Developing a Model of Black History Month Programming in Public Libraries:
The Role of Key Competencies

The University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (utilizing three of its Centers – the Research Center for Group Dynamics (RCGD), the Survey Research Center (SRC), and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), in partnership with the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA), and the Public Library Association (PLA), will build on a 2020 planning grant from IMLS to BCALA and undertake a comprehensive examination of Black History Month programming in public libraries. The requested $750,000 for an Applied Research grant will allow us to operationalize previously identified core library programming competencies, explore the current state of Black History Month (BHM) programming with a nationally representative sample of public libraries, build a model of BHM programming, and develop a Toolkit for staff at public libraries. We will answer the question: **What is the relative importance of competencies compared to demographic variables in determining whether BHM programming is conducted in public libraries?** The project will be conducted from August 1, 2022 – July 31, 2025.

Project Justification
The demographic shifts occurring in the United States, and the commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion by IMLS and the American Library Association, highlight the need for increased attention to diversity in public library programming. This makes it very timely to be able to offer quality programming that celebrates the contributions of African Americans.

While there is a need to do Black History Month Programming, we were surprised to find during our preliminary research that 13% of the District/Library Systems and 22% of the branches **do not** conduct BHM programming. In addition, some librarians expressed feeling less than competent to develop such programming. We believe competencies play a role in whether BHM programming takes place, but we will test that in the proposed study. Towards that end, this project will also build on the National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment (NILPPA) conducted by the American Library Association, in which they identified nine Core Library Programming Competencies. We will operationalize and develop a scale for two of those competencies that we feel are most relevant to BHM Programming given data from the planning grant: 1) Knowledge of the Community, and 2) Interpersonal Skills. Another competency not included in the NILPPA has surfaced in the literature as being very important to cultural programming. Therefore, Cultural Competency will be included as a third capability focus area in this Applied Research Grant. The NILPPA report noted, "An important next step in serving the needs of programming librarians, therefore, is to define more fully how such competencies can be developed and strengthened." The proposed project will do just that and develop a self-assessment scale that provides an indication of mastery for each competency that can be used by library staff.

This project will contribute substantially to librarians' professional knowledge base and competencies related to Black History Month programming. It will also build the capacity of libraries to contribute to efforts that improve community well-being, strengthen civic engagement, and increase opportunities for continuous learning for families, groups, and individuals from diverse backgrounds by providing a BHM Programming Toolkit to develop and improve programs. The Toolkit will include a self-assessment on the three targeted competencies, provide resources for professional development for librarians to build mastery in those competencies, and resources for librarians to use when developing BHM public programming in their communities. We know there is a great need for the latter because, from our exploratory survey, we found that 86% of branches and 76% of library systems **had not** heard of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), which founded BHM and designates a BHM theme each year. Through the Toolkit, librarians will learn about the BHM resources annually made available through ASALH and other easily accessible Black History resources for developing BHM programming. This project will not only have national societal impact by addressing needs identified in a national survey of public libraries, but it will also advance knowledge and increase equity, diversity, and access by providing a BHM Programming Toolkit, thus aligning with NLGLP's Goal 2 and Objective 2.1.

Project Work Plan

This three-year project will use a mixed-method research design with qualitative focus groups and a quantitative national survey based on a stratified sample of public libraries. **Focus groups** will help us identify the core concepts and operationalize each competency. There has been some level of scale development for all three of the target competencies, albeit in different disciplines. We will ask focus group participants about the key dimensions identified in previous scales and see if and how those concepts can be measured in relation to competency in public library programming. We envision two Focus Groups for each competency and will utilize the PLA to obtain participants from their national network. At least **two pilot studies** will be conducted, with a subsample of the national stratified sample, to refine and validate each competency scale. This work will be completed so that the scales can be included in the national survey. We will use the IMLS Public Library Survey database to draw the stratified sample of public libraries (both branches and district/library systems) for the **national survey** whose field period will be in the second half of Year 2. Stratification typically increases the efficiency of the sample and helps ensure that smaller subgroups in the overall population are represented. The national study will include many of the items we developed during the planning grant but will be conducted on a representative sample so that we have confidence that our results truly represent BHM programming at public libraries. We will also extend what was done previously to include three key competencies. Although the research team will start working on the **BHM Toolkit** in Year 1, based on the findings from the survey and the model, the team will finalize a draft of the Toolkit in the first half of Year 3. It will include key results from the survey, a Self-Assessment for public librarians to utilize differentiating levels of mastery of the three critical programming competencies, resources to develop mastery on those professional competencies, and resources to create BHM programs.   Before the Toolkit is piloted in Year 3, a third subsample of the stratified national sample will be utilized in the second half of Year 2 for a "Pre" or Time 1 competency self-assessment and whether they conducted BHM programming that year. We will send that same group the draft of the BHM Toolkit and ask them to utilize it in preparation for BHM 2025. We will compare competencies at T1 and T2 for both those who do and do not conduct BHM programming, and receive feedback on the Toolkit's usefulness during the planning and implementation of their Black History Month programming. Based on feedback, the Toolkit will be revised and finalized. We will archive the data from the national survey at the Institute for Social Research, specifically the Resource Center for Minority Data, at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. **The University of Michigan** will take the lead on the research (IRB approval, focus groups, scale development, national study, and archiving) components of this project. **The BCALA** will take the lead on the BHM Toolkit development, convening the National Advisory Committee, and disseminating findings. **The PLA** will activate their professional national network to create awareness and adoption of the Toolkit and Self-Assessment, outreach to the selected libraries to encourage them to respond to the national survey, and assist in disseminating the findings of the study as a whole.

Project Results

The major outputs from this project are three competency scales, data on BHM programming from a representative sample of public libraries, a BHM Toolkit, and an archive of the dataset from the national study that will be maintained and available to the public online via the Institute for Social Research. Dissemination of information and results from the project will be conducted throughout the three years via the BCALA and PLA social media platforms, conference participation, and publication of academic articles. While this project focuses on Black History Month Programming and competencies related to conducting such programming, it has broader implications for other ethnic commemorations.

Budget

The Regents of the University of Michigan are requesting $750,000 for a 3-year Applied Research grant. That amount includes $151,385 personnel costs for work done by the Research Center for Group Dynamics (RCGD) and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), $136,000 for work by the Survey Research Center (SRO), a $231,453 sub-award to the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, $22,600 for PI Travel, $13,442 for Materials and other costs, and $195,120 for Michigan's negotiated 56% indirect costs.