Extending School Librarian Preparation Through Transitional Mentorship with Early Career School Librarians

Jenna Spiering (University of South Carolina's iSchool), requests $374,194 for a three-year Laura Bush 21st Century Library program Early Career Research Development project, "Extending School Librarian Preparation Through Transitional Mentorship with Early Career School Librarians." This project aligns with program Goal 2 and Objective 2.3 to support the long-term research agenda of untenured faculty members in LIS. It also contributes to agency-level priorities to enhance professional development that supports a diverse library workforce (IMLS, 2023). Working together with a field coordinator at the University of Iowa, the PI will implement a multiphase project that includes 1) a national survey about the challenges recent Library and Information Science (LIS) graduates face in their early years of school librarianship and 2) the use of survey data to collaboratively design (alongside veteran school library mentors), implement, and qualitatively evaluate the impact of a formal mentoring network. The mentoring network would focus on supporting school librarians (SLs) in their efforts to champion core tenets of school librarianship like equity, intellectual freedom, and collaboration. This program is designed as a transitional measure for early career SLs as they leave LIS preparation programs and enter the school library profession—bridging theory and praxis. The project will address the following research questions:

RQ1: What challenges do SLs face in the early years of their career?

RQ2: Does a formal mentoring network support SLs in the early years of their careers in school librarianship as they implement services related to equity, intellectual freedom, and collaboration?

RQ3: Do mentees perceive a benefit from a formal cohort-based mentorship program in the early years of their careers as SLs?

Project Justification

School librarians (SLs) in the United States typically work as the sole librarian in their schools. They are often alone without support staff and are increasingly responsible for the school libraries in several buildings, or an entire district. While classroom teachers have embedded communities of practice in their schools, SLs are often at a disadvantage when it comes to establishing a professional network, having instead to rely on social media, listservs, and conferences for a chance to network with other SLs (Harlan, 2009). The singular nature of the school library profession can often result in professionals who feel alone and disconnected especially given the unprecedented scrutiny and the challenges they may face from their community when attempting to build a culture of inclusivity in their school library programs. An informal survey conducted in preparation for this project in early 2023 (n=211) pointed to some specific challenges that are ubiquitous for SLs working in today's education climate. Challenges identified by the preliminary survey include (but are not limited to) SLs role in managing technology, cultivating equitable policies and practices, defending intellectual freedom, establishing collaborative relationships, and time management. A mentoring network could function as a powerful support for early career SLs as they navigate the increased scrutiny that is undoubtedly making for a demanding and (oftentimes) difficult work environment.

Educator Attrition

In education overall, 44% of classroom teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2018). While SLs are also (often) certified teachers, we do not have the same data specifically about SL positions. However, in a study done over a decade ago, Solomon and Rathbun Grubb (2009) demonstrated similar trends among SLs, and education statistics writ large show that teacher attrition rates have only risen since then. We also know that the overall number of school library

positions nationwide has dropped in the last decade and that some states struggle to fill their school library positions (Lance & Kachel, 2022). Further research has suggested that educators leave the profession for a variety of reasons, one of which is a lack of support from administration in their buildings and districts. For teachers of color in particular, retention is often impacted by a lack of support coupled with colorblind philosophies that do not attend to teacher's individual cultural experiences and expertise (Wynter-Hoyte et al. 2020). However, one factor that has significantly contributed to retention within librarianship is mentorship (Harper, 2020).

Benefits of Mentorship

Mentorship has been defined in many different ways, particularly within education (e.g. supervision, coaching, advising). However, for the purposes of this project mentoring is defined as a sustained relationship nurtured through structured formal as well as informal activities between (in this case) an early career school librarian (less than 5 years in the profession) and a veteran or mid-career school librarian (five or more years in the profession) for the mutually beneficial goal of growing in their professional practice. Mentorship is "an activity, a process, and a long-term relationship" (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015). Mentoring relationships in professional contexts have long been a subject of inquiry, and research has demonstrated several key areas that contribute to a mentoring program's success (Hobson, 2009): 1) mentors need to see their role as one where they are not only teaching, but also learning alongside mentees-- one bringing experience, the other bringing new ideas and insights (Clarke et al., 2013; Patrick et al., 2010), 2) mentors must display an openness to learning and a commitment to self-reflection (Langdon, 2014), 3) mentors need to understand local school and district dynamics in order to navigate the school politics (Achinstein, 2006), 4) mentoring is most effective when mentors receive training (Beutel and Spooner-Lane, 2009), 5) sociocultural factors (e.g. race/ class/ ethnicity) that influence their roles as mentors are taken into account (Clarke et al, 2013), and 6) a mixture of informal and formal elements are most effective when designing mentorship models (Patrick et al, 2010).

Teacher Induction Programs

Teacher mentorship (or induction) programs are commonplace in colleges of education (e.g. CarolinaTIP, Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline), as well as through local boards of education (e.g. LACOE Beginning Teachers Induction Program.) Empirical data from these programs has been overwhelmingly positive – strong mentorship and induction programs lead to higher levels of recruitment and retention of educators (Skeen et al., 2020), as well as improved practice and instruction and oftentimes student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). However, there are very few models of induction programs that are geared toward the specificities of school library positions. While many districts do offer local ("in-house") mentoring support to new SLs, they are rarely focused on the core tenets of a school library program (as defined by professional organizations and accrediting bodies) and instead focus on the individual characteristics and challenges of local school contexts and administrative initiatives.

School Library Mentorship

This project aims to contribute to this body of scholarship focused on mentoring of new teachers by considering the impact of a structured mentorship program for new SLs in the early years of their career in school librarianship. There is abundant support for a variety of mentorship programs for SLs in the professional literature (Baaden, 2008; Bicksler, 2004; Creighton, 2007), however, the work thus far has focused on the mentoring of preservice SLs while they are in their graduate programs (Smith, 2013, 2015; Project RUSL), SLs serving as mentors for new teachers (Soulen, 2018), and mentorship networks for school library supervisors (Project LILEAD). Baaden and Uhl (2006) look specifically at new SLs but focus on the relationship between the new librarian and the exiting librarian and the mentoring relationship during that transition. This project will explore how a formal and structured mentoring

network that provides individualized support in a non-evaluative capacity and uses a cohort model, tailored to the specific concerns of new SLs, would support early career SLs as they endeavor to meet professional goals. The outcome of the project is support for new SLs (from highly qualified mentors) when challenges arise in their first years of school librarianship related to the content that is covered within their school librarian preparation programs, and thus, increased retention and more stable school libraries.

Target Group

The target group for this project is 24 early career SLs (less than 5 years working full time in the profession) from Iowa and South Carolina, who will be selected and organized into cohorts comprised of one mentor and four mentees. Preliminary survey data gathered in early 2023 from the two populations of SLs in Iowa and South Carolina (the focal states in this study) shows that 50.2% of SLs surveyed (n=211) consider leaving the profession because of challenges in their positions related to collaboration, book challenges and censorship, demands of the job, feelings of deprofessionalization, contentious political climate, and the inability to juggle increasing responsibilities placed on SLs. The results of this preliminary survey point to the need for a structured mentorship program for SLs (like those that are often available to new teachers in undergrad teacher preparation programs).

Project Beneficiaries

By providing a bridge between preparation programs and early career professionals, we can support a diverse field of SLs who will serve as powerful advocates for the profession and ultimately, their students in k-12 schools. Other beneficiaries of the program include the 6 mentors themselves, as research has demonstrated the impact of mentoring relationships on both the mentor and the mentee (Hobson, 2009), as well as other SL preparation programs who may be able to employ this model at their institutions in the future.

Project Director's Long Term Research Agenda

My research broadly explores the question: how can SL preparation programs support new SLs who strive to develop and maintain inclusive spaces in their schools? This research question connects to previous work I have done that examines barriers that contribute to a lack of LGBTQIA+ inclusive collections and programs in school libraries, including censorship and self-censorship. Recent work has shifted my focus on the "controversial" nature of these types of collections, toward the role SL preparation programs play in addressing the kinds of challenges SLs face within their practice by providing professional development for practitioners in the field. I have served as the Principal Investigator on a Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources grant project for the past three years which creates opportunities for classroom teachers and SLs to work together to design collaborative instruction around graphic novels and primary sources. In this work, I explored how professional development models can be designed to provide educators with structured support for developing instructional partnerships. In my current teaching role, I supervise all school library interns in their practicum placements in the final semester of their program. In my teaching, I often hear from students eager to put their graduate coursework into practice but who face barriers in their professional settings or observe barriers within their internship experiences. Students graduating from SL preparation programs need support enacting the ideals and best practice they are introduced to within their graduate coursework. This mentoring program is the logical next step in my research agenda as I consider how SL faculty can work to support these new graduates in their first years as SLs who are working toward the foundational principles of the profession we teach in our programs.

<p align="center">Project Work Plan</p>

Project Research Design

The project is grounded in a tradition of Design-Based Research (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012) and employs a sequential mixed model design (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015) which includes three phases. Within this model of research, the researcher engages with practitioners to design, implement, and iteratively refine a mentoring model collaboratively, and in response to the emerging practical problems mentees face in the profession. The sequential nature of this design dictates that each phase builds on one another (see Table 1), and that the quantitative data in Phase I informs the direction of the qualitative inquiry in Phase II and III.

Phase	Project Task	Outcomes
1 **Aug 2024-** **Aug 2025**	• Develop and disseminate National Survey • Analyze survey data • Present and promote findings from the survey	• Gather and share national data about specific challenges SLs face in the early years of their careers
2 **Mar 2025 –** **Aug 2026**	• Co-develop mentoring program with mentors • Recruit mentors/mentees • Train mentors • Enact a year-long mentorship program	• Develop and implement mentor training and work with those mentors to develop a sustainable mentoring framework for early career SLs
3 **Aug 2026 –** **July 2027**	• Interview participants • Analyze cumulative data • Present findings for a broad audience and promote framework	• Share an empirically developed framework for transitional mentorship programs for SL preparation programs • Share participants experiences participating in this program

Table 1 Sequential Mixed Model Design

Phase I (August 2024 – August 2025) National Survey
RQ1: What challenges do SLs face in the early years of their career?

The PI will design and conduct a national survey about the challenges early career SLs face in their new professional roles. The national survey will build on the short and informal survey conducted in preparation for this project in early 2023 (n=211). While there is significant anecdotal evidence about the challenges that SLs face, there is no empirical data that points to the specific challenges that early SLs face particularly in the contentious and post-COVID climate that SLs are currently facing. The survey will be designed and tested from August 2024 to November 2024, and the final survey will be promoted, administered, and monitored from November 2024 to January 2025. The survey will be tested by advisory board members, including a research specialist with experience in the design of studies that employ qualitative and quantitative components and will include demographic questions, closed-ended questions, and open-ended free-text fields. While the preliminary survey data suggests several key areas that are challenging for SLs generally (e.g. book challenges, technology issues, and collaboration), the survey will extend those results by focusing on the experience of early career SLs and the complexities of those challenges for the specific population. For example, how do book challenges impact a SLs' ability to effectively do their work, how do they impact their personal well-being, and how could components of this challenge be addressed through mentorship.

The project research assistant (RA), a University of South Carolina doctoral student, will assist with survey creation in Qualtrics, dissemination, and promotion. Participation in the national survey will

be limited to SLs in full-time positions in K-12 public schools who have been working in the profession for five years or less. Participants will be recruited to participate in the survey through state association listservs and the AASL Member Forum. Survey data will be analyzed (February 2025-May 2025) using descriptive statistics to measure distribution, central tendency, and variability. Open-ended text responses will be coded using thematic and content analysis with deductive and inductive codes. The PI will use survey findings to inform the content and format of the mentoring model employed in Phase II. To this end, the final piece of Phase I includes aggregating and analyzing survey data, preparing a manuscript for publication, and adding the results to the project website to disseminate these findings broadly and to be used within mentor training. A secondary goal of the national survey is to create a data set that will complement the mentoring framework developed during this project and can be used to inform the development of mentoring programs in other SL preparation programs and states.

It is important to note that Phase I and II will overlap as analyzed survey data will be used to begin planning for mentor training and the mentoring program before findings are submitted for publication.

Phase II (March 2025 – August 2026) Design and Implementation of Formal Mentoring Program RQ2: Does a formal mentoring network support SLs in the early years of their careers in school librarianship as they implement services related to equity, intellectual freedom, and collaboration?

Phase II involves development, facilitation, and continuous evaluation of the mentoring program--from design to implementation and through its ongoing and responsive review. The two states were chosen to capture the experience of SLs working in regionally and demographically diverse settings and who have received their SL preparation in two distinct areas of the United States. The University of South Carolina's iSchool (South) and the University of Iowa School of Library and Information Science (Midwest) are both situated in states where there are statewide shortages in SLs-- both places where measures focused on retention are of particular importance. However, these states also have distinctly different challenges. In South Carolina, a state that consistently falls in the bottom 10 states for quality of education, each school building is required to employ a certified SL (teaching certificate and Master's degree in Library and Information Science). In Iowa, each district (not school) is required to have a SL, and this has led to districts employing "creative" strategies, particularly in rural areas, to subvert the need for a building-level SL by hiring a single SL to serve an entire district. Because replicability for other SL preparation programs is an important goal of this project's national impact, testing at two different University sites, working under different state requirements, is an explicit design feature.

Mentor/Mentee Recruitment

The first part of Phase II involves recruiting and training 6 mentors (three from South Carolina and three from Iowa) and recruiting 24 mentees (12 from SC and 12 from IA). Mentor and mentee selection are concurrent processes as the dynamics between the mentor cohorts (one mentor and their four mentees) are vital to the design of this project. Mentors and mentees will be selected through an application process promoted on both states' school library association listservs. Applicants will complete an application form with biographical and demographic information and a statement expressing their interest in participating as either a mentor or mentee.

Mentor selection. Criteria used for the selection of mentors will involve a variety of factors designed to ascertain the mentors' skillset within the field of school librarianship including years and levels of experience, awards received, as well as any mentorship experience and participation in leadership roles within the profession. Research has demonstrated that successful mentoring occurs when participants have personal connections to one another (Beutel and Spooner-Lane, 2009), as well as subject expertise and knowledge of local contexts and politics (Desimone et al., 2014). Demographic information will also be collected within the applications in order to purposefully select a diverse pool of

applicants and to ensure that mentors are carefully selected for a diverse group of mentees. In an effort to recruit this diverse (race/class/ethnicity/gender) group of mentors and mentees, participant support and recruitment criteria will be used. Furthermore, mentors will be selected based on how their experiences, demographic information, and geographic locations are in line with the mentees they will work with (as mentee selection will be a concurrent process).

Mentee selection. Each mentor will lead a cohort of four mentees. 24 mentees total (12 from SC and 12 from IA) will be selected to participate in the program through the application process. Participants will be recruited to participate in the program through an email that will be sent to graduates from each school's respective master's program who have been working in a school library for less than 5 years. This population will also include SLs who have accepted positions and will be graduating after recruitment has begun but before the mentorship program commences. Mentee selection will be determined using a set of ranked criteria. SLs with fewer years of experience within the school library profession and education generally will be ranked higher for selection (e.g. if Applicant A and Applicant B had both worked in a school library for two years, but Applicant A had been a classroom teacher for 15 years before that, Applicant B would be ranked higher for selection). Additionally, preference will be given to applicants who are working within the geographic area of the mentors so that local contexts are considered, and physical meetups are possible (e.g. if Applicant A and B both had two years of experience, but Applicant A works in the same geographic area as a highly ranked mentor, Applicant A would be selected before Applicant B). Finally, priority will be given to diverse applicants (consider race, gender, ethnicity, and regional representation) as these groups face barriers to recruitment and retention in the profession that this program seeks to address. While training for the mentors will begin before the program starts, it is important to recruit mentors and mentees concurrently to ensure the dynamics of each mentor cohort are considered during the selection process.

Mentor Training

A vital component of the development of a successful mentor/mentee relationship is mentor training. To this end, the PI and the field coordinator will conduct mentor training virtually with the six mentors before the mentoring program begins. This training will involve (among other topics) the study and discussion of 1) development of their identity as mentors and educators (Bullough, 2005), 2) interpersonal skills and cultural competency in mentoring (Rippon & Martin, 2006), and 3) a variety of (self) reflection techniques that can be used within the mentoring relationship (Crasborn et al., 2008). Mentors will then use their learning as well as data gleaned from the national survey to collaboratively co-design a mentoring structure. This structure will involve formal (facilitated by the project leaders) and informal (facilitated by the mentors) components. Mentors will be paid $1000 in Y1 as they participate in mentor training and program development and $3,000 in Y2 as they coordinate monthly cohort meetings, serve in an on-demand capacity as mentors to their cohorts, participate in Discord channels, and attend the three large group meetings (two virtual and one face-to-face). They will also receive a stipend to cover the cost of travel to the in-person meeting.

Mentoring Program

Whole Group Meetings. The PI and field coordinator will be responsible for planning and facilitating the three large group meetings as well as providing on-demand support to the mentors throughout the mentoring year. The mentoring program will include one face-to-face meeting and two virtual meetings with all mentors and mentees (from both states). The in-person meeting will be held at AASL's Annual Meeting in St Louis in 2025 and participants (mentors and mentees) will be provided a stipend to cover their travel and registration for the national conference. We will also propose to present a panel presentation at AASL that includes key personnel from the project (PI and Field Coordinator as well as a group of mentors and mentees) about challenges early career school librarians face.

Each whole group meeting design will be emergent and based on topics identified in the survey as challenges and barriers faced by SLs in the early years of their careers. For example, one significant challenge noted in our preliminary survey was the looming threat of book challenges in their schools and districts. To that end, one of the large group meetings would address this topic with information and materials to assist SLs, careful consideration of individual policies and procedures, guest speakers, and time for dialogue about the kind of support that professionals need in order to defend intellectual freedom. In general, each meeting will follow a similar format with a set of attending activities (see Table 2) but will address a different unifying theme or topic.

Meeting Activity	Description
Community Building Introduction Activity	Each meeting will include an informal component designed to create community and develop collegiality
Small and Large Group Activities	Both small and large group discussions will be used within each meeting to encourage dialogue between all group members.
Guest Speaker	Experts on the whole group meeting topics and themes will be invited to speak and lead discussion.
Solution Brainstorming and Discussion	While time will be devoted to listening to mentor and mentees concerns and challenges, equal time will be spent engaging in collaborative problem solving and space will also be given to celebrate successes.

Table 2 Whole Group Meeting Format

Cohort Meetings and Informal Channels. The topics addressed in the meeting will then be the focuses of regular cohort meetings that are an important part of this project's design. Research suggests that mentoring is more effective when formal and informal components work in tandem, and when mentors make themselves available for on-demand concerns (Harrison et al., 2006). On-demand support can take many different forms depending on the mentor/mentee relationships but generally refers to the availability of the mentor (via text/email/phone/Discord) to provide support as professional issues arise over the course of the mentoring year. Each mentor cohort will have physical monthly meetups after which the mentor will submit a report to the research team with information about mentees who attended, and the topics discussed. Other informal components will consist of one-on-one and as-needed mentor/mentee conversations, a whole group Discord Channel, as well as a mentor Discord Channel that will function as a collaborative space for asking questions and receiving support from the wider group. The channels will be moderated by the PI, Field Coordinator, and Project RA, and will serve as a source of data for the project as well. The overall design of the program (both formal and informal components) will be iteratively assessed and modified as the PI and field coordinator deem necessary and through bi-monthly conversations with mentors (facilitated by the field coordinator with the IA mentors, and by the PI with the SC mentors).

Data Collection and Analysis

Collected data include: recruitment applications, field notes from meetings, materials generated during whole group meetings, monthly mentor reports, and Discord channel transcripts. Data collection and analysis is an ongoing and iterative process in this study. The PI and Project RA will engage in a recursive first round coding process as data is generated that aims to capture participants voices and perspectives. For this reason, In Vivo and descriptive codes will be used during the first round of data analysis. The PI will be working with project RA to monitor the program and evaluate its effectiveness (RQ2 and RQ3) as well as manage the data generated throughout the program. Findings from Phase II

will be shared through conference presentations and publications and will focus the impact of a mentoring model for addressing and supporting SLs on specific topics that emerge through the program, whereas Phase III will address, on a summative level, the program's impact.

Phase III (August 2026 – July 2027) Qualitative Evaluation and Framework Dissemination
RQ3: Do mentees perceive a benefit from a formal cohort-based mentorship program in the early years of their careers as SLs?

At the program's conclusion (August 2026), the PI and project RA will conduct individual semi-structured interviews with mentors and focus groups with mentee cohorts (4 mentees who had worked with one mentor). The semi-structured interviews with mentors will cover several topics, including their formative experience serving as a mentor, challenges faced in mentoring, mentee dispositions, observations/evidence of mentee growth, and ideas for how the program could be improved. The focus groups with the mentees will cover similar topics but with a focus on their individual experiences within the mentoring program and what aspects of their mentors' disposition and availability resulted in formative experiences within the program as well as their general outlook for their career. The choice to use focus groups will allow for participants to co-construct narratives about their experiences in the program that are not specific only to their context but reflect on the program as a whole.

After conducting the interviews and focus groups the PI, along with the project RA, will analyze the data using a combination of in vivo and descriptive coding in order to capture participant perspectives. After coding interviews and focus groups, the PI will look across different data types (including meeting notes/materials, communications, Discord channel and interview/focus group transcripts) to identify themes. Focused coding will be used at this point to identify salient categories and theorize about aspects of the mentorship model enacted through this project that can be replicated in other settings to support early career SLs.

After data analysis has concluded the PI will develop findings and prepare manuscripts sharing the results of the project. Throughout the project, the PI will also propose to present findings at both discipline-specific conference venues (e.g. American Association of School Librarians and International Association of School Librarians =) as well as interdisciplinary meetings (American Educational Research Association). The PI will also disseminate findings in Y3 in coordination with a dissemination partner, the ALISE School Library Special Interest Group,--providing a webinar that will be available to faculty in SL preparation programs and will be added to a collection of webinars that are accessible well after the project's conclusion (see Supportingdoc2.pdf). A framework for transitional mentorship programs will be promoted during each of these presentations and shared through the project website including: all project materials, meeting agendas and resources, findings, and anonymized data sets.

Project Personnel

Principal Investigator: Jenna Spiering, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at the iSchool at the University of South Carolina. Before receiving her doctorate from the University of Iowa in the College of Education, she worked in junior high libraries in Iowa City, IA for seven years. Her research is broadly focused on issues within school librarianship with a more specific focus on issues of selection and censorship and young adult literature as well as the impact of professional development models for SLs. She currently serves as the Principal Investigator on a Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Grant ($249,675.28) and was a 2021 recipient of the AASL Research Award. She teaches various courses within the school librarianship track at USC including School Library Program Development, Young Adult Materials, and Internship in Library and Information Science. She also serves on the Board of the South Carolina Association of School Librarians.

Field Coordinator: Jacqueline Biger, is an Associate Professor of Instruction in the School of Information Science at the University of Iowa. There, she serves as the program coordinator for the Teacher Librarian MA program and teaches Foundations of School Library Media Administration, School Library Media Practicum, Children's Resources, and Literacy and Learning. She is also a co-facilitator of the state-wide Teacher Librarian Leadership Team.

Advisory Board: The PI has assembled an advisory board of four experts on various aspects of the project plan. The purpose of the advisory board is to provide additional feedback on the survey design, participant recruitment, program development, data collection and analysis and findings. The following individuals have agreed to serve as advisory board members: Dr. Kafi Kumasi (Associate Professor at Wayne State University, Project Direct for Project RUSL, and former mentor in Project LILEAD), Dr. Ann Weeks (Professor of Practice Emerita at University of Maryland and Project Director for Project LILEAD), Stacey Hockett Sherlock (Research Specialist and Qualitative Analyst at the University of Iowa) and Tamara Cox (SL at Wren High School in Piedmont, SC and President of the South Carolina Association of School Librarians).

Project Research Assistant (RA): The project will employ a doctoral student who will assist the PI with project administration, data collection and management, data analysis, and dissemination of project results. The PI will mentor the project RA in the implementation and evaluation of a large-scale and multi-site research project.

Webmaster: Patty Hall, Webmaster at the University of South Carolina, will create and maintain the project website where recruitment, participant materials, findings, and framework will be disseminated.

Diversity Plan

The diversity plan for this work is multilayered and considers the needs of diverse students as well as SLs. In line with many of the challenges that SLs have identified as barriers in the professions, the program aims to support SLs who are curating, promoting, and defending diverse collections, creating and implementing equitable and inclusive policies and practices, and designing collaborative instruction for diverse learners. The singular nature of the school library profession can also lead to SLs who lack support and encouragement when attempting to build relationships and a culture of inclusivity in their school library programs. To this end, the larger goal of this project is to support the diverse student bodies in k-12 schools who benefit from strong SLs (Froggatt, 2015).

Recruitment and retention of diverse school library professionals continues to be a significant barrier to the creation of a diverse school library workforce (ALA, 2012). However, across LIS professions, the presence of strong mentors has made an impact on recruitment and retention particularly for librarians of color (Harper, 2020). Through participant support, the program will prioritize the recruitment and inclusion of diverse early career SLs and diverse mentors as participants in this project. During the application process for mentors and mentees, demographic information will be collected, and priority given to diverse applicants who are underrepresented in the profession. When possible, the PI and field coordinator will match mentors with mentees who also embody minoritized identities. These shared identities are critical to a successful mentorship relationship and will work towards the goal of retention in the profession.

The PI has intentionally recruited a diverse advisory group to serve on this project and provide guidance through the survey creation to the mentoring program implementation to ensure that the communities served by the project are included in the design. The advisory board contributes diverse and rich experiences in project management (two previous IMLS grantees), research expertise (Stacey Hockett Sherlock, research specialist at University of Iowa) and professional expertise (Tamara Cox, a practitioner in the field). Additionally, Dr. Kumasi's research and Project RUSL taking place in diverse

urban districts, and Dr. Week's work with the LILEAD project focused on school library leaders from districts serving diverse populations (geographically, ethnically, economically, and racially).

Project Results

The project results will be disseminated in multiple ways ensuring that not only do the findings contribute to knowledge creation in the area of school library research, but also have practical impact for the people who work with, train, and mentor SLs. The focus on sharing the project with a broad audience of school library educators is the backbone of the project's replicable design. The (anonymized) data collected throughout the project will be available through Open Science Framework including the data collected in the national survey in Phase I as well as the mentoring framework and findings from Phase II and III. Both can be used and tailored by other SL preparation programs across the country who might consider implementing a transitional mentorship program at their own institutions.

This project supports the goals of the program in its effort to provide support to a diverse group of SLs as they enter the workforce and endeavor to apply the concepts learned in their SL preparation programs to the work they do with today's learners in K-12 schools. This project will yield important empirical findings that will both inform and serve as a model for mentoring programs in other SL preparation programs well after the project's conclusion. The design of this project, although it is designed as a research project, at its core is also a service to practitioners in the profession. The literature is unequivocal in its finding that mentorship is a successful component of professional satisfaction and advancement. Participants in this project will benefit from the network gained through this mentoring program and the data collected throughout will assist educators of SLs in their own planning for how to support their students leaving their programs. Retention of SLs in the field will be pivotal to ensuring that SLs are an important member of school communities going forward. Furthermore, the materials and resources generated and used during formal mentorship meetings, as well as findings from the project and data from the national survey to lend empirical support to the need for projects in their own states. ***See supportingdoc1.pdf for references.***

Activities	Year 1 2024-2025				Year 2 2025-2026				Year 3 2026-2027			
	Aug-Oct	Nov-Jan	Feb-Apr	May-July	Aug-Oct	Nov-Jan	Feb-Apr	May-July	Aug-Oct	Nov-Jan	Feb-Apr	May-July
Project Management												
Secure IRB Approval	X											
Hire and onboard project RA	X											
Initial website development	X	X										
Website maintenance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Meeting with advisory board	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
National Survey												
Design and test survey	X	X										
Publicize and administer survey		X	X									
Monitor survey response rate			X	X								
Analyze data from survey			X	X	X							
Develop survey findings for publication			X	X	X							
Mentor Training and Program Development												
Create mentor and mentee applications		X										
Recruit mentors and mentees		X	X									
Select mentors and mentees			X									
Mentor virtual training				X								
Develop mentoring framework			X	X								
Mentoring Program Implementation												
First whole-group mentoring workshop, in-person at AASL				X								
Second whole-group mentoring workshop						X						
Third whole-group mentoring workshop								X				
Monthly cohort meetings				X								
Individual mentor meetings with PI				X								
Data Collection and Analysis												
Field notes, transcripts, personal communications			X									
Mentor interviews							X	X	X	X		
Cohort focus groups								X	X			
Mentor program analysis			X					X			X	X
Data analysis of focus groups and interviews								X			X	X
Data management	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Practice Orientated Dissemination												
Provide project updates on the website		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide mentoring framework on website											X	X
Practitioner Publications			X	X								
Practitioner Conference Presentations			X	X								
Research Dissemination												
Project Website	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Conference Presentations				X				X				X
Research Publications								X				X
Webinar												X

Digital Products Plan

Type
The PI and the Project RA will collect the following digital products throughout the research process:

Asset	Description	Quantity	Format
Mentoring Framework	Recommendations for administering and implementing a mentoring program with schedule of activities and progress monitoring documents	1 website	html
National Survey Dataset	Data from a National survey of early career school librarians	1 dataset	PDF
Application Materials	Applications will be submitted for all prospective mentors/mentees and will include identifying and demographic information as well as statements of interest.	6 mentor applications, 24 applications	PDF
Monthly Mentor Reports	Reports submitted monthly by 6 mentors	60 mentor reports, 1 codebook	PDF
Whole Group Meeting Field Notes	Field notes will be generated during and after each whole group meeting by the PI and the field coordinator	6 documents (3 from PI and 3 from field coordinator)	PDF
Whole Group meeting materials	materials generated during the meetings	TBD	PDF, JPG
Discord Channels	Two Discord forums created for mentors and the whole group and used throughout the mentoring year, Data analysis codebook	2 transcripts, 1 codebook	PDF
Interviews	Interview audio recordings, interview transcripts, Data analysis codebook	6 transcripts, 1 codebook	MPEG4, PDF
Focus Groups	Focus group audio recordings, Focus group transcripts, Data analysis codebook	6 transcripts, 1 codebook	MPEG4, PDF
Research publications and presentations	manuscripts and conference presentations	TBD	PDF

All hardware and software necessary for this research is provided by the University of South Carolina with the exception of NVivo qualitative coding software which has been included in the budget justification. Microsoft Office products will be used to create data products, publications and presentations, Zoom will be used to host virtual meetings, Zoom will be used to record interviews and focus groups, and Qualtrics will be used to administer the national survey.

Availability

The research products will be made widely available and promoted through presentations and the project website. Anonymized digital products (including the mentoring framework and data products) will be made available through the project website and the OSF repository. Publications resulting from the project will, when possible, be published in Open Access venues.

Access

Access to research products will be available via the project website, which is accessible using standard web browsers, as well as deposited in OSF. Both are publicly available. The main research products can be divided into three categories: project website, data products, and research publications and presentations.

1. The **project website** will host the mentoring framework as well as links to publications and presentations and data products deposited in Open Science Framework (OSF). The website will be hosted by USC's College of Information and Communications (CIC) – the larger college of which the School of Information Science is part. This website and resources will be published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license, which allows the project's audience to access, publish, share, and readapt the materials to suit their own purposes and contexts. These products will include attribution to the PI and IMLS for supporting the project. The PI will provide a clear overview of the license details including attribution and how the research products can be re-used.

The **data products** include national survey data, interview and focus group transcripts, monthly mentor reports, meeting materials, applications, whole group meeting field notes, and Discord channel transcripts. With participant consent, these data will be made available to facilitate re-use. The data products will be added to OSF and will be available pending access protocols from USC's IRB office to protect participant confidentiality.

2. When possible, **research publications and presentations** will be published in open-access venues with a copy of each being added to the project website and OSF. When open access is not possible, the PI will pursue agreements to publish pre-print versions.

USC has ownership of the data products and project website. All website content will be published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license. Data products that participants consent to being accessible, including primary data and other supporting materials, will follow access protocols set by USC's IRB office to protect participant confidentiality. Finally, research publication ownership will vary based on agreements with various publishing venues.

Sustainability

This project aims to ensure the sustainability of the digital products created. USC's CIC will permanently host the project website on a stable sc.edu URL. Research output, including publications, presentations, data products, and the mentoring framework will be hosted in OSF for a minimum of 50 years.

Data Management Plan

Identify the type(s) and estimated amount of data you plan to collect or generate, and the purpose or intended use(s) to which you expect them to be put. Describe the method(s) you will use, the proposed scope and scale, and the approximate dates or intervals at which you will collect or generate data.

1. In Phase One, the project will collect survey national data from early-career school librarians. Data will be collected from January to March 2025. This data will then be analyzed and inform the design of the mentoring program employed during Phase Two.
2. In Phase Two, the project will collect data from participants (mentors and mentees) in a mentoring program. These data include application materials from mentors/mentees (applications will be solicited from April to June 2025), monthly mentor reports (one submitted by each mentor monthly from August 2025 to August 2026), field notes and materials from whole group mentoring meetings (three meetings taking place at the beginning, middle, and end of the program), and transcripts from two Discord channels that will be open for the duration of Phase Two.
3. In Phase Three, the PI will evaluate the project through focus groups and interviews (these will take place from July 2026 to September 2026). Data will include audio interview recordings, and transcripts from those recordings.

All data will contribute to scholarly publications and presentations and the framework for the mentoring program framework that will be shared on the project website.

Will you collect any sensitive information? This may include personally identifiable information (PII), confidential information (e.g., trade secrets), or proprietary information. If so, detail the specific steps you will take to protect the information while you prepare it for public release (e.g., anonymizing individual identifiers, data aggregation). If the data will not be released publicly, explain why the data cannot be shared due to the protection of privacy, confidentiality, security, intellectual property, and other rights or requirements.

The National Survey will be anonymous and will not collect any identifying information from participants. All mentoring project participants (mentors and mentees) will be assigned pseudonyms. Any identifying information will be redacted from collected data. Final datasets made available for use outside of the research team will be anonymized. The PI will limit access to data products (along with following USC IRB access protocols) and require a confidentiality agreement from re-users. All data collected and analyzed during the project will be stored on secure, password-protected machines, to which only the project staff will have access.

What technical (hardware and/or software) requirements or dependencies would be necessary for understanding retrieving, displaying, processing, or otherwise reusing the data? How can these tools be accessed (e.g., open-source and freely available, commercially available, available from your research team)?

Final datasets will be made available via Open Source Framework (OSF) upon publication of project manuscripts and, according to OSF, will be made available for a minimum of 50 years. Because research data will be saved in open formats that can be accessed by almost any machine (.csv, .txt etc.), no special hardware or software will be required to access or reuse the data.

What documentation (e.g., consent agreements, data documentation, codebooks, metadata, and analytical and procedural information) will you capture or create along with the data? Where will the documentation be stored and in what format(s)? How will you permanently associate and manage the documentation with the data it describes to enable future reuse?

Project staff who have passed USC Human Subjects training will administer informed consent to all participants in the mentoring program and collect signed consent forms (either a physical copy, or a copy that has been emailed, signed, scanned and sent back to the research team). A random three-digit numerical code will be assigned to each participant (e.g., 563, 478). The PI will create a spreadsheet matching each code to the participant's name and project pseudonym. This file will be kept in a password-protected folder accessible to project staff. Consent agreements will be scanned and stored in this same folder. Print copies of agreements will be kept in a locked file cabinet for at least three years after the study's end (under USC IRB requirements). Once interviews have been transcribed, their corresponding audio files will be deleted to avoid identifiable voice information. Each of the data sources will be in password protected (if digital) or locked (if physical) storage.

Codebooks and project memos will be created and stored on local, secure machines as .docx and .pdf formats. The naming convention of a randomly assigned three-digit number indicating the data collection type (FG - focus groups, I - interviews) will be used to label these documents as necessary.

The OSF repository interface will assign metadata to research and data products. The metadata is flexible and customizable based on dissemination needs. All of the metadata fields are targeted to promote search discoverability. The PI will consult with USC librarians who support OSF on appropriate metadata standards and content based on the goals for dissemination, which will be established throughout the duration of the project. The data set will be linked through the project website so it will be discoverable.

What is your plan for managing, disseminating, and preserving data after the completion of the award-funded project? If relevant, identify the repository where you will deposit your data. When and for how long will data be made available to other users?
All sharable datasets will be deposited into Open Science Framework and will be made available for a minimum of 50 years. OSF utilizes persistent identifiers, such as DOI, which will facilitate discovery of the dataset.

When and how frequently will you review this data management plan? How will the implementation be monitored?

The data management plan will be evaluated monthly by the PI and project RA, and annually in project meetings with the project advisory board. The PI will monitor compliance with the plan as well as new institutional and technological developments that might warrant modification of the plan. Datasets will be curated and preserved in Open Science Framework.