

Understanding the natural world is critical for stewardship of the planet. With more people residing in cities, much has been written about the decline in children's and adults' access to our natural world. Recent surveys say that American children spend an average of seven minutes a day outside. Poets House, a 70,000-volume poetry library and literary center, proposes to work with library systems and natural history museums in Milwaukee, WI and Salt Lake City, UT to create community anchors that can provide the public with multiple humanities-based entry points for STEM learning of the importance of natural history to every aspect of life.

This project is an expansion of our successful 5-city project, *Language of Conservation*, which created joint programming and utilized poetry in libraries and zoos to foster issues of conservation. Based on professional evaluations, we learned that displaying thought-provoking poetry text at key exhibits deepened people's connections to the idea of conservation (even though people didn't realize what they were reading was poetry) and made them feel more connected to their surrounding environment.

Statement of Need

A recent scientificamerican.com blog stated that when "kids do not grow up around natural history, they become adults who are not only ignorant of natural history, but do not care about nature and view it as disposable and unimportant." This project, which aligns with IMLS Strategic Goals #1 (learning in libraries), #2 (community anchor institutions) and #3 (discovery of knowledge and cultural heritage), will create partnerships between the Milwaukee Public Library System and the Milwaukee Public Museum and the Salt Lake City Public Library System and the Natural History Museum of Utah to offer collaborative programs illuminating the role of natural history in our everyday life, "poetry paths" to showcase new ways of experiencing the language and ideas of natural history, and paired poet/scientist residencies that will work with institutions and communities to join science learning with poetry. As librarians shift away from their traditional support role to one in which they become equal thought-partners with fellow cultural institutions and active participants in programming and community engagement, this project will enable librarians to become facilitators of STEM knowledge within their communities, as well as—and as importantly—reach thousands of children, teens and families in each city.

Both the library systems and natural history museums of Salt Lake City and Milwaukee—Milwaukee's library system was a *Language of Conservation* partner—are fully committed to this project and will provide the necessary outreach to their local and state networks to ensure the project's success. Salt Lake City and Milwaukee share key demographic similarities: large populations of people under 18 and those between 25-44; populations that are 50% religious; and small enclaves of refugees (in Salt Lake City, mainly Bosnian and Sri Lankan; in Milwaukee, Hmong, Somali and Burmese). Yet, the population size and racial makeup of the two cities differ vastly: the population of Salt Lake City is close to 600,000 people of which 75% are white, 17% Hispanic, 4% Asian and 3% black. While Milwaukee has a population of approximately 190,000 of which 39% are white, 39% black, 16% Hispanic and 4% Asian. Working with both cities will allow us to create a strong baseline model, while also accounting for larger vs. smaller cities and cities that are more homogenous vs. those that are more diverse.

Work Plan

We anticipate this project will create a shift in the perception, meaning and value of libraries and museums for librarians, scientists and those working in the humanities, where practitioners learn from one another and stimulate new thinking about their work. To that end, we propose a series of project activities: 1) convening representatives from the libraries and museums together with poets and science advisors for an intensive 2-3 day retreat that will lay the foundation for the collaborative partnerships, identify potential partnerships with government, nonprofit, business, neighborhood groups and schools, determine possible ways to reach different audiences, and provide librarians with a preliminary toolkit (a detailed how-to about presenting

public literature programs in libraries and community settings, marketing materials to optimally present programs to different audiences, bibliography, and evaluation protocols based upon our previous handbooks), which will also serve as an iterative, working document throughout the process of the collaborations and residencies; 2) establishing 9-month paired residencies for scientists and poets in libraries and natural science museums that will further enable librarians to become active participants in the designing of co-created public programs by familiarizing them with local scientists and writers who incorporate science in their art in order to become comfortable facilitators of science learning; 3) installing temporary poetry paths related the public programs in both libraries and museums that will allow visitors to experience natural history through fresh language they may be unaccustomed to, surprised by and deeply engaged with; and 4) creating opportunities for public feedback with librarians, poet/scientist residents and other partners in order to find out what is being learned, ideas for future programs, if synergies between science and poetry and/or museums and libraries are being discovered, and what social media projects should be part of the program.

As with *Language of Conservation*, we will work with external consultancy firm New Knowledge to document and evaluate through one-on-one interviews and group interviews with participants and exit surveys with visitors, what was successful about the project and what could be recalibrated in the future regarding: the programmatic and institutional balance between the libraries and natural history museums; the effectiveness of the paired scientist/poet residencies; institutional and public reaction to the co-created programming and poetry paths; whether visitors felt more deeply engaged with issues of natural history and why; and the impact of this project on the institutions. The final evaluation will result in a “white paper” that will serve as a road map for future projects, which will be accessible online for free. It will also result in a fine-tuning of the toolkit for replication efforts, which will also be available online for free via our website and partner websites.

Additionally, we anticipate reaching hundreds of librarians and hundreds of museum professionals through dissemination via: local and state libraries, librarian peer training, professional publications, and conferences for professional librarians (such as the American Library Association) and museum professionals. Our other main audience is children, teens and families. The library systems and natural history museums of Milwaukee and Salt Lake City—and Poets House—will work with the institutions’ educational networks, in addition to school networks and neighborhood and community associations to reach as many children, teens and families as possible. We anticipate this project will reach at least 10,000 children, teens and families in each city.

National Impact

This IMLS grant will allow us to spearhead an innovative, replicable model of science-literature partnership that will result in new humanities approaches for engaged communication across disciplines, furthering STEM resources. This replicable community engagement model will provide library professionals with new skills in collaborating with other cultural organizations and new capacities to engage as equals in the exploration and presentation of new forms of public presentation and dialogue. It will also unite science and literary arts by enabling libraries and museums to be community anchors, leading to new cross-sectoral/institutional learning and new dialogues with local communities and visitors.

Poets House has over 25 years of experience partnering successfully with institutions. Funding of \$248,000 over 15 months will enable Poets House to provide: facilitation and training to the Milwaukee Public Library System, Salt Lake City Public Library System, The Natural History Museum of Utah and Milwaukee Public Museum (\$35,000); fees for the poets and scientists in residence (\$38,000); travel and planning for the convening (\$30,000); design and implementation for the poetry paths (\$35,000); programming budget for each institution (\$20,000); marketing (\$10,000); and partial administrative fees (\$40,000) and consultancy fees for New Knowledge’s research, evaluation and documentation (\$40,000). Funds will be matched through private, foundation, and possibly corporate funding streams.