

ALA announces recipients of \$1 million in community engagement funding for small and rural libraries

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CHICAGO — The American Library Association (ALA) has announced the recipients of nearly \$1 million in funding for small and rural libraries, the second grant distribution as part of the association’s Libraries Transforming Communities: Focus on Small and Rural Libraries initiative.

The funding will enable libraries to lead community engagement efforts in more than 300 small and rural communities on topics like the COVID pandemic, mental health, public land use, the climate crisis and Black history. Grant funds may be used to cover a range of expenses, including staff time and collections and technology purchases.

“Through community engagement, libraries are continuing their important work on literacy and access, while also working to fill gaps in other areas that may not have fallen to libraries in the past,” said ALA President Julius C. Jefferson. “We are excited to provide the resources for hundreds of libraries to take on new challenges in their communities and look forward to seeing the great things they accomplish.”

The 317 funded proposals — public, academic, school/K-12, special and tribal libraries — represent 45 U.S. states. Eligibility was limited to communities with populations less than 25,000 in accordance with Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) definitions.

Two hundred grants were awarded during the first round of Libraries Transforming Communities: Focus on Small and Rural Libraries in January, for a total of 517 participating libraries. Millbury Public Library was one of seventeen Massachusetts libraries to receive this award. Millbury Public Library plans to use the funding for library programming and staff development training. Library programs planned are “Learning the Facts about Sharks and BOTS! Robotics for children, a 3D Printing Workshop for teens/adults, Qigong: Mindfulness in Motion for adults, and a seven-week Computer Essentials Course for Adults & Seniors. All programs are virtual via Zoom. Staff development training planned are a fifteen-week course on computer technology skills, two workshops of Team Building and Laughter

Games for Librarians and Library Staff, and a Staff Stress Relief workshop. These programs are planned throughout May to November 2021. “I was extremely excited to hear that our library was chosen to receive this grant especially since it represents 45 US states. This funding will support residents of the community who are interested in opportunities to increase their technology and/or recreation skills. Staff professional development will also prepare library staff to help better serve our community”, stated Ann Dallair, Director of the Millbury Public Library.

Each library will receive online staff training in how to lead conversations, a skills vital to 21st-century librarianship, and \$3,000 to support their proposed community engagement work. Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with community members — library users, residents, faculty, students or partner organizations — to address issues for the betterment of the community.

ALA announced plans in fall 2020 to award nearly \$2 million to small and rural libraries in 2020 and 2021 to help them address issues of concern in their communities.

Since 2014, ALA’s Libraries Transforming Communities initiative has re-imagined the role libraries play in supporting communities. Libraries of all types have utilized free dialogue and deliberation training and resources to lead community and campus forums; take part in anti-violence activities; provide a space for residents to come together and discuss challenging topics; and have productive conversations with civic leaders, library trustees and staff. The initiative is part of ALA’s longtime commitment to preparing library workers for the expanding role of libraries. Learn more at ala.org/LTC.

Libraries Transforming Communities: Focus on Small and Rural Libraries is offered in partnership with the Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL).

About the American Library Association

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library’s role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. For more information, visit www.ala.org.

About the ALA Public Programs Office

The ALA Public Programs Office empowers libraries to create vibrant hubs of learning, conversation and connection in communities of all types. Learn more at www.ala.org/ppo.

About the Association for Rural & Small Libraries

The Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL) is a network of persons throughout the country dedicated to the positive growth and development of libraries. ARSL believes in the value of rural and small libraries and strives to create resources and services that address national, state, and local priorities for libraries situated in rural communities.