

## **Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program Grant Preliminary Proposal: Gigabit Libraries and Beyond**

The University Corporation for Advanced Internet Development (UCAID), doing business as Internet2, requests \$249,788 for a project entitled “Gigabit Libraries and Beyond,” which will build on the IMLS-funded Toward Gigabit Libraries Toolkit and Broadband Action Plan (RE-00-15-0110-15) to empower library practitioners to become more informed consumers, advocates, and providers of Internet access and digital services to their communities. The project will include Carson Block Consulting as a partner.

### **1. Statement of Broad Need**

If libraries in rural and tribal areas do not have technical skills to continually increase and manage connectivity speeds, they risk leaving behind millions of people who rely on public access technologies and connectivity. Many libraries without access to skilled technical staff do not make the best use of their connections through best practices that would maximize the connectivity and best serve their communities.

### **3. Project Design**

The purpose of this project is to further leverage IMLS investment in the agency-level objective of building the capacity of libraries to scale the successful “Toward Gigabit Libraries” (TGL) program to more US rural and tribal libraries and improve the well-being of their communities. TGL provided hands-on broadband infrastructure training to rural and tribal librarians, especially for those serving small, rural or tribal libraries with limited technology support to enhance provision of community digital and broadband-enabled services. TGL piloted the development of technical broadband assessment tools (a “toolkit”) that gave thorough hands-on training to librarians to advance their understanding of and advocacy for broadband infrastructure in their libraries.

TGL continues to have a dramatic impact on US rural and tribal libraries. Project participants unanimously gave the project high rankings, and state library organizations and research and education (R&E) networks have used the open-source toolkit for regional and local training outreach and training. For example, in Montana, 115 of the state’s 117 libraries have used the toolkit and participants improved their data networks and participated in the Erate program. As of fall 2019, project members continue to respond to requests to present the toolkit for regional and national audiences.

The maturity level of the project is scaling. The work has been piloted within the identified domain and yielded positive results with its initial target users. The key concept of this proposal is further saturation- to empower and equip state library staff, move more significantly into tribal areas, and train the trainer. In 2019, subject matter experts who contributed to the development of the Toward Gigabit Libraries project were asked if the toolkit has been effective for the libraries they serve, and whether/how the toolkit should be scaled. Respondents enthusiastically confirmed the positive results of the toolkit, and offered specific suggestions to address unmet needs, including connecting with state library organizations, tribal organizations, and research and education (R&E) networks to deploy the toolkit. The project’s activities include the following:

- **Perform minor updates to the TGL toolkit.** The library community has been using the open-source toolkit since 2018, often “remixing” toolkit content into training materials at local, regional, and state levels. The project will learn from these to identify areas of improvement or refinement to the core toolkit.
- **Expand toolkit use and effectiveness in rural and tribal libraries.** The project will increase outreach and education opportunities for rural and tribal libraries, including training materials, and train-the-trainer activities.
- **Formally connect State Library Organizations, R&E network, and other partners for toolkit deployment.** The project will continue TGL’s practice of convening meetings of State Library Organizations and technology experts from R&E networks, universities, and tribal entities while building pathways, methods, and opportunities to sustain and expand these demographically and geographically.
- **Enhance tribal library outreach.** Of the 58 libraries visited in the TGL project, 11 were tribal. This project will build upon and expand the use of the toolkit in tribal libraries.
- **Automate/simplify the toolkit.** Although TGL toolkit trainees reported that it was easy to use, this project will increase accessibility to promote easier understanding.
- **Expand Partnership Opportunities.** The project will engage in outreach with potential partners, including state library organizations, R&E networks, universities, the Association for Rural and Small Libraries, the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM), and tribes and tribal universities.

### **3. Diversity Plan**

This project will focus on two underserved populations in terms of library services and broadband: rural and tribal libraries, both of which have limited technical resources available to support any library broadband or digital initiatives. Many of these are in lower income, impoverished communities, where a library’s digital services may be the only available broadband to community members. This project will support and promote rural and tribal librarians’ understanding of their broadband infrastructures to ensure they are optimized to meet community needs. The project team recognizes the sensitive nature of working with sovereign tribal nations and will involve key organizations and figures from related organizations, namely Matt Rantanen from the Southern California Tribal Chairman’s Association and ATALM. It also will include local R&E network staff for pilot visits, who are familiar with their community anchor institutions and their unique needs.

### **4. Broad Impact**

Widespread implementation of the TGL toolkit will have a broad, positive impact on rural and tribal libraries. Of the libraries that participated in the TGL project nearly 90% cited improvements to their broadband connection knowledge, 77% cited improvements in their knowledge of their WiFi network, and 61% reported an increase in their knowledge of broadband funding opportunities. Moreover, a full 100% of the participating libraries would recommend the toolkit process to other libraries.

### **5. Budget Summary**

This proposal requests \$249,788 in IMLS funding over a 24-month project period, and profiles \$56,083 in cost-sharing for the project’s duration. This funding will support site visit travel to rural and tribal libraries for toolkit deployment and training, regional workshops to offer in-person exchange of ideas and lessons learned with a diverse range of participants, presentations and dissemination of findings at regional and national conferences, staff support for toolkit scaling, automation, and refinement, and community outreach.