



LAURA BUSH 21st CENTURY LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

Sample Application RE-259752-OLS-26
Project Category: National Implementation

Catholic University of America

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$287,155
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The Catholic University of America in partnership with rural library directors in Virginia, Illinois, and Massachusetts, will develop a self-paced, web-based online professional development course for library staff who deliver reader services to adults. The training, consisting of 15 short modules, will benefit those who work with readers one-on-one, through book groups, literacy programs, outreach initiatives, and online reading engagements. It will address challenges facing libraries in this arena, including limited opportunities beyond fiction genre training, the expense of most professional development, and access to this kind of training for staff that are not librarians. These issues are exacerbated in rural libraries that generally operate with scarcer resources and limited personnel. The project will leverage a combination of academic expertise, practical experience, and new technologies.

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.

Happy Readers, Informed Communities: Training Library Staff for Success in Reader Services

Introduction

This Laura Bush 21 (LB21) National Implementation project will pursue the goal of developing a self-paced, web-based, state-of-the-art online professional development (PD) course¹ for library staff who work with adult readers and deliver reader services. The course will be available through the Catholic University of America (CUA) Brightspace Learning Management System (LMS) in combination with the D2L/Merchant system, free of charge, to any library staff member irrespective of their position, education, or rank, and of the type of library or information organization in which they work. The training will rely on the strong professional praxis whereby interdisciplinary research, including a vast body of Library & Information Science (LIS) scholarship, will be put to practical application for the benefit of those who work with readers one-on-one, through book groups and clubs, literacy programs, outreach initiatives, and online reading engagements. The project will be led by Dr. Keren Dali of the Department of Information Sciences at CUA, in partnership with the Directors of three rural libraries: Cindy Scheu (J. Robert Jamerson Memorial Library, Appomattox, VA), Jessica Sparenberg (Parlin-Ingersoll Public Library, Canton, IL), and Antonia Stephens (Hyannis Public Library, Barnstable, MA). Both published research and professional experience attest to the fact that reading is paramount to people's health, mental health, decision-making capacity, and coping skills. Facilitated by libraries, reading is an exciting, profound, versatile, and low- or no-cost activity. Yet, despite the centrality of reading, libraries providing reader services face challenges in staff PD. Courses on reader services are not offered consistently in LIS programs; there are not enough opportunities for PD in the field beyond training in fiction genres; most offerings are expensive; and non-librarian staff often have no funding for or access to requisite PD. These issues are exacerbated in rural libraries, which operate with much scarcer resources and smaller personnel compared to larger urban libraries. The proposed project will be built to overcome the aforementioned challenges by leveraging academic expertise and vast practical experience, and using "new technologies, including artificial intelligence" "creatively and effectively" [1] to improve the training of library staff in reader services. It will explore innovative opportunities in the "provision of continuing education" with the priority in training given to "rural and remote communities" [1]. The project will result in a free-of-charge PD course, built using technologies available both through CUA and open-access, including AI. It will consist of 15 modules incorporating various learning opportunities that will appeal to different learning styles and preferences. The three rural partner libraries directly involved with the project will become the first beneficiaries of this PD and provide much-needed feedback for improving the course before it is made widely available to the LIS community. The project will align with the "Agency-Level Goal 1: Champion Lifelong Learning": "Objective 1.2. Support the training and professional development of the museum and library workforce"[2]. It will also meet the LB21 "Program Goal 2. Train and retain current library and archives professionals, faculty, and staff" "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" [3]. The program will have embedded flexibility whereby learners can complete individual modules and receive a badge/letter; they can also complete the entire course and receive a certificate. The grant work is planned for three years, from September 1, 2026, to August 31, 2029. It is estimated that the project will require \$287.155 in IMLS funding. Funds will be administered through CUA by the project Director. Library partners will not serve as subrecipients or subgrantees, i.e., they will not manage the grant funds. However, they will benefit from the IMLS funds as explained in the proposal.

Project Justification

The Need, Challenge, or Opportunity that the Proposal Addresses and How It Was Identified

The need for the project and the ensuing opportunity for staff training were identified through numerous research and professional publications that span decades of experience, as well as a review of the immediate situation in the three partner libraries. We rely on both in the justification below. Supporting reading—for meaningful leisure, personal well-being, entertainment and relaxation, civic education, information, spiritual development, and coping with life challenges—has always been a cornerstone of public library activities. In its essence, reading is engagement with stories, be they true or invented. While libraries have always invested in promoting and nurturing lifelong reading habits in readers of all ages, in the context of services for adults, the unprecedented revival of reader services started in the early 1980s and still continues today [4, 5, 6]. The early 2000s further saw the resurgence of interest and efforts to support not only readers of fiction but also readers of a broad range of nonfiction genres [7, 8, 9]; they also marked the revival of reader services in academic libraries. The reading experience plays a particularly crucial role in academic library missions to educate "the whole person" and to support the well-being of students, faculty, and staff holistically [10, 11, 12].

¹ We use "training," "professional development (PD)", and "course" interchangeably in many places in this proposal.

Libraries are loved and actively used as free and incredibly rich cultural institutions that make the joy of reading accessible to community members of all backgrounds. And yet, the reading crisis in American society has become a documented fact, with “[d]aily reading for pleasure [plummeting] 40% over the past 20 years,” while “people with lower income or educational levels, and people in rural areas experienced the steepest decline, which highlights a growing disparity in reading access” [13]. This means that we are losing something important both individually and collectively. Lifelong readers are critical thinkers, creators, innovators, problem-solvers, artists, and builders. They are people who value their neighbors and respect human dignity, who cherish their roots and strive for equality, who respect the diversity of human experiences, who engage in lifelong cultural learning, who care for the good health, mental health, and sustainability of their communities, who have a great sense of humor and understand the importance of leisure, hobbies, relaxation, and enjoyment in life. They are those who strive for happiness and a meaningful contribution to society. Decades of reading research tell us that those who read regularly and avidly by choice are better equipped to approach conflicts, cope with life challenges, build trusting and effective relationships in their personal and professional lives, and create bridges across cultures. Without sustainable lifelong reading, these abilities will collectively dissipate because non-readers may be closed off to inspirational, entertaining, informative, imaginative, and educational stories that keep individual and community lives moving forward. Hence, there has never been a more critical time for libraries of all types to get involved and take the lead in helping community members to re-engage with reading once again and find joy and meaning in stories: fictional and real, written, drawn, or told, presented through different media and in different formats. [13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18]

How This Project Differs from, Builds Upon, or Adapts Existing Models, Standards, Theories, Scholarship, or Practice

Helping readers effectively requires training. Nonetheless, the training in effective reader services that are available to library staff leaves a lot to be desired, despite the progress made in the last four-and-a-half decades. In particular, not many LIS programs have dedicated courses on the reading experience and reader services. Most courses are limited to public libraries and do not address academic and special libraries. There is less focus on reading by adults than on reading by children and teens. The major thrust of these courses is on the study of genres with little attention paid to studying reading communities, reading motivation, the nature of the reading experience, and the transformative meaning of reading in people’s lives. Although in the last 25 years, a substantial body of reading scholarship that can benefit library staff has been created within and outside of LIS, much of it is not easily discoverable and not readily accessible to library staff, librarians and non-librarians, who are currently not graduate LIS students or active students in a library technician program. As such, even for practitioners who go through formal LIS education, dedicated PD in reader services is inadequate. The situation for practitioners in the field is even more challenging. Compared to the opportunities for PD in AI, data science, online learning, and information literacy, for example, PD in reader services is less prevalent. Still, some training is available for free through professional associations [19], state libraries [20], and non-for-profit organizations, such as WebJunction [22]. More training is available through for-profit entities, but it requires payment; a course from Library Juice, for example, is priced at \$375 in 2026 [23]. Many PD sessions are delivered as part of professional conferences, symposia, and workshops. These are consistently expensive venues requiring travel, registration, association membership, and per diem funding, which further limits access to PD by staff members without financial support. Often, they are non-librarian staff who work with readers. This is true of libraries across the board, irrespective of their size and location; however, the extent of the funding deficit is greater in smaller and/or rural libraries than in large urban libraries.

The proposed PD will grow out of the framework developed by Dr. Dali and her students in 2021 and called Reading Experience Librarianship (REL). This concept is holistic and all-encompassing; it does not limit professional activities to advising readers on what to read for leisure. REL takes a multi-pronged approach to working with readers that is based on the following ten principles. REL (1) looks at the reader holistically, in a way similar to the user experience approach, accounting for the reader’s life context; (2) builds on an understanding of publishing trends, and an interdisciplinary knowledge of the reading experience, reading culture, reading as a social phenomenon, and differences between reading behaviors and information behaviors; (3) focuses not only on avid readers but also on non-readers and potential readers; (4) requires people orientation and community-mindedness; (5) connects to management practices and libraries’ missions and goals; (6) goes beyond reading and branches out into other types of leisure activities; (7) values accessibility and advocates for equal access; (8) includes one-on-one reader services, in-house programming, and outreach initiatives; (9) benefits from mutual learning by staff from public, academic, and special libraries interacting with each other; and (10) builds on a combination of research/evidence and personal creativity and intuition [5] (see, Supportingdoc1 for an infographic on REL). Building on REL principles, Dr. Dali and her students also developed a framework for effective communication with readers in the context of libraries whereby they promoted a three-pronged approach: questions about the reading context; open-ended questions about the story sought; and specific questions to

narrow down the reading choices [24] (see, Supportingdoc2.pdf for visualization). That is, at the heart of this project, there is a documented progression from conceptual thought development to practical application.

Additionally, Dr. Dali has been teaching graduate LIS courses on reader services and the reading experience since 2010. She has also offered multiple workshops for public and academic libraries and given keynotes on the topics of working with readers; organizing and promoting reader services; bibliotherapy; and serving readers with different backgrounds, interests, and preferences. All of these will contribute to the foundation to build upon in this project. Another crucial and integral component of this foundation is the experience and knowledge provided by the three rural libraries that are partnering on this project, as summarized in the table below.

Partner Libraries, Their Communities, Staff, and PD Priorities (FY=fiscal year)

J. Robert Jamerson Memorial Library	Parlin-Ingersoll Public Library	Hyannis Public Library (HPL)
Library		
The J. Robert Jamerson Memorial Library serves the historic County and Town of Appomattox, Virginia, a rural community spanning 334.2 square miles. The total annual budget is \$404,914.70 for FY2025-2026: \$308,278.70 from Appomattox County and \$96,636.00 in State Aid from the Library of Virginia. This budget covers all operational expenses including salaries, utilities, programming, collections (books, movies, magazines, maker kits), minor repairs, software contracts, and streaming) [25]	The Parlin-Ingersoll Public Library is located in Canton, Illinois, the largest city in Fulton County. It serves a mostly agricultural community. The operating budget for the library is \$832,154, and these expenses include salaries, collections, utilities, minor upkeep, programs, etc. The library receives two thirds of its funds through the Charles D. Ingersoll endowment (\$699,267) while the rest comes through property taxation (\$296,577) and grants from the Illinois State Library (\$19,532) (all numbers are for FY2026). [26]	HPL is located in the village of Hyannis on Cape Cod, MA. It is one of seven private 501(c)(3) libraries providing service to the Town of Barnstable (population ~50,000), which does not have a municipal library. While it receives a portion of its operating budget from the Town, the library must raise the balance of its budget through grants, fundraisers and private donations. The FY26 operating budget is \$802,411; of this amount, \$606,651 comes from the Town. [27]
Community		
The library serves a population of 16,119 residents (as of 2024) that consists of 75.4% White, 18% Black/African American, 2.1% Hispanic/ Latino, and 4.3% mixed-race residents, as well as some other ethnic groups. Nearly 1/4 of residents are under the age of 18 (24.7%); 53.4% are working-age adults (25-64 years old), and about 15% are aged 65+. The median household income is \$62,337; only 20.5% of the population hold a Bachelor's degree or higher; only 57.6% are employed and 8.8% of households lack health coverage. As such, the library plays a crucial role in providing educational and informational resources, support services, and affordable recreation [28a, 28b]	With a community of approximately 12,896 as of 2024, Canton serves as an economic hub. Despite this, 46.7% of the working population commute to work. The highest unemployment rates are in the group of those 16-24 years of age [29]. 14.8% live in poverty (above the national average of 12.5%) [30]. Only 17% of the population hold a Bachelor's degree [30]. The population is 86% White, 6.9% African American, and 4.9% Latino residents, with the rest being mixed-race. 22.6% of residents are aged 65+, above the state average of 17.6% [29]. Although only 2.1% do not have health coverage, many likely utilize Medicaid. Hence, the population greatly benefits from the free library materials, services, and programming, making the library a vital hub for the entire county.	The population of Barnstable has become younger and more diverse, with an average age of 38.7, and over 43% of the population identifying as other than White, non-Hispanic [31, 32]. The percentages of low-income students in the two elementary schools served by the library are 77% and 62%, respectively, and the percentages of English Language Learners are 54% and 47%, respectively. [33, 34] The median household income of the four Hyannis census tracts was \$61,216, with 13.2 % of people living in poverty [31, 32]. That is, HPL serves many members of the socioeconomically disadvantaged population in town.
Knowledge and Skills Gaps		
There are a total of eight—four full-time and four part-time— library	The library is staffed with 11 individuals: six full-time positions and	HPL has seven full-time staff, seven scheduled part-time staff,

employees. The former category includes the Library Director (the only position requiring an MLIS degree). The absence of an MLIS requirement opens employment to individuals from different backgrounds, including retirees, but also means that new staff may lack library experience. While employees receive training in essential operational tasks, such as circulation, shelving, and basic technology, the library lacks the capacity to offer comprehensive training in professional reference services and reader services, i.e., two critical service components.	five positions such as pages, circulation clerks, and a maintenance staff. The former category includes the Director, who is the only staff member with an MLIS; all other employees had no prior library experience at the time of hire. New employees, except for maintenance staff, receive training in the integrated library system and customer service, sexual harassment training, and tutorials in using proprietary library technology. This training often leaves gaps in understanding that can only be addressed as the need arises, which can lead to confusion on the part of the new employee.	three flexible part-time staff (on call) and a part-time janitor. The Commonwealth requires that only one of the library directors serving the Town have an MLIS, which affords flexibility in hiring practices. There are degreed librarians on staff, but many other positions have been filled based on the skillsets that people have, e.g., language proficiency. Now library staff have the capacity to communicate in five languages. There is also a considerable need for staff training in literacy support and reference and reader services.
Training Needs		
Alongside training in comprehensive customer service and reference interviewing, training in delivering reader services remains one of the top priorities. This training is crucial to make staff members less reliant on their personal reading preferences and more confident recommending materials beyond familiar genres. Having access to self-paced training opportunities (particularly during slower periods) would enable staff to become proficient in using reading databases and other professional tools, ultimately improving the service quality.	Training for reader services and conducting interviews with readers has emerged as one of the top priorities, on par with training for customer service, strategies for handling problematic patron encounters, diffusing conflict, and conducting reference interviews. Currently, library staff utilize several websites to assist with reading inquiries, to find titles similar to those that readers loved, and to research series for patrons. However, there is no formal training structure in place to provide guidance and a model for these interactions with patrons. This will also make for a more rewarding experience for both patrons and staff.	Ensuring that all our patrons engage with high-quality library service is paramount; as such, there is a continuing need for training in reference and reader services. Being able to connect and engage readers of all ages from vastly different backgrounds and with a disparity in literacy development is vital not only for our patrons but also for the confidence and professionalism of library staff. Training costs and scheduling form a barrier; hence, flexible and cost-effective training resources are what is needed the most.
Given the libraries' rural locations, limited budgets, and small staff sizes, flexible training solutions that accommodate individual schedules, while building essential professional competencies, would significantly enhance their ability to serve their economically and educationally diverse communities effectively. Having a program available to staff at all times would mean not interrupting the workflows and making staff self-sufficient.		

Who Will Benefit from the Project and Its Results: Justification for National Implementation

It is important to note that the intended application for the proposed PD is not limited to the partner libraries, nor is it limited to public libraries in general. This is what makes the project a national implementation type rather than a community-centered implementation one. The three libraries in question will serve as partners to the course development and also as testing sites for the initial iteration of the course. As institutions with limited resources (in terms of funding, PD opportunities, and other resources), they will become the first beneficiaries of this PD. However, the training will be made inclusive, comprehensive, and flexible. As such, we expect that *all and any* public libraries that provide reader services will benefit from the results of our project, as will academic libraries that are now experiencing a resurgence of interest in leisure reading. Special libraries, including hospital and other health libraries engaged in the practice of bibliotherapy, are also certain to find this PD relevant to their needs. Finally, it will be of interest to archivists, staff in museum libraries, and other LIS professionals who work in cultural heritage organizations insofar as these organizations have public programming, outreach, or community initiatives that involve stories, reading, and storytelling. In sum, the reach of this project is national and stretches across various types of libraries and cultural heritage organizations.

Project Work Plan

Description

As stated, the proposed LB21 national implementation grant will be used to create a free-of-charge, state-of-the-art online PD initiative for library staff who work with readers and reading promotion in order to enable them to provide expert, comprehensive, and evidence-based service rooted in a combination of (a) formal instruction informed by interdisciplinary research; (b) experiential learning; and (c) the innovative use of latest technologies to engage communities effectively and creatively. The course will be designed to address the PD gaps mentioned earlier by achieving the following:

- A no-cost PD course that integrates interdisciplinary reading scholarship with the vast practical experience and tacit knowledge of practitioners who work with readers in all types of libraries;
- Availability to any library, including small and rural libraries, any library staff, librarians and non-librarians;
- A single point of access to PD related to multiple aspects of reading and reader services, overcoming the scattered nature of available opportunities (currently offered through corporate entities, NFP, associations, and professional conferences);
- Multi-modal learning (readings, videos, lectures, online resources, audio materials, animation, etc.);
- An asynchronous self-paced PD opportunity;
- State-of-the-art technology balanced with human expertise and empathy that facilitate creative and innovative methods for reader engagement and reading promotion;
- A comprehensive scope of the PD course, specifically:
 - Suitable for not only public but also academic and special libraries, museums, archives, and any setting that works with readers, reading, and storytelling;
 - Focused on readers and communities in addition to the coverage of genres;
 - Focused on nonfiction reading and the reading of online materials and periodicals in addition to fiction.

Staff members will register through the CUA D2L/Merchant system for free in order to gain access to the course. They will be able to start at any time, although we will provide recommendations for the most effective “cohort” start dates when groups of individuals will proceed through the course together, capitalizing on peer learning and experience exchange. This will help us monitor progress, troubleshoot any content-related or technical issues, and continuously collect assessment data to improve the course and keep it up to date. The proposed PD will consist of 15 modules and one repository of resources; the modules will utilize both recurrent and unique elements, depending on the topic. At the basic level, the course will be divided into two large parts and further broken down into topics, as shown below:

1. History and Foundations of Reader Services in American Libraries. Applications of Reading Theories in LIS Practice	9. Information-Driven Nonfiction Readers and Related Genres
2. Appeal Factors and the Reading Experience	10. Narrative Nonfiction Readers and Related Genres
3. Effective Conversations with Readers	11. Reading Periodicals and Online Content for Leisure
4. Reading Groups. Reading Outreach and Programming	12. Sci-Fi, Fantasy, and Horror
5. Reaching Beyond Traditional Readers (e.g., reluctant readers, readers who do not use libraries, etc.)	13. Religious, Biblical, and Christian Fiction. Romance, Historical Fiction
6. Reading in Academic Libraries	14. Mystery, Crime, Thriller, and Adventure Genres Westerns.
7. Foundations of Bibliotherapy for LIS Professionals	15. YA and Graphic Novels for Adult Readers
8. Making Reader Services Integral to Your Library’s Mission, Goals, and Strategic Plan. Reading Promotion.	An Online Repository of Crowdsourced Updatable Resources for Helping Readers

The following recurrent elements will be included in each module:

- Pre-recorded content (a professionally recorded mini-lecture/talk, supplied with human-edited closed captions; a deck of pdf. slides; and a generated transcript of the recorded talk available for download).
- Interactive exercises and knowledge checks, mostly, building on scenario-based activities and involving either creative tasks (e.g., given a prompt, developing a basic plot in a specific genre/subgenre) or problem solving (e.g., working with specific groups of readers or individual readers with specific interests and expectations); some quizzes can also be considered.

The following unique elements will be integrated into select modules:

- Five-minute pre-recorded interviews with LIS practitioners about their experience delivering reader service; these will include public, academic, and possibly special libraries, with an emphasis on highly creative, innovative, and low-cost practices that can be adapted in other libraries.
- Ten-minute recordings from participating partner libraries reflecting on their local practices and experiences, including interviews with the partner library Directors.
- Panel discussions related to reading promotion, programs, outreach, and events.
- Short recorded skits and creative videos that act out reader engagement and salient professional dilemmas in reader services, recorded by CUA students.
- For genre studies, animated videos created using such applications as VideoScribe by Sparkol or an equivalent; the use of AI (e.g., Google Notebook LM) will be considered in some instances.

Last but not least, we will develop an online crowdsourced repository of the most commonly used categorized resources that help staff to provide reader services. This repository will be built outside of Brightspace/university servers and linked to the course. A few aspects will be left out. Hands-on training in specific professional electronic tools (e.g., the NoveList database by EBSCO or Books & Authors by Gale) will be strategically excluded. They are rapidly changing commercial products that have their own training materials and workshops. We also choose not to promote specific commercial products. However, the most commonly used professional tools, both electronic and print, will be mentioned in the appropriate course modules.

The Sequence of Activities. Planning, Implementation, and Management

September 1, 2026 – February 28, 2027: The detailed planning and development of learning modules; content selection, accompanying materials, and assessment techniques. *March 1, 2027 – August 31, 2027:* Working with a professional video production company, LearningMate, on the filming of modules related to readers and reading practices. *September 1, 2027 – February 29, 2028:* Working with CUA students on the creative production of the genre-related modules. The production cycle will therefore take 18 months. Simultaneously, we will be working with the CUA (Office of the Provost/Director of Online Programs and the University Registrar) on the creation and proper branding of badges, letters of completion, and certificates for future learners. *March 1, 2028 – August 31, 2028:* Making PD modules available to employees of the three partner libraries; administering the course; and collecting feedback; it will be a testing stage lasting for six months. *September 1, 2028 – December 31, 2028:* Collected feedback will be used to improve the newly developed course and finalize the offering. *January 1, 2029 – August 31, 2029:* The course will become available to all learners. The team will engage in the active promotion and marketing of the course. The careful and detailed documentation of the process and lessons learned will take place throughout the project, from day one. The project website will be created at the beginning of the project, and the LIS community will be kept updated on the project progress. However, starting January 2029, the team will also be writing proper summary reports about their experiences and making them available through the project website. They will also be preparing conference presentations and articles for publication to share thoughts, insights, experiences, and observations for the benefit of LIS practitioners, educators, and students. The project completion time will not detrimentally affect the content. Many contents are foundational and do not change often; we have also deliberately excluded the aspects of training that are bound to rapidly changing technology. Also, please note that we are requesting three years in order to promote the project and have the chance to analyze and report on our experience properly through professional venues. The actual training will become available within 18-22 months, including the time needed for testing, incorporating feedback, and implementing improvements. See, Supportingdoc3 for the visualization of the design thinking that guided this planning. See the Schedule of Completion document.

Technology and Platforms Used

To recap, the PD course will be built in the CUA-supported Brightspace using the D2L/Merchant application to provide access to the learning modules and facilitate course registration for non-CUA-affiliated learners. The production of learning modules will be implemented in collaboration with LearningMate (<https://learningmate.com/>), an online education company contracted by CUA. CUA has an ongoing partnership with LearningMate in the development and delivery of online courses for graduate and non-credit certification courses. LearningMate provides project management, instructional designers, media development, and technical support to build courses in the Brightspace LMS in collaboration with subject matter instructors; the courses are built using Quality Matters standards for online courses. The university will loan us technology, such as cameras for filming, and we will be able to use the institutional version of Yuja for video processing. The Brightspace functionality will also be utilized to create electronic badges and certificates of completion for learners who completed either individual modules or the entire PD course. The use of AI will be considered for various components of the course, for example, for creating learning opportunities whereby participants

can practice conversations with readers; for building knowledge-check quizzes; for AI-moderated feedback on standardized exercises, etc. The choice of AI will be made when the project begins because technology is changing and developing so fast that there is no way of knowing which one will be the most suitable for the task. The project website will be built on a CUA-associated Google Sites.

The Project Team

The stakeholders for this project are represented by the project Director, team members from the partner libraries, and advisory group members. Their roles are as follows.

Project Director

Dr. Keren Dali is an Associate Professor at the DIS, CUA. She has 25 years of research experience in the areas of reader experience, reader services, and genre studies. She has been teaching courses on reading in LIS graduate programs since 2010 while also delivering workshops in this area of practice to libraries nationwide and internationally. She has previously held an LB21 IMLS grant (#RE-252345-OLS-22) focused on enhancing the capacity of public libraries to serve multilingual readers, which resulted in 11 open-access reports (<https://catholic.digication.com/lb21-multilingual-public-libraries/home>) in addition to conference presentations and a book in progress with Cambridge U Press; and an NLG IMLS grant focused on the employment of disabled and neurodiverse librarians (#LG-252342-OLS-22), which resulted in six open-access reports (<https://catholic.digication.com/disability-neurodiversity-workplace/home>) and the book currently in press with Bloomsbury. Out of over 60 peer-reviewed publications that she's authored or co-authored, 28 are dedicated to reading and readers. The project director will provide general management and oversight of the project, including planning, implementation, assessment, and quality control. She will be in charge of hiring and training students and supervising their employment and PD; coordinating and collaborating with the partner libraries, units on campus, the video production company (LearningMate), and university offices involved; and the financial administration of the grant, among others.

Team Members/Library Partners

The team members have already invested in this project by doing a brief environmental scan in their libraries and identifying the expertise gaps and PD needs, as mentioned earlier. This situates the proposal in the daily realities of libraries and adds a concrete praxis component to the broader experiential and theoretical grounding described in the earlier sections. The team members will continue lending their expertise throughout the process by (1) participating in quarterly one-hour meetings to keep track of the project and make necessary adjustments; (2) contributing ideas to and providing feedback on the course module design; (3) serving as a liaison to the field of practice in order to bring the latest practices and knowledge for inclusion in the course; (4) engaging their staff in the first round of PD after the course development is complete; (5) recording at least one 10-min interview to be included in the course modules; (6) helping with collecting staff feedback for improving the course; (7) helping with promoting the course through their professional networks when it is ready; and (8) delivering at least two conference presentations about the project at national or regional professional venues. They will contribute to the grant outside of their working hours; as such, each member will be compensated at the rate of \$5,500, out of which \$4,000 (\$2,000 x 2) will cover participation in two national or regional conferences (e.g., ALA, Illinois Library Association, New England Library Association, etc.).

- Cindy Scheu is the Library Director of the J. Robert Jamerson Memorial Library in Appomattox, Virginia. With over 16 years of library experience spanning academic and public libraries, she holds an MLIS from Catholic University of America and an MLA in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Richmond.
- Jessica Sparenberg is the Director of the Parlin-Ingersoll Public Library, of Canton, IL. A member of various organizations, including the Illinois Library Association Advocacy Committee, Canton Rotary Club, and Big Brothers, Big Sisters, she has grown the library's program offerings and attendance by 58% since the beginning of her tenure.
- Antonia Stephens is the Director of the Hyannis Public Library. She holds a BA from Bennington College, an MSc from Queen's University, and a Master of Museum Studies from the University of Toronto. Her career interest is the curriculum of the non-school setting, particularly in supporting resources and training that allow individuals to develop reading and other literacy skills through libraries.

Advisory Group

The rigor and overall quality of this project, as well as its connection to the field of practice, will also be ensured through the advisory group whose input will be as follows: (1) providing feedback on and ideas for developing learning modules

to maximize their usefulness for library staff; (2) serving as advisors on ad-hoc issues, problems, and difficulties that might arise; (3) participating in quarterly one-hour meetings with the project team; (4) promoting project outputs and outcomes to make sure that as many library staff as possible benefit from the developed PD course. The advisory contribution of the group members will be acknowledged on the project website and in all resulting publications. The advisory group members will be compensated at \$1,500 per person, paid in three installments of \$500 in the fall of 2026, 2027, and 2028. The group will be represented by frontline librarians and librarians in leadership positions and composed of the following members (alphabetically by last name):

- Gayle Blodgett is the Director of Spoon River Library in Cuba, Illinois, where she has worked for the past 14 years. While she majored in Library Science, she worked in corporate jobs for many years. After completing her Master's Degree in Instructional Design and Technology, she worked at a community college helping faculty with the design of online education and teaching an education class. When the opportunity came up to be the director of the library, she jumped at the chance to put her library skills to work.
- Helen Cawley has over 30 years of experience connecting library patrons to leisure reading. Currently an academic reference librarian and selector for a new Popular Reading Collection at Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame, Helen has long maintained a Leisure Reading subject guide to help patrons find enjoyable material and to provide tools for colleagues as they fulfill their mission to connect patrons to reading.
- Autumn M. Hassett is Executive Director of Cotuit Library in Massachusetts and will complete her MLIS at Louisiana State University in March 2026. With a decade in the technology sector developing learning management systems and training programs, she specializes in digital literacy, AI integration, and continuing education for library patrons and professionals.
- Barry Trott is the Library of Virginia's Adult Services Consultant, helping public libraries plan and develop services for adults. He is an editor of *RUSQ: A Journal of Reference and User Experience* and a past president of ALA's Reference and User Services Association; he is also a recipient of the RUSA Margaret E. Monroe Award recognizing his work in public libraries.

Additional Stakeholders, Beneficiaries, and Participants

Staff Members from the Partner Libraries Who Deliver Reader Services: The staff members from the partner libraries will become the first beneficiaries of the developed course, as explained earlier, and provide invaluable feedback after the first run of the course, which will help us improve the offering. They will be compensated for taking the course outside of their work hours and for providing feedback on their experience at the rate of \$500 per person. This participation will be entirely voluntary without any negative consequences for their decision not to undertake training at that time.

CUA Students: Engaging students and providing them with research, training, and employment opportunities are some of the major goals of this grant proposal. Students will be involved in the following tasks: project management; project communication; module planning; module filming; acting in skits and other simulations to create engaging learning materials; and preparing professional conference presentations, among others. We are planning to hire primarily LIS graduate students; we may also engage students from the Benjamin T. Rome School of Performing Arts for developing videos that illustrate conversations with readers, showcase reading programs, or act out professional dilemmas.

Additional Collaborators

LearningMate—the online learning company contracted by CUA for the consistent quality production of online courses—will be engaged as described earlier.

Other Units and Officers on Campus: The Provost Office/Director of Online Programs will help with the course design and engaging LearningMate; Registrar and IT – the Brightspace Team will be consulted on and help with setting up digital badges and the certificate of completion.

Evaluating and Demonstrating an Impact

Since the project is a PD course for library staff and other practitioners potentially interested in acquiring new knowledge and skills related to reader services and reading practices, the initial measure of success will be the popularity of the course. We will track the numbers of individuals who take the course, breaking these numbers down into those who completed individual modules vs. the entire course. We will track the popularity of the course among librarians vs. non-librarians; reaching the latter category is one of the priorities of this PD because this category of library workers have fewer PD opportunities across the board. We will track what modules are the most popular to draw ideas for future PD offerings. Another measure of success will be the geographic reach of the course, measured by state. An additional aspect of geography will be the rural versus urban status of participating libraries. The reach within the field will be determined

by tracking the type of libraries and/or other cultural heritage and information organizations in which participants work. The latter will also serve as a measure of interdisciplinary reach. Additionally, as is standard practice, we will collect course evaluations at the end of each learning cycle, irrespective of whether it is a single module or the entire course. This will provide a recurrent data point for both format and process assessment and for the evaluation of impact. However, we are aware that learning does not occur instantaneously. For some individuals, it takes time to process and implement the newly learned material in practice. It takes even more time to implement changes and to see improvements on an organizational level. That is to say, in order to determine a more meaningful impact, we might reach out to the learners who have completed either the entire course or select modules with a brief survey about 12 months after PD completion. However, this step will be outside of the project scope.

Project Results

The intended result of the project will be the PD course described in detail under the Project Work Plan. The same section also examines how this PD will address the identified challenges and gaps currently noted in the area of staff training in reader services. We expect that upon completion of the entire PD course, participants will develop or improve the following skills, knowledge, and abilities:

- Interacting with readers in person and online, understanding “readers as people and people as readers” [35];
- Establishing and working with reading groups and reader communities;
- Serving a broad range of readers to provide inclusive services (e.g., readers of different genres; nonfiction readers; multilingual readers; rural and urban readers; academic readers; religious readers, etc.);
- Self-guided and informed PD (awareness of the scope of the knowledge required and knowledge gaps that exist in their own professional toolkit);
- Outreach, programming, marketing, promotion, and strategic planning skills as relevant to reader services
- Book reviewing;
- Connection between reading and other types of leisure and entertainment, including hobbies, travel, informal education, as well as its role in personal well-being, improved mental health, motivation, and spiritual growth;
- Understanding various genres and types of literature.

Usability Across Institutions and Communities

The study is intentionally designed to fit with the PD needs of staff from various types of libraries, archives, and other information and cultural heritage organizations. Unlike almost all PD opportunities on reader services available today, it is not intended exclusively for public libraries. As such, we expect that it will be useful across the entire spectrum of services and organizations. Subject coverage in each module will take into consideration reader service practices in various types of libraries. Also, we intentionally included modules on reading in academic libraries and on bibliotherapy.

Dissemination of Results

The three rural partner libraries will be the first beneficiaries of the project. We will rely on the broad professional network of our partners and advisory group members to spread the word and promote the project widely thus making sure that the LIS community broadly is aware of the project. In particular, our promotion will stress that the course is free, self-paced, and designed not only for librarians but for any library staff member who serves readers. We will further promote this project through conference presentations and direct messages to the distribution lists and online forums of professional associations—national, regional, and local. Since the beginning of the project, we will create a project-associated website that will inform the LIS community of the project progress. We expect that this will create interest and anticipation in the LIS community and generate enough demand for people to undertake PD through our offering. Last but not least, we will commit to sharing our knowledge through both professional venues (e.g., *American Libraries Magazine*; *Public Libraries Online*) and peer-reviewed publications (select LIS journals).

Sustainability of the Project Beyond the Completion Date

It is always a challenge for educators to design a course that can both reasonably withstand the test of time (at least for several years) and remain current and relevant. Due to an effective and valuable combination of ongoing professional experience contributed by the project partners and the decades of research and graduate teaching experience lent by the project director, the team is very aware of the learning design components that will be relatively stable (if not truly ‘ever-green’) and those that will need updating. As described in the Project Work Plan section, each learning module will consist of multiple components; we can metaphorically call it a “collage design.” As such, only some elements of the collage will need to be updated from time to time to keep the course current, interesting, and relevant to learners. For

instance, the fundamental principles of bibliotherapy, genre conventions, and history of reader services will remain fairly stable while the methods of engaging with readers online will evolve.

This Narrative is supported by the following documents: Supportingdoc1 (Infographic: Reading Experience Librarianship); Supportingdoc2 (The Conversation with Readers-Visualization); Supportingdoc3 (The Design Thinking Cycle); Supportingdoc4 (References); Supportingdoc5 (Letters of Support from the Partner Libraries); and Supportdoc6 (The Letter of Support from the CUA Office of Online Programs).

Schedule of Completion

