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LESSONS FROM IMLS FUNDED COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

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>> SANDRA TORO: Hi, everyone. We'll be getting started in just another minute. If you can hear me, could you please type "yes" into the chat box? Great, thanks. Hi, good afternoon. My name is Sandra Toro, I'm a Senior Program Officer in the Office of Library Services. Today, we are presenting Lessons from IMLS-Funded Communities of Practice.

We presented this in person at the conference about a month ago, or a little bit less. And we thought it was just such a nice introduction to a variety of Communities of Practice that we wanted to spread the word, and thought we would have a virtual presentation of the in-person meeting. And today we are going to be joined by Lisa Hinchliffe from the University of Illinois, Korie Twiggs from the Association of Science-Technology Centers, Anne Holland, Jill Castek, Alicia Suskin, Kristin Lahurd representing the American Library Association, and Janet McKenney, who is from the Maine State Library. After everyone gives an overview of their Community of Practice and shares some information about the challenges and assumptions they've had to rethink throughout the process of overseeing the Community of Practice, we'll have some time for discussion.

And these are some of the questions that guided how we put the presentation together. And we'll come back to these questions at the end. But just to give you a sense of what those questions are, they're up on the screen now. And you'll see that

we were thinking about the kinds of important theoretical ideas and themes that guide how Communities of Practice are developed and supported, what our definitions are around what a Community of Practice is, and what successful Communities of Practice might look like.

What are some new perspectives and projects that we need to help address issues of equity and access? And the assumptions we need to rethink about Communities of Practice and how to support the CoPs' members' needs. Teaching tools and techniques that we think are working really well, and finally, a research agenda around Communities of Practice -- do we need one, and if so, what might that agenda look like? So we are going to go ahead and get started with Lisa, who will be talking about assessment in action.

>> LISA JANICKE HINCHLIFFE: Wonderful. And thank you, Sandy, and also to all of my other copresenters who are running such interesting and valuable Community of Practice projects. It's my honor to tell you about the Association of College and Research Libraries Initiative, Assessment in Action. This project was a three-year project through which we developed a Community of Practice that consists of more than 200 academic librarians around the United States with a few outside of the United States as well who led campus-based teams.

And those teams themselves were also Communities of Practice, including they were developing teams on their campus, and we see that those Communities of Practice are continuing as well. Everyone who participated in Assessment in Action engaged in a 15-month professional development program, during which they not only learned about assessment and investigating the impact of the library on student learning and success at their academic institution, but they carried out an actual project in which they did such an investigation.

So they learned about research, and also did research. (Clearing throat) We used -- we were actually really fortunate in our case that we got to work directly with one of the founders of the concept of Community of Practice. And so we worked with that person and Bev, using their definition that a Community of Practice is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do. And they learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. And this reflects the social nature of human learning. So we had a Community of Practice at the national level, and then a Community of Practice at the campus level for all of our teams.

We were able, over the course of this three years, and the three cohorts of librarians that went through it to develop a somewhat self-organizing and ongoing professional Community of Practice. One of the things that we're seeing is that national

Community of Practice needs ongoing support. And that is what an association is well-situated to do. So the Association of College and Research Libraries being sort of, if you will, a platform upon which that 200 plus member group can continue to self-organize and connect with each other.

We also saw the development of many campus Communities of Practice. And our research right now is working on investigating what made a really successful Community of Practice. And one of the things we noted is that leadership matters in those campus communities. The places where librarians were able to be strong leaders of those campus Community of Practice teams, they often have been elevated to a leadership role on campus relative to assessment. So, they have become seen as scholarship of teaching and learning, or action research, research and scholars in addition to librarians.

They wrote campus project reports. In addition, we have annually published a white paper about that year's work. We've also seen a huge scholarly output from this project. We have a monograph on action research methods. We have a special journal issue of an action research scholarly article. And we've seen hundreds and hundreds of presentations, poster sessions, and the like. So we're in the midst now of robust planning for the next phase of this project.

We were very grateful to have IMLS funding that allowed us to do this very robust program for three years. But, of course, now we need to see how it is sustainable. One of the things that we have seen is that it's not sustainable at the price point that it would cost in order for it to be exactly the same experience. So our librarian community has said this is great, but we need you to put it into smaller pieces and bites so that we can, sort of, access it at a lower price point. So's good to know.

We did have some challenges in soliciting institutions to join. Having some of those programs gain momentum. In a couple cases, there was dissipation of leadership and support at the campuses. And without a doubt, it's definitely challenging to sustain a 15-month commitment for a librarian and a campus team, especially as so many things are changing at their own institution.

So these are some of the challenges and the questions that we came up with. We thought, originally, that an initial commitment to join would mean sustained commitment and support for participation. And in many cases, that was true. But in other cases, places where having to generate recommitment from their institutions in order to keep the project going. We really struggled with figuring out whether we should teach people about Community of Practice, which is what we did the first year, or

we settled in the second year and continued with, is it better to practice being a Community of Practice rather than learn about it, and only later give them the language and vocabulary for that.

And then we're really still working out what is the role of a professional association for sustaining an ongoing Community of Practice in a subarea of expertise when we have a lot of other competing demands as well. So, it's been a great project. Our website has an immense number of resources. And with that, I'll turn it over to Korie.

>> KORIE TWIGGS: Thank you. Well, hello, everyone. My name is Korie Twiggs, and I am a program manager at the Association of Science Technology Centers, as well as being a Community Manager -- one of the community managers for the YOUmedia learning labs community of practice. I just want to make sure my slides will turn. All right. They will. (Laughter) All right. Well, our Community of Practice is funded by IMLS. We are an open online community that invites all educators, librarians, practitioners, museum community members who are committed to providing transformative system experiences for youth, and particularly teens.

There's a focus in our CoP. And that focus is specifically on allowing these users to find a community of people with like-minded views to network with one another, provide them with resources -- a repository of resources, in fact, that they can download and share, as well as attempt to promote professional development opportunities for our CoP users.

Now, the idea for this CoP was actually born out of a very popular, successful grant that was supported by both IMLS and the MacArthur Foundation. Some of you may know I'm speaking specifically about Learning Labs and Libraries Museums Grant that gave seed money to libraries and museums across the nation to build 24 digital media spaces for teens. That project was extremely successful, garnered a lot of attention and popularity.

And as a result, IMLS was kind enough to work with both Aztec and the National Writing Project. We are copartners on this grant -- to start to think about and develop this online Community of Practice that was based on the principles of the Learning Labs Grant, which is to promote free-choice learning, teen-centered -- and, of course, teen-centered learning -- and to provide community for its mentors and practitioners to share their resources and practices.

All right. Now, in thinking about our CoP and the characteristics of that CoP that demonstrate our success, really center on the design that was created -- the design of the CoP that was created specifically for users and their needs.

In developing the CoP and its structure, we asked our users what they wanted to see. And they specifically identified a space -- an area that held a repository of resources highlighting their needs, both as mentors working at their sites, and any sort of administrative need that they felt was important to load to our CoP.

They also wanted a discussions area, because they're huge communicators. They wanted to have the power to bounce off ideas, share their practices. They like to talk. Our people like to communicate. So, the discussion area has really been the heart, if you will, the town square of our CoP, and an important piece of it. We rely on our CoP platform as well as an annual survey to gather information about the needs and trends of our community.

And specifically, that discussion area has become an area that we keep our ear to the ground on. Our users are communicating left and right to one another. The discussion forum is an area where they can upload and share resources which we as community managers capture and specifically curate into different areas of our resource bank that are easiest for our users to download.

They also talked about the trends, what they want to know about and what they want to hear. And as a result of that, we've developed online programming that specifically fits the needs of our users. Our users happen to be very busy people working at their libraries or their museums, or the other organizations that follow and become members of our CoP. So we thought that the easiest way of providing information for our users is through podcasts.

So we developed a podcast series that's become extremely important to -- for our users for capturing information. The podcasts are quick fixes, if you will. They run no more than 30 minutes. It's done in the discussion style. It's done by our users who have knowledge of the particular topics that they select. People can download them, get the information at the pace and at the time that they want, and use it to inform their own programs or any sort of research that they're doing. So that's been a really important and successful demonstration of how our users are taking advantage of the CoP.

So those particular elements -- the curated resources, the discussion forums, certainly, and the fruits of that such as the resources that people garner from our podcasts have indicated the success that we've had in the structure of our CoP and the way in which we engage our members. Our growing community -- and our community is growing by leaps and bounds.

We started off two years ago with 50 users. We are now up to approximately 300, something we're really proud of. The

original YOUmedia learning labs grantees came from a conglomeration of 24 museums and libraries. And the number of institutions that are now a part of the CoP has grown exponentially. And it's something, again, that I say we're really proud of. To that point, when we think of the challenges that our CoP faces and that we address on a daily basis, the biggest challenge is our biggest success, which is the growth and the diversity of our community, the users and the learners within that community.

The primary way in which we face this challenge is by keeping our users at the center of everything that we do, and specifically making sure that they are informed and engaged. We're listening to everything that they do. We're following their footsteps on the back end of our CoP using CoP analytics. We are running surveys annually to get their issues right there on the table so that we can address them. And a big part of the way in which we do that is through our community.

And when I specifically say through our community, I am talking about these seven lovely people that you see before you. We have -- within our grant, we have funding to support three to four persons per year who are actually from the community and have been involved in activities in the CoP to serve as our LCs, we call them, or Lead Contributors. The Lead Contributors work with the community managers, as well as within the CoP in the three most important content areas on the CoP. And those content areas, of course, were selected by our community of users and indicate the most important pieces -- elements -- to the community.

And those are, of course, our discussion and our resource areas, and also our events. Our people want to make sure that they are up to date on the activities, any conferences, any funding that specifically relates to the work that they're doing in their libraries, museums, or other spaces where they're engaging youth. The LCs liaise with users continually. They facilitate a lot of the online programming. Most importantly, they ask and answer questions that our users may have in the process of using and getting their -- the maximum value for the CoP.

In terms of assumptions, the assumptions that a lot of people have when it comes to CoPs -- and we were certainly sensitive to this particular issue -- is the lack of democratization in CoPs. A lot of times when you're developing a community, your intentions are good. You want to make sure that you are listening to the voice of your users. However, it doesn't always work out that way. A lot of times it's only one voice, or one influence that users are flooded with. The goal of our CoP was, of course, to create and design it. But the end

point, which is really the last year of our CoP and our funding will run out at the end of next year, was really to build it, design it, and then give it back to our users.

And the way in which we do that, again, is to make sure that they're included in any sort of decisions that are made. Part of that inclusion is down to our lead contributors, who are -- who apply and are selected from the community themselves, as well as ensuring that there is an ownedness that users feel on the site. And to stay true to that practice, the majority of our resources are from the community. We are up to about 170 resources, and I'd say about 95% of those resources come directly from our users. These are people who have expertise in different areas that are important and impactful to the work and the practices that these users are connected to and are a part of.

So, a lot of our users are very quick and quite gracious to share the resources that have made their particular areas work, that they know might be helpful to their colleagues within the CoP. We allow and we encourage users to lead our podcasts. And they lead in their own areas of expertise. So they are, of course, provided content as well as hosting the online programming that we offer users. And we also provide other areas and opportunities for them to engage and also be a part of the management -- direct management of this site.

So I think one of our biggest challenges this year is making sure that we are on that path of connecting users to this site. That hasn't been a problem since our numbers have increased exponentially over the course of three years. But really making sure that they are actively a part of the activity that goes on, as well as the management of that site. So far so good, I'd say. And for those of you who are interested or just want to join, as I said, we are an open -- free, of course -- online community. And you can just go to community.youmedia.org, and we welcome you wholeheartedly. We hope that you'll take the time to come in. Thank you, everyone. And now I will turn it over to Anne Holland, who is from the Space Science Institute, National Center for Interactive Learning.

>> ANNE HOLLAND: Excellent. Thank you, so much. Can everybody, or at least one person, hear me? Perfect. All right. Yes. My name is Anne Holland, Public Engagement Manager at the Space Science Institute. The program I want to talk about today is our and STAR library education network program and its CoP. Just as a little bit of backstory for those of you who aren't familiar, this community has been around for about seven years. We have funding from the National Science Foundation, NASA, the National Institutes of Health, and of course from IMLS for this

community. So it is definitely an evolving project, depending on funder desires.

So, how we have decided to define our community is a group of librarians, library staff, STEM professionals both informal, formal learning, as well as scientists, who are interested in reaching the unique audiences present at libraries with quality STEM programming. Our community is mostly online, though the resources we provide to them are not.

So all that is to say, I use the word Community of Practice when I'm writing reports and doing presentations like this, but our members do not necessarily know the term "Community of Practice." We started down that route, and they tend to just either ignore that part or think it's something that requires more effort on their part than just participation. So it was a term that turned them off a little bit.

So I typically just refer to our community at the STAR_Net online community. That tends to work well. The reason that we developed our STAR_Net Community of Practice is that we were doing all kinds of surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews to librarians and the library community that really indicated that there was a need for a one-stop shop, if you will, for librarians who were hoping to incorporate STEM learning into their practice. Now, I will say there have been huge strides -- and I hope we're at least a small part of it.

You know, six or seven years ago, when we were doing these surveys, more than 80% of respondents said they hadn't done STEM programming or weren't interested in doing STEM exhibits. It was really not something that was on their radar. When we do the same surveys now, 80 to 90% of people are already doing it or interested. So definitely having a place, even just to find out about those opportunities, has made a real difference.

We also found out in those surveys that libraries were desiring high quality -- and the key word is vetted training, not just me getting online and talking to people, but actually making sure it's something relevant. They also requested tools and resources to help them incorporate the STEM activities. It's not enough to put the activity on our website, we need how-to videos, we need access to people who can help them do it, or even just a form letter that people can send to community members to say, hey, I'm thinking about doing a maker's space, can you tell me what to do and how to do that. Just little simple things like that.

So, I realized as we got on here that all of my neat PowerPoint tricks aren't going to work in this presentation today, so bear with the jumbled picture. Don't worry about that. (Coughing) So a couple ways that we have demonstrated success as a startup project. Internally, the way that I am measuring

success is that I have had to scrap my online community like six times at this point. And the reason I'm seeing that as a positive is it means that we've really done a good job of listening to the community and being iterative in our process.

Our initial online community, the one that we did call a Community of Practice, was a SharePoint site. It was password-protected because our stuff was really good and only people who would give us their information deserved to get it, right? That worked terribly. (Laughter) We had a couple dozen people, mostly people who were actually in the process of hosting our exhibits. Beyond that, we couldn't get any participation. The folder structure in SharePoint was hard for people to navigate. No one felt comfortable adding discussions because they thought they were making this permanent set in stone resource that people would look to.

And they didn't necessarily want to do that. After we decided to throw that one away, we moved to -- excuse me. We moved to a WordPress site. That worked better, but I was the only one doing it. Those of you who have done those before know it's not the sturdiest of platforms if you can't spend the time on it. So we had an interactive WordPress site. And then we had a very stoic program attic site that had all of the background info, pictures, and things we didn't need community members editing. That was confusing, having two sites, not a good plan.

We combined those into our current website, which is just STAR_Netlibraries.org. It's buried in the picture somewhere. It has the blog, forums, activities, videos, STEM resource clearinghouse, the collection -- brand new, I'm still working on it -- collection of vetted resources that can be used in libraries. And even just in the couple of weeks -- maybe a month that we've had, kind of, the beta version of these two sites up, we've seen visitorship quintuple. It's crazy the number of people that are coming now that we've made things a little easier to figure out.

Also very important to us in demonstrating success is that we have partnerships. And they're real partnerships. It's not just WGBH let me use their activities, they're a partner now. That's a good first step, but we have a monthly webinar series that our partners participate in. We have NASA partners presenting webinars. We've really found that the community needs to see that we're not just in this for us. We're helping them connect to these other people that are in their community. Just because I don't have a NASA center right next to me in Boulder doesn't mean a lot of libraries don't and can't use those resources. That's been key.

Externally, the way we demonstrate success, we track new members through our newsletter signups. And then the harder way

to track it is through members leading effort. We have community members both stipended and non-stipended that are writing our blogs for us. I try to write as few of them as possible. The same community members are doing forums and really, kind of, leading the creative side of that website. So, you know, they tell us, I really wish there was a forum on this, or, wow, that forum you put up was not useful to me, then I delete it.

Really what I like to do is delete my websites, the moral of this story. Taking that community member feedback and dialogue, and getting that into the site is why it's been working for us so far. And really great considering our initial efforts were not met with near as much success. So, a couple challenges real quick for this community. First, it was determining who was invited. That sounds easy, let's invite libraries. Our first version, before SharePoint, we decided based on the surveys, everyone's not super interested in STEM. Let's just get the people that are.

Let's just get the people who are hosting our exhibits and are forced to, by contractual obligation, to do STEM programming. That didn't work very well. They were interested in for the three months they had the exhibit and then they were done. What we really wanted to do was invite people that were trying to incorporate STEM into their practice rather than just meeting a requirement. And that's why we decided to open it to everyone, including scientists, who have actually loved the opportunity to find local libraries that they can do some of their outreach at.

We also really needed to understand that we needed to give up some of our ability to track participation in order to be more inviting. This was huge. We initially had people do this whole big signup process. You had to log in to do stuff so I could more easily track who was downloading what. That was great for my annual report. And it was terrible for growth of membership. So there has to be some balance between, yes, we have to have something to report to the agencies, but we still want people to feel comfortable just showing up and not needing to give us all this information.

Another challenge was maintaining participation and involvement. A really clear way we've fixed that problem is having community editors. It's a year-long commitment. They're able to re-up in they want. They're the ones, that when I'm too busy, are able to keep the community alive. Then people aren't just seeing my name. As cool as I am, just seeing my name doesn't say, this is for libraries. It says, this is for the Space Science Institute, and that's not what we want. Other challenges, involving other projects.

It's easy to say, we want to get your solicitation for your grant and put that on our site. We can do that and we can share those kinds of things, but really getting those projects to see STAR_Net not as competition, but more as a -- you know, a collaborative tool that they can use -- has been huge. And we've made some breakthroughs in that, but it's something I would definitely recommend. There's so many of these Communities of Practice out there, make your own. It's absolutely fine. Just don't think it has to stand separate from all the other ones, because I think there can be a lot more overlap than many of the projects are currently exploring.

The last challenge was making sure we didn't become stagnant in our offerings. For a while it was, every week I put up a new activity. I would write a blog about that activity. And that was that. We really needed to make sure that we're not just doing what Anne wants. After the webinars, we send out surveys, what are you looking for? Is there a big one we got a lot of response on, have there been rare opportunities that you didn't get funded on and it's because you need some more information? Doing things like that, seeing what people are actually looking for rather than what we the agencies are looking for.

So then really quick -- I'm sorry, I'm sure I've gone over my time here. Assumptions we made in the solutions. A big assumption was who our audience was. We fixed that by inviting everyone. What our audience wanted. Again, huge assumption. I thought they wanted these really great activities with all this background information. And really, that's not what it is. They wanted support. They want someone they can ask questions of. And we also assumed -- again, incorrectly -- that leaders would just magically emerge. And I think the previous presenters mentioned this, too, if we build it, they will come and keep building it for us. And that's not accurate.

We can build it and invite the leaders and give them the tools to keep this thing going, but I still need to be here. My staff still needs to be here. And we need to make sure that those leaders feel supported and they don't feel like we've just dumped the weight of the Community of Practice on their shoulders. So we are doing better there. If any of them are on this webinar right now, thank you for your help. (Chuckling) But that's really the big thing. It's no good if you're having to do this all by yourself. And it's no good if the community's having to do it all by themselves, either.

So, that is the end of that. Again, sorry, I think I went too long. Really quickly, our two websites down there, if anyone wants to give us any feedback on our Community of Practice. I

am always updating it based on user feedback. And I will go ahead and turn it over to, I believe, Jill is next.

>> JILL CASTEK: Hello, everyone. I wanted to thank IMLS and all of the co-presenters for being able to be a part of reflecting on the Community of Practice. I come from Portland State University, and we have a research group called The Literacy Language and Technology Research Group that's housed in a Department of Applied Linguistics. And what we really are is a group committed to equity and social justice. And that means that the research that we conduct is always looking for ways to better the community at large, and for ways to help make connections between university and community partnerships, and help those to grow.

And so, we were fortunate enough -- and thank you to IMLS -- we've had two funded projects by IMLS, Advancing Digital Equity in Public Libraries is the one I'll be talking about today. It stems from activities that came in our previous funded IMLS grant called Digital Literacy Acquisition in Hard to Serve Populations. Both of these were National Leadership grants.

So in sort of building out the definition of Communities of Practice, we started with the idea on Communities of Practice. But we did shift our definition just a little bit in order to, kind of, really think about the action-oriented component of Communities of Practice. So we define our relationships and coming together in our Community of Practice as a group of people who share a concern and a passion, who interact regularly, and share ideas, work together to take action that has lasting impact.

And it's really those two final elements that undergird the ways in which we think about Communities of Practice. So moving on to the next slide -- I'm trying to figure out how to do that, if anyone can help me. Ah, thank you. So, characteristics that demonstrate success of our Community of Practice -- we came together with our local library community to build a university-community partnership around using data to support research that had lasting impact.

So the library and the university came together to expand work that we had both done on digital literacy, digital acquisition, and digital inclusion. And in thinking about ways to take our national efforts and bring them down to the local level, we really thought about ways to maximize resources to meet community needs, and to expand these notions of digital access, providing opportunities for communities and community members and organizations in our local area to use the resources, to help develop resources that would build digital acquisition, digital literacy for people in the community.

And then our project is really unique in that we're bringing libraries along into the national and international conversations with the collection of our data. Through this additional community called PIAAC -- the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies -- it is a national and international assessment effort to try to determine the skill sets that working individuals between the ages of 16 and 65 have to meet labor force and workforce demands nationally and internationally.

And the assessment provides for comparison between groups in different nations. So, our project brings libraries and university partnerships together under the umbrella of using data to inform the library's programming efforts to support its local constituent group to meet their digital literacy demands. And our local library we're working with is a large urban library. And it helps us to be able to bridge what they provide for their patrons, which is more than a million Wi-Fi sessions and nearly a million access computers for individuals who don't have access in their community to come to the library and be able to connect digitally with others around the country, around the world.

So when it comes to our particular challenges that we face and address around Communities of Practice, along the way as we were working with our library and our assessment tool that looked at digital problem-solving, we had to make principal adaptations or compromise to the procedures and protocols for collecting data. And this is really trying to balance national and international efforts with our local implications, and really listening to and being participatory with our library partners to really better understand what they need in order to drive their programming.

As a result of shared conversations and shared priorities, we made adaptations that allow us still to be able to compare the data that we've collected against national and international samples. But to really hone in on what would be most efficient in helping the library to meet the needs of their own participant group. So in the process, we honed in on our shared priorities in order to make this data collection and data analysis effort manageable.

We streamlined our assessment protocols. And everyone is involved in interpreting the data through multiple lens so is that it makes sense not just in the world of research, and not just to folks in the ivory tower, but it can really live and breathe and be actionable in the community at large. I'm looking to advance the next slide. So, when it comes to our community of practice, we've had to rethink a few things in order to help to make this a sustainable effort ongoing. First, just the opportunity to have this research project in collaboration

between a university and a library in and of itself is quite innovative, especially around this issue.

What we're looking to do is to connect local, national, and international efforts around making sense of data in ways that make sense. So we're thinking about the sustainability and practicality of developing research protocols and procedures that not only can be used in our local community, but also can be expanded and put forth nationally for other, smaller, less urban libraries to utilize as well. Thus, along the way, we're seeking to expand our collaboration beyond just our singular, right now, university community partnership to really widen the participation and widen the conversation to what digital literacy and measuring digital problem-solving might mean for other communities.

And then, to sustain that effort scale-up effort. Because as we know, digital literacy is an evolving construct. It's not going to be the same today as it is tomorrow. And digital problem-solving is going to constantly evolve as more tools and the internet interfaces continue to shift. So we're thinking about ways to use the results that we're collecting, making sense of them with our library partners, expanding this conversation and scaling this up in a way that represents the changing nature of digital literacy and digital problem-solving going forward. So, thank you. I'm going to pass it over now to the folks from ProLiteracy.

>> ALICIA SUSKIN: Hello, everyone, my name is Alicia Suskin, and I am a Project Manager at ProLiteracy. For those of you that do not know, ProLiteracy is an international organization that promotes adult literacy through education, training, publications, research, policy development, and advocacy. And for the past several years, we have been working on an initiative with the American Library Association on our adult literacy libraries in action project. It is a multiphase project.

The first phase was a two-year project. It was a partnership between ProLiteracy and the ALA as well as county public libraries in central New York to create an action agenda, which you're seeing a visual of on the screen. And this agenda consists of seven priority areas that were developed with our organizations and a Community of Practice. And each priority area has outcomes supported by concrete action recommendations.

The action agenda was created to respond to the need to increase and expand adult literacy services in public libraries. The action agenda is intended to help literacy providers, librarians, and library workers develop and advocate for accessible and innovative adult literacy services and resources. So as we mentioned, it was written by ProLiteracy staff in an original Community of Practice of library staff from the public

libraries, as well as other public libraries and leaders in the adult literacy field.

It was intentional that about half of the Community of Practice was library staff, and the other half consisted of adult literacy people. This was an easy and productive combination for the purpose of the project. The first phase of the project was funded by an IMLS National Leadership Grant for Libraries and the current phase is funded through the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program. So we published the action agenda in the first phase of the project which ended in 2014.

We're now in the second phase of the IMLS project, which is now just a partnership between ALA and ProLiteracy, although we do -- we are in contact with representatives from the County Public Library. And the second phase is to expand on what was established in the first IMLS project. After the action agenda was created, we saw a need and opportunity to make the recommendations more actionable, to create an online course with supporting resources that would walk users through implementing their own action plans, and we're piloting the material with three libraries in Halifax, North Carolina, Santa Monica, California, and Colorado.

ProLiteracy and ALA are working with a national advisory group similar to the Community of Practice group in the first project to help inform content for the online course and provide assistance to the three pilot libraries. The National Advisory Group is made of leaders in both adult literacy and library fields, similar to the first Community of Practice, and the advisory group consists of members from the original CoP and new members. So when asked to present at ALA, and doing the same presentation, we looked to our advisory group. And we asked what's the definition of what makes a Community of Practice?

What have we learned about ourselves? And in that discussion, we learned that our own pilot group of three libraries has emerged as a smaller Community of Practice that we didn't initially intend to be created. It wasn't something that we assumed would happen. But we realized as the term Community of Practice implies, our Communities of Practice are communities of practitioners, of like-minded people with aligned values and goals.

So, with these two phases of the project, what has made our Communities of Practice successful? We asked our Communities of Practice for their input, as well as, you know, talked amongst our organizations, and learned that for one, we have regularly scheduled meetings. Each month we have a meeting that a member schedules far in advance, the days and times of the meetings are discussed and agreed-upon by all members of the Community of Practice. And a designated staff member from

ProLiteracy and ALA sends out group updates and sets tasks and timelines for all members.

In our pilot community, we were able to schedule a two-day in-person meeting which you see on the screen. That face-to-face exchange of ideas inspired and motivated our participants. We also have diversity -- the diversity of portfolios and expertise of the advisory group participants. There are people working in various areas of adult literacy, education, and libraries, and that's added to the richness of our discussions and to the feedback they provide.

Similarly, our pilot library cohort are a diverse group in terms of their library setting, the personnel. We're currently working with a director, a branch manager, a public services librarian, and an adult literacy coordinator. And then also, the diverse background in services and adult literacy that they all provide. Both Communities of Practice are charged with specific tasks. The advisory group is facilitating webinar and digital literacy. And then for the pilot group, it's conducting a community assessment, piloting the course, creating an action plan for their libraries, and then implementing their action plan. We're also successful related to the task.

We have concrete outcomes to work toward that have made the communities more effective. Chief among these, the action agenda and the online course. The original Community of Practice contributed ideas and recommendations for the agenda that ALA and ProLiteracy staff hadn't thought of. An in-person meeting in Washington, D.C., to finalize the action agenda provided critical success on identifying -- that includes identifying a section of the action agenda that they had left out, realizing when meeting in person that they should include a section on collection development.

And then finally, as the advisory group pointed out to us, having staff to provide structure and support and to dedicate hours to the project has ensured its success. Now I'm going to pass it over -- the remaining two slides of our presentation -- to Kristen Lahurd from ALA, who's also working on this project with me.

>> KRISTIN LAHURD: Hi, everyone. As Alicia said, I'm at the American Library Association. My role is Literacy Officer here. And as she also mentioned, our advisory group Community of Practice consists of experts in their field who have volunteered their time to participate in this project in addition to their full-time job. And what we've certainly experienced is that when you have any group of highly respected individuals, you face the challenge that their contributions are wanted in other committees, on boards of directors, that sort of thing.

So as an example of how they're volunteering their time in the midst of these other commitments, we have a screenshot of the online course we are creating. It's an extensive undertaking in terms of time and other resources. The advisory group is contributing their time and ideas as their schedules allow them to to the creation and revision of the course. And that gives us a rich base to draw from.

Also, because it's a national Community of Practice, we're limited to meeting remotely via teleconference. And it's a challenge not being able to work face to face. Alicia just gave a good example of how productive it was when the original Community of Practice met face to face. But it's also a benefit to the project that we have these literacy leaders from around the country. Similarly, we in our advisory group felt it was essential to have broad geographic representation among our pilot libraries. And that means that the majority of our work together with them is by phone or email as well.

And then finally, a challenge in creating the action agenda was how to incorporate the wealth of ideas from the Community of Practice into seven priority areas for the action agenda. And it's a good problem to have, but it was also a challenge to really refine those ideas and narrow them down. Finally, an assumption that underlies the work of a group of experts is that they are in the position to share their expertise, but not to learn themselves from the experience.

But, in fact, our Communities of Practice are very much learners as well as experts. For example, the advisory group learned-- or in some cases relearned-- that staff turnover is a reality. And we didn't anticipate these situations at the start of the project, but we have faced turnover at two of our three pilot libraries. And we've been able to provide ongoing support to the libraries as they, sort of, transition and navigate these changes. And both the advisory group and the pilot libraries have learned from the situation.

And also, they don't have regular meetings with each other. Our organizations, ALA and ProLiteracy, have been able to bridge that conversation. And both Communities of Practice are sharing their experiences, and sharing advice, and learning from each other and from the process. So that covers it for us. And I'll now pass it to Janet McKenney.

>> JANET MCKENNEY: Thanks so much. So, our Community of Practice is around science literacy. And we received IMLS leadership grants to empower public libraries to become science resource centers for their communities. And we're also creating a guide for state library agencies so that they can encourage public libraries within their state to embark around STEM. And this all started in Maine with an organization called

Cornerstones of Science that started with a wonderful gentleman from MIT who wanted to further STEM and science via public libraries.

And it's grown to over 40 public libraries in Maine, and the Maine State Library, and the Maine science community. And so now we're taking what we've learned here in Maine and testing it out and broadening out nationally. So we have six grant libraries in Maine and Massachusetts, and we're working with two state library agencies here in Maine and Massachusetts, as well as Rhode Island and Vermont.

And we have STEM partners, businesses, museums, and other organizations both in Maine and Massachusetts and nationally. And we're also working with ten other state library agencies that are acting as reviewers and collaborators for us. And so, our Community of Practice is kind of an ever-expanding community as we grow. So we're just entering our second year of the grants. And so we're seeing the Community of Practice go from a state level through the SLAs, but also, you know, working out nationally.

And, in fact, you heard Anne from STAR_Net -- we're working with STAR_Net for the resources -- for the national resource and the national Community of Practice. So we are collaborating and partnering. Great. So, as far as our successes for year one, we had great success with convening the grant libraries together, and then convening the grant libraries with the other Cornerstone libraries in Maine. And so that's where the great interaction and sharing, and excitement of being involved in STEM -- along with all of the fears -- were there.

And we've also created some tools. So we created a library capacity assessment so a library could determine, are we really ready to go down this road? We hired a STEM librarian here at the State Library as part of the grant. And in Massachusetts, one of the staff is taking that role. We have a researcher and evaluator. We're doing a national analysis of state library agencies, capacity and interest in STEM.

And so we're learning as we go, sharing successes and inspiration from others. And the other success, we purchased the domain stemlibraries.org and stemlibraries.com. So, our challenges have been maintaining communication and collaboration between the face-to-face meetings. Everybody does like to meet face to face. So we're trying to increase the frequency of calls and web meetings, you know. We're exploring the idea of doing podcasts. So it was really interesting to hear about the success of those. And adding more details to our communication with our grant libraries.

And also talking more to the other libraries in the state that are involved in doing science programming. And increasing

the STEM liaison work with the libraries, just scheduling them has been a challenge. Creating tools that are accessible to all public library sizes, urban and rural, and populations. And patron reading comprehension levels. So trying to pay attention to that. We've had a little bit of tension with our researcher and our evaluator between academic rigor and the practicality of what public libraries can actually do. So that's been wonderful learning negotiating skills.

And, you know, we're in the part where it's planning and assessment. And so we're not at the -- we're just getting ready to enter the fun part. So, maintaining the excitement about the grant. And, you know, it's exciting working with STAR_Net creating that online collaborative space that will be accessible nationally. So around the assumptions about the Community of Practice needs, we made assumptions about the time available that the grant libraries would have, as well as the State Library agencies.

So we're always running a little bit behind schedule and trying to meet specific goals, and trying to meet with the libraries just because everybody else has over -- you know, as much as they're focused on the grant and want to be a part of it, you know, carving out that time is always tough. So, we pared down some of the timeframe expectations and, you know, relooking at that, as well as the level and detail of what we're asking those grant libraries to do as part of the grants.

And the other thing is, you know, actually getting the public libraries to understand and appreciate what it is to integrate science literacy into the public library. They're still kind of looking at science as something totally separate, where it kind of flows through -- we're trying to get them to think of it flowing through so many different partnering opportunities and partnerships that they can have. So we're working on our communication techniques and our strategies, and our library capacities.

You know, we are focusing on creating a guide versus publishing a research paper and, you know, utilizing Facebook more and things like that. And I can see we're over the time, so I'm going to stop and throw it back to Sandy. (Chuckling)

>> SANDRA TORO: Thank you so much, Janet, and all of the presenters. We are a few minutes over time, but happy to take any questions you might have. If you can go ahead and type your questions into the chat box, all of the moderators, I believe, still can talk, although audience members are muted. I've been posting some questions as we've been going, so if anyone wants -- who was a speaker wants to take a look at those and answer them, that would be great. If not, we'll give people who are attending a minute or so to type in a question.

>> You asked a question about getting funding for the same project from two different programs. I wanted to say as far as our project goes, obviously the Community of Practice has always very much been in the dissemination part of our proposal. So -- I mean, that's what I've seen a lot of. People have the community as a pain piece in grant number 1. And you're exactly right. You can't expect the funders to keep paying for it, but you need to keep it in your proposals as a dissemination tool so that you can still go and be adding stuff. And that's what we've done to be able to get so much traction out of ours.

>> SANDRA TORO: Thank you for sharing that, Anne. Does anyone else want to address that issue?

>> Well, here in Maine, we went to STAR_Net because they had something already. And that was our thought, that that would help with the sustainability as well. And so, you know, I think the partnering piece and thinking forward is important, because you just don't want it to die after your grant is done.

>> I wanted to pick up a moment and talk about sustainability as well. In the chat, Sandy posted a comment. How do you sustain involvement -- you know, outside of or beyond when the grant funding runs out. And I think, you know, part of marshaling all the activities and resources and personnel effort around something -- it shifts the priorities. And I think when a group or an organization sees that something is working, or feeding into their larger mission, sometimes there's a way to shift priorities to continue sustaining it, even though the seed of it came from a grant organization like IMLS or another. I think it's a matter of shifting priorities and just recognizing the potential and wanting to keep it going.

>> SANDRA TORO: Thank you so much, Jill. That's really interesting to think about. And I don't know if that's possible for all organizations. I was just having a conversation with someone earlier today about how sometimes it's challenging for people who may not be at the upper levels of an organization to really want to implement, you know, new strategies or effect change. But they don't really have the power to do that. So that idea about shifting priorities is really important. I don't see any questions in the chat, so I'll throw it back to the presenters. Any final thoughts you might want to share, or any particular question on the slide I have up now that you'd like to address?

Well, I'll throw one out there. I was really intrigued when Jill started talking about her project, her community, and how it seemed to me that issues of equity and access were being considered from the beginning, and were really vital to, kind

of, setting up the project at the onset. And I was wondering if you could talk about that a little bit more.

>> JILL CASTEK: Yeah. I think equity and access come at multiple levels. If we're thinking more broadly about Communities of Practice and having everyone have a voice, and have this democratizing notion, I saw people reflecting on the notion of everybody learns from everybody. And, you know, in the wider endeavor that is research, sometimes people think, oh, I'm not a researcher. I didn't get a degree in that. It's really an opportunity to think about an apprenticeship model that allows everyone, sort of, a peek into what is the research endeavor, in a participatory culture around research that I think is really alive and well.

And that doesn't stop with just the people who are in the formal Communities of Practice. It takes into consideration participants as well. And so our group really brings library patrons into the conversation around what does digital equity mean, how can we continue to use the library as a portal to provide access, to provide training, and to continue to reflect on how well we as the library, we as the Community of Practice, are meeting those goals.

So for me, equity and access in our Community of Practice, it really is opening up the research endeavor as much as it is the full participation of everyone in the endeavor, including library patrons and those who might use this data to help inform change in their own community.

>> SANDRA TORO: Thank you. Anybody else want to chime in about that? Korie, I was thinking you might have a couple thoughts. Korie, you might be on mute. Anyone else?

>> JANET MCKENNEY: This is Janet. You know, I think in talking about outreach to the community and the patrons, you know, that's a really big part of what we're trying to do with our grant, and to have libraries really engage with their community, and think of the importance of the variety of literacies. You know, when we talk about STEM, we're talking about science, so we're talking about local water pollution, and we're talking about digital literacy with technology. And, you know, we're talking about, you know, does the community need a new bridge. So all those STEM issues are really part of what's going on in the community.

And so, you know, how can the library be a leader and a convener in those conversations.

>> SANDRA TORO: That's great. Thank you, Janet. I think we're having an issue with audio. We are ten minutes over, so I think we probably want to end now, just to respect people's time. But I want to thank Lisa, Korie, Anne, Jill, Kristen, Alicia, Janet, and Allie who has been behind the scenes making

this webinar happen. The webinar will be archived. It'll be on our website, if you'd like to share it. If you have any followup questions, feel free to reach out it us. You can send me an email and I can put you in touch with any of the presenters. So, thank you so much, and I look forward to continuing this conversation.

>> Thank you.

>> Thanks.

>> Bye, thank you.

>> Bye.

(Session concluded at 3:12 p.m. CT)

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