

Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR): Safe Spaces for Cultural Heritage, Preliminary Proposal

Summary: LB21 Goals and Objectives: Goal 3, Objectives 3.1 and 3.2 | Lead Organization: Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) | Project type: Implementation | Amount requested from IMLS: \$249,999 | Partner organizations: HBCU Library Alliance | Overall need: Black librarians who experience workplace trauma and racial disparity need a safe space and community to heal. | Intended impact: Provide a safe space and mentoring guidance to navigate these experiences and create a network of Black librarians working to improve workplace conditions and share lessons.

Project Justification: Black librarians are among the most committed professionals to using their positions to contribute to the [well-being of their communities](#), yet Black librarians often find themselves navigating professional spaces that were not made for them. As of 2021, only [7.1% of librarians in the U.S. were Black, whereas 87% of librarians were White](#). Black librarians often find themselves facing both [direct and indirect acts of racism](#), including recent pressure to remove books by BIPOC authors. More work needs to be done to retain and support Black librarians, many of whom feel like they are [being forced out](#) of a field they love and away from the communities they have dedicated their lives to.

CLIR and the HBCU Library Alliance propose a program that would create a safe space for Black librarians to come together to process these challenges--to heal and support each other through dialogue, mentorship, and cultural immersion. The program would serve as an incubator to help Black librarians develop and augment programs that would support equity in their home communities. The program would focus on sustaining community development through trust-based networks and collective leadership. It aims to inspire organizational change across the field, by sharing lessons that can only be expressed with the backing of a strong community.

This project seeks to address two objectives of the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program, under Goal 3: “Enhance the training and professional development of the library and archival workforce to meet the needs of their communities.”

Objective	Alignment with project
<i>3.1: Develop training to equip the library and archival workforce to engage in sustained community development.</i>	This is a leadership development program rooted in a trusting professional community of Black librarians. It equips Black librarians with tools to navigate the professional landscape and begin to heal after professional trauma. It promotes organizational change through collective action, and through the publication and micro-grant projects.
<i>3.2: Create and/or refine training programs that build workforce expertise in contributing to the well-being of communities.</i>	The well-being of the librarians’ home communities is central to this project. Participants will receive micro-grant funds in support of community equity projects, and support and guidance throughout their implementation.

Project Work Plan: CLIR proposes to host a convening for Black librarians and cultural heritage workers in the summer of 2024 that include 20 participants and 5 facilitators. Our hope is that this grant will support the pilot year for what would eventually become a recurring program. Each meeting will be held in a culturally and historically significant place where Black librarians can heal through the practice Sankofa: going back to find the things from the past that have relevance to the future.

The meeting will be held over 2.5 days. The first afternoon will welcome participants and focus on finding community in each other; the second day will be about healing from trauma; and the final day will focus on creating more equitable communities at home. Each day will offer mentorship, idea exchange, training, healing, and cultural immersion. In addition to discussion sessions and professional growth activities, we’ll care for participants through yoga and meditation, journaling, sharing meals, and group and individual therapy sessions. Expert facilitators will guide the conversations, teach relevant skills, and help to foster trusting

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connections between participants. On the final afternoon, participants will consider how we can bring the lessons and support we've found through this program back to their home communities. When participants apply for the program, they will propose a microgrant project (up to \$3000) that would support a library project focused on local community equity. At the retreat, participants will workshop their proposals to refine their plans and will have opportunities to pool funds and partner with other participants on collaborative projects.

Charleston, SC has been selected as the first location for the program because of the important role it has played in African American history. Sullivan Island, off the coast of Charleston, is known by many as the Ellis Island for Black Americans and it is estimated that more than half of Black people in the U.S. have ancestors that came through during the transatlantic slave trade. This region is also home to the Gullah Geechee people, a community descended from formerly enslaved people who escaped and have held onto many of the traditions and heritage from Africa. It is a place where participants can heal trauma by facing it, and learn lessons from the past for the present and future. Activities will be planned by the facilitators, who will also serve as a planning committee for the program. One of our facilitators, Dr. Porchia Moore, identifies as Gullah, and will work with us to ensure authentic experiences that support the local community. Proposed cultural activities include stories by a Gullah griot, a sweetgrass weaving tutorial, and an African dance session. Vendors and caterers will be carefully selected to support Gullah and Black-owned businesses serving local cuisine. Participants will also partake in site visits, such as the forthcoming International African American History Museum, Avery Research Center, the Harriet Tubman Kayak tour, tours of the region by Gullah owned companies, and a visit to Sullivan Island.

Upon returning home, the group will participate in six online meet-ups over the course of the following year to support each other's projects and professional lives. We will come together again a year later at the DLF Forum, HBCU Library Alliance Meeting, Association of African American Museums (AAM) and/or Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), which the program will provide fellowships for, to share lessons on panels and reconnect. Findings from the experience will be shared through a publication and short-run season through CLIR's Material Memory podcast.

Timeline: • August 2023-July 2024: planning and recruitment • August 2024: Convening • September 2024- September 2025: microgrant projects and online meet-ups • October-November 2025: Connect and present at conferences and meetings.

Diversity Plan: Racial equity is at the heart of this proposal. Core program staff, facilitators, and participants will all be Black, and grants awarded will support equity in communities across the US. This program was conceived of by Black librarians and cultural workers, and Black facilitators and staff will plan and execute the details of the meetings. CLIR as an organization also speaks to White and non-Black BIPOC librarians, so lessons learned from this experience can be shared with other communities in an effort to help retain and improve experiences for Black librarians across the field.

Project Results: This project will address the identified need by creating a safe space for Black librarians to heal themselves and the field through connection, reflection, and action. We will share insights from these conversations in several ways, e.g. podcasts, conference panels, and/or publications. The retreat will be followed by a year of regular Zoom meetings, where participants can come together and support each other and their microgrant projects. Following the conclusion of the grant, we hope to have in-person alumni meet-ups online and at ASALH, the DLF Forum, and/or the HBCU Library Alliance bi-annual meetings.

Budget Summary: CLIR requests \$249,999 to support the activities outlined in this proposal. The bulk of this figure is for program participant support, including \$75,000 for payments for external program facilitators and mentors, \$60,000 for 20 small individual grants to program participants for projects of their own design, and \$42,000 for travel and lodging costs for participants at the in-person event. \$73,999 is requested to recover a portion of the staffing costs related to CLIR's and the HBCU Library Alliance's management of the program over the two and a half year period.