

Integrating Community-Based Learning with LIS Education

Drexel University, in collaboration with the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Drexel Lindy Center for Civic Engagement, and the Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships, is submitting this proposal to the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program for Masters-level program enhancement focusing on Community Catalysts. The project's goal is to develop a community-based learning model for Library and Information Science (LIS) education and to educate 12 IMLS Fellows as Community Catalysts to become designers and providers of innovative, data-driven community service that will connect local communities with libraries, archives, and museums. The total requested funding is \$248k, with a Drexel's matching fund of \$132k.

1. Statement of Need. “Re-branding for community-based librarianship” is one of the overarching themes identified in the recent [IMLS Forum Report](#). When LIS educators came together to discuss the 21st century skills and expertise of future librarians, “community competencies” appeared at the top of the list of the expertise and competencies crucial to the LIS profession. However, despite the importance of community competencies, there is little knowledge of how to define community engagement practice and how to train and educate LIS students to become community catalysts in this digital era. This proposed project will fill this gap through developing a community-based learning model for LIS education that fully integrates a community-based learning component into the LIS curriculum. This proposed project will build on our newly enhanced LIS curriculum, expand our capability for educating the next generation of library and archival leaders, and present a vetted model that can be shared with other LIS programs.

2. Project Plan and Expected Outcomes. Drexel University is actively building an infrastructure to support community-based learning. [Drexel's strategic plan](#) sets ambitious goals for the University to become the most civically-engaged university in the country and to make strong positive impacts on those living in the local community. [The Lindy Center for Civic Engagement](#) was established to provide “a centralized, multidisciplinary hub for Drexel and its partners to incubate and launch innovative, effective, community initiatives that build regional economic strength while promoting experiential learning.” Similarly, [the Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships](#) combines Drexel's knowledge resources with the expertise of our community-based partners to address the needs and interests of the university neighborhood “in a way that strengthens, empowers, and educates, while maintaining a strong commitment to economic and social justice [See [here](#)].” Already, coPIs of this project, Lin and Greenberg, have worked with the Dornsife Center to run a [Play with Data” camp](#) for high-school girls in the neighborhood community.

Taking advantage of this excellent infrastructure for community-based learning, we propose a community catalyst project to enhance our capacity for educating the next generation of LIS students to become leaders in community engagement through information services. Three outcomes are expected: 1) a community-based learning model for LIS education that can be shared with other LIS programs nationally; 2) an enhanced LIS curriculum with a community-based learning component, and 3) graduating 12 pioneering LIS Community Catalysts.

The model: Drexel University has developed a community-based learning (CBL) model for civic engagement. The model encourages students not only to study the issues affecting the world, but also study alongside the people affected. The Lindy Center has experience in working with faculty to develop three types of community-based-learning courses: **Side-by-side** courses that create a co-learning environment in which Drexel students and community members take classes and learn together. **Community hybrid** courses for Drexel students that span both the classroom and the community. **Service learning** courses that require community service hours. In this project, LIS faculty will work with the Lindy Center and develop, implement, and test the model for LIS education. We will improve the model throughout the project, seek input from two independent project advisors ([Family & Community Engagement](#) center representative, and Ms. Angela Lindo, Senior Librarian, New York Public Library), and share our model and outcomes with LIS schools—nationwide.

The curriculum: The second outcome of the project will be an innovative curriculum enhancement in the design and development of community-based service. Our recently updated curriculum includes four new core courses, such as “Organization of Data and Information” and “Data and digital stewardship,” that target the

development of knowledge and skills for working with digital data. The proposed project will allow for students to apply such knowledge and skills to community service. Further, we will enhance our curriculum in this area through the development of two new courses based on the community-based learning model:

- **Design Thinking for Digital Community Service** – A side-by-side CBL course to foster understanding of the community needs and develop services that will meet these needs.
- **Data Analytics for Community-Based Data and Service** – From action research to impact assessment, this course will help students pursue scholarship on engagement and practice community-based learning skills.

The IMLS Fellows: We will recruit 12 LIS students who demonstrate excellent academic performance and superior service attitudes and who are interested in scholarship of engagement and community-based learning as IMLS Community Catalyst Fellows. The fellows will engage in community-based learning through their MSLIS course work. Each fellow will also complete a specialized capstone course comprising supervised community project to advance their proficiency in design and development of community-based digital service.

The project will be implemented in three years and co-directed by Professors Xia Lin (Department Head), Jane Greenberg (Associate Department Head), Denise Agosto (LIS Program Director), Erjia Yan and Alex Poole (Assistant Professors). The first year of the project will focus on new course/curriculum development and on community-oriented student recruitment. Six students each in the second and third year will be admitted to the LIS program to become IMLS community Catalyst Fellows. The fellows will work closely with faculty to develop community-based service and mentality in their coursework and capstone projects. In the third year, we will also develop and refine the CBL-based model for civic engagement and publish and disseminate the results. The curriculum, the course materials, and the lesson learned in this project will be disseminated to the LIS community nationwide through conference presentations and a virtual workshop to be held at the end of the project.

3. Diversity Plan. We will make special efforts to identify and recruit fellows from groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in LIS programs, drawing as much as possible from the highly-diverse Philadelphia population with the goal of recruiting and supporting students from traditionally underserved populations. We will work closely with the Dornsife Center to develop service in the Philadelphia's Promise Zone. Philadelphia was among the first to receive Promise Zone designation in 2014 through the White House's Promise Zone Initiative, created to promote educational, economic, and health development in some of the nation's most severely economically-disadvantaged neighborhoods.

4. Broad Impact. The success and experience we gain through this project will have significant national impact. The project will be developed based on design thinking, data-driven service, and civic engagement principles. The community-based learning model developed in the project will be transferable to other LIS schools. The courses and special training materials and tools created for community-based learning can be shared with the LIS community nationwide. For sustainability, we anticipate our degree program will be enhanced by this project and the community-based learning will enrich our curriculum as well as other LIS curriculums as we face a paradigm shift in LIS education – from content-centric to service-centric LIS education. Prior trainee-based community engagement projects have largely focused on rural or specialized (e.g., ethnic studies, digital stewardship) communities. Our project will focus on community-based learning in an urban, underserved community. More than 55M of the U.S. population live in cities larger than Cincinnati (300k). There is an untapped opportunity for LIS education to be more integrated into urban civic institutions.

5. Budget

A significant portion of the budget (\$140K) will be on tuition scholarships for the 12 students recruited to become a LIS Community Catalyst. This will allow to recruit the best students and provide incentives for the students to spend time and efforts on community-based learning. About \$30K is budgeted for development of the community-based learning model and courses. Another \$30K for teaching the courses and supervising students on community-based projects. The total funding requested is \$248,471, with an indirect cost of \$39K. Each of the five faculty members involved in this project will commit 5% of their academic year's time to design, develop, execute the proposed project, participate in evaluation, and disseminate project results.