

Project Justification

The Institutional Library Services (ILS) program of the Washington State Library (WSL), in collaboration with the Washington State Department of Corrections (WADOC), seeks a two-year \$87,700 IMLS National Leadership Planning Grant to pilot a national effort to develop strategies and tools to address disparities in the service standards and capacities of general services libraries located in U.S. state and territorial prisons. In alignment with Goal 5; Objective 5.1, this project will bring stakeholders together to identify best practices, policies, standards, and outcomes for prison library services; develop scalable and replicable models for providing these services; and create an online workspace for these collaborative activities. The focus of this project is state prison libraries, but the resulting products will be scalable, modular, and adaptable to other carceral settings and available online at no cost to the user.

The Directory of State Prison Libraries (DSPL) is an online directory of state prison library professionals created by Maryland Correctional Education Libraries in 1991. ILS assumed responsibility for maintaining the directory in 2012, and from 2019 to mid-2021 performed an extensive content update and migrated the directory to a new platform. The DSPL update included a short description how each state provides prison library services and is referred to as their *operational model*. A prison library operational model includes information about state statutes, agency directives and agreements, and other documented procedures meant to mandate, instruct, or inform the delivery of prison library services. Information about circulation, acquisitions, reference services, reentry support, programming, staffing, hours of operation and all other aspects of prison library services was also collected and is referred to as a *service model*. ILS collected information directly from state departments of correction and education as well as from state libraries, and WADOC submitted surveys designed by ILS to state departments of correction through the Correctional Leaders Association (CLA). An analysis of the data revealed that standards and capacities of general service prison libraries differ significantly from state to state, and even among facilities within the same state department of corrections system.

The primary activities of the proposed planning grant are to (1) continue efforts to gather, evaluate, and document current operational and service models for general services libraries in U.S. state and territorial prisons; (2) design and launch an online platform for prison library professionals to share and evaluate information about prison library operations and services; (3) create opportunities for prison library professionals and stakeholders to discuss and document best practices, policies, performance standards, and outcome measures for state prison libraries; (4) provide information about ILS operations and service models; and (5) foster collaboration among prison library professionals and prison library stakeholders. Prison library stakeholders include administrators or staff employed by state departments of correction and education, state libraries, other state agencies involved in providing prison library services, and national library associations. ILS believes state libraries in particular are uniquely positioned to affect positive change in their states' prison libraries as they have a vested interest in all libraries located in their state. These activities are intended to lay the groundwork for future ILS IMLS grant proposals in the Forum, Implementation, and Applied Research project types. ILS will seek out partnerships with national library organizations, such as the American Library Association (ALA), Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), and other groups and individuals working on a national level to improve prison library services.

Project Work Plan

This project builds on existing practice by adapting public library performance standards and outcome measures to state prison library settings, providing an opportunity for prison library professionals and stakeholders to identify and implement best practices and policies into state prison library operations. ILS and WADOC will build on work performed and data collected during the DSPL update, as well as our study of current prison library standards, policy, and practice. As part of the update, ILS curated an extensive contact list of institutions and individuals working in prison settings, as well as those working to promote the delivery of library services to justice impacted populations. ILS will continue to network with these contacts and, whenever possible, endeavor to work collaboratively with them to meet common goals. For the DSPL project, ILS utilized Springshare software platforms to develop data repositories, contact management tools, and information centers and this project will leverage and expand our expertise in developing these tools. Our experience in creating, implementing, and improving prison library operational and service models will also be leveraged.

The project team will carry out tasks falling under three phases including (1) planning and system development (2) data collection and assessment (3) outreach and partnership development.

Planning and System Development: August 2022 - March 2023

The project team will negotiate and contract with Springshare for systems design and training consultants. An administrative assistant with a background in data management and customer relations will be hired at the beginning of this phase. In consultation with the Springshare contractors the team will determine the training needs of the administrative assistant and any further training needs of the project team. The project team and contract staff will create a work plan, assignments, and schedule. With the guidance and assistance of the Springshare contractor, the project team and administrative assistant will build the content management and customer relationship platforms.

Data Collection and Assessment: January 2023 – December 2023

During the first quarter of 2023 the team will revisit the scope and organization of the data to be collected, existing surveys will be reviewed, and additional surveys will be designed. Communications channels and narratives will also be revisited and expanded. Surveys to collect information about state prison library operations and services will go out at the end of the first quarter. During second and third quarters of the year the team will contact stakeholders through additional communication channels including phone, email, and direct mail to fill in information gaps. The team will also track and record survey responses and information collected through all other communications channels, and develop and conduct any follow-up surveys and direct contacts necessary to fill gaps in the data during this period. The third and fourth quarters of 2023 will be used to analyze and report on data collected through all communications channels, and the customer relationship platform will be populated with contact data.

Outreach Plan and Partnership Development: July 2023 – July 2024

The final phase of the project will consist of outreach and collaboration activities. The intended outcome is to bring library professionals and stakeholders together, through the Springshare platforms developed during phase one, to review and discuss the data and present information about identified disparities in service. Participants will engage in a discussion of prison library standards, policies, best practices, and outcomes. ILS will share information about its own prison library operations and service models. The project team will finalize the development of, and schedule for, online collaborative activities and events. Potential candidates and partners for further collaboration will be identified as a result of these activities and events, and partners will engage in planning activities addressing the scope and outcomes of these projects. The project team will convene with any interested partner to determine possible future grant projects. Finally, the grant team will publish a report on the findings of the grant activities on the DSPL.

Project Results

The intended results of this project include (1) a critical discussion of the state-to-state disparities in prison library services; (2) drafts of best practices and policies for prison libraries based on standards and outcomes; (3) scalable, modular, and adaptable operations and service models for libraries in carceral settings; (4) an online platform for ongoing communication and collaboration about prison library operations and services; (5) and an opportunity for collaboration among prison library professionals and library stakeholders. The target group for this project is prison library service providers, but the ultimate beneficiaries will be the adult patrons of state prison libraries in the U.S. -- an underserved, racially disproportionate, and vulnerable population of library patrons. ILS believes the potential of state prison libraries to meet the needs of incarcerated populations has not been fully developed in any state. The goal of this project is to provide an opportunity for state prison library professionals and stakeholders to begin that work.

Budget Summary

The proposed two-year budget of \$87,700 in requested grant funds includes \$17,000 for Springshare contract staff and services, \$58,000 for a part-time administrative assistant contract staff, \$2,000 in local travel, \$4,500 communications software development and graphic design, \$3,200 for supplies, materials, and equipment, and \$3,000 for project specific promotional materials.