Transformation for Libraries: The Futures School

Across the United States, librarians embody core strengths of research, data synthesis, storytelling, and community connection. The Connecticut State Library (CSL) has identified Strategic Foresight as a critical discipline that will tap into these strengths while serving as the vehicle for librarians to transform into collaborative innovators, community motivators, and change agents. Strategic Foresight is a framework to create multiple scenarios of the future grounded in today's hard trends and shifting values to support decision-making in the present. CSL requests $315,000 in grant funding, matched by $316,500 from CSL and participants, to lead a two-year (Oct. 2021-Sept. 2023) grant project to partner with Kedge: The Futures School, to provide training that will equip 300 librarians with a futures mindset and a publicly available reusable toolkit, resulting in the development of adaptable individuals with diverse strategic mindsets who are able to connect and capitalize on their changing organizational environment. The Natural Foresight® training program from Kedge includes foresight tools such as environmental scanning, assumption and bias modeling, and scenario development, and is organized in an adaptive, resilient, and transformative approach that has been successfully implemented in large, multinational firms. Kedge developed a customized curriculum based on feedback from an LSTA funded full-scale pilot with academic, public, and special librarians from Connecticut and New York in June 2020, with additional cohort sessions taking place at the Southeast Florida Library Network and with state library partners in Colorado in fall 2020, and in Hawaii, Minnesota, and Maryland in spring 2021.

National need: ALA's "Libraries Transform" public awareness campaign implies both that libraries transform the lives of patrons and that libraries are transforming as organizations with new services and ideas. Similarly, ALA's the Center for the Future of Libraries' mission is "to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural civic engagement." Yet there are few solutions offered for how librarians can transform themselves by learning new skills and a mindset to encourage innovation and experimentation at their libraries. During the IMLS funded EXCITE Transformation for Libraries grant project, CSL implemented The Futures School, Strategic Foresight training as a facilitator component. This project is well-suited to the IMLS Community Catalysts grant category as it empowers librarians, and thus libraries, to be proactive agents working alongside collaborative stakeholders towards a thriving community through access to information, ideas, and resources as well as the ability to collectively impact the systems and infrastructure that shape the environment for us all. This program advances the foundational work of CSL's EXCITE program and the independent work of the Center for the Future of Libraries, as Strategic Foresight is a practice that allows us to create functional views of alternative futures and possibilities. Through this process, organizations and people generally are better prepared for potential threats and can capitalize on hidden opportunities. The COVID19 pandemic is a real time threat, forcing adaptive change in the way libraries serve their communities; Strategic Foresight training can provide librarians with the skills to plan for future shifts. As noted by a pilot participant: "This is an opportunity to deliberately shape the future based on knowledge and proven techniques, rather than to react to the future."

Work plan: Dawn La Valle, Director, CSL Division of Library Development, will serve as project director and contributing facilitator with assistance from Gail Hurley and Maria Bernier, Library Development Consultants at CSL. CSL will contract with Kedge, a minority-owned global foresight, innovation, creativity, and strategic design consultancy. Kedge launched The Futures School™ (https://kedgefutures.com) as the culmination of years of client-facing, foresight content development and workshop facilitation.

The 3-Day Natural Foresight® training program is an immersive, hands-on, project-based program that exists to democratize foresight across disciplines and domains. The curriculum has been delivered to hundreds of leaders in over 25 countries and has been repeatedly hailed as one of the most energizing, thought-provoking and actionable programs available. As one pilot participant said, "The framework for thinking long-term about what is coming for libraries was a revelation. By envisioning multiple alternative futures, we can build not only our resilience, and adaptability but exercise our agency and help determine the best future possible. External pressures become a context for agency not a cage."

CSL will offer ten 3-day in-person or online training experiences and two 1-day networking meetups for up to 300 participants from public, academic, school and special libraries. In these sessions, as tested in the full-scale

pilot, participants will work with a library-specific focal issue to produce multiple scenarios on libraries in the year 2030. Cohorts consisting of 6 teams of 5 people from different types of libraries will complete a rigorous program including an introduction to strategic foresight and unconscious biases; an analytical model that promotes the deeper understanding of issues and events by examining their root causes; identification of trends and emerging issues in society, technology, the environment, the economy and policy; identification of converging patterns; and development of well-crafted future scenarios that challenge conventional wisdom, initiate collaborative dialogue, and create the possibility of genuine transformation. Cohorts will regroup for a networking session to develop library focal issues to create, design, hand execute scenarios.

CSL will help to further sustain the ongoing project by establishing a state library strategic foresight facilitators network, partnering with library associations and other stakeholder groups identifying focus areas in libraries and librarianship to develop scenarios for planning. **80% of those surveyed in the pilot program plan to continue developing their foresight skills, and 66.7% plan to use foresight tools and futures thinking to have an impact (small or large) on transforming libraries.** In the peak of the pandemic (June 2020), Kedge was able to pivot their 3-day program online, leveraging the same curriculum yet structuring the course design for an exceptional virtual experience. Despite library services on hold and librarians working from home focused on reopening plans, the pilot participants fully engaged and immersed themselves. They leveraged the pandemic as the business case for the training and toolkit. A pilot participant even touted that this was the smoothest virtual training she had experienced.

Training	# Librarians	Days	Timing
Cohorts 1-5	30/cohort, 150 total	3/cohort, 15 total	Oct. 2021-July 2022
Cohort Meetup	150	1	Aug. 2022
Cohorts 6-10	30/cohort, 150 total	3/cohort, 15 total	Sept. 2022-Apr. 2023
Cohort Meetup	150	1	May 2023

Starting in Oct. 2021, CSL will recruit across the country through professional associations, national and regional library conferences, and COSLA. Librarians from all types of libraries (urban, rural, public, academic, school, and special) and career levels may apply through a competitive process. Applicants will be interviewed for Cohort placement and are expected to commit to the 3-day training. Commitment was not an issue in the pilot.

Goals/outcomes: Led by TechInPedagogy, a continuous iterative evaluation will integrate input from the 1st year cohort in the project design for the 2nd year cohorts. *Goal 1*: Create a community of future-focused and future-empowered librarians. Outcomes: Library staff will develop the skills to identify and capitalize on emerging trends, weak signals and changing patterns through tangible models and reusable templates that allow them to apply their learnings immediately. *Goal 2:* Transform the culture of the library to ensure librarians are community champions equipped to map the future in order to inform decision-making in the present. Outcomes: Evaluators will assess impact by how librarians operationalize Strategic Foresight to support decision-making and actions, strategy development, cultural transformation, and personal development. CSL expects teams to seek out and learn from library initiatives like theirs and likewise to share their design and results with the profession through blogs, articles, websites, webinars, and conferences.

Diversity Plan: CSL will recruit participants from different types of libraries (public, academic, special) that represent diverse geographic and patron communities. There may be racial, ethnic, gender, and age diversity among the participants as well. Participants can be from any department, professional level, and length of experience. Through these various means, CSL will work toward bringing this opportunity to a diverse and inclusive library workforce.

Budget: The grant budget of $315,000 will be matched by $316,500 from CSL and participating libraries, library systems and organizations. Grant funds will cover contractor fees to Kedge ($265,000) for materials, preparation, training, and additional follow-up and networking; and professional evaluation from TechInPedagogy ($50,000). Match Funds will include personnel costs for project staff and participants, discounts on Kedge's fees, travel, supplies, technology for online training option, and meeting space.