



LAURA BUSH 21st CENTURY LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

Sample Application RE-260376-OLS-26
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

Georgia Highlands College Libraries

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$99,544
Amount of cost share:	\$0

Georgia Highlands College (GHC), a state college serving rural Northwest Georgia and the Appalachian region, will develop a 12-month initiative designed to introduce undergraduate students to careers in library and information science (LIS). Through this community-centered implementation project, cohorts of undergraduate fellows will participate in a structured training program focused on archival practices, digital collections, research methods, public programming, and community engagement. Fellows will work directly with primary sources from the GHC Archives and regional collections to highlight local history in Appalachia and Northwest Georgia and extend the national Semiquincentennial commemoration. Through mentorship from library and archives professionals, students will gain practical experience while building transferable skills in project management, communication, and public engagement.

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.

Introduction

Georgia Highlands College, a public state college serving Northwest Georgia and the Southern Appalachian region, requests \$100,000 in IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program funds to implement *America 250 Student Fellows: Building the Next Generation of Library and Archives Professionals through Community-Engaged Learning in Southern Appalachia*, a community-centered workforce development and act of stewardship for regional memory initiative that prepares undergraduate students to explore careers in libraries, archives, and cultural heritage organizations. Through hands-on training in the GHC Library and Archives, students will gain experience in archival processing, research methods, program planning, and public humanities and histories engagement while developing interdisciplinary capstone projects connected to the national America250 commemoration. The project addresses the need to recruit and prepare the next generation of library and archives professionals, particularly from rural and Appalachian communities, by providing structured experiential learning, mentorship, and community-centered programming opportunities. Project partners include the Georgia Archives, Kennesaw State University, and regional cultural heritage organizations such as the Bartow History Museum and Archives supporting student training and professional development. The project will produce trained student cohorts, public programs, and exhibits interpreting regional history, and a scalable community-engaged training model for introducing undergraduates to library and archival careers, building on established practices in experiential learning and public humanities programming.

Project Justification

Libraries and archives face an increasing workforce challenge as experienced professionals retire and fewer students enter library and information science (LIS) graduate programs. This challenge is particularly acute in rural and Appalachian regions, where access institutions often serve communities with limited exposure to library and archival career pathways. Many undergraduate students, especially first-generation college students, are unaware that librarianship, archives, and public humanities work represent viable and impactful career options. Without intentional recruitment and experiential learning opportunities, the profession risks losing potential future leaders who reflect the communities libraries serve.

Georgia Highlands College (GHC), a public state college serving Northwest Georgia and the Southern Appalachian region, is uniquely positioned to address this challenge. The region is characterized by strong cultural heritage traditions but also faces persistent educational barriers. Northwest Georgia communities experience lower-than-average literacy rates and limited access to cultural heritage resources, particularly in rural counties. Libraries and archives therefore play a critical role not only in supporting academic success but also in strengthening community literacy, civic participation, and access to local history.

At the same time, the Southern Appalachian region holds a rich and complex cultural history that remains under documented and under interpreted in many institutional archives. Preserving and sharing Appalachian voices, histories, and humanities traditions is an urgent need for libraries, archives, and cultural heritage institutions. Students at Georgia Highlands College are uniquely positioned to help document and interpret this history because many come from the very communities whose stories are at risk of being lost.

Recent initiatives at GHC, including student involvement in archival research, an ongoing oral histories project, the development of a digital herbarium from the Walraven botanical collection, and community-centered exhibitions, have demonstrated strong student interest in working with archives, research, and cultural storytelling. However, these opportunities currently occur in informal or ad hoc ways rather than through a structured training pathway designed to introduce students to library, archives, and public humanities careers.

The proposed project responds to this need by creating a structured experiential learning program within the GHC Library and Archives that trains undergraduate students in archival research, information literacy, program planning, and community storytelling. The upcoming America250 national commemoration provides a timely opportunity for students to research and interpret regional history while developing professional skills in libraries, archives, and public humanities engagement.

Through this work, students will help preserve and share Appalachian histories, cultural traditions, and community memory, while simultaneously gaining the skills and mentorship needed to pursue careers in the library and archives professions.

Relationship to Existing Models, Standards, and Practice

This project builds upon established models of experiential learning, community archives practice, and public humanities programming, which demonstrate that students are more likely to pursue professional pathways when they participate directly in authentic professional environments. Experiential learning models emphasize the importance of hands-on research, mentorship, and project-based learning in preparing students for professional fields.

Community archives and public humanities initiatives similarly demonstrate the value of engaging students and community members in documenting local history and interpreting cultural heritage collections. These models highlight the role libraries and archives can play as community-centered spaces for knowledge creation, preservation, and dialogue.

The proposed project adapts these models by embedding them within a structured undergraduate training pathway located in an academic library and archives environment at an access institution. Students will receive mentorship from librarians, archivists, and faculty while developing interdisciplinary capstone projects that translate archival research into public-facing programs, exhibits, or educational initiatives tied to the America250 commemoration.

While many LIS recruitment initiatives focus on graduate fellowships or internships, fewer programs introduce undergraduate students—particularly those at rural access institutions—to the profession early in their academic careers. This project complements existing recruitment strategies by providing foundational training, mentorship, and professional exposure that encourages students to pursue graduate education or careers in libraries, archives, and cultural heritage organizations.

The project also builds on existing strengths at Georgia Highlands College, including its library instruction program, archives collections, community programming initiatives, and interdisciplinary academic events such as the Academic Showcase. By integrating these efforts into a cohesive program, the project creates a scalable model for community-centered pathways into the library and archives professions.

Who Will Benefit

The primary beneficiaries of the project are Georgia Highlands College undergraduate students, particularly those from rural and Appalachian communities who may not otherwise be exposed to careers in libraries, archives, and cultural heritage institutions. Participating students will gain hands-on experience in archival research, collection stewardship, program planning, and public humanities interpretation while developing professional networks and mentorship relationships that support future career pathways.

The project will also benefit local communities across Northwest Georgia by expanding access to regional history and cultural heritage. Student-led exhibits, programs, and interpretive projects will highlight Appalachian history, local narratives, and community voices, helping preserve and share stories that might otherwise remain undocumented.

Libraries, archives, and cultural heritage organizations will benefit from the project's contribution to strengthening the pipeline of future library and archives professionals, particularly individuals with ties to rural communities and an understanding of the cultural context of Southern Appalachia.

Finally, the broader library and archives field will benefit from the development of a replicable model for undergraduate recruitment into LIS professions, demonstrating how small colleges and access institutions can integrate experiential learning, archives engagement, literacy development, and community humanities programming to strengthen both the profession and the communities libraries serve.

Additional Justification

The proposed project is grounded in a place-based educational framework often described as “place as case,” in which local landscapes, communities, and histories become the primary texts through which students investigate broader cultural, environmental, and historical questions. Rather than studying national narratives in abstraction, students engage directly with the lived experiences, archives, and cultural memory of their own communities.

This approach is particularly relevant in the Southern Appalachian region served by Georgia Highlands College. Appalachia possesses a rich and complex cultural heritage shaped by agricultural traditions, environmental stewardship, storytelling, and community knowledge. Yet much of this history remains under documented or inaccessible in formal archives. Libraries and archives therefore play a critical role in preserving regional history and humanities traditions while ensuring that local voices remain part of the national narrative.

The philosophy underlying this project is informed by the work of Wendell Berry, whose writing emphasizes the importance of understanding knowledge, community, and stewardship through a deep relationship with place. Berry argues that education is most meaningful when it connects learners to the landscapes and communities they inhabit. This perspective aligns closely with the mission of libraries and archives as institutions that preserve collective memory while fostering civic engagement and informed participation in community life.

Georgia Highlands College itself provides a powerful example of place as case. The Rome campus is located on the historic site of the Georgia Institute of Genetics, an important agricultural research center that contributed to scientific and agricultural advancements across the American South. The institute was led by Alphonse Collins, a farmer and pioneering geneticist who served as its first director. Collins played a critical role in revolutionizing cotton production in the South by developing improved seed varieties that transformed regional agriculture and continue to influence cotton cultivation today. In recognition of these contributions, the project will include student-led research and programming celebrating Collins’s legacy and exploring the connections between agriculture, science, and regional history.

By using Northwest Georgia and the broader Appalachian region as a living case study, students will learn archival research methods, information literacy, and public humanities practice while examining the histories and cultural traditions of their own communities. Through this work, students will investigate archival collections, conduct historical research, and develop programs and exhibits that connect regional history to broader national narratives.

This place-centered approach is particularly powerful in a region where literacy challenges persist and access to cultural heritage resources is uneven. By engaging students directly in the preservation and interpretation of Appalachian history, including the agricultural innovations and scientific contributions that shaped the region, the project simultaneously supports literacy development, community storytelling, and workforce pathways into library and archives professions.

Project Work Plan

The project will be implemented over a 12-month period through four primary phases: program development, student training, community-centered research and programming, and evaluation and dissemination. Activities are designed to provide students with progressive experience in archival practice, information literacy, and public humanities programming while developing career pathways into library and archives professions.

Phase 1: Program Development and Partnership Coordination

Months 1–2

During the initial phase, project leadership will finalize the program structure, recruit the student cohort, and establish detailed training plans. The project team will collaborate with institutional and community partners to refine the curriculum for archival training, public humanities programming, and community engagement.

Key activities will include:

- Developing student training modules in archival research, collection stewardship, and public programming

- Establishing mentorship roles for librarians, archivists, and faculty collaborators
- Coordinating training opportunities and visits with the Georgia Archives, Kennesaw State University's Rare Books and Manuscripts, and the Bartow County History Museum
- Preparing archival materials and collections that will support student research projects
- Establishing evaluation instruments and collecting baseline data with the external evaluator

This phase will ensure that all project activities are aligned with the program goals of recruiting and educating future library and archives professionals.

Phase 2: Student Training and Archival Research

Months 3–6

During the second phase, participating students will receive structured training in library and archives practices while engaging in hands-on research projects focused on regional history and Appalachian cultural heritage.

Training activities will include:

- Workshops on archival processing, metadata creation, and digital preservation
- Instruction in information literacy and primary source research methods
- Mentored archival research projects using collections housed in the GHC Archives and partner institutions
- Student travel to the Georgia Archives for professional development and research experience
- Training in program planning, exhibit development, and public humanities interpretation

Students will investigate topics related to regional history, including agricultural innovation and the legacy of Alphonse Collins, whose leadership at the Georgia Institute of Genetics shaped cotton cultivation throughout the South. Because Georgia Highlands College occupies the historic site of the institute, students will explore the campus itself as a historical case study while developing research projects that interpret local history for public audiences.

Phase 3: Community Programming and Public Humanities Projects

Months 7–10

Students will translate their research into public-facing programs designed to engage the campus and regional community. These activities will emphasize literacy development, cultural storytelling, and public interpretation of Appalachian history.

Planned activities include:

- Development of student-designed exhibits highlighting Appalachian history and regional archives
- Public lectures and humanities programs connected to the America250 commemoration
- Community storytelling initiatives that document local voices and historical experiences
- Public events celebrating regional contributions to history, humanities, and cultural heritage

- Participation in Georgia Highlands College’s Academic Showcase and related scholarly events

Through these activities, students will gain experience in public humanities practice, program planning, and community engagement, while the college library and archives expand access to regional historical materials.

Phase 4: Evaluation, Dissemination, and Sustainability Planning

Months 11–12

During the final phase of the project, the team will evaluate outcomes and disseminate findings to the broader library and archives community.

Activities will include:

- Assessment of student learning outcomes and career pathway development
- Analysis of participation metrics for public programs and exhibits
- Administration of post-participation surveys measuring changes in student awareness of library and archives careers
- Documentation of the program model and instructional materials developed during the project
- Preparation of presentations and publications sharing project results with the library and archives field
- Development of sustainability strategies to continue the student training model beyond the grant period

Project findings and resources will be shared through professional networks, conference presentations, and publicly accessible documentation to support other institutions interested in developing undergraduate pathways into library and archives professions.

Project Leadership and Management

The project will be led by Jessica Osborne, MLIS, Director of Library Services and Assistant Professor at Georgia Highlands College, who will serve as the Principal Investigator. Osborne has extensive experience in library administration, archives management, student instruction, and interdisciplinary programming. She currently oversees four campus libraries and the Georgia Highlands College archives and leads numerous community-engaged initiatives that integrate research, cultural heritage, and student learning.

The project team will include Emma Johnson, Manager of Library Associates, who oversees the daily operations of the archives and will coordinate student archival training and collection stewardship activities.

Additional instructional and program support will be provided by librarians and faculty collaborators across Georgia Highlands College who contribute expertise in information literacy, humanities research, and interdisciplinary teaching.

Project evaluation will be conducted by Dr. Tamara Livingston, an external evaluator from a sister institution within the University System of Georgia, who brings extensive experience in program assessment, higher education research, and archival expertise.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders have been actively involved in the development of the project concept and will continue to contribute throughout the implementation process. Planning discussions with librarians, faculty, and community partners identified

the need for structured opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in archival research and public humanities programming.

Students themselves have also influenced the design of the project through their participation in existing archival initiatives and interdisciplinary research projects. Their strong interest in hands-on archival work and community storytelling helped shape the project's emphasis on experiential learning and public programming.

Throughout the project, stakeholder input will be incorporated through:

- Student reflection and feedback sessions
- Faculty and librarian advisory meetings
- Community engagement through public programs and exhibits
- Ongoing consultation with project partners and the external evaluator

This collaborative approach will ensure that the project remains responsive to both student needs and community interests.

Evaluation and Demonstration of Impact

Evaluation will be integrated throughout the project to measure its effectiveness in achieving the program goals of recruiting and educating future library and archives professionals. The external evaluator will work with the project team to develop an evaluation framework that includes both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Evaluation activities will include:

- Pre- and post-participation surveys measuring student awareness of LIS career pathways
- Assessment of student learning outcomes related to archival research, information literacy, and program development
- Tracking student participation in training, research, and public programming activities
- Monitoring attendance and engagement at public events and exhibits

These measures will help demonstrate the project's impact on student learning, community engagement, and workforce development while informing future program improvements.

Project Results

The project will produce a set of educational, community engagement, and professional development outcomes designed to strengthen pathways into library and archives professions while preserving and interpreting Appalachian cultural heritage.

The primary deliverables of the project include:

- A structured undergraduate training program in archival practice, information literacy, and public humanities programming implemented within the Georgia Highlands College Library and archives with a focus on career ready competencies.
- Student research projects and capstone experiences focused on regional history, Appalachian culture, and the America250 commemoration.

- Public humanities programs and exhibitions developed and led by students that interpret regional history and cultural heritage for campus and community audiences.
- Instructional materials and training modules for archival research, community storytelling, and public humanities programming that can be reused and adapted by other institutions.
- A documented program model outlining best practices for introducing undergraduate students, particularly those at rural access institutions, to careers in libraries, archives, and cultural heritage organizations.

Together, these deliverables will provide both educational opportunities for students and publicly accessible resources that expand knowledge of regional history and Appalachian humanities traditions.

Addressing the Identified Need

These results directly address the challenges identified in the project justification: the need to strengthen the recruitment pipeline into library and archives professions, improve access to cultural heritage resources, and expand opportunities for literacy development and community engagement in Northwest Georgia.

By providing undergraduate students with hands-on training in research, public programming, and cultural interpretation, the project introduces students, many of whom come from rural and Appalachian communities to professional pathways in libraries and archives. At the same time, student-developed programs and exhibits will make regional historical materials more accessible to local audiences, strengthening community literacy and engagement with cultural heritage.

The project's focus on place-based research and interpretation also ensures that students develop a deeper understanding of how libraries and archives contribute to civic knowledge, cultural preservation, and public scholarship.

Adaptability

A central goal of the project is to create a replicable model that can be implemented by other access-oriented colleges and universities, particularly those located in rural or underserved regions.

The project model will be designed to be adaptable through several mechanisms:

- Training modules for student archival research and public humanities programming that can be implemented in other academic libraries and archives.
- Documentation of project workflows, instructional materials, and mentorship strategies used to train undergraduate students.
- Templates for student research projects, community programs, and public exhibitions.
- A detailed program guide describing how small institutions can integrate archival training, experiential learning, and community engagement into undergraduate education.

Because many colleges and universities maintain archival collections and host public humanities programming, this model will be broadly applicable to institutions seeking to introduce students to library and archives careers through experiential learning.

Dissemination

Project results will be shared widely with the library, archives, and higher education communities to encourage adoption and adaptation of the program model.

Dissemination activities will include:

- Presentations at professional conferences focused on libraries, archives, and Appalachian studies.
- Workshops or panel presentations describing the development of undergraduate training pathways into LIS careers.
- Publication of project findings and instructional materials through professional and scholarly venues.
- Public documentation of project resources through the Georgia Highlands College Library website and digital repository.
- Community presentations and exhibits that share research findings with regional audiences.

Through these dissemination efforts, the project will contribute to national conversations about workforce development in the library and archives professions and the role of small colleges in preserving regional history and cultural heritage.

Sustainability

Georgia Highlands College is committed to sustaining the benefits of the project beyond the grant period. The project is designed to build on existing institutional programs and infrastructure, including the college's library instruction initiatives, archives collections, and interdisciplinary academic programming.

Key sustainability strategies include:

- Integrating the student training model into existing library and archives programming.
- Incorporating student research and archival engagement into course-based assignments and capstone experiences.
- Continuing partnerships with regional cultural heritage institutions and archives.
- Maintaining instructional materials and project documentation for use in future student training cohorts.
- Seeking additional institutional and external support to continue student programming and community engagement activities.

By embedding project activities within existing institutional structures, Georgia Highlands College will ensure that the student training model and public humanities programming remain an ongoing part of the college's mission to support learning, cultural preservation, and community engagement.

Long-Term Impact

Over time, the project will contribute to a stronger pipeline of students prepared to pursue graduate education or careers in libraries, archives, and cultural heritage institutions. It will also expand public access to Appalachian historical materials and foster greater community awareness of the region's cultural and scientific contributions.

By combining experiential learning, archival research, and community-centered humanities programming, the project demonstrates how academic libraries at access institutions can play a critical role in both workforce development and cultural preservation.

Schedule of Completion

The following Schedule of Completion outlines the major activities of the project over the 12-month period of performance and aligns with the activities described in the Project Narrative and the project budget.

Project Activity	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug
Project kickoff & management planning												
Partner coordination (Georgia Archives, KSU, Bartow Museum)												
Recruitment & selection of student cohort												
Develop training modules & curriculum												
Baseline surveys & evaluation setup												
Archival training workshops (processing, metadata, preservation)												
Information literacy & primary source research training												
Student archival research projects												
Georgia Archives research visit & professional development												
Program planning & exhibit design training												
Community exhibits & public humanities programming												
Academic Showcase presentations												
Community storytelling & America250 programs												
Project evaluation & post-participation surveys												
Documentation, dissemination, sustainability planning												

References

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Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Association of American Colleges and Universities.

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