

Raven Reads at the Library: Culturally Responsive Training for Library Professionals and Library Programming

OVERVIEW. Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI), in collaboration with the Alaska Library Association (AkLA), the Juneau Public Library (JPL), and SERRC respectfully requests \$249,942 to implement Raven Reads at the Library. The 2-year project addresses the 21st Century Librarian Program Goal #3 (*Enhance the training/professional development of the library/archival workforce to meet the needs of their communities*) and Objective 3.2 (*Create and/or refine training programs that build library/archival workforce skills and expertise in contributing to the well-being of communities*).

SHI is located in Juneau, Alaska’s capital city. Sealaska Corporation (Sealaska) created SHI as a 501(c)3 nonprofit in 1980 with a mission to perpetuate and enhance Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures and a goal of promoting cultural diversity and cross-cultural understanding. Sealaska was established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 and serves 23,000 tribal members. SHI operates a public library and archives at its 29,000 sq ft Walter Soboleff Building.

AkLA is a nonprofit for the employees, volunteers, and advocates at academic, public, school, tribal, and special libraries in Alaska (100+ public libraries/50+ tribal libraries). JPL is a department of the City & Borough of Juneau with a workforce of 40 and operating three branches to serve Juneau’s 31,700 residents. SERRC is Alaska’s Educational Service Agency, employing best practices and state-of-the-art techniques to support school districts, educators, and learners.

Raven Reads at the Library uses SHI’s award-winning culturally responsive (respect for one’s own culture/ the culture of others) early literacy program model to create library activities for children, parents, and families. SHI and its partners will: (1) co-design **12 Raven Reads at the Library lesson plans**; (2) co-design **culturally responsive Raven Reads at the Library implementation training** for library professionals; (3) pilot Raven Reads at the Library culturally responsive implementation training and programming at JPL; (4) create the **Raven Reads at the Library Online Toolkit**; (5) train Alaska’s library workforce to use the toolkit at AkLA’s annual meeting; and (6) collaborate with a national library association to share the online toolkit – and strategies for scaling it for local use – with our nation’s tribal libraries.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Alaska is home to the country’s largest percentage of Indigenous people (21.9%). In 2002, Alaska’s library directors were assisted by Dr. Lotsee Patterson (founder of the American Indian Library Association) to create AkLA’s **Culturally Responsive Guidelines for Alaska Public Libraries** to “*help public librarians examine how they respond to the specific informational, educational and cultural needs of their Alaska Native users and communities.*” The authors suggest using the goals/outcomes established by the guidelines to create training for Alaska’s library workforce. The guidelines were updated in 2018. To date, the culturally responsive training has not been created or offered for Alaska’s library workforce.

“Cultural responsiveness” is the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures. In 2012, SHI developed curriculum for its **Culturally Responsive Training for Teachers**; hundreds of educators have since completed SHI’s 50-hour training. SHI and SERCC are currently collaborating to train leaders in eight Alaska school districts to implement culturally responsive learning in their schools. SERCC has created an impactful project training model delivered using a series of synchronous and asynchronous components (training units).

AkLA’s guidelines state: “*Culturally responsive programming and services are based on the expressed needs of the community.*” Supporting families to build their **children’s early literacy skills** is a local need of national proportion. U.S. Department of Education data show children’s reading performance has been declining since the 2000s. Indigenous and minority children are more likely to be affected. Alaska ranks last in the Nation in 4th grade reading proficiency; only 9% of Alaska’s Native 4th grade students were reading proficiently in 2019. SHI created Raven Reads to respond to this crisis.

SHI piloted its award-winning (*Library of Congress; American Indian Library Association*) **Raven Reads program** in Juneau from 2014-2017. Raven Reads is family-centered, community-involved, and models ways caregivers can support Alaska Native children to enter kindergarten prepared for success in school and life. Enrolled children participate in early literacy events and receive a **Raven Reads book** (or other culturally sustaining book) monthly. Written and illustrated by Native authors and artists, SHI’s series of 30 Raven Reads book feature Indigenous characters and place-based themes.

Raven Reads’ pedagogy supports children to develop cultural competence, a vital skill as our nation’s population becomes more ethnically and racially diverse. Non-Native families consistently request to participate in Raven Reads, a need SHI cannot meet. SHI has provided Alaska’s libraries with copies of its 30 Raven Reads books; the nation’s libraries can obtain Raven Reads books; children develop and maintain healthy reading habits through access to reading materials; building positive associations with library resources and programming encourages children to become lifelong learners.

PROJECT WORKPLAN: YEAR 1 (8/1/2023-7/31/2024)

Months 1-3: SHI’s Early Childhood Education Specialist (Project Director = **PD**) and JPL’s Youth Services Librarian use Raven Reads books to co-design 12 Raven Reads at the Library lesson plans; PD initiatives monthly partner meetings
Months 1-3: SERRC creates a matrix: the 4 foci in AkLA’s guidelines (Environment, Service/Programs, Collections,

Staff); the 28 corresponding culturally responsive (CR) practices in the guidelines; SERRC's existing CR training units

Months 2-3: AkLA "e-surveys" (website/email) AK's library workforce to compile specific culturally responsive training needs/interests; SHI e-surveys constituents to suggest/prioritize library-based culturally responsive early literacy activities

Months 4-6: Partners use: lesson plans/matrix/surveys to co-design Raven Reads at the Library implementation training

- Identifying training opportunities for CR "technical work" (learning the skills, tools, language)
- CR "adaptive work" (becoming aware of one's own biases and ways to embrace asset-based mindsets)
- Select from SERRC's existing CR training units; identify/develop additional CR training units as needed

Months 7-8: SHI/SERRC train JPL's 40-member library workforce to implement Raven Reads at the Library using the co-designed, CR training curriculum; library staff provide feedback on training; SERRC incorporates that feedback

Months 9-12: PD and JPL's Youth Services Librarian co-implement monthly Raven Reads at the Library programming at JPL; PD designs post-participant survey with project partners; PD compiles survey data; SHI submits annual IMLS report

PROJECT WORKPLAN: YEAR 2 (8/1/2024-7/31/2025)

Months 1-6: The partners review participant feedback from the project's: (1) training and (2) programming – and identify SERRC's CR training units to refine/create as "video training modules" for the Raven Reads at the Library Online Toolkit

Months 1-8: JPL implements Raven Reads at the Library; PD uses participant surveys to refine/finalize 12 lesson plans

Months 5-6: SHI's Communications staff create a Raven Reads at the Library Online Toolkit webpage on SHI's website

Months 7-8: Project partners are recorded delivering key components of the Raven Reads at the Library training curriculum by SHI's Senior Media Technical Specialist who uses the footage to create the video training modules

Months 6-9: PD uploads AkLA's guidelines, 12 Raven Reads at the Library lesson plans, Raven Reads at the Library implementation training curriculum, video training modules, other SHI Raven Reads resources (which include videos) to the Raven Reads at the Library Online Toolkit; project partners beta test the toolkit; refinements to the toolkit are made

Month TBD: AkLA hosts a Raven Reads at the Library Online Toolkit training session at its 2025 annual meeting

Month TBD: PD and JPL co-present paper at the Assoc. of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums Annual Conference

Months 11-12: AkLA and SHI's national tribal partner (TBD – SHI is discussing the project with its desired partner) disseminate the link to the Raven Reads at the Library Online Toolkit to their membership; SHI submits final IMLS report

DIVERSITY PLAN

A diversity of perspectives and practices will be brought to the project by SHI, JPL, AkLA, and SERRC co-designing and embedding the Raven Reads at the Library implementation training curriculum with culturally responsive instruction specific to the opportunities and needs of library professionals. Similarly, participant feedback will be used to refine/finalize the project's 12 Raven Reads at the Library lesson plans. SHI will include videos from its annual Culturally Responsive Education Conference (650+ participants in 2022) featuring nationally recognized scholars in the field of culturally responsive education, including educators describing ways to scale programs to meet local interests and needs.

PROJECT RESULTS

JPL's 40-member workforce will complete the Raven Reads at the Library implementation training in Year 1. Raven Reads at the Library programming at JPL will be open to Native and non-Native pre-school children/families and SHI and JPL anticipate 175 children and 150 parents/caretakers will participate in that programming in Years 1-2. SHI and AkLA anticipate 50 members of Alaska's library workforce will complete SHI's training to use the Raven Reads at the Library Online Toolkit training provided during AkLA's annual meeting in Year 2. In total, SHI and its partners anticipate serving 415 people in-person during the 2-year project.

Project staff will also co-author/present at a national tribally sponsored conference analyzing the project's impact, and make that paper available through the online toolkit, advancing knowledge and understanding.

SHI will use google analytics to track and report to IMLS the number of unique visitors to the Raven Reads at the Library Online Toolkit. The federal investment made in the project will benefit society during the 2-year project and into the future by creating culturally responsive training curriculum used to train JPL's and Alaska's library workforce and that can be used (as it is or as a model) by the nation's public and tribal libraries. Similarly, Alaska's and the nation's libraries will be able to access and use the project's Raven Reads at the Library programming long into the future.

BUDGET SUMMARY

Total expense for the two-year project is \$249,942. YEAR 1 (\$103,295): \$40,936 Salaries; \$20,877 Benefits (51%); \$1,500 AkLA Contract; \$15,000 SERRC Contract; \$1,800 JPL Supplies; \$819 IT Expense; \$1,637 SHI Occupancy; \$20,725 SHI Indirect (25.1%). **YEAR 2 (\$146,647):** \$59,060 Salaries; \$30,121 Benefits (51%); \$9,100 Travel; \$10,000 SERRC Contract; \$5,400 JPL Supplies; \$1,181 IT Expense; \$2,362 SHI Occupancy; \$29,423 SHI Indirect (25.1%).