

New York Library Association & Urban Librarians Unite Library Trauma Support Network

Project Justification

The New York Library Association (NYLA), in partnership with Urban Librarians Unite (ULU), is seeking a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program Grant in the amount of \$142,500 for an 18 month planning project. The purpose of this grant is to research best practices, create a structure and develop a prototype network of peer support groups for public library workers at all levels across the United States. The [Urban Library Trauma Study](#) (IMLS RE-246392-OLS-20) found that two-thirds of respondents to the survey had experienced some sort of traumatic event or abuse at work, either physical or verbal, and that many library staff across the country feel alone in their experiences. During the Trauma Study Forum in 2022, multiple work groups identified a support network as a necessary part of creating a professional culture of care. This project is a direct outgrowth of the Urban Library Trauma Study. We propose a peer driven, online support network that will be able to provide practical support for library workers encountering trauma in the workplace. It will be free, easy to access, open to library workers of all levels, specializations, and demographics, and administered by trusted and trained peer leaders.

The Library Trauma Support Network will directly work towards achieving Goal 1 of the LB21 Program, particularly Objective 1.2. It will enhance the training and professional development of the library workforce to help library workers meet the needs of their communities in a healthy way, by building a network of community support and training a cadre of peer support leaders. As library workers find new ways to serve and support our communities we are similarly facing new challenges. These support groups will allow our colleagues to bring the best of themselves to the workplace and hopefully start to offset a national crisis of burnout in the profession. The saying can be overused, but this project will allow library workers to put their oxygen mask on first, so that we can be fully present and prepared to help address the many needs in our communities. This is the beginning of the three year implementation recommended by the Trauma Study, and will conclude with a tried and tested prototype of the Library Trauma Support Network, ready for further implementation.

Project Work Plan

Following the recommendations from the Trauma Study, we will create a peer support network with a three year process for growth. The project proposed for this grant will comprise the first 18 months of that process. It will be broken down into 4 main design phases: research, collaboration, prototype implementation, and evaluation. At the conclusion of this project, we will be prepared with the experience, training materials and data we need to move forward with a wider implementation of the support network.

Phase 1 - Research (6 months)

Phase one of the project will include extensive research on best practices for setting up peer support groups. The first stage of the project will involve collecting best practices around support and recovery groups with a special focus on formats and systems which can be adapted to the library community. This will take place through traditional research practices, but also through conversations with library workers, mental health professionals, and recovery specialists. Then, this research will be summarized, sampled, prepared, and distributed to the project design team which will convene for a design retreat.

Phase 2 - Collaboration (3 months)

The second phase of this project will use participatory design techniques to bring together a group of diverse individuals to think and plan how to create the focus groups. Similar to the successful Trauma Study forum, this convening will use design methods to develop the core principles and practices of the support groups. By bringing together affected staff into community with us and each other, we intend to build a practical foundation and prototype that will meet the needs of those affected most by stressful or traumatic events in the workplace.

The group of 15 - 20 library workers selected to participate in the design convening will be chosen with a twofold purpose in mind. These participants will help to develop the structure and prototype for the support groups and also act as the first round of leaders for the trial roll out of the peer support groups in the prototype implementation phase of this project. The design convening will use design thinking methods to deeply involve affected library workers in building a solution for the issues we face in our daily work lives. It will be focused on a practical set of questions about what will make these support networks work, how to best market them to library

workers, and how they will make long term impacts on the mental health and wellness crisis outlined in the Urban Library Trauma Study.

Phase 3 - Prototype Implementation (6 months)

Phase 3 of the project will be dedicated to implementing a prototype of the online trauma support network. Using the structures and plans created at the design convening, we will create a training guide for peer leaders and provide technological infrastructure and practical support to those peer leaders as we implement the support groups. Further prototype details will be determined by the earlier focus group, ensuring that this product remains created for library workers, by library workers. Finally, during implementation groups will support at least 150 library workers in various online groups in the network involving job type (management, frontline, etc.) as well as identity groups (BIPOC, LGBTQ+, etc.). Again, these exact groups will be discussed and determined by the earlier convening

Phase 4 - Evaluation (3 months)

Throughout the implementation phase, we will distribute anonymous surveys to participants in order to evaluate the project and make necessary changes to both the structure and training documentation. This will include a pre participation survey, one or two surveys during the midpoint of the prototype phase and a post participation survey. Additionally, leaders in the network will also be interviewed/surveyed/etc. about their experiences leading the support group. The data from these surveys will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program at the end of the grant period. This evaluation process not only allows us to check for effectiveness and address any new problems that arise, it also allows us to go back to earlier iterations of the design process and reevaluate the problems and solutions previously discovered.

Diversity Plan

The Trauma Study reinforced what we already knew, that minority members of our professional community are disproportionately affected by traumatic experiences at work. We plan to focus on recruiting participants in the design convening from marginalized populations, and will work to actively address disparate needs and cultural differences in the support groups themselves. Additionally, the nature of ULU's work creates an environment that is for library staff by library staff, which allows for real changes to be enacted. As such, this research has a foundation in decolonial work, ensuring that participants' voices are valued and change is enacted. The project's grounding in critical research, and critical librarianship, helps to insure that participants from marginalized backgrounds will not continue to be exploited, while also recognizing the deep history of exploitation by the academy and research that individuals from marginalized populations have historically endured.

Project Results

The goals of the proposed project are to:

- 1) Determine best practices for implementing support groups in a professional setting
- 2) Create a group of trained peer leaders, ready to host and facilitate those support groups
- 3) During the prototype implementation phase, we will host support groups impacting at least 150 library staff across the US

We hope that by implementing these support groups, we can live up to the faith that was placed in us by the Trauma Study Forum participants who recommended this approach. This project will result in a group of trained committed peer leaders ready to continue in facilitating support groups and in training further cadres of peer leaders. This project will be the start of creating a professional culture of community care in libraries, and will allow library workers to continue to serve their communities in a way that is safe and healthy for both those communities and the workers themselves.

Budget Summary

This project is asking for \$142,500. Of this award \$55,000 will be allocated as a Research and Facilitation fee for Urban Librarians Unite. Marketing and outreach will be budgeted at \$5,500. The Design Convening is budgeted at \$36,000 and project related travel for researchers is budgeted at \$3,000. Honoraria for peer support group leaders is budgeted at \$15,000. Indirect costs for NYLA at 5.5% is \$8,000. Student support costs will be \$10,000 and we are budgeting \$10,000 for professional and other services to include consultation with social work professionals and other necessary professionals.