

NLG-Libraries-FY 24 City of Rapid City/Rapid City Public Library

Creating a Replicable Roadmap and Toolkit to Build a Library Consortium that Maximizes Public Access

Introduction: The City of Rapid City/Rapid City Public Library (CRC/RCPL), in conjunction with the Black Hills Library Consortium (BHLC), requests \$101,750 for an eighteen-month planning grant to secure further collaboration with underserved libraries throughout western South Dakota and improve the public's access to regional library collections. This proposal aligns with IMLS's Goal 3: Advance Collections Stewardship and Access, Objective 3.2: Promote access to museum and library collections, and with NLG Goal 5: Strengthen the ability of libraries, archives, and museums to work collaboratively for the benefit of the communities they serve, Objective 5.1: Support the development of replicable systems that leverage institutional expertise and experience to maximize public access to and use of knowledge resources. The proposal will address limitations to library collections' accessibility, with the goal of increasing the reach/breadth of the BHLC by developing a comprehensive work plan that will make a marked difference on ensuring underserved populations acquire expanded, seamless access to library collections. This proposal will result in a roadmap (comprehensive step-by-step guide) for libraries around the country to follow, complete with a toolkit of templates, documents, and resources libraries can use as they build and grow their own partnerships and collaborative systems.

Project Justification: Rapid City is western South Dakota's largest city and is a part of an MSA that includes an estimated population of 145,159 (Census, 2022) and communities within two counties (Pennington and Meade). Because Rapid City operates as a center of economic, education, health care, and cultural resources in the region, individuals living outside city limits frequently commute for work, appointments, shopping, etc. Individuals residing outside of Pennington County, however, are precluded from borrowing from RCPL unless they pay a monthly or annual fee. South Dakota state legislature prohibits the creation of a library district, so the Black Hills Library Consortium, created in 2015 to maximize cost savings for an Integrated Library System and facilitate local interlibrary loaning, allows for a workaround. Since its foundation, BHLC has expanded to include collaborative collection development and some limited reciprocal borrowing. The Consortium currently has twelve partnering libraries that serve five counties and 66,846 registered users (library cardholders). With a combined population of 188,749 (Census, 2022), a significant percentage (64%) of the five-county region's population remains underserved, due to distances required to travel to BHLC libraries, lack of transportation, and lack of knowledge regarding BHLC benefits. Furthermore, counties beyond the immediate region have populations that could benefit from BHLC services yet cannot use its library collections because their library is not a BHLC member.

Through the proposed project, CRC/RCPL and BHLC seek to maximize community access to library collections by partnering with additional libraries in western South Dakota, expanding existing reciprocal borrowing agreements, making the borrowing process more seamless and streamlined, and determining how best to reach underserved communities and increase library literacy and patronage. The vision is to potentially extend consortium benefits to eleven counties (combined population of 56,857; Census, 2022) and thirteen libraries (32,084 registered users) that are beyond the current reach yet have populations that would benefit from BHLC collections access. The developed plan, complete with a roadmap describing processes and a toolkit with templates and resources, will be replicable in other parts of the country that have similar collections limitations as a result of distance/demographic restrictions. This plan will also strengthen the BHLC's ability to work collaboratively and replicate systems and institutional expertise that will maximize public access.

Project Work Plan: Over the span of eighteen months, the following will be accomplished and systemized in a comprehensive roadmap that will explain each phase and its deliverables. Phase I: Contract with a facilitator who will meet with current consortium members through a series of in-person (at RCPL) and Zoom meetings to establish the baseline of what is working, what needs to change, and what currently is not being done. Input and feedback from each library and patrons will be taken into account as a thorough review of the consortium's current status is completed. Toolkit products created at this stage will include a list of facilitator qualifications, a SWOT analysis guide, library and patron questionnaires, and a framework for organizing, assessing, and disseminating feedback and results. Current by-laws and policies and procedures will be reviewed, and examples of standard consortia documents will be created for the toolkit. Phase II: Determine what other libraries may want to join the consortium and reach out to them to explore partnership agreements. Additional in-person and/or Zoom meetings with the facilitator will bring current and potential consortium members together. Memoranda of Agreement will be discussed and best practices for creating such agreements will be determined. During this stage, an opt-out option will be allowed for those libraries who decide they do not want to participate. Toolkit products created during this phrase will include examples of invitation letters, a guide for

establishing MOAs, and an opt-out form. Phase III: Complete a cost benefit analysis on how recommended steps will enable the consortium to meet its new vision/goals while providing cost savings as a result of enhanced collaboration. Findings and data will be compiled into a PDF package for email and online distribution. A step-by-step guide for completing and interpreting a cost benefit analysis will be created for the toolkit. Consortium leaders will present the analysis' findings to area library boards to seek buy-in and approval. This will lead to solidifying new and existing partnerships. A template of the presentation along with best practices for gaining board approval will be created for the toolkit. Phase IV: Develop a work plan that will demonstrate next steps the BHLC should take to expand its services to a larger underserved population. Discussions will include how by-laws and policies/procedures should be amended, what IT changes and collection merges will be required, and how consortium members will need to maximize collaboration to ensure collection access remains seamless for all patrons. The work plan will establish implementation steps, budgetary needs, an outreach plan, and a list of recognized partners who have agreed to the revised by-laws/procedures and have the buy-in/approval needed to make the new vision/goals of the consortium a reality. A comprehensive, fillable template of the work plan, with detailed instructions and recommendations for all its sections, will be created for the toolkit.

The facilitator will need to be an outside entity (not a library staff member) who can approach this project objectively, be practical and realistic yet understanding when dealing with varying opinions and financial considerations, and adept in completing SWOT analyses and gathering and disseminating data and information. This same individual may complete the cost benefit analysis and create the toolkit products and deliverables, or another consultant will be hired to do so. In addition to the facilitator/contractor(s), personnel required to complete this planning project will include each library's director and some support staff (library technicians, etc.). RCPL, the largest library within the consortium, will lead the planning efforts, with the RCPL Director acting as the Project Director. The RCPL Director has prior experience with library consortium development, as she was a board officer for the South West Library Consortium in Australia and visited new libraries and helped develop operational guidelines that were later used as a framework during BHLC's formation. Management of the project (tracking progress, IMLS-required deliverables, etc.) will reside with the Grants Division of the City of Rapid City. Overall project progress will be tracked by assessing how well deliverables created during each phase of the work plan meet the needs of this project, include both qualitative data (partner/library board/patron opinions and observations) and quantitative data (estimated cost savings, percentage of underserved population reached, growth to library collections/resources, etc.), and translate into the completion of the roadmap and toolkit that are to be made available to other libraries throughout the country.

Diversity Plan: Western South Dakota is predominantly rural. Individuals living in the immediate vicinity travel between eight miles to 30 miles to reach city limits, but individuals beyond that may travel from 40 miles to 200 miles or more. Residents in outlying areas often have inadequate transportation and typically coordinate trips to Rapid City only once or twice a month. A significant percentage of this population is also disadvantaged, having a larger degree of socioeconomic and health inequalities, as well as historical trauma experienced by multiple generations of Native American community members. Furthermore, library literacy is low, resulting in fewer individuals in the underserved demographic taking advantage of library collections. This proposed project will enable RCPL and the BHLC to develop a plan that will allow for more equity and inclusion across all populations with varying cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Project Results: The projected results of this planning project will be a clear vision for how the BHLC wants to grow and the development of a work plan that can be implemented locally upon project completion and nationally with the roadmap and toolkit. Immediate target groups that will benefit will be local underserved populations and libraries throughout the country who desire to form similar collaborations and replicable, shared collections systems. Long-term beneficiaries include the growing populations in the region and throughout the country that seek a more streamlined way to access library collections, resources, and services. Ultimately, the envisioned project will provide area and national libraries a complete step-by-step guide for establishing, growing, and improving library collaboration and public access.

Budget Summary: CRC/RCPL requests \$101,750 in IMLS funding over eighteen months to support contract costs for a meeting facilitator (\$40,000) who will lead meetings, complete a SWOT analysis, gather questionnaire feedback, and analyze feedback and results. This same individual or a second consultant will be hired to complete a cost benefit analysis (\$15,000) and create the roadmap and toolkit deliverables (\$15,000). A total of \$11,000 in stipends is requested in compensation for the time 22 library directors and staff will be spending on this project. Travel reimbursement for mileage and per diem meals (\$9,500) is requested for library directors and staff to attend eight in-person meetings. Additional material costs (\$2,000) and indirect costs (\$9,250) are requested for project management and maintenance.