

Title: Expanding Open Data Opportunities for Small Public Libraries

Asotin County Library is requesting a Planning Grant of \$134,195 for our one-year pilot project “Expanding Open Data Opportunities for Small Public Libraries”. National Leadership Grants for Libraries Goal 2: Build the capacity of libraries and archives to lead and contribute to efforts that improve community well-being and strengthen civic engagement.

Objective 2.1: Develop or enhance replicable programming, models and tools that engage communities and individuals of diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Objective 2.2: Develop or enhance collaborations between libraries and stakeholders, and leverage opportunities to address community needs.

Asotin County Library (ACL) is proposing to test whether the processes and tools we developed as we carried out the Asotin County Open Data Project (LG-28-19-0229-19) can be used by other small, rural libraries to successfully publish open data. The end product will be a toolkit for small and rural libraries to use in publishing open data. We plan for the toolkit to be robust enough so that it can be used by small libraries who may not think they have the capacity for this work.

Easy access to open government data is beneficial for communities of any size by providing information people need to make decisions about their personal lives as well as the health and well-being of the places they live. Open data is also key to government transparency and accountability. These factors alone are impetus enough for creating a toolkit that makes it possible for small libraries to help their communities gain access to this world of information, but our experience at Asotin County Library has had some unexpected benefits that go beyond data. Because of the relationships we developed with local leaders through the open data project, when Jennifer Ashby formed a Broadband Action Team in 2021, there was enthusiastic participation by community leaders from business, non-profit agencies and government. The Director of the Port of Clarkston credits that spirit of collaboration as the primary reason she recently won over \$5,000,000 in federal grants to bring high speed broadband to underserved areas of the county.

In our previous IMLS grant, the ACL project team brought together community and government leaders to learn from open data experts from the Washington State Library and the Office of the Chief Information Officer of Washington State. They discussed what open data is and its benefits to local agencies and the community. The ACL team then met with the community leaders to select data from their agencies. Once acquired, we cleaned, formatted and created metadata for publication on [DATA.WA.gov](https://data.wa.gov), the state’s open data platform. We also linked to the state portal from our [website](#).

For this pilot project, we will partner with small, rural library cohorts of two to four libraries each in two regions of the country. The project team will train key library staff in open data practices. Each cohort will also work with the ACL project team in these areas: educating patrons in understanding and using open data; gathering and publishing locally relevant open data, as determined by the libraries using tools such as focus groups and questionnaires; and finding avenues for spreading open data practices in their regions. This pilot will foster civic engagement, both within the library community and among stakeholders, refine the tools and methods we created for gathering and publishing open data in our Accelerating Promising Practices grant, and result in the development of an Open Data Toolkit that could be used by small libraries nationwide.

By the end of the grant, we will have tested the feasibility of expanding the model nationally and created a toolkit by refining the open data tools developed in the original grant. Participating libraries will benefit from building the civic relationships necessary for evaluating and obtaining data, and from the development of a locally relevant open data collection.

Project justification Open data has become more visible to the public over the course of the pandemic, with tables of illness counts, deaths, and hospitalizations frequently shown in the news media. This has raised the expectation of general availability of open data. However, that expectation of access to open data doesn't make publishing or understanding it any easier. Access to open data can empower people to understand issues and address them on the local and global level. In our previous grant, we found that city and county governmental agencies in small communities rarely have the capacity to make their data available to the public other than in response to public records requests. Libraries, as trusted institutions embedded in both rural and urban communities, are in a prime position to gather and publish open data and help their communities learn how to use it. This project will test the feasibility of nationalizing a previously successful project by expanding the model on a small scale.

Project work plan We will work with smaller public libraries to develop open data literacy and publication programs in their communities. We will approach state librarians through COSLA (Chief Officers of State Library Agencies) for

assistance in recruiting innovative small libraries to participate in our project. We will select two to four libraries within a concentrated area in each of two regions of the country. Selection of libraries will be based on service population (under 50,000), rural location, capacity to participate and sustain the project, COSLA recommendation, and commitment to disseminating knowledge gained to other libraries in their region. We will form an Advisory Board consisting of Kathleen Sullivan, the Open Data Librarian at Washington State Library, Ayoung Yoon from Indiana University/Purdue University IMLS Grants recipient (LG-9601700184-17; LG-250098-0L6-21), Cindy Aden, University of Washington iSchool Professor of Practice and Distinguished Practitioner in Residence, Toby Greenwalt, formerly of the Civic Switchboard (LG-70-17-0146-17) and Wendy Pearson, Kansas City Library, which served as the mentor library for the Accelerating Promising Practices Digital Inclusion Cohort (LG-00-19-029 (a)). They will advise us on the project, help in reviewing applications, and evaluate Asotin County Library's role in the project as well as the toolkit and any other deliverables. Our consultant, Lillian Curanzy, from our previous IMLS grant will serve in the same capacity on this project.

We will gather the cohorts via Zoom to become acquainted and discuss the project. We will teach them about open data using the [Unlocking the Power of Open Data](#) curriculum, which we helped develop as participants in "Data Equity for Main Street" funded by the Knight Foundation. The curriculum covers defining open data; finding and evaluating quality of open data; using open data; visualizations; advocating for open data. We will help the participants select potential community partners. Then, we will travel to their communities to present to those potential partners about what open data is, why it is important to their communities, and the benefits of participating, also helping with some of the initial conversations to model the nuances necessary to acquire data while building or strengthening positive collaborative relationships. Once data has been acquired, we will train on using best practices to publish data in an open format. We will be using the data preparation tool developed by Lillian Curanzy when she was interning for the University of Washington's Open Data for the Public Good (RE-40-16-0015-16) IMLS grant. We will hold monthly Zoom meetings with the library participants to review progress, troubleshoot issues and celebrate successes. The ACL project team will also be available for one-on-one guidance as needed.

As we conduct these activities, we will be creating a toolkit specifically for small and rural libraries. Evaluating and refining our methods and tools by means of feedback from the participating libraries and advisory board will be an ongoing process, as will incorporating appropriate processes and materials developed by organizations such as the Open Knowledge Foundation.

We are aware that our plans may be affected by the COVID pandemic. If that should be the case, we are confident about conducting our activities over Zoom, with the exception of site visits, which we would reschedule as needed.

Project results The results of this pilot project will be that we will know whether expansion of the model nationally is advisable. If so, we will seek further funding to implement the project nationwide. We will also have had the opportunity to test our data preparation tool to make sure that it is useful in other libraries and on other platforms such as Socrata, CKAN and Dataverse. The ACL project team will create a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) to share results of the project and provide opportunities for continuing education units as approved by state libraries and an Open Data Toolkit. We will also explore opportunities to disseminate the results in the following ways: presenting at a national conference, offering a preconference introducing participants to the skills and tools developed during the grant period, and writing an article for a professional publication.

Results for our participating libraries will be: having the ability to teach their communities about open data using the [Unlocking the Power of Open Data](#) curriculum; continuing involvement in strong relationships with local agencies; using best practices to publish high quality datasets with extensive metadata; having contributed to the toolkit, and becoming leaders in their regions by teaching the skills they have developed to other small libraries.

We will measure success in these ways: having created an Open Data Use & Publishing toolkit and MOOC; evaluations by members of the advisory board and the partner libraries; and the success of partner libraries in publishing open data relevant to their communities, offering open data education to their communities and to libraries in their regions.

Budget Summary: Project budget includes \$134,195 in IMLS funds with no matching funds. \$72,000 will cover stipends for participating libraries (6 libraries @ \$12,000 each); \$27,300 will cover salaries and benefits for ACL Librarians; \$7,200 will cover ACL consultant sub-contract; \$3,750 will cover 5 advisors at \$750 each; \$10,680 will cover travel costs (Flights \$4,000, Lodging \$3,000, Meals \$1,680, Ground transportation, luggage fees, parking, \$2,000); indirect costs of 10% will total \$13,265. By carrying out this project, Asotin County Library will have leveraged the funding and support that has already been invested in our open data projects by the Knight Foundation, IMLS and others.