Narrative

The Boston Library Consortium (BLC) requests $149,878.61 on behalf of the *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia* for a two-year planning grant addressing **IMLS Agency-Level Goal 1**, **LB21 Program Goal 2**, and **Objectives 2.1** and **2.2** to design, pilot, and assess the *BIPOC Leadership Academy for Support Staff (BLASS)*. BLC is a founding member of the *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia*, a coalition of twelve U.S. library consortia that work to expand and enhance the range of professional development opportunities available to their 1,006 member libraries nationwide. This project will provide one, three-day *BLASS* Leadership Academy to 30 BIPOC support staff library supervisors without MLIS degrees across the U.S. to promote retention, development of a leadership skill set, and deliver training and education on current, front-line library topics.

Project Justification.

I'm a Navajo woman who for 18 years has led a rural library as head librarian (without an MLIS, leading a group of five library employees). My small team works hard, but I still experience many challenges in a rural, low-income community. As a woman of color, I rarely get noticed for national leadership programs, and funding myself isn't an option. It's nice that BLASS might offer the chance to connect with people like myself who love the library, but are fiscally restrained.

I'm an Asian American woman who is the Head of Access Services in a medium-sized academic library. Currently I manage over 27 people – students, staff, and even some librarians. Despite my leadership role, I lack the MLIS degree. So far, I have been overlooked for all the top leadership programs and BIPOC focused conferences because I do not have a library degree. BLASS feels like a breath of fresh air – a chance to network with BIPOC colleagues who understand my unique journey.

I'm an African American woman who is the Head of Budget and Planning for a college library. I currently manage 10 employees and have a MBA from my institution. I plan on retiring here and this is my profession, but sadly have never been invited to attend any national conferences or meet other BIPOC professionals. It would be exciting to have the chance to attend the retreat.

These are just a few of the stories from potential participants of BLASS Leadership Academy. National leadership conferences, institutes, and retreats, designed to not only learn new skills but also a chance to connect with other like-minded professionals, are normally out-of-reach for many BIPOC library staff without the MLIS degree. The MLIS requirement is usually a key requirement, shutting out those with a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of their communities' needs. Being overlooked for these opportunities gives this group the perception that they are not as important or that their commitment to the library profession is not a real career.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, twelve library consortia formed the *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia* (PDA) (Supporting Document 1) in 2020 to provide their member libraries with a wide range of free, online professional development events coordinated through a shared calendar. In the last year, members of the PDA began conversations about how they could offer impactful, in-person training as a collaborative service. Several consortia in this group already provide leadership training, institutes, and retreats. CARLI (Supporting Document 4) hosts in-person and online leadership programs, including the IMLS LB21 project CARLI Counts, which prepares librarians to use research findings on

student success effectively, and CARLI's New Directors' Institute. BLC hosts a signature leadership development program, BLC Leads, an immersive and multi-experiential six-month program that embeds mid-level library professionals in the diversity of individual and organizational leadership journeys across its member institutions. ASERL also hosts Professional Development and Networking Retreats, which provide career development, self-care, and reflection opportunities for all BIPOC employees. Given this track record, the PDA is well-positioned to offer a leadership academy with a national reach. The objective of this initiative is to reach demographic groups that the PDA has not effectively connected with in the past.

BLASS goes beyond traditional leadership development by fostering a collaborative curriculum creation process. We will convene a diverse group of stakeholders, including BIPOC thought leaders, representatives from our target audience (BIPOC library supervisors without MLIS degrees), experienced management consultants (Supporting Document 2), and members of the PDA consortia, to co-create a curriculum that strikes a compelling balance between broader organizational issues and practical leadership skills. This collaborative approach ensures the curriculum resonates deeply with the needs and aspirations of our participants. It will delve into critical organizational topics such as workplace culture, departmental strategic planning, and goal setting, equipping participants to navigate complex institutional landscapes and advocate for themselves and their teams. The BIPOC Leadership Academy will provide opportunities for participants to network and connect with people from across the country. Simultaneously, the program will equip participants with a robust toolkit of practical leadership skills, including conflict resolution, crafting effective performance plans, leveraging personal influence, and motivating disengaged employees. By addressing both big-picture thinking and hands-on application, BLASS empowers participants to become impactful leaders who drive positive change within their libraries.

Project Work Plan.

Phase I - Needs Assessment (August - December 2024)

The first phase of this planning grant will feature a needs assessment of the target population of this program to determine priorities and a needs-based response to the curriculum design and program logistics. August through December 2024 will be devoted to developing and implementing a survey to be circulated among potential program candidates and subsequently analyzing and synthesizing the responses to bring to the Advisory Board's planning meeting at Tufts University in December 2024 to inform the direction and content of the program.

In August 2024, the Principal Investigators will create an electronic needs assessment to identify training priorities, professional support, and practical needs desired by potential program participants. Respondents of this survey will be the target audience of BLASS, specifically BIPOC library professionals who oversee one or more individuals in their current position but do not hold a graduate degree in library and information science. The survey will include a professional development needs assessment, including both practical and conceptual training opportunities, in addition to gathering further information on what kind of training, or lack thereof, this priority population has previously received. The needs assessment will feature the following questions, in addition to other prompts determined by the Key Project Staff:

- What is your most pressing professional development need?
- Have you participated in leadership training before?
  - If so, was there anything missing from that experience?

- Did you receive any leadership training when you became a supervisor?
- What training did you wish you had received upon becoming a supervisor?
- What do you most struggle with as a supervisor?
- What elements of leadership are you most interested in learning more about?
- What leadership training would you find most helpful at this point in your career?
- What practical management and leadership skills would be most helpful to you?
- What organizational and leadership training would you find more helpful in your career?

This survey will also gauge the availability and interest of the intended audience of participants. These logistics encompass the respondents' ability to travel for professional development and any accessibility issues related to in-person program experiences. We will also identify any challenges or limitations that would keep respondents able to attend this program. In addition to seeking professional development needs responses, survey respondents will also be able to access initial promotional details of BLASS, including scholarship opportunities and application timelines. Survey respondents will also be encouraged to sign up for a dedicated BLASS program listserv that will announce the call for applications and available scholarships in Phase III.

This survey will be reviewed, revised, and amended by the project consultants (Supporting Documents 5 & 6) and consortial partners of the *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia* throughout the creation process to maximize engagement and assessment data.

During the survey creation process, the Key Project Staff and consortial partners will also create a directory of contacts and listservs to assist in disseminating the survey to its intended audience. Respondents will be invited to participate in this survey through email invitations through consortial channels, encouragement from institutional library leaders, and open calls to relevant listservs. Survey dissemination will include email promotion through:

- The *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia*, which includes more than twelve U.S. library consortia with direct outreach to their combined 1,006 member libraries nationwide.
- The American Indian Library Association, Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Chinese American Librarians Association, and REFORMA, of which BLC is an active member of each of these National Associations of Librarians of Color.
- Consortial partners, including the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) and the Association for Collaborative Leadership (ACL); and
- Human Resource employees at prospective libraries.

This list is not exhaustive and will continue to be updated.

In September 2024, the survey will be circulated electronically and promoted internally and externally with libraries, consortia, and peer organizations. The survey will prominently display the closing date of the survey, November 15, 2024. BLC and ASERL will prompt their Boards of Directors to share the survey with their staff and encourage BIPOC library supervisors without MLIS degrees to complete it. BLC will also feature the call for responses and a link to the survey on its homepage. We will also request the consortia within the *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia*, ICOLC, and ACL do the same. We will send multiple reminders to all channels identified in the survey promotion directory.

The ideal number of respondents will be 200. We will monitor the responses to confirm engagement and pivot outreach strategies if survey engagement does not meet our response goal.

Upon the survey's closing date, the Key Project Staff will assemble the raw response data and create anonymized data to share with the Advisory Board (Supporting Document 7). This data will also be accompanied by a report of response trends, identifying priorities, and recommendations from the Key Project Staff.

The survey itself, anonymized response data, and the report will be assembled and shared with the Advisory Board within two weeks ahead of the planning meeting in December to ensure each Advisory Board member has adequate time to review it.

Phase II - Curriculum Development and Planning (December 2024)

The planning meeting in December 2024 marks a critical juncture in the development of the Leadership Academy curriculum, bringing together key stakeholders from various consortia, an esteemed Advisory Board, and dedicated support staff (Supporting Document 8). The meeting's primary objective is to collaboratively craft a comprehensive curriculum that addresses the unique challenges and opportunities of BIPOC library supervisors without MLIS degrees. The Advisory Board will also review the results of the survey disseminated in the fall, determining the professional development needs and interests as well as the barriers to attending the Leadership Academy.

In addition to curriculum development, the meeting will focus on the application process. Participants will strategize on outreach initiatives to ensure broad representation and inclusivity within the Leadership Academy. Furthermore, discussions will center on developing selection criteria for the application. Members from the *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia* (Rose Nelson, Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries; Melissa Sykes-Silvers, Florida Virtual Campus Library Services; and Devon Waugh, NC Live) will be responsible for reviewing applications and choosing the 30 attendees of the Leadership Academy. By the meeting's culmination, the Advisory Board aspires to establish a transformative Leadership Academy that not only provides practical tools and resources but also cultivates a supportive network for BIPOC library supervisors to thrive and excel in their roles.

Bringing this diverse group together in person is crucial for fostering collaboration, building rapport, and exchanging diverse perspectives. Face-to-face interactions enable richer discussions, spontaneous ideation, and deeper engagement, leading to more innovative outcomes. Leadership academies often cater to participants with varying backgrounds, experiences, and skill levels. Designing a curriculum that meets the diverse needs of participants while maintaining coherence and relevance can be challenging. The topic of leadership also encompasses a broad range of concepts, from strategic planning to interpersonal skills. Balancing the depth and breadth of topics within the curriculum while ensuring accessibility and practical application can be daunting. Additionally, more research has been published in the last few years on the factors that impact the retention of BIPOC staff in libraries (Jennings & Kinzer, 2021)[1](Shearer &

---

[1] Jennings, A., & Kinzer, K. (2021). Whiteness from the top down: systemic change as antiracist action in LIS. Reference Services Review, 50(1), 64–80.

Chiewphasa, 2022)[2](Bryan & Karagher, 2023)[3]. Having researchers of this topic in the planning process will ensure that the curriculum addresses what BIPOC library supervisors need to thrive in their roles. By convening in person, the group can navigate the challenges of the curriculum design process more efficiently.

Phase III - Applications and Acceptance (January - April 2025)

The initiation of the third phase will entail the development of the BLASS Leadership Academy website. This online platform will encompass crucial project details and serve as a pivotal tool for communication and marketing purposes. The *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia* will provide support in the creation of the BLASS website, subject to review by Key Project Staff for approval prior to the anticipated launch date of January 27, 2025.

The promotion of the application invitation will be distributed across consortia channels via listservs, websites, and social media platforms. Invitations will be extended to potential candidates who previously participated in the assessment survey during Phase I and expressed interest in further engagement with the Leadership Academy. The application process will remain open for approximately one month to allow ample time for submission of application materials.

Subsequently, the selection committee will convene virtually to review applications and select thirty participants based on pre-established criteria developed during the planning phase. The chosen participants will be publicly announced in March 2025.

Concurrently, the project's Co-Principal Investigator, Elaina Norlin, and Advisory Board member, Melissa Sykes, will undertake visits to the host location at the University of South Florida to strategize and assess logistical aspects.

Phase IV - BIPOC Leadership Academy (May 2025)

The BLASS Leadership Academy, spanning three days with an optional fourth day, will be held at the University of South Florida at St. Petersburg Campus (Supporting Document 3), a serene and picturesque branch campus that overlooks the water. The library has a rooftop space that is perfect for lunches, breaks, and the welcome reception. The branch campus has plenty of walking trails, quiet spaces, and is just a few blocks from downtown with plenty of restaurants, hotels, and museums.

After the retreat content has been designed during the planning meeting, two Advisory Board members will visit the campus to meet with the local library staff to finalize the event details. These Advisory Board members will also work on optional networking and cultural activities. Current suggestions include curated museum and library tours like the Woodson African American Museum of Florida. Management and Leadership Consultants, Dr. Loubna Noureddin and Jami Yazdani (Supporting Document 6) will facilitate the training throughout the three-day academy, and the Key Project Staff will facilitate the

---

[2] Caragher, K., & Bryant, T. (2023). Black and non-black library workers' perceptions of hiring, retention, and promotion racial equity practices. Journal of Library Administration, 63(2), 137-178. https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2022.2159239

[3] Shearer, J. J., & Chiewphasa, B. B. (2022). Radical re-imagination: Centering a BIPOC library workforce in an asset-based autoethnography. Reference Services Review, 50(1), 113-126. https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-07-2021-0029

additional activities offered to participants throughout the academy.

Acknowledging the importance of well-being within the demanding realm of leadership, the program incorporates scheduled breaks for participants to engage in self-reflection and foster meaningful connections with fellow participants. The serene campus setting, complete with tranquil gardens and inviting walking paths, offers ample opportunities for journaling, mindful reflection, and rejuvenation. Our goal is for participants to return to their leadership roles feeling refreshed, empowered, and equipped to make a lasting impact.

The University of South Florida at St. Petersburg Campus boasts a convenient location within walking distance of downtown and hotels, minimizing logistical concerns and maximizing participant engagement. Additionally, the airport is conveniently located just 20 miles away, with an airport shuttle option available for their comfort. The campus itself features brand-new spaces, offering ample room for participants to connect, learn, and relax in an inspiring and comfortable environment.

Phase V - Assessment (June- September 2025)

BLC will lead qualitative and quantitative participant assessment activities to assess the efficacy of the program. Assessment of the application process, onboarding, and the academy itself will be executed via continuous electronic assessment surveys to the program participants. Responsive assessments at the academy will also include a continuous improvement discussion implemented at the conclusion of each program experience in the form of a Plus-Delta activity to evaluate the session or activity (Plus: What produced value during the session? Delta: What could we change to improve the process or outcome?)

The post-academy assessment will also include an exit interview between each participant and a member of the Key Project Staff.

We will also establish a long-term impact assessment to measure the effect of the academy on the participants' professional development and career growth. Institutional impact will be assessed through the lens of practical application as participants leverage their skills and training to influence their institution and colleagues. Additionally, assessment results will inform future iterations of the training program as a scalable model for leadership training of BIPOC library supervisors without MLIS degrees.

This phase will also include the development of a video recap of the Leadership Academy to facilitate a proof of concept. Key Project Staff will compile program recordings and record testimonials of the academy participants to showcase the program experience, its successes, and the opportunities for improvement and growth for Phase VI. This video will be shared and promoted across the *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia*'s consortial listservs and websites, and disseminated across the industry through the communication listservs noted in Phase I and conferences noted in Phase VI.

Phase VI - Dissemination (August 2025 - July 2026)

After the pilot BLASS Leadership Academy, the goal is to create a video recap that we will use when presenting to potential partners for future partners and collaborators. After the event, we will have a better idea of how much it costs to host the event and potentially sponsor participants for future academies. We realize that many people will want to attend, but financial barriers and tight library budgets will remain problematic. This was confirmed through preliminary research and evidenced by the significant interest in attending the pilot conference, drawing inquiries from diverse locations. It is our goal to work with

national organizations to sponsor future scholarships to provide access to libraries who may not be able to afford this target group to attend the academies. In terms of potential partners and collaborators, organizations like the Association for Research Libraries (ARL), the Conference of Academic Library Management (CALM), the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), and the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) have expressed preliminary interest and we will be sharing the video recap and assessment outcomes at future library conferences. Building upon this foundation, we plan to expand outreach to the Public Library Association and the Urban Libraries Council, leveraging existing interest from public library support leaders who participated in the pilot.

The PDA members will play a crucial role in this dissemination strategy. They will actively engage with potential sponsors to increase travel stipends for BIPOC library supervisors without MLIS degrees in future Leadership Academies, fostering greater inclusivity and accessibility within the program. This aligns with our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion principles. IMLS funds will support travel and registration costs for Key Project Staff to attend conferences both in-person and virtually to present on BLASS, including the design and assessment process. Key staff members will attend and present at the following in-person conferences: ICOLC North American Conference, Public Library Association annual conference, and Association for Rural and Small Libraries national conference.

Diversity Plan.

The target population for the BLASS project is BIPOC Library Leaders, and the PDA wants to ensure that diverse voices are included in every phase of the planning grant. It is critical that the curriculum is created with input from the target population. The moderator for the planning committee will be PI Elaina Norlin who has hosted and implemented several successful consortium-based BIPOC professional development and networking retreats and is a certified facilitator and trainer. The Advisory Board will consist of three BIPOC Library Professors who are known for their leadership and management research, key members of the *Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia* group, and two BIPOC Library Leaders from our target population, who will shape the curriculum design and implementation. The local host committee is a diverse group of librarians and library professional staff who will plan the optional activities. Geographic diversity will also be ensured by representation from at least twenty states. The PDA's membership of 1,006 libraries includes public libraries as well as academic libraries from community colleges, private colleges and universities, and public universities.

Project Results.
The *BLASS* project will bring consortia together to develop and deliver a national leadership academy for 30 multitype library staff from around the U.S. that supports the long-term professional growth of a vital population of workers in libraries whose needs for training and professional development are currently unmet. The project team will evaluate the long-term impact by measuring increased BIPOC library supervisors without MLIS degrees representation in library leadership roles in the two years following the academy, as well as a measurable improvement in library services and programs reflecting a broader range of perspectives. Success will be measured through qualitative and quantitative participant assessment activities to evaluate the program's efficacy, track academy alumni, and assess institutional impact for increased diversity and inclusion. The project architecture is such that its replication will require planning and an understanding of costs, needed expertise, and recruitment. Impacts and next steps include sharing the proof of concept with potential sponsors and working toward a sponsorship-funded model to support an open, sustainable, and scalable leadership academy beyond the pilot.
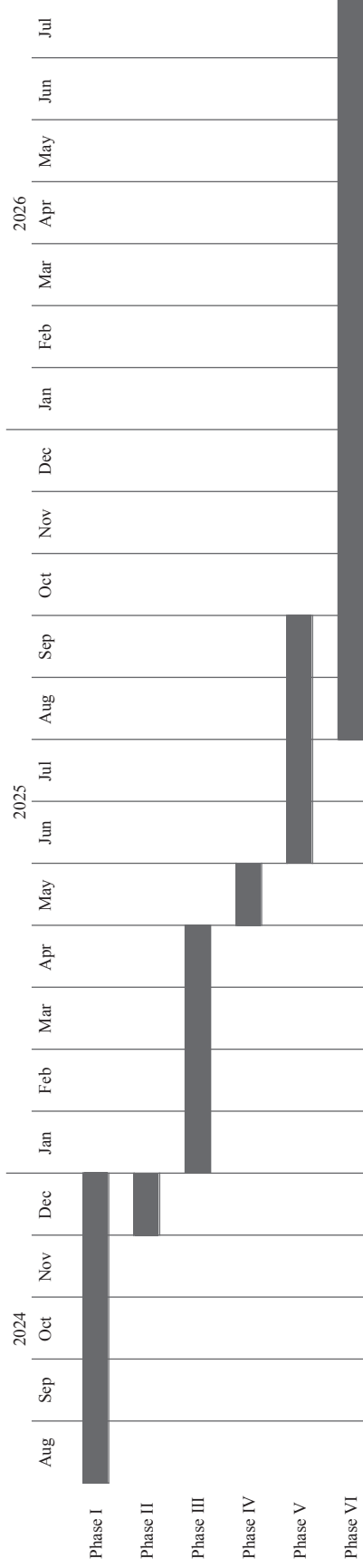
<u>Supporting Documents.</u>

Letters of Support

    (1) Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia [SupportingDocument1.pdf]

    (2) Shaundra Lee, Undergraduate Circulation Supervisor, Access Services and Delivery, Florida State University [SupportingDocument2.pdf]

    (3) University of South Florida at St. Petersburg [SupportingDocument3.pdf]

    (4) Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois [SupportingDocument4.pdf]

Additional Documents

    (1) Jami Yazdani Resume [SupportingDocument5.pdf]

    (2) Dr. Loubna Noureddin Resume [[SupportingDocument6.pdf]

    (3) BLASS Planning Committee - Advisory Board Members [SupportingDocument7.pdf]

    (4) BLASS Planning Committee Agenda [SupportingDocument8.pdf]

Schedule of Completion

Phase	2024				2025												2026						
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul

Phase I

Phase II

Phase III

Phase IV

Phase V

Phase VI

Digital Products Plan

We will create a range of openly available digital products, ensuring accessibility and promoting knowledge sharing. Our core curriculum will be available as a downloadable digital packet, and the accompanying video recap of the Academy will feature closed captioning and transcripts to cater to diverse audiences. We understand the importance of privacy and cultural sensitivities. To address this, key staff will thoroughly review all content to ensure confidentiality and respectful representation.

For long-term accessibility, we will strategically disseminate our materials through various channels. Our open curriculum will be available on the websites of several consortia, including ASERL, BLC, FLVC, and NC Live. The video recap of the Academy will be hosted on a combination of platforms including Vimeo, YouTube, and SpringShare, depending on the specific consortium. This multi-platform approach ensures our resources are discoverable and easily accessible to a wide range of users.