

Reading Nation: Libraries Serving Native American Children, Youth, and Families

The Blackfeet Tribal College Library in collaboration with The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Department of Library and Information Studies proposes a one year planning grant to: 1) **Establish** an advisory committee to help design a study of how children, youth, and families of the Blackfeet Nation currently use library services, 2) Work with the advisory committee to **Conduct** an environmental scan to understand the current state and potential factors impacting tribal member use of library services, and 3) **Design and Pilot Test** a community assessment process that identifies needs and challenges tribal members face in using public and community college libraries with a specific focus on children and youth services.

Background: Need and Impact

Our grant will address this research question: How might libraries collaborate in creating a reading supportive environment for Blackfeet children, youth, and their caregivers? A seminal 1989 study by U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science found significant barriers and limited access to library services for American Indians due to both cultural differences and lack of culturally appropriate resources. A recent 2017 evaluation of the Montana State Library LSTA program found that barriers to library services for tribal members still exist: little to no convenient access to either a public or tribal college library¹; little support and awareness of libraries among tribal members because their services are not typically a feature of their indigenous worldview; racial tension experienced by tribal members visiting public libraries that border tribal territory; and, lack of financial resources in tribal college libraries to prioritize early literacy programming (Chow, 2017).

The Blackfeet Nation, one of eight tribes in Montana, resides on a reservation encompassing 3,000 square miles in north central Montana, bordered by Glacier National Park to the west and Alberta, Canada to the north. The tribal college library, located in the southwestern part of the reservation in Browning, MT, is over a 35-minute drive for one-third of the tribal members living in the northern, southern, and eastern areas ([see map](#)).

The **Reading Nation** planning project aligns closely to the *library as community anchor* IMLS strategic goal and will pull together a national team of advisors and primary investigators to further study the preliminary findings found during the Montana 2017 LSTA evaluation. More specifically the project will seek to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the current state of library services among Blackfeet tribal members both on and off the reservation? 2) What are the unique needs and barriers to access to library services for tribal members with an emphasis on children, youth, and families? And 3) What are the potential challenges faced by

¹ The mission of tribal colleges, first established in 1973, are to “provide higher education opportunities to American Indians through programs that are locally and culturally based, holistic, and supportive” ([AIHEC](#), nd). Typically, tribal college libraries are the only library on a reservation.

public libraries in understanding and meeting those needs in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways?

Project Design

The **Reading Nation** project team is comprised of tribal member and Community College Tribal Librarian [Aaron Lafrombosie](#) (Blackfeet); Dr. [Loriene Roy](#) (Anishinabe), Professor at the School of Information, University of Texas-Austin; and Dr. [Anthony Chow](#), Associate Professor at the Department of Library and Information Studies at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Their attached CVs document their work with and for Native peoples.

The **Reading Nation** planning project will involve four phases: **Phase 1** (May - July 2018) – **Establish** a national advisory committee to help guide and oversee all aspects and phases of the project. Members of the board will include representatives from the Montana State Library, American Indian Library Association (AILA), Tribal College Librarians Institute (TCLI), urban and rural public library directors, academic librarians from Montana universities, and tribal leaders and tribal members. **Phase 2** (July - September 2018) - **Conduct** an environmental scan that collects and examines existing data and statistics and identifies external factors that help inform the current context of tribal member use of library services. **Phase 3** (October 2018 – January 2019) - **Design** and **Implement** a community assessment process that identifies needs and potential barriers tribal members face in using public and community college libraries with a specific focus on children and youth services. This will involve a mixed-method approach of qualitative interviews, focus groups, and surveys disseminated by print, smartphone text, and online. Participants will be recruited using convenience sampling (collecting data at the annual powwow), stratified and purposeful sampling (ensuring a diverse stratum of tribal members and public librarians), and a random sample of 100 tribal members living on and off the reservation. **Phase 4** (February - April 2019) – **Analyze** and **Interpret** results using a phenomenological approach² to understand and interpret results through the lens of tribal members as well as with descriptive and parametric statistics (analysis of variance by factor), that will allow more precision in identifying demographic differences (where a tribal member lives, age, gender, etc.). The advisory board will also conduct a summative assessment and evaluation that will help determine whether to put forth a future research proposal for studying and testing possible prototypes designed to address challenges and barriers identified in the study.

Budget

We request a budget of \$49,999.38: \$27,024.70 in salaries, \$7,000.00 for on-site travel to collect data, \$2,848.00 in supplies and postage, including random sample participant incentives, and \$13,126.68 in indirect costs to BFCC.

² The phenomenological approach attempts to identify phenomena through the lens and perceptions of the participants; such insight requires gathering ‘deep’ information and perceptions through qualitative data collection such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and interpreting and explaining the phenomena from the participants’ perspectives, values, and worldview (Lester, 1999).