Developing a Social Service Model in Rural Libraries
Project Summary: The research team at Indiana University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) is applying for the NLG research grant to request $499,630 to develop a social service prototype for rural libraries based on multistep studies to explore rural communities' social needs and libraries' current practices. This project has a national focus and addresses the IMLS goal *Strengthen community engagement* and Project goal 2: *Building capacity*.

Statement of Need
The role of libraries as community and civic centers has emerged from the changing needs of communities. Past research has shown the prevalence of patrons experiencing psychosocial needs in public libraries, which has resulted in libraries seeking innovative ways to meet patrons' needs related to mental illness, homelessness, poverty, and physical health issues (Whaler et al., 2020). In recent years, Covid-19 brought new challenges regarding health care, unemployment, and poverty to the steps of libraries. As a result, more public libraries have started offering various social services, from stocked resource rooms for addressing homelessness to case management of patrons through interprofessional collaborations with social work professionals (Lee et al., 2022; Whaler et al., 2020). Particularly, the statistics from Whole Person Librarianship indicate growth in this type of collaboration: approximately 60 public libraries have professional social workers in place. Library professionals have also tried to develop best practices and resources that can be integrated into libraries to address patrons' social needs at libraries (e.g., the Public Library Association's Social Work Task Force and the Social Work Interest Group from the American Library Association).

Despite public libraries' growing efforts to respond to communities' social needs, there are still clear gaps in research and practice. First, while two-fifths of U.S. libraries are in rural areas and serve a total population of over 30 million, the majority of library social services are provided in metropolitan areas (mostly in the Northeast or West Coast), indicating the death of social services at public libraries in rural areas (Lee et al., 2022). Rural libraries may have different community demands for social services nowadays because of the rapid changes brought about by Covid-19, and offering library social services has been a challenge due to less capacity, resources, and experience. Second, because library social services are still in their infancy, there has been less research on them, despite the recent growth in practice. Library social services present new opportunities and challenges for interprofessional collaboration, education, and practices (Soska & Navarro, 2020). Introducing and integrating new services into existing practices requires careful adoption of existing practices (e.g., policy changes, raising professionals' awareness) and educational preparation (e.g., topics on community practices and organizational leadership).

To address this gap in research and practice, our project aims to develop a model for social services in public libraries. Our focus is *rural libraries,* given the urgent needs and lack of resources in rural areas (following the definition of 'rural' proposed by the Office of Management and Budget and the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA-ERS)). To achieve this goal, we will (1) explore rural communities' psychosocial needs and libraries' existing efforts to meet those needs and (2) design a prototype social service that can be used in rural libraries. Our overarching research question is: ***How can rural libraries meet communities' psychosocial needs?*** This is followed by three sub-questions: *1. What are rural communities' social service needs? 2. How have libraries' existing social services and library social workers addressed their communities' social needs? What are the libraries' perceived roles in this? 3. How can rural libraries provide social services to their communities?*

Preliminary studies: As a part of an IMLS-funded project (#LG-96-17-0184-17), the PI collected a small set of interview data from five rural library directors presenting rural communities' social needs, such as homelessness, mental health, poverty, opioid, aging, and housing issues. Rural librarians reported challenges responding to those needs including limited human, financial, and knowledge resources at libraries, community's anger due to the lack of help, as well as difficulties to build a local network.

Project Work Plan
Phase 1. Rural community study with community members and local librarians: The goal of Phase 1 is to conduct an in-depth community study to unpack rural communities' unique psychosocial needs, local libraries' perspectives and practices in responding to community needs, and existing community resources (RQ 1 & 2). We chose rural counties for the study (Hancock, Brown, Henry, Marshall, Whitley, Washington, and Newton) based on the research fit (following a demographic and economic overview of Rural Indiana) and feasibility (research access). We will utilize Indiana University School of Social Work's (IUSSW) professional and

educational network (e.g., local students and field coordinators), which exists nearby in those locations, to access local participants. We will first conduct a phone survey with about 140 rural community members (20 each in seven locations) to examine self-identified psychosocial needs, their expectations towards libraries for such needs, and any other local resources. Then, we will interview rural librarians in those seven regions to understand their views and experiences in dealing (or not dealing) with communities' needs identified from the phone survey.

Phase 2. National study with rural libraries and library social workers: Based on the in-depth community study conducted during Phase 1, the main goal of the Phase 2 study is to explore our research questions at the national level and identify the role of stakeholders, librarians, and social workers relevant to providing social services at public libraries. First, we will conduct a national survey targeting rural librarians. We will design survey questions based on the data collected from Phase 1 and administer the survey by working with the Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL). Second, we will conduct in-depth interviews with 15 library social workers (five each from urban, suburban, and rural areas) to understand their lived experiences and perspectives in addressing patrons' psychosocial needs, the challenges of offering social services at libraries, and desired resources.

Phase 3. Prototype social service co-design: In Phase 3, we will utilize evidence from our findings to develop library social services (RQ3). We will work with partner libraries to co-design a prototype service, which will be evaluated by our advisory board (AB) and rural librarians from the Phase 1 study. To gain broad community feedback, we will also run a half-day workshop at the RIPL or ARSL conferences. We cannot specify what types of services we will be designing; our goal is to let the data guide us with the project's progress.

Evaluation Plan: We will adopt a community engagement research and evaluation framework and invite our partner libraries, AB, and professional communities to evaluate our research process and outcomes. This will include an ongoing evaluation of project progress by AB and an annual meeting; mid-evaluation of our prototype by partner libraries, AB, and social workers; and a focus group on our final model with stakeholders.

National Impact and Intended Results

The project will have a major impact in several areas. Our findings will broaden the understanding of library social services and the role of library social workers. This can promote greater collaboration among libraries, social workers, community agencies, and other relevant stakeholders to serve rural communities. Our prototype model can be potentially implemented at different locations if validated at a national scale, which can be a useful resource/tool for rural libraries to meet community needs. Our findings will also provide implications for LIS education to prepare students by training them in the necessary skills and knowledge. The project will contribute to the field of social work by enhancing opportunities for community practice and engagement and broadening the boundaries of social work professions in non-traditional settings (e.g., libraries), which can further help to promote the role of social workers in rural communities.

Diversity Plan: Our project contributes to the diversity of the LIS landscape by targeting rural communities as a research site, which has been under-studied, and hiring diverse students from rural areas for the Phase 1 community study. We will also ask our focus group participants (evaluation of the final service model) to address diversity and inclusion issues relevant to rural communities and libraries.

Project Personnel: Ayoung Yoon (PI) is an associate professor in the Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) at IUPUI. Her research has been focused on community data, which led her to the issue of underserved communities' social needs. She is the recipient of several IMLS grants (PI: #LG-72-17-0139-17, #LG-96-17-0184-17; Co-PI: #LG-250098-OLS-21, #RE-252380-OLS-22). **Michin Hong (Co-PI)** is an associate professor at the School of Social Work at IUPUI whose research has focused on psychosocial determinants in health disparities and community-based social work practice. *Advisory board*: Yanna McGraw (Social worker at Indianapolis Public Library), Andrea Copeland (Associate Professor at DLIS, IUPUI, public library expert), Beth Wahler (Director of the School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, libraries-based social work practice expert), (two more rural library representatives will be determined)

Budget Requested: Total project cost $499,630 (Indirect cost: $161,115, 58.50%) including PIs salary and fringe ($125,734), 1 PhD student and 1 hourly masters student ($20/h) wages and fringe ($198,599), conference travels for the project team ($24,000), study participants stipend ($14,440), travel to the study sites ($5,019), advisory board compensation ($7,500), open access publication ($9,000), workshop ($5,000).