American Library Association
Skills for 21st-Century Librarians: Developing an Introductory Curriculum for Programming Librarians

The American Library Association (ALA) requests $99,594 in IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program funding for a **12-month planning grant.** *Skills for 21st-Century Librarians: Developing an Introductory Curriculum for Programming Librarians* will allow the ALA Public Programs Office to: conduct a landscape review of existing programming training resources in the field; create a pilot curriculum for introductory programming skills for public librarians; pilot an in-person programming workshop for public library workers; field-test the curriculum at an in-person workshop with 25 beginner-level programming librarians; and iterate the curriculum based on participant and facilitator feedback. This project falls into the IMLS project category of **Lifelong Learning** and the **Exploratory** maturity phase.

STATEMENT OF NEED: In today's fast-changing world, library programming is increasingly integral to enhancing library responsiveness and adaptability. Through programming, libraries identify, address, and reflect community needs; enhance their institutional capacity and services; and contribute to our democratic society. But as ALA learned in 2017-2019 through the IMLS-funded National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment (NILPPA): Phase 1, master's-level library science programs rarely train the next generation of library professionals for the dynamic and vital work of creating and leading programs. And many library workers receive no formal programs training at all.

In NILPPA: Phase 1, ALA identified 9 Core Library Programming Competencies: **knowledge of the community, interpersonal skills, creativity, content knowledge, evaluation, financial skills, outreach and marketing, event planning and organizational skills**. Together, these competencies encompass the unique skill set required of library programming professionals. In NILPPA, researchers surveyed and interviewed library programming professionals from all library types, representing a broad spectrum of service communities, to learn where and how they gained the skills needed to do their jobs. The research found:

- 50 of the 58 masters-level library degree programs offer courses that address programming. However, no university requires students to take these courses; all were offered as electives.
- 93 percent of respondents said they learned to run programs on the job, 62 percent from colleagues, and 74 percent from other informal learning. Only half of survey respondents said they learned programming skills in their degree program.

NILPPA determined that, unlike other areas of library service, the skills needed to deliver great programs are currently acquired at different career points and often in ad hoc circumstances. Given the massive shift toward programming as a core library offering, concrete resources are needed to train the next generation of library professionals for this work. *Skills for 21st-Century Librarians: Developing an Introductory Curriculum for Programming Librarians* will build on NILPPA's 9 Core Library Programming Competencies to create and field-test a library programming curriculum for in-person training. This project focuses on public libraries, but future efforts may be customized for academic and school contexts.

PROJECT DESIGN: ALA will work with a curriculum designer (provisionally Convergence Design Lab at Columbia College Chicago) to develop, test and iterate a beginner's programming curriculum for public libraries. The process will engage a six highly skilled programming librarians as advisors/subject matter experts (SMEs) in a collaboratively structured, hands-on and inquiry-based sequence that mirrors the design process. The project will take place over four quarters.

- **Q1: Planning and landscaping.** ALA will invite six expert programming librarians to advise and serve as SMEs for curriculum development. The SMEs will represent a diverse cross-section of the public library world, with representation from urban, rural and suburban libraries; a range of programming

interests and experience; and diverse service populations. A "solo librarian" (a librarian who is the only staff member at his/her library) will be included. Diversity will be sought in race, ethnicity and gender. In Q1, the SMEs will begin a landscape review of existing programming curricula and resources in the library field.

- **Q2: Interviews and SME meeting**. The curriculum designer will conduct virtual interviews with SMEs to tap their vast knowledge about library program development and execution. This discovery process will offer a deep dive into the precise skills, knowledge, tools, resources and even computer applications utilized on the job by programming librarians. The curriculum designer will analyze the interviews, identify common themes, and distill them into a set of proposed learning objectives. The project team (ALA staff, curriculum designer, SMEs) will gather for an in-person meeting in Chicago to discuss the analysis and gather SME response and feedback.
- **Q3: Phased content development and revision.** The curriculum designer will refine their analysis based on SME feedback and develop draft curriculum materials (i.e. a training binder) for a two-day pilot training workshop for beginner programming librarians. Curriculum materials will be reviewed by the project evaluator. Two project SMEs will be recruited to serve as instructors for the Q4 pilot workshop and will receive training from the curriculum designer on how to effectively lead the workshop.
- **Q4: Pilot workshop.** Twenty-five early-career public librarians from across the U.S. will gather for a two-day pilot training at the 2021 ALA Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. Participants will be selected through a competitive, peer-reviewed application process and will receive the training for free. Six library workers from small and rural libraries will be granted travel stipends to underwrite their participation. Following the workshop, the curriculum designer will collect feedback from workshop participants and facilitators for additional iteration. The output of Q4 will be a tested curriculum, ready for scaling and national distribution, in a future project grant.

DIVERSITY PLAN: Libraries play a crucial role in empowering diverse populations for lifelong learning and full participation in a democratic society. This project will take steps toward preparing the next generation of library workers to offer the best possible opportunities for their communities. Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is one of ALA's strategic directions; ALA commits to "addressing, dismantling, and transforming policies structures and bias throughout the organization and the field." In the context of this project, EDI means addressing issues around race, ethnicity, gender and sexual identification; geographic isolation and distribution; demographics of communities served; type of library; and MLIS and non-MLIS library workers.

BROAD IMPACT: *Skills for 21st-Century Librarians: Developing an Introductory Curriculum for Programming Librarians* will enable ALA to create a much-needed introductory programming librarian curriculum. This planning grant will position ALA to next pursue a project grant for scaling and national distribution of the curriculum. The goals will be to (1) fully develop and widely distribute learning resources, free of charge, to the library field for self-directed learning; (2) incorporate a train-the-trainer model that will enable in-person workshop participants to lead programming workshops at state and regional conferences. The eventual broad dissemination of these resources will be a remarkable step toward improving the quality of community-based lifelong learning opportunities nationwide and developing an accessible curriculum that will expand the capacity of library practitioners, state library agencies, academic library science programs, and others to effectively serve their communities.

BUDGET: The IMLS request of $99,594 includes $34,500 for consultants ($18,000 curriculum designer, $12,000 SME stipends, $2,000 trainer stipends, $2,500 evaluator fees); $14,000 for travel ($6,000 SME meeting travel, $2,000 workshop instructor travel, $6,000 travel stipends for small and rural workshop participants); $4,000 for meeting expenses; $700 for marketing and communications; $21,000 for salaries and wages; $6,930 for employee benefits; and $18,464 in indirect costs (at an overhead rate of 26.71%).