

## Abstract

### *Cultivating Rural Librarians' Technology Skills* 2010 IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program

The Nebraska landscape is dominated by sparsely populated, remote rural areas, containing about 42% of the state's nearly 1.8 million residents, but spread over 94% of the land area. More than 88% of Nebraska public libraries serve communities of fewer than 5,000. In many cases, these libraries are the sole source of free Internet access for their communities. Most of the personnel staffing these libraries are part-time, undereducated, poorly paid, and do not receive benefits. To help Nebraskans "build the skills Americans need in the 21st century," library staff must first possess the skills themselves.

The Nebraska Library Commission (NLC), the lead applicant, is Nebraska's state library agency, with the mission of statewide promotion, development, and coordination of library and information services. The quality of library service in Nebraska will be improved through this partnership project to recruit and provide support to promising students. We aim to ensure that rural libraries throughout the state will have qualified staff with 21st century technology skills to serve their communities into the future. *Cultivating Rural Librarians' Technology Skills* will operate from November 2010 through October 2013 and will build on what we learned from our previous 21st Century Librarian grant.

Our partner organization, Central Community College, and our supporting organizations (Nebraska Educational Media Association, Nebraska Library Association, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska at Omaha) bring years of experience in library education and service. These relationships are already in place, and they are strong and deep. A broad-based advisory team will be assembled for this project. Our evaluator is Keith Curry Lance from RSL Research Group. The Nebraska Community Foundation will assist in the sustainability of this project.

Awarding scholarship, internship, and stipend support to students engaged in preprofessional—associate- and bachelor's-level—education (and secondarily, master's-level education), will equip more Nebraska library staff members with the skills to provide high-quality, individualized customer service. Providing the students with value-added learning experiences will ensure that Nebraska library staff members are proficient in helping library customers develop 21st Century Learner Skills, especially technology literacy.

The NLC will cultivate rural librarians' 21st century skills through:

- **Scholarships, internships, and stipends** to support preprofessional and professional education for at least 165 students.
- **Value-added learning** experiences—such as consultation, training, national conference attendance, professional organization memberships, and social and face-to-face networking—to ensure that scholarship recipients build 21st century learning and technology skills that can be transferred to library customers.
- **Recruitment** of promising high school and college students and diverse library personnel to match them with educational/employment opportunities at appropriate levels of the career/education ladder.
- A multi-faceted **marketing and communication** campaign to raise awareness and identify prospects for library service careers and to disseminate the student learning experience. Traditional marketing strategies will be enhanced with a Web-based Storybank and other Web 2.0 communication strategies to encourage online social networking.

Project deliverables include curriculum and recruitment materials in various formats designed to reach both high school and college-aged students. These materials will include handouts, displays, and brochures, as well as interactive learning exercises, video spots, Webinars, and podcasts distributed via social networking applications.