

Planning Grant: Young Changemakers in the 21st Century Library

PROPOSAL SUMMARY: The Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP) at Harvard University (Principal Investigator: Danielle Allen) aims to leverage public libraries and school libraries as key venues through which to disseminate innovative approaches to civic education in a digital age. Building on nearly a decade of research on youth civic development in digital environments, Allen and her team have developed a civic education curriculum to support the development of youth into equitable, effective, and self-protective civic actors. Libraries play a pivotal role in youth civic engagement, digital literacy, youth media production, and cultural engagement. We seek funds to plan a dissemination project, to be organized in collaboration with the Massachusetts Library System, to train librarians in the use of the DKP materials in the context of their youth programs. Our project seeks (a) to prepare library professionals to help youth develop into equitable, effective, and self-protective civic agents in a digital age; (b) to support libraries that work for/with underserved youth to create positive civic learning experiences; and (c) to equip librarians with assessment strategies to track the impact of their work on youth civic learning. This project will produce a concrete plan for professional development, resource creation/sharing, and assessment in support of new civic learning in 21st-century libraries. We request a planning grant of \$50,000 to support planning work that runs from Dec. 1, 2018, through June 30, 2019 for the Community Anchors grant category

BROAD NEED: Civic Education Reform through Libraries in a Digital Age. The conventional mission of civic education is to help young people both cultivate discernment about public issues and participate in problem-solving processes. The advent of digital technology, however, has introduced major challenges to the conventional notion of civic education. Social media and digital platforms have drastically amplified communicative capacities and broadened access to political participation. Individuals and groups can now drive social change in multiple contexts beyond legacy political institutions. This new media landscape has given young people new opportunities and prominence as key civic actors. Young people have the chance to enhance their voice and influence in social, civic, and political life thanks to their technical savvy, to youth practices of creative expression, and to a surrounding context in which expression and action cross swiftly from the cultural to the political domain. But digital technology also brings risks for youthful civic agents: privacy breaches, unprepared exposure to public attention, misinformation, and political polarization and animosity. Civic education needs re-invention to meet the challenges and benefit from the opportunities of this new environment. For instance, media literacy needs to be integrated into the basic structure of civic education. Libraries have always played a central role in civic education outside of schools, and they should be a part of this re-invention.

As a member of the MacArthur Foundation's Youth and Participatory Politics Research Network (2009-2017), Danielle Allen, and colleagues, developed a reflection and action framework to scaffold the development of young people's capacity for civic agency and civic media-making. Known as "The Ten Questions Framework," this pedagogic framework seeks to help youth develop into successful—equitable, effective, and self-protective—civic agents in a digital age. Allen's research group at Harvard, the Democratic Knowledge Project, has been working for the last two years to disseminate this pedagogic framework in a variety of teaching and learning contexts. (The Ten Questions and some sample learning modules built around them are available here:

<https://yppactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/home>).

Since 2016, the DKP has been disseminating the Ten Questions to a wide range of educators including school/teen services librarians; several of them have created exemplary practices using the Ten Questions, applying them to book discussion, service-learning research projects, and digital storytelling. This work has generated learning modules and strategies for assessment. We seek now to expand our work with librarians specifically and to disseminate our materials throughout the Massachusetts Library System.

PROJECT DESIGN. The goal of the project is to produce a plan for a two-year statewide initiative for professional development, knowledge creation/sharing, and assessment strategies for new civics in the 21st-century library. In collaboration with the Massachusetts Library System, we will develop a two-year set of professional development opportunities, resources, and accompanying assessment instruments for youth-serving librarians ready to work in support of civic education in libraries. The professional development resources and workshops will be open to all librarians in the system and advertised throughout the system. In addition to planning activities and developing resources, we will use the planning period to develop a network of partner libraries ready not only to adopt the Ten Questions framework for youth programs but also to serve as professional leaders and mentors. These partners will not only adopt the Framework but also contribute resources to our ever-growing catalog of exemplars, modules, teaching materials, and workshop plans.

The planning meetings will begin December 1, 2018 and the project design will be complete by June 30, 2019. The work will be conducted by a post-doctoral fellow/Project Manager, under the auspices of the Democratic Knowledge Project. The agenda will include: (a) developing a plan for trainings and template assessment strategies and tools; (b) identifying locations and scheduling the trainings; (b) publicizing opportunities to librarians via Massachusetts listservs, website, and the MLS calendar (c) facilitating resource sharing specific to the project; (d) selecting librarian trainees in consultation with the Massachusetts Library System; and (e) further grant-writing to support the program itself.

DIVERSITY PLAN. We will strive to support the Massachusetts Library System's mission to promote equitable access to excellent library services and resources for all who live, work, or study in Massachusetts. In consultation with MLS, we will engage as many libraries as possible that serve underserved youth from diverse social and cultural communities. We will also encourage individual libraries to contemplate the particular needs of their communities and their potential to benefit from new civics programming.

BROAD IMPACT. The Massachusetts Library System serves more than 1,700 libraries of all types and sizes throughout the state, including 373 public libraries and over 700 school libraries. Our goal would be to engage at least one librarian from about 75% of them in our programs, as well as to identify up to ten partner libraries positioned to achieve deep dissemination of DKP resources in their communities. Because of the MLS's extensive membership and services, our work will have the potential to impact all the youth in the state.

BUDGET PLAN. The requested budget (\$50,000) will be spent to hire a Program Manager at Harvard. The direct cost will be \$37,313 for salary and fringe, and the indirect cost will be \$12,684 ("Other Sponsored Projects" rate, DHHS 5/4/2017). The program facilitator will have extensive knowledge of and experience with civic learning, for both school and library settings, and manage the key planning tasks.