

Project Justification

Howard County Library System (HCLS) requests \$356,580 to fund **Pathways to Success: Professional Development for Skilled New Americans**, a two-year implementation project providing contextualized workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, job search skills, and interview/job preparation training for skilled immigrants (college degrees, and/or professional training) and leadership and training to adapt all or part of the project model for a cohort of public libraries. Project partners are The Howard County Office of Workforce Development and Luminus Network for New Americans. The project directly aligns with the National Leadership Grants' goal of promoting libraries as centers for continuous learning for individuals of diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Libraries in most communities are an important entry point to services for New Americans, and as trusted institutions, should take the lead to build collaboration among community partners interested in workforce development and English language instruction for this growing demographic. Many well-educated and trained skilled immigrants face barriers to employment in their field of expertise. English language proficiency and job training are high priorities for this growing population, so that employers consider them as qualified, skilled workers already in the country. For the past 33 years, Project Literacy, HCLS' adult basic education curriculum, mainly served adults with low-literacy skills and/or learning disabilities engaging in low wage or entry-level jobs. **Pathways to Success: Professional Development for Skilled New Americans** enables HCLS to expand services customized for skilled immigrants and demonstrate how others can adapt this model (or parts thereof) to start their own program serving New Americans in their communities.

This project will implement the model developed by the Career Pathways for Skilled Immigrant Planning Project, funded by IMLS, and extended through next August. The planning grant designed classes and a partner network of services and resources to assist New Americans to improve their English language proficiency for work and everyday life, increase their knowledge about credentialing and career pathways, build professional networks, and prepare for and get interviews in their fields of expertise. Guided by an Advisory Board of 25 stakeholders serving the immigrant community, New American participation increased 300% (15 proposed, 60 served) and immediate impacts measured through surveys included 95% felt more knowledgeable about the job-search process and 80% received an interview or new job offer in the area they wanted. HCLS is proposing to scale up the planning grant model to reach more participants, and deepen the involvement and services provided by Advisory Board partners and community volunteers. Many from the Advisory Board will continue in that role for the new grant, with Luminus and the Howard County Office of Workforce Development partnering with HCLS to expand their support and engagement with the target audiences

The primary objectives for Pathways to Success: Professional Development for Skilled New Americans are:

1. Delivering classes and activities for 120 skilled immigrant participants using the model and partnerships.
2. Forming a cohort of library systems interested in adapting curriculum for their systems. Creating toolkits and a library training plan for four curriculum levels outlined in the work plan.

Project Work Plan

This project has two target populations: skilled immigrants and public libraries. Both groups may participate via online and in-person courses/activities. The project design has these instructional strategies:

- Small size reading, writing, speaking, and listening classes, including one-on-one conversation with native English speakers, career exploration needs, and focus group real-world and simulated work-based projects
- Workforce development opportunities from partners to prepare for job searching, including mock job interviews, access to apprenticeship opportunities, job search workshops, and job fairs
- Connecting participants with each other, local college, non-profit organizations, and statewide workforce development resources and training
- Mentoring and training cohort libraries to tailor the curriculum and model levels to their needs

Recommendations from the Advisory Board partners and from a six-person focus group formed by skilled immigrant participants will be implemented and include: (1) Forming an online project community through FB and LinkedIn groups, (2) Adding more in-person networking classes and mock interviews (some partner-led) and including understanding American culture and how it impacts the workplace, (3) modifying the website and promotional materials for easier comprehension by New Americans, (3) Digital literacy tech help labs focusing on online job searching and job application skills, (4) Luminus staff going on site at workplaces to offer ESL support directly to New American workers, and (5) Create a virtual tour of the county to help students learn about all the resources available to them.

Year One, HCLS will provide participants with English language classes in workplace and job search contexts, and classes about American culture. Monthly Advisory Board and focus group meetings will guide the project and refine the model, HCLS and partners will provide services/resources to skilled immigrants. The project model has four levels that build in complexity and staffing requirements:

Basic English Language. Drop-in, weekly classes in work-related contexts (can be volunteer or Library led)

Comprehensive English language model. English language classes in reading, writing, speaking, listening and pronunciation. This is an intensive program designed for job seekers with advanced levels of English competency and requires dedicated library staff to manage. Participants will register, complete an intake interview, and test for proper placement. Partnering with other agencies will staff one-on-one tutoring for those who need extra instruction.

Job Search and Networking model. A presentation series on job readiness, including an exploration on the U.S. Dept. of Labor's O'Net system, how to build an online presence on networking sites (i.e., LinkedIn) and networking skills for job search strategies. Co-host job fairs with partners focusing on professions specifically applicable for skilled immigrants. Digital literacy classes plus one-on-one digital literacy job searching labs.

Workforce preparation model. Collaboration with local workforce development organizations provides classes and one-on-one support for resume and cover letter writing, networking skills, workplace digital skills, mock interviews, and case management. Workplace ESL provided on site at employers through Luminus partner.

Year Two, HCLS will continue classes based on the model, with continuous refinements. HCLS will develop an informational webinar and send out a call for applications to create a Library Learning Cohort and a selection committee of professionals will review, rank and select libraries to participate. Libraries will be asked to identify their intent and community need, and provide a proposed project leader, as well as data and information on their target population, and potential partnerships. The project team will develop Library training tools and toolkits and invite cohort libraries to observe classes, attend Advisory Board meetings, and take part in training workshops.

This project includes an evaluation component during each project phase, examining project components and measuring learning goals for participants. HCLS will also submit a project overview and summary of outcomes to cohort and Advisory Board members, ALA's New Americans Library Project, and a presentation for 2023-24 library conferences.

Diversity Plan

The Project Director is a member of the Maryland Skilled Immigrant Task Force, whose work informs the project. The project's 15-20 member Advisory Board brings a diversity of perspectives and practices relevant to skilled immigrants. HCLS has intentionally solicited recommendations from participants through surveys and a focus group considering ways to make the project inclusive and equitable (such as modifying website language and content). HCLS will consider if the cohort library's size, location, experience, or target community add diversity to this project.

Project Results

120 skilled immigrant participants and five libraries in a training cohort. Host two Job Fairs designed for skilled immigrants, and create two toolkits (building partnerships, curriculum phases/models). HCLS will apply to Library conference presentation/webinars and create an informational webinar for interested Library systems available on demand and through ALA, PLA and MLA. HCLS will create 30 "virtual take-home job fair" kits, and monthly tech help support labs will provide one-on-one ESL technical assistance for adult learners and job searching tools/skills. Project partnerships strengthen opportunities for other state and local grant funds to sustain the project beyond the grant period, and the Library will work to engage with more volunteers and identify existing community assets to provide classes and activities to the New Americans.

Budget Summary

Total project costs are \$716,540 with a match of \$359,960 from HCLS and partners including \$292,800 in salaries for a part-time Project Director, Adult Basic Education Assistant, five Library PR Communications staff, and partner Project Managers. Contract costs of \$320,000 cover five tutors, dedicated partner project staff, an Intake Specialist, Career Navigator/Analyst, Lead Instructor, PT Social Media Intern, and Evaluator. Supplies costs are \$30,000, and project space is 15 tutorial cubicles, a classroom with A/V and wi-fi, intake/assessment and administrative offices, and resource room.