



LAURA BUSH 21st CENTURY LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

Sample Application RE-259430-OLS-26
Project Category: Planning

University of West Georgia

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$135,833
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The University of West Georgia, with expert consultants from University of Georgia and Georgia Southwestern State University, will conduct a national gap analysis examining the alignment between institutional expectations for online library instruction and practicing academic librarians' preparation to meet them. Academic librarians are increasingly expected to design and deliver high-quality online learning experiences, yet no field-specific competency standards for online library instruction exist within academic librarianship. This planning project will build from the project team's preliminary gap analysis and development of a competency model. It will further adapt the competency model and develop research instruments, systematically analyze a national sample of academic librarian job postings, administer a national practitioner survey, and synthesize and disseminate findings.

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.

Project Narrative: Competency-Based Gap Analysis for Online Library Instruction

Introduction

The University of West Georgia requests \$135,833 in Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funds (with no cost share required) to conduct a national, framework-based gap analysis examining the alignment between institutional expectations for online library instruction and practicing academic librarians' preparation to meet them. Academic librarians are increasingly expected to design and deliver high-quality online learning experiences, yet no field-specific competency standards for online library instruction exist within academic librarianship; the COVID-19 pandemic made this gap acutely visible as confident instruction librarians suddenly found themselves without professional guidance for the online teaching contexts they were being asked to master. This Planning project will address that gap by systematically analyzing a national sample of academic librarian job postings and administering a national practitioner survey, using the expert-validated Peacock Competency Model for Online Library Instruction as the analytic framework. Consulting organizations include the University of Georgia, contributing instructional design and research methodology expertise through Senior Research and Instructional Design Consultant Dr. Jill Stefaniak, and Georgia Southwestern State University, contributing academic librarian practitioner expertise through Instructional Technology/Librarian Consultant Jennifer Griffin. The intended project results include a national job description analysis, a national survey dataset, a competency-based gap analysis organized across the framework's five domains, a publicly accessible summary report with visualizations, at least two national conference presentations, and an open-access peer-reviewed publication; collectively providing a national evidence base to inform future professional development, LIS curriculum reform, and the potential development of field-specific competency standards for online library instruction.

This Planning project supports IMLS Agency-Level Goal 1, Champion Lifelong Learning, and Objective 1.2, Support the training and professional development of the museum and library workforce. It aligns with LB21 Program Goal 2, Train and retain current library and archives professionals, faculty, and staff, and Objective 2.1, Develop or enhance professional development and training programs to enable the library and archival workforce to meet the needs of their communities, by generating the national diagnostic evidence needed to inform targeted professional development, LIS curriculum reform, and the potential development of field-specific competency standards for online library instruction.

Project Justification

The Need, Challenge, and How It Was Identified

Academic librarians are increasingly expected to design and deliver online instruction, including asynchronous learning objects, synchronous virtual sessions, and embedded learning within learning

management systems such as Canvas, Blackboard, and Google Classroom. Yet preparation for these roles remains uneven, shaped by varied educational backgrounds, professional contexts, and access to institutional support (Baer, 2021; Caffrey et al., 2023; Peacock, 2022; Omarsaib, 2025). These expectations expanded dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic and have not receded; "Online Learning" has become one of the largest thematic categories in annual reviews of library instruction literature (Caffrey et al., 2023, 2024). Despite this reality, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has not developed field-specific competency standards for online library instruction. ACRL's current guiding document, *Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians* (American Library Association, 2017), was developed primarily with face-to-face instruction in mind and offers limited guidance for digital pedagogy, a limitation explicitly noted by scholars (Shank & Bell, 2011; Peacock, 2025). In stark contrast, organizations serving instructional designers and online educators, including IBSTPI, ISTE, AECT, and OLC, have each developed specific, validated competencies for online and technology-enhanced instruction (Darabi et al., 2006; ISTE, 2021; AECT, 2012; OLC, 2021). The absence of parallel guidance for academic librarians creates a significant structural gap between what the profession requires and the standards available to support librarians' development, evaluation, and preparation.

The need for this project was identified through two converging lines of evidence. First, qualitative research with 18 academic librarians possessing both instructional and instructional design expertise revealed significant barriers to effective online instruction delivery: limited institutional support, resource constraints, negative attitudes toward online learning and library instruction, insufficient student motivation, and inadequate professional preparation, showing that many librarians acquired instructional skills through self-study rather than formal training (Peacock, 2022; Ducas et al., 2020; Westbrook & Fabian, 2010). International evidence corroborates these findings, with Omarsaib (2025) finding that while librarians often possess basic technical skills, many lack confidence in designing interactive online activities and leveraging learning management systems in pedagogically meaningful ways. Studies examining the increase of emergency remote library instruction further underscore that effective online instruction competencies must encompass equity considerations, including student access, bandwidth, and digital literacy, that are not addressed in existing ACRL documents (Ibacache et al., 2021).

Second, the same research that identified these barriers generated the Peacock Competency Model for Online Library Instruction, an expert-validated framework that revealed the complexity and breadth of knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for effective online library instruction, competencies that extend well beyond what is typically addressed in LIS programs or ACRL guidance (Peacock, 2022). The framework organizes competencies across five domains: designing online instruction, teaching in online environments, learning technology, interpersonal communication, and attitudes. Having a validated framework is a necessary but insufficient step; what the field now needs is national evidence of where the gaps actually exist between what institutions expect, what librarians are prepared to do, and what evidence-based competency standards indicate is necessary.

How This Project Differs From, Complements, Builds Upon, and Adapts Existing Work

This Planning project differs from existing competency studies and needs assessments in several important ways. Unlike prior work that relies on descriptive surveys or anecdotal evidence, this project uses an expert-validated competency framework as an analytic lens, enabling systematic comparison across domains rather than ad hoc identification of isolated skills (Peacock, 2022). The Peacock Competency Model reflects not only observable instructional skills and knowledge but also affective and attitudinal competencies, such as instructional confidence, professional identity, and dispositions toward learner-centered and inclusive design, that generalized ACRL documents do not capture. The framework builds on established competency-based needs assessment methodology from the instructional design literature (Gupta et al., 2007; Kaufman, 1977; Marrelli, 1998; McLagan, 1980, 1997) while remaining specific to academic librarianship contexts.

The project also complements and extends existing scholarship in meaningful ways. Prior studies have examined job advertisements for instructional design language (McTavish, 2019; Shank, 2006), evaluated specific instructional formats (Anderson et al., 2024; Greer et al., 2016), and documented barriers (Peacock, 2025), but no prior work has conducted a national-scale gap analysis using a comprehensive, validated competency framework to assess the alignment among institutional expectations, practitioner preparation, and expert-validated standards simultaneously. The project adapts competency identification approaches used in higher education research, where scholars have mapped faculty competencies for online instruction through literature analysis and survey methods (Bigatel et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2019), but addresses the unique position of academic librarians, who often teach across disciplines, lack formal pedagogical training, and operate in institutional structures that may not recognize their instructional roles. By grounding analysis in a theoretically informed and practice-validated framework rather than descriptive categories, this project enables the kind of systematic, reproducible evidence generation the field needs to move beyond anecdote and toward informed action.

Who Will Benefit from the Project and Its Results

This project will benefit multiple stakeholder groups across academic librarianship and higher education. Academic librarians engaged in online instruction will gain evidence-based insight into competency expectations and preparation gaps, enabling them to make informed professional development decisions and to advocate for institutional support with concrete evidence. Library and information science educators will receive diagnostic information about which competencies are most frequently expected in practice but inadequately addressed in graduate curricula, directly informing curriculum review (Raju, 2017; Turner, 2016). Library administrators and hiring managers will gain clarity about which competencies to prioritize in position descriptions, hiring decisions, and performance evaluations, moving beyond generic language toward evidence-based expectations (Bryan et al., 2018). Professional organizations, including ACRL, will receive empirical evidence to inform the potential development of field-specific online instruction competency standards comparable to those maintained by IBSTPI, AECT, and ISTE (AECT, 2012; Darabi et al., 2006; ISTE, 2021). Finally, higher education institutions will better understand the preparation and support needs of instructional library

staff, enabling more strategic investment in professional development and instructional infrastructure. The project's framework-based approach ensures findings will be interpretable across institution types, career stages, and organizational contexts, providing actionable evidence for systemic improvement rather than isolated interventions. This project is significant because it will engage librarians and community stakeholders in collaboratively defining competencies that reflect evolving community and institutional needs. The resulting competencies will directly inform academic library and information science programs as well as ongoing professional development initiatives ensuring alignment between education, practice, and public impact.

Project Work Plan

Activities and Sequence

This Planning project will be carried out through a sequenced set of five research and analysis phases over an 18-month period (September 1, 2026 – February 28, 2028).

Phase 1: Framework Preparation and Instrument Development (Months 1–4). The project team will adapt the Peacock Competency Model for use in document analysis and survey research. Activities include developing a coding scheme aligned with the framework's five competency domains, creating framework-aligned survey items assessing preparation, confidence, professional dispositions, and access to institutional support, and pilot-testing all instruments with a small sample to ensure reliability and validity before finalization.

Phase 2: Job Description and Position Announcement Analysis (Months 3–8). Academic librarian job postings with instructional responsibilities will be systematically collected from national job boards (ALA JobLIST, HigherEdJobs), professional association listings (ACRL, state library associations), and institutional websites, targeting positions posted within the past three years. Framework-based coding will identify which competencies are explicitly or implicitly signaled in position requirements and descriptions, with inter-rater reliability established through double-coding of a random subsample. Analysis will identify patterns of emphasis, omission, and variation across institution types, position levels, and geographic regions.

Phase 3: National Survey Development and Administration (Months 6–12). A two-round Delphi study will be conducted to establish expert consensus on competency priorities and build community-informed validation of the framework across diverse library instruction contexts. A purposive sampling strategy will be used to recruit an expert panel reflecting diversity across institution type, professional role, career stage, and regional context, with invitations distributed through professional association networks (including ACRL instruction interest groups and state library associations), library instruction listservs, and social media channels. The study will proceed through two iterative rounds administered via Qualtrics: in Round 1, participants will respond to open-ended prompts inviting them to identify,

describe, and prioritize competencies within each framework domain, including emerging competencies not yet fully represented; responses will then be qualitatively synthesized into a structured item set for Round 2, in which panelists rate each item for importance and feasibility using a Likert-type scale and receive aggregated group feedback to inform their reflection. Consensus will be reported using descriptive statistics to characterize agreement across items, and qualitative content from open-ended items will be analyzed thematically throughout to capture contextual nuance and emergent competency areas that structured items may not fully surface.

Phase 4: Framework-Based Gap Analysis and Synthesis (Months 10–16). Findings from both data sources will be synthesized to identify alignment and misalignment patterns. Cross-dataset analysis will map job description findings against survey responses to identify where institutional expectations align with or exceed reported preparation. Domain-level synthesis will analyze patterns within each of the five competency domains, and demographic analysis will examine variation by institution type, years of experience, educational background, and access to professional development. Specific competencies where expectations significantly exceed preparation, or where institutional support is insufficient, will be documented as priority areas for future intervention.

Phase 5: Reporting, Dissemination, and Future Planning (Months 14–18). Results will be synthesized and disseminated through a publicly accessible summary report with domain visualizations and gap analyses, national conference presentations, and a peer-reviewed open-access manuscript. Recommendations will be developed for future implementation research, professional development initiatives, and competency standard development.

Project Staff, Partners, and Consultants

Project Director Rebeca Peacock (University of West Georgia) will provide overall project leadership, coordinate all activities, oversee framework-based analysis, lead synthesis and dissemination, and ensure adherence to the project timeline. Dr. Peacock is an accomplished academic librarian, instructional designer, and educator who has served in multiple higher education settings, including Wayne State University, Michigan State University, and Boise State University. She specializes in designing and delivering high-impact online learning experiences, integrating emerging technologies, and cultivating inclusive teaching practices. The research underpinning this planning project — including both the qualitative barrier study and the development and validation of the Peacock Competency Model — was designed and conducted by Dr. Peacock, ensuring deep familiarity with the framework and its theoretical foundations (Peacock, 2022, 2025).

Senior Research and Instructional Design Consultant Dr. Jill Stefaniak (University of Georgia) is an Associate Professor of Learning, Design, and Technology in the Mary Frances Early College of Education. Her expertise includes instructional design, online learning, performance improvement, needs assessment, and research methodology. She has published extensively on instructional design competencies and has led an instructional design competency project for IBSTPI. Dr. Stefaniak will

contribute methodological guidance for survey design and instrument alignment, expertise in competency analysis, collaboration on interpretation of findings, and co-authorship of dissemination products. Her dual expertise in instructional design and rigorous research methods ensures the project's methodological soundness.

Academic Librarian and Instructional Technology Consultant Jennifer Griffin (Georgia Southwestern State University) holds an Ed.S. in Instructional Technology and brings current practitioner expertise in online instructional responsibilities in academic library settings. She will assist with job description sourcing and review, practitioner interpretation of competency-domain findings, survey piloting, and dissemination activities. Her involvement ensures the project remains grounded in the realities of front-line instructional librarianship throughout its duration.

Together, this team integrates library instruction expertise (Project Director Peacock), instructional design and research methodology expertise (Consultant Stefaniak), and practitioner insight (Consultant Griffin). This combination helps provide a holistic, informed team to conduct framework-based analyses, interpret findings across both library and instructional design contexts, and disseminate results to the appropriate professional audiences.

Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholder input is embedded throughout the project's design and will continue through implementation. The Peacock Competency Model, which serves as the project's analytic foundation, was itself developed through extensive stakeholder engagement: semi-structured interviews with 18 academic librarians possessing significant instructional experience and formal instructional design training, representing diverse institution types, career stages, and geographic regions (Peacock, 2022), followed by expert validation by field professionals in both academic librarianship and instructional design (Peacock, 2025). Practitioner expertise is directly represented on the project team through Consultant Jennifer Griffin, an actively practicing academic librarian who will contribute throughout the project duration.

Survey dissemination will leverage multiple professional networks, including national and state library associations, instruction-focused interest groups, and library instruction listservs, to ensure broad representation across institution types (community colleges, liberal arts colleges, regional comprehensive universities, and research universities), geographic regions, career stages, and instructional roles. Limited open-ended survey items will allow participants to identify emerging competencies, contextual factors, and professional development needs not fully captured by the framework, ensuring the analysis remains responsive to evolving practice. Participants who opt in will receive an executive summary of findings, creating a practitioner feedback loop for validating interpretations. Conference presentations will provide additional structured opportunities to gather input

from instruction librarians, LIS educators, and instructional design professionals, informing the refinement of recommendations and the identification of future research priorities.

Evaluation and Demonstration of Impact

As a Planning project, evaluation will focus on the completion of planned activities, the generation of high-quality datasets, and the usability of findings for future work. The Project Director will maintain regular communication with Consultant Stefaniak through monthly meetings to assess progress, address methodological challenges, and adjust timelines as needed. Quarterly internal progress reports will document completed activities, emerging findings, and any necessary adaptations.

Activity completion will be demonstrated through: pilot test results and inter-rater reliability coefficients documenting instrument readiness; coded job description and survey datasets with documented collection and reliability procedures; completed Delphi consensus results and gap analysis findings organized by all five competency domains; and a full set of dissemination products. Dataset quality will be assessed through inter-rater reliability for job description coding (target: Cohen's kappa ≥ 0.80) and internal consistency of survey scales (target: Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70). Delphi consensus will be evaluated using pre-established thresholds, with item-level agreement defined as $\geq 70\%$ of panelists rating an item within a single Likert response category, and stability assessed by comparing Round 1 and Round 2 responses. Representativeness of the Delphi panel and survey sample across institution types, regions, and career stages will be evaluated against national academic library workforce benchmarks. Impact will be demonstrated through the public report's reach across practitioner and scholarly audiences, conference presentation evaluations, and peer review of the open-access manuscript. These formative and summative measures will document that the project has generated trustworthy, actionable diagnostic evidence.

Project Results

Intended Results and Deliverables

This Planning project will produce five primary deliverables.

First, a National Job Description Analysis will map a systematic sample of academic librarian position announcements to the Peacock Competency Model, documenting which competencies are most frequently emphasized, which are omitted, and how expectations vary by institution type, position level, and region. This provides a framework-based national evidence of what institutions signal they expect from academic librarians regarding online instruction.

Second, a National Survey Dataset will document academic librarians' self-reported educational preparation, professional development experiences, confidence levels, and access to institutional support across all five competency domains, providing national-scale evidence of practitioner readiness.

Third, a Competency-Based Gap Analysis will systematically identify alignment and misalignment between institutional expectations and librarian preparation, organized by domain, and will reveal which competencies are frequently expected but inadequately addressed, where gaps vary by institution type and career stage, and which areas should be prioritized for intervention through training, curriculum reform, or institutional support.

Fourth, a Publicly Accessible Summary Report will synthesize findings with competency-domain visualizations, gap identification, implications for practice, and recommendations for future work, designed for use by LIS educators, library administrators, and professional organizations. Fifth, the project will produce at least two National Conference Presentations at venues such as ACRL and AECT, and one Peer-Reviewed Open-Access Publication reporting findings and methodology.

How Results Will Address the Identified Need

The project results will directly address the identified need by replacing anecdote and speculation with the first national-scale, evidence-based assessment of alignment between institutional expectations for online library instruction and librarians' actual preparation. Currently, discussions of preparation gaps rely primarily on localized case studies or generalized assertions about inadequate training (Omarsaib, 2025; Peacock, 2022; Raju, 2017). By systematically documenting both what institutions expect and what librarians report being prepared to do, this project will generate specific, actionable evidence: identifying the competency domains where gaps are largest, revealing whether gaps are field-wide or concentrated by institution type or career stage, and pinpointing whether inadequacies trace primarily to graduate preparation, professional development access, or institutional support structures. Critically, the findings will provide an empirical foundation for ACRL or other professional organizations to develop field-specific online instruction competency standards, addressing the critique raised by Shank and Bell (2011) over a decade ago and remaining unresolved, comparable to the standards maintained by IBSTPI, AECT, and ISTE for instructional designers and online educators.

Ensuring Results Are Readily Adaptable, Generalizable, and Usable

Results will be designed for broad applicability. Organizing findings according to the Peacock Competency Model's five domains, already expert-validated and grounded in established instructional design and competency theory, ensures comparability with other competency-based studies in librarianship and instructional design (Peacock, 2022). Multi-format dissemination, including executive summaries, domain-level visualizations, and detailed methodological appendices, will allow different audiences, administrators, practitioners, researchers, and LIS educators, to extract relevant information at appropriate levels of depth. Documenting variation by institution type will allow libraries to benchmark against comparable institutions and identify whether observed patterns reflect local conditions or field-wide trends. Full methodological transparency, including the coding scheme, survey instruments, and analysis procedures, will enable other researchers to replicate the analysis in specific

regions, adapt the framework for related contexts such as public or school libraries, or conduct follow-up studies assessing change over time.

Dissemination Strategy

Dissemination will target multiple audiences through appropriate channels. Findings will be submitted to peer-reviewed, open-access journals including *Communications in Information Literacy*, *College & Research Libraries*, *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, *TechTrends*, and *Computers and Education*, ensuring reach across both library and instructional design scholarly communities without access barriers. Conference presentations at ACRL will reach instruction-focused librarians and library leaders, while presentations at AECT will connect findings to the broader instructional design and educational technology community. Project reports will be shared with ACRL's Instruction Section and ALA's Library Instruction Round Table, and results will be disseminated to LIS program directors through ALISE channels to support evidence-based curriculum conversations. Survey participants who opt in will receive executive summaries, enabling practitioner validation of interpretations and maintaining the feedback loop established through stakeholder involvement.

Sustaining the Benefits Beyond the Period of Performance

Sustainability is built into the project's design. The summary report, domain visualizations, and methodological documentation will be deposited in institutional repositories and shared through open-access platforms, ensuring long-term accessibility without ongoing project funding. The validated methodology and baseline dataset will enable future researchers to conduct longitudinal studies, evaluate the effectiveness of professional development interventions, or adapt the framework-based approach to other library contexts — establishing infrastructure for ongoing evidence-based workforce assessment rather than a one-time snapshot. LIS programs that use findings to inform curriculum revision will generate sustained benefits as graduates enter the profession better prepared for online instructional roles. If findings reveal sufficient consensus around essential competencies and significant preparation gaps, they may catalyze the development of field-specific competency standards by ACRL or other professional organizations, creating lasting impact on professional expectations, evaluation practices, and hiring decisions across academic librarianship.

How Results and Deliverables Will Inform Future Work

As a Planning project, all deliverables are designed as evidence-based starting points for future implementation, not endpoints. The gap analysis will identify specific competency areas where targeted interventions, professional development programs, curricular modules, or communities of practice are most urgently needed, providing professional organizations with a diagnostic foundation to design evidence-based continuing education offerings rather than programs built on assumed needs. Developing such interventions would be a logical next step for this team to build.

Results will help determine the appropriate scale and focus of future work: whether field-wide interventions are needed (if gaps are widespread across all domains), targeted professional development (if gaps concentrate in specific areas), institutional policy advocacy (if gaps relate primarily to support structures rather than individual skills), or LIS education reform (if gaps trace to inadequate graduate preparation). If findings reveal substantial field-wide agreement on essential competencies, they will provide the empirical foundation for ACRL or other organizations to develop online instruction competency standards comparable to those maintained by IBSTPI, AECT, and ISTE. Variation in preparation and support by institution type may also raise important equity questions about access to professional development, generating a future research agenda focused on equitable workforce development. Finally, the validated survey instrument could be refined for use as a practitioner self-assessment tool, enabling individual librarians to identify their own development needs and track growth over time. In each of these ways, the Planning phase ensures that findings serve not as conclusions but as the evidence base for a sustained program of research, professional development, and ultimately the field-level guidance that was missing when librarians needed it most.

Schedule of Completion

The 18-month project will be led by the Project Director (PD), who will oversee all phases of planning, data collection, analysis, and dissemination, with targeted support from consultants Dr. Jill Stefaniak and Jennifer Griffin.

- Months 1–3, the PD will coordinate project launch activities, finalize project management procedures, and initiate framework alignment.
- Months 1–6, the PD and Dr. Stefaniak will collaborate to refine instruments and ensure alignment of survey measures and analytic procedures with the validated competency framework.
- Months 4–9, the PD and Jennifer Griffin will lead the systematic collection and coding of academic librarian job descriptions using NVivo, while all team members contribute to refining the national survey.
- Months 7–12, the PD will administer the national survey and oversee data cleaning, with Dr. Stefaniak providing consultation on analytic procedures and interpretation.
- Months 10–15, the PD and Dr. Stefaniak will conduct framework-based gap analysis and synthesize findings across job description and survey data sources.
- Months 13–15, the PD, Dr. Stefaniak, and Jennifer Griffin will prepare reports and manuscript drafts translating findings for both research and practitioner audiences.
- Months 13–18, the PD and consultants will disseminate results through conference presentations and publications, and the PD will complete final reporting and project closeout activities.

This phased work plan ensures that personnel and consultant expertise are engaged strategically at key stages to support rigorous analysis, efficient implementation, and broad dissemination of project findings.

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