

Project Name: *Wonder Media: Ask the Questions! Library Extension Project*

Lead application organization: Western Michigan University

Amount of IMLS funds requested: \$150,000

Amount of funds provided as cost share: N/A

Names of partner organizations: Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Library of Michigan

Overall need to be addressed: This project seeks to fulfill Goal 3, to enhance the training and professional development of the library and archival workforce to meet the needs of their communities. Specifically, it addresses Objectives 3.3 and 3.4.

Project Justification: *The Wonder Media: Ask the Questions! Library Extension Project* brings the timely and relevant topics of media literacy and news literacy training to public librarians in youth services. The project will develop training modules and materials to build awareness, expertise and facility in communicating these essential principles to the public, as well as offer adaptable and interactive library programming. The widespread use of digital media, particularly via the internet and social media, requires that libraries address public knowledge- and technical skill-building in this area. The critical thinking skills developed through the project's elements are applicable lifelong, and essential to an informed, working democracy that depends on shared facts and civic dialogue. While *Wonder Media* is scalable to many age groups, this project focuses on youth ages 10 and older. Middle school is when many adolescents receive a smartphone to supplement their growing independence, as well as experiencing less parental oversight in online activities. Our project will create essential professional development and programming to aid libraries in teaching critical thinking skills to the communities they serve.

Abstract: This project represents a unique opportunity to expand the skillsets and programming opportunities of the Michigan public library workforce to teach critical thinking skills by extending a successful 14-element museum exhibition on media and news literacy beyond its current location at a regional public museum in Southwest Michigan. The project as a Planning Grant would allow digitization of all the components of the exhibition, which has proven to be effective in communicating media literacy and news literacy concepts and skills to a middle school audience through gamification, play, critical questions and popular media. The grant would allow for the exhibition components to be converted to an all-digital format housed on a single website available to public library personnel who have successfully completed a training program provided by the project team of librarians, content specialists and middle school educators. Activities, resources and prepared materials for out-of-the-box public programs for young teens would be included in the website materials, along with opportunities for content customization by region, demographic served and by current media use data.

Project Work Plan: Particularly exciting in this proposal is the collaboration, buy-in and input that has already occurred in the making of *Wonder Media: Ask the Questions!* as a museum exhibition. The project is a collaboration among the Library of Michigan and two public higher education institutions in the state, Western Michigan University (the exhibition creator and curator, Sue Ellen Christian, is a full professor in the School of Communication) and Kalamazoo Valley Community College, which owns the Kalamazoo Valley Museum that hosts the physical exhibition. The initial museum exhibition was informed by the latest scholarship in the areas of media literacy and news literacy (two distinct academic fields that for lay people are often seen as blending or co-occurring), a national team of media literacy and news literacy experts, faculty in education and technology, middle school educators and middle school students. This project would capitalize on the planning, design, formatting, fabrication, testing and execution that has already occurred for the museum exhibition, which has resulted in positive impact as

evidenced by a five-pronged assessment protocol approved by WMU's research office. Scholarly articles on the museum exhibition are underway but not yet published and public. Examples of exhibition content can be found at <https://bit.ly/WonderMedia1> and <https://bit.ly/WonderMedia2>.

The pilot project will include recruiting and hosting two staff members from each partner library to visit the *Wonder Media* exhibit, receive training on key concepts and offer feedback on the conversion of the current exhibition format to the public library setting. Cohort participants will advise on the creation of professional development training modules, out-of-the-box and adaptable in-person programming, interactive online materials and physical exhibits/displays. A team consisting of Amy Bocko, PI, Associate Professor and Digital Projects Librarian, Christian, the WMU Presidential Innovation Professor in Communication '21-'24, Dr. Brianna Pitts, Assistant Professor of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies, and Cathy Lancaster, Youth Services Coordinator, of the Library of Michigan will collaboratively develop the materials, activities, information gathering and analysis of the efficacy of adapting *Wonder Media* to a public library audience.

Diversity Plan: The six libraries selected for the Planning Grant represent diversity of size, budget, location (rural, suburban and urban) and demographics of the population served. Careful attention was given to ethnic and racial diversity in character appearance, roles and voice overs in creating *Wonder Media: Ask the Questions!* The content addresses media representation of members of the BIPOC and LGBTQ communities, and people with intellectual disabilities; representations of members of these communities are included in the exhibit in a respectful way that promotes equity. Further, the student advisory team consulting in the design of the exhibition was comprised of a diverse group of individuals in terms of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, geography and income level. Local libraries will often have options to customize content; for example, media use data can be adjusted to target statistics involving older adults for senior programming, and templates to create mock social media posts can be designed to appeal to specific diversity issues. The reading level of *Wonder Media* is aimed at 6th grade for accessibility, but many of the elements have a basic and advanced level to match a variety of cognitive levels. Closed captioning is used in all digital games.

Project Results: The potential impact of this project is substantial for the Michigan library workforce, as well as for library users throughout the state. Cognitive and technical skills communicated in this project include: Reverse image searches, identifying deep fake technology, recognizing manipulated content, evaluating information sources, sorting fact vs. opinion, understanding conspiracy theories, knowledge of the history of media inventions and of media ownership consolidation and its impact on content diversity. Furthermore, the professional development modules offered to the Michigan library workforce engender *an attitude of inquiry* about media and news/information. Feedback from multiple sources and throughout the project timeline will be collected via interviews, surveys and group discussions.

Budget Summary: Salaries: \$38,066; Fringes: \$13,523; Travel: \$5,390; Stipend: \$3,000; Materials & Supplies: \$5,672; Publication Costs: \$34,700; Total Direct Costs: \$100,351
Total Indirect Costs: \$49,649; Total Project Costs: \$ 150,000.