

***Cultures and Practices of Community College Libraries: Capacity Building for Community Catalysts***

Everett Community College will team with librarians at the University of Washington’s iSchool, Pierce College, Highline College, Seattle Central College, Shoreline Community College, Centralia College and representatives from the Washington State Board of Community & Technical Colleges Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup to lead a statewide effort to examine the culture and practices of Washington’s Community & Technical College libraries through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This 18-month, \$60,000, IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Community Catalysts Planning Grant seeks to explore the potential expansion of known equity-supporting work within the community college library space, and identify aspects of community college library cultural norms and practices that may currently hinder the advancement of equity, diversity, and inclusion on community college campuses. Recognizing the interconnectedness of student and employee experiences in educational institutions, this grant will gather data on both populations to simultaneously build a more equitable, diverse, and sustainable community college library environment and professional field of community college librarianship.

**STATEMENT OF BROAD NEED**

Three dominant themes of action for colleges to take emerge from the research regarding closing of equity gaps that reflect the rationale for our project focus: 1) eliminating historical structural barriers; 2) building trusting relationships; and 3) empowering students to navigate the higher education environment. (Holzer and Blum, 2017; Anderson, et.al 2013; Levesque, 2020). In order to respond to these themes, libraries need to explore their own cultures and practices and identify specific actions to assure that we are prepared both culturally and operationally to support our historically underserved students. (Holzer and Blum, 2017). We believe that doing this work in community college libraries has the potential to improve the experiences of current librarians of color, create a foundation to increase the diversity of librarian workforce, and support the evolving needs of students and faculty of color that community college libraries serve.

**PROJECT DESIGN**

This project builds on the contributions of Pierce College in the IMLS funded Community College Library Support for Student Success research grant (RE-96-17-0113-17) and broader achievements in equity work recognized by Achieving the Dream, Guided Pathways, and the Aspen Institute among many of the partnering colleges.

Planning grant activities will result in: 1) A survey of the cultures and practices of Washington state community college libraries; 2) First person artifacts reflecting the experiences of historically marginalized library employees and students; 3) Analysis of the data to inform individual college and system-wide library planning for change; and 4) Recommendations for a statewide approach to adopting high impact practices intended to address inequities. A steering team of stakeholders including each partner college identified will oversee a project over four phases:

**Phase 1: Organizational Climate Assessment.** An established self-assessment tool will be used to understand individual and systemwide cultures. Tools under consideration include ReTool: Racial Equity in the Panel Process and ClimateQUAL®: Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment, which collects data on library staff perceptions related to (a) their library's commitment to the principles of diversity, (b) organizational policies and procedures, and (c) staff attitudes. The questions in this online survey are designed to help understand the impact perceptions have on service quality in a library setting.

**Phase 2: Individual Experiences Interviews.** In this second phase, using a storytelling approach and working with an experienced researcher in qualitative research design, we will seek a richer understanding of how the colleges' organizational climates affect library staff and students of color. We will gather quantitative and qualitative information from individual library staff, faculty, and students of color and other marginalized groups using an action research tool (such as Photovoice) to provide snapshots of the lived experience of people of color marginalized populations within our libraries which can inform future planning.

**Phase 3: Analyze and Assess.** A consultant with expertise in and focus on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion will conduct a preliminary analysis of the combined climate and individual experiences data to identify patterns, concerns, promising practices, and needs. We will convene a series of meetings for stakeholders to analyze and understand the findings and use them to inform individual college strategic plans to address local needs and recommend systemwide strategies to support them. In addition to convening library staff from across the state, consultants will include Debra Gilchrist, Vice-President of Learning and Student Success, Pierce College, and the University of Washington iSchool.

**Phase 4: Action Planning.** In the final phase, we will compile and present findings in a summit to engage a wider community of academic libraries in a discussion of equity practices and organizational culture and student engagement. Recommendations based on the grant findings will be presented to the WA CTC Library Leadership Council and are anticipated to become part of the Council's annual action plan. This will include metrics of success, benchmarks, and goals for sustainability and continuous improvement in order to mechanize accountability moving forward.

### **DIVERSITY PLAN**

This project will support the community colleges of Washington state to better understand their internal climates in order to identify actions aimed at increasing persistence and success among students, faculty, and staff of color. The project will seek a better understanding of challenges and opportunities within community college libraries in order to positively impact all of our libraries' skills, resources, and expertise in serving diverse student populations that result in better student retention, success, and educational experience.

### **BROAD IMPACT**

This project seeks to leverage our statewide system of community and technical colleges in Washington state to provide data and recommendations that improve our libraries. Our 34-college system includes community and technical colleges, both rural and urban, small and large. While some libraries in the system lack capacity to fully engage in typical grant projects, the activities in this grant will be designed to maximize participation in order to include student and staff voices from across the state. The resulting plans and recommendations will form an early blueprint for community college library planning across the country.

### **BUDGET**

The total anticipated costs of the project are \$60,000 allocated to include: \$14,300 in salaries, wages and benefits to support project coordination across libraries; \$30,000 to contract with a consultant and researcher to facilitate Phases 2 and 3 activities and deliverables; \$4,500 dedicated to participant support in Phase 1 and 2; \$5,000 to support action research and analysis tools in Phase 1 and 2 and dissemination in Phase 4; and, \$3,000 to support regional mileage reimbursement. The negotiated indirect rate is 40% of salaries only and is estimated at \$3,200.