

BIPOC Leadership Academy for Support Staff: Practical Skill-Building, Networking, and Self-Care

The Boston Library Consortium (BLC) requests \$148,280 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 ten U.S. library consortia that work to expand and enhance the range of professional development opportunities available to their 640 member libraries nationwide. This project will provide one, three-day *BLASS* Leadership Academy to 30 BIPOC support staff library employees 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

The target audience for *BLASS* is BIPOC library staff at multitype libraries who hold supervisory positions but do not possess a master's degree in library science. Many libraries are experiencing a wave of retirements among senior leadership positions and are still coping with staffing shortages from the Great Resignation.¹ Supervisors in these libraries bridge the gap between senior leadership and frontline staff, ensuring the effective delivery of library services and resources. Some of these supervisors do not have master's degrees in library and information science and often lack access to the necessary professional development opportunities to excel in their roles. While various professional development programs are available for librarians, few initiatives target the needs of support staff. Leadership training equips library staff with the ability to adapt and innovate in response to changing user needs and the research landscape of their institutions. Programs have also been proven to impact participants' career paths, guiding them toward promotions and leadership positions.²

Background

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ten library consortia formed the Professional Development Alliance of Library Consortia (PDA) 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 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 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 BIPOC employees. Given this track record, the PDA is well-positioned to offer a leadership academy with a national reach.

The PDA group working on this *BLASS* proposal realized that a key population was missing from the leadership events, namely BIPOC support staff, specifically those in positions like Head of Access Services, Resource Sharing, or Circulation. Initial conversations with this target population revealed that financial barriers, such as a lack of travel funds and offerings for support staff, contributed to the lack of in-person attendance at professional development programs. Offering an in-person leadership institute would allow the PDA group to build on its existing collaboration and provide a system of mentorship and networking for BIPOC support staff around the country. Support staff often work in isolation, limiting their exposure to broader industry trends, best practices, and networking opportunities. This academy addresses an opportunity gap in professional development rather than a skills gap, as there is currently no access or opportunity for support staff to gather on a national scale to meet other support staff leaders for in-person training, networking, and community-building. By investing in this population's professional growth, libraries can enhance the effectiveness of service delivery, promote innovation, and facilitate knowledge sharing in the years to come.

¹ Goldman, C. (2023). Academic Library Succession Planning in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). *Journal Of Library Administration*, 63(3). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2023.2201720>

² Banush, D. (2020). The measures of success: Tracking the career paths of a leadership program's participants. *Journal of Library Administration*, 60(4), 393–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2020.1733355>

Project Work Plan

The PDA will hold a planning meeting with an Advisory Board to design the curriculum and the criteria for participation. After reviewing applications and accepting 30 participants, the board will pilot an in-person leadership academy. The three-day leadership academy aims to address this target population's practical needs, along with opportunities for networking, reflection, and self-care.

BLASS features six phases. **The first phase (September-December 2024)** will assess the more practical needs of BIPOC support staff and narrow down priorities. **The second phase (December 2024)** will involve a facilitated planning meeting with representatives from each PDA consortia and an Advisory Board to develop the curriculum and the application for selecting attendees. The Advisory Board will consist of experienced researchers (Dr. Kawanna Bright, Dr. Silvia Vong, and Dr. Aisha Johnson) and three management consultants (Jami Yazdani, Shaundra Lee, and Dr. Loubna Nouredin). The Advisory Board will also recruit four BIPOC support staff to attend the planning meeting and provide feedback about the curriculum. The management consultants will then develop tailored leadership sessions based on the direct input from the planning meeting. **The third phase (January-March 2025)** will include a call for applications. The Advisory Board will review applications and accept 30 participants who will each receive a \$2,000 travel stipend. The PDA will create a website to publicize the academy and facilitate a call for applications. During this time, the Principal Investigators will visit the host location to plan and review logistics. **The fourth phase (May 2025)** will involve hosting one three-day *BLASS Leadership Academy* at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg campus. This waterfront location has interactive workshop spaces, a rooftop deck, walking trails, and a nearby park. **The fifth phase (June-September 2025)** will involve an assessment of the academy and the development of a video overview of the academy to facilitate a proof of concept. During **the sixth phase (September 2025–August 31, 2026)**, the PDA will present the results of hosting this academy at major conferences, including but not limited to ACRL and ICOLC (the International Coalition of Library Consortia). The Advisory Board will also work with potential sponsors to expand BIPOC support staff travel stipends for future leadership academies. Principal Investigators include Cate Harriman, Program Manager of Learning and Development for BLC, and Elaina Norlin, Professional Development Coordinator for ASERL.

Diversity Plan

Because the target population for the project is BIPOC support staff, 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. PI Elaina Norlin has previous experience hosting BIPOC professional development retreats and is a certified facilitator and trainer. The Advisory Board will consist of BIPOC researchers, management consultants, and support staff who will shape the curriculum design and implementation. The local host committee at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg campus will also have BIPOC support staff who will have opportunities to network with their peers from around the country. Geographic diversity will also be ensured by representation from at least twenty states. The PDA's membership of 640 libraries includes public libraries as well as academic libraries from community colleges, private colleges and universities, and public universities.

Project Results and Impacts

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 long term impact by measuring increased BIPOC support staff 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 first year.

Budget Summary: The total project cost is \$148,280, inclusive of indirect costs. Project costs include \$60,000 in stipends for *BLASS* participants, \$28,800 in subcontracts for site hosts, management consultants, etc., \$27,000 in travel expenses, \$12,000 in staffing costs, \$7,000 in marketing expenses, plus \$13,480 in indirect costs.