

## Enriching Library Family Programming Using the Smithsonian Institution's *Talk with Me Toolkits*

[Family Place Libraries™](#) (FPLs) will lead this Project Grant in partnership with the [Smithsonian Office of Educational Technology \(OET\)](#) and [Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy \(GI\)](#) at Penn State University to adapt and evaluate OET's free, online [Talk with Me Toolkits](#) (TMTs) for use in libraries' family literacy and engagement efforts. This two-year (8/1/2022 – 7/31/2024) project budget of \$249,379 supports IMLS Goal 1: Build the workforce and institutional capacity for managing the national information infrastructure and serving the information and education needs of the public; Objective 1.1: Develop or enhance replicable library tools that provide opportunities to support all types of learning; and Objective 1.3: Create and/or facilitate opportunities for continuous learning for families, groups, and individuals of diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The intended impacts of the project include: (1) pilot-tested digital museum collections to complement children's books in public libraries and use in libraries' family programming, (2) increased capacity for librarians to use TMTs and develop their own digital collections, (3) increased parent-child literacy interactions and parents' comfort with digital technology, and (4) expanded digital collections and implementation materials in libraries and museums.

**Project Justification:** Parents and caregivers play a key role in nurturing their children's development and preparation for school, and increasingly, [digital technologies mediate parent-child communication and literacy interactions](#). Families in low-income neighborhoods have inequitable access to resources that foster print and digital literacy, learning, and exploration, including books, [computers and technology](#), libraries, and museums. Libraries can reduce the digital divide by [providing free access](#) to these resources and digital learning tools. As learning hubs, libraries allow children and parents—particularly in lower-income families—to [play](#) and [explore digital media together](#), thereby strengthening parents' ability to support children's language and literacy development. However, the “new” digital divide [transcends material access](#); it stems from [what people do with technologies](#), particularly their ability to use technology for critical thinking and knowledge production rather than passive consumption. Libraries are ideally positioned to partner with families (1) to build parents' skills in using and interpreting multimodal media (e.g., digital images, videos, scanned books, websites, blogs, podcasts); (2) to help parents and caregivers harness [digital tools for children's learning and education](#) rather than entertainment; and (3) to experiment with new ways to [support lifelong and intergenerational learning](#). Libraries can also partner with museums to provide novel intergenerational learning opportunities ([IMLS, 2013](#)) for children and parents. Through this implementation project, Smithsonian's TMTs will provide librarians with a tool to foster family engagement and digital learning and strengthen their capacity to develop their own digital collections to meet community needs. Designed for families of children age birth to 8, the TMTs are digital, thematic collections of museum artifacts with captivating videos and real-world photographs representative of diverse cultures that support parent-child talk and learning. Each TMT includes recommended books and hands-on activities related to the collections. OET staff know that TMTs can be used by classroom teachers with training and support, but they also realize how critical it is to partner with libraries to implement TMTs with the families that they serve. Family Place Libraries™ is the perfect partner to provide input for the TMTs development because of their focus to be a “center for early childhood information, parent education, early literacy, socialization and family support.” FPL staff are committed to providing resources and materials to support healthy family and child development, and to provide a place for families to come together. The TMTs will be of tremendous value to FPL's vast network of librarians who serve the target population of families who would benefit from access to high-quality authentic digital materials curated by the Smithsonian Institution. TMTs will also help guide librarians and parents through the conversation tools that develop early literacy skills, digital literacy, and parental involvement.

**Project Work Plan:** The work plan has four goals: (1) to adapt, pilot, and refine TMTs in four geographically diverse FPLs; (2) to partner with library staff to effectively implement TMTs and develop new collections; and (3) to assess TMTs' effectiveness in strengthening parent-child talk and literacy interactions and increasing parents' comfort with digital technology; and (4) to disseminate TMT collections and implementation guides widely in libraries. The goals will be completed in three phases: *Planning*, *Testing*, and *Disseminating*.

*Phase I: Planning (8/1/2022– 12/31/2022).* OET staff will modify six purposefully selected TMTs to ensure they have a consistent structure that can be used in libraries and then develop training materials and a national webinar to help library staff use the collections with families. FPLs and GI will work with OET to inform the training content. GI will develop protocols for the pilot-tests and FPLs will gather information for participating libraries to develop the training and pilot-testing schedule. OET will host the webinar training to help library staff learn about the TMTs and how to use them to engage families, practice navigating and using the collections, and develop new collections

*Phase II: Testing (1/1/2023 – 4/31/2024).* Pilot-testing will occur in four FPL sites that serve lower-income, under-represented families, including FPL’s home site, Middle Country Public Library (Centereach, NY). The three other selected libraries will represent urban and rural communities. OET will provide coaching and technical assistance to library staff throughout pilot-testing. A mixed-methods evaluation design will be used to test the TMTs with two cohorts for six-week sessions of one hour per week with 10 families per program, for a total of at least 80 families. GI will collect and analyze data (surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations) to understand: (1) the programmatic features and supports needed to help library staff engage parents and children in using TMTs effectively; (2) how TMT collections influence parent-child talk and interactions; and (3) if parents’ comfort level using technology with their children increased. Data gathered from the **first iteration** will be used to adapt the TMTs and training guide and webinar, if needed, and to improve implementation of the second iteration. Evaluators will solicit librarians’ and parents’ perceptions of the TMTs and their suggestions will be incorporated for the **second iteration** pilot test. Final recommendations will be included in a project report and will inform an implementation guide that includes a training webinar and materials, ideas for using the TMTs in libraries, suggestions for connecting the TMTs to books (both hardcover and e-books) and other library resources, and directions and resources for librarians to develop their own digital collections for use with families.

*Phase III: Disseminating (5/1/2024 – 7/31/2024).* The TMTs are useful tools for libraries to reach an underserved audience. The team will create two **deliverables**: a **project report** with pilot-test results and case studies about how libraries used the TMTs and an **implementation guide** with links to the revised TMTs, training webinars and materials, ideas for incorporating TMTs into library programming, and instructions for developing new digital collections. These deliverables and wider project findings will be widely disseminated to all FPLs and their partners (500 libraries in 32 states), the OET’s and GI’s vast networks, and the Public Library Association’s family engagement initiative. FPL will distribute the report and implementation guide through National Family Place Training Institutes, national network webinars, and the biannual Family Place Symposium held during the PLA conference. Deliverables will also be shared through conferences (e.g., American Library Association [ALA], American Alliance of Museums, Family Involvement Conference), research briefs, journals (e.g., ALA Briefs, *Public Library Quarterly*, *Journal of Museum Education*), and FPL, OET, and GI websites. The project outcomes—(1) pilot and refine digital museum collections that complement children’s books in public libraries, (2) partner with librarians to use TMTs and develop their own digital collections, (3) strengthen parent-child literacy interactions and increase parents’ comfort with digital technology, and (4) disseminate TMT implementation materials widely to libraries, museums, and family literacy engagement programs—are also aligned with IMLS’s lifelong learning goal “to advance shared knowledge and learning to all.” Ideally, the project is intended as an in-person program, but should the project need to be implemented remotely, all partners have the capacity to rapidly pivot to online platforms.

The project team includes: [Kristen Todd-Wurm](#) (National Coordinator, FPL), [Darren Milligan](#) (Acting Director, OET), [Carol Clymer](#) (Co-Director, GI), and [Heather Zimmerman](#) (Professor, Penn State), among others.

**Diversity Plan:** At least 50% of the families in the pilot will be immigrants, families of color, or low-income families. The evaluation will examine the TMTs’ relevance for racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse, low-income families by surveying parents after each session. The findings will also inform the development of future TMTs to enhance cultural relevance (e.g., covering topics pertinent to immigrants and families of color; including artifacts from the National Museum of African American History and Culture, National Museum of the American Indian, and the Anacostia Community Museum) and suitability for families with limited economic resources.

**Project Results:** This project will result in increased ability for librarians to implement the TMTs and develop their own digital collections for families. The TMTs and digital collection implementation materials will be widely disseminated for use in libraries and family engagement programs that serve lower-income and racially and culturally diverse populations who have limited experience with and limited access to high-quality digital learning resources and museum collections. Librarians across the country will be supported with the webinar training and implementation guide so that they are comfortable using the TMTs with families in any libraries that are committed to family engagement. Further, the results of this project will assist in understanding how to develop additional TMTs and digital collections to encourage family engagement in libraries, museums, and other programs, with an emphasis on language and literacy development and comfort with digital literacy.

**Budget:** The \$249,379 budget includes \$72,894 to Family Place Libraries™ for salaries/benefits (\$25,346), indirect (\$10,736), FPLs/library stipends (\$33,000), and conference travel (\$3,812); \$156,285 to GI for salaries/benefits (\$74,732), pilot test and conference travel (\$15,864), transcription (\$4,200), focus group participant gift cards (\$4,000), and indirect (\$57,489); and \$20,200 to OET for TMT modification, training and implementation guide development, and conference travel.