

Summary: The University of Michigan School of Information (UMSI) requests \$412,847 from the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program for a three-year Early Career Research Development project to investigate how public libraries can work with community partners to meet the social determinant of health (SDH)-related information needs and practices of individuals navigating reentry after experiencing incarceration. The Project Director (PD), Dr. Megan Threats, will work in collaboration with staff of the Detroit Public Library, Ypsilanti District Library, federally qualified health centers across the state of Michigan, and the Michigan Department of Corrections Offender Success Program with the goal of enhancing the capacity of public libraries to work with community stakeholders to better support the SDH-related information needs of formerly incarcerated individuals. The proposed project works to develop: 1) an empirical model describing the institution-oriented (e.g., library, health, government) health information worlds and needs of formerly incarcerated individuals; 2) an open-source toolkit and training materials for public library staff seeking to better serve formerly incarcerated individuals in their communities; 3) a reentry planning guide, and 4) evidence-based recommendations for library staff collaboration across sectors to enhance services, programming, and resources for formerly incarcerated individuals. **Need:** Libraries are community anchors that play a critical role in providing information, programming, and services to vulnerable populations in their communities¹. While there is empirical evidence that public library staff work to address the SDH-related information needs of patrons, there is no research to our knowledge about the SDH-related information needs and practices of formerly incarcerated individuals^{2,4}. To enhance the capacity of public library staff to work with community partners to meet the SDH-related information needs of formerly incarcerated individuals, it is necessary to first identify the specific needs and information practices of this community. Thus, the project addresses the following **research questions:**

RQ1: What are the SDH-related information needs and practices of formerly incarcerated individuals?

- RQ1.1 How does *intersectional stigma* shape these needs and practices?
- RQ1.2 What *information systems* (human and information and communications technology) support the SDH-related information needs and practices of formerly incarcerated individuals?
- RQ1.3 What are the *critical elements* of a reentry planning guide for formerly incarcerated individuals?

RQ2: How have public libraries *previously* supported individuals in their communities navigate reentry after experiencing incarceration?

- RQ2.1 To what extent do public libraries *currently identify and reach out* to formerly incarcerated individuals in their communities?
- RQ2.2 To what extent do public libraries *collaborate with formerly incarcerated individuals and staff at community-based organizations and healthcare institutions* to address the SDH-related information needs of formerly incarcerated individuals?

RQ3: What are the *professional development* needs and experiences of public library staff and administrators providing services and programming for formerly incarcerated individuals?

- RQ3.1 What *training* have library administrators and staff received to address the SDH-related information needs of formerly incarcerated individuals?
- RQ3.2 What are the critical elements of a *training program and toolkit* for library administrators and staff to address the SDH-related information needs of formerly incarcerated individuals?

This project aligns with a major goal of the Laura Bush program: It enhances the training and professional development of the library workforce to meet the needs of their communities (**Goal 3**), in particular, (**Objective 3.2**) the creation of a training program that builds library “workforce skills and expertise in contributing to the well-being of communities.”

Project Justification: Annually, more than 600,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons in the United States⁵. These individuals are disproportionately Black and Latino, have a low socioeconomic status, lower educational attainment, and a high burden of chronic illnesses and conditions^{6,7}. Upon release, individuals navigating reentry face structural barriers to housing, employment, literacy (e.g., health, digital, reading), healthcare, transportation, and are at a heightened risk of poor health outcomes. In the PD’s previous work developing reentry planning resources as a Public Services and Reference Librarian, she found that her library was often noted as the most accessible local institution for individuals newly released and navigating reentry in the city of Philadelphia⁸⁻⁹. While libraries are community anchors that provide a range of services, programming and resources for vulnerable populations, previous research suggest that library staff feel that their professional training, or lack thereof, left them ill equipped to assist community members seeking help to address their SDH-related information needs^{10,11}. Despite the lack of training public library staff have reported in this area, public libraries have a rich history of serving as partners in health promotion for their communities^{12,13}. This rich history demonstrates the utility of public libraries leveraging community collaboration to better meet the needs of their communities. Due to the structural barriers facing individuals navigating reentry after incarceration, libraries are well-positioned to help this population improve their access to critical information and resources. In recent years, there has been an uptick in the exploration of the role libraries play in providing services to formerly incarcerated individuals^{14,15}. However, empirical investigations of the information needs and experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals who utilize library services to

navigate reentry are often missing from this growing body of work¹⁶. Little is known about the SDH-related information needs and practices of formerly incarcerated individuals, and their roles in the development and implementation of public library services and programs meant to help them navigate reentry. Even less is known about the specific professional development needs and experiences of public library administrators and staff providing services and programming for formerly incarcerated individuals. Thus, this project aims to fill these gaps in knowledge, and create a training program and resources that build public library staff members skills and expertise in contributing to the well-being of formerly incarcerated individuals in their communities.

Project Work Plan: To address the aforementioned gaps, this project will use a **methodological approach** developed by the PD (Threats, under review) that integrates intersectionality theory with principles of community-based participatory research and an information practices approach to provide a robust understanding of the information needs and practices of individuals, especially those who experience marginalization¹⁷⁻¹⁹. This approach centers the knowledge and agency of individuals who experience intersecting stigmas rooted in the interconnectedness of their social status (e.g., ex-offender) and socially-constructed identities (e.g. race, sexual orientation, gender, class, etc.), the dimension of power or oppression present within each identity, and how these collectively shape their information needs and practices²⁰. A *community advisory board* comprised of formerly incarcerated individuals, social workers, community health workers, and library and information science professionals/researchers with expertise in working with individuals navigating reentry after incarceration will help guide this project (n=6). Board members will be recruited via the professional network of the PD. During the first phase of the study (**Year 1, Part 1 – Aug 2023-Dec 2023**), to ensure that the SDH-related information needs and practices of formerly incarcerated individuals are identified *prior to* the development of programs, resources, and training mechanisms for public library staff seeking to enhance their capacity to serve formerly incarcerated individuals, a *state-wide survey* exploring the SDH-related information needs and practices of formerly incarcerated individuals (ages 18+) will be disseminated (n=650) (**RQ1**). The community advisory board, along with the project collaborators and PD will help recruit survey participants through convenience and purposive sampling. Purposive sampling will be used with the intention of having a diverse sample of formerly incarcerated individuals living in urban, rural, and suburban areas across the state of various genders, sexual orientations, and race/ethnicities. The PD will conduct a descriptive analysis of survey data, and multivariate logistic regression analyses to determine correlates of SDH-related information practices and accessibility. These analyses will be conducted using SPSS v27. During the next phase of the study (**Year 1, Part 2 – Jan 2024-June 2024**) the PD will recruit n=20 of the survey respondents to participate in *semi-structured interviews* to further elaborate on their SDH-related information needs and practices. (**RQ1**). The interview guide will be developed in collaboration with the community advisory board, and based in part on survey results. The PD and Graduate Student Research Assistant (GSRA) will conduct interviews, which will be audiorecorded. In July and August 2024, the PD and the GSRA will analyze interview data thematically using grounded theory methodologies (e.g., line-by-line coding, focused coding, and the constant comparative method)^{21,22}. During the second phase of the study, (**Year 2, Part 1 – Sept 2024-Mar 2025**) the PD will work with staff at the Detroit Public Library and Ypsilanti District Library to recruit a convenience purposive sample of n= 40-50 library staff (including administrators) via the Michigan Library Association and JESSE list-servs to participate in semi-structured interviews about how their libraries have previously supported formerly incarcerated individuals in their communities (**RQ2**), and the professional development needs and experiences of public library staff and administrators providing services and programming for formerly incarcerated individuals (**RQ3**). The PD will conduct these interviews, and a GSRA will take notes during the interviews. The PD will audio record and transcribe the interview texts, and analyze the data thematically. During the third phase of the study, (**Year 2, Part 2 – Apr 2025-Sept 2025**) formerly incarcerated individuals and staff from public libraries and community-based health organizations will participate in *community design workshops* (six groups of five, n=30) to develop a reentry planning guide, and an open-source toolkit and training materials for library staff. During year 3, (**Oct. 2025-July 2026**) the **Project Results:** including the *reentry planning guide*, *open-source toolkit* and *training materials* will be disseminated by the project team via list-servs, professional conferences, and at community-sites. The toolkit will be the first of its kind developed based on an in-depth, empirical information needs and practices investigation and in collaboration with formerly incarcerated individuals. The toolkit and training materials will be open-access online on a project website hosted by UMSI. The *empirical model* that will be developed can be used by other libraries nation-wide seeking to develop and/or enhance their services to formerly incarcerated individuals. It will be published in a peer-reviewed journal, and shared at the Public Library Association, Association for Information Science and Technology, and American Public Health Association conferences. **Diversity Plan:** Given that this project is geared toward enhancing the capacity of public libraries to better serve the needs of formerly incarcerated individuals, a population that is disproportionately Black and Latino, economically disadvantaged, and with a higher burden of chronic illnesses and conditions in comparison to the general population, it helps to expand the field's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion of historically marginalized and under-resourced communities.

Budget Summary: The estimated budget is \$412,847. IMLS Direct Costs include \$64,256 Salaries/Benefits, \$13,430 for site visit and dissemination travel, \$72,500 for Research Costs (including compensation of survey/interview participants and advisory board members) and \$136,135 Student Support Costs. (IMLS Direct Costs \$286,321 + \$126,526 IDC @ 56% = \$412,847). There is no cost share requirement for this research proposal.