The Seattle Public Library Foundation (SPLF) as lead applicant along with the University of Washington (UW) and the Meridian (ID) District Library (MDL) proposes a 3 year, $249,000 IMLS National Leadership **implementation** initiative, *Creating Space for Teen Mental Health.* By expanding library staff's ability to **co-design spaces to reinforce positive teen mental health,** this initiative aligns with IMLS NLG goal 2 and objective 2.1. The project builds on learning gained through the IMLS-funded *Caring for Teen Mental Health* project which focuses on helping teens build positive mental health through co-designed VR experiences. The new initiative will increase access to opportunities and resources for library staff to learn how, through co-design of spaces, to regularly engage with teens in building positive mental health.

Project Justification

In the fall of 2020, SPL digital media and learning (DML) staff launched the IMLS-funded project, *Caring for Teen Mental Health*. Focused on co-designing VR mental health experiences with and for teens, this initiative is deeply rooted in the ways in which the pandemic had an impact on teen mental health. In the first year SPL and project partners (from the University of Washington, the D.C Public Library, and the Fayette Public Library, Museum and Archives, in LaGrange TX) realized that the current work is only a starting point in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on well-being (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2021). A finding coming to the fore in the work to date, is that public libraries are a community-centered organization ideal for engaging with teens to bolster their mental health. The space and activities that libraries can provide to teens, the adult mentoring and coaching that can be available, along with access to digital and physical learning opportunities, supports this premise. As a *Caring for Teen Mental Health* team member noted, "We learned that having a space such as the library to escape stress, along with adults who can say, 'It's OK we know this is difficult, we will work through it together,' has great impact."   Co-designing (a hands-on approach for teen engagement) spaces with teens harnesses opportunities for positive mental health as the co-design process encourages teen youth voice, power sharing, and overall engagement leading to a decline in stress among teens. This is apparent in the reflections posted by teens in the SPL VR co-design process, they wrote, "Just having fun can help your mental health which VR definitely did" and "I'm much more conscious of my mental health and creative ways to learn about it."

The current project team discovered that in order to serve teens in this way several areas require attention: 1) There is a need for library staff to have an improved understanding of their role in engaging in authentic mental health support for and with teens. This authentic support must acknowledge the role that co-design processes centered on library spaces play in bolstering teen mental health. Beyond offering materials and hot line numbers to teens in crisis, libraries must help teens before crises occur by giving them opportunities to de-stress through co-design activities. 2) As the library is an ideal environment for teens to build quality mental health, teens and library staff require opportunities to work cooperatively, build relationships, and talk honestly with each other about mental health challenges. While the vulnerability that is required in order to achieve this may be challenging to library staff, through co-design these conversations happened organically in the *Caring for Teen Mental Health* project. As a result, teens and library staff felt more confident in their own mental health and we saw stigmas around mental health decline. 3) Libraries must build equitable mental health services so as to reach youth throughout the entire community. The pandemic served to highlight the mental health needs of BIPOC teens (Center for American Progress, 2020). It is imperative that libraries ensure that their focus is not only on privileged teens, who tend to be traditional library users (Pew Research Center, 2016) and intentionally connect with communities of color so as to buttress the mental health of teens needing the most support.

Project Work Plan

Creating Space for Teen Mental Health addresses areas of need by designing training and materials that can be used throughout the United States and that will: 1) Build capacity of library staff to guide teens - through design of physical & virtual spaces- how to manage their personal stress/stressors in support of positive well-being. 2) Reduce the stigma library staff and teens place on mental health and create opportunities for authentic conversations related to well-being. As a library staff member in the current project stated, "This project helped me realize that mental health is an everyday thing and we talk naturally about that with teens." 3) Expand ways in which library staff see the role they play in helping teens to engage in mental health activities. Activities that occur nationwide will take place via Zoom. Participating local libraries will determine, based on their communities needs and assets, if activities occur via hybrid, virtual, or a face-to-face model.

Phase 1: Design - August 1- 2022-July 31, 2023 SPL and UW, along with MDL will design a framework and process for providing training to library staff in support of reaching the need areas listed above (self mental health, guiding teens in co-design for positive mental health, reducing mental health stigma, and moving beyond digital and physical resources). Activities and training designed by the team will be tested by teen library staff at SPL and the MDL. Using these materials staff will learn how to facilitate co-design processes with teens in their neighborhoods. Materials designed for this phase will be revised and iterated as participating staff provide feedback. Beginning in the last quarter of year 1, the project team will recruit applicants to form a cohort that will learn how to facilitate co-design for teen mental health in their own

communities A call for applicants will be disseminated widely including through ALA Division and Affiliate communications channels, state library agency distribution lists, and LIS and information school communications channels. The project team will pay close attention to recruitment of libraries from a variety of settings, (rural, small, urban, and suburban), capacity of the organization to participate, commitment to engaging BIPOC and non-dominant youth, and a mindset for embedding mental health into everyday practices. 6 to 8 libraries will be selected.

Phase 2: Test & Iterate - August 1, 2023 - July 31, 2024 Phase 2 launches with an orientation session for selected libraries. Then participating library staff will begin a training process, as a cohort, that uses the above-mentioned framework, to develop skills in facilitating co-design processes with teens in support of mental health. This training will provide cohort members with the chance to engage with the materials designed in phase 1 and practice, as a cohort, using a co-design approach. The additional libraries will also have the opportunity to customize the materials developed by the project team for use in their own setting. In the second half of phase 2, trained library staff will begin facilitating co-design sessions with teens in their own communities. Monthly Zooms will afford participating library staff opportunities to continue to learn with each other. Based on feedback, materials will continue to be iterated.

Phase 3: Dissemination - August 2024 - July 31, 2025 In the 3rd phase of the initiative, participating library staff from across the U.S. will continue to facilitate co-design for mental health through their libraries. Concurrently the project team will begin a nationwide dissemination of project materials and learnings; making the materials available via a virtual catalog of materials created by the project team and libraries participating in years 2 and 3. Along with customizable training plans, materials will include resources for learning more about everyday approaches to mental health, co-designing spaces in support of teen mental health, and co-design as an approach to supporting teen mental health. The project team will also publish articles in publications such as Public Library magazine and Library Journal and submit proposals to conferences such as PLA, LibLearnX, and ARSL. The ALA Public Information Office will serve as a project partner and support wide-dissemination of materials and findings

Project Team: Lead PI, Juan Rubio, Digital Media and Learning Program Manager at SPL and PI of the IMLS-funded *Caring for Teen Mental Health* initiative, brings expertise in building library staff skills through co-design and digital processes. **Co-PI: Jin-Ha Lee,** Associate Professor, UW iSchool, is expert in co-design in digital and analog spaces. **Co-PI: Elin Bjorling,** Senior Research Scientist, UW, Department of Human Computer Design and Engineering brings her background in nursing science and psychology, along with expertise in co-design for mental health to this initiative. **Co-Design Expert: Luis Gonsalez**, Digital Media and Learning Program Coordinator at SPL, brings vast expertise in design and delivery of activities for and with library staff and teens. **External Evaluator**: **Caitlin K. Martin**, a learning sciences research consultant and project evaluator. Students from UW majoring in human centered design & engineering, architecture or urban planning will serve as interns and support co-design processes. The project team will work with MDL staff who bring experience in community partnerships and staff development, as a project partner. The partnership between SPL and MDL will expand communities served to include BIPOC and non-dominant youth.

Project Results The *Create Space for Teen Mental Health* project will equip library staff with the co-design literacies needed to encourage positive teen mental health and the ability to respond to local teen mental health needs. The initiative's external evaluator will engage with participating staff through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and reflections so as to assess project results. The project team will iterate activities based on evaluator findings and will, through testing in years 2 and 3, make sure that what is designed is usable to those not engaged as a part of the project cohorts. During year 3, materials developed will be disseminated across the U.S. so library staff are able to serve their community's teen mental health needs.   Libraries will provide much needed services to their communities and will prepare teens nationwide for successful healthy futures. Ultimately, this initiative will provide staff with skills they can use, beyond those associated with mental health, in work with all age groups. The skills will be transferable to projects such as equity-based library services and building community-based services.

Diversity Plan The [impact of the pandemic on BIPOC communities](Wiley, 2020) was extreme and, as mentioned above, exacerbated the mental health challenges of youth in these communities. *Creating Space for Teen Mental Health* recognizes this and will embed in activities for and with library staff resources for learning about the mental health needs and assets of BIPOC youth. (And, through partnership with MDL, will broaden connections with BIPOC and non-dominant youth.) These will include templates and tools for use in recruiting BIPOC and non-dominant teens to co-design sessions, understanding the specific mental health needs of BIPOC and non-dominant youth, and giving BIPOC and non-dominant teens opportunities to authentically add their voices to co-design sessions.

Budget Summary We are seeking $249,000. $100,000 will be for salaries and related personnel costs at SPL and UW and contracted positions (including co-design facilitator, student intern wages, website developer), $50,000 for mental health expertise and associated costs, $48,000 will be for training costs including incentives for libraries, $25,000 will be for dissemination of information regarding the project approach and results including web design and development; $10,000 will be for evaluation; trainer fee $10,000 and $6,000 will be for equipment and software costs**.**