

Strengthening Smaller Public Libraries through Staff Diversity

Project Category: Community Catalyst; IMLS Strategic Plan Objective: Build Capacity

Lawrence Public Library (LPL) in Lawrence, Kansas, respectfully requests \$100,000 in IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program funding for a two-year planning grant. In partnership with Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU), the University of Kansas (KU), the Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS), and Emporia State University's School of Library and Information Management (SLIM) the objective of *Strengthening Smaller Public Libraries through Staff Diversity* is to create a pipeline program that reduces barriers to a career in library service for students from diverse backgrounds. The result is stronger local public libraries and stronger local communities. This Master's-level project targets public libraries serving communities of up to 100,000 people.

Statement of Broad Need. The library profession is mostly White and female; smaller public libraries must obtain the tools and resources to do the hard work of diversifying their workforces so that they more closely reflect and better serve their communities. Diverse libraries are strong libraries.

Project Design. LPL and its community partners will select four interns from diverse backgrounds, two each year from 2021-2023. Interns will have the opportunity to earn their Master's level library education, with one year of tuition and fees provided by LPL and project partners. During their first year of study at Emporia State University's SLIM program, they will gain hands-on experience through a paid part-time position at LPL, as well as month-long assignments at KU, HINU and NEKLS. In addition, they will receive one-on-one support from LPL, KU, HINU, and NEKLS library mentors. Interns will have the opportunity to participate in local, state, and national library conferences.

Lawrence Public Library and its partners will create a competitive application process for the diversity internship program. The application will focus on a prospective intern's enthusiasm for helping others, commitment to reducing barriers to access, passion for social justice, creative thinking, and interest in community engagement. Applications will be reviewed and interviews conducted by a committee consisting of representatives from LPL, NEKLS, HINU and KU. The successful candidate must submit a separate application for admission to Emporia State University's SLIM program.

Throughout the two years of the LB21 planning grant, LPL will document its diversity internship program with the goal of sharing its experience with other smaller public libraries and PLA. A formal, written report will outline a "diversity internship in a box" that shows how to build successful community partnerships, recruit interns, create a strong application process, serve as effective mentors, and find funding to support a successful program that benefits the intern, their host library, and the local community.

The *Strengthening Smaller Public Libraries through Staff Diversity* project has all of the indicators of a successful Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program project.

- **Broad Impact.** With more than 93% of public libraries in the US serving communities of fewer than 100,000 people, smaller libraries represent a large and important group that often struggles with diversifying their workforce. They need the tools to help recruit and retain diverse staff that more closely reflect their communities. A LB21 planning grant will position LPL and its partners to pursue a project grant for a larger distribution of a turnkey “diversity internship in a box” concept for smaller public libraries. This project, led by a small Kansas public library, builds on PLA strategic initiatives and provides a pathway to staff diversity for its peers.
- **Current Significance.** *Strengthening Smaller Public Libraries through Staff Diversity* builds on the model created by the Public Library Association’s [Inclusive Internship Initiative \(III\)](#). Like III, it is a community-based learning project that aims at inspiring future librarians from diverse backgrounds. This project extends the III pathway by providing opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to achieve the education and experience they need to launch a successful public library career. LPL will share its findings with the Public Library Association to explore expanding the III program to help diverse students complete their librarianship journey.
- **Strategic Collaborations.** The heart of this project is strong community partnerships. LPL will collaborate with HINU, the premiere tribal university in the US that serves 1,000 students each semester from federally recognized tribes. Additional support will come from KU Libraries and the university’s Office of Diversity and Equity. Both HINU and KU are essential partners in recruiting and mentoring candidates for this project, and will host students for month-long assignments at their libraries. NEKLS, which assists 117 member libraries, will serve as a liaison to smaller libraries, provide educational funding support, and will host students for a month-long assignment. Interns will study at Emporia State University’s library school (SLIM) which will provide an educational grant to each intern. This project also will provide information and guidance on how smaller libraries can forge partnerships within their own communities, with local community colleges, NAACP chapters, churches, regional library systems, and library schools in their state.
- **Demonstrated Expertise.** The team behind *Strengthening Smaller Public Libraries through Staff Diversity* has strong collective experience in library theory and practice. Together, there are 70 MLS librarians supporting this project at LPL, KU, HINU, and NEKLS, and countless others at SLIM. They bring a solid understanding of the realities of a career in libraries and are fiercely committed to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan.** Social justice lives within the mission of every public library. This project provides a clear path forward to create a long term pipeline to welcome racially and ethnically diverse individuals to the library profession. It reduces barriers and enables smaller public libraries and their local partners to more effectively serve their communities.

Budget Summary: \$100,000 Total

\$64,000	LPL employment costs for 2 years; \$32,000/yr (\$15/hour living wage)
\$10,000	LPL mentor staff costs (5% of supervisor salary; \$5,000/yr for 2 years)
\$9,000	Partner stipends for one-month assignments (\$1500/yr for 2 years: KU, HINU, NEKLS)
\$8,000	Tuition assistance (\$4,000/yr for 2 years; matched by NEKLS and SLIM)
\$8,000	Professional conferences (\$4,000/yr for 2 years)
\$1,000	Shareable written final project plan (graphic design, printing, etc.)