

**Statement of National Need**

Racial, socio-economic and ethnic disparities remain deep and persistent in the United States. Numerous studies show racial disparities in incarceration rates, employment rates, income and life expectancy. (Pew Research, Olshansky et., al., Manduca)

These racial and socio-economic divides impact members of disadvantaged populations from the outset of their lives and perpetuate as they grow older, allowing for limited opportunities to break the cycle of inequity. (Center for American Progress) Further, this cycle of inequity leads to lifelong consequences not only for individuals, but negatively affects families, communities and our nation as a whole.

In 2018, an estimated 40% of the U.S. population, or 140 million people, were either poor or had low incomes, with Latino and Black communities forming the bulk of this population (US Census). There is a [deepening economic divide for low-income individuals](#) and [it is estimated that current childhood poverty levels will have a trillion-dollar cost](#) (McLaughn, Rank) in the U.S. economy, including health care costs, criminal justice costs and losses in economic productivity.

Especially in areas where disparities are most apparent, communities want change and opportunities that will enable disadvantaged individuals to reach their highest potential. The U.S. has been reminded of our difficult history with race through recent social unrest including Black Lives Matter demonstrations in Baltimore, Memphis, Chicago, St. Louis and Ferguson (Mo.), and white supremacy demonstrations in Charlottesville (Va.). Further, there are already early studies that show low-income and minority communities are contracting and dying of COVID-19 at higher rates. (NYU, Furman Center)

Mayors and county government leaders and their national professional organizations are talking about these critical and difficult issues. These leaders are directly engaging with how to identify key equity barriers and decrease the opportunity gaps in their communities. For example, an article in the International City/County Management Association's [PM Magazine](#) discussed "gnarly" issues local governments face including recidivism, human trafficking, violence and homelessness.

Below are examples of existing race and social equity frameworks from national organizations that local governments are embedding in their cities and county priorities.

- The **National League of Cities** created the [Race, Equity and Leadership](#) initiative to strengthen local leaders' knowledge and capacity to eliminate racial disparities and build more equitable communities.
- The **National Association of Counties** has dedicated its last two presidential initiatives to reducing inequity. [Serving the Underserved](#) identified actions counties could take to break the multi-generational cycle of poverty. [Connecting the Unconnected](#) explored how county governments can ensure all residents have access to equal services.

- The **U.S. Conference of Mayors** created a [written compact](#) for mayors to pledge their commitment to enhancing equity in the jurisdictions they serve.

In the last few years there have been efforts to reduce barriers to diversity, equity and inclusion in the library field by providing education and training, including the American Library Association's Taskforce on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and the Public Library Association's Advancing Racial Equity in Your Library initiative. Both of these initiatives have increased understanding of the systemic structures of race and social inequity and inherent biases that exist in the library field.

In 2018, ULC launched the [Statement on Race and Social Equity](#), which serves as a baseline for libraries to build policies and actions that make their communities more inclusive and just. Library systems across the country have signed the statement, and used it as a communications tool to increase local government leader's understanding of the library's role in promoting diversity and inclusion.

Another equity-based ULC initiative, the [Leaders Library Card Challenge](#) was launched in 2015 in partnership with the Council of the Great City Schools and IMLS. The Challenge created partnerships between libraries, schools and local government leaders to increase access to library resources for all students. The strong relationships built in the 105 participating communities endure today and have resulted in over 6 million children gaining access to library resources.

The Leaders in Race and Social Equity initiative builds directly on ULC's work with the Leaders Library Card Challenge and Statement on Race and Social Equity, which have both shown that communication and engagement with local government leaders can effectively scale library efforts designed to reach disenfranchised communities. While most emerging library initiatives to address race and social equity are not directly connected to city and county frameworks, there are a few examples in the field that can help frame this opportunity and potential practices, including:

- **Houston Peace:** The Houston Public Library is working in partnership with a number of the city's organizations and community partners to address youth violence through the Houston Peace initiative. Led by the Houston Health Department and the Mayor's Office, this work is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's four-step socio-ecological model to reduce violence and develop goals and objectives that address prominent forms of youth violence in Houston.
- **One Fairfax:** In Virginia, the Fairfax County Government and Fairfax County Public Schools jointly issued the "One Fairfax" policy on social and racial equity in late 2017. Beginning in 2018, Fairfax County Public Library initiated its own One Fairfax task team, focusing on updating policies, procedures and programs using an equity lens.
- **Saint Paul Public Library:** As part of the mayor's equity plan, Saint Paul Public Library conducted a racial equity assessment to examine how library practices, policies and services inadvertently disadvantaged people of color, and used the results to address areas of inequity.

## Project Design

**Leaders in Race and Social Equity** is based on the assumptions that libraries can be a significant force in every type of community for race and social equity efforts if the library is understood as a vital partner and asset by local government. Further, by establishing shared language, goals and metrics with local government agencies, the library can align resources, personnel and priorities across diverse types of partners *and* build the political will essential for this difficult and important work.

While every aspect of race and social equity demands each institution and each leader ask difficult questions, the scope of the proposed initiative is designed to gain knowledge and preemptively identify future challenge areas. Challenge areas already identified include:

- The leaders “at the table” need to represent the communities they serve and have a strong knowledge and history of confronting difficult race and social equity issues. In addition, they must have deep experience with building initiatives and partnerships.
- The conversations must include many viewpoints, including both strong supporters of race and social equity efforts as well as leaders who will bring a voice of caution, concern and doubt.
- By increasing the visibility of local government partnerships and by adopting the language used by city and county agencies, libraries may lose the trust of underserved and minority community members who see the local government as a source of institutionalized inequity.

### Goal One:

**Identify nationally recognized local government frameworks to address race and social equity issues.**

ULC will conduct a **model and literature review** to identify and document current local government approaches to addressing race and social equity issues. This will include a review of existing frameworks, language, metrics, evaluation strategies and methodologies as well as the departments who are responsible for these efforts.

This work will also look at how public libraries are currently represented in frameworks and their role in the ecosystem of organizations that are addressing equity issues. The role for the public library will be identified as well as any expected impact, metrics or outcomes.

ULC will conduct a review of publications, frameworks and articles from national organizations representing government leaders as well as published external evaluations of equity efforts and research studies on collective impact efforts. As part of this review, ULC will also research existing publications and studies from the public library field that are connected to local government equity efforts.

As part of the model review, ULC will leverage existing partnerships with national equity and local government organizations to conduct a series of conversations to better understand the current gaps and challenges for local government leaders. These conversations will be designed to raise awareness, share thoughts and identify opportunities for local governments to address equity challenges by partnering with public libraries.

ULC will work closely with peers at the National League of Cities, National Association of Counties and International City/County Management Association to collect data, process feedback and inform the development of the model and literature review. On completion of the literature review, there will also be a series of meetings with local experts to discuss how local governments are using data and metrics in their efforts.

These efforts will result in a **summary chart** which will establish local government trends in strategies, language and metrics used to measure the impact of these efforts. The summary chart will be used to inform the design of the national library survey and to inform the Leaders in Race and Social Equity Working Group. The literature review and summary chart will establish the basis of capturing language, efforts, metrics, partnerships and strategies that local government leaders are prioritizing in their communities.

### **Goal Two:**

**Conduct a national scan of the current state of library field practices and readiness to engage in local government race and social equity efforts.**

ULC will conduct a **program and partnership scan** of the library field's current knowledge of local government race and social equity efforts, key underlying factors of race and social equity issues and how individual libraries are framing their equity role, programs, staffing, metrics and practices.

The scan will begin with a **national survey** open to all libraries. This survey will be sent directly to ULC's 160 members and to libraries participating in the Edge program, including 3,000 libraries of all sizes. ULC will also ask peer library associations to share the survey with their members.

This survey will identify and inform a series of **interviews with libraries** who work in partnership with local government to advance equity initiatives. The interviews will explore how these libraries are implementing innovative programs, as well as how they are capturing and using data and metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of their local efforts. The communities will be selected to ensure the project team speaks with libraries who represent urban, suburban and rural communities at different stages in addressing these issues.

Key questions being explored include:

- Are libraries adopting the practice of applying an equity lens internally to the library's programs, partners, policies, staffing and practices?

- Do library leaders use common local community metrics to gauge inequity, such as the percentage of students with free and reduced lunch, grade level reading proficiency and high school graduation rates?
- Are libraries intentionally designing programs to increase race and social equity in the community?
- If so, who are their partners? Who are their target audiences? Are there metrics, feedback channels or data collection strategies libraries are using to capture the success of these programs?
- Are library leaders aware of their community's greater race and social equity ecosystem, including collective impact efforts, agencies, nonprofits, initiatives and potential partners?
- Are library leaders aware of the priorities of their mayor/city manager/county manager?
- If so, have they directly connected these to the priorities, metrics and/or goals of the public library on race and social equity?
- Do library leaders connect their resources, services and programs to external community and/or local government race and social equity efforts, metrics and intended outcomes?
- If so, how are libraries capturing key metrics as a race and social equity ecosystem leader?

The research will inform the national Leaders in Race and Social Equity Working Group and resulting recommendations on conducting a subsequent pilot phase with libraries.

### **Goal Three:**

**Convene conversations across equity, local government and library leaders to understand the opportunity, emerging strategies and current challenges to aligning library efforts with existing local government race and social equity frameworks.**

Activities to meet this goal will include two phases which, build on the knowledge gained from the national scan of literature, current library practices and local government models.

In the first phase, ULC will host a **Leaders in Race and Social Equity Working Group** to engage equity experts and local government and public library leaders on the methodologies, examples and frameworks to understand the opportunity to adapt and apply multiple models to public libraries.

The working group will explore the new knowledge of library and local government race and social equity models, strategies and practices to identify opportunities, gaps and potential challenges for engaging public libraries in local government race and social equity efforts.

The working group of 15 to 20 library leaders and equity and local government organizations will identify potential strategies and methodologies to leverage library assets in support of local government equity initiatives. Potential working group members will be based on the library field baseline scan and literature review, and are anticipated to include the National League of Cities, Houston Public Library, San Francisco Public Library, and Saint Paul Public Library.

Based on the working group's findings, ULC and its equity advisors will **frame a concept** to guide development of a larger initiative and inform language and communications on the value of public libraries as local government partners on race and social equity. The concept will capture a theory of the change we expect to see for communities if libraries partner with local government.

The second phase of work will focus on convening a **national online townhall** to expand the discussion on knowledge gained and key concepts by sharing them with the broader library field. The ***Library and Local Government Partnerships for Race and Social Equity*** townhall will share widely the concepts and results of the exploratory phase, raise the library field's awareness of equity and local government perspectives on race and social equity efforts and provide an additional opportunity to listen to the public library field and gain feedback.

Held in an interactive format, the townhall will be moderated by ULC President and CEO Susan Benton in conversation with a library CEO and their local government leader, as well as national equity and local government leaders from the National League of Cities and New America. The National League of Cities is the voice of cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. New America is dedicated to renewing America by continuing the quest to realize our nation's highest ideals, honestly confronting the challenges caused by rapid technological and social change and seizing the opportunities created.

The conversation will begin with an overview from ULC's CEO on the challenges the United States faces as a country and the importance of libraries working in partnership with local government. This will be followed by a public library and local government leader discussing how a local issue was identified, why they chose to work together and how they framed local success.

Joining this discussion will be national experts who will frame the opportunity, priorities and challenges based on what has occurred across the United States. These national experts bring diverse viewpoints and language on how communities can advance race and social equity. Public libraries who attend the townhall will have an opportunity to ask real-time questions and participate in online chat room discussions.

The townhall will be recorded and can be leveraged by libraries at a later date to increase their knowledge of how to engage local leaders in discussions to build partnerships and pilots that address race and social equity issues in their community.

### **Senior Project Team**

While in the exploratory phase, wide scope of the initiative's research, conversation and partnerships will require the coordination of a senior team. Members of this team will include:

- **Susan Benton, ULC President and CEO** - Susan has worked with libraries and local governments for over 30 years. Her professional career has been dedicated to assisting city and county executives initiate and manage change in their organizations.

- **Jennifer Blenkle, ULC Director of Strategic Initiatives** - Jennifer will lead the program. Her career includes over 20 years of program development in nonprofit organizations including equity efforts and serving disenfranchised communities.
- **Dr. Mary J. Wardell-Ghirarduzzi, Senior Advisor** - An educator, executive, author and thought leader on implementing broad-based diversity strategies, Dr. Mary J. Wardell-Ghirarduzzi serves as the inaugural vice provost and chief diversity officer at the University of San Francisco and is a leadership, organizations and diversity studies lecturer in the USF School of Education and School of Management.

## Diversity Plan

Diversity and equity are at the heart of this proposal. This project builds on ULC's commitment to racial and social equity and the national statement issued in 2018. ULC's Statement on Race and Social Equity serves as a baseline upon which libraries can build policies and actions that make their communities more inclusive and just to "help achieve true and sustained equity through an intentional, systemic and transformative library-community partnership."

Diversity will be embedded across each element of the initiative, including:

- Libraries and local governments participating will represent diverse needs, local efforts, government jurisdiction types (city/county/town), communities served, geographic locations and library system sizes.
- The research will focus on libraries joining local government race and social equity partnerships which leverage resources, share common metrics and intentionally design activities to serve, empower and reach disenfranchised people.
- Participating experts and leaders will represent the communities they serve and will provide diversity of thinking, experience and professional backgrounds, including experience with the many issues that communities address within the frame of race and social equity.

## National Impact

Libraries have an immense capacity to create societal change which is strengthened when they work effectively with partners on equity issues that are essential in their communities. Supported by the requested Planning Grant, the initial phase of the **Leaders in Race and Social Equity** project will lead to future phases of work to create library-local government pilots and implement a theory of change that includes models, partnerships and knowledge resources.

This work will build the public libraries' recognition and capacity to address race, social and income inequity in communities and leadership role in local ecosystems, creating long-term change for the library field and local government leaders.

After completing a pilot phase, ULC will work with experts to evaluate the opportunity to create national benchmarks that will deepen equity practices in libraries and awareness of local government leaders of the public library as an asset for race and social equity efforts.

The concept, field awareness, resources and local government-public library conversations established through this project will be sustained beyond the IMLS Planning Grant investment. This project is the next stage in ULC's commitment to libraries as race and social equity leaders, and all resources created will be available to libraries online. These resources will include:

- A **summary on the models** captured in the national scan to raise awareness and engagement by libraries in local government efforts.
- Three actionable **case studies** on libraries addressing race and social equity which will result from the national scan. These case studies will include blogs written by each of the libraries as well as highlights of their work shared across ULC's communications platforms (newsletter, website and social media).
- The recorded **national townhall** will help a wide range of libraries and potential local government partners join the conversation on an ongoing basis.

Further, with the knowledge and relationships developed, ULC will identify a local government and race and social equity national partner and work to attract additional foundation and corporate funders, as well as look at ways the work can be expanded into programs that are sustained by the library field, like pre-conference trainings.

Finally, the libraries who participate in the townhall will have new ideas that they can share with local leaders and potential partners. While the intention is to provide additional support to a group of libraries as they move from planning to action in a following phase, each participating community will have an opportunity to leverage knowledge gained in the planning phase to build partnerships and expand their role in local race and social equity efforts.



## Schedule of Completion

## Leaders in Race and Social Equity

