

2024 IMLS NLG Proposal: National Forum to Connect and Advance Library Makerspaces

I. INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois and the Champaign-Urbana (C-U) Community Fab lab are requesting \$149,993 with no cost share for a one-year National Leadership Forum project, in partnership with [American Library Association](#), [Nation of Makers Library Makerspaces Working Group](#), and [Library Makers](#). The project addresses the need of leveraging and solidifying current networks, projects, and expertise in library makerspaces, charting the directions for advancing library makerspaces that reinforce and reconceptualize the fundamental values and the core mission of the contemporary librarianship, including access, community, learning, diversity, and more. This project addresses the IMLS National Leadership Grant for Libraries grant program *Goal 1: Build the workforce and institutional capacity for managing the national information infrastructure and serving the information and education needs of the public* and all three of its objectives. The intended project results will support a newly proposed ALA Round Table on makerspaces and develop infrastructure and strategic directions for a sustainable national-level network of current and future library makerspace professionals, administrators, and scholars and educators in higher education from diverse backgrounds.

II. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Since the opening of the first 21st-century U.S. public library makerspace at Fayetteville Free Library in New York in 2011, library makerspaces have consistently experienced substantial growth for over a decade. A search for IMLS-funded projects from the Office of Library Services reveals that approximately 36 projects were awarded regarding makerspaces between 2012 and 2023. These projects encompass a range of objectives and scopes, including but not limited to the development of a makerspace, evaluation, physical and online spaces, post-pandemic issues, accessibility, makerspaces in school, public, academic, rural, and urban libraries, some leading to the creation of makerspace toolkits and guidelines (Chang et al, 2019; Children's Museum of Pittsburgh & IMLS, 2016; Knox, Koh, & Zalot, 2022; Makers in the Library, 2023). Recognizing the growing need for library makerspace professionals to connect and share resources, several networks have emerged, including the Nation of Makers, Library Makers, Makerspace for Innovation and Research in Academics (MIRA), and regional and local groups. This moment presents an excellent opportunity to solidify these existing networks and expertise, as well as an essential need to reflect on the achievements and progress made in the maker movement within libraries over the past decade and chart a course for the future.

ALA, the world's oldest and largest library association, provides leadership for the nation's library and information services, and it has a far-reaching impact on libraries and their communities. ALA offers various Round Tables from which members can choose based on specific areas. These Round Tables span different ALA divisions and types of libraries, and they provide members with valuable opportunities to explore their interest, network with peers, and get involved and share expertise to build the resources and tools the profession needs. Currently, the project team is working toward the establishment of a new ALA Makerspace Round Table, which requires signatures of at least 150 ALA members. Once established, a national conversation is necessary to develop its strategic directions, bylaws, and other foundational infrastructure to ensure the group is sustainable, effective, and beneficial for its members. As we strive to establish a sustainable network focused on library makerspaces, the national forum aims to foster conversations and develop directions regarding the value and roles of library makerspaces that solidify and re-conceptualize the fundamental mission of libraries, centering around ALA Core Values such as access, community, learning, and diversity. The proposed IMLS NLG Forum will serve as an ideal venue to support this endeavor, ensuring the inclusion of voices and expertise from makerspace projects previously funded by IMLS and other key players in the field.

III. PROJECT WORK PLAN

This IMLS Forum project will initiate on August 1, 2024 and end on July 31, 2025. The target launch date of the Makerspace Round Table is September 2024. We plan to hold a series of in-person and virtual town hall

meetings as part of the Forum. The project will culminate in a white paper synthesizing the discussions and outcomes from these meetings. Please note that we are reasonably confident that the Round Table request will be approved by August 2024, given our partnerships and current interests. However, if the Round Table has not been approved by the start of the IMLS project in August 2024, we will use this forum opportunity to bring the library makers community together to continue pursuing the Round Table's establishment or to identify challenges and explore opportunities. Key milestones and timelines include: project initiation (Aug 2024), 2 virtual town hall meetings (Nov and Dec 2024), remote work group meetings (Sep 2024, Nov 2024, Jan 2025, Mar 2025, and May 2025), ALA Annual Meeting (June 2025), a concluding webinar (July 2025), and project completion (July 2025), followed by a white paper completion and dissemination.

The project includes the following personnel and organizations: The Project Director is Dr. Kyungwon Koh, an Associate Professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign iSchool and the Director of the C-U Community Fab Lab. Dr. Rebecca M. Teasdale, Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois Chicago, serves as the Project Co-Director. ALA is the oldest and largest library association in the world. Nation of Makers is a national nonprofit supporting America's maker organizations and it includes the Libraries Working Group. Library Makers is a community of library makerspace professionals, made possible through the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Library Program.

IV. DIVERSITY PLAN

Library Makerspaces contribute to the values of equity and diversity in librarianship, by providing access to tools, spaces, expertise, and social opportunities for community members with different backgrounds. These resources may not be readily accessible to them otherwise. Literature indicates that library makerspaces have expanded and diversified the range of maker projects and embraced user groups who may not have previously identified themselves as a maker. This National Forum will intentionally facilitate a discussion on diversity and equity in the maker movement, and we will ensure diverse representation among participants by extending invitations to groups that have been underrepresented in maker culture. We will also invite the directors of the makerspace projects IMLS has funded from 2012 to 2023, many of which include a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion in making.

V. PROJECT RESULTS

The results of this 1 year-project include: 1 in-person forum at the ALA 2025 Annual Meeting, 2 virtual town hall meetings and 1 concluding webinar, and 3-5 workgroup meetings to set down ALA Round Table bylaws, ALA Round Table webpage and communication channels, and a white paper. In addition, we will create a pop-up maker booth at ALA 2025 to provide participants an opportunity to make, learn, and network during the conference.

VI. BUDGET SUMMARY

We request total sponsor costs of \$149,993. Sponsor costs are: 1) Salaries and Wages: \$24,086; 2) Benefits: \$9,482; 3) Travel: \$25,850; 4) Supplies: \$1,250; 5) Subawards: \$0; 6) Student Support (direct costs): \$25,569; 7) Other costs: \$11,715; 8) Indirect costs: \$52,041, of which \$9,459 are for Student Support.

REFERENCES

- Chang, S., Penney, L., Wardrip, P., Anderson, A., Craddock, I., Martin, C., Millerjohn, R., Stone, N., Mohammadi, G., & Dow, K. (2019). *Opportunities and vignettes for library makerspaces*. https://makered.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/IMLS-LibraryMakerspaces2019_WPweb_final.pdf
- Children's Museum of Pittsburgh & Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2016). *Making + Learning in Museums and Libraries: A Practitioner's Guide and Framework*. <https://www.imls.gov/publications/making-learning-museums-and-libraries>
- Knox, E., Koh, K., & Zalot, A. (2022). *Measuring the Impact and Value of Makerspaces in Public Libraries*. <https://www.measuringmakerspaces.com/white-paper>
- Makers in the Library. (2023). *Makers in the Library: Resources to create a makerspace with and for your community- on any budget*. <https://www.makersinthelibrary.org>