

IMLS LB21 Planning Grant Pre-Proposal: Urban School Library Renewal Project (USLR)

Introduction:

The School District of Philadelphia (SDP), the lead applicant, along with partners, [Philadelphia Alliance to Restore School Librarians](#) (PARSL), a local, grassroots advocacy group with 700+ supporters, and [Hosting Solutions and Library Consulting](#) (HSLC), a Philadelphia-based non-profit providing libraries state-wide with technical services, submit this two-year, pre-proposal. This project will examine and propose a model plan to address the lack of certified school librarians in high-poverty, urban school districts that primarily serve students of color (IMLS LB21 Goal 1, Objective 1.1). Project results are: 1) research and publish strategies from urban school districts that restored school libraries and librarian positions; 2) create a survey, discussion guide, and protocol for assessing readiness for establishing school library programs; and 3) plan a replicable model in a Philadelphia public school that restores an effective school library with a certified librarian. Philadelphia is an ideal choice for creating and modeling a school library renewal plan as the district has just one full-time equivalent (FTE) librarian for 217 schools and 113,000+ students who are 86% students of color, 72% economically disadvantaged, with about [two-thirds of 4th graders not reading on grade level](#). A request of **\$79,313.00** will fund the Project.

Project Justification:

The disproportionate decline of school libraries and credentialed staff in urban school districts that largely serve low-income students of color has been well documented and continues to worsen. Nationally, in 2018-19, 64% of all students whose districts operate without librarians were in school districts that serve majority students of color. Also, 59% of all students in districts without librarians were in school districts with at least 50% low-income families ([SLIDE Project](#)). Yet, [multiple research studies](#) have found that certified school librarians and well-resourced libraries increase literacy, student achievement, graduation rates, and college and career readiness by teaching research skills and digital citizenship. However, recently some urban school districts, such as New York City, D.C., Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Boston, have changed course and successfully marshaled resources to restore librarians to their schools. Representatives from such districts will be engaged virtually to share barriers, strategies, and solutions which will be documented and published online. Improving diversity in the pipeline of certified school librarians will be a focus, at a time when many school library certification programs have closed.

Project Work Plan:

Project Goal: Develop a school library renewal plan that addresses the unique challenges of urban schools. [Overall management: SDP Special Projects Manager]

Objective 1: In Year 1, gather information and share urban school library renewal success stories and strategies. [Responsibility: USLR Project Director, USLR Research Leader, and HSLC]

- Meet virtually 5 times with each representative from 5 districts that recently staffed school libraries with certified librarians to identify successful strategies.
- Create a website to publish a white paper outlining these strategies, relevant research, articles, and news reports.

Objective 2: In Years 1 and 2, develop options to prepare future certified school librarians, focusing on improving diversity, using Philadelphia as a model. [Responsibility: USLR Project Director, Pipeline Research Leader, and SDP ORE]

- Develop pathways for various candidates (e.g., paraprofessional to certified teacher and librarian certification; certified teacher to librarian certification) and research existing model accelerated programs.
- Investigate curriculum, delivery, certification issues, and reduced tuition costs among LIS and education universities capable of supporting Philadelphia candidates.
- Propose a budget and funding stream for scholarships and local support.
- Develop an evaluation plan and recommendations to disseminate this model on a national level.

Objective 3: In Year 2, develop a replicable model to renew school libraries with certified librarians in Philadelphia schools. [Responsibility: USLR Project Director, Model Plan Leader, and SDP ORE]

- Form a SDP Library Renewal Team, including project leaders, curriculum administrator, and key stakeholders such as principals, teachers, parents, community members, university representatives, and student leaders.
- Hold forums to elicit local needs and opportunities, share the contributions of effective school library programs staffed by certified librarians, and establish partners from Philadelphia community organizations, parents, teachers' union, government officials, etc.

- Using strategies learned from other urban districts, the Renewal Team will develop a five-year phased-in plan (aligned with SDP “Goals and Guardrails”) to restore SDP school libraries, collaborating with relevant departments, and sharing with interested partners for input.
- Develop and test a survey tool, discussion guide, and protocols for districts to use to assess the readiness and existing library assets of a district or school desiring to reinstate school libraries with certified staff.
- Coordinate with SDP Operations staff to assess the readiness of each Philadelphia district-operated school using these tools and based on internal assessments of enrollment and condition.

Diversity Plan:

Project staff will work closely with the SDP Equity Coalition Policy Review Team that reviews existing programs and policies and provides feedback in the areas of advancing equity, stakeholder engagement, resources, and progress monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, this project will create a plan to recruit diverse candidates to become certified school librarians and to ensure that library services are culturally appropriate and supportive in urban schools that have large numbers of Black and Brown students and English Learners.

Project Results:

Project deliverables include a website and publications, including a white paper of urban school library renewal strategies, Library Renewal Readiness Instruments (survey, interview protocol, discussion guide, and school readiness assessment and preparation instrument), a pipeline assessment of options for training new school librarians with a focus on diversity, and a model five-year plan to renew school library programs in Philadelphia. Additionally, USLR will present an evaluation plan and propose a process to disseminate the model nationally, to ensure that deliverables are readily adaptable and usable by other institutions and communities.

By sharing school library readiness instruments and tested successful strategies, as well as using SDP as an actual, replicable example, this planning grant would provide a framework for urban districts to restore libraries and librarians to improve lifelong learning for their students. The proposal addresses IMLS objectives by developing pathways for librarian training with a focus on diversity and illustrates how community engagement and collaboration can support renewal of effective school library programs.

Budget Summary:

Proposal total = \$79,313.00

(1) **Salaries and Wages = \$15,723.** A SDP Special Projects Manager will oversee the budget and project management; the SDP Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) will provide grant evaluation services including survey and assessment tool creation. (Year 1 Salaries and Wages = \$7,745; Year 2 Salaries = \$7,978; for 5% FTE for each salaried staffer, including a 3% COLA - negotiated rate.) A SDP Operations Specialist will support the school library facilities assessment, within the scope of their regular duties, and not receive compensation through this Planning Grant.

(2) **Fringe Benefits = \$9,775.** For SDP Special Projects Manager and SDP Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE). (Year 1 Benefits = \$4,815, Year 2 Benefits = \$4,960.)

(3) **Travel = \$0.**

(4) **Supplies, Materials, and Equipment = \$1,050.** Website hosting by HSLC.

(5) **Subawards and Contracts = \$44,600.** A contracted USLR Project Director will facilitate Philadelphia community forums, solicit partners, hold monthly virtual meetings with team leaders, oversee the website and publications, oversee project implementation, and track progress. Stipend \$25,000 over 2 years. The following will be under the direction of the Project Director and will be contracted as subawards. 1) A Model Plan Leader will develop the five-year phase-in plan to restore SDP school libraries and librarians, incorporating community and partner concerns. Stipend \$6,000. 2) A USLR Research Leader will hold virtual meetings with five U.S. school library leaders to document successful library strategies, resulting in a publishable white paper. Stipend \$6,000. 3) A Pipeline Research Leader will investigate potential education and LIS programs to prepare teachers and paraprofessionals to become certified school librarians and publish viable options on the website. Stipend \$6,000. HSLC will be subcontracted as a fiscal agent estimated at \$1,600.

(6) **Student Support = \$0.**

(7) **Other Costs = \$4,750.** Urban School Library Leaders who participate in the virtual meetings sharing successful renewal strategies will receive stipends of \$150 per Zoom. Cost of attendance for five leaders at 5 virtual meetings estimated at \$3,750. Report printing by SDP and mailing costs at \$1,000.

(8) **Indirect Costs = \$3,415.** The School District of Philadelphia’s Negotiated Restricted Rate is 4.5%.