

## **Title: Scaling Community Through Archives: A National Program to Expand Community Archives**

**Introduction:** The University of Washington (UW) requests a 3-year National Leadership Grant (Applied Research) in the amount of \$423,169 *to systematically investigate how library needs and best practices related to the development of community archives vary across urban and rural library systems*. The project will ask the following research questions: (1) How do understandings of community archives, and their desired role within communities, vary between public library staff in differently sized rural and urban systems? (2) How do urban and rural systems differ in terms of the challenges they must navigate to effectively build a community archive? (3) How do these systems differ in terms of best practices for implementing impactful community archives? To answer these questions, *the project will support a diverse cohort of eight public librarians, split between differently sized urban and rural systems, to develop community archives across the nation*. The cohort will participate in a series of in-person training workshops, have access to mentors from the project team, engage in peer mentorship, and be provided seed funding to support their community archives project. Project researchers will concurrently carry out interviews, focus group sessions, and participant observation with the cohort to answer the project's research questions. Project outcomes will include the expansion of an existing community archives toolkit; curricular resources to support the training of library staff to implement community archives; the development of multiple community archives across the nation; and scholarly and practitioner-oriented publications and presentations sharing research results. These *outcomes address the need to broaden participation and inclusion within cultural heritage collections* across the US, thereby *addressing National Leadership Grants for Libraries Program's objective of supporting innovative approaches to digital collection management (Goal 3, Objective 3.2)*.

**Project Justification:** Over the past three years, this project team has been supported by the IMLS (*The Community Archives Center for Tacoma*, LG-250126-OLS-21) to develop a toolkit to support mid-sized urban public libraries to produce more equitable archives for and about their diverse communities. This work was designed to address a significant problem with the American historical record - namely, that the voices and experiences of many historically marginalized, underrepresented, and minoritized communities are missing from it. The histories of some groups have been actively suppressed in ways that exacerbate and extend other forms of ongoing oppression. In reaction to these conditions *scholars and practitioners have called for a reformulation of archival studies around core values of social justice* (Caswell et al 2017). Community archives hold unique promise for increasing the inclusion of all groups and communities within the historical record. The prior project addressed this need by developing a community archive in Tacoma, Washington. The project team systematically documented the process used to create this archive, to provide libraries in other small and mid-sized communities with a strong model for implementing their own more equitable archives. A key project outcome was the development of the *Community Archives Toolkit*, a set of resources describing best practices across the full life cycle of creating and sustaining a community archive. This resource has been widely disseminated within library and archival communities at recent conferences, where rural and urban library staff responded with enthusiasm.

Feedback from these librarian engagements, however, also revealed ongoing needs. First, *library staff expressed the need for resources that support libraries that do not fit the midsized urban model provided by the Tacoma Community Archive*. Discussions about the toolkit at the WLA Conference, for instance, highlighted some of the unique challenges and needs that librarians in rural communities face when trying to implement a community archives. The Toolkit was grounded in work in the city of Tacoma, and therefore best supports libraries that work in similar midsized urban contexts. Rural communities can have very different relationships to concepts like, for example, social justice and cultural preservation, highlighting the need for an extension of the Toolkit to reflect those community contexts. The size of the system also produces its own unique constraints and opportunities. This project will engage in systematic research to identify differences and similarities between urban and rural libraries of different sizes, resulting in case studies and other resources that will support a broader range of libraries in implementing community archives. Second, *library staff expressed a desire for support that goes beyond a toolkit*. The implementation of a community archive requires building expertise across many domains, including development of archival policies, selection of supporting technologies, community engagement, and navigation of social issues. This can be daunting. Furthermore, the nature of community archives requires staff to make decisions based on localized conditions, in ways that exceed the advisory capacity of even the most carefully designed toolkit. These factors point to the need for more rigorous forms of training and mentorship, as well as the benefits of having access to a community of practice for peer support. Fortunately, multiple IMLS projects offer models that could be adapted for this purpose. The *Memory Lab Network* (LG-95-17-0079-17), for instance, provides a model for leveraging training, mentorship, and financial support to support personal (rather than community) archiving. This project will explore how to adapt such a model to community archiving.

**Project Work Plan:** We propose *a three-year investigation into how local context mediates the needs and best practices associated with implementing a community archive*, with an emphasis on variations between how urban and rural libraries implement such archives. The project will build on the IMLS-funded *Community Archives Center for Tacoma* project, so that a more diverse set of libraries are supported by that project's toolkit. This new project will be composed of

the same core personnel, from University of Washington (UW) and Tacoma Public Library (TPL), that led the prior project to successful conclusion. The UW team brings extensive experience in developing community archives (Marika Cifor), partnering with and building the capacity of low-resource libraries (Chris Jowaisas), and using community-based approaches to engage diverse communities in applied research (Jason Young). Given recent feedback at library conferences the project will include library systems that serve large Native populations, and we have added Sandy Littletree (UW) and Cindy Aden (UW) to the team to add perspectives on Tribal librarianship. The UW team also possesses professional networks that will enable them to recruit partners from rural and urban library systems of different sizes, and experience developing LIS curricular resources and carrying out research. Anna Trammell (TPL) and dindria barrow (TPL) bring deep expertise from their roles in leading the design and implementation of the Tacoma Community Archive Center, and they will be able to share knowledge based on hands-on experiences as library practitioners. Cifor will direct the project, with support from a UW graduate student research assistant.

The team will carry out three phases of research, each with research methods crafted to answer project questions. During Phase 1 (Aug '24 - July '25), ***the team will engage in programmatic and curricular development related to the community archives cohort program.*** The researchers will develop training modules based on the Community Archives Toolkit. The team will acquire UW IRB approval and conduct a first round of interviews with rural staff, to inform initial adaptation of training materials to rural contexts. The team will develop a process for evaluating applications to the training program and solicit applications from staff representing diverse urban and rural libraries. Eight library staff will be selected, and will be invited to an orientation meeting. This will mark the beginning of Phase 2 (Aug '25- July '26), which focuses on ***supporting the cohort to implement their own community archive project.*** The cohort will participate in an initial set of in-person workshops. They will then be paired with a research team mentor, who will be their primary source of support while they implement their project over the subsequent year. During this year they will meet virtually with their mentor and the broader cohort. Cohort members will be asked to keep a journal, to help document their work and associated challenges, lessons learned, and best practices. The cohort will participate in a final workshop to share outcomes. Finally, in Phase 3 (Aug '26 - July '27) the research team will ***carry out interviews and focus groups to rigorously explore differences and commonalities in how the libraries performed across all activities associated with implementing their archives.*** The team will also collaborate with cohort members to construct case studies that describe each library's experience. Case studies will be supported by participant observation by the researchers, the journals of the cohort members, and interview and focus group data. Insights generated will be used to improve the toolkit and training materials. Throughout, the research team will hold bi-weekly meetings to track progress and identify next steps.

**Diversity Plan:** Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are the core of this project. The project will ***support a cohort of library staff that represent diverse urban and rural communities.*** This cohort will be selected based on short applications, which will include a description of the impact that a community archive project would have on DEI within the applicant's community. We are particularly interested in including libraries that serve large Native populations, with the goal of building toward future work that explicitly expands the archive toolkit to Tribal library contexts. At a higher level, work with this cohort will ***improve existing educational resources so that a more diverse set of communities are supported to produce community archives.*** Finally, the community archives projects themselves are also oriented toward diversity, given their ***emphasis on producing more inclusive historical records in diverse institutional environments.***

**Project Results:** This project will produce several sets of deliverables. First, the project team will design and implement a ***training program*** for teaching librarians how to create and sustain their own community archives. The program will leverage the existing Community Archives Toolkit, but will be iteratively improved to include specific learnings about designing archives within diverse urban and rural library systems. Materials will be designed so that other institutions - from MLIS programs to library professional development organizations - can use them in their own training programs, contributing to the project's scalability and sustainability. Second, the project will support a cohort of eight libraries to produce their ***community archives***, directly addressing the need for more inclusive historical records. These archives will serve as models for other communities. Third, the project will produce ***fundamental new knowledge*** of the needs and best practices related to the development of community archives across diverse communities and library systems. The researchers will leverage these findings to produce a second version of the Community Archives Toolkit, and will also broadly publish and present on the findings in academic and practitioner journals and conferences.

**Budget Summary:** The proposed 3-year budget is for \$423,169, inclusive of UW's 55.5% indirect cost rate. The total anticipated costs includes \$100,234 for personnel (salaries + fringe benefits for UW faculty and research staff); \$50,347 for student support (research assistant salary, fringe, and tuition); and \$11,200 in conference travel and registration fees. \$31,771 is requested for consultant, Tacoma Public Libraries, of which all will support staff salaries, wages, and fringe benefits. \$83,132 is requested for other costs, including library stipends for participation in the community archive cohort (\$72,000), venue rental fees (\$1,000), workshop meals (\$632), transcription and publication fees (\$6,000), human subjects incentives (\$3,500). \$146,485 is requested for indirect costs. No cost share is requested.