Library-Based Data-for-Good Programming: A Win for Libraries, Learners, and Communities Nationally

Providence Public Library (PPL) requests $330,000 and will provide equal cost share in support of seeding innovative, responsive, holistic education programming--our Data-for-Good curriculum-- to library partners locally, regionally, and nationally.

PPL Data-for-Good, built on our successful Data Navigators (Data Analytics and Visualization training) curriculum, is an innovative, mutually beneficial programming model that links data professionals and teens developing their career pathways to nonprofits and other agencies in need. PPL, in partnership with Tableau®, launched its "Data for Good" initiative in April 2019. Creating and utilizing a Rhode Island Tableau Users Group (RITUG) as an engine for social good, we are able to match the data science skills of professionals across many sectors with nonprofit and government agencies that lack staff expertise in these areas. Our adult Data for Good volunteers have helped the Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) create the RI Women's Well Being Index, exploring dimensions of well-being that highlight the systemic barriers that undermine women's efforts to achieve economic security during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project example illustrates how libraries have the capacity to provide much needed technology-based skill training opportunities to individuals and help local organizations create valuable insights for these organizations to continue their good work.

We recently implemented an expanded pilot for teen learners in Summer 2020 in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Teens were employed by the library to complete a data challenge with the goal of facilitating more efficient and impactful use of all manner of raw data the clients collected (i.e. helping What Cheer Flower Farm, a local flower charity, analyze their donor data to determine their most effective fundraising strategies).

Statement of National Need:

Data-for-Good represents a scalable, replicable model that has the potential to meet many data-related needs, challenges, and gaps in capacity faced by nonprofits, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals-- particularly now, in the ongoing wake of the COVID-19 crisis--while helping learners build in-demand skills and earn valuable, paid, hands-on experience. Many professionals and students have a passion for learning more in a community of practice. Also, many non-profit community organizations have a wealth of data but lack the in-house talent to make that data actionable. In Data for Good projects, we have created a vehicle to match volunteer and emerging data analysts with non-profits to create valuable insights for these organizations to continue their good work.

The potential of public libraries to meet the needs of and empower underserved populations with skills and opportunity has not been fully realized. Data Skills are in strong demand across all levels of an organization. Having a workforce with strong data skills will be the key for all companies, non-profits, municipalities, and educational institutions. Most are beginning to realize the importance and their organizations' skills gap. Additionally, many adults and teens interested in learning about Excel, data analysis and visualization have

barriers to formal learning opportunities, including lack of access to technology, inability to pay for expensive training courses, and no meaningful avenues to explore this pathway. Libraries have the potential to utilize their technology and infrastructure to provide an on-ramp exploratory tech training program that meets the needs of the local business community and job seekers.

The other need the program addresses is the lack of capacity local non-profit programs have to actualize their data, which can be better utilized to understand issues or problems facing them, interpret findings to improve practices or highlight successes and help these agencies advocate for funding. Many programs lack the ability and capacity to analyze and visualize data, and having libraries assist in this community outreach has incredible positive effects on local communities. One non-profit PPL has worked with, Team Read out of Seattle, already expressed interest in using the Data Navigators curriculum and workforce development pieces with the teens in their program. This represents the scalability and impact Data-for-Good can have when libraries are involved.

Project Design and National Impact:

We will work to refine and disseminate our model using a variety of tools that are responsive to the socially distanced climate of today. Information sharing, formal training, and ongoing technical support will be available to libraries, nonprofits, and other interested providers nationwide. Training and info sharing will be provided in the form of virtual workshops, one-on-one technical and email support with our key program staff, a dedicated online project dashboard containing templates, curricula, course materials, job descriptions, digital tools, videos, and other useful assets for replicating programming, and an online community of practice (via Slack or other appropriate platforms) where providers can connect and learn from one another.

PPL will work with up to 5 pilot libraries regionally and/or nationally in Years 1-2 to seed far-reaching Data-for-Good programming. The process will entail working with partners to adapt and modify the model as needed based on library space, access to technology, staff expertise, staff capacity, age demographics, community partners, and other differing patron needs; providing technical and funding support to facilitate successful program delivery; facilitating an online community of practice and information sharing among partners; and engaging in evaluation and supporting documentation of national impact on both program participants and clients receiving data services. In addition to impacting thousands of learners and benefiting communities broadly by catalyzing them to apply their skills to critical persistent and emerging social needs, the process will result in further refinement of the model and process for replication that will be further disseminated in Year 3 through virtual tools, conference attendance (virtually and in-person as feasible), etc.

Budget Summary for 3 Years: Approximately $330,000 in IMLS funds and equal cost share will support: a Project Manager ($200,000); Evaluation and technical support ($30,000); additional project team staff ($150,000); technology purchases and curriculum materials ($100,000), stipends for learners and library partners ($50,000); dashboard, website, and digital tool development ($50,000); marketing, outreach, and dissemination ($30,000); and overhead and indirect costs ($50,000).