

Narrative

Introduction and Overview

The [State Library of Iowa](#) (SLI), in collaboration with consultant [Dr. Beth Wahler](#), is seeking \$246,348 in IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program grant funds to support a 3-year implementation project, *Building Public Library Capacity for Serving High-Needs Patrons*. This project is planned in response to the [high numbers of patrons with psychosocial needs](#) visiting US public libraries daily, whose needs often far exceed the training of most library staff. These high-needs patrons and the challenges they bring result in growing numbers of library staff experiencing [trauma](#) from violence, threats, or dangerous incidents in the library, and/or [burnout](#) as a result of chronic, unmanaged work-related stress. Mirroring these national workforce challenges, a [2022 needs assessment of Iowa public libraries](#) by the project team found similar needs in Iowa. This needs assessment also obtained feedback from public library staff about what was needed to better address these challenges and support them in their library roles. Suggestions focused on two needed components, 1) education and training for public library staff focused on serving high-needs patrons, and 2) support for staff's own mental health, well-being, and resilience in the face of work-related stress. Thus, we propose to develop, pilot, implement, and disseminate a replicable training program and a mental health support group for public library staff, exploring the impact of these project components on staff knowledge, work-related confidence, overall stress, well-being, and burnout. *Building Public Library Capacity* will meet the goals of the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program by enhancing the training and professional development of the library workforce to meet the needs of their communities (Program Goal #3) through creating and refining a professional development and support program to build skills and expertise in contributing to the well-being of communities (Objective 3.2).

Project Justification

Statement of Need

As many social safety nets have been reduced across the US, psychosocial needs of public library patrons have increased. *Psychosocial needs* refers to any psychological, social, or environmental factor which is associated with stress or strain in general populations, such as mental health problems, substance abuse, and relationship violence as well as poverty-related needs and social determinants of health such as food insecurity, housing instability, and inadequate transportation or childcare. The top areas of patron need include homelessness or unsafe/unstable housing, mental health challenges, substance use/overdose, and poverty-related needs (Pressley, 2017; Provence et al, 2021; Torrey et al., 2009, Wahler et al., 2021). These areas of need vary based on housing status (Provence et al., 2021; Wahler et al., 2022), with patrons who experience unstable housing more likely to also have additional poverty-related needs, mental health problems, substance use disorders, chronic health problems, and other complex challenges; thus, libraries serving high numbers of unhoused patrons also have large numbers of patrons with co-occurring needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in these types of patron needs (Hertz-Palmor et al., 2021; Horowitz et al., 2021; NAEH, 2020), and studies of library staff have found that they report addressing more patron mental health problems, poverty-related needs, and behavioral issues compared to their pre-pandemic job responsibilities (Wahler et al., 2022).

Library workers are feeling the strain from the growth in patron needs. Staff are often not trained or qualified to assist with the types of needs or the severity of needs present in their patron populations (Anderson et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2018). Patrons with psychosocial needs often take an inordinate amount of staff time, which can cause difficulty for staff trying to meet the needs of all patrons visiting their libraries (Soska & Navarro, 2020; Torrey et al., 2009; Wilkins Jordan, 2014). A growing number of library staff are experiencing violence at work, with these incidents increasing after the beginning of the COVID pandemic, and some staff fear for their safety or for the safety of other patrons (Anderson, 2018; Clark, 2019; Cullen & Hayes, 2012; deGranpre & Wang, 2017; Fisher, 2022; Skipworth, 2020; Torrey et al., 2009; Urban Librarians Unite, 2022). For example, the recently released [Urban Libraries Trauma Study](#) (2022) found that the majority of participants had experienced violence from patrons. However, patron violence is not the only concern in

libraries, since nearly a quarter of respondents in this study reported experiencing violence or aggression from coworkers. Notably, participants in this national study frequently reported inadequate responses or inaction by their supervisors which worsened the traumatic experience for them. In addition to addressing patron concerns, these findings also indicate challenges on behalf of administration with creating and sustaining a trauma-informed and responsive library environment. Staff sometimes experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or experience worsening of a pre-existing mental health condition due to the violence and trauma to which they are exposed at work (Fisher, 2022). Additionally, staff sometimes feel conflicted about or unsure of their role with these types of patron needs (Wahler et al., 2019), which adds to the stress experienced while working in public libraries.

Much of the existing literature and media attention on library stress and worker trauma has focused on urban libraries; however, rural libraries also experience patrons with psychosocial needs (Wahler, 2022) and staff report work-related stress and trauma (Fisher, 2022). Rural libraries often have significant staffing, funding, and other resource limitations that add additional barriers to addressing these challenges, and staff in these libraries also have difficulty accessing training due to these resource limitations (Freeman, 2016). Research and pilot programs focused on determining effective strategies for supporting library staff with patron psychosocial needs and work-related stress should thus include both urban and rural libraries.

In response to this increasing knowledge, a growing number of trainings are beginning to be offered nationwide to try to support library staff with the stress of their work. However, many are available only through paid consultants and can be difficult to access for libraries with limited resources, some written materials focus on theoretical information rather than direct tools for action, and libraries may have difficulty sifting through the information available to find practical strategies they can use in their local areas. Also, existing resources focus largely on knowledge and no established tools to provide assistance to library staff or administrators attempting to implement strategies to support staff's personal mental health and well-being. Thus, practical tools are needed for guiding library staff and administrators with this work from all sizes of libraries across the country

Project Background

The project team's recent [needs assessment](#) (2022) of Iowa public libraries found that the national challenges mentioned above are experienced across the state in Iowa and in both urban and rural libraries. Staff participants in the needs assessment (N = 386), representing public libraries from all six Iowa library districts and from rural, suburban, and rural communities, reported unmet patron mental health needs, financial challenges, housing insecurity, substance use, food insecurity, childcare needs, medical problems, and behavioral problems. When asked which patron needs caused them the most stress, they identified mental health, behavioral problems, and substance use as the top three most stressful patron needs. Although more urban library staff reported these patron needs in their libraries, large numbers of rural and suburban staff also reported the same patron needs, indicating that these are challenges for most libraries and library staff no matter the community context in which they are located. In Iowa, nearly half of staff participants reported that they had experienced violence in their library, with over half reporting that they are fearful of violence occurring in the future. Staff expressed concern for their own mental health, indicating that they had few supports for their own well-being. Library administrators participating in the needs assessment reported concerns for their staff's physical safety and psychological well-being, but also expressed that they did not know how best to support them or respond to their needs. Additionally, many administrators had attempted to initiate collaborations with community partners such as social workers to try to support staff and address patron needs, but reported challenges with initiating and sustaining these collaborations, not the least of which was difficulty obtaining buy-in for new services or collaborations with their boards or city/county administrators.

To help with these challenges, Iowa staff and administrators expressed a desire for training and information, specifically focusing on de-escalation, mental illness, substance abuse, violence prevention, poverty, homelessness, health problems, and intimate partner violence. Notably, the findings from Iowa are similar to recent national research on the topic, including the Urban Library Trauma Study, which also found that participants expressed a need for both education (specifically, *meaningful* and *relevant* training such as trauma-informed approaches, de-escalation, and Mental Health

First Aid) and mental health support/support groups. The Urban Library Trauma Study also specifically recommended education and resources for administrators on creating and sustaining trauma-informed organizations.

To address these national needs and workforce challenges, we are planning to implement *Building Public Library Capacity for Serving High-Needs Patrons*, a three-phased project which aims to improve training and preparation of staff for serving high-needs patrons, provide training for administrators on best practices for supporting staff while also addressing high-needs patrons, and increase needed mental health support for library staff. We will implement these strategies statewide in Iowa, then disseminate our findings and materials nationally to inform similar strategies and interventions in other states and regions. This project will result in practical, clear, and research-based guidance for library staff and administrators across the country.

Drawing directly from public library staff and administrator feedback and suggestions gained from the project team's 2022 statewide needs assessment of Iowa public libraries, *Building Public Library Capacity* contains the following components to support the *information and training needs* of public library staff and administrators for serving high-needs patrons:

1. A free online training program for library staff to gain essential information and skills for serving patrons with psychosocial needs
2. A free online training program for library administrators that builds upon the staff-focused training program but also adds modules on trauma-informed organizational approaches, how to support and respond to staff in a trauma-informed way, strategies for building successful collaborations with social service providers, and talking points to use with local decision-makers to increase buy-in for library-based social service collaborations or programs
3. Free Mental Health First Aid training available to staff across the state

In addition to providing education for working with high-needs patrons, we will also hire a licensed social worker to facilitate mental health support groups for library staff and administrators to *address their mental health and well-being*; this recommendation also arose from the Iowa needs assessment as well as the Urban Library Trauma Study. Evaluation has been built into each phase of the project to obtain feedback from Iowa public library staff to inform revisions and iterations and to gain information about staff experiences with the project components and to guide the development of a toolkit to inform replicability of the interventions in other regions of the country.

Target Group and Beneficiaries

This project targets and will benefit all public library staff and administrators, both in Iowa and throughout the country. Throughout the project period, Iowa public library staff and administrators will directly benefit from the training programs and mental health support implemented, while public library staff and administrators across the country will benefit from the national dissemination of the toolkit informing the adaptation and implementation of similar programs in their regions of the country. Adequately preparing and supporting library staff to address high-needs patrons while caring for their own health and well-being is timely and relevant given U.S. library trends in both patron needs and library staff trauma, stress, and burnout. The ultimate beneficiaries of this project will be the patrons served across Iowa and nationally by better prepared, more mentally well public library staff.

Project Goals and IMLS Program Goals Addressed

The ultimate goals of this project are to increase training and preparation of public library staff for working with high-needs patrons and to increase mental health, well-being, and perceived support of public library staff by creating and implementing a replicable training and support program. This project aligns well with the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century

Librarian Program Goal #3 to enhance the professional development of the library workforce to meet community needs and it addresses Objective 3.2 to create and refine a training program to build library workforce skills and expertise in contributing to the well-being of communities.

Project Design and Work Plan

Project Team

The Project Team for *Building Public Library Capacity* consists of Michael Scott (Project Director), Brenda Hall (Project Advisor), Angela Forret (Continuing Education Technical Support), and Dr. Beth Wahler (Social Work Consultant, Trainer, and Evaluator). In addition, a licensed social worker will be hired in year one to facilitate staff support groups and MHFA classes.

Project Director Michael Scott- Mr. Scott will lead the project and oversee overall strategy, budget management, performance measurement plan, and dissemination of the project results and toolkit. Mr. Scott is currently the Iowa State Librarian and has been in his role for nine years. Prior to working with the State Library, he has experience in regional library systems, medical, and special libraries. He has a particular focus on library administration, library technology, collection development, and training which will be helpful to inform this project. His extensive professional network of state library representatives and public library administrators in both urban and rural communities will assist with project and toolkit dissemination.

Project Advisor Brenda Hall- Ms. Hall will serve as project advisor on the team, helping to inform the training programs' modules to ensure they take the Iowa context and statewide resources into consideration, ensuring linkages between the team and staff from public libraries around the state, supporting communications about the project statewide through SLI communications networks, and helping monitor and problem-solve any local logistical or political issues that arise while conducting the project. Ms. Hall is currently employed as SLI Library Program Director. In this role, she is responsible for facilitating the Library Support Network with the 543 public libraries across the state of Iowa. She joined the State Library in 2022 after serving in various frontline and administrative public library roles for over 17 years; her background in public library work and her current role of supporting libraries around the state give her acute awareness of staff needs for serving high-needs patrons and coping with work-related stress.

Continuing Education Technical Support, Angela Forret- Ms. Forret will be responsible for video production, scheduling in-person and virtual events and spaces, and technical support for participants. She is currently a Library Resource Technician with the State Library of Iowa, responsible for supporting continuing education programs for staff across the state and providing technical assistance as needed, and has been in her position for 2.5 years. She has 13.5 years of previous experience as a full-time library assistant and adult services librarian in public libraries.

Social Work Consultant, Beth Wahler- Dr. Wahler will be responsible for the development, creation, and implementation of the modules for the training program and overseeing the evaluation. She will also lead the development of the toolkit in collaboration with the other members of the team. Dr. Wahler is a social work consultant, trainer, and scholar who studies public library patrons' psychosocial needs, staff needs related to serving high-needs patrons, trauma-informed librarianship, and various interventions for better addressing patron needs while supporting library staff. She has published multiple articles focused on public library patron and staff needs in peer-reviewed journals and has presented nationally and internationally on these topics. Dr. Wahler has collaborated with statewide library associations, large library systems, and single libraries of all sizes from urban, suburban, and rural communities for needs assessments, training programs, and assistance developing social work or other related collaborations or library-based programs. She is the author of the forthcoming book (September 2023), *Creating a Person-Centered Library: Best Practices for Supporting High Needs Patrons*.

TBD Social Work Group Facilitator- For this project, a licensed, masters-level social work clinician will be hired to facilitate the staff support groups to assist staff with processing their work-related stress, caring for their own health and

well-being, and learning skills for improving resilience and self-care. This person will help inform toolkit documents pertaining to replication of library staff support groups. They will also facilitate the Mental Health First Aid classes.

Project Work Plan

The project team will carry out a three-phased work plan to 1) build, pilot, and prepare training programs for statewide implementation, 2) implement and evaluate the training programs, MHFA, and support groups across Iowa and distill key components for the toolkit, and 3) create the toolkit and disseminate it nationwide. Details about each phase are below:

Phase One- "Build and Pilot" (8/1/23-7/31/24)

Phase One will be dedicated to 1) building and piloting the online training programs and recording the video-based training modules, 2) increasing resources available to public libraries through adding to the State Library's collection, 3) preparing to offer Mental Health First Aid groups, 4) hiring and training the licensed social worker, and 5) creating technology kits which will be available for statewide loan to allow small or rural libraries to participate in the available interventions despite not having their own technology to otherwise participate.

- 1) **Building the Training Program-** The training program will be created using video-based training modules and administered using the LearnSoft learning management system. The SLI already offers [training programs](#) for library staff and directors to teach skills for effective library services and the new staff and administrator training programs for addressing high-needs patrons will be hosted and advertised through the same system and available on the State Library's continuing education site. The SLI's training programs include video-based training modules and brief quizzes to assess learning along with supplemental handouts/written resources. SLI Library Resource Technicians normally provide technical support for the training program, and District Consultants field questions or requests for additional information or support from libraries around the state.

For this project, Dr. Wahler will design and record the training modules based on her expertise about library patrons' psychosocial needs, staff and administrator needs and workforce trauma, and social work-informed strategies for addressing these needs in the context of a public library. All modules will also include suggested reading and supplemental materials useful to public library staff for serving high-needs patrons, which will be purchased by the State Library and available for loan throughout the state. Included module content will be directly informed from the 2022 needs assessment of Iowa public libraries as well as other needs assessments Dr. Wahler has completed across the US. Modules for staff will include content on trauma-informed librarianship, working with patrons in crisis, de-escalation, and self-care/resilience. Modules for administrators will include the above topics as well as additional modules focused on trauma-informed leadership principles and how to best support their staff with serving high-needs patrons. Embedded in the administrator modules will be additional resources aimed at supporting libraries with developing social service collaborations in their local areas, such as talking points for libraries wishing to "sell" their local city/county administrators or boards on the benefits of or rationale behind social service/library collaborations and templates for developing collaborative agreements with local service providers.

The training programs will be piloted with a small yet diverse group of 8-12 staff and 6-8 administrators to solicit feedback and inform needed revisions before making the program available to the whole state in Phase Two. Pilot participants will be nominated by the State Library of Iowa's six District Consultants and intentionally include a diverse group of staff and administrator representatives from rural, suburban, and urban libraries across all six districts of the state as well as including diversity of gender, age, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation and/or gender identity. These participants will then meet via Zoom with Dr. Wahler to provide feedback about their perspective of the modules and whether any revisions are needed. In addition, the SLI

District Consultants and Library Resource Technicians will complete the training modules in Phase One, prior to offering them to the state's workforce, so they will be familiar with the content before needing to field questions from staff in Phase Two.

- 2) Hiring the Social Worker- A licensed social worker will be hired to facilitate the support groups (which will be implemented in Phase Two), and this person will be trained to be knowledgeable about the challenges facing contemporary public libraries. We will specifically hire a social worker since that profession is trained to address a wide variety of issues related to mental health and wellbeing, including how an individual's environment impacts their mental health and personal functioning, and it is this "person-in-environment" lens of social workers (versus other mental health-focused disciplines) that is preferred since library staff mental health concerns are often directly related to their work environment and the patron needs they address in their jobs. A licensed social worker is also preferred because they can assess and intervene with more severe crises or mental health concerns in case something is disclosed in a support group that needs further follow-up or intervention.
- 3) Preparing to Offer Mental Health First Aid- The selected social worker will be trained as a facilitator of both adult and youth MHFA to later provide these trainings across the state. Currently, there are few certified and available-for-hire MHFA facilitators in Iowa, with only one person listed on the national MHFA website as offering classes to the public and no publicly available classes offered in the state in the last two years. Training our own facilitator will ensure that we are able to offer the number of classes needed for statewide implementation. MHFA is an evidence-based method for training non-mental health professionals to identify, understand, and respond to mental health and substance use-related crises. MHFA has been [demonstrated](#) to be an effective way of training people in many different disciplines to work effectively with individuals experiencing symptoms of a mental health problem and to prevent worsening of a mental health crisis.
- 4) Creating Technology Kits- The State Library of Iowa has experience conducting virtual programming for public library staff and is aware of an array of technology and space limitations, especially for small and rural libraries. Many times, staff lack access to private space due to only having desktop computers in public workspaces, and often staff lack working webcams or microphones. To increase private access to the support groups, we will use project funds to purchase Chromebooks, webcams, microphones, and hotspots to create technology kits to ensure public library workers have what they need to participate privately. A minimum of 12 kits will be purchased, which provides an average of 2 kits per library [district](#). The technology kits would be available for checkout from the State Library of Iowa and be routed to the participating library via the delivery system, Iowa Shares.

Phase Two- "Implement and Evaluate" (8/1/24-1/31/26)

Phase Two will be focused on statewide implementation of the project components and evaluation, as well as determining essential components and guidelines to include in the toolkit for national dissemination (in Phase Three). During the Implement and Evaluate phase:

- 1) The training modules will be offered to all Iowa public library staff and administrators via LearnSoft, the SLI's online Learning Management System (LMS).
- 2) Six support groups of approximately 15-20 staff (two for rural staff, two for urban or suburban staff, one for rural administrators, and one for urban or suburban administrators) will begin meeting virtually (through zoom) every two weeks. Participants will register for the groups directly with the social worker to avoid needing to disclose their personal information to anyone with the State Library. Separate groups will be held for staff and administrators since each group may not be comfortable talking freely in front of the other. Similarly, separate groups will be held for rural and suburban/urban staff and administrators since those libraries have different contexts and related challenges and might be more comfortable talking freely in front of staff or administrators from similar community types. Group membership is fluid, with staff staying in the support group as long as it is beneficial to them and able to leave at any time. A waiting list will be created so vacancies can be filled if/when someone leaves a group. All group participants will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement indicating

the importance of maintaining privacy of the other members and not disclosing topics discussed in the groups to any outside individuals.

Since other states may not have the resources to contract with a social worker to facilitate groups, this person will assist with determining the key components of a support group and create a guide for peer support group facilitators that will become part of the toolkit we disseminate to other states. This guide will also include reflective practice activities, recommended group discussion prompts, and other tools that could be used by peer facilitators as well as licensed professionals who might facilitate groups in other regions.

- 3) MHFA training will be made available to library staff across the state. At least 20 training dates will be offered to accommodate a variety of schedules, and at least half of the training sessions will be offered virtually to avoid travel and reduce time needed for participation. MHFA requirements limit class sizes to 30, so 600 staff can be trained with the 20 planned training dates. The SLI District Consultants and Library Resource Technicians will be trained first since they will field questions and provide support to the state's workforce as needed. This training is voluntary and staff will self-select to participate.
- 4) SLI District Consultants and Library Resource Technicians will provide technical support as needed and field questions from library staff and administrators. Dr. Wahler will provide regular consultation and support to this group as needed, and together they will monitor themes in questions to determine if additional resources need to be distributed or added to training modules.
- 5) An evaluation will be conducted throughout this phase as detailed later in this proposal. Pending positive evaluation data, the SLI plans to include the training modules and support groups in their ongoing budget, seeking additional funding sources and partnerships with other Iowa state agencies as needed to support the sustainability of the interventions.

Phase Three- "Disseminate" (2/1/26-7/31/26)

In the Disseminate phase, we will actively create and distribute an electronic toolkit, which will be an online resource including a detailed curriculum guide with in-depth descriptions of the content of each of our training modules, a "getting started guide" for other state libraries or regional associations to know what resources are necessary to implement these programs, a "lessons learned" document to provide guidelines for other states about challenges to anticipate and how we overcame them, and general guidance on how to adapt this information to reflect their own region's context and resources. The toolkit will include evaluation results and lessons learned from the project team to inform replication in other areas. We will also include detailed guidance and recommendations for creating and facilitating staff support groups, including guidance for group discussion prompts and activities as well as suggestions for training materials for both peer facilitators and licensed professional facilitators, informed by the focus group participants as well as the licensed social worker. We will make the toolkit available through our professional networks, social media accounts, and sharing with relevant groups such as the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), the Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL), and others. We will hold a virtual webinar about the toolkit to guide other states and regions in using it and adapting our interventions for their one unique context and resources.

Evaluation and Performance Measurement

Throughout the project, the project team will hold monthly meetings to review project progress, deliverables, performance management plan, strategize next steps, and troubleshoot as needed. In addition, evaluative components have been developed for all phases of the project to ensure feedback from public library staff and administrators to inform iterations of the interventions as well as the components that get added to the toolkit and disseminated to others.

In Phase One, we will collect data from the pilot participants about the utility and relevance of the training module content, perceived gains in knowledge from participating in the training program, satisfaction with the training program,

and perceptions of module quality. This information will be used to revise and refine the module content as needed before statewide implementation of the programs.

In Phase Two:

- We will track the number of participants in the training programs, Mental Health First Aid, and the support groups.
- All participants of the staff and administrator training programs will complete quizzes at the end of each module to ensure knowledge gains and assess their perceived work-related confidence with patrons who have psychosocial needs. Participants will have to complete the quiz at the end of the modules to receive continuing education credit. In addition, surveys will be sent to participants through the LMS six months after completion of the training program to assess whether participants have implemented new strategies or programs as a result of their learning.
- All participants of MHFA will complete pre and post-surveys to measure knowledge gains and changes in confidence for addressing mental health-related emergencies or crises in the library.
- The social work support group facilitator will track support group participation and retention (average number of sessions completed). All participants of the support groups will be surveyed quarterly to measure changes in burnout, stress, well-being, and work-related confidence. The social work support group facilitator will send participants an electronic link to the survey at the end of a zoom support group session to invite them to participate. Data will be collected and analyzed by Dr. Wahler.
- Changes in work-related confidence will be compared for participants who complete one of the above interventions, two of them, or all three of them to see if more participation translates to greater confidence gains for working with patrons who have psychosocial needs.
- District Consultants and Library Resource Technicians will track questions they receive from libraries across the state related to module content, support group participation, or developing collaborations or services to address patrons with psychosocial needs. The project team will review these data in monthly meetings to determine any needed revisions to the program.

Phase Three Evaluation- We will monitor dissemination activities by tracking the number of contacts we make and receive about the toolkit and the number of downloads of the toolkit. We will track the read rates on dissemination emails and the views on listserv posts about the toolkit. We will also track the number of participants in our online webinar about the toolkit.

Diversity Plan

Participation in this project by a diverse group of library staff and administrators is critical to the success of this project, especially since staff from underrepresented groups may be at higher risk of trauma due to discrimination, harassment, and abuse they may experience at work and elsewhere. The project team will pilot the interventions with a diverse group of staff and administrators, specifically focusing on diversity in race/ethnicity, gender, age, and rural/urban libraries. Being mindful of how personal characteristics impact experiences in libraries, exposure to trauma, and potential experiences in the support group intervention, evaluation procedures have been designed to take into account experiences based on race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. For example, we will collect demographic information to determine whether any personal characteristics are associated with measured outcomes. Procedures for interviewing and selecting the licensed social work group facilitator will prioritize social workers able to effectively demonstrate skills and experience with cultural humility, addressing microaggressions in group settings, and facilitating groups with diverse populations.

Although we will include diversity of perspectives in a broad sense, one key area in which our project strengthens the field's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the library workforce is the specific exploration of strategies for assisting library staff with high-needs patrons and self-care who live in rural areas and the Midwestern US. Although much of the nation includes rural areas as well as urban ones, much of the existing research on patrons' psychosocial needs, staff trauma and wellbeing, etc. has been conducted in urban areas. In addition, much existing knowledge about public library and social work collaborations comes from large cities on both U.S. coasts. This project will intentionally

include many rural public library staff as well as suburban and urban library staff, with findings that will have relevance to many states in the Midwestern US as well as in similar states across the country.

Project Results

Key project results include: 1) Develop and pilot the training programs for both staff and administrators, 2) Train Iowa public library staff on Mental Health First Aid, 3) Provide a support group intervention for Iowa public library staff, and 4) Develop a toolkit to guide the implementation of similar programs in other regions of the country and disseminate it nationally. By the end of the grant period, we project that the toolkit will be disseminated to all 50 states and also some international locations.

As a result of this project, public library staff will be able to more effectively and confidently support patrons with psychosocial needs, administrators will be better able to support their staff as well as implement programs or services to support patrons with psychosocial needs, and staff and administrators will have more mental health support to increase overall wellness and decrease burnout and stress. This project will subsequently improve library services to vulnerable or at-risk individuals and communities. Pending positive evaluation data, the SLI plans to include the training modules and support groups in their ongoing budget, seeking additional funding sources and partnerships with other Iowa state agencies as needed to support the sustainability of the interventions.

Nationally, this project will result in replicable programs across the country since Building Library Capacity will culminate in the creation and dissemination of a toolkit sharing resources and providing guidance to other states or regions to implement similar programs in their local contexts. The disseminated toolkit will be an online resource including a detailed curriculum guide with in-depth descriptions of the content of each of our training modules, a “getting started guide” for other state libraries or regional associations to know what resources are necessary to implement these programs, a “lessons learned” document to provide guidelines for other states about challenges to anticipate and how we overcame them, and general guidance on how to adapt this information to reflect their own region’s context and resources. The toolkit will include evaluation results and lessons learned from the project team to inform replication in other areas. We will also include detailed guidance and recommendations for creating and facilitating staff support groups, including guidance for group discussion prompts and activities as well as suggestions for training materials for both peer facilitators and licensed professional facilitators, informed by the focus group participants as well as the licensed social worker. The toolkit will be intentionally inclusive of states and library systems that might offer peer facilitated support groups, rather than support groups facilitated by a professional social worker, and include content to guide states with developing either type of group.

Schedule of Completion

Year One

	8/23	9/23	10/23	11/23	12/23	1/24	2/24	3/24	4/24	5/24	6/24	7/24
Develop training modules for staff training program	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Pilot staff training program							X	X				
Refine staff modules as needed									X	X	X	X
Develop training modules for administrator training program	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Pilot administrator training program							X	X				
Refine administrator modules as needed									X	X	X	X
Hire licensed social worker									X	X		
Train licensed social worker on library staff needs											X	X
Social worker to be trained to facilitate MHFA											X	X
Build SLI collection on mental health and similar resources									X	X	X	X
Build technology kits for loan to Iowa libraries									X	X	X	X

Digital Products Plan

The State Library of Iowa plans to create an online training program that will use video-based training modules and will be administered using the LearnSoft learning management system. Modules will be developed in two tracks:

- Modules for library staff will include content on trauma-informed librarianship, working with patrons in crisis, de-escalation, and self-care/resilience.
- Modules for library administrators will include the content developed for library staff as well as additional modules focused on trauma-informed leadership principles and how to best support their staff with serving high-needs patrons. Additional resources embedded in the administrator module will include support materials for libraries developing social service collaborations.

The training modules will include a mix of pre-recorded videos, text for self-paced reading and research, activity prompts, and a list of recommended readings/resources. The training will adhere to W3C accessibility standards, which include alternative equivalent text for images, keyboard input functionality, and transcripts for audio components. The Library plans to continue to host and maintain the training via the Learning Management System beyond the grant period.

Electronic toolkits will be made available through professional networks, social media sites, as well as a dedicated page from the State Library's website (<https://www.statelibraryofiowa.gov/>). The toolkits will be an online resource including detailed descriptions of the content of our training modules, guidelines to assist other states in adapting the information for their context and region, and evaluation results and lessons learned to inform their modification for their own region's context and resources. In order to ensure relevance and sustainability, the State Library will continue to revise the modules as needed in response to broad user feedback.

Technology kits will be created to allow public library workers the ability to fully participate in the virtual support groups due to the Library's knowledge of the lack of technology and space available to workers. The twelve kits (2 kits per district as outlined on the State Library's website, <https://www.statelibraryofiowa.gov/index.php/libraries/training-consulting/district-consultants>) will include the necessary technology for full participation in a virtual support group, including Chromebooks (or other portable devices of a similar nature), webcams, microphones, and internet hot spots. These kits will be housed at the State Library and made available for checkout from the Library and routed through the delivery system, Iowa Shares. The State Library plans to continue providing and maintaining these kits beyond the grant period.

Organizational Profile

Mission: The State Library of Iowa strengthens Iowa library services and information access for Iowans. (*State Library of Iowa LSTA Five-Year Plan for FY 2023-2027; Iowa Commission of Libraries Review 12.15.2022*)

Structure within State Government: Currently, the State Library of Iowa is organized under the Department of Education. There is proposed legislation to restructure Iowa government. If passed, the State Library would be organized under the Department of Administrative Services.

The Library Landscape: Iowa is defined by the large number of public libraries. Of the 543 public libraries in Iowa, 380 are in small, rural towns of less than 2,500 people. Of the 398 towns in Iowa without libraries, 261 have contracts with a nearby city to provide library services to their community. Each county in Iowa also contracts with libraries in their county to provide library services to rural residents. Finally, most public libraries participate in the state-funded Open Access program. Open Access enables eligible Iowans to check out physical materials at approximately 500 participating public and academic libraries. As a result, Iowans have greater access to more library resources, more choices in library service, and the convenience of using a library where they live, work, shop, or visit.

The residents of Iowa have shown an outsized appreciation of this widespread library service. As of 2019 (the most recent data available), Iowa ranks 10th nationally in library visits and number of registered borrowers and 16th in total circulation.

Demographics: Iowa is the 31st most populous state in the nation and the 26th largest by size. Iowa's total population is 3,190,369 people (64.3% urban; 35.7% rural). According to the 2020 Census, 84.5 percent of Iowa residents are White, which is a decrease of nearly 7 percent from 2010; 6.8 percent of residents are of Hispanic or Latino origin, up from 5 percent in 2010. The African American population in Iowa (4.1 percent) also saw a population increase of 1.2 percent since 2010. Many Iowa residents have challenges such as mental health problems, substance use disorders, or disabilities. For example, the National Alliance of Mental Illness (2021) estimates that 473,000 Iowa adults have a mental health condition, with 154,000 not receiving any treatment and nearly 2 million Iowans living in a community lacking a sufficient number of mental health professionals for the population. Many Iowa residents also struggle with substance use disorders, slightly above the national average, with 475,000 Iowa adults having a substance use disorder in 2021 and the majority of those (393,000) unable to access needed treatment services (US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023). In addition, an estimated 11.8% of the noninstitutionalized population has some sort of disability (American Community Survey, 2019).

History: The State Library began as a territorial library in 1838 by an Act of Congress and transitioned to an agency when Iowa reached statehood in 1846, with the mission to provide services to state government. Over the years, this mission grew to include the planning and development of library services on a statewide basis. Today, the State Library offers a multitude of services and programs to the libraries and citizens of Iowa via the Library Support Network and Specialized Library Services. The Library Support Network comprises six districts in order to provide localized support to libraries. Six district consultants meet regularly with new and established directors, facilitate county meetings, and offer regular continuing education programs for directors, staff, and boards. Library Resource Technicians (LRTs) provide each district's librarians with technical support and assistance for state-sponsored resources.