

1. JUSTIFICATION

This project ***Building Social Capital: An Inclusive Approach to Immigrant Financial Integration*** responds to IMLS Goal 2/Objectives 1, 2, 3. It develops a collective impact model for public, private, and social sectors invested in raising the financial health of local immigrant, refugee, and migrant communities (Hereafter referred to as Immigrants). Through the integration and scaling of asset building strategies, it generates innovative approaches towards mainstreaming un-/underbanked communities resulting in key indicators that demonstrate how best to address these barriers. The model deployed is universally applicable to other disenfranchised populations. Hartford Public Library (HPL) is the lead applicant and requests \$487,853 and provides \$495,029 as cost share. Our key partners are as follows:

[Liberty Bank](#) serves as the project's Host Bank partner. In selecting a bank, HPL prioritized a mutual bank with strong consumer ratings. Free from stockholder calls for larger returns, mutual institutions tend to be community focused. Established in 1825, Liberty Bank is one of the oldest and largest mutual banks in the U.S. named 'Top Workplace' by the Hartford Courant every year since 2012. In 2019, Liberty ranked 4th in the U.S. in Forbes' first-ever "Best Banks in the World" listing, and in 2021 it was designated as 'Best-In-State Bank' in Connecticut. This prestigious award is presented by Forbes and Statista Inc., the world's leading ranking source. As a member of Bank On Connecticut, Liberty further demonstrates its commitment to expand widespread availability of safe, low cost transactional products.

[Connecticut Association for Human Services](#) (CAHS) was founded in 1910 as an independent, nonprofit public education, research and policy development organization committed to decreasing poverty and inequality. A key strength of CAHS is its ability to work in coalition with others, bringing together diverse interests – concerned citizens, policy makers, human service providers, corporate leaders, labor leaders, academics, state and municipal organizations, and religious organizations – to ensure that all state residents have the opportunity to lead healthy, productive lives. HPL and CAHS have collaborated on various past projects. This project leverages CAHS' financial wellbeing services which include volunteer financial coaches and financial literacy tools.

[The Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund's \(CFE\) Bank On](#) is a national initiative supporting local Bank On coalition efforts to connect consumers to safe, affordable bank accounts. CFF offers strategic financial support and advocacy by liaising with national banking institutions, regulatory commissions, and nonprofit organizations. Our partner CAHS coordinates Bank On Connecticut and serves as the State's liaison. This connectedness loops this Project into an existing network of local, state, and federal stakeholders working together to improve the financial stability of marginalized populations.

Additional key stakeholders actively support the implementation and success of this initiative include Connecticut United Way ALICE Saves, the City of Hartford, the City's Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, and the State's District Attorney's Office.

► **Need/Challenge:** Approximately one-quarter of all households in the United States are *unbanked* - having no relationship with mainstream financial institutions or *underbanked* - having a current checking or savings account but still relying on non-bank transactions. These households regularly use commercial money orders, check-cashing services, payday loans, rent-to-own agreements and pawn shops. Accompanied by high fees, non-bank financial transactions take a heavy toll on generating individual wealth. While challenges caused primarily by socioeconomic status affect access to financial products, by both immigrants and the native-born, immigrants are more likely to be unbanked, less likely to participate in formal retirement savings and possess lower levels of financial literacy. While 5.1% of native-born families don't have transaction accounts, the percentages lacking such accounts are significantly

higher among immigrant households, i.e., 53% of Mexicans, 37% of other Latin Americans, 20% of Asians and 17% of Europeans. Similar patterns hold for savings accounts, homeownership and stock ownership with the gap in financial participation widening with the growing sophistication of each level of financial product. Immigrants constitute a rapidly growing share of the U.S. population. In 2018, immigrant-led households had \$1.2 trillion in collective spending power. Despite their crucial role in growing our nation's economy, the record-breaking size and diversity of our nation's immigrant population has created a critical demographic that remains marginalized from the American financial mainstream. Even if immigrants find ways to meet their immediate needs for managing money, it often takes them more time and effort over the long term to benefit from the full scope of financial products and services available.

The field scan above is further observed through Library staff's own level of community engagement. How to mainstream un-/underbanked populations and curb predatory lending practices, particularly pervasive in immigrant communities, is a recurrent agenda item at neighborhood meetings and economic development convenings. Staff have also shared ample anecdotal evidence in their daily interactions with newcomer immigrants. Frequent targets of predatory loans - in the form of abusive mortgage lending, high interest car loans, rent-to-own furniture and electronics, tax refund anticipation loans – victims seek advice from Library staff often when it is too late to remedy. Predatory lending is further exacerbated by sophisticated online tactics, which staff have witnessed firsthand navigating customers away from such fraudulent Websites and phishing tactics. In spite of significant legislative efforts, designed to curb predatory lending, the problem persists.

The following challenges are unique to immigrants and often transcend socioeconomic factors: Unfamiliarity and distrust of both financial and government institutions; limited English proficiency; and, societal isolation. Financial education institutions also encounter numerous challenges in reaching immigrants, notably, ensuring accessibility and convenience, timing the delivery of information, and adapting curriculum and materials in ways that are culturally responsive. Public libraries, on the other hand, are at the forefront of their communities in welcoming immigrants with diverse collections, cultural, and educational programming aimed at linguistic, civic, and economic integration. In fact, an increasing number of organizations and government agencies such as the Census Bureau, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Center for Diseases Control, and the Federal Trade Commission, broker their resources to immigrants and other marginalized demographics through public libraries and the strategic locations of neighborhood branches. Of note, since 2014, IMLS has partnered with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to provide resources for public libraries to serve as community hubs for financial information and literacy. This has fueled innovative outreach strategies and programming across the nation. However, while libraries continue to educate the public through forums, financial capability workshops, and dissemination of pamphlets, it is apparent that we need to be more intentional in our efforts if libraries are going to have a lasting impact on our beneficiaries. Our focus has been on imparting knowledge in a vacuum, without providing real-life opportunities for participants to apply what they've learned. What is lacking are strategies that actively engage participants in the learning experience leading them away from unscrupulous alternative financial services sectors and towards establishing mainstream banking relationships. According to research conducted by the Brookings Institute, one key strategy for bringing un-/underbanked households into the banking system is for both banks and not-for-profit community-based organizations (CBOs) to partner. If the CBO is well-respected and well-connected in the community, it can take measures to mitigate any distrust that the community might have of banks. Furthermore, they understand the particular literacy needs and social safety nets of their communities, and how to respond appropriately.

This proposed cross-sector collaborative harnesses the library's requisite public-trust, knowledge building, and social capital as fertile ground for building relationships of trust between banks and un-/underbanked populations. It offers a unique learner-centered, project-based approach, utilizing a Learning Circle framework particularly well suited to these public library aspects. The practice of Learning Circles is becoming increasingly popular in education, specifically in the field of Adult Education. Not only do they foster community and mutual trust, but also can enrich the academic as well as the social and emotional dimensions of education. Many libraries, including HPL, deploy learning circle practices in a range of subjects such as digital literacy and English conversation groups. The social aspect of Learning Circles is also a familiar grassroots practice among many immigrants for managing their finances, and is popular among many cultures across the globe. Known as *Rotating Savings and Credit Associations* (ROSCA) or *Lending Circles*, they are formed by a group of people lending money to each other without interest or fees. Members take turns withdrawing money from the pool until every member has tapped their allocation. These lending circles operate outside the greater national economy. Today some companies have taken the concept and formalized it by reporting on-time repayments to credit bureaus, making it an option for building credit. However, they offer a restricted range of consumer financial products and still do not fully engage and integrate the participant into the financial mainstream. This project model named ***Savings and Credit Building Library Circle (SCBLC)*** further refines the familiar lending circle practice by fostering a responsive and ongoing partnership directly between the participant and their local bank through a matched savings program. A basic bank transaction account is unarguably an important first step in opening access to long-term financial wellbeing.

The design model to be implemented consists of participants meeting in small learning circles once a week for a duration of a 5-month cycle providing multiple opportunities for participants to interact throughout the cycle and build relationships of regard and trust. Participants develop knowledge and skills through direct and ongoing engagement with each other, library staff, bank representatives, financial coaches, and cultural navigators resulting in a dynamic and inclusive learning community. From this foundational experience, participants gain the skill set and self-confidence to tap into a wider social network facilitating their integration into the broader community. Individual ownership and group responsibility are at the center of each participant's success as they learn together and support each other towards a shared goal – a sounder financial future. While the savings incentives provided by project partners encourage retention to some extent, it is the building of social capital that organically occurs as participants develop a shared understanding of one another through the building of knowledge, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity, throughout the duration of each SCBLC cycle, that is integral to the success of this model.

The American Place (HPL's nationally recognized program for immigrants and refugees) has implemented two IMLS NLGs to date. One in FY 2016 was designed to promote the linguistic and social integration of late-arrival immigrant/migrant high schoolers (recipient of Library of Congress Literacy Award), and another in FY 2010 was designed to engage immigrants civically so they are both seen and heard. The latter led to the establishment of the City's first *Commission on Refugee and Immigrant Affairs*. The building of social capital – forging relations between immigrants and native-born through volunteer Cultural Navigators and Community Dialogues – was core to the success of both these IMLS investments. Evaluation results demonstrated that a sense of belonging and social capital are theoretically and empirically intertwined. This project allows us to further enrich our work in this field.

► **Target Population/ Beneficiaries.** This project aims to narrow the financial divide for those at highest economic risk locally and nationally. It targets un-/underbanked immigrants with limited English proficiency and/or with under 10 years of residency in the U.S. The project is sufficiently flexible and scalable for libraries to

respond to their local economically disenfranchised demographic. To ensure the broadest reach, the project deploys three promising practices as identified by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau:

1. *Outreach and awareness campaigns* – to recruit SCBLC participants and disseminate information demystifying distrust around mainstream banking culture to the community at large. **Anticipated reach, minimum 3000 immigrants**
2. *Integrated Financial Literacy* – English language learners studying in HPL's classes and not yet enrolled in an SCBLC will benefit from financial literacy education as ESL instructors create lesson plans that contain modified financial literacy content gleaned from the *Connecticut Money School*' curriculum **Anticipated participants, minimum 300**
3. *Targeted financial products and services education* – the core component of this project – the SCBLCs - offers instructional strategies specifically to establish a lasting relationship between the program participant and the bank. To demonstrate replicability of this model, two different disenfranchised communities with whom the Library is currently collaborating with will be targeted in Year 3: Opportunities Youth (out of school youth ages 16 -24) and Reentry Citizens (formerly incarcerated persons). **Anticipated participants, minimum 72 (60 immigrants/12 other.)**

In addition, the project will:

- Improve the knowledge of financial education practitioners in effectively serving immigrant populations – **Anticipated participants, minimum 400**
- Improve the knowledge of library staff (locally, regionally, and nationally) in effectively serving un-/underbanked immigrant populations. **Anticipated participants, minimum 600**

Long-term Beneficiaries:

- Banks – As more insured financial institutions improve their outreach strategies to the immigrant market, these institutions are expected to experience more rapid deposit and loan growth and offer a broader range of financial services, positively contributing to their bottom line.
- Public Libraries – Libraries that adopt this model will serve as vital catalysts within their communities in achieving financial inclusion for marginalized populations and therefore filling a significant equity gap.
- Broader Hartford Community – Communities that develop and nurture a strong financial services infrastructure are more likely to develop financially stable and empowered households.

2. PROJECT WORK PLAN

Confidentiality Statement: Project staff and volunteers agree to sign a *Personal Identifiable Information* confidentiality form. Participant intake forms include the following statement: “*I understand that student information is confidential and will be used only for program administration, research and evaluation purposes.*” All records are kept confidential.

2022 August – September

- ▶ *Notify partners and execute MOUs with Liberty Bank and CAHS.*
- ▶ *Award Announcement is Publicized*
- ▶ *Execute Contract with Evaluator:* The Project has identified an independent evaluator, Dr. Melanie Long from the College of Wooster, Ohio, with expertise in the area of political economy of inequality. Evaluation of the project is ongoing. Collection of qualitative data for the purposes of process and outcome evaluation will begin with funding notification. The evaluator will meet with project staff on a semi-annual basis to review findings and consider recommended modifications to the model as needed.
- ▶ *Publicize and Hire Project Coordinator:* This full-time position has a number of responsibilities including overall day-to-day management, coordination, and implementation of project activities, community outreach, participant recruitment, intake and assessment.

► *Publicize and Hire Financial Capability Specialist:* This part-time position brings subject expertise and experience to the project. The Specialist will have strong ties to the banking sector and financial education institutions and serves as primary liaison between the host bank and participants. The Specialist works closely with the Coordinator in the intake and assessment phase of the participant, specifically honing in on the financial aspect of the intake process. Both the Coordinator and the *Financial Capability Specialist* work closely with the Project Evaluator ensuring accurate data collection and timely reporting.

2022 October – December

► *Launch Financial Inclusivity Advisory Group:* In 2007, HPL established the Immigrant Advisory Group (IAG) designed to facilitate communication and resource sharing among Hartford-area service providers working with immigrants. The Financial Inclusivity Advisory Group (FIAG) will draw its membership from the IAG - specifically those members that serve as the “go-to” persons within each immigrant community. They are those individuals who serve as the critical link between their respective immigrant enclaves and the broader community. Other FIAG members will include project staff and partners, the Evaluator, Financial Coaches, Circle participants, and other key stake holders drawn from the CT Bank On Coalition. The Project Coordinator is responsible for coordinating meeting logistics, taking minutes and compiling reports. Teleconferencing options are available for individuals unable to attend in-person. The FIAG group will meet quarterly scheduled to follow each IAG convening.

► *Recruit Volunteer Financial Coaches:* Recruitment begins in October and spreads out over the three years of the project drawing from an existing pool of Library and CAHS volunteers, and recommendations made by the Immigrant Advisory Group. Forty Financial Coaches are recruited over the life of the project: 10 in year one, 15 more in year two, and 15 more in year three. When selected, the volunteer is required to sign a confidentiality agreement and undergo a background check. Once cleared, training is provided by the Financial Capability Specialist. After the Coaches receive orientation and training, each is assigned to a participant under the guidance and supervision of the Coordinator and Specialist. Coaching sessions take place at the Library or via remote teleconferencing. Each coach volunteers at least one hour per week, for a minimum of five (5) months. They are supervised and matched with participants by the Financial Capability Specialist. The Coaches work with program participants supporting both their long-term financial goals and any immediate financial need that may arise such as rent payment/eviction.

► *Cultural Navigators:* With support from both the IAG and FIAG, “go-to” immigrants from various communities are recruited and trained to serve as Cultural Navigators to assist with outreach, recruitment, and retention, and to provide advisement that presents mainstream U.S. financial concepts defined within a culturally-responsive context. A similar model was successfully deployed in reaching hard-to-count populations for both the 2010 and 2020 Census and was a key component of both prior IMLS NLG grants. Navigators receive hourly stipends managed by the Project Coordinator.

► *Circle Curriculum:* The project utilizes the Connecticut (CT) Money School Curriculum to help adults enhance their financial skills and create positive banking relationships. It’s comprised of 11 instructor-led modules which the Financial Capability Specialist, working with the Cultural Navigators, modifies to fit the Learning Circle framework and to specifically respond to immigrant barriers. (Note: *CT Money School* is based on the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation’s *Money Smart* Curriculum available nationwide for free.) Meeting are also held with the ESL teachers to modify content for incorporation into ESL instruction.

► *Library Umbrella Account:* Hartford Public Library’s Finance Director sets up and opens a Matched Savings Master account with Liberty Bank with an initial minimum deposit of \$25. Circle participants then open individual sub-accounts as delineated below under *Intake and Assessment Phase 3*.

► *Outreach and Recruitment Phase 1Product Development:* This includes the production of a brochure, flyers, and YouTube videos describing the program, with updates to include testimonials in YR 2 and YR3. Material that will help guide

our efforts include the *We Belong Here* marketing playbook (Supporting Doc. 1 and 2), an outcome of the IMLS NLG FY2010, and material developed by Connecticut United Way ALICE Saves and Bank On Coalition.

2023 January – February

► *Outreach and Recruitment Phase 2 Product Dissemination:* Conducted via social media platforms; ethnic media and press PSAs, ads, and interviews; presentations at ethnic-/faith-/community-based organization meetings and events.

► *Intake and Assessment:* This takes place in three phases.

Phase 1 Initial Intake: (Supporting Doc. 3) The initial intake begins with an in-person 1:1 interview and program orientation. The Coordinator collects the applicant’s basic information (i.e. age, country of origin, income range, education) and pre-program baseline data on the participant’s financial knowledge and trust of banks (Supporting Doc. 4) while some of the information on the participant’s financial health is gathered during the next financial goal-setting phase. The Coordinator also provides (as needed) appropriate strategies and warm referrals to wrap around services allowing the participant to resolve potential barriers and set clear goals for their full engagement. If not a library card holder, the applicant registers for a card and is introduced to the full range of library resources available to them and their family. All participants are required to complete the Northstar Digital Literacy assessment modules or take a digital literacy class offered by the Library. Note: Banks are employing new digital platforms at breakneck speed. Lack of digital literacy and unfamiliarity with the benefits of mobile financial services only lead to further marginalization.

Phase 2 Financial Goal Setting: Upon completion of the initial intake, the Coordinator schedules the applicant to meet with the Financial Capability Specialist to assess the applicant’s financial circumstances and to ensure that the participant’s monthly matched savings contribution does not cause undue financial burden. The Specialist provides a deeper explanation of the financial outcomes and products available to the participant through their participation in the program, as they work together toward both short-term and long-term financial goal setting.

Phase 3 Agreement: Participants sign a letter of agreement with the Financial Capability Specialist and are enrolled in the Circle. The agreement includes opening a savings sub-account under the Library’s master account in the host bank, with a commitment to deposit \$50.00 each month for the five-month cycle. The agreement also allows the Project Coordinator to receive monthly statements to monitor participants’ activity and progress without transactional capabilities. When the participant reaches their goal of \$250, they transfer their sub-account from under the Library master account to an individual personal account with the host bank activating transactional capability. A matched incentive of \$250 is then added to each individual’s account by the host bank. At this point the participant can decide to close the account or maintain it. Those participants that choose to maintain a minimum monthly balance of \$250 in their personal account for another five-month period will then be matched with an additional \$250 from HPL’s donor funds. Research by United Way ALICE Saves shows that families with a savings of at least \$250 are less likely to be evicted or miss a utility payment. Participants that completed the initial Circle also have access to other products notably Liberty’s Credit Builder Account. The Financial Capability Specialist meets with the participants to guide them in determining if they are able to open and manage the Credit Builder Account. This account offers an interest free loan and regular payments are reported to the credit bureau as evidence of establishing good credit. However, those that default are not reported and will not have their credit damaged. Life is unpredictable and we recognize that our participants may experience a personal emergency obligating them to withdraw from the Circle prior to the end of the 5-month term. In an attempt to re-engage the participants, the Financial Coach makes three follow-up attempts.

2023 March – July

► *Circle Convening:* The Project Coordinator convenes 2 Circles during this time frame. Participants meet for 3 hours every other week. One hour focuses on financial education delivered by the Financial Specialist in collaboration

with Project Partner CAHS utilizing the *CT Money School* curriculum. The other two hours offer networking opportunities and facilitated dialogues led by community leaders on topics related to quality of life issues of concern raised by the participants. The dialogues are coordinated by project staff in collaboration with HPL community librarians and the City’s department of Community Engagement. Circle models may be implemented as either ‘general’ or ‘goal-specific’. In Year 1, the Project offers one ‘general’ circle and one ‘goal-specific’ circle by targeting Citizenship applicants to help defray the cost of the \$725 application fee. While an estimated 40% of citizenship applicants seek fee waivers, for many others their income is slightly over the stringent federal poverty guidelines. The dialogue portion of the Citizenship Goal-Specific Circle focuses on building participants’ English communication skills and knowledge of U.S. government facilitated by The American Place staff and its volunteer Citizenship tutors. The first most common reason for a naturalization denial is failing the Civics and English components of the test at the interview. Financial issues affect and are affected by virtually every aspect of a person's life. Research conducted by *Prosperity Now* has demonstrated that by embedding financial capability services within other programs can serve to also increase the likelihood that clients will succeed in those programs.

The remaining SCBLCs Start – End dates are as follows and align with the host banks fiscal calendar:

2 Circles August – December 2023 ■ 2 Circles January – May 2024 ■ 3 Circles August through December 2024 ■ 3 Circles January – May 2025, one of which targets out of school youth ages 18 -24; and, one of Reentry Citizens, to demonstrate replicability of this model. The Library is already partnering with the entities that serve both these populations offering digital literacy and workforce readiness programming.

3. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES

A detailed action plan within the project’s three-year duration is provided in the attached Schedule of Completion. We anticipate a smooth project start up and implementation rollout given the social capital foundation upon which this project builds as well as the strong mission alignment among our partners. HPL also benefits from the experience gained from its prior IMLS LG and partnerships targeting immigrants. We expect all start-up activities to be completed between August 1, 2022 through July 31, 2025 with a slated SCBLC launch taking place in March 2023. (Attached resumes, new position job descriptions, budget justification and Scheduled Timeline.) **Grant funded:** A full-time *Project Coordinator* manages day-to-day project operations and logistics which include: participant recruitment, intake and initial assessment; Circle coordination and arrangements for speakers; and, coordination of staff, partner and advisory group meetings including setting agendas, taking minutes, and, compiling reports. The Coordinator works hand-in-hand with the part-time *Financial Capability Specialist* whose roles include: conducting each participant’s financial assessments and setting of goals; training of volunteer Financial Coaches; and, serving as the bank liaison. HPL will contract with an Evaluator to document and measure the effectiveness of the entire process and outcomes of the project. The findings and process impact will be made available on the project Web site. Additional associated grant funds cover *marketing products; conference/travel* expenses for project dissemination, and the position of *Website developer*. We estimate some cost associated with outreach, translation and interpreting services provided by the Cultural Navigators. **In-kind:** *Volunteer Financial Coaches* assigned to program participants to support their financial growth both during and beyond the duration of the cycles. *Savings incentives* (Host Bank \$18,000, Donor Funds 18,000, ALICE Saves); *Bus-tokens* removing transportation barriers, devices and Wi-Fi hotspots removing digital barriers; *refreshments* for Circle Convenings, community forums, and graduation events. *Curriculum* and *financial literacy instructors* provided by CAHS. *In-kind Management and Administration* Hartford Public

Library Board of Directors and HPL President, Chief Executive Officer, Hartford Public Library has assembled a strong and diverse Leadership Team to successfully oversee the success of this project. Other senior staff that will assist with the project include: Director of Public Services, who will coordinate staff training and integration of the project within on-going library services; Director of Information Technology, who will provide technology support for the Project Website and other online tools/plugins; the Director of Financial Services and Grant Manager who will ensure grant compliance. HPL's Communications Manager and Outreach staff support the ongoing project's communications, marketing, and outreach efforts. Direct oversight is under the Library's highly regarded *The American Place* (TAP) Division, composed of a cadre of expert educators, and counselors, with over 20 years of experience providing adult education, occupational trainings, and immigration services. TAP's Manager serves as the Project Director and together with TAP's Adult Education Transition Specialist will utilize a collaborative management approach to support the Project Coordinator and Financial Capability Specialist. In developing the project's workplan, *The American Place* conducted focus groups with its ESL and Citizenship students for ideas and input as well as from the Immigrant Advisory Group. Continuous input and consensus is sought via the FIAG that meets quarterly and project staff's regular interactions with SCBLC members, Cultural Navigators, and HPL's own broadly diverse staff from Bosnia, Albania, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Ghana, Sierra Leon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India, Portugal, Canada, Philippines, Vietnam, and Laos.

► **Tracking Progress/Results.** *Effectiveness:* Effectiveness is assessed using questionnaires administered pre- and post-program participation as well as a long-term follow up questionnaire. Surveys will collect data on characteristics including but not limited to participant demographics, household characteristics, financial health (credit scores, debt, savings, and use of alternative financial services), and familiarity/comfort with the mainstream financial system. Using multivariate regression analysis, the evaluator will assess whether participation in the Circles had a meaningful impact on 1) the measures of financial health and 2) on participants' comfort with mainstream financial institutions and services. The evaluator has experience applying these statistical techniques in previous peer-reviewed research projects. *Quality:* In addition to questions on financial health and comfort with the financial system, the post-program questionnaire will ask participants about their experiences in the Circles and their satisfaction with the financial services and education they received throughout the program. A final long-term follow-up survey will be administered to all participants from Years 1 and 2 of the grant. *Efficiency and Timeliness:* The evaluator will also meet on a semi-annual basis with project staff and partners, which will offer an opportunity to discuss the efficiency and timeliness of the program. The project administrators will report on expenditures associated with operating the Circles in terms of supplies and labor hours. The evaluator's results on the impacts of the Circles can be compared with these expenses to assess the return on this investment. During these meetings, project administrators and the evaluator will ensure that Circle activities, survey administration, and data analysis are following the timeline established at the start of the project. The process of survey administration and data analysis described above will be repeated for each Circle. Every six months, the evaluator will produce an evaluation report that assesses outcomes for the one to two previous Circles. This recursive evaluation process will allow the project administrators and evaluator to monitor the effectiveness of the project in meeting both the project and participant objectives. The host bank will generate a monthly report to provide to the Project Coordinator to aid those participants requiring intervention with meeting their goals as delineated in their agreement. The Project Coordinator tracks the following: Circle participant digital literacy gains; Circle participants that achieve Citizenship; Number of outreach awareness presentations and attendees; Analytics provided by HPL's Communication Dept; ESOL class participants pre-post surveys demonstrating financial literacy gains.

► **Dissemination** Project findings will be disseminated in three waves. First, all results will be presented in a final white paper intended for the use of practitioners, libraries, and other institutions. This will be combined with presentations at national and regional professional library convenings along with article submissions to ALA, PLA and Library Journal. Second, the results will be shared at academic and nonprofit venues with an interest in consumer finance, inequality, and financial inclusion. Potential venues include the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Allied Social Sciences Association annual meetings organized by the American Economic Association, the National Immigrant Inclusion Conference, the Conference for Community Bankers, and other regional economics conferences. Finally, an abbreviated version of the white paper will be prepared for submission as a manuscript to a peer-reviewed academic journal. The purpose of this final wave of dissemination plans is to ensure that the implications of the project reach the widest possible group of consumer finance experts and economists, informing future research and policymaking. Based on previous work published on related topics, potential journals include but are not limited to *Applied Economics*; *Journal of Money, Credit, and Banking*; *Journal of Financial Services Research*; *Journal of Economic Issues*; *Social Work*; *Review of Social Economics*; and *Eastern Economic Journal*.

3. DIVERSITY PLAN

This project refines a grass roots financial management practice (ROCA/Lending Circles) popular across many cultures, combined with a circle format utilized for creating an atmosphere of inclusivity and community by giving everyone an equal opportunity to be seen and heard. The smaller group size encourages freer communication and expression among participants irrespective of differences in viewpoints. Circle alumni are invited to participate in the Financial Inclusivity Advisory Group and provide input to the continued implementation of the project and may also serve as Cultural Navigators or peer mentors. Equity statement: this initiative targets groups with the highest rates of economic exclusion struggling with multiple disadvantages such as underemployment, limited education, linguistic challenges, and no/low digital access. Immigrant and other economically marginalized communities are among the most likely to be unbanked in the United States. Financial exclusion, in turn, contributes to persistent inequities in wealth accumulation and financial security. By helping participants from these communities develop robust relationships with community banks and providing tailored financial capability trainings, this project directly addresses this issue. Robust documentation and evaluation of the process ensures that this model can be scaled and transferred for application by other libraries with similar financial equity impacts. Moreover, the SCBLC model aligns with and further strengthens libraries' inclusion efforts by offering opportunities for dialogue among participants, community leaders, and library staff; supporting immigrant participants in the process of applying for Citizenship.

4. PROJECT RESULTS

A total of 12 LCs are developed over the grant's 3-year duration serving a minimum of 72 participants. Desired outcomes for immigrant participants in the Circles include: improved understanding and navigation of the U.S. economic system; increased trust and use of mainstream financial products (online and on-ground); improved savings rates and/or credit scores; and marked decreased reliance on predatory vendors (e.g., payday lenders). In addition, the project expands impact via its Financial Capability Awareness campaigns, the incorporation of financial literacy content in ESL classes, and professional development trainings for financial education practitioners and library staff in effectively serving immigrant populations. Financial exclusion is a widely recognized barrier to financial stability for marginalized communities, reducing the opportunity for long-term wealth accumulation. The United States has a much larger unbanked population than most high-income economies. By operationalizing and

rigorously assessing a series of Savings and Credit Building. Circles for immigrant community members, the project will both support the financial health of the Hartford immigrant community and enhance the model for adaptability in libraries nationwide. The data collected through the evaluation will generate key indicators to better understand and address barriers to immigrant financial integration. Tangible outputs from this project include a marketing playbook, project website, multiple mid-year and end-of-year reports, a final white paper, presentations to audiences including community finance practitioners, and at least one peer-reviewed publication sharing the results with the consumer finance research community.

► **Adaptability** The white paper and other project deliverables will follow two guidelines to ensure the greatest possible applicability to other institutions and communities: process transparency and rigorous evaluation techniques. All survey instruments will be included as appendices in the final deliverables as will a detailed timeline of the *Savings and Credit Building Library Circle* operations. Any challenges or special considerations encountered in the process of survey and program administration will be discussed. A rigorous evaluation technique will also ensure that program results are as generalizable as possible. Adaptability is further strengthened by targeting a Circle to reentry citizens and another to out-of-school youth 18-24. Ease of adoption is facilitated through broad long-term access to all project deliverables via the project's Website.

► **Sustainability** The implementation of the Circle framework is a one-time cost. With increased institutional expertise and capacity in place among all participating agencies, as well as a shared vested interest in sustaining this collaborative network. The resulting social capital built through these relationships will gain momentum as participants meet successful outcomes and share their own experiences by word of mouth and ongoing publicity featuring their stories of struggle and triumph. The *financial* sector plays a major role in sustaining such a model as this clearly demonstrates the unique ability libraries have as *financial* intermediaries to overcome the many challenges associated with supporting the shift in behavior required for disenfranchised populations to generate increased wealth. According to a Brookings report, "A full-time time worker without a checking account could potentially save as much as \$40,000 during his career by relying on a lower-cost checking account instead of check-cashing services. Depending on types of checking accounts, residence, money management skills, and account stability, this same unbanked worker, assisted in transferring his savings into a low-cost exchange-traded fund with a discount broker, could generate as much as \$360,000 in wealth over his 40-year career." IMLS's investment in this project further underscores the libraries distinctive role in delivering a collective impact model for public, private, and social sectors to achieve the goal of raising the financial health of local immigrant, refugee, and migrant communities.

Schedule of Completion - Year 1

TIMELINE												
Tasks	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23
Communicate award announcement. Post new project positions.												
Meet with Finance Director and Grant Manager to review budget and deliverables and set up quarterly meetings for expenditure monitoring and reconciliation.												
Notify partners and execute MOUs with Liberty Bank and CAHS.												
Recruitment of key personnel (Project Coordinator and Financial Capability Specialist). Convene internal library senior team to review project goals, timeline logistics, staff trainings.												
Convene partners and evaluator for clarity of shared vision, outcomes, roles, etc. and schedule monthly meetings.												
Recruit Volunteer Financial Coaches and Cultural Navigators.												
Launch and coordinate quarterly Financial Inclusivity Advisory Group.												
Join Bank On meetings quarterly.												
Convene meeting to review and adapt CT Money School Curriculum.												
Develop outreach products.												
Disseminate outreach material.												
Setup library's master savings account.												
Professional development training (library staff/external agencies)												
Recruit Circle participants. Conduct intake and assessment of new circle recruits.												
Evaluator data-gathering and evaluation (baseline and every 6 months).												
Coordinator identifies guest speakers for Community Dialogues.												
1st Circle Convening												
2nd Circle Convening												
Incorporate Financial Literacy into ESL class instruction.												
Launch financial awareness campaign to coincide with Financial Literacy Month.												
Website development												
Program feedback revision and refinement.												

Schedule of Completion - Year 2

TIMELINE												
Tasks	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24
Website development												
Meet with Finance Director and Grant Manager for expenditure monitoring and budget reconciliation.												
Recruit Volunteer Financial Coaches and Cultural Navigators.												
Quarterly Financial Inclusivity Advisory Group meetings												
Quarterly Bank On meetings.												
Disseminate outreach material.												
Professional development training (library staff/external agencies)												
Recruit Circle participants. Conduct intake and assessment of new circle recruits.												
Evaluator data-gathering and evaluation.												
Coordinator identifies guest speakers for Community Dialogues.												
3rd Circle Convening												
4th Circle Convening												
5th Circle Convening												
6th Circle Convening												
Collect anecdotal and empirical evidence plus outputs and outcomes for annual report.												
Incorporate Financial Literacy into ESL class instruction.												
Launch financial awareness campaign to coincide with Financial Literacy Month.												
Project dissemination												
Program feedback, revision and refinement. Course correction if necessary.												

Schedule of Completion - Year 3

TIMELINE												
Tasks	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25
Website maintenance												
Meet with Finance Director and Grant Manager for expenditure monitoring and budget reconciliation.												
Recruit Volunteer Financial Coaches and Cultural Navigators.												
Quarterly Financial Inclusivity Advisory Group meetings												
Quarterly Bank On meetings.												
Disseminate outreach material.												
Professional development training (library staff/external agencies)												
Recruit Circle participants. Conduct intake and assessment of new circle recruits.												
Evaluator data-gathering and evaluation.												
Coordinator identifies guest speakers for Community Dialogues.												
7th Circle Convening												
8th Circle Convening												
9th Circle Convening												
10th Circle Convening												
11th Circle Convening												
12th Circle Convening												
Collect anecdotal and empirical evidence plus outputs and outcomes for final report.												
Incorporate Financial Literacy into ESL class instruction.												
Launch financial awareness campaign to coincide with Financial Literacy Month.												
Project dissemination												
Final evaluation report.												

DIGITAL PRODUCTS PLAN

DIGITAL PRODUCT

Complete information about the project – implementation steps, results, lessons learned, etc. – will be carefully documented and broadly accessible through a dedicated project website. The website includes all tangible products that result from the project for ease of integration by other libraries. These include the financial capability curriculum and pedagogical framework, contextualized learning activities lesson plans, resource list for low- incident languages, assessment tools and surveys administered, and white paper. Outreach Resources, strategies for recruiting program participants as well as marketing tools, i.e. templates for flyers, postcards, banners, etc. is also made accessible via the website, along with professional development resources including PowerPoint presentations and recorded webinars. YouTube videos are made public. The project website (The American Place) is managed by the Hartford Public Library.

AVAILABILITY

The computer source code will be open-access under the Creative Commons agreement "Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International". The source code will reside on a web server for free download. Site content is created utilizing Word Press and third-party plug-ins for common content management systems (CMS).

ACCESS

Hartford Public Library follows the recommendations published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), such as HTML/XHTML, Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), image formats such as Portable Network Graphics (PNG) and Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG), as well as accessibility technologies like WAI-ARIA. These features come standard with Wordpress, and are currently implemented with the Library's websites. The sites are designed for desktops, laptops, and mobile devices. They are also mobile friendly. The sites have the accessibility tool to allow users to switch fonts on the website to Readable Font if the user is visually impaired. The project's Website is accessed through The American Place portal Tap.hplct.org compatible with Internet Explorer 9 or higher (which came out in 2011), google Chrome, Firefox, Opera, Safari, iOS and android browser. Users with 10 year or older desktop will be able to access the website, but user experience will vary depending on browser installed. There will be no conditions on access or use of the content. The only conditions on use will pertain to commercial use. We will request that when utilizing our curriculum or other contents that are attributed and properly cited, that written consent be provided before utilizing any published content.

SUSTAINABILITY

Each Library department ensures that content reflecting information in their respective area is current. While compatibility across all browsers is always a concern, HPL's IT Department ensures a quality experience across the major platforms (IE, Chrome, Firefox and Safari). Curriculum content is uploaded to Open Educational Resources (OER) Commons where it can be revised, remixed, added upon, translated, and then shared again to meet different needs.

Organizational Profile

Founded in 1893, Hartford Public Library's mission is to provide free resources that inspire reading, guide learning, and encourage individual exploration.

The Library aims to ensure that all Hartford residents have the multiple literacy skills to make informed choices that improve their lives and communities. It also makes the city and the community stronger by providing free and vital access to information and opportunity. Its physical presence provides an anchor for economic development and neighborhood revitalization, and helps to strengthen social bonds and community identity. Its role is focused on being an active catalyst for learning, connectivity, creativity, and literacy for all ages. In FY 2021, Library usage statistics were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Library received 110,603 visits, answered 22,438 reference questions, and circulated 90,941 items to 89,069 library cardholders. Over 27,758 individuals attended 2,640 educational and recreational programs. The Library's 300+ public computers logged over 26,528 sessions.

The American Place (TAP) is a division of Hartford Public Library. Fully aligned with the Library's mission, TAP offers opportunities for adults 17 and older to pursue educational advancement and compete in today's workplace. Emphasis is placed on elevating learners from the lowest levels of literacy and English speaking to obtaining a High School Equivalency (HSE)/ GED credential, achieving U.S. citizenship, and obtaining industry-approved certifications. Established in 2000 TAP's U.S. Citizenship program, supporting immigrants in achieving citizenship and becoming vested citizens, is nationally recognized as a best practice by the U.S. Department of Citizenship and Immigration Services. TAP's after school English Academy for newcomer youth is recognized by the Library of Congress for its outstanding and measurable contributions to increasing literacy levels. TAP's Immigrant Career Pathways: Building a Stronger Workforce program was chosen in 2019, for the inaugural Top Innovations Award from the Urban Library Council. Such success is testament to TAP's dedicated and knowledgeable staff, resilient customers, and inclusive learning environment that reflects Hartford's shared civic values, rich history, and vibrant multiculturalism.

In FY 2021 and year-to-date FY 2022, The American Place accomplished the following: 233 individuals were assessed for Citizenship Literacy, 157 individuals passed Citizenship and 216 were Naturalized; 50 Citizenship classes were attended by 440 individuals; 100 youth ESL classes were attended by 2,243 students; 745 adult ESL classes were attended by 6,140 individuals; 170 individuals were GED tested; and 64 Digital Literacy classes were attended by 88 individuals. During this period, TAP had 726 digital devices on loan with 354 individuals receiving coaching sessions.

Population Served: Hartford is a majority-minority city (population 121,054): 80% of all residents are non-Caucasian, with a low percentage of owner-occupied units, and a low median income. Additionally, Hartford is a resource-constrained city with 64% of families designated under the ALICE Threshold. Racial composition: Hispanic (44%); African American (38%); White alone (15%); Asian alone (3%). Seven percent identify themselves as "two or more races"; 22% are foreign born, 14% are not citizens; 21% are non-English speakers; 47% speak a language other than English. A total 85 languages are spoken in the City

Hartford is the capital city of the state of Connecticut. According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 18.5 square miles. The city covers 40 census tracts: 5001-5049, 5244, 5245.01, 5245.02, 5426 and 5427. The city is made up of 17 unique neighborhoods. The Hartford Metro area, officially labeled the "Hartford-East Hartford-West Hartford, CT NECTA," is delineated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and has a population of 1,214,295. The Hartford-East Hartford-Middletown, CT Metropolitan NECTA consists of 54 towns, including 25 in Hartford County, 5 in Litchfield County, 6 in Middlesex County, 2 in New London County, 12 in Tolland County, and 4 in Windham County.