting reports, and preparing materials for dissemination to ensure the findings are effectively communicated to both academic and community audiences.

Share Findings in Peer-reviewed Venues

As the grant period concludes in Year 3, findings will be disseminated through peer-reviewed venues such as conferences and top-tier journals. Additionally, these findings will serve as a foundation for future grant applications, reinforcing the project's broader impact. This research serves as a cornerstone for Dr. Shiroma's long-term community-based research agenda, providing a strong foundation of engaged rural librarians who can collaborate as research partners in future initiatives. By fostering relationships, shared knowledge, and collective expertise, this project establishes a committed group of library professionals who can contribute to ongoing and future studies. Their insights and experiences will shape future research directions, ensuring that emerging projects remain grounded in the realities and needs of rural libraries and the communities they serve.

Representative Research Plan

To ensure representative research, we will prioritize: (1) recruiting a representative group of librarians from rural Louisiana communities; (2) building research partnerships with organizations that serve these communities; (3) engaging with key stakeholders and community gatekeepers throughout data collection and interpretation; and (4) recruiting a graduate research assistant with ties to rural Louisiana. To achieve this, the research project prioritizes representative recruitment. A key component of this approach is recruiting librarians and library staff with different

experiences, perspectives, perceptions, and familiarities from a variety of rural Louisiana communities. Louisiana comprises 13 parish library systems defined as “rural” and 34 parish library systems defined as “town” in the IMLS Search Tool. This project seeks to engage participants from both rural and town-designated library systems to capture a diverse range of insights, ensuring that the findings reflect the varied strengths, challenges, and needs of rural Louisiana libraries. Additionally, the research study will prioritize hiring a graduate research assistant with ties to rural Louisiana. Having a team member who understands the nuances of these communities will enhance recruitment efforts, facilitate more effective engagement, and ensure that the research process remains respectful and responsive to local needs. By embedding these efforts into every stage of the research process, this study will not only increase representation of rural Louisiana research but also ensure that participant insights contribute to the development of relevant initiatives and deliverables.

Project Results: This project will advance academic knowledge and have direct practical impacts. Through the production of both scholarly and practical outcomes, this project ensures broad impact within the fields of library and information science, rural librarianship, as well as in community engagement. The project’s asset-based approach will highlight the strengths and leadership of rural librarians, positioning them as active contributors to the profession while informing best practices and policy development. The research will result in multiple academic presentations at conferences focused on local, regional, and national librarianship as well as library and information science. These presentations disseminate findings and foster cross-disciplinary conversations on how rural libraries serve as innovative community hubs. Additionally, two to three peer-reviewed manuscripts will contribute to the academic literature, offering insights on rural librarianship, asset-based frameworks, and the role of rural libraries in informing larger library systems. Potential publication venues include *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *Public Library Quarterly*, and *Journal of Research in Rural Education* among others.

Beyond academic dissemination, the project will establish a community-developed framework for a rural library network, shaped by participants’ input. While the specific structure will be determined through data analysis, possibilities include collaborative resource-sharing platforms, professional development initiatives, and strategies for engagement with larger library systems. To ensure sustainability, post-project workshops will be held to share findings, refine the network’s direction, and facilitate discussions on long-term implementation. These workshops will serve as a model for future community-led library initiatives, extending the reach of the project beyond its initial participants.

To maximize impact, findings and resources will be made publicly available through open-access publications, professional library organizations, and partnerships with rural library consortia. The project aligns with the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program’s goals by strengthening professional development opportunities for rural librarians and ensuring they are recognized as leaders in the field. By integrating research, practice, and community engagement, this project will contribute to a larger movement advocating for the recognition and sustainability of rural libraries as essential institutions in the broader library and information science field.

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Schedule of Completion

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