

## You Belong Scholar Program: Retaining a Diverse Library Workforce

The Missouri Library Association (MLA), with the support of the Missouri State Library & guidance from Michigan Library Association, Kentucky Library Association, Iowa Library Association, Virginia Library Association, & the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, will plan & implement the You Belong Scholar Program to retain & develop existing library workers from historically underrepresented groups, in order to address the persistent lack of diversity in library & information science professions (Laura Bush 21st Century Goal 1, Obj. 1.1). We request \$249,950 to implement 2 cohorts of the You Belong Scholar Program & create a model for other state library associations & state libraries to follow, filling the gap between national recruitment initiatives & state-level needs to retain a diverse library workforce. Each year's cohort of You Belong Scholars will include 5 library workers from historically underrepresented groups who are pursuing either an undergraduate degree or Master's in Library & Information Science (MLIS). You Belong Scholars will receive: a stipend for tuition and/or a computer; participation in the You Belong Leadership Academy at the MLA Annual Conference; mentorship from diverse library professionals; opportunities for paid internship experience; & an additional professional development stipend for MLIS students. Results of the 3-year project will include scalable toolkits for other state library associations & libraries to adopt to retain diverse library employees and increased interest in & preparation for long-term library careers among diverse library workers.

### Project Justification

Overview, Target Group, & Beneficiaries | After 25+ years of national efforts to recruit a more diverse library workforce, there has been no significant change in representation. White librarians represent the vast majority of U.S. librarians, with overall data showing that 80-88% of librarians are White & have been since at least 2009 [1], with higher rates of non-White representation among non-librarian library workers [2]. Ten years after the American Library Association (ALA) Spectrum Scholarship program for MLIS students from racial & ethnic minorities launched, the stagnant growth of diverse representation in the library profession led to the conclusion in the 2007 ALA Diversity Count report that "high attrition among librarians of color speak[s] to the need for retention planning in diversity recruitment strategies" [3]. It is time to activate the potential of state-level programs across the country that focus on *retaining* historically underrepresented library workers who are already in the workforce to achieve exponential results in the effort to diversify the library profession. This is an especially important strategy in regions that are less likely to attract out-of-state applicants. The You Belong Scholar Program will pilot a statewide diversity retention program & develop resource toolkits to enable easily scalable adoption by state library organizations. The target group is historically underrepresented library workers, & ten of these individuals in Missouri will become You Belong Scholars during the project. Ultimate beneficiaries of the project include the U.S. library workforce & the communities they serve, by increasing access to the vast resources available through libraries.

Lack of Significant Change | Demographic data about librarians & library employees has been collected in various ways by groups external to the profession as well as by library groups like ALA. External data sources include federal surveys like the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey [4] & the Census Bureau's American Community Survey [5]. ALA's Office for Research & Statistics studied the demographics of librarians & library workers in a 2007 Diversity Counts Report, updated in 2012 [6]. With different collection methodologies for each dataset, it is difficult to determine precise current counts, but the data overall along with a 2023 Ithaka S+R report strongly confirm that White library professionals outnumber non-White library professionals by about 4:1 [7]. While the makeup of the library profession has remained stagnant, the population of the country has not, with the total U.S. White population steadily decreasing from 82.7% in 1997 [8] to 75.5% in 2023 [9]. The 2007 Diversity Counts report slides summarized their findings with prescience, stating that "For both credentialed librarians & library assistants under age 45, these numbers suggest a revolving door effect where individuals are compelled by competing workforce opportunities or by delayed

access to managerial leadership to leave the library field for greener pastures” [10]. The door has been revolving for 17 years, preventing meaningful diversification of the library workforce.

National Diversity Recruitment Programs | The Spectrum Scholarship, ALA’s flagship diversity scholarship, began in 1997 & has awarded 1,240 MLIS candidates & 18 doctoral fellows [11, 12]. The You Belong Committee (YBC) is proud to have 2 Spectrum alumni leading this work. The Spectrum program offers a \$5,000 scholarship & attendance at the Spectrum Leadership Institute at the ALA Annual Conference [13]. However, it is only open to students enrolled in MLIS programs who are from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group & does not include mentorship or paid internship experience. There is no provision for a computing device [14]. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Kaleidoscope Program, established in 2000 as the Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce, offers Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) graduate students a scholarship, mentorship, educational experiences, & signature events [15]. YBC has the privilege of having the contributions of 2 Kaleidoscope alumni. Despite offering these additional components, the Kaleidoscope scholarship is only open to graduate students from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups [16] interested in academic library careers & does not offer a paid internship [17].

ALA Affiliate Scholarships & Local MLIS Program Incentives | Other national scholarships for underrepresented MLIS students exist, often offered by ALA affiliates & other specialized groups [18]. However, they provide scholarships with no mentorship, professional development, conference travel, or internships. Representative examples include the Virginia Matthews Memorial Scholarship by the American Indian Library Association for an American Indian MLIS student [19], the ALA Century scholarship for an MLIS student with disabilities [20], the E.J. Josey Scholarship by the Black Caucus of the American Library Association for African-American MLIS students [21], the REFORMA Scholarship for MLIS students who are Spanish-speakers or interested in serving Latinos or Spanish-speaking people [22], & the Chinese American Librarians Association scholarship for MLIS students of Chinese descent [23]. These worthy initiatives do support diverse MLIS students, but altogether only ~9/year. Their national structure creates tough odds for applicants & limits the impact felt at local levels. A handful of programs aim to develop existing library employees rather than students, like the Tom & Roberta Drewes Scholarship, but they do not include mentorship, leadership development, or paid internships [24]. There are also some local recruitment efforts in the form of financial incentives offered to ALA Spectrum Scholars. Multiple MLIS educational programs offer a matching scholarship to Spectrum Scholars [25, 26] or even full tuition [27], helping to drive recruitment to that school. While these programs do amplify the financial impact of the Spectrum Program, they do not offer non-financial support & do not necessarily lead to post-graduation employment in that state, let alone increased retention in the library workforce.

The Gap | None of these programs offer all of the components that the You Belong Scholar Program will. Existing scholarship programs have very narrow eligibility & are mostly open only to MLIS students. The predominantly national-level approach leads to large pools of eligible applicants, small numbers of annual recipients, & uneven distribution of awardees throughout the U.S. Existing diversity recruitment efforts targeting MLIS students have not meaningfully impacted local library workforces, especially in states where out-of-state MLIS graduates are less likely to apply. It is time to implement strategies that retain & develop the library workers from historically underrepresented groups that are already working in our libraries.

The You Belong Difference | The You Belong Scholar Program will address this gap by working to *retain* existing library employees of any type who are pursuing either an undergraduate or MLIS degree & self-identify as belonging to a historically underrepresented group. This inclusive approach addresses the persistent lack of equity that stymies retention of diverse library employees. The focus on retention addresses the reality that recruitment alone cannot lead to increased representation if recruited workers do not stay. The state-by-state approach of You Belong creates the opportunity to exponentially increase impacts on the library workforce &

accelerate the work of national recruitment & retention efforts. Throughout the project, YBC will survey current library workers from historically underrepresented groups to gain a better understanding of retention rates. This data will be collected annually long-term in order to understand retention outcomes over time. By creating adaptable models & providing resource toolkits under the guidance of other state library associations and state libraries, YBC will make it easy for other states to implement their own You Belong retention program.

## **Project Work Plan**

**Overview** | The 3-year You Belong Scholar Program aims to retain & develop existing library workers from historically underrepresented groups in order to address the persistent lack of diversity in library & information science professions. We define historically underrepresented groups as groups that have been minoritized, othered, or underrepresented on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual identity, ability, &/or other immutable characteristics. Our approach focuses on the specific challenge of retaining a diverse library workforce, so the target group of the You Belong Scholar program will be limited to undergraduate & MLIS students who are also currently working in a Missouri library, in any capacity. By piloting this approach of activating state-level initiatives to implement retention strategies, the You Belong Project will have a widespread & efficient impact on the library profession across the country. To achieve this goal, the You Belong project will 1) deliver holistic support to develop existing library workers with diverse identities & 2) design & disseminate an adaptable model for other state library associations & state-level organizations to implement.

- **Scholar Eligibility, Selection & Benefits** | The project will have 2 You Belong Scholar cohorts. Each cohort will include 5 scholars from historically underrepresented groups who receive holistic support August-July in their award year as they pursue their undergraduate degree or MLIS. Scholars must be current library workers in any capacity at any library in Missouri. To select Scholars, YBC will release a call for applications & conduct anonymized reviews using a rubric to score each applicant without bias & in a standardized manner (see more below under Specific Activities). Scholar support will include a stipend (\$4,200 for undergraduates & \$7,700 for MLIS students), mentorship, travel to the Missouri Library Association (MLA) Annual Conference in October for the You Belong Leadership Academy, & the option to complete up to 40 hours of paid internships. Stipends will be disbursed at the beginning of the award year. Undergraduate Scholars can use their stipend toward tuition and/or a computer; MLIS Scholars can use theirs for tuition, a computer, and/or professional development. This flexible structure allows Scholars to use resources to equitably meet their individual needs. Over time, the program will build a network of Scholar alumni who might serve as future mentors, internship hosts, presenters at Leadership Academies, & even as You Belong Committee members as they build long & successful library careers.
- **Mentor Selection & Preparation** | Mentorship for You Belong Scholars will be provided by other current library professionals from historically underrepresented groups. These are individuals who have professional & lived experience are equipped to understand the perspectives of & challenges faced by You Belong Scholars. YBC will release a call for applications & conduct anonymized reviews using a rubric to score each applicant without bias & in a standardized approach (see more below under Specific Activities). After selecting 5 plus 1 alternate, YBC will ensure that mentors receive training before they are paired with their mentee. This training will address setting goals for their mentorship, maintaining safe spaces for the Scholars, & establish expectations for receiving & providing feedback. All mentors will receive funding to travel to the MLA Annual Conference to meet mentees in person & be involved in the Leadership Academy. After the Leadership Academy, scholars & mentors will continue to meet remotely at least monthly or as frequently as they determine is needed. Mentors will advise MLIS You Belong Scholars regarding professional development opportunities that are relevant & impactful to their career goals. Mentors will receive \$800 for their services at the end of their cohort's program in July.
- **Internship Site Selection** | Internship sites & projects will be recruited by YBC to provide a breadth of opportunities in a variety of library types throughout the state. Potential internship sites will submit applications describing their project, time needed, benefits to the You Belong Scholar, & their commitment

to providing safe & welcoming environments for the intern as well as their entire workforce. Internship sites will be required to share an optional, anonymous, annual survey with their employees to help YBC collect retention data from historically underrepresented library workers. In addition to reviewing the suitability of proposed internship projects & their format or structure, YBC members will assess the ability of the host institution to provide a welcoming & inclusive experience to the scholars during their internship.

- Leadership Academy | The Leadership Academy will take place at the MLA Annual Conference which occurs annually in late September/early October. Events & experiences at the Leadership Academy will be designed to facilitate collegiality among the scholar cohort, enable meeting mentors in person to establish goals, introduce Scholars to potential internship hosts, provide opportunities to network, & gain a greater perspective of libraries & library work in Missouri. Robin Westphal, the State Librarian of Missouri & YBC member, will address the Scholars & mentors to describe the landscape of libraries across the state. Additional speakers will address topics relevant to the particular interests of the You Belong Scholars. During the conference, YBC will also staff an MLA committee booth in the exhibit hall to promote awareness, answer questions, & recruit participants for future You Belong cohorts.
- Internship Projects | From October-June, You Belong Scholars have the option to work up to 40 hours on internship projects. Since Scholars will necessarily be individuals who are both working & pursuing a degree, we acknowledge they may not have the capacity to add a traditional full-time, multi-week internship on top of those obligations. Thus, internship sites must propose projects that would take 15-20 hours & could be completed in-person on weekends/evenings, or remote & asynchronously. Internship project proposals must articulate plans to ensure the experience will benefit the You Belong Scholar. This approach ensures that You Belong Scholars can have multiple paid internship experiences to explore career interests without unduly impacting their current employment & education responsibilities. Undergraduate Scholars will receive \$15.00/hour and MLIS Scholars will receive \$25.00/hour.
- Assessment | Evaluation activities will take place throughout the project to measure outcomes & the experiences of Scholars, mentors, & internship hosts (see more under Evaluation Plan). This data will inform adjustments to improve each annual iteration of the You Belong Scholar Program.

Project Personnel: You Belong Committee | Project work will be completed by 10 members of the MLA You Belong Committee (YBC) with the guidance of the You Belong Advisory Council. To successfully plan, execute, & manage this project work, the following roles within YBC have been defined. *Project Director*, Jennifer Gibson (Assistant Director, Strategic Initiatives, St. Louis County Library), will oversee all project components, including collaboration with the You Belong Advisory Council (YBAC), timely achievement of goals & milestones, recordkeeping & reporting results, & grant administration. *Co-Chair*, Cindy Thompson (Dean of Libraries, University of Missouri-Kansas City), will lead the collaboration with YBAC, facilitate communication with the MLA Board & MLA membership, manage payments & contracts, oversee YBC membership, & assist Project Director when needed. *Assessment Chair*, Erin Magner (Associate Director, Daniel Boone Regional Library), will lead the development evaluation strategies & instruments and oversee their implementation & analysis. *Communications Chair*, Brandy Sanchez (Founder & Leadership Coach of SoulFire Collective), will coordinate external communications with stakeholders & internal messaging with participants & lead graphic design projects & supply orders. *Internship Chair*, Nick Genthon (Library Associate, St. Louis County Library), will coordinate the development of internship site selection processes & implementation of internship projects including tracking Scholar progress. *Leadership Academy Chair*, April Roy (Director of Employee Success, Kansas City Public Library), will plan & organize each year's Leadership Academy including curriculum development, securing speakers, & coordinating logistics with MLA Conference Planners. *Mentorship Chair*, Casey Phillips (Health Sciences Librarian, University of Kansas Medical Center), will oversee the implementation of mentor selection, training, & pairing with Scholars. Finally, there are 3 YBC members who will help select You Belong participants, facilitate the Leadership Academy, create toolkit documents for dissemination; & provide other project support as needed. Robin Westphal, State Librarian of the State Library

of Missouri, is one of the YBC members. Robin will leverage the knowledge, resources, & networks of the Missouri State Library to support the project. Joe Kohlburn, Assistant Professor, at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, serves as the second YBC general member. YBC is actively recruiting to fill the last YBC Member position. Each YBC member receives an annual stipend based on role.

Project Personnel: You Belong Advisory Council | Project guidance will be provided by the You Belong Advisory Council (YBAC) which currently includes 5 state library organizations, most of which are library associations. YBAC was formed specifically to support the You Belong Program. They will attend virtual meetings, provide guidance on project design & implementation, & advise YBC to ensure a model that provides realistic solutions to identified challenges. With YBAC insights, we will create the most adaptable, thus adoptable, retention model. YBAC members include: King Simpson, Kentucky Library Association Scholarship Committee Chair & Director of Logan County Public Library; Sam Helmick, Iowa Library Association President & Community & Access Services Coordinator at Iowa City Public Library; Cammy Koch, Virginia Library Association member & Children's Services Supervisor at Henrico County Public Library; a to-be-determined representative from Michigan Library Association; & Elizabeth Tomev, Director of Data & Communications for Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. YBAC members receive a \$500/year stipend.

### Specific Activities

#### Year One: August 2024-July 2025

- Meet monthly with YBAC to provide updates & receive project guidance.
- Contract graphic designer to create vector logo; place orders for equipment & branded program supplies.
- Develop selection instruments for You Belong scholars, mentors, & internship sites, including instructions for applicants, applications, instructions for reviewers, & scoring rubrics. In addition to being scored on application completeness & eligibility requirements, scholars will be reviewed for intention to remain in libraries, existing barriers to retention, & capacity to participate in all program elements.
- Develop assessment instruments to evaluate the program objectives, the experience of You Belong Scholars with Leadership Academy, mentors & internships, & the experience of mentors & internship sites, & create a calendar for assessment activities including collection, analysis, & committee discussion.
- Determine procedure for review & selection to ensure unbiased review & no conflicts of interest.
- Attend MLA 2024 (YBC) to promote the project & upcoming calls for applications.
- Finalize curriculum for 2025 Leadership Academy; seek & confirm relevant speakers & presentations.
- Call for 2025 You Belong Scholar applications; hold info session to convey the goals & vision of the program, answer questions, & encourage eligible individuals to apply; accept applications. Eligible applicants will be employees in a library of any type, regardless of position, who are also earning an undergraduate or MLIS degree & self-identify as belonging to a historically underrepresented group.
- Review & select 5 2025 You Belong Scholars using anonymized review process & standard scoring rubric.
- Call for mentors; offer info session; accept applications. Eligible mentors will be library professionals from historically underrepresented backgrounds with the experience & capacity to productively coach Scholars.
- Review & select 5 2025 You Belong mentors using anonymized review process & standard scoring rubric. In addition to being scored on application completeness & eligibility requirements, mentors will be reviewed for the depth of their lived & professional experiences & commitment to diversity.
- Train mentors on setting clear expectations & facilitating safe spaces for Scholars; pair with mentees.
- Call for internship sites & projects; accept applications. Eligible internship sites will be able to provide asynchronous remote or in-person night/weekend projects that provide beneficial experience to Scholars.
- Select 2025 internship sites & projects, ensuring that the host institution is committed to providing an inclusive & welcoming environment. Hosts will be required to share an optional retention survey with their workforce to generate accurate long-term retention data about diverse library workers.

- YBC & YBAC receive stipends for services performed throughout the year.

### Year Two: August 2025-July 2026

- 2025 You Belong Cohort runs from August 2025-July 2026; scholars receive stipends & mentorships begin.
- Meet bimonthly with YBAC to provide updates & receive project guidance.
- Perform evaluation & assessment activities throughout the year in accordance with the planned assessment activity calendar to measure outcomes, project performance evaluation, & understand the experience of Scholars, mentors, & internship sites to improve each iteration & center Scholar voices.
- 2025 You Belong Scholars, mentors, & YBC travel to MLA Conference in Fall 2025 to: 1) attend/implement the Leadership Academy with speakers including the Missouri State Librarian, mentor meetup, & a preview of internship projects; & 2) work the YBC booth in the exhibit hall to promote awareness about upcoming application windows for scholars, mentors, & internship sites & recruit additional YBC members.
- 2025 You Belong MLIS Scholars work with mentors to select professional development for their stipend.
- 2025 You Belong Scholars select & complete up to two internships.
- Finalize curriculum for 2026 Leadership Academy to identify library & leadership topics for speakers & achieve developmental goals for scholars; search for relevant speakers & presentations.
- Call for 2026 You Belong Scholar applications; hold information session; accept applications.
- Select 5 2026 You Belong Scholars using anonymized review process & standard scoring rubric.
- Call for 2026 mentors; offer info session; accept applications. Same eligibility criteria apply.
- Review & select 5 2026 mentors using anonymized review process & standard scoring rubric; train mentors for setting clear expectations & facilitating safe spaces; pair with mentees.
- Call for 2026 internship sites & projects; accept applications. Same eligibility criteria apply.
- Select 2026 internship sites & projects, ensuring that the host institution is committed to providing an inclusive & welcoming environment. Hosts will be required to share the optional retention survey.
- YBC attends JCLC in 2025/2026, depending on when it is held, to staff an exhibit booth, promote awareness & encourage adoption, provide a presentation, & hear experiences of diverse library workers.
- YBC attends PLA Annual Conference in 2026 to provide a presentation if accepted, connect with other state organizations to promote adoption, & learn about other diversity initiatives.
- Begin seeking additional sources of funding to ensure support continuity for 2027 You Belong cohort.
- YBC, YBAC, & mentors receive stipends for services performed throughout the year.

### Year Three: August 2026-July 2027

- 2026 You Belong Cohort runs from August 2026-July 2027; scholars receive stipends & mentorships begin.
- Meet monthly with YBAC to provide updates, receive project guidance, & develop digital toolkits that will be freely available on the MLA website for state library organizations seeking to launch retention initiatives.
- Perform evaluation & assessment activities throughout the year in accordance with the planned assessment activity calendar to measure outcomes, project performance evaluation, & understand the experience of Scholars, mentors, & internship sites to improve each iteration & center Scholar voices.
- Continue seeking sources of sustainable funding to ensure long-term continuity of You Belong.
- 2026 You Belong Scholars, mentors, & YBC travel to MLA Conference in Fall 2026 to: 1) attend/implement the Leadership Academy with speakers including the Missouri State Librarian, mentor meetup, & a preview of internship projects; & 2) work the YBC booth in the exhibit hall to promote awareness about upcoming application windows for scholars, mentors, & internship sites, & recruit additional YBC members.
- 2026 You Belong MLIS Scholars work with mentors to select professional development for their stipend.
- 2026 You Belong Scholars select & complete up to two internships.
- Finalize curriculum for 2027 Leadership Academy to identify library & leadership topics for speakers & achieve developmental goals for scholars; search for relevant speakers & presentations.
- Call for 2027 You Belong Scholar applications, if funding allows; hold info session; accept applications.

- Review & select as many 2027 You Belong Scholars as possible given funding realities, using anonymized review process & standard scoring rubric.
- Call for 2026 mentors; offer info session; accept applications. Same eligibility criteria apply.
- Contract graphic designer to create infographics & visually appealing toolkit materials.
- YBC attends ACRL Annual Conference in 2027 to provide a presentation if accepted, connect with other state organizations to promote adoption, & learn about other diversity initiatives.
- Review & select 5 2027 mentors using anonymized review process & standard scoring rubric; train mentors for setting clear expectations & facilitating safe spaces; pair with mentees.
- Call for 2027 internship sites & projects; accept applications. Same eligibility criteria apply.
- Publish toolkit resources on MLA & Missouri State Library websites.
- Select 2027 internship sites & projects, ensuring that the host institution is committed to providing an inclusive & welcoming environment. Hosts will be required to share the optional retention survey.
- YBC travels to ALA 2027 Annual Conference to staff an exhibit booth to promote awareness of toolkit materials & encourage adoption, & provide a presentation if accepted.
- YBC, YBAC, & mentors receive stipends for services performed throughout the year.

Evaluation Plan | Evaluation & assessment strategies & activities will be led by YBC Assessment Chair with YBC Member help as needed. The Assessment Chair will lead the development of instruments during the program preparation period in Year 1, which will include surveys for scholars to assess: the impact of the program on their knowledge, attitudes, or behavior; the quality of program administration; & areas for improvement. Scholars will provide feedback in August, November, February, & July of their award year. The August & July instruments will contain pre- & post-evaluations to assess changes in knowledge, attitude, or behaviors. A separate survey will evaluate scholar experiences in their internships; the timing will vary among scholars based on their internship project completion. Internship hosts will complete an evaluation of the scholar, as well as of their experience participating in the You Belong Scholar program. Each year, as a condition of hosting a scholar, internship sites must also agree to share an optional anonymous survey with their workforce each year, asking 4 questions: Do you identify as belonging to a historically underrepresented group in U.S. libraries?; How long have you worked in libraries?; How likely are you to continue working in libraries?; & What would keep you working in libraries? Responses will build a dataset over time to understand the state of diversity retention in Missouri libraries & the impact of the You Belong program. At the end of the program year in July, mentors will provide their feedback on the mentorship experience & areas for improving the service. Each July, You Belong alumni will be surveyed to assess long-term impacts. The Assessment Chair will lead the process of collecting feedback & will report on evaluation & assessment activities & findings to YBC & YBAC at meetings, for the group to interpret together & use to improve future iterations of the program. Feedback from August & November evaluations about the application & selection process, disbursement & program administration, timing, & Leadership Academy will be carefully considered at the November YBC/YBAC meeting to identify improvements before the next calls for participants begin. Using this strategy, YBC will center participant voices to improve each iteration of the You Belong Scholar program.

Dissemination Strategy | YBC is developing a model that can be followed by other state library associations to retain a diverse workforce. Piloting 2 cohorts will allow for proof of concept plus the ability to make improvements, resulting in a tested & optimized model for other organizations. Furthermore, by incorporating the diverse perspectives of other state library organizations, the resulting You Belong Scholar program will be intentionally adaptable to serve the goals of retaining diverse library workers across the U.S. YBC & YBAC will work together in Year 3 to develop these materials to help a state library organization jumpstart the process of creating a You Belong Scholar program including essential documents like sample applications, review rubrics & selection guidelines, template contracts & MOUs, Leadership Academy curriculum components, mentor training materials, example internship projects, & premade assessment instruments. The toolkits will be freely

available to download at both the MLA & Missouri State Library websites in formats using freely accessible software. To enhance adaptability, multiple scaled toolkits will be available based on the level of financial & human resources a state can dedicate to retention activities, along with other variables that may materially impact the success of a retention program. To encourage wide adoption of the You Belong Scholar program, YBC members will actively pursue opportunities to present & publish about this initiative. Throughout the project, YBC along with YBAC will travel to national conferences including PLA, JCLC, ACRL, and ALA to promote awareness through presentations and exhibit booths, encourage adoption, gather retention data from attendees, & continue to learn from the experiences of historically underrepresented library workers & other diversity initiatives. YBC & YBAC members will also leverage their considerable networks to encourage state-level adoption throughout the nation to other state library associations and state libraries.

### **Diversity Plan**

Diversity is at the core of the You Belong Scholar Program & is intentionally woven throughout along with principles of equity & inclusion. The overarching purpose of the project is to increase diverse representation in the U.S. library workforce to more closely reflect communities we serve & benefit from lived experiences.

Project Leadership | From the very beginning, the project has been led by an ALA Spectrum & ARL Kaleidoscope Scholar who felt called to develop a program that could extend her experience to others on a state-by-state level. The initial task force that developed the You Belong program, as well as the current YBC, includes intersectional racial, ethnic, & other identities, in addition to a wide variety of professional experience. YBC is proud to have a diverse composition of employment type, library, statewide geography, professional experience, & tenure. YBC members include people working at all levels of multiple types of libraries, from library associate to librarian, manager, assistant professor, assistant director, & dean, in the major population centers across the state. In addition to library work, YBC members possess professional & educational experience in marketing, education, law, history, & military service. Crucially, YBC also includes an entrepreneur who left librarianship to start a business offering leadership development & organizational coaching for libraries seeking to enhance employee wellness, engagement, performance, & retention. Her perspective as a woman of color & Spectrum alumna who left librarianship to support library workers is invaluable. YBC also benefits from having the insights of 2 ALA Spectrum & 2 ARL Kaleidoscope alumni who bring their professional & lived experiences from these prestigious programs to inform the choices made for You Belong program design. You Belong Advisory Council (YBAC) members also represent a diverse collection of states from different U.S. geographical regions, with varying population sizes, demographics, & community challenges. Having a diverse set of perspectives in both YBC & the YBAC ensures that the You Belong project design will meet actual instead of assumed needs of the target groups it intends to serve.

Intentional Program Design | With diverse perspectives informing the design of the You Belong project from the start, we have intentionally prioritized diversity, equity, & inclusion throughout the project. You Belong Scholar eligibility is based on self-identification as belonging to a historically underrepresented group, which we define broadly to include all who have been othered, excluded, & minoritized in the library profession. We also define library employee to include any type of employee within any type of library, both part- & full-time. Finally, we purposefully include both undergraduate & MLIS students. This not only diversifies the You Belong Scholars & future alumni, but also addresses the reality that more library leadership positions are available without an MLIS. You Belong mentors, whose services are essential to providing crucial support for You Belong Scholars, will also be library professionals from historically underrepresented backgrounds who can best understand scholar experiences & provide informed guidance. The mentors will receive travel to the MLA conference & a stipend at the end of their year of service to ensure that their expertise & emotional labor is compensated.



Eliminating Barriers & Advancing Equity | We are focused on eliminating barriers to participate in the You Belong program, attempting to balance the obligations required of You Belong Scholars with the benefits they will receive. Thus the internship component has a reduced time commitment instead of a typical multi-week internship. Furthermore, internship sites will be assessed by YBC members for inclusivity before they are approved. You Belong Scholar feedback after internship experiences will be essential to determining the suitability of the host site for future cohorts. Conference travel for You Belong Scholars & mentors to the MLA Annual Conference includes funding for temporary dependent care if made necessary by the travel. This ensures Scholars & mentors who are caregivers can attend the Leadership Academy without incurring additional financial burdens, ensuring equitable access to the benefits of You Belong & inclusion of scholars from a variety of life circumstances. The stipend structure for You Belong Scholars allows each scholar to use the stipend towards tuition and/or a computing device (as well as professional development for the MLIS scholars) in the manner that best meets their individual needs. Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all structure, this approach acknowledges & does not question the reality of scholars' individual needs. The You Belong Program's specific focus on retention is also a focus on equity. The persistence of underrepresentation despite the profession's consistent emphasis on diversity recruitment over time reveals inequities in retention. This program aims to provide equitable access to support that underrepresented workers need to overcome structures that prevent them from achieving workplace outcomes similar to majority counterparts. The voices & feedback of You Belong Scholars, mentors, & the YBAC will be a primary source of information to guide improvements for each iteration of the You Belong program to ensure the program continues to meet the real needs of historically underrepresented library workers as they pursue their degrees as well as the needs of different state library associations working to retain a diverse library workforce.

## **Project Results**

Description of Results | Expected outputs of the You Belong Program include 2 cohorts of You Belong Scholars, which include 10 awarded scholars, 10 mentors, 2 Leadership Academy events, & up to 20 internship projects at a variety of library sites. Within these 2 cohorts, the 10 Scholars will receive a total of \$109,200 for tuition, computer, & professional development support, & up to \$16,800 in internship wages. In addition to these student support outputs, the You Belong project will result in multiple resource toolkits that other state library organizations can freely download from the MLA or Missouri State Library websites to launch recruitment initiatives in their states. These scalable toolkits will accommodate differences among states, especially in regard to variables that would materially alter their approach to a retention program. YBAC will be instrumental in sharing insights of other state library associations & state libraries to help determine the most salient variables. YBC, with YBAC guidance, will create toolkits of resources including template applications, review rubrics & selection guidelines, template contracts & MOUs, Leadership Academy curriculum components, mentor training materials, example internship projects, & premade assessment instruments as appropriate for the scaled version of the You Belong program. State library associations will be able to download these toolkits for free & efficiently begin their own retention program.

Anticipated Outcomes | In addition to these outputs, the You Belong Scholar Program will lead to outcomes that benefit both individual library workers & the profession overall. The program will result in immediate financial, educational, leadership, & career benefits for the scholars during their award year, as well as produce long-term benefits from being connected to a collegial network of other You Belong Scholars as well as mentors & YBC members. Individual You Belong Scholars will also experience increased knowledge about library careers & leadership in addition to classroom learning through their degree. The program will also yield advancements in knowledge for the library profession as a whole. Knowledge gained from implementing the You Belong program, from the perspectives of YBAC, & feedback from You Belong participants will inform YBC members who will in turn distill & disseminate the knowledge gained from practice with colleagues & other state library organizations. YBC will pursue opportunities to present & publish their findings & advocate for

wide adoption of a version of the You Belong retention program in other states. Promotional efforts that result from potential presentations & publications, along with promotion of the free toolkits on the MLA website, will help advance industry knowledge throughout the library profession about how to retain diverse employees. Thus, the You Belong Program will transform this federal investment into benefits for society by developing a more diverse workforce that represents the communities they serve, making the institutions & services more welcoming, & ultimately connecting people to the incomparable benefits offered by libraries.

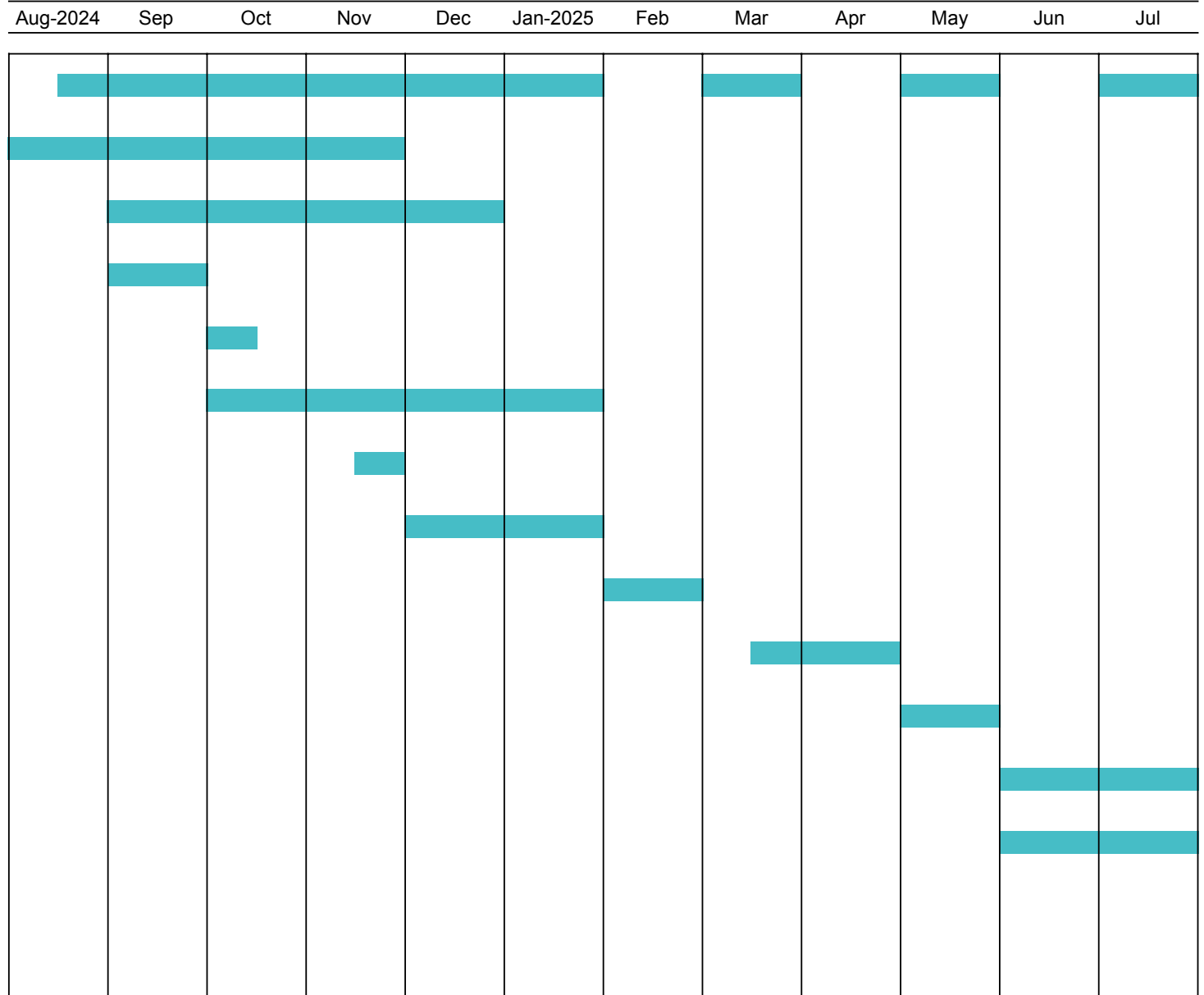
Maximizing Adoption & Impact | The You Belong project has been designed from the start to maximize ease of use, adoption, & adaptability by other state library associations. The You Belong Advisory Council (YBAC), is a unique element of the project that helps ensure the perspective of these library organizations is heard throughout. YBAC will be invaluable in providing YBC with insights from their respective state organizations to ensure that the You Belong program toolkits reflect the realities facing associations. YBAC & YBC members will meet bi-monthly throughout the life of the project, increasing to meeting monthly during the project time periods or close collaboration, for example while creating toolkit resources. YBAC feedback will be essential each November when scholar feedback from the previous cohort is used to improve the next cohort. YBAC will ensure that the voices of state library organizations are included in plans, so that the final program design & resource toolkits maximize the ease of use, adoption, & adaptability of the You Belong retention program.

By providing toolkits to support different levels or styles of the You Belong program, the program results will be adaptable which will help maximize adoption. All resources will be available absolutely free, in digital formats accessible with freely available software & with no charges or fees to use. Materials will be available under CC BY-NC-SA Creative Commons license which allows reusers to “distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator. If you remix, adapt, or build upon the material, you must license the modified material under identical terms.” Other YBC efforts to maximize adoption will include actively pursuing opportunities to publish findings & present the project at conferences. YBC will submit presentation proposals to JCLC, the 2026 PLA Annual Conference, the 2027 ACRL Annual Conference & the 2027 ALA Annual Conference & purchase booths at JCLC & ALA. YBC members will attend those national conferences to promote awareness of the You Belong program, connect with state library associations, actively encourage adoption of the program & use of our toolkits, & learn about other diversity recruitment & retention initiatives. As state library associations adopt the You Belong program, YBC will update the MLA website to reflect the adoption rate, testimonials, & successes experienced. This information will act as an additional strategy to encourage adoption.

Sustaining Results Long-Term | After the grant performance period ends, YBC will continue to sustain the results of the You Belong program in multiple ways. YBC will continue to exist as a committee within MLA with active volunteer membership. YBC members will continue to provide the personnel & time needed to run the You Belong Scholar program year after year. After the initial push for adoption during the grant performance period, YBC will no longer travel to national conferences specifically for You Belong promotion, but will continue to attend in their professional capacities. When attending these conferences & other professional gatherings, YBC members will always promote awareness & advocate that other state library associations adopt a You Belong retention program. To truly sustain the program & its results long-term beyond the IMLS grant performance period, YBC will need to secure a source or multiple sources of sustainable funding. With the results generated from this grant project, YBC will actively seek opportunities to leverage that knowledge & experience to develop relationships with community partners, sponsors, & grantors who are committed to developing a library workforce that more closely reflects the communities they serve.

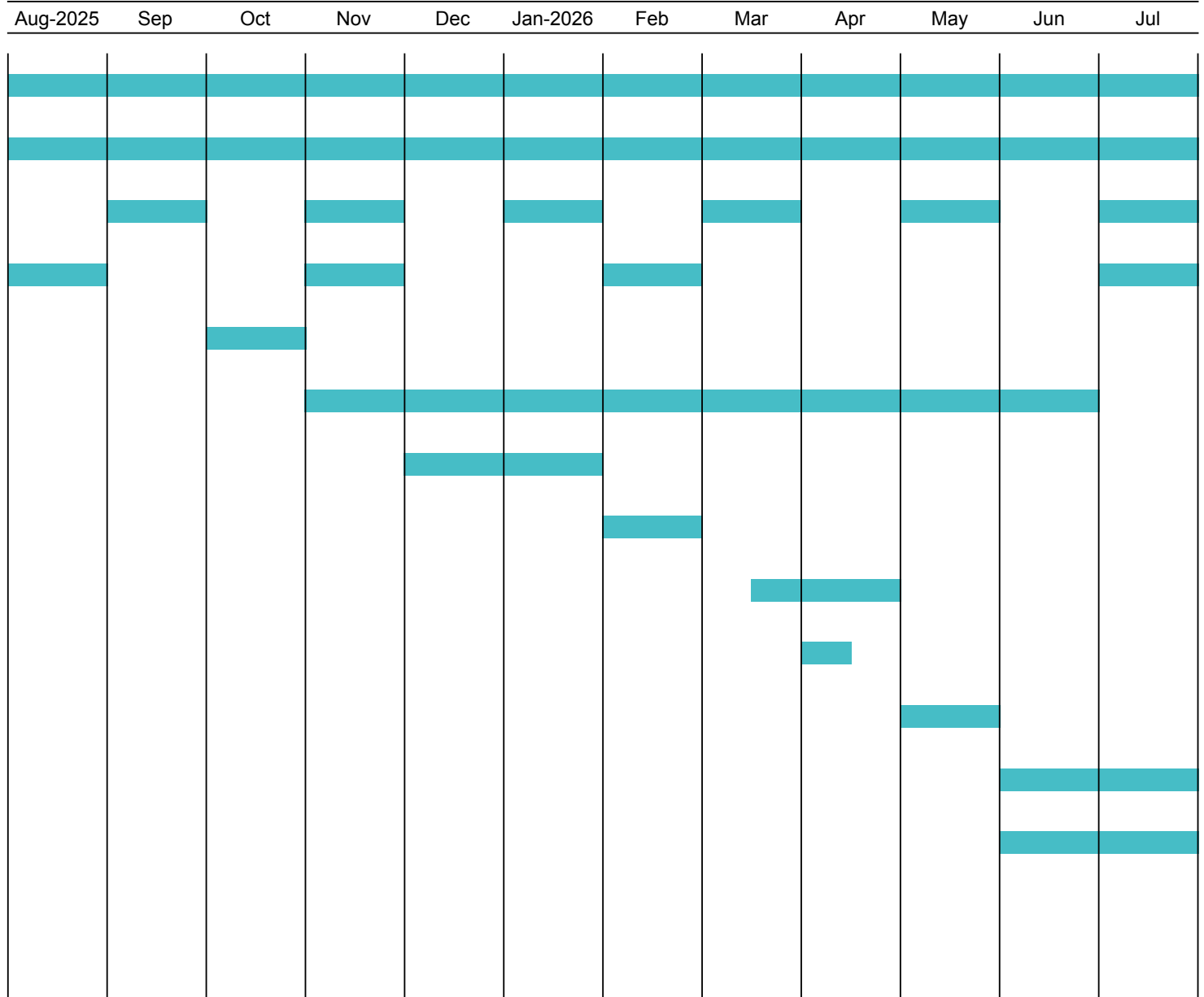
You Belong Scholar Program: Retaining a Diverse Library Workforce

Year 1



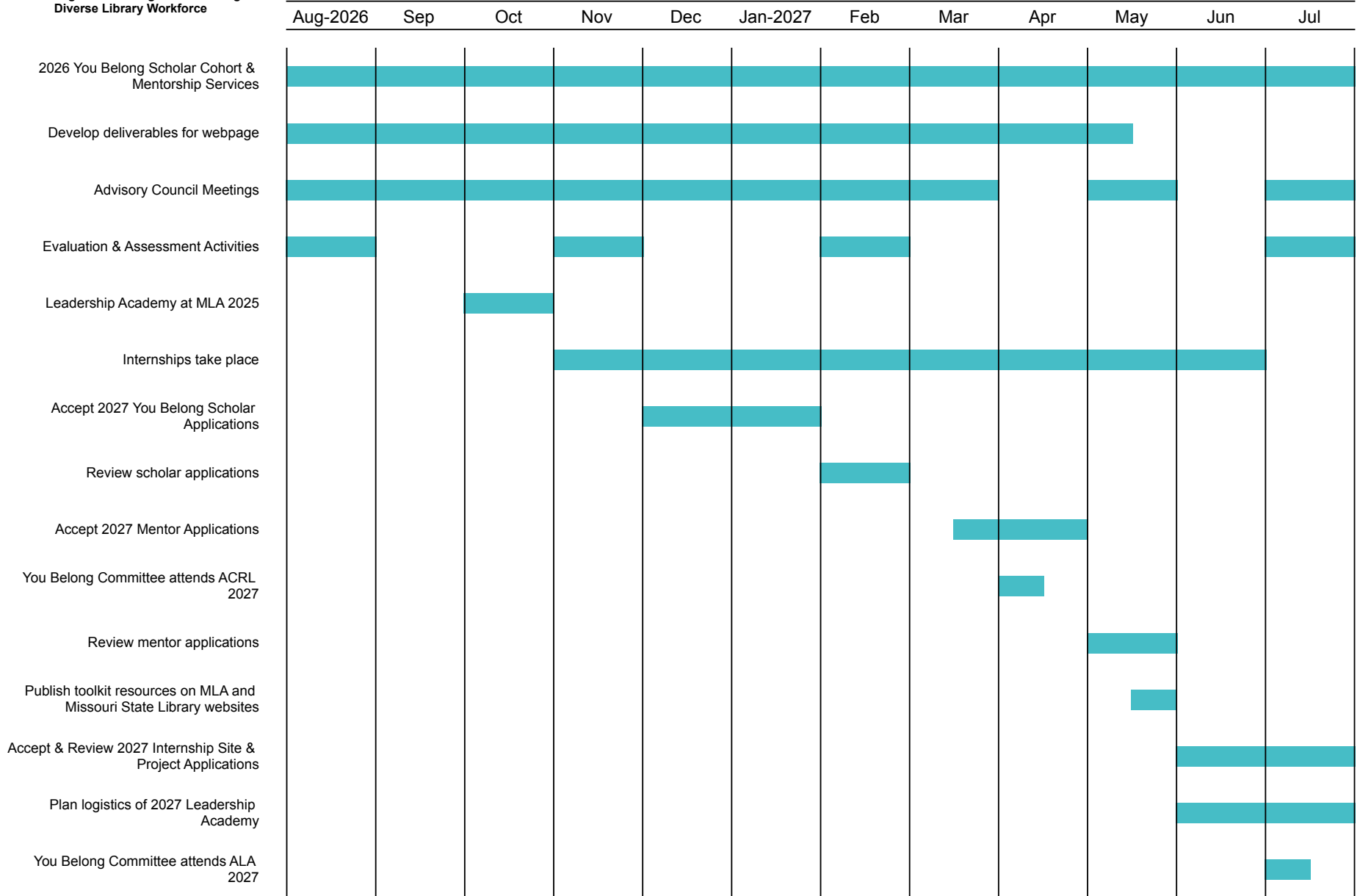
**You Belong Scholar Program: Retaining a Diverse Library Workforce**

**Year 2**



**You Belong Scholar Program: Retaining a Diverse Library Workforce**

**Year 3**



## **Digital Products Plan**

### **You Belong Scholar Program: Retaining a Diverse Library Workforce**

#### **Digital Product Types**

This project will produce a webpage that provides access to freely downloadable digital documents in .docx, .pdf, .xml, and .jpeg formats. The project will also produce a digital logo and infographics. Those digital documents will be the main content of the resource toolkits available for other library organizations to use to launch their own state-led recruitment programs. The documents created by the project will include:

- Applications for scholars, mentors, and internship sites;
- Review guidelines and selection rubrics for scholars, mentors, and internship sites;
- Training for mentors;
- Curriculum for Leadership Academy;
- Expectations for Internship sites;
- Surveys to assess scholar experiences in the program overall and with each program element;
- Surveys to assess mentors' experiences;
- Surveys to assess internship host experiences;
- Surveys to assess advisory council experiences;
- Surveys to assess statewide retention;
- Template MOUs and contracts;
- Committee work descriptions;
- Project documentation; and
- Conference presentation slides.

#### **Availability, Access, & Sustainability**

Digital products created as a part of the You Belong Program will be made available through the free public website of Missouri Library Association (URL). These resources will thus be openly available online so that they are freely and readily available for use and re-use by libraries, archives, museums, and the public. All digital products will be available in open file formats and created using freely accessible software. The webpage created will adhere to industry standards to ensure they are accessible to all users. .

Published digital products on the MLA website will be shared under a CC BY-NC-SA Creative Commons license which allows reusers to “distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator. If you remix, adapt, or build upon the material, you must license the modified material under identical terms.”

The You Belong Committee members will be responsible for the preservation and maintenance of digital products during and after the period of grant performance. Digital products will be stored in shared Committee Google Drives and a complete digital product list maintained. On a biannual basis after the grant performance period, the You Belong Committee will review the digital product list and participate in any required migration planning if the MLA website infrastructure changes. Going forward, MLA contracted services for maintenance of the website will include the You Belong digital products in their scope of work.