

Sayre Public Library (Sayre, PA)

Library type: Public library (community size: 5,000-9,999)

Topic: Racial injustice in the community

Funds used for: Staff time, collection development, program supplies, EDI trainers/speakers

What the reviewers liked about this proposal: Topic input from a variety of sources demonstrates value for community

Community and Library Information

Describe your library and the community it serves, including demographics, dynamics and key issues or challenges it faces. What should reviewers know about your library and community in order to understand your proposed community engagement project?

Sayre Public Library is located in Sayre, PA, which has a population of 5,366. It is one of three small towns, along with Athens, PA (pop. 5,073) and Waverly, NY (pop. 4,214), that are often grouped together and referred to locally as “the Valley.” Sayre Public Library is a rural library in an area with not a lot of racial/ethnic diversity on paper. Census data for Sayre shows that the borough is 95.4% white, 1.2% Asian, 0.7% black/African American, and 0.3% Hispanic/Latino. However, the library is in a unique position in that we are located one block from a major hospital that has been recruiting and employing medical professionals from a broad international base including, but not limited to, Nigeria, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Iran. Many times an entire family is uprooted and relocated so that one or both parents can take advantage of working at the facility. We have several teachers on our library board and they report seeing more diverse families in general in the past decade in our local school systems as well, through relocation due to job and education opportunities in the area. There are very few civic or social organizations in the Valley area with the aim of either supporting families and individuals new to the area so we often see our libraries as a place where people come to fill that void. Similarly, there are no organizations with the aim of supporting and celebrating particular racial or cultural minority groups in our immediate area, so individuals or families who wish to seek such organizations out must travel 30-60 minutes to more metropolitan areas like Elmira, NY, Binghamton, NY or Ithaca, NY. Sayre Public Library applied for and received a two-year Teen Reading Lounge grant in 2019. Teen Reading Lounge is a humanities-based program for teens aged 12-18 funded by the Pennsylvania Humanities Council and Pennsylvania's Office of Commonwealth Libraries that focuses on supporting marginalized populations and on developing leadership skills that can be used to positively affect the communities in which participants live. Teens read young adult literature on socially relevant topics and are able to discuss thoughts on the content of the books and parallels to their own lives. We very quickly saw the benefits for teens of having a space where they could examine the concerns and injustices faced by marginalized populations, as well as their own hopes and desires for changing beliefs and attitudes. Based on our success with the teen population, we now wish to expand our capacity for facilitating these types of conversations to younger and older patrons in some way as well.

Conversation Topic or Issue*

Describe the topic or issue that your community engagement project will focus on. Why is it important for your library or community to discuss this particular issue/topic? How did you arrive at this

particular topic/subject (e.g. did you talk with library patrons, reach out to other area organizations? Dig into data about your community)? How will your library and/or community benefit from having this/these discussion(s)?

Sayre Public Library's community conversations will allow adults to come together to discuss how we might, as a community, counter racial injustice and inequity in the Valley. Interest in pursuing this topic began with discussions that occurred in our Teen Reading Lounge program. Participants were easily able to identify stereotypes and biases that occurred frequently in educational and social settings in our community, and expressed frustration with the perceived lack of action that was being taken. Concurrently, there were several documented instances in local media within the past six months of racial slurs being used in our community, both verbally and written in graffiti at a local park. Additionally, there were conflicting reactions to local efforts to highlight nationwide racial concerns through organized demonstrations, with social media posts encouraging residents to bear arms if necessary to counteract those wishing to highlight racial inequity, and a counterprotest taking place during a Black Lives Matter demonstration that attempted to drown out speakers with revving motors and loud music (see attachments). Our adult book club has also selected to discuss some titles in the past year that have dealt with racial dynamics, including *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah and *Warriors Don't Cry* by Melba Patillo Beals. As our library began exploring the possibility of pursuing Libraries Transforming Communities grant funding, we hosted an hourlong Zoom-based listening session attended by eight community members to further document the desire and need for a race-based discussion series, based on participants' experiences and observations. One experience shared was instances of people disparaging minorities not realizing that the speaker belonged to a racial minority group. Another recounted being told that when she moved to the area to take a job that minorities are taking away the jobs of local people. A third person commented that it wasn't until she moved away from the area to attend college that she realized how narrow-minded and stereotypical some of the attitudes held by those in the community were. Several of the participants in our listening session are also involved in the newly formed Valley AntiRacism Coalition (see letter of support) and it is our hope that by partnering we will be able to strengthen our resources and messages and be able to present a united front in championing acceptance and diversity. There will be a number of benefits to having community-based discussions on the topic of racial injustice and inequity. Community-based discussions will help in gaining a picture of the type of, as well as the scale and breadth of, race-based concerns in our community. They will also help to identify concerned individuals and target populations that may be receptive to exploring efforts to making our community a safe and welcoming place for individuals of all races, cultures, and creeds. As our Teen Reading Lounge group moves toward identifying a community project they can take on, as required in the second year of grant funding, it is hoped that having an adult discussion group examining racial injustice and inequity would ballast the project and allow the adults serve as support and a sounding board for the teen-based project. We also have a monthly Kindness Club that is for children ages 7-12 that has begun exploring the value of diversity and acceptance, and that group could also benefit from ideas and initiatives that the adult discussion group may come up with.

Conversation Goals*

Describe the library's goal or purpose of your project plan. What are you aiming to accomplish? (e.g. enhance library resources based on community input; explore a topic and/or build understanding of

others' experiences; generate ideas, explore options, and make a decision; discuss an issue and collaboratively determine next steps, etc.)

Sayre Public Library hopes to be able to reach out to community members who have an interest in exploring the topic of racial injustice and inequity in a more in depth manner and to allow a welcoming and non-judgmental space where community members can explore how bias manifests and affects both individuals and systems in our community. We plan to do this using the Harwood Institute's Turning Outward Model. We were drawn to the goals of the Turning Outward Model, specifically in that they identify the aims of making conversations more community focused, being proactive to community issues, and putting community aspirations (rather than just problems) first. We also believe that there would be a need for, and benefit from, multiple conversations, as this is such a broad and complex topic and it may take time to identify particulars specific to our community within the larger context. We also believe that the Turning Outward model's incorporation of the Ask Exercise component, where involvement and input is solicited from individuals not necessarily involved in the discussion group, would allow for expanded perspectives and multiple levels of involvement. We recognize that community members will be coming to these discussions with a wide range of experiences and knowledge and we hope to develop a dynamic and empathetic space where individuals can be supported in their desires to learn and be heard and also in recognizing communal goals and impacts. We aim to be a resource for community members, as well as the other eight libraries in our nine-member system, as we develop a collection of current fiction and nonfiction materials that explore the scourge of racial bias and how it may be counteracted with antiracism efforts. Our ultimate goal for the project is to be able to identify and explore options where the library can support further action toward antiracism efforts in targeted ways as determined by project participants.

Conversation Planning*

How do you envision your conversation taking place? (e.g. virtual book club discussion, socially-distanced conversation outdoors at the library using the National Issues Forum Model, etc.) Do you feel you are able to describe how you envision your conversation(s) will take place? Or are you new to this and planning to learn these skills through the online course? What kind of marketing/outreach do you plan to do for the conversation? How are you planning to share the content/outcomes of the conversation? (e.g. writing an article for the local newspaper, creating a video about what was discussed for the library's social media, etc.)

Sayre Public Library has been hosting virtual programming since May 2020 in response to the pandemic. Should our project be funded, we see initial conversations taking place via an online platform such as Zoom, with the potential for transitioning to more socially-distanced conversations that could take place outdoors in late spring/summer. Conversations will be facilitated by the library director, Heather Manchester, and the newly hired adult services librarian, Annie Caplan, both of whom also serve as facilitators for the Teen Reading Lounge program. Heather comes from an education background and has a number of years of experience facilitating discussions. Annie is relatively new to the experience but has been investing a great deal of her personal time learning about race and reaching out to community leaders both nearby and in surrounding cities on this topic. Both individuals look forward to learning more about strengthening facilitation skills through the e-course and through utilizing the Turning Outward model. The structure and scope of the Turning Outward model seems to be a good fit for both experienced and novice facilitators and the emphasis put on community members identifying aspirations, assessing community conditions and attitudes, and finding potential for action meshes well

with our overall goals for the discussion series. Marketing and outreach will be done through the currently existing Valley Anti-Racism Coalition, through social media and flyers posted in the library and throughout the community, and through special low-rate advertising offered to non-profit programs by our local radio station. We will write press releases that will be sent to local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations to publicize the discussion series. We have also discussed doing podcast style interviews with our Teen Reading Lounge group that could be shared via our website and social media, so it is possible that we could share the outcomes of our adult discussion group in a similar way as well.

Budget*

Describe your plans for the grant funds. What will you use the funding to purchase or support? Please be specific (e.g. \$1,000 will be spent on staff time to support the development and implementation of the project, \$200 will be used to purchase a Zoom Business license in order for us to virtually host our conversation). The total amount of your proposed budget plan should add up to \$3,000. Note: If you are unable to spend the entire grant down by July 31, 2021, you may accrue funds to spend through February 28, 2022. If you anticipate needing to accrue funds, please note this in your response and include your plans for spending it down.

Sayre Public Library plans to use the Libraries Transforming Communities grant funds in the following manner. \$1,350 would be used toward staff time to organize and implement the discussion series, and to research, purchase, and catalog \$500 worth of materials for all ages on the theme of race and diversity that we would add to our collection and make available for lending to community members and other libraries for programming. We would also budget \$300 for books and materials that would be used directly for the discussion series and given to all participants free of charge. \$200 would be allocated for a high-definition document camera that would allow notes, books, and other print materials to be shown to online participants in an easy and clear manner. We would budget \$500 for outside guest speakers/trainers on diversity and inclusion. We would also use \$150 for costs related to marketing and promoting the discussion series, including printing costs and radio advertising time.