

## Joint Professional Development Institute To Cultivate Collaborative Library Scholars

### Project Justification

The future of academic libraries hinges on our capability to transform the library research and learning service model from a reactive, supportive intermediary to a [collaborative](#) specialist with sought-after expertise. Our workforce must be able to [directly contribute](#) to the university's research and learning goals. Past research has identified that, besides [knowledge](#) and [skill gaps](#) (addressed by many other LB21 funded projects) and [innate factors](#) such as self-motivation and confidence, [a number of](#) persistent *institutional barriers* also impede librarians from deep, effective research partnerships. These include but are not limited to: the lack of [systematic training](#) to conduct research; [the lack of](#) [constructive criticism](#) and [mentorship](#) associated with the training; the [lack of growth opportunities and experiences](#) engaging in [multidisciplinary research and scholarship](#); the lack of startup [funding](#); and the lack of [designated time release](#) to pursue research endeavors.

To address the startup funding and the experience gaps, Virginia Tech (VT) Libraries has piloted an innovative [internal seed grant](#) model hinged on: 1) equal partnerships between library employees and academic faculty; 2) research topics which are not dictated by the library administration or limited to well recognized library scopes; but 3) must leverage library resources and expertise; 4) short, clearly defined, with measurable deliverables; and 5) instead of a substantive merit review, the selection is made through a [lottery](#) after satisfying the [scope review](#). The pilot has since spurred 31 diverse and pertinent collaborative projects in research topics far exceeding the [previously identified](#) library research strengths.

To expand this successful pilot to address also the training, mentorship, and time release gaps, University of North Texas (UNT), University of Colorado (CU) Boulder, and Los Alamos National Lab will join VT to request \$499,966 from IMLS LB21 Program (with additional \$310,433 cost share) to implement a 3-year joint professional development institute (PDI) to: 1) incentivize academic library professionals to build deep research partnerships with scholars in their organizations; 2) advance their academic capabilities and scholarly acumen to the next level; and 3) establish an effective and easily replicable model for library professional development. This project broadly addresses LB21 program Goal 1 to develop and retain academic library professionals. More specifically, we will implement targeted institutional support and programming to address Objective 1.2 to prepare a library workforce for better embeddedness in the nation's fast evolving research and learning ecosystem. This project aims to demonstrate the value of a [positive research culture](#), reward librarians for their creativity and scholarly achievements, and establish a clearer career path to attract, cultivate, and retain high-achieving library scholars with a strong commitment to collaboration.

### Project Work Plan

Co-PI libraries at VT, UNT, and CU represent a diverse spectrum of US academic libraries across different geographic locations, with a variety of library employment terms and appointment statuses, and with varied disciplinary strengths. To benefit the library workforce at different stages of their career, the joint PDI provides three levels of participation with increasing intensity and engagement. At Level 1, library professionals with scholarly ambition from any US academic or research institute are invited to attend a series of free online training and mentorship events provided by established library, information science, liberal arts and social sciences, and STEM scholars. Co-PI libraries have agreed to contribute seed grant funding for their employees to participate in Level 2 activities, and have made administrative arrangements to release time for their selected employees to participate in the Level 3 activities. Other interested academic libraries are also invited to observe and adapt our implementations and run their own Level 2 and 3 activities in parallel if they are willing to commit similar resources and administrative adjustments.

Level 1: Training & Mentoring 1) A semester-long MLS Research Methods training program, developed and offered online at no charge to participants by the University of North Texas Department of Information Science, tailored towards library employees without prior independent research experience; 2) Invite experts to share success stories and lessons learned, topics include: Balancing service and scholarship in a library career; Bridging skill gaps; Research partnership with academic faculty (part 1: arts, humanities & social sciences & part 2: STEM); 3) Guided hands-on workshops, topics include: Writing a research paper; Writing a scholarly book; Writing a grant proposal; Learning from successful grant proposals; Grant budget and finance; Managing research projects as PI/co-PI; and 4) Facilitated, self-organized research interest groups, journal clubs, and/or writing groups.

Level 2: Seed Funding for Collaborative Research Projects Following VT's funding model, co-PI libraries will provide more than \$230,000 (before adding any indirect costs) seed funding for their selected employees to conduct up to 46 collaborative research projects, with particular emphasis on attracting participation from inexperienced or junior employees. The joint PDI will facilitate the matchmaking of research interests, expectations, and expertise between researchers from within and outside of the libraries.

Level 3: PDI Fellowships 6 library professionals from co-PI libraries will be selected through a competitive process as PDI fellows. Candidates for PDI fellowships should have accumulated some collaborative research experience, either through Level 2 activities or other means, and aspire to progress their academic capabilities to the next level. They will submit a full application dossier with a research proposal to be rigorously reviewed by a selection committee. If selected, the PDI will fund each fellow with about 3 months' time release to conduct focused research and produce concrete scholarly work, which may be in the form of manuscripts, grant proposals, data sets, and/or experimental results. The PDI, through project staff or external experts, will provide group and one-on-one career and academic mentorship and assistance.

### **Diversity Plan**

Level 1: We will solicit participants from a diverse group of library professionals, including but are not limited to [ALA/ACRL BIPOC groups](#) and [Spectrum Scholars](#). Level 2: We will continue the successful practice of awarding seed grants through a lottery of pre-qualified candidates in place of a merit review. This has shown to help eliminate systematic barriers against [underrepresented groups, women, and junior researchers](#). Level 3: Instead of being based purely on credentials and past achievements, the selection of fellows will balance the participating institutes' disciplinary strengths and growth strategy, as well as take into consideration the candidates' potential, needs, timing, and DEI aspirations. The selection committee will include three DEI advocates who have received formal training to do so.

### **Project Results**

The Joint PDI will produce the following results throughout the performance period: 1) A series of openly available training materials (e.g., videos and slides) to facilitate library professionals' scholarly career development; 2) Up to 40 funded collaborative research projects, each producing their proposed research outcomes; 3) Potentially high-impactful manuscripts, proposals, and/or research outcomes as the result of the time release and intensive mentorship/assistance for 6 PDI fellows; 4) A cohort of aspiring library scholars who have received institutional support to grow to the next level; 5) Data on training program utilization and completion, and seed grant and fellowship participant performance and goal attainment; and 6) A final report summarizing best practices and the lessons learned from the project, to be widely disseminated to relevant audiences as a blueprint for replications and expansion, through venues such as ALA/ACRL/iSchool conferences, CNI and ARL meetings.

This project will also chart a clearer career path for aspiring library scholars as well as make a strong case for 9-month academic appointment in the library, comparable to that in an academic department both in terms of structure, expectations, and compensation, for selected library professionals with high scholarly potential, ambition, and achievements.

### **Budget Summary**

We request \$499,966 from IMLS. The direct cost breakdown is as follows: 1) VT: \$230,013 total salaries and fringes (including \$125,098 time release for 4 PDI fellows, counted as student support); \$9,000 domestic travels; \$9,800 honorariums to invited speakers, external reviewers and advisors; and \$23,871 tuition remission for a partial graduate assistant. 2) UNT: \$98,226 total salaries and fringes (including \$35,285 time release for 1 PDI fellow and a partial GRA, all counted as student support). 3) CU: \$59,434 total salaries and fringes (including \$43,685 time release for 1 PDI fellow, counted as student support). After applying VT's federally negotiated off-campus outreach indirect rate of 23.30%, our total request from IMLS minus student support is \$266,750. VT, UNT, and CU will provide \$310,433 total matching funds, exceeding the 1-on-1 matching requirement. The vast majority of the matching fund is for Level 2 seed grants. The total cost of this project is \$810,399.