

Transforming and Scaling Teen Services for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (TS4EDI)

Funding Category: *Research in Service to Practice*

Project Category: *Lifelong Learning*

National Need. Creative and purposeful youth-centered learning activities allow teens to explore a variety of platforms, tools, and media in order to collaborate, communicate, and problem solve—exercising capacities essential in preparing for their future (Braun et al. 2014; Penuel et al. 2019; Subramaniam et al. 2018). Libraries can provide opportunities to develop critical capacities and also create vital links in learning networks that connect young people to new educational and career opportunities (Barron et al. 2014; Ching et al. 2016; Clegg and Subramaniam 2018; Johnson and Griffis 2013; Pinkard 2019), which can be especially helpful in rural and small communities (Phillips et al. 2018). It is in this context that the TS4EDI project will conduct research that supports the creation of dynamic learning experiences for youth from underserved communities by addressing the following needs:

Need 1: *Clarity on approaches to **designing effective teen learning experiences.***

Need 2: *Capacity to **use evaluation to adapt and improve programming.***

Need 3: *Commitment by multiple stakeholders to **scale exemplary models.***

TS4EDI will engage researchers and practitioners in a research collaboration that supports three goals: first, increasing and improving programs for youth; second, providing tools that help library staff evaluate and improve their efforts; and third, creating stakeholder support for dissemination of resources that can scale new models for services. The project builds on research showing that studying program design and implementation—not just outcomes—is necessary to develop effective programs (Dede 2005) and scale them in service to equity (Bevan and Penuel 2017). The project also builds on the connected learning (CL) model—combining personal *interests*, supportive *relationships*, and new *opportunities* for academic, career, and personal growth for youth (Ito et al. 2013; 2020).

Our research questions are: **(1) Connected learning challenges.** What challenges do library staff face in the design and implementation of CL programming for underserved teens, and how can these challenges be overcome? **(2) Evaluative approaches for improvement.** How can evaluative approaches (a) train library staff to continuously improve their understanding of youth needs as they create CL opportunities, and (b) be integrated into the T3 and Future Ready models for implementing and expanding CL? **(3) Documentation and support for scaling.** How can better resources for CL design and evaluation be used to (a) demonstrate the value of CL programs, and (b) build stakeholder support for increasing the programs' scope and scale, particularly in service to equity goals?

Project Design. The TS4EDI project grows out of a collaboration among three existing projects. The goals of the first project, [Capturing Connected Learning in Libraries](#) (CCLL) ([LG-81-16-0012-16](#)), are to create evaluation tools and models that enable libraries to better assess learning outcomes for their CL programs and spaces, and to use evaluation data to improve their programs. The second, [Transforming Teen Services: A Train the Trainer Approach](#) (T3) ([RE-95-18-0048-18](#)), builds the capacity of libraries and communities around the country to prioritize teen services by developing staff capabilities to use CL principles in designing new programming, particularly for engaging teens in computational literacies. The third, [Future Ready with the Library: Connecting with Communities for College and Career Readiness Services](#) (Future Ready) ([RE-40-16-0081-16](#)), supports the capacity of small, rural, and tribal libraries to provide future-oriented services for middle schoolers. Together, these projects have developed new approaches to creating, implementing, and improving youth services to address inequalities in underserved communities. Yet, these projects have also revealed challenges that libraries face, such as adapting approaches developed elsewhere to rural regions.

TS4EDI will use a research-practice partnership approach, in which researchers will focus their efforts on solving the problems library practitioners identify as critical to improving services, and working with them in cycles of design and testing to solve these problems (Coburn and Penuel 2016).

Leaders in the CCLL project and YALSA's T3 and Future Ready will work together to identify the most effective means for scaling CL services for teens, leveraging relationships developed through the T3 and Future Ready projects with state and national agencies (COSLA, PLA, and YALSA) to increase commitment to quality CL practice across the U.S. The project will engage co-equal partners from state library agency staff in Wisconsin (WI) and Rhode Island (RI), both states with expanding needs for teen services across diverse communities and geographies and with agencies committed to the goals of this project. These state library agency partners, who are active participants in the T3 project, will identify and engage 3 pilot sites in tribal, rural, urban, and suburban libraries in WI and RI serving diverse demographics with varying degrees of CL-type programming. Project leads will enlist youth at library sites as co-researchers, engaging them in formulating questions, collecting data, and exploring interpretations (Cammarota and Fine 2008; Watson and Marciano 2015).

In year 1, the project team will focus on RQs 1 and 2 by documenting challenges to designing and evaluating CL opportunities with 3 libraries each in WI and RI, in order to test improved approaches. In year 2, the project team will conduct 2-3 iterative rounds of design-based research, incorporating both staff and youth voices by testing virtual training and coaching with library staff and library-based program models with teens—including volunteers in other states. In year 3, the project team will codify the tools and techniques created and share findings through professional networks regarding the benefits and best ways of providing CL services for teens. Research conducted in years 1 and 2 will enable the project team to disseminate findings in year 3 and provide opportunities for library staff across the U.S. to build their capacity through videos, coaching sessions, articles, and conference presentations. We also will monitor the communications channels used to provide these resources to administrative and teen services staff across library networks to better determine the most effective methods for sharing information, resources, and models. This work will answer RQ3.

Diversity Plan. The CL framework privileges cultural relevance and emphasizes the development of learning experiences that promote equity by centering the interests, relationships, and opportunities most helpful to minoritized youth (Ito et al. 2020). TS4EDI is designed around close partnerships with WI and RI in part because these two states include increasingly diverse demographics among their tribal, rural, suburban, and urban communities. Roughly 45% of WI's under-17-year-old population is a member of a nondominant group, and these groups vary in ethnic and racial composition, spread across a moderately large state experiencing challenging equity issues. Though small, RI nonetheless contains a mix of tribal, rural, suburban, and urban settings, and nearly one-third of the under-17 population is from a nondominant group.

National Impact. This project will improve uptake of CL principles, building capacity for designing programs and using evaluative approaches to improve and extend CL widely. It will generate new program and service modules for trainings and outreach at local, state, and national levels that can bring learning resources to better serve diverse populations. It will add to *systematic testing* of existing, refined, and new approaches designed for scale; *expansive dissemination* through its products (e.g., examples of CL programming, training materials, and videos); and *enduring impact* through its partnerships with COSLA, PLA, and YALSA.

Budget summary. Total project costs: \$594,669. Direct costs include: \$286,375 to salaries and benefits for partial time of PI Vera Michalchik and project manager Amanda Wortman, and a full-time postdoctoral scholar (TBN); \$13,795 for travel to research site visits to 3 libraries in both Wisconsin and Rhode Island and to present at conferences in year 3; \$66,000 in stipends for consultant Linda Braun (project manager of T3 and Future Ready), Wisconsin (Tessa Schmidt), and Rhode Island (Danielle Margarida) state-level agencies and the advisory board (William Penuel and Mega Subramaniam); \$6,600 for participant incentives; \$4,000 for costs related to design and publication. Total budget includes \$215,899 in indirect costs based on the federally approved rate of 57%.