LG-256631-OLS-24 - University of Kentucky (University of Kentucky Libraries)

"The Mountains Seemed Empty, but I Knew They Weren't"[1]: Elevating Appalachian Voices in Library Collections

Introduction: The University of Kentucky and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville request a National Leadership Grant for Libraries – Forum Project of $99,168, which will be expended over 2 years (2024-2026) to develop and convene a series of forums designed to: 1) develop a consortium of research libraries committed to implementing a strategy that will create a comprehensive, distributed, prospective shared Central and Southern Appalachian monograph collection; 2) identify challenges and barriers facing libraries, publishers, and vendors as research libraries seek to develop monograph collections that elevate traditionally marginalized voices and then develop strategies, approaches, and solutions to overcome these challenges; and, 3) develop an approach to develop a distributed, prospective shared monograph collections that could be implemented by other libraries and consortia. This project will support IMLS Goal 5 and objective 5.1 by bringing together libraries and other stakeholders to develop solutions and approaches that will allow libraries to collaborate on a prospective shared print project to create a comprehensive Appalachian monograph collection. The approach taken by the libraries in this project will be able to be replicated by other groups of libraries looking to advance other shared print projects, including, but not limited to, those that aim to elevate and enhance access to works by and about other marginalized communities.

Project Justification: In popular culture and the media, the people of Appalachia are too often stereotyped as poor, backward, and white. Appalachian dialects are often associated with negative connotations related to intelligence, ambition, wealth, and education, rather than the reality of historic geographic isolation and limited regional economic development opportunities. These stereotypes and generalizations speak to the discrimination and marginalization that the region faces, and they belie the rich culture and diversity of a region that stretches from New York to Mississippi.

Appalachia has a rich literary tradition. Noted contemporary writers include the likes of Wendell Berry, Silas House, and recent Pulitzer Prize winner, Barbara Kingsolver. Afrilachian poets and authors, including Nikki Finney, Frank X. Walker, and Crystal Wilkinson, and writers like bell hooks and Neema Avashia, have served to highlight and elevate the stories and voices of people of color who live in Appalachia, but are often overlooked because they do not align with stereotypes. While well-known authors are often published by national publishers, many others are published by university presses and smaller regional presses, such as Mountain State Press and Appalachia Book Company.

Despite having a number of major research libraries located in or adjacent to Appalachia, there is little focus on comprehensively collecting monographs about Appalachia or works by Appalachian authors. Appalachian collecting efforts are often centered within libraries' special collections, often focusing on rare books and manuscript collections and generally limiting access via resource sharing networks. An analysis done at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville showed significant gaps in their collection. Analyses of other regional research libraries' holdings based on the work done at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville suggested similar gaps in collections.

While these gaps will assuredly vary from institution to institution, a significant barrier to building Appalachian collections is incomplete or missing metadata that limits the identification of these works. Nonfiction works about Appalachia or issues occurring there are often not identified as such by book vendors. Even GOBI Library Solutions, which has added "Appalachian Mountains" as a geographic descriptor and "Appalachian Studies" as an interdisciplinary subject descriptor often does not properly label books with these tags. These challenges are even greater when it comes to identifying literary works by authors from Appalachia and works from small, regional publishers that may not be profiled by vendors like GOBI. Yet, changes in work flows by vendors and enhanced metadata coming from publishers could ameliorate many of these challenges. With better metadata, libraries would be able to identify more works of interest and could make better-informed local and collective collection development decisions.

With declining budgets and the proliferation of published content, it is challenging for most libraries - even the most well-resourced ones - to collect comprehensively. At the same time, it is not necessary for any one library to collect comprehensively (see articles by Way, Dempsey, Malpas and Lavoie, and Levine-Clark). Libraries have made significant progress cooperatively managing legacy print collections through shared print projects, yet in spite of the numerous calls to do so, there has been relatively little progress in cooperatively developing prospective shared print collections.

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[1] Gipe, Robert (2015). *Trampoline: An Illustrated Novel*, Ohio University Press.

Project Work Plan: This project will run for two years and will consist of two in-person forums and a series of virtual forums. Planning and facilitation of the forums and deliverables will be carried out by the project team: [Doug Way](#), [Erin Whitaker](#) and [Kat Brooks](#). The team has published and presented widely and has significant expertise in the areas of collection development, collection analysis, shared print, and the use of library collections. The project team will invite additional subject matter experts to the forums to supplement their expertise. The project team will also identify groups for involvement via an open call and targeted outreach to groups such as the [Appalachian College Association](#), [ASERL](#), [Stay Project](#), [Highlander](#), [Black in Appalachia](#), and [Invisible Histories](#).

The first in-person forum would be a two day meeting in Lexington, Kentucky in Fall 2024, which would bring together approximately 30-35 individuals, including librarians from potential partner institutions located in Central and Southern Appalachia, representatives from consortia who could facilitate partnerships and who have worked on similar collaborative collection development projects, representatives from regional university presses and literary presses, representatives from vendors that supply books to academic libraries, such as GOBI Library Solutions and Ex Libris, and Appalachian scholars and authors. Day one of the forum would explore the challenges facing each stakeholder group, while day two would examine possible solutions and start to chart paths forward. By holding this meeting in person, a more fluid approach to identifying possible solutions and collaborations can be taken. Individuals will be able to opt in and out of conversations exploring paths that could be taken.

The in-person forum would be followed up by a series of 3 to 5 synchronous, half-day online forums with different stakeholder groups. The exact make-up of these forums, the number of times the stakeholder groups would meet, and their work would be dictated by the issues surfaced and outcomes of the first in-person forum, but these could include publishers and book vendors working on metadata issues, libraries working with vendors to improve the description and discoverability of relevant works, and libraries working together to establish a coordinated collection development approach.

A final in-person forum would take place in concert with a relevant national or regional meeting, such as the annual [Charleston Conference](#), which brings together librarians, publishers, and vendors in conversations around common issues and concerns. At this meeting stakeholders from the first in-person forum and the subsequent online forums would share findings and next steps with core stakeholders and other interested parties. The intent of the in-person forum will be to engage interested parties in a dialogue and exchange of ideas and approaches rather than simply the one-way dissemination of information that only a whitepaper would provide.

Diversity Plan: While Appalachia as a whole is underrepresented in library collections and in popular and scholarly discourse, we recognize that other voices are equally or even more marginalized. This project seeks to develop solutions and frameworks that will allow libraries to diversify collections and elevate traditionally marginalized voices. Project outcomes and deliverables will be archived and disseminated openly and in accessible formats, increasing access outside the forum directly.

Project Results: The findings of this forum grant will be disseminated through a whitepaper that will be hosted on one or more institutional repositories and through an in-person forum held in concert with another conference. In the whitepaper and the in-person forum findings specific to the development of a comprehensive Appalachian monograph collection will be shared. The conveners and forum participants will also disseminate how metadata solutions identified by publishers and vendors will help libraries build collections that elevate marginalized voices. In addition, a universal approach to building prospective shared monograph collections will be shared, providing libraries a replicable framework, which can advance coordinated collection development efforts across libraries and consortia. The conveners will also seek to disseminate their findings in appropriate conferences and venues, such as the Charleston Conference, the Timberline Acquisitions Institute, Print Archiving Network fora, and the biannual ACRL conference.

Budget Summary: This two-year $99,168 project budget includes $12,218 for salary and wages, $2,586 for fringe benefits, $14,620 for a subaward to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for salary, fringe, travel, and indirect costs, $11,000 for conference/workshop, $45,000 for participant support, and $13,744 for indirect costs.