

## STORYCORPS

IMLS NLG-Libraries-FY24

One Small Step Libraries (August 1, 2024–January 31, 2026)

### Preliminary Proposal Narrative

#### I. INTRODUCTION

StoryCorps respectfully requests an 18-month Implementation grant of \$249,999 (August 1, 2024–January 31, 2026) from the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG-L) program to support One Small Step Libraries (OSS Libraries), a model of civic engagement and dialogue for libraries across the country. OSS Libraries will address NLG-L Goal 2, Objective 2.1 by supporting libraries as sites for civic engagement and dialogue, with the goal of nationwide replication in diverse library settings. It will leverage StoryCorps' history of partnering with and responding to the needs of libraries through tools such as our [StoryCorps DIY](#) (SCDIY) suite of free community resources, with the proven methodology for bridging political divides and combating toxic polarization of our [One Small Step](#) (OSS) initiative. OSS Libraries will be responsive to the lead-up and aftermath of the 2024 presidential election—a time when libraries will be called upon to support civic engagement, voter registration, and the countering of misinformation. StoryCorps will convene an advisory cohort of 3–5 libraries as partners on this project, including confirmed partners the Library of Virginia, Wichita Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and North Liberty Library in Eastern Iowa, along with a cohort 10 libraries for a community of practice that will gain professional development, share insights, and whose feedback will contribute to the ongoing development of OSS Libraries' offerings.

#### II. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

OSS is StoryCorps' multi-year effort to reduce animosity and dehumanization across political divides by forging new bonds of connection and trust, revealing we can overcome toxic polarization. This initiative brings strangers who disagree together to record a conversation about their lives, and in the process, rediscover their shared humanity. As we approach a presidential election year in 2024 that will only exacerbate divides and deepen divisions in communities, there is a compelling need to sharpen our approach and begin to scale the work nationally. OSS Libraries will also build on our SCDIY tools, which include a suite of free community resources developed to support the nationwide implementation of OSS. It will leverage the success and impact of OSS and SCDIY to bring tools for civic dialogue and engagement to libraries across the country.

OSS Libraries is the result of feedback from our trusted library network about the need for these tools and training, including strategic conversations with Shamichael Hallman, Director of Civic Health & Economic Opportunity at the Urban Libraries Council and Jennie Garner, Acting President at the Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL) to think about ways to support urban and rural libraries, and responds to research about the desire of libraries to engage in bridge-building activities, as well as the challenges, barriers, and needs for implementing this work.<sup>1</sup> A recent listening tour of seven library partners, including libraries in StoryCorps' SCDIY network and in OSS anchor communities, found excitement for OSS Libraries, with librarians recognizing both the need and desire for this type of programming. There has also been an acknowledgment of the challenges that come from our increasingly polarized culture and the ways in which libraries have become centers of controversy in some communities, with librarians emphasizing need for professional development, peer support, and dialogue around these issues, along with replicable, yet flexible, programming to support these efforts among diverse communities.

#### III. PROJECT WORK PLAN

**1. Pilot Programs** (August–December 2024): StoryCorps will work with an advisory cohort of 3–5 organizations (individual libraries, library systems, and library networks) to implement programming that supports civic connection and engagement opportunities for listening across divides. Using resources and insights from OSS, StoryCorps will work with advisors to identify and co-create an achievable, replicable program model for advisory libraries to pilot in fall 2024. Confirmed partner organizations include the Library of Virginia, who will customize these ready-made materials for use and implementation in the state of Virginia,

<sup>1</sup> IREX, "[How U.S. Public Libraries are Bridging Social Divides](#)," May 2023.

while working to create a scalable nationwide model of the program; the Wichita Public Library, who will use OSS Libraries to support their Candid Conversations program, engaging residents in conversations around community priorities; the Brooklyn Public Library, who will collaborate on program tools and needs as part of their bridge building activities; and the North Liberty Community Library in Eastern Iowa, who will help develop an OSS Libraries toolkit designed for smaller, rural libraries. **2. Community of Practice & Professional Development** (January–December 2025): StoryCorps will put out a broad call for participation through our SCDIY network of hundreds of libraries, and work in collaboration with the ARSL listserv, to convene a community of practice, bringing together librarians who are both newcomers and emerging leaders in facilitating civic dialogue bridge-building activities, around the questions: “What is the library’s role in bridging divides?” and “What is ‘one small step’ for my library/community?” Participants will be chosen based on a decision-making rubric that ensures wide recruitment, including at least 10 program-level librarians and practitioners representing a broad cross-section of the nation (rural and urban; large and small). This cohort will share insights and lessons, provide support, and engage in ongoing professional development opportunities and collaborative sessions to incorporate OSS Libraries’ materials into their existing programs, with their feedback used to further improve program offerings. **3. Refinement and Dissemination** (October 2025–January 2026): The resources developed in the first two phases of this project will be shared and disseminated through virtual networks, national library conferences, local and national channels of communication, a campaign targeting SCDIY users, and the community of practice developed in the second phase of this project, among others. In addition, new lessons and materials will be offered as a resource through the SCDIY free online learning hub and dedicated OSS Libraries page.

Project planning and development will be led by StoryCorps’ Director, Learning & Engagement and Managing Director, Program Operations, who will also oversee implementation. StoryCorps will hire an Associate Manager to support implementation, facilitate the community of practice cohort, and supervise a research and evaluation consultant. StoryCorps’ Director, Marketing & Digital Engagement will support branding and messaging; the Digital Production Manager will supervise a UX/UI consultant to create a landing page for the project’ tools and resources; and the Archivist will provide training and support on best practices for SCDIY recordings and materials, and support their addition to the StoryCorps Archive and OSS Libraries website.

#### IV. PROJECT RESULTS

Anticipated project results include: (1) Librarians will feel more equipped to host civic dialogue, bridge-building programs at their libraries; (2) Libraries and library-adjacent organizations will have access to a host of resources to support activities related to improving civic engagement and dialogue; (3) Librarians will have a community of practice to share and disseminate best practices and resources that respond to their own community needs; (4) Libraries will be equipped to serve as locations for civic engagement, regardless of the results of local or national elections.

OSS Libraries will create a suite of resources and materials that support bridge-building programs that are easily replicable and adaptable in libraries throughout the country. These tools and learnings will be disseminated at national library conferences such as LibLearnX and ARSL, a dedicated OSS Libraries landing page, blog posts about participant experiences and community of practice, social media posts, and resource hubs such as SCDIY and [Library Bridgebuilding](#), among others. Key performance indicators include the number of library partners, resource downloads, program attendees, public events, and trainings.

#### V. BUDGET SUMMARY

The total budget for OSS Libraries is \$280,966. StoryCorps requests \$249,999 from IMLS, with a cost share of \$30,967 to be covered by StoryCorps. **(1) Salaries and Wages:** \$136,803 for the project team, as listed above; **(2) Fringe Benefits:** \$33,517, at a rate of 24.5%; **(3) Travel:** \$9,680 for travel to three in-person conferences, including support to libraries to offset travel costs; **(4) Supplies, Materials, and Equipment:** \$2,120 for printing and creation of materials; **(5) Subawards and Contracts:** \$71,500 for library stipends, including our advisory team members and community of practice, and consultants, including UX/UI, research & evaluation, professional development, graphic design, and production; **(6) Student Support:** \$0; **(7) Other Costs:** \$3,850 for registration for three conferences, postage, and shipping; **(8) Indirect Costs** of \$23,496, at a rate of 10%.