



LAURA BUSH 21st CENTURY LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

Sample Application RE-260108-OLS-26
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

Columbus Metropolitan Library

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$93,035
Amount of cost share:	\$42,527

Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML), in collaboration with University Libraries at The Ohio State University and Aspyr Workforce Innovation, will address the need for a replicable Artificial Intelligence (AI) fluency training model for public library staff. Public libraries are confronting a rapidly growing need to strengthen staff competency with AI, not only to understand it well enough to use it responsibly in their daily work, but to guide community members in navigating AI tools. The project will adapt academic library workshops for public library use and make them available to a cohort of 25 CML employees, who will each design a pilot AI program and train other library staff members. The cohort will also produce an open-source AI playbook for use by libraries nationwide.

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.

CML Ambassadors Academy

Introduction

Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML) requests a \$93,035 award to develop and disseminate a training tool for public libraries which will help staff gain important competencies in Artificial Intelligence (AI), be equipped to train fellow staff members, and understand the ethical issues needed to serve, educate and guide their patrons through the transition to ubiquitous AI. This project addresses the need for a replicable AI fluency training model for public library staff so they can ably assist community members as they navigate AI and the changes it is bringing to everyday life. This Community-Centered Implementation project, called CML AI Ambassadors Academy, will be a collaborative effort between CML, University Libraries at The Ohio State University (OSU), and Aspyr Workforce Innovation. The project's curricular model builds from OSU Libraries' workshops supporting "Teaching and Learning to Build AI Fluency" designed for OSU faculty and staff. The workshops will be adapted from an academic model to a public library model and presented to a cohort of 25 CML employees, who will each design a pilot AI program for the public and who will then train other library staff members on personal AI fluency and instructional approaches for assisting the public with AI. Under the direction of an Instructional Designer and CML's Information Technology Officer, the cohort will produce an open source "AI Ambassador Playbook," for use by libraries nationwide to adopt as a workforce development model. The project will enhance the disciplines of library science, user services, library instruction, and information literacy. This grant proposal 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 supports 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."

Project Justification

Public libraries are confronting a rapidly growing need to strengthen staff competency with AI. Staff must not only understand AI well enough to use it responsibly in their daily work but also be prepared to guide community members who increasingly rely on libraries for help interpreting and navigating AI tools. This dual challenge, building internal AI literacy and supporting public AI learning, is intensified by ethical and privacy questions that accompany emerging technologies. Without structured training, libraries risk falling behind in their role as trusted sources of information and digital guidance. This project directly addresses these needs by developing a comprehensive training program that equips staff with foundational AI knowledge, practical skills, and a clear understanding of the ethical and privacy considerations involved in AI use. Beginning with a set of workshops currently delivered by University Libraries faculty addresses both personal fluency and a focus on teaching others and will be modified skill by skill so that each teaching objective translates effectively to a public library workforce need.

The project will build library capacity in AI as Ambassadors perpetuate a "train the trainer" model that will strengthen the library's ability to support its community, and help ensure that staff are confident, prepared, and capable of helping library users navigate AI safely, effectively, and with informed awareness. The project will culminate in publication of an open source "Ambassador Playbook" for use by libraries nationwide to adopt as a workforce development model. The Playbook will be shared through professional conferences and key industry organizations.

There will be three primary groups of beneficiaries:

- 25 CML staff members who will earn a micro-credential recognizing validated AI fluency and facilitation capability, distributed across all 23 locations and across key service roles.
- Franklin County, Ohio residents, especially those facing barriers related to workforce disruption, digital inequity, and information credibility, who will receive in-branch support and programs from trained Ambassadors.
- Public libraries nationwide that can replicate the curriculum, templates, and evaluation approach through the open-source AI Ambassador Playbook.

Project Work Plan

People who don't see themselves as "technical" often experience a mix of emotions when confronted with new technology, which can include feeling overwhelmed by not knowing how it works, worrying about job security and stress about doing it wrong. The public library is a trusted institution and the first place many approach for assistance. Library staff cannot assist community members if they do not have a solid foundation in AI fluency and the confidence to assist with it.

For decades, public libraries addressed the "Digital Divide" by providing free access to computers, connectivity, and foundational digital skills. Generative AI introduces a new challenge. Many commercial AI tools are low-cost or free and increasingly pervasive in all areas of life, impacting employment, education, housing and information credibility. The new challenge is teaching users to understand how different models of AI function, evaluate outputs, recognize information imbalance, and protect privacy. It's essential for people to understand how automated systems shape everyday civic life. Without addressing this growing gap in AI fluency, many will simply miss opportunities for lack of knowledge on how to navigate the changing technical world.

This proposal directly builds upon workshops that are part of OSU AI Fluency initiative. OSU's framework provides a rigorous, competency-based structure that connects mechanisms, ethics, and effective instructional practice. This is the "middle-layer" workforce infrastructure that is currently missing from many library AI training efforts.

The current workshops delivered by OSU University Libraries' faculty are designed for university faculty and higher education contexts. The central work of this project is the translation and adaptation of the endorsement into a public library service environment, where staff must support diverse customers and apply AI fluency in real-time service interactions. For example:

- An academic competency such as "construct course policies related to AI use" becomes "patron- and service-point-ready guidance around acceptable use, safety boundaries, and staff service expectations."
- "Critique the accuracy of AI outputs" becomes "practical AI-enhanced information literacy, verification habits, and reference interview integration."
- "Design assignments to build AI fluency" becomes "Design of public programs that build community competence and confidence with AI."

This project captures and utilizes higher education innovation by translating it into an accessible model for public libraries and the communities they serve.

CML will complete the project over 12 months in three phases: (1) curriculum adaptation and governance, (2) delivery of the 12-week Ambassador Academy, and (3) capstone deployment and evaluation, culminating in dissemination materials and a final replicable toolkit.

Phase 1: Curriculum Adaptation and Governance, September – December 2026

Governance and stakeholder validation. CML will establish an AI Think Tank governance group comprised of CML leadership, frontline representation, and OSU University Libraries partners to oversee the project, validate relevance, monitor risks, and ensure alignment with public library service realities. The Think Tank will meet at defined intervals during Phase 1 and again during capstone implementation to review findings and recommend updates.

Curriculum translation. A contracted Instructional Designer will collaborate with OSU subject matter experts to adjust existing or new workshops into a public-library-ready curriculum, including learning objectives, learning activities, facilitation supports, and assessments. A core project artifact will be a Translation Matrix mapping academic teaching competency to public library applications and community-facing program outcomes.

Deliverables by the end of Phase 1

- 12-week hybrid curriculum tailored for public library staff
- Facilitation plan and session guide
- pre/post assessments and capstone evaluation rubrics
- Translation Matrix and capstone template library outline
- Recruit staff to attend AI Ambassador Academy
- Establish an expert Advisory Group

Recruitment

- CML will recruit 25 staff across diverse roles (Adult Services, Youth Services, Customer Services, branch leadership) and across all 23 locations. Cohort composition will intentionally reflect geographic and service diversity, ensuring AI fluency is embedded across neighborhoods and not concentrated in one department. One staff member from Aspyre will also participate in the Ambassador Academy.
- Project leaders will establish a formal "AI Think Tank" Advisory Group consisting of 5 external community and academic experts who will guide the project as it progresses through each stage.

Phase 2: The Ambassador Academy, January - March 2027

Staff will participate in a 12-week hybrid Academy with peer-supported practice. Training will be delivered using small group, interactive sessions complemented by structured learning materials and facilitator-led demonstrations. This approach supports different comfort levels with technology while building shared language and consistent service expectations.

Deliverables by end of Phase 2:

- Presentation of AI Ambassador Academy

- Learning progression for CML AI Ambassador Academy:
 - Foundations: “The Black Box” will cover practical understanding of how Generative AI works, why errors happen, and how to prompt and verify responsibly.
 - Ethics and Impact: “The Civic Layer” will tackle the issues of skewed information, privacy, IP, misinformation/synthetic media, and real-world implications for work and civic life.
 - Applied Pedagogy: “The Ambassador Layer” will deliver facilitation skills, program design, and practice “teach-backs” to confirm readiness to deliver public programming.
- Evaluation: Pre- and post- assessments

Phase 3: Capstone Deployment and Evaluation, production of Ambassador Playbook, April - August 2027

Completion of capstones. Each certified Ambassador will design, market, and deliver a public-facing capstone program at their branch. These programs will be practical, community-centered applications of AI fluency and will function as pilots to gather community feedback and validate the training model.

Capstone archetypes (examples).

- Workforce Accelerator (job search, résumé/cover letter support, interview practice plus verification and bias discussion)
- Small Business Sprint (practical AI uses paired with IP and privacy guidance)
- Family AI Night (intergenerational learning focused on safety, credibility, and creativity)
- Deepfake/Misinformation Lab (evaluating synthetic media and credibility signals)
- Civic Information Clinic (responsible use of AI for interpreting public information with verification practices)

Dissemination of AI Ambassador Playbook through national library conferences, library associations and other professional channels.

Deliverables by the end of Phase 3:

- Design, promotion and presentation of capstone projects
- Analyze Data on effectiveness of academy and readiness of ambassadors

Project Leadership

- CML’s Information Technology (IT) Officer, Justin Bumbico, will lead the project and recruit key personnel. Justin is an IT leader with over twenty years of experience, focused on delivering reliable, secure, and cost-effective technological solutions which align with organizational strategy.
 - Justin has led the CML Task Force for three years, conducting public AI roundtables, establishing an AI speaker series, developing CML staff AI guidelines and policy, offering hands-on learning sessions and overseeing CML’s evaluation and early adoption strategy for Microsoft Copilot within Microsoft 365. The AI Task Force has presented at various state and national conferences, including ALA, Ohio Educational Library Media Association, Ohionet, and Ohio Library Council. The task force was recognized when CML was named the recipient of the 2025 Library of the Future Award for its work with bringing

awareness and education of AI to the library community. Justin and the AI Task Force have facilitated dozens of conversations with other libraries, both large and small, sharing the work and the journey.

- Aspyr's Lisa Pratt-McDaniel will help ensure that the AI Ambassador Academy curriculum is accessible to learners with diverse education levels, backgrounds and schedules. As the first CEO of Aspyr (formerly the Workforce Development Board of Central Ohio) since November 2016, she has led efforts to develop strategies for placing job seekers on paths to family-sustaining careers and collaborating with employers to build talent pipelines. The board, under her leadership, directs the Ohio Means Jobs Center Columbus Franklin County and partners with other agencies to deliver innovative workforce solutions for the Central Ohio business community.
- Meris Mandernach Longmeier (Administrative Oversight) As the Interim Associate Dean for Research and Education and Head of Research Services at OSU Libraries, Meris will serve in an administrative oversight and governance role for this partnership. She provides the institutional authorization for the collaboration and will act as a high-level advisor to ensure the project aligns with both organizations' strategic goals.
- Michael Flierl (Subject Matter Expert & Co-Facilitator) As an Associate Professor, Student Learning Librarian, and AI Faculty Fellow at OSU, Michael will be instrumental in the instructional design and delivery of the training. He will draw on his extensive experience developing AI fluency workshops for university students to help adapt the AI Ambassadors Academy curriculum for public library staff.
- E. Leigh Bonds (Subject Matter Expert & Co-Facilitator) Professor Bonds will act as a core collaborator for content development and instructional delivery. She will work to translate academic AI competencies into accessible, community-centered training modules, ensuring the content is effectively tailored for the library workforce.
- Jane Hammons (Subject Matter Expert & Co-Facilitator) Professor Hammons will also serve as a key partner in the curriculum's development and execution. She will assist in collaborating on the 12-week syllabus, mapping the educational frameworks, and the peer-learning cohorts for the 25 CML AI Ambassadors.

Project results

By the end of the project period, CML will deliver:

- 25 certified AI Ambassadors distributed across 23 locations
- 25+ public-facing capstone programs delivered across Columbus neighborhoods
- A complete curriculum package including
 - the 12-week syllabus and facilitator guides
 - assessments (pre/post instruments) and evaluation rubrics
 - the Translation Matrix connecting OSU endorsement competencies to public library practice
 - a library of capstone templates and implementation checklists
- An open-source AI Ambassador Playbook designed for replication by other public libraries

The primary digital product of this project, the AI Ambassador Playbook and associated templates, curriculum materials, and evaluation tools—will be created and managed using standard practices for documentation, versioning, accessibility, and updates. CML will publish the playbook in an accessible format and update it annually as a living resource with scheduled updates based on lessons learned and evolving practices. Feedback from libraries that use the playbook will be collected using a survey tool.

CML will disseminate results through national library conferences and professional associations and will make the playbook accessible as a practical toolkit that other institutions can adopt or tailor.

Sustainability is built into the model through a train-the-trainer approach: the first cohort of Ambassadors develops an ongoing internal capacity to mentor future staff. Because the curriculum emphasizes foundational concepts and frameworks (not specific tools that rapidly change), the training remains relevant beyond the grant period.

CML Ambassadors Academy Schedule of Completion

Phase 1: Curriculum Adaptation & Governance (Months 1–4): Encompasses Activities One through Four, ensuring the OSU partnership and curriculum are locked in before staff training begins.

Phase 2: The Ambassador Academy (Months 5–8): Encompasses Activities Five through Seven, focusing entirely on the 12-week internal staff training and their initial capstone planning.

Phase 3: Capstone Deployment & Evaluation (Months 9–12): Encompasses Activities Eight through Eleven, focusing on public-facing execution, evaluating the impact, and disseminating the Ambassador Playbook.

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