

The Free Library of Philadelphia, in partnership with Webjunction, ALA, and a diverse advisory board, proposes a Continuing Education Project Grant, “Skills for Community-Centered Librarianship.” Proposed IMLS funding will be used to teach public library professionals the community engagement skills needed to convene, create, plan, implement, and evaluate new public programs. The project will result in an extensive print/downloadable curriculum guide for libraries to conduct in-person trainings, as well as online content adapted for self-directed learners. IMLS funds of \$450,000 will be matched by \$562,000 in cost share.

**1. Statement of Need:** For many years, the field of librarianship had relatively stable competencies, which were largely collection-centered and inwardly-faced. As we reorient the work of public libraries, there is a growing need to deploy community-centered competencies across the field. This project will draw on the successes of multiple libraries that have launched community engagement initiatives, while bringing intentional skills development within reach so that libraries of all sizes can serve more effectively as Community Anchors. This project builds on a substantial body of evidence showing the need for skills development and identifying the kinds of skills essential to this work, for example: the University of Maryland report, *Re-Envisioning the MLS*; the Salzburg Curriculum developed by R. David Lankes and Michael Stephens; the latest Webjunction *Competency Index for the Library Field*; PLA’s *Leadership Academy* and *Project Outcome*; ALA’s *Libraries Transforming Communities*; and the IMLS *Community Catalyst* initiative. This project will synthesize the ideas presented in sources of these kinds, and hone the practical skills needed to put those ideas into action.

**2. Project Design:** What distinguishes our approach is that it will give a sustained, sequential immersion in fifteen skill areas that are fundamental to community engagement. The fifteen skill areas are grouped into three modules: (1) Outreach (needs assessment, asset mapping, relationship building, community-embedded librarianship, storytelling); (2) Program Development (project management, budgeting, promotions, evaluation, failing forward); and (3) Leadership (personnel management, internal communication, team dynamics, diversity and inclusion, and innovation). Some of these skill areas overlap with core practices of the social work profession, such as using a strengths-based approach that weaves the library’s services into an existing network of community assets, and developing relationships with individuals and organizations to make social progress. Participants will also develop skills needed to launch strong and sustainable programs, such as innovation, project management, and evaluation. Each of the three modules will be designed for completion in 18 hours of in-person training over eight weeks: This includes six weeks of discussion-driven, face-to-face education (three hours each week), followed by two weeks devoted to “in-action” projects designed so that learners can synthesize that module’s skill areas and apply them to their unique community contexts.

The project timeline is three years beginning in October 2017. During Year One, the curriculum will be designed with input from a broad range of library staff and external advisors (described below). This year will also include assessment of current skills and knowledge of library staff, and research of existing curriculum resources from the library field. The curriculum design will also draw content expertise from allied fields like social work, community development, education, and public/nonprofit administration. During Years Two and Three, the curriculum will be piloted, tested, and refined through an iterative process involving about 300 staff, divided into nine cohorts. These staff represent a large cross-section of the Free Library of Philadelphia, both MLIS-degreed and paraprofessional, and Shippensburg Public Library, which serves rural northcentral Pennsylvania. Shippensburg’s partnership will help us design a curriculum applicable to the needs of a smaller library system. The curriculum will be shaped by an advisory board composed of community engagement library professionals from a mix of library systems, as well as representatives of masters-level and continuing education programs for librarians. Interest in participation has been expressed by the leadership of public libraries in Cleveland, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Multnomah County, as well as by David Lankes and Webjunction. The advisors will meet in-person midway through Year One to contribute to curriculum design.

During Year Two, they will be asked to replicate elements of the curriculum at their own libraries as part of the pilot phase, and in Year Three they will support national dissemination.

The staff team includes Joe Benford, project director and Deputy Director of Customer Engagement; Lynn Williamson, Chief of Neighborhood Library Services; Geri Clement, Training and Development Manager, along with her staff; Nathaniel Eddy, Strategy Coordinator; and Miriam Holzman-Lipsitz, Manager of Community Relations. A grant-funded Project Coordinator will manage workflow and facilitate communications among all staff, consultants, and advisors. The lead curriculum developer is a Philadelphia-based firm, *language connectED*, which has tailored adult curricula, in-person and online, for agencies such as the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania. In 2016, *language connectED* worked with the Free Library of Philadelphia to create a multi-part curriculum called *Edible Alphabet* that combines culinary literacy and ESL. The project team will work with evaluator Research for Action (RFA), which has expertise in adult learning. RFA will use a combination of interviews and/or focus groups, a survey for all training participants, and training observations to assess the training methods and perceived outcomes, including how the training influences librarians' creation of programs linked to community needs. The findings will be used to refine the curriculum before it is released nationally.

**3. Diversity Plan:** The curriculum developers will draw on the knowledge of library staff representative of diverse cultural backgrounds, varied job positions, and different service areas. Philadelphia is very much a city of neighborhoods with diverse local needs, which positions the city as an excellent laboratory for piloting the curriculum. The training will also reinforce diversity and inclusion as part of the Leadership module.

**4. National Impact:** During Year Three, the curriculum will be released nationally in a printable/downloadable format, along with companion online course content. Online course content will be shared freely via a learning management system. Our vision for this course content is informed by Webjunction's "Supercharged Storytimes" course, which uses Moodle to blend online and offline learning with a mix of webinars, peer-to-peer dialogue, independent activities, and guided self-reflection. National input and awareness will be developed started during the pilot phase, by sharing progress and gathering input on a project blog. National dissemination partners will ensure that the project reaches a broad spectrum of library professionals. Our partner Webjunction will advise on best practices around translating in-person training to effective online training, promote the training by producing a webinar, and include the curriculum content in its course catalog. Webjunction's mission is to support the development of the library profession through free, online educational content. Last year its webinars had 7,600 participants, and its e-newsletter, *Crossroads*, had 24,000+ subscribers. We will also collaborate with ALA's *Transforming Libraries* initiative. Other dissemination methods will include conference presentations, communication with state library councils and state library agencies, and outreach to other stakeholders like the Association for Library and Information Science Educators, Association for Rural and Small Libraries, Urban Libraries Council, and others.

**5. Budget:** Salary and Fringe cost is \$160,000 for a grant-funded Project Coordinator, as well as \$497,000 (cost share) for staff who will implement the project and participate in the pilot trainings. Travel cost of \$23,500 includes conference travel (cost share), exchange with rural librarians, and one face-to-face meeting with the advisory board. Supplies cost of \$54,000 includes handouts and supplies for each training event. Contracts cost of \$185,500 includes curriculum developers *language connectED*, dissemination partners ALA and Webjunction, evaluator Research for Action, a curriculum graphic designer, and stipends for trainings to be replicated by the advisory board. Other costs of \$7,000 include conference registration and training facilities (cost share). Indirect is \$85,000.