NARRATIVE

Project Justification

Clemson University Libraries and partners at Western Carolina University and Purdue University request $658,250 (with $0 cost sharing) in an applied research grant to conduct a two-year, mixed methods workforce study of racially and ethnically minoritized academic library support staff. This proposal follows the successful completion of a one-year research planning grant funded by IMLS. The proposed project will support **LB21 Program Goal # 1: to recruit, train, develop, and retain a diverse workforce**, and **Objective 1.1 to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to pursue professional careers in library and information science**. For this study, we will use the following definitions:

- *Academic libraries* are the libraries serving accredited, degree-granting higher education institutions within the United States and its territories, including universities, colleges, and community colleges.
- *Library support staff* are library employees who are not in senior administrative positions and whose job title and job requirements do not require the credential of a MLS/MLIS or related degree, even if the employee happens to have earned such a degree. Support staff often are also referred to as "paraprofessionals."

This research is important because it will increase the profession-wide understanding of the multiple barriers (systemic and localized) to achieving greater LIS professional workforce diversity. A lack of diversity in the library professional workforce is well-documented. (Citations 1,2,3,4,5) One recent report noted, "In spite of concerted efforts from major library associations as well as library and information science programs over the last several decades, little progress has been made concerning the representation of racial and ethnic categories that, historically, have been underrepresented within the profession."(Citation 6) Minoritized representation within the professional librarian workforce has held steady at 10-12% for decades. In comparison, the percentage of underrepresented groups as a percentage of the U.S. population has increased to nearly 40% during the same period. (Citations 7,8)

This is a problem across all types of libraries, but the American Library Association's "Diversity Counts" and other studies demonstrated that it is more pronounced in academic libraries. (Citations 9,10) With minimal improvements despite more than two decades of national efforts to diversify the professional librarian workforce, what more can be done? One promising idea for more successful diversity recruiting can be found within the same data that confirms the problem. Previous studies showed that library "paraprofessionals" (non-librarian clerical and support staff) are more diverse than their professional librarian counterparts. While only 11% of degreed academic librarians are non-white, almost 25% of paraprofessionals in academic libraries identify as members of underrepresented groups. This data raises exciting possibilities for research to inform future minority recruiting efforts;perhaps this group is the missing piece of the puzzle. A preliminary literature search identified multiple past studies on changes in the jobs of academic library paraprofessionals (Citations 12,13,14,15,16) and other publications suggesting better ways to support paraprofessionals. However, little was found concerning diversity among paraprofessional ranks, even among IMLS-funded projects. Clemson University and its partners believe this is a largely unexplored opportunity. For these reasons, the applicants propose to conduct a national workforce study of racially and ethnically diverse support staff to gain new insights and understanding of their current status (numbers, distribution, demographics, levels of educational attainment, activities, etc.), their professional interests and aspirations, and potential barriers (financial, cultural, personal) that might hinder recruitment, training, and placement programs.

We believe the results from our proposed study may dispute common misconceptions regarding recruitment, retention, promotion, and training of these populations and provide insight into academic library climates for minoritized, non-MLS staff. The study will be one of the largest and most comprehensive investigations of the experiences of minoritized support staff in academic libraries. Our planning grant began with a focus on three states (Indiana, Maryland, and North Carolina), but the next iteration will be more intensive and national in scope. Generalized observations may also lead to innovation

in program planning to counter this population's stated barriers to career advancement. Through a survey plus supporting focus groups and interviews, we will gather rich narratives that illuminate the lived experiences, challenges, and motivations of minoritized support staff. This data will provide essential context and paint a holistic picture of their experiences within academic libraries.

Research Questions, Relevance and Theoretical Framing

Q1. How do racially and ethnically minoritized academic library support staff describe their work experiences within academic libraries?
Q2. How do minoritized academic library support staff perceive the career ladder within academic libraries?
Q3. What barriers to career advancement do minoritized academic library support staff perceive in academic libraries?
Q4. What opportunities for career advancement do minoritized library support staff perceive there to be in academic libraries?
Q5. What incentives or motivations would most likely cause minoritized academic library support staff to pursue career advancement toward professional librarian positions?

Prior research has yielded limited insights into the demographic makeup and workplace experiences of minoritized support staff in academic libraries. We lack data specifically focused on racial/ethnic classifications, job classifications and the career aspirations of this group. Except for large-scale demographic studies conducted previously by the American Library Association (ALA) and Ithaka S+R, there have been no comprehensive studies of demographics, inclusive of racial/ethnic classifications, for minoritized support staff in academic libraries, nor have there been extensive efforts to collect data on the workplace experiences of these populations. This would be a seminal and comprehensive study.

Though the previously mentioned studies are essential, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) serves as the single, most crucial source of comprehensive data on institutions of higher learning in the United States. This data includes information on academic libraries, such as staffing levels, collections, and expenditures. However, the proposed elimination of the IPEDS Academic Libraries (AL) survey in 2025-26 (Citation 17) creates a critical urgency for this study. The AL survey is currently the only source of comprehensive data on academic libraries, including staffing levels. Without the AL survey, gathering data on the experiences and demographics of minoritized library support staff will become significantly more challenging. Our national study of minoritized support staff will fill a critical gap in understanding diversity, equity, and inclusion within academic libraries, especially considering the upcoming planned cessation of the vital data collected by the IPEDS Academic Libraries survey in 2025-26.

Our planning grant proposal asked, "What more can be done despite decades of national efforts to diversify the librarian workforce, with little progress?" This project will be continue the planning grant's original intent: to generate new insights and understanding of minoritized academic library support staff's status (numbers, distribution, demographics, levels of educational attainment, activities, etc.), their professional interests and aspirations, and barriers (financial, cultural, personal, other) that might hinder recruitment, retention, and advancement of minoritized populations in the field. With IMLS support, this two-year study promises to be a catalyst for change, and it will provide actionable insights to address and dismantle systemic inequities, and shape a more diverse, inclusive, and thriving library workforce for the future.

Planning Grant Results

This research proposal follows the successful completion of an IMLS-funded planning grant (RE-252396-OLS-22). During the planning grant project, we designed and tested research instruments and methods for the envisioned study, assembled a standing advisory board composed entirely of minoritized academic library staff, began establishing

communication networks in multiple states and regions, and collected initial quantitative and qualitative data to understand the target population better. Now that the planning grant is completed, the project team is prepared to conduct a full study to answer the above questions. Major activities within the planning grant included promoting and raising awareness of the proposed research to encourage participation; designing and testing the mixed-methods study; analyzing quantitative and qualitative data (such as data from IPEDS, the U.S. Census, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics) to establish greater context and understanding about minoritized academic library support staff nationally; building and strengthening relationships with related researchers and projects; and putting in place the relationships, logistics, and processes to help ensure the envisioned national study will be successful.

During the planning grant phase, we investigated the feasibility of a nationwide study on library paraprofessionals by gathering initial data from 278 libraries in three states. While the response rate (155 libraries) wasn't optimal for drawing broad conclusions, it provided valuable insights. These libraries collectively reported a total of 2,507 library support staff, with 27.4% of that total identifying as a racial or ethnic minority. This finding aligned with previous research. Our work confirmed the need for a comprehensive study and informed our envisioned nationwide effort by highlighting the target population's potential sample size and demographics. This initial data collection was a stepping-stone, guiding us in designing the full-fledged study. In addition to data, our final report (see Supporting Document 3) highlighted valuable lessons learned during the planning grant that will be addressed in the plan for implementing the full-fledged study.

Methodology

Leveraging the groundwork laid during the planning grant, the project team intends to deploy a survey instrument (see Supporting Document 2 for the version tested during the planning grant) to capture the experiences of minoritized academic library support staff. Informed by the diverse perspectives and experiences of our Advisory Board and refined through pilot testing with over 250 respondents, this validated instrument can help unlock critical insights into the library workforce. Following Sankofa's (2022) transformative measurement development methodology (Citation 18), with input from our advisory board, the co-designed instrument allows support staff to report their perceptions of barriers (e.g., tuition for MLS programs) to professional librarianship. With the descriptive intentions of a workforce study, we anticipate that large-scale deployment of our survey in conjunction with focus groups in a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design will allow us to describe barriers to pathways to librarianship (i.e., to understand why so many minoritized individuals remain in support staff roles instead of becoming librarians).

The co-designed survey instrument consists of five sections seeking information regarding career considerations and aspirations, job satisfaction, library climate, opportunities for mentorship, and demographics. Part one examines career considerations and aspirations, and was co-designed with the advisory board to explore multi-levels of decision-making about career advancement using advanced logic trees. For example, if a respondent said they were interested in becoming a reference librarian but had yet to pursue the position, there would be follow-up questions about why they had not pursued it. The job satisfaction section gathers information on satisfaction in their current position. The library climate section borrowed from previously established scales about the racial climate in the workplace and a scale on the experiences of microaggressions in the workplace.

Setting a survey response rate goal is challenging for this research because no specific figures are available about the total size of the population we wish to study. IPEDS provides aggregated numbers of the total numbers of library employees in colleges and universities but does not provide granular racial or ethnic data for just library employees within institutions. Instead of being able to send targeted survey invitations exclusively to members of this target population, the team will broadcast national and regional messages (through email lists, consortia, library associations, project partners, etc.) to explain the project and invite responses from those who identify as members of the minoritized or underrepresented racial and ethnic groups we have defined for this study. However, previous studies by ALA and other organizations have shown

that approximately 20-25% of the non-MLS paraprofessional staff in academic libraries likely belong to minoritized and underrepresented groups. Our work during the planning grant used 2020 IPEDS data to identify approximately 4,250 academic libraries in-scope for this study, with a total of 85,544 employees. Of that total number of employees, 22,567 were listed as "non-librarians" and "non-professional staff". Using these numbers, if 20% of those 22,567 library employees belong to minoritized and underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, our best estimate of the total size of the population we wish to study is 4,513 people. We will set a goal for our <u>survey response rate between 40% and 50%, meaning we will strive to obtain responses from 1,800 to 2,300 people</u>.

Recognizing the limits of a survey in capturing our target audience's full range of experiences (Citation 19), we will also conduct regional focus groups with minoritized library support staff across the US, categorized by Census Bureau regions. The focus groups will be a mixture of virtual and face-to-face events, and will allow participants to discuss and define issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion within academic libraries and clarify their perceived barriers to advancement and obtaining an MLS. Each focus group will participate in a semi-structured discussion guided by a facilitator, exploring experiences, challenges and opportunities in academic libraries (Supporting Document 4). The data collected through these focus groups will be transcribed and analyzed thematically, enriching our survey findings.

When the project team reaches the stage of having a draft report of our research findings, we will post it for two months for open comments. We will use Docketscope or a similar platform designed for public comment analysis to analyze qualitative feedback received in the open comment period. Data from the analysis of the open-ended comments will be integrated with our report of survey findings and insights from the regional focus groups.

Project Work Plan

As in the planning grant, our project hinges on completing several major project activities. As co-designers of the survey in the planning grant phase, our advisory board returns to us with an expanded role dispersed throughout our project activities. This expanded role offers a valuable learning experience for board members, allowing them to gain practical experience in analyzing data, presenting research and conducting focus groups. Their continued commitment is evidenced by each member's positionality statements (see Supporting Document 1), expressing their dedication to the project's goals. Our project team work to ensure completion of the following activities:

Activity 1: Kickoff. Our kickoff activities will focus on establishing a solid foundation for the project. During this phase, we will apply for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Clemson University before proceeding with the study. Based on the work with an IRB during the planning grant, we anticipate a smooth and timely approval process. Website development will begin during kickoff. Our comprehensive, interactive website will include information about the study's objectives, methodology, timeline, project milestones and ways to participate. The site will consist of a calendar of upcoming conference events we'll attend and webinars we'll host. Following guidance from our IRB office, the site's interactive features may include a Qualtrics response ticker widget (to show the number of surveys taken) and an interactive map that displays geographic survey participation rates. Other critical kickoff activities include:

- reuniting the existing team and welcoming any new members to the project
- establishing regular meeting schedules with the project team and advisory board members
- developing communication protocols, and assigning areas of responsibility
- finalizing and optimizing our survey for distribution
- creating a focus group participant application
- developing a targeted conference travel schedule for project promotion and presentations
- reconnect with partners established during the planning grant

We also will pursue new partnerships across the country with national and state library associations, library alliances, and library consortia to promote the study. We'll target regional library associations and relevant listservs frequented by our target audiences. We'll collaborate with the Joint Council of Librarians of Color (JCLC Inc.) to ensure our project reaches a broad audience of minoritized academic library support staff. This organization represents five leading library associations serving diverse communities, including the American Indian Library Association (AILA), the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA), the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-speaking.

Activity 2: Market. To generate widespread awareness and engagement for our project, we'll launch a multi-faceted, multilingual marketing campaign titled *"100 Days to Have Your Say- Take Our Survey"*. In addition to continued web development work, during the marketing stage, we will engage in the following:

- Social media engagement: We'll heavily utilize Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn platforms to share project information (in English and Spanish) updates, engage with audiences, and answer questions. We'll encourage visitors to these pages to "follow us" for the latest updates on the project.
- Conference participation and webinar hosting: We'll explore opportunities to present and/or exhibit at relevant conferences and offer webinars discussing our survey.

Activity 3: Survey Launch. For 100 days we'll invite academic library support staff who identify as belonging to one or more of the following racial or ethnic backgrounds to complete our survey and volunteer for focus groups via our website: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern or North African, Two or more races, and Unknown. During the 100-day data collection, we will utilize partnerships, established contacts, referral systems, and personal networks to encourage participants to complete the survey. To further encourage participation, we'll offer a randomized drawing for a pool of 50 prizes each consisting of $50 Amazon gift cards throughout the launch period. Within the launch period of our survey, we will also:

- continue outreach and travel to promote the survey
- make periodic updates to our website and social media
- hold randomized drawings at predetermined intervals as incentives to those who complete the survey

Activity 4: Analyze. After data collection ends, our team will analyze the results for the next four months. We will:
- develop a codebook within Dedoose (coding software) to categorize and organize survey data
- use descriptive statistics to summarize key survey responses
- prepare initial reports and visualizations
- update our website with initial survey findings
- continue analyzing quantitative and qualitative data collected during the planning grant phase; continuing previous work with other sources (such as data from IPEDS, the U.S. Census, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics)

We will also use this time to begin preparations for our upcoming focus groups. Preparing for focus group facilitation will include the team completing training on our focus group protocol and preparing our discussion guides. Logistical tasks for the focus groups will include:

- creating a schedule for focus groups and facilitator rotation
- contacting participants for focus groups and obtaining consent forms
- reserving spaces for focus groups and making local arrangements
- arranging travel to focus group location

- ordering supplies for focus group facilitation

Activity 5: Focus. We will select participants for the focus groups from those who signed up via our project website using predetermined criteria. We'll conduct 10-15 focus group sessions, combining virtual and in-person formats, with minoritized support staff in academic libraries. These groups will be strategically located across the United States and informed by the Census Bureau's regional and divisional designations (see Supporting Document 4). Each focus group will consist of 6-8 participants. The combination of virtual and in-person formats caters to participant accessibility and preferences, maximizing participation. For all focus groups, the project team will ensure representation from at least two team members, including at least one co-PI. Virtual focus groups will leverage their flexibility to facilitate broader participation from the project team and advisory board members. The focus group sessions will gather insights from minoritized support staff in libraries about their experiences, aspirations, and suggestions for improvement within the workplace. Focus group activities will be adapted for virtual focus groups to ensure similar experiences for participants. The 90-minute sessions will be divided into four parts:

- **Part A. Experiences in Libraries:** Focus on participant journeys, challenges encountered, and impacts of policies and practices on their experiences. It explores how identities play a role in their careers.
- **Part B. Aspirations:** Participants will create a "Vision Board" reflecting their ideal library workplace or a "Career Ladder" representing their professional aspirations. This is followed by discussing the barriers hindering them from achieving their aspirations.
- **Part C. Towards Improvement – Thinking Broadly:** Participants discuss broader changes needed in libraries to promote equity and inclusion for support staff. They will identify resources and support systems that would benefit their career development for those pursuing an MLS and those seeking advancement within other library career paths.
- **Part D. Action Now:** Focuses on solutions. Participants propose specific actions that library leadership can take to address the challenges and barriers identified throughout the session.

Activity 6: Data Cleaning and Analysis. The project team and advisory board will corroborate and triangulate quantitative survey findings with qualitative data gathered through regional focus groups and prepare a draft findings report. We will integrate the focus group data and create case studies for use later in the project.

Activity 7: Open Comment Period. With our first draft of findings from the project, we will invite national feedback with an open comment period for the LIS community on DocketScope, a platform built for open comment analysis. Within this project activity, we will:

- contact our established partners to notify them of the initial findings posted for review;
- use collected email addresses to inform participants and interested parties of the draft posted for review;
- promote the open comment period on our website and social media channels, engage with the audience, and respond to comments and questions throughout the comment period;
- host webinars and answer questions from the LIS community on the project and the draft findings.

Activity 8: Evaluations. After the open comment period closes, we will review and integrate the comments into our reporting documents. In this activity, the entire project team will regroup to review the project before entering the next phase of visualization, connecting and sharing broadly. This comprehensive review will encompass survey results, focus group themes, and open comment analysis.

Activity 9: Visualize. In this activity, we'll focus on transforming our research into impactful visualizations, including compelling charts and graphs, infographics, and presentations for upcoming project activities.

Activity 10: Connect and Collaborate. Meet with personnel from related IMLS grant-funded projects to share results and discuss how to use the data and possible collaborations. Connect with the broader LIS research community to facilitate knowledge exchanges.

Activity 11: Share Broadly. The team will disseminate our findings with presentations, workshops, webinars, and online resources, and publications. We will invite advisory board members to co-present at conferences and webinars, showcasing their contribution to the study, perspectives, and lived experiences in academic libraries. While we'll seek to publish our work in established journals in the field such as the *Journal of Library Administration*, *College & Research Libraries* and others, we will make a concentrated effort to publish primarily in open access journals like *Library Trends*, *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, and *portal: Libraries and the Academy*. To ensure our work reaches a wide audience, we'll submit to other notable open access journals related to higher education and educational leadership.

Activity 12: Research to Practice. We will offer a series of three virtual presentations to LIS educators and Library Leaders (Deans, Directors, Administrators, and Library HR professionals) called "Research to Practice," where we share actionable insights and practical recommendations gleaned from our project as well as, anonymous case studies derived from our focus groups.

Activity 13: Finalize and Sustain. We'll focus on activities to increase and sustain the project's impact. We'll create easy-to-use toolkits that contain our recommendations for removing systemic barriers. We will approach ALA, ACRL, and other organizations to seek their help in promoting these products. Other activities will, include:
- drafting a comprehensive white paper summarizing the project and including further areas of research;
- uploading all digital products to the project website;
- updating contact information for ongoing project inquiries; and
- solidifying a plan for long-term website maintenance

Activity 14: Evaluate. Throughout the project, we will work with the Advisory Board to conduct formative evaluations on a quarterly basis. We'll conduct a comprehensive summative evaluation of the project. Some of the major evaluation questions will include: How effectively did we reach a national audience, particularly the population we wish to study? Was our research project successful, and did we learn anything new or helpful? How well did we share research and project results? How well did we connect with people doing related work? How did we influence practice in libraries and LIS education, and what more can we do?

Activity 15: Wrap up. Conduct final meetings with partners and advisory board. Ensure all materials are uploaded to the project website, prepare data and documentation for archiving and access. Create a bibliography of all products produced during the project. Discuss ways to encourage and sustain a community of practice and sharing. Within 60 days of the end of the project, prepare and submit the final financial and narrative reports to IMLS.

Project Budget

The requested budget is substantial and reflects the complexity of conducting a national workforce study. Capturing the experiences of a diverse and distributed population will require more than just emailing our survey instrument. The project's success depends upon strategic outreach to library associations, travel to connect with diverse communities and promote the study, incentives for participation and engagement, and the expertise of a team of dedicated librarians, researchers, staff, and advisory board members. Their combined time, expertise, and cultural competency are essential to every project stage, guaranteeing we gather robust data, engage directly with diverse voices, and ultimately build informed initiatives that empower this vital population and propel libraries forward. The project's true value lies in its potential to

inform concrete action across the profession and local contexts. Understanding this often-overlooked population's specific challenges and aspirations is crucial for crafting targeted recruiting programs in libraries, dismantling systemic barriers, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable library environment for all library employees. This project doesn't just fill a knowledge gap; it generates transformative knowledge. It's a crucial investment in understanding the underrepresented voices within libraries. The findings will pave the way for raising awareness of the issue nationwide, developing targeted interventions and national awareness, setting a new standard for inclusive practices, and ensuring this vital workforce population thrives professionally. We are fortunate to have members of our target audience join us as an advisory board to guide our work. As a team, we believe in demonstrating the value and significance of their contributions and are committed to improving their experiences within the library workforce. The budget includes stipends for advisory board members (continuing the yearly stipend for advisory board members from the planning grant). Some funds will be expended to support advisory board members presenting at professional conferences regarding their project experiences.

The requested budget will enable us to:

- harness expert talent via project personnel, contracted consultants and graduate student assistance
- develop and conduct a multi-faceted, multi-lingual marketing campaign
- incentivize participation and engagement from the target audience
- perform extensive outreach to promote the project and widely disseminate results

Some examples of other budgeted expenses include:
- data analysis tools, visualization services, and transcriptions for in-depth analysis
- custom website design
- editing services for reports and publications
- printing and supplies for focus groups
- facility and room rentals for meetings and focus group facilitation
- licensing software as a service (SaaS) products during the project (ex., Dedoose, DocketScope)

This robust budget ensures we can reach, listen, and learn from minoritized support staff in academic libraries and provide high-quality research, ultimately translating data into transformative action. The budget represents a critical investment in data gathering, analysis and dissemination. This project addresses diversity, equity and inclusion and offers a sound return on investment for libraries and the profession. By removing barriers for an overlooked group already invested in the library space, we enable libraries to utilize a diverse internal workforce to lead and serve their communities.

Diversity Plan

This project integrates diverse perspectives, backgrounds and practices from the outset. The team itself is notably diverse, with two project co-PIs and two Library Residents identifying as Black women, two project members identifying as Latinx, and a dedicated Inclusive Excellence Coordinator on board. Our project team brings together diverse expertise, including doctoral-level researchers, a methodologist, MLS and non-MLS library workers, and library administrators and library support staff. This diverse representation ensures that multiple perspectives and experiences are actively considered throughout the project's design, execution, analysis and dissemination. This commitment to inclusivity will yield insights and solutions that resonate deeply with the needs and aspirations of minoritized library support staff and uncover barriers to obtaining the MLS degree.

Project Results

This nationwide project aims to report on the experiences of minoritized support staff in academic libraries. This mixed methods workforce study will identify barriers hindering career advancement through surveys and focus groups and develop actionable recommendations to address them. At the project's conclusion, Clemson University Libraries is committed to maintaining a web presence to ensure long-term access to results and facilitating ongoing research and knowledge exchange beyond the project's lifespan. Additionally, many of our publications regarding project success and results will be published in open-access journals. Pre-prints of publications and presentations will be available via Clemson University's digital repository and publishing platform, Tiger Prints.

Specifically, the project intends to produce meaningful and sustainable results beneficial to the library profession by:

Advancing knowledge and understanding: Data-driven insights are the priority of this project. Through surveys and focus groups conducted with minoritized support staff, we will gather rich data illuminating their experiences, aspirations, and the unique barriers to progress they face within academic libraries. This knowledge base has the potential to encourage positive change in the profession by:

- Challenging assumptions: Findings will go beyond anecdotal evidence, bringing credence to discussions around the experiences of this workforce segment. This data will debunk often stated myths and biases regarding the recruitment and promotion of minoritized populations in libraries, laying the foundation for evidence-based solutions explicitly tailored to the needs of this population.
- Actionable insights: Quantitative data will reveal patterns in areas such as educational attainment, professional development and leadership opportunities, and distribution across job classifications. Qualitative data will provide the 'why', to the numbers and offer a nuanced picture of the challenges in obtaining the MLS and motivational factors shaping the experiences of our target population.
- National benchmarks: The project's scope allows us to identify trends and commonalities across regions, leading to national benchmarks for inclusive practices within academic libraries. These benchmarks will empower institutions to measure their progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange: Our project will do more than present findings; it will also facilitate new partnerships and co-create solutions with stakeholders across the library field.
- Informing policy and practice: The knowledge we generate will inform the library field, influencing policy changes within institutions and at the national level. This includes revisions to hiring practices, targeted mentorship programs, and allocating resources for developing a diverse library leadership pipeline.

Considering libraries as beneficiaries and return on investment: Actionable recommendations will arise from our study. By identifying barriers hindering career advancement for minoritized support staff, the project will provide the concrete recommendations to create more inclusive work environments, promote leadership development opportunities, and tap into an existing talent pool. The project will inform recruitment strategies by:

- Removing hidden barriers to the MLS: Our findings will uncover systemic and otherwise obstacles that may hinder the advancement of minoritized support staff and the obtainment of the MLS. Libraries can use this knowledge to incentivize degree attainment and foster a more equitable environment where this existing talent pool has room for growth.
- Targeted professional development: Understanding the career aspirations of minoritized support staff will empower libraries to design tailored professional development programs and mentorship opportunities, nurturing leadership potential and building a pipeline of diverse leaders from within.
- Internal recruitment and retention: By investing in the growth of their current minoritized support staff, libraries make the profession more attractive and reduce turnover/attrition. Satisfied and engaged employees become champions for the institution, aiding in recruiting future talent from similar backgrounds.

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Schedule of Completion: Year 1
(August 1, 2024 - July 31, 2025)

Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	Apr 2025	May 2025	Jun 2025	Jul 2025
Project Kickoff											
	Advisory Brd. Mtg.			Advisory Brd. Mtg			Advisory Brd. Mtg			Advisory Brd. Mtg	
Ongoing Core Project Team Coordination (weekly meetings)											
Periodic Meetings w/ Other Orgs Doing Complementary Work											
Build Project Website + Data Visualizations											
Market & Promote Project and Survey (emails, webinars, social media, presentations at conferences and events, etc.)											
	Optimize / Finalize Survey				Conduct Survey						
					Monthly Random Awards to Respondents						
								Initial Survey Data Analysis			
	Recruit for Focus Groups							Prepare for Focus Groups			
	Further Analysis of External Related Data (IPEDS, Labor Statistics, Census, etc.)										

Schedule of Completion: Year 2
(August 1, 2025 - July 31, 2026)

Aug 2025	Sep 2025	Oct 2025	Nov 2025	Dec 2025	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Apr 2026	May 2026	Jun 2026	Jul 2026
	Advisory Brd. Mtg			Advisory Brd. Mtg			Advisory Brd. Mtg			Advisory Brd. Mtg	
Ongoing Core Project Team Coordination (weekly meetings)											
Conduct Focus Groups + Analyze Focus Group Data											
				Draft Report - Research Results							
							Post Report - Open Review + Comments				
					Promote Project, Initial Findings, and Open Comment Opportunity						
										Revise Report Based on Open Comments	
							Convene Virtual "Research and Practice" Discussions w/ LIS Educators and Library Leaders				
							Create Toolkits & Other Products				
										Final Project Evaluation	
										Project Wrap-up	

Digital Products Plan

TYPE	AVAILABILITY	ACCESS	SUSTAINABILITY
Project Website	Openly available to the public. The website URL will be broadly and routinely shared as part of all project communications and promotion in all formats (email, handouts, presentations, social media, etc.)	The website will be openly accessible to the public. It will adhere to accessibility standards and principles that guide all of Clemson's web-based resources. The website will be made available under the "CC-Zero" Creative Commons universal license (ver. 1.0) that does not require attribution or permissions to distribute, reuse, or adapt content.	The website will be subject to the same routine backup and preservation processes used for all Clemson websites. We will strive to maintain and keep the website fully functioning for at least five years after the project ends.
Online Survey and Survey Instrument	The online survey will be open for 100 days.It will be delivered using Clemson University's licensed Qualtrics survey software. A copy of the survey instrument will be available both through the project website, and through a copy deposited into Clemson's "Tiger Prints" repository.	The live online survey is intended only for use by people who are invited to take the survey. It is not intended to be permanently available. The underlying survey instrument will be usable under a Creative Common "Attribution Non-Commercial" license (ver. 4.0) that allows non-commercial reuse and modification as long as the source is cited.	The survey instrument deposited into Tiger Prints is intended to be available as a long-term asset. The document and its metadata will be preserved using processes employed for all Tiger Prints deposits.
Promotional Materials	Promotional materials such as flyers, handouts, bookmarks, images, etc. will be saved as born-digital assets and made available through the project website, social media, and other channels. Copies of all these materials will be deposited into Clemson's "Tiger Prints" repository.	Digital copies of promotional materials will be accessible and usable under a Creative Common "Attribution Non-Commercial" license (ver. 4.0) that allows a wide variety of non-commercial reuse and modification as long as the source is attributed/cited.	Materials deposited into our repository are intended to be available as a long-term asset. Materials and metadata will be preserved using processes employed for all Tiger Prints deposits.
Survey Dataset and Data Codebook	Within sixty days of completion of the grant period, a copy of the primary survey response dataset and codebook will be made available through the project website, and deposited into Clemson's "Tiger Prints" repository. The dataset will be archived in a preservation-friendly (e.g., CSV) format, and the codebook will be archived in similarly preservable plain text format. Any personally identifying	The survey response dataset and codebook will be treated as a primary deliverable for this project. They will be accessible and usable under a Creative Common "Attribution Non-Commercial" license (ver. 4.0) that allows non-commercial reuse and modification as long as the source is attributed/cited. Survey response data will likely contain potentially sensitive information about negative work experiences. The project team will review,	Materials deposited into the Tiger Prints repository are intended to be available as a long-term archived asset. The materials and accompanying metadata will be preserved using processes employed for all Tiger Prints deposits. Personally identifying

	information such as respondent names, email addresses, and institutional identifiers will be removed from the dataset before it becomes available to the public.	identify, and take action when responses might reveal the identity of individuals or institutions. Some data may be redacted / scrubbed before it is made publicly available. We will work with the Clemson IRB on a plan to manage different versions of the dataset.	information will be retained as a separate and controlled dataset, by the co-PIs in secure servers and/or desktop computer locations approved by Clemson University's IRB.
Focus Groups Notes	Notes from focus group discussions may contain much sensitive or personally identifying information. We have no plans to disseminate or make these notes widely available. Focus group notes and information about participants will remain under the control of the co-PIs. It is very likely to be selectively and anonymously quoted in publications and presentations.	N/A (This digital product is not intended for public access and use).	The Clemson co-PIs will retain and make good-faith efforts to preserve focus groups notes on secure desktop computers and networked drives according to Clemson University's policies and practices for data preservation.
Supporting Data and Data Visualizations	This project will produce secondary contextual data and visualizations about the U.S. library workforce, survey and project participation, and relevant racial/ethnic demographics. All of these products are intended for public distribution and use. They will be made available through the project website, and deposited into Clemson University's "Tiger Prints" repository.	These materials will be accessible and usable under a Creative Common "Attribution Non-Commercial" license (ver. 4.0) that allows a wide variety of non-commercial reuse and modification as long as the source is attributed/cited.	Supporting datasets and visualizations will be deposited into Tiger Prints using preservation friendly formats such as delimited datasets, plaintext files, PDF files, JPEG2000 or TIFF files, etc. The materials and metadata will be preserved using processes employed for all Tiger Prints deposits.
Research Publications	This project will produce a variety of reports and publications intended for publication in peer-reviewed scholarly literature, professional newsletters, and other gray literature in LIS and other social-scientific fields. Copies of each paper will be made available through the project website and deposited into Clemson University's "Tiger Prints" repository.	Published papers and reports will be made available in ways that comply with any publisher requirements. Our intention is to make copies of all publications freely and publicly available under a Creative Common "Attribution Non-Commercial" license (ver. 4.0) that allows a wide variety of non-commercial reuse and modification as long as the source is attributed/cited.	Whenever allowable under publisher requirements, copies of each publication will be deposited and made available through the Tiger Prints repository. Materials and metadata will be preserved using processes employed for all Tiger Prints deposits.

Data Management Plan

Identify the type(s) and estimated amount of data you plan to collect or generate, and the purpose or intended use(s) to which you expect them to be put.

If successful, our survey will collect several thousand (estimated 1,000 - 4,000) responses that may include a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data as numeric, geographic, and textual information. Because the target population to be studied is difficult to measure or map in specific geographic areas, the project team will solicit respondents by broadcasting national and regional messages (through email lists, consortia, library associations, project partners, etc.) to explain the project and invite responses from those who identify as members of the minoritized or underrepresented racial and ethnic groups we have defined for this study. The entire dataset of survey responses will be analyzed to define broad generalizations and other insights into the experiences of the target population working in academic libraries, and perceived barriers or other variables that might inhibit minoritized library paraprofessionals from seeking MLS degrees and/or employment as professional librarians. Once the survey response period has ended, the co-PIs will identify remaining questions and conduct 10-15 virtual and physical focus groups to help gain better understanding and clarification of the survey responses.

Describe the method(s) you will use, the proposed scope and scale, and the approximate dates or intervals at which you will collect or generate data.

An online survey will be conducted for 100 days (from January - April 2025). A copy of the survey instrument is included in the supporting documents for this proposal. To incentivize survey participation, every month of the survey, the project team will randomly select recipients of $50 gift cards from among those respondents who agreed to provide their name and contact information to be eligible for the drawings. A total of 50 awards will be given within the 100 day period.

Will you collect any sensitive information? This may include personally identifiable information (PII), confidential information (e.g., trade secrets), or proprietary information. If so, detail the specific steps you will take to protect the information while you prepare it for public release (e.g., anonymizing individual identifiers, data aggregation).

Survey respondents will be given the opportunity to opt-in to random incentive awards by providing their name and email address. Such data will be separated, deleted, masked, or anonymized by the project team before any copies of the dataset are made available online. Additionally, the project team will review all survey responses to make sure no personal or institutional identities are revealed in full-text responses. All personally identifying information that is retained separate from the main dataset during the investigation will be permanently discarded once the research project is completed.

If the data will not be released publicly, explain why the data cannot be shared due to the protection of privacy, confidentiality, security, intellectual property, and other rights or requirements.

Not applicable, the primary survey response dataset and its associated codebook will be made available through the project website for at least five years after the end of the project, and made permanently available through Clemson University's Tiger Prints repository.

What technical (hardware and/or software) requirements or dependencies would be necessary for understanding retrieving, displaying, processing, or otherwise reusing the data? How can these tools be accessed (e.g., open-source and freely available, commercially available, available from your research team)?

The publicly-accessible survey response dataset will be archived and made available as delimited data (e.g., CSV format) to ensure its long-term usability and compatibility with a variety of data tools. Data documentation such as the codebook will be similarly archived in plaintext format to ensure their availability and compatibility with a variety of softwares in the future. The project team will review all data products to help ensure that textual and numerical content is fully documented to note the use of any special characters that might not translate well into plaintext formats. However, we hope to minimize the possibility that such characters make their way into the dataset or documentation.

What documentation (e.g., consent agreements, data documentation, codebooks, metadata, and analytical and procedural information) will you capture or create along with the data?

The survey will contain a consent click-through agreement to be retained as part of the data. The data documentation will contain a copy of the survey instrument, data definitions, information about the types of alphanumeric data represented in the dataset, etc. The data and documentation will be deposited into the Tiger Prints repository, and fully described using the metadata schema utilized in Tiger Prints, which is a mixture of Dublin Core and other commonly-used metadata elements.

Where will the documentation be stored and in what format(s)? How will you permanently associate and manage the documentation with the data it describes to enable future reuse?

The formats question is answered in other sections of this plan. To permanently associate and manage the data documentation with the dataset, the documentation will be deposited alongside the dataset as "related files" in the Tiger Prints repository, with its own metadata describing its relationship to the dataset.

What is your plan for managing, disseminating, and preserving data after the completion of the award-funded project? If relevant, identify the repository where you will deposit your data.

The Tiger Prints repository will be the home of the archived dataset and documentation – see https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/. The project website also will provide deeplinks to these resources within Tiger Prints. At this time, our preservation plan for managing, disseminating, and preserving the data relies primarily upon Tiger Prints as a long-lived and trustworthy digital preservation and access repository.

When and for how long will data be made available to other users? • When and how frequently will you review your Data Management Plan?

We plan to make the data permanently available to other users, or at least for as long as we can make such promises. The Data Management Plan should not require frequent review, but it will be evaluated again mid-project and at the end of the research project, to make sure it remains viable.