

Activating Library Response to the Opioid Crisis

OCLC is seeking a National Leadership Grant (NLG) of \$248,359 toward its two-year project to build a free and openly available **toolkit** of resources for public libraries, particularly those in rural communities, to address opioid use disorder. The toolkit will be beta tested with 15 U.S. library staff and will support **library-led projects** to respond locally to the opioid epidemic; these projects will serve as models to activate other libraries to take steps to respond to the opioid epidemic in their communities. The final toolkit will be freely and publicly accessible to all library staff across the nation after the beta version has been tested and refined.

Statement of National Need

The opioid crisis has not abated in the last years, and is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ In September 2020, the American Medical Association reported that more than 40 states have indicated recent increases in opioid-related deaths² and, as before the pandemic, rural areas continue to be impacted heavily.³ As open institutions, public libraries often attract people looking for a safe space, including those in crisis, and library staff often find themselves on the front line of the opioid epidemic. To understand the needs of these libraries, OCLC led a 2018 IMLS NLG project, “Public Libraries Respond to the Opioid Crisis with Their Communities,” which studied eight U.S. public libraries that had formed local partnerships to address opioid use disorder. The project culminated in a call-to-action report with five strategies for addressing opioid use disorder, and underscores two key messages: there are many options for how libraries can respond to the opioid crisis locally; and it is vital to take a first (or a next) step and do *something*.⁴

Project Goal

This project in the **Community Catalysts** category will advance the IMLS-level agency goal to **Build Capacity** that enables library staff to improve the well-being of their communities. The goal of this project is to provide public library staff with resources to help them take a first (or next) step to address opioid use disorder.

Project Design

OCLC will develop and distribute a free online toolkit for public library staff who seek information and guidance for responding to opioid use disorder in their communities. These resources will align with the five strategies identified in OCLC’s call-to-action report: evaluating local health data; building strong community partnerships; educating staff and community members on the issue; caring for staff; and offering programs and services to support local needs. This project will leverage the experience and skills of the OCLC team that led the “Public Libraries Respond to the Opioid Crisis with Their Communities” project, under the leadership of WebJunction Senior Program Manager Kendra Morgan, who will serve as project director.

1. Build beta version of toolkit (September 2021–April 2022). Working with subject matter experts (e.g. from government agencies, public health organizations, community organizations, and library leaders), OCLC will build a beta toolkit comprising new content, including short informational and instructional videos with accompanying resource guides; examples of programs implemented by public libraries addressing opioid use disorder; a resource for seeking funding sources to sustainably support services; and a curated list of existing free resources developed by OCLC and others.⁵

1 “[The Opioid Crisis, Already Serious, Has Intensified During Coronavirus Pandemic](#),” *Wall Street Journal*, 8 September 2020, and “[Opioid overdoses on the rise during COVID-19 pandemic, despite telemedicine care](#),” ABC News, 24 August 2020.

2 “[Issue brief: Reports of increases in opioid-related overdose and other concerns during COVID pandemic](#),” American Medical Association, 8 September 2020.

3 According to the [Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program at the University of Baltimore](#), U.S. opioid overdoses have increased circa 18% during COVID-19, and the Centers for Disease Control recently reported that 2019 opioid overdose deaths exceeded 71,000. See “12 Month-ending Provisional Number of Drug Overdose Deaths,” at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm?source=email#nature_sources_of_data; accessed 25 September 2020.

4 A recent commentary on COVID-19 and the opioid epidemic in rural areas described how the COVID-19 crisis and the turmoil it is causing may both endanger and further marginalize rural persons who use drugs (PWUD), an already at-risk population. “[COVID-19 During the Opioid Epidemic – Exacerbation of Stigma and Vulnerabilities](#),” Jenkins et al, from *The Journal of Rural Health* 00 (2020) 1–3. 2020 National Rural Health Association.

5 “[Call to Action Report. Public Libraries Respond to the Opioid Crisis with Their Communities](#),” OCLC, February 2020.

5 These may include materials developed by the Public Library Association, the National Network of the Library of Medicine, and the Rural Health Information Hub.

2. Recruit beta testers and beta test toolkit (January–October 2022). The project team will select 15 beta testers from libraries across the country using a basic application process open to all U.S. public libraries; at least eight of the beta testers will be from libraries in one of the IMLS rural locale codes. Selection criteria will include a willingness to provide feedback as beta testers and to develop and implement a local action plan. WebJunction channels will promote the opportunity to participate as a beta tester, and recent collaboration partners (e.g. Public Library Association (PLA), Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL), and the National Network of the Library of Medicine) will be invited to help promote the opportunity. After a brief orientation to the testing process, beta testers will use the toolkit to develop an **action plan** describing a program or service they will lead at their libraries. Beta testers will complete the toolkit activities, providing feedback on each of the components. The group will also meet for an online feedback session facilitated by the project team. Beta testers will be asked to submit their action plans along with a timeline, resource list, and a list of the outcomes they expect to achieve through the activity. Beta testers who implement their action plans will receive reimbursement for acceptable program costs up to \$350. A success indicator for this deliverable is at least **10 implemented library-led projects addressing opioid use disorder**.

3. Finalize and disseminate free, openly accessible toolkit (October–December 2022). Using the feedback from the beta testers, the beta toolkit will be refined and published on [WebJunction.org](https://www.webjunction.org), where it will be available for all public libraries. The toolkit and associated content will be disseminated widely through OCLC’s and WebJunction’s national communication channels via means such as interviews, articles, and social media posts. WebJunction will also propose presentations about the toolkit for conferences of associations such as the American Library Association, PLA, and ARSL.

4. Evaluation (September 2021–August 2023). With a third-party consultant, the project team will develop an evaluation plan to measure indicators of success for the project goal described above. The project will create user assessments for the toolkit; collect and analyze data from the beta testers as they implement their action plans through the end of the project; and produce a final formative and summative evaluation report.

Diversity Plan

No community is immune from the suffering arising from opioid use disorder. And while the epidemic affects people across the nation, including cities and suburban areas, the regions currently reporting the worst impact include rural New England, Appalachia, and the Midwest. Given this, the beta testing process and the development of the toolkit resources will specifically aim to include the participation of staff at rural public libraries throughout the U.S., many of which are in under-resourced and geographically isolated locations.

National Impact

OCLC will promote the free toolkit nationally, and WebJunction will use its broad network to ensure that the toolkit reaches rural library staff. The near-term outcome for public library staff who use the toolkit will be their strengthened capacity to provide services and programs to address opioid use disorder locally, thereby fostering community health. A longer-term impact of applying this strengthened capacity will be skillful and confident library staff who are activated and inspired to help their libraries serve as community catalysts that leverage expertise, relationships, and networks to improve the social determinants of health in their communities.

Budget summary: The requested grant amount of \$248,359 will cover project team salaries and fringe (\$141,304; fringe benefit costs \$35,326) for the 24-month period; an evaluation consultant (\$12,500); fees for subject matter experts (\$9,000); closed captioning fees for video content and webinars (\$165); reimbursements for beta testers’ implemented program costs (\$5,250) and indirect costs (\$44,815). The total project costs are \$249,988, and OCLC will provide \$1,629 as an in-kind contribution.

This work will help strengthen and support libraries—and, more broadly, the communities they serve—as our nation continues to struggle with the opioid crisis. OCLC is grateful for the opportunity to propose this project, and we look forward to your review.