

RE-256725-OLS-24, American Library Association (Public Programs Office)

The American Library Association (ALA) requests \$170,824 in IMLS Laura Bush 21st-Century Librarian funding for a 12-month implementation grant, Skills for 21st-Century Librarians: Programming Librarian Learning Lab (Prototyping). This funding will enable ALA to plan and prototype professional development resources for library workers that cover a wide range of programming skills, meeting a critical need for our profession.

The Programming Librarian Learning Lab (working title) will be an online professional learning community where programming library workers can access free learning experiences and resources that build their capacity to plan, design, and deliver engaging public programs (e.g., events, discussions, workshops) that meet the needs of their library patrons. The resources will be designed to be accessed quickly and easily — to accommodate both in-depth and just-in-time learners — on ProgrammingLibrarian.org, an ALA website free from login requirements and paywalls.

Working in close collaboration with librarian advisors, learning design agency Convergence Design Lab, and evaluation partner Knology, ALA will: design an effective and engaging online learning hub for library workers that engage in library program/event development and execution; prototype multimedia content that highlights outstanding real-world library programming; conduct a thorough mixed-methods evaluation; and complete all the advance work needed to proceed into full production of the Programming Librarian Learning Lab. Since the resources will utilize real library programming success stories, its lessons will be relevant to programming library workers of various skill levels and library types, though our target audience will be non-MLIS-holding public library workers.

The project will take place over 12 months, from September 1, 2024, to August 31, 2025.

Project Justification

For decades, public libraries have seen programming rise to the forefront of their daily operations. “While libraries have always had a broad educational mission and an esteemed role as collection holders and lenders, the 21st century is witnessing their rapid transformation to centers for lifelong experiential learning, hubs for civic and cultural gatherings, and partners in community-wide innovation,” ALA states in its National Impact for Library Public Programs Assessment (NILPPA) Phase 1 white paper (**see Supportingdoc1**).¹ With this transition, the role of the library worker has changed immensely. “In many communities, librarians are also ad hoc social workers and navigators,” stated Marcela Cabello and Stuart M. Butler of the Brookings Institution. “They help local people figure out the complexities of life, from navigating the health system to helping those with housing needs. This ‘go-to’ role has influenced library programming and events, with libraries providing advice and connections to health, housing, literacy, and other areas.”²

These observations are confirmed in the number of library programs being held. According to the IMLS Public Library Survey data set, the number of library programs reported nationwide increased 60 percent from FY2009 to FY2019, from 3.7 million to 5.9 million programs. In that same decade, reported attendance at public library programs increased by approximately 35 percent, from 291 per 1,000 people in FY2009 to 394 per 1,000 in

¹ https://nilppa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NILPPA_Phase-1-white-paper.pdf

² <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-public-libraries-help-build-healthy-communities/>

FY2019³. The library world's increased interest in, and reliance on, library programming is also evidenced by the rapid growth of programming-related professional development interest over the past decade. More than 215,000 unique users visited [ALA's Programming Librarian website](#) in 2023, with an average of 23,000 unique visitors per month so far in 2024. Opt-in mailing list subscribers have increased from 14,000 in 2022 to over 17,000 in 2024. Since its formation in 2014, ALA's Programming Librarian [Facebook group](#) has grown to more than 31,000 individuals, and ALA Connect message boards managed by the ALA Public Programs Office have over 2,000 active members.

Library programming is especially vital in today's challenging political times. In communities where libraries and library staff are increasingly vilified, library workers need ways to build bridges with their communities. High-quality programs are a vehicle for building relationships, healing divides, and demonstrating the full scope of libraries' value. From book clubs to community dialogues, library programming helps libraries identify, address, and reflect community needs; enhance institutional capacity and services; and contribute to our democratic society. Now more than ever, library workers need access to free professional development tools to develop job skills and build confidence to foster relationships with their communities.

Background Work

The groundwork for the Programming Librarian Learning Lab is well laid, as this proposal builds upon three previous IMLS-funded efforts. Through its [NILPPA](#) Phase 1 research (2017-2019), ALA identified nine [Library Programming Competencies](#) that are vital for producing successful programming: Content Knowledge, Creativity, Evaluation, Event Planning, Financial Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Knowledge of the Community, Marketing, and Organizational Skills.⁴ In its Skills for 21st-Century Librarians: Task Force for the Development of a NILPPA-Informed Programming Librarian Curriculum planning grant (2020-2021), ALA convened a task force of library practitioners and instructors to propose [learning objectives](#) for each of the Library Programming Competencies and recommend next steps for the development of learning resources rooted in them. Most recently, ALA has built upon these findings with NILPPA Phase 2 (2021-2024), which studies indicators of programming's impact in communities, as well as libraries' collaborations with partner organizations.

Despite the increasing importance of programming within the library field, ALA's previous research has found that most library workers are not being adequately trained for the work. Findings from NILPPA Phase 1 demonstrated that master's-level library and information science (LIS) programs rarely prepare the next generation of librarians for the vital work of creating and leading programs; and many library workers, of course, receive no formal training in librarianship at all, especially in rural and under-resourced communities. In a survey of programming library workers, 93 percent of respondents said they learned to run programs on the job, 62 percent from colleagues, and 74 percent from other informal learning. Only half said they learned in their degree program or through other academic training. Informal learning has been filling the gap; survey respondents reported picking up programming skills through ad hoc circumstances like retail jobs, involvement in theater productions, and planning their own children's birthday parties.

³ <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey>

⁴ https://nilppa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NILPPA_Phase-1-white-paper.pdf

It is clear from ALA’s research that library workers need training to conceive, develop and execute outstanding programming. A comprehensive collection of free learning materials does not currently exist, and ALA’s prior work has us poised to take on the task. Development and prototyping learning resources based on these extensive NILPPA findings will allow us to proceed to the culminating step of this work: producing a full suite of learning offerings.

Goals and Target Audience

The Programming Librarian Learning Lab supports IMLS LB21 Goal 3, to enhance the training and professional development of the library and archival workforce to meet the needs of their communities, especially Objectives 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3. With guidance from Knology, our external evaluator, the project team has developed its own goals for the proposed project. The Programming Librarian Learning Lab will be considered successful in its final form if it meets the following goals:

Goal	
The final learning materials:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are shaped by practitioner input and correspond to data (i.e., users’ needs, aspirations, and expectations) collected during NILPPA Phase 1 and the Skills for 21st-Century Librarians planning grant. ● Build library workers’ skills in all 9 competency areas, with equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) framing prioritized throughout. ● Have practical and immediate relevance for library workers, who are able to apply them in meaningful ways.
The overall learning experience:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can be customized according to the desires of the learner and is flexible enough to be used in various ways. ● Builds learners’ confidence in their ability to deliver high-quality programs, in particular for those with little to no formal training or who lack access to other professional development opportunities. ● Prompts enthusiasm for peer-to-peer learning and an increase in user-generated content being added to the Programming Librarian website.
The project leadership team:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Has identified concrete ways to measure what makes an outstanding program and to identify programs to hold up as exemplars for the field. ● Has articulated short- and long-term outcomes for learners corresponding to the learning map developed in Phase 2 (described in Work Plan below). ● Has a plan to sustain the learning experience over time, past the duration of the IMLS funding.

Our target group for this project is non-MLIS-holding public library workers, particularly individuals who lack formal training in program development and execution; however, the lessons conveyed in the resources will be relevant to workers in many types of libraries. A secondary beneficiary will be library patrons/communities,

which will benefit from more effective and community-centered programming created by better trained library workers.

Project Work Plan

In its final form, the Programming Librarian Learning Lab will provide an easy-access resource where programming library workers across all levels of experience can refine and master a diverse range of programming competencies through guided practice and exploration. The Learning Lab will help library workers “learn to fish” by building their programming skills and competencies; inspire library workers to try out, test, and experiment with innovative strategies, learning by reflecting with peers as they go; foster new connections across a community of practice that drives continuous improvement; and create a user/content-driven community that is sustainable well beyond the life of the grant.

Housed on ALA’s ProgrammingLibrarian.org website (a free-to-all, non-paywalled website built apart from the main ALA.org site architecture and requiring no log-in), the Learning Lab may include the following components (actual contents will be determined during the Phase 1 discovery process described below):

- a tagged and discoverable repository of resources, examples, case studies, videos, and micro-content, all aligned with the NILPPA Library Programming Competencies and the Skills for 21st-Century Librarians learning objectives
- self-guided tools and playbooks that enable learners to try out ideas and strategies based on their own contexts and learning needs
- space for sharing and ideation in a community of practice, likely built into an existing (freely accessible) virtual networking space, such as the Programming Librarian Facebook group or ALA Connect

Planning and prototyping learning materials over this 12-month project will position ALA to shift seamlessly into full production of the much-needed resources in late 2025.

Key Staff and Consultants

This project will be led by the ALA Public Programs Office (PPO). Created in 1992, PPO empowers libraries to create vibrant hubs of learning, conversation, and connection in communities of all types. Since its founding, the office has attracted more than \$40 million in private and federal support for library programming, offered more than 60,000 grants to libraries, and reached tens of millions of library program attendees. The office’s staff collaborates with librarians, humanities scholars, artists and documentarians, museum curators, and others to create and scale nationwide programming opportunities, grants, and traveling exhibitions for libraries, and to offer professional development, recognition, and research that supports programming library workers.

In addition to ALA, other key players will be Convergence Design Lab, a 100 percent woman-owned, full-service research and design agency that specializes in building resilient learning ecosystems; Knology, a social science research nonprofit that led data collection and analysis for NILPPA Phases 1 and 2 and the Skills for 21st-Century Librarians planning grant; and two librarian advisors, Dr. Audrey Barbakoff, EdD, MLIS, founder

and CEO of Co/Lab Capacity (Community Led Capacity-Building), and Jose Miguel Ruiz, LIS instructor and librarian supervisor at Arlington (Va.) Public Library (**see Resumes**).

Phases

This 12-month project will fall into three phases, with a total work period of 12 months (**see Schedule of completion**).

In **Phase 1 (Discovery and Success Framing, 4 months, September - December 2024)**, ALA and Convergence Design Lab will conduct a survey of target users to get a “pulse check” of the needs of the profession in 2024 and to ensure that we are setting ourselves up for success. To reach a broad cross-section of programming library workers, we will survey users of ALA’s [Programming Librarian Facebook group](#), a highly engaged group of 31,000 individuals (mostly nonmembers of ALA) with a professional connection to library programming. The survey will ask questions to better understand (1) which of the Library Programming Competencies they feel most/least skilled in; (2) how the learning materials would fit into their programming development process; (3) which formats would best support their needs; and other topics. Offering the survey as a short Google Form will lower barriers to participation, and we expect to receive at least several hundred responses.

Knology will collaborate on development of the survey questions, and once results are available, they will analyze the data and author a blog post for publication on the Programming Librarian website (www.programminglibrarian.org) and the NILPPA website (NILPPA.org). This blog post, and two subsequent ones, will provide an opportunity for the project team to share interesting findings with the library field, while also drumming up enthusiasm for the in-progress Learning Lab.

Following completion of the survey, we will collect more in-depth feedback through a series of virtual collaborative design workshops with advisors and target users. This process will help us to fully understand context and user needs and to establish a cohesive vision for the Programming Librarian Learning Lab. The design workshops will be synchronous, collaborative, 90-minute sessions, held via Zoom with 10 participants each. At least four design workshops will be held — two for highly experienced programming librarians and two for individuals new to the work — all of whom will be recruited from ALA PPO’s extensive database of library workers who have taken part in, or applied for, past ALA grant-funded initiatives, as well as members of the 2020-21 Skills for 21st-Century Librarians Task Force. During each session, Convergence Design Lab will guide participants through questions and activities to inform insights and directions for learning design. For example, participants may be asked to talk through, or even sketch out, the process of creating a new library program (e.g., where inspiration for the program arises, if/how goals are formulated, who is involved in planning). As another example, participants may be asked to discuss their motivations for accessing learning content, barriers that might hinder their participation, and what would inspire their active participation in a learning community.

Combined, the learnings from the survey and the design workshops will help Convergence Design Lab and ALA to determine which learning modalities are best suited to our learners, what principles of adult learning best align with desired competencies, and what components (e.g., online learning modules, shareable stories and

multimedia content, social learning experiences) should be included in the overall learning architecture and creative design.

The full project team (ALA, Convergence Design Lab, Knology, and advisors) will meet twice monthly throughout Phase 1 to track progress, discuss results, and adjust procedures as needed.

In **Phase 2 (Design Learning Map, 4 months, January - April 2025)**, Convergence Design Lab will take the information gleaned from Phase 1 and develop concrete plans for the Learning Lab: a “learning map” outlining its learning architecture, components, assessment strategies and delivery systems. While full production of the learning materials will occur later, we will develop learning maps for the Learning Lab in its final form; this will position us for a seamless transition into production after prototyping and iteration is complete.

The precise elements of the learning map will be informed by the learnings of Phase 1, but it may include such elements as:

- insights into user needs and learning preferences (gathered through Phase 1 research, plus adult learning theory review)
- suggested structures for engagement for our learners (e.g., stories, media, interactivity)
- learning activities that build knowledge and skills (connected to the NILPPA Library Programming Competencies and Skills for 21st-Century Librarians learning objectives)
- potential user pathways (exploring how learners will “come at” the learning and what their experience will be as they move through the various offerings)
- Plans to incorporate assessment strategies into learning artifacts

In developing a learning map that foregrounds just-in-time learning, Convergence Design Lab will draw from parts of three key adult learning theories:

- **Andragogy (Adult Learning Theory):** Proposed by Malcolm Knowles, andragogy emphasizes self-directed learning, where adults are motivated to learn when they see a direct relevance to their lives or goals. Just-in-time learning approaches cater to this by providing immediate access to information or resources when learners need them.
- **Experiential Learning Theory:** Developed by David Kolb, this theory emphasizes learning through experience and reflection. Just-in-time learning approaches allow learners to apply newly acquired knowledge immediately in real-world contexts, facilitating experiential learning.
- **Situated Learning Theory:** Proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, this theory posits that learning occurs within authentic contexts and communities of practice. Just-in-time learning approaches provide learners with resources or information at the point of need, within the context of their immediate tasks or challenges.

In order to create a sustainable system that does not become stale over time, and also to empower programming library workers to utilize their learnings, the Learning Lab will center around a growing collection of stories and other multimedia content that invites the participation and contributions of users. Again, details will be cemented during Phase 1, but for example, learners may be tasked with working through the process of

developing a new library program in response to a community needs assessment, and then sharing the resulting program with peers in the community of practice.

During Phase 2, to ensure that our plans align with users' needs, Knology will conduct a formative focus group to collect feedback on a draft outline of course components. We will invite library workers (n=6) — recruited from individuals who filled out the Phase 1 survey — to participate. The formative focus group will ensure learners find the proposed components practical, relevant, and customizable to their unique needs. The full project team (ALA, Convergence Design Lab, Knology, and advisors) will continue to meet twice monthly throughout Phase 2 to review progress, discuss results, and adjust procedures as needed.

In Phase 3 (Learning Design and Multimedia Prototyping and Dissemination, 4 months, May - August 2025), we will use the learning map created in Phase 2 to prototype select learning materials. While the actual components and delivery systems are to be determined, we expect that they may include videos, audio stories, webpages, graphics, interactive guides and/or eLearning content. We anticipate that these prototypes will feature real-world programming success stories from library workers, representing a variety of communities, education levels, and backgrounds. From its work with thousands of libraries, ALA PPO has extensive knowledge of outstanding library programs around the country, including many that have won ALA awards, been featured in national conferences, or been published on ProgrammingLibrarian.org. By tapping into this database of excellent programming, the project team will be able to hold up programs as exemplars for the field, demonstrating how they align to the Library Programming Competencies, thereby demonstrating how additional libraries can also learn to plan and execute successful programs. ALA PPO values the time and expertise of professionals in our field; as such, we commit to compensating featured library workers for their participation **(see Budgetjustification)**.

Once prototypes are complete, Knology will solicit feedback on the early drafts through another focus group with a representative group of library practitioners who stand to benefit from using the learning tools. Participants (n=8) will be recruited using the survey from Phase I, where they can indicate desire to be involved. Participants will be selected from a range of library contexts and roles to maximize future usefulness of the learning tools. Findings from this focus group will be written up in a short report that includes recommendations for the next phase of development.

Phase 3 also will include disseminating the results of this project to the library field. In addition to the three blog posts published over the course of the year on ProgrammingLibrarian.org and NILPPA.org, further dissemination of the results will include a webinar to the library field that shares the learning maps and prototypes. This webinar will be presented synchronously and also recorded, with the recording made available for future viewing on Programming Librarian. Finally, the project team will seek out opportunities to present the work in education sessions at library conferences, such as the 2025 ALA Conference and 2025 Association of Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) Conference.

Again, the project team (ALA, Convergence Design Lab, Knology, and advisors) will meet twice monthly throughout Phase 3 to track progress, troubleshoot issues that arise, and adjust procedures as needed.

Diversity Plan

At a time when library workers are facing discrimination and attacks, based both on their profession and, sometimes, their personal identities, ALA commits that this project will include and center the perspectives and experiences of a diverse group of people.

During the prototyping of the learning resources during Phase 3, we commit to prioritizing the inclusion of program examples created by and created for the following groups: historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups; those discriminated against based on gender or sexual identities and expressions; those from other protected classes, including age, religion, and disability status; those discriminated against based on nationality or language; those who experience socioeconomic barriers; people geographically isolated; immigrants, refugees and new Americans; and new and non-readers.

In the real-world programming success stories from public library workers that we anticipate featuring, we commit to prioritizing culturally relevant program examples and, to the best of our ability, to excluding programs that present bias and/or perpetuate harm. In order to do this, we will call upon our connections with highly skilled programming library workers that PPO has cultivated through our work with hundreds of libraries annually, as well as through the expertise and direction offered by the librarian advisors and staff in ALA's Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services. Furthermore, we commit to creating resources that help public library workers become more effective listeners, better advocates, and more empowered public servants for marginalized constituents.

In Phase 1 discovery activities, including survey dissemination and focus group recruitment, we commit to prioritizing the recruitment of BIPOC and other historically under-represented individuals. This will be achieved through direct outreach to ALA affiliate groups, including the [Black Caucus of ALA](#), the [Asian/Pacific Librarians Association](#), [REFORMA](#): The National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking, the [American Indian Library Association](#), and the [Joint Council of Librarians of Color](#).

Project Results

This project aims to increase the programming competencies of library workers through applied practice of theoretical concepts designed for local context. In its final form, this comprehensive set of free learning materials, all dedicated to the advancement of skills-building for library programming, will provide much-needed foundational learning for the tens of thousands of library workers nationwide whose work involves conceiving, planning, and executing programs for their communities. Rooted in a decade of IMLS-funded research and planning work, the Programming Librarian Learning Lab will make the important learnings of NILPPA relevant to the daily work of programming library workers. It will result in more thoughtful and impactful programs and, hopefully, in more connected, community-driven, and appreciated public libraries.

By featuring real-world library programming success stories, we seek to recognize and inspire creativity and innovation; foster connection between individual library workers; and advance excellent practices related to the Library Programming Competencies. By doing so, we will create deliverables that are adaptable to the particular needs of individual libraries and communities.

Sustainability of these resources is important to the project team, and we endeavor to create a Learning Lab that remains relevant far beyond the life of the grant. In order to create a sustainable system that does not become stale over time, the Learning Lab will center around a growing collection of stories and other multimedia content that invites the participation and contributions of users. ALA has already worked closely with our evaluators at Knology to develop specific project goals and to align them to evidence sources that will be tracked throughout this 12-month project and in future production and dissemination efforts.

Digital Product Plan

Digital Product Types

ALA will produce the Programming Librarian Learning Lab, an online professional learning community where programming library workers can access free learning experiences and just-in-time resources that build their capacity to plan, design, and deliver engaging public programs (e.g., events, discussions, workshops) that meet the needs of their library patrons. The Learning Lab may include the following components (actual contents will be determined during the Phase 1 discovery process as described in the Project Narrative):

- a tagged and discoverable collection of resources, examples, case studies, videos, and micro-content, all aligned to previous IMLS-funded work (i.e., the NILPPA Library Programming Competencies and the Skills for 21st-Century Librarians learning objectives);
- self-guided tools and playbooks that enable learners to workshop ideas and strategies based on their own contexts and learning needs;
- and a space for sharing and ideation in a community of practice that may draw upon existing communities on the ALA Connect platform and/or a private Facebook group.

The Learning Lab's resources will correspond to the nine Library Programming Competencies defined in NILPPA Phase 1. ALA will collaborate with instructional design partner Convergence Design Lab, as well as librarian advisors and independent evaluator Knology, to create and share the learning resources with library workers and other interested individuals through a comprehensive marketing plan.

While the actual components and delivery systems of the digital product deliverables will be determined in Phases 1 and 2 (as described in the Project Narrative), these may include videos, audio stories, webpages, graphics, interactive guides and/or eLearning content. We anticipate featuring real-world programming success stories from public library workers, representing a variety of communities, education levels, and backgrounds.

The PL Learning Lab will be available online and hosted on the Programming Librarian website (www.programminglibrarian.org). Programming Librarian is an ALA web property, hosted separately from the main ALA.org website architecture. Programming Librarian is accessible to everyone (regardless of ALA membership status) and requires no log-ins or passwords whatsoever. In addition to hosting the content on Programming Librarian, learning materials will be shared via ALA's social media sites, including Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook. Press releases promoting the resources and other project-related content may also be hosted on ALA.org.

Convergence Design Lab and ALA will perform the work involved with creating the digital content of the learning resources by using Moodle/WebCourseWorks Articulate, Zoom, MS

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Office, Drupal, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or YouTube. No other special equipment or software is required for this project. Products and deliverables resulting from the project will be created in XML, MP4, TIFF, SCORM, and/or PDF formats.

All deliverables produced for this project will be compliant with ALA Accessibility Standards (www.ala.org/support/style/accessibility), requiring all content appearing on the ALA website or appearing on a third-party website with ALA-affiliation to level 2 accessibility guidelines as specified by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines WC3 Recommendation (<https://www.w3.org/TR/2008/REC-WCAG20-20081211/>).

The taxonomy metadata is created during upload and stored on ProgrammingLibrarian.org via Drupal taxonomies.

Availability

The digital content created for this project will be available to all libraries through ALA's Programming Librarian website (<http://www.programminglibrarian.org>). All online learning and resources will be made available freely via the web. Content on Programming Librarian is accessible via all standard web browsers and requires no special software tools to view or interact with the content. Learners will not be required to create a user account to access content on the Programming Librarian website, and ALA membership is not required.

Access

ALA will provide access to all publications or products and deliverables resulting from the project, in furtherance of its non-profit and tax-exempt status. Permission to use, copy, and distribute these publications or products and deliverables will be granted for private, non-commercial, and education purposes only, provided that ALA's copyright statement, available on ALA's website (<http://www.ala.org/copyright>), is used.

Any publications or products and deliverables resulting from the project and use of the Grant funding will be governed by the Creative Commons License, Attribution - Non-Commercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International.

As needed, ALA will require all individuals appearing in video/audio/photo content to sign an agreement granting ALA right, title, and interest (including intellectual property rights). No restricted images or other digital assets will be used.

Sustainability

All digital content resulting from the project will be publicly available during and beyond the grant term on the ALA project website and ProgrammingLibrarian.org, with the above conditions of use clearly posted.