Project Title: Libraries as Catalysts for Creating More Inclusive Data

Project Summary: The University of Washington Information School (Principal Investigator: Marika Cifor; Co-PI: Maria Garrido; Senior Personnel: Megan Finn and Stacey Wedlake) request $245,620 from the *National Leadership Grant for Libraries program* for a *research in service to practice grant (*Category: *Strengthening Community Engagement*) to investigate ways in which public libraries can become catalysts for creating more inclusive data on the effects of COVID-19 in socially marginalized groups. Our research questions are: How can public libraries engage and support marginalized communities in creating more inclusive data about the effects of COVID-19? And, what are the most effective strategies and tools for public libraries to engage their communities in inclusive data practices that can better inform policy and program decision-making? We seek to answer these questions by developing a national workshop for library staff, piloting community engagement-based inclusive data practices in five libraries, and testing community-driven data collection methods. Over this 1-year project, we will generate a proven curriculum and tools on inclusive data practices for library staff across the country, uncover pressing data gaps, and gather preliminary data on impacts in marginalized communities. This research will inform policy and program development for libraries, community-based organizations, and local governments to develop more equitable crisis responses in the future.

Project Justification: Data-driven responses are central to how scientists and other experts advise policymakers on effectively managing the social, economic, and cultural effects of COVID-19 across diverse communities. Yet, we also know that as much as data can reveal, datasets often embody the historical underrepresentation of racial, ethnic, and other marginalized groups.[1] These limitations render significant amounts of government data insufficient to inform policies and programs that address the urgent needs of marginalized communities hardest hit by the crisis, including African-Americans, LatinXs, Native Americans, refugees, and undocumented workers.[2] Current exclusionary data practices rooted in racism, colonialism, misogyny, and xenophobia amplify the harm marginalized groups face during a pandemic.

Public libraries, social organizations, and policy-makers struggle to meet the specific needs of their communities due to the lack of widely available county-level race and ethnicity data for COVID cases[3] - *a stark reflection of existing inequities in local and national government datasets.* As our Yakima Valley library partner noted: "I am not able to get data more specific than Hispanic." When data, if available, is only disaggregated by this demographic factor it lacks specificity in other key intersectional factors (income, gender, household composition, living conditions, etc.) critical to addressing diverse needs of communities even within the same racial or ethnic group.

Public libraries can play a role in creating more inclusive data processes which will build more equitable responses to COVID-19 and future crises. Open-data and data literacy projects in the library field have focused on enabling the use of open data (e.g. "*Leveraging Use of Open Data by Public Library Staff for Community Benefit*" (LG-246255-OLS-20); IFLA's *Library Map of the World*) by equipping library staff to better use *existing* government data to identify community needs. **This project extends these efforts by enabling public libraries to play a key role in ensuring that diverse voices are involved in _producing_ more inclusive data related to COVID-19.** Just because data is open does not mean it is inclusive. More inclusive data better reflects the realities of people who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and can raise the visibility of their lived experiences of the crisis. Libraries have long embraced their role as informational authorities helping to inform the public. We envision public libraries not only as places to *access* information and knowledge, but also to co-*create* knowledge and facilitate agency in and with their communities.

Project Work Plan: To aid public libraries in becoming catalysts for creating more inclusive data on COVID-19, we propose a three-pronged approach:

> *Phase 1: National workshop with library staff (Months 1-3):* Based on our recent creation and implementation of a four-week online training course for public librarians in California,[4] and in close partnership with the Research Institute for Public Libraries (RIPL) and the Califa Group, we will design curricula for a free 2-day, two hour per day, online workshop for public library staff nationwide. Workshop participants will be recruited through advertisements to RIPL's networks, social media, and through ALA, PLA, and other listservs for public librarians. The workshop provides

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[1] Barchas-Lichtenstein, J. (2020). Who Counts? The Politics of Covid-19 Data. https://knology.org/article/who-counts-the-politics-of-covid-19-data/
[2] Lopez, H. M, et, al. (2020). FInancial and Health Impacts of Covid-19. https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/
[3] Center for Disease Control (2020). The Covid Racial Data Tracker. https://covidtracking.com/race
[4] Data Literacy: Why it matters for underrepresented groups and how libraries can help (2020). https://infopeople.org/civicrm/event/info?id=907

customizable techniques to library staff, including librarians and paraprofessionals, to support them in developing *community engagement strategies* to enhance data literacy, community advocacy, and participation in processes that build knowledge to inform decision-making. Themes to be covered include: *identifying critical data gaps; assessing the representation of diverse voices in government datasets; factors that affect underrepresentation; training for securing data privacy; and mapping community assets and other stakeholders relevant to creating equitable data collection.* Each library that participates will create a plan for supporting their local communities in addressing COVID-19 data gaps.

Phase 2: Pilot of community engagement strategies in five libraries (Months 4-10). We will partner with five public libraries - two confirmed participants in Washington State (NCW Libraries, which serves low income rural communities, and Yakima Valley Libraries, which serves rural LatinX, Native-American, Filipino, and Japanese communities) and three additional libraries in the Midwest, South, and East. Library staff participants in the Phase 1 workshop will work with the PIs and senior personnel to develop community engagement strategies that will: 1) *identify key community-based organizations (CBOs) and other relevant stakeholders*; 2) *collaboratively map pressing data gaps*; and 3) *build bridges with local communities to better understand and document the health, social, and economic effects of COVID-19.* Phase 1 workshop content will support each public library in identifying which underserved group(s) in their community to target, and thus which CBOs to partner with, in their preliminary projects. This phase entails planning meetings once during months 4, 5, and 6; an online workshop with librarians, CBOs and other stakeholders in month 7; and monthly check-ins to evaluate preliminary data collection modalities. Data collection activities with communities will be implemented in months 8-10. We anticipate the latter activity to include surveys, interviews, or focus groups depending on methods most appropriate for the context and community groups that each library identifies.

Phase 3: Curriculum revision and writing reports (Months 10-12): Based on findings from the national workshop and the five pilot projects, we will revise our online workshop curriculum and make it publicly available via the project website. We will also prepare a report for librarians and researchers with the results of our partnership with the five public libraries, documenting approaches for engaging communities in inclusive data processes, and lessons learned. We will share findings at ALA and PLA, through publications, by co-hosting a Twitter based CritLib session with library partners, and on the project website featuring the curriculum, community-engagement plans, and implementation data from participating libraries. Lastly, we will integrate our findings into the MLIS curriculum at University of Washington to train emerging professionals in community engagement and data literacy. The project's findings will advance *research*, *curriculum,* and *professional practice.*

Diversity Plan: The project focuses on redressing data gaps for marginalized communities. It provides public libraries with tools to better serve rural, low-income, racially and ethnically diverse communities in ways that empower marginalized people to generate data that reflects community needs and experiences with COVID-19. Our five library partners at rural, urban and suburban libraries serve similarly diverse communities and regions. The project also engages and benefits underrepresented library professionals and students.

Project Results: The project aligns with IMLS strategic plan goals: *lifelong learning* (goal 1), *build capacity* (goal 2), and *community collaboration and engagement* (goal 5) (IMLS, 2022). By incorporating the resulting curricula and approaches for community engagement and inclusive data collection practices in the five libraries, this project will serve as a model for library action that can be adopted during other crises, whether fire, earthquakes, or hurricanes. This health crisis has exposed the urgency of not only making data accessible as prior efforts have focused on, but, moreover, demonstrates the need for libraries to support generating novel data that better reflects the needs and realities of vulnerable communities. In building inclusive data, libraries nationwide can inform a more equitable and effective response to the COVID-19 health crisis.

Budget. The estimated total request from IMLS for this 1-year project is $245,620.00 with no cost share. This includes $40,182 for salary plus $10,214 for benefits for 3.5 of PI summer support; $34,607 for 4.5 months of RA support (including fringe) per year; $68,800 for subcontracts to library partners; $12,006 for student tuition. Indirect costs are charged at 55.5% on MTDC per the UW's negotiated rate for applied research, totaling $79,811.40.