General Information

Fill in the contact information below and answer the pre-application questions. When complete, submit the document to LibraryReport@dpi.wi.gov by **October 25, 2021.** Please either submit the pre-application file as an attachment to an email, or ensure the submitted file has appropriate viewing permissions when sharing the link.

Project Director Name:

Crystal Hooper

Project Director Phone:

908-458-4944

Project Director Email:

chooper@sclibnj.org

Applicant (Project Director's Agency/Entity to Receive Grant Funds):

Somerset County Library System

Project Title:

Chromebook Home Lending

Project Total Request Amount:

Requested amount should be between $50,000-$200,000. All equipment requests (items that cost $5,000 or more per-unit) must be pre-approved by the Department of Public Instruction and by IMLS. Contact Alexandra.Delvoye@dpi.wi.gov to discuss potential equipment costs by October 25, 2021.

$60,000

Pre-Application Questions

Please answer each question below with a response of around 3-5 sentences each. Projects will be evaluated by 3 project reviewers and scored based on the rubric provided in the ARPA Grant Guidelines document.

1. Project Abstract: What hybrid library service option(s) are you proposing to develop? Describe the problem or need that this project addresses in your community or target audience. Please be specific about what you plan to purchase, how you plan to implement including staffing needs, and/or where you envision providing any service options outside of the library building. (0-4 points)

Hybrid library service proposal: A library workforce resources extension model loaning Chromebooks with LTE for at-home use. Loaning Chromebooks extends the library's mission to support local businesses to build back after the losses from the economic shutdown caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Target Audience: Community members who experienced job loss, displacement, or other economic hardship because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Those who have transportation barriers or health issues and cannot visit the library will benefit by getting to take home one of the most desirable resources the library offers—technology with a direct line of support from library staff.

The Problem: With limited public operational hours, library guests need access to equipment that complements their schedule, not just the library's open hours, which lessened by two hours per day because of the Coronavirus pandemic, a change that will remain in effect. During operational hours, computers are the prime resources patrons want to access once the doors get unlocked. Staff can make reservations for computers, but more equipment is a necessity. Allowing patrons to bring technology home for extended use generates access for more patrons to use the in-branch equipment.

Equipment Needed: We'll purchase 100 Chromebooks, and each costs around $300. A license to manage each device costs $150 per unit. Funding will also cover what CIPA mandates for internet filtering if a child loans a Chromebook. Carrying cases to protect the device and USB mice for easier accessibility will also get included.

Implementation Plan: (1) Tech-team staff will inventory the purchased equipment, then configure each device for remote access, granting opportunities for troubleshooting, and ensuring we set the parameters within the license and filtering provisions. Ten Chromebooks will get sent to each of the ten branch locations. Staff will charge the devices, keeping them ready for use. (2) Patrons can place holds on the Chromebooks and designate a pickup time that includes an optional tutorial from staff on how to use the equipment. Lenders will have unlimited access to the internet to aid in their job search, application submission, and virtual interview processes. (3) Library staff will provide troubleshooting guidance in-person and online, offering further digital resources to support each user's needs. Any device returned damaged or with missing parts will be subject to replacement costs charged to the patrons' account.

Staffing Needs: The library system previously implemented Chromebox stations at all public service desks and in workrooms before the global pandemic affected our service model. Staff previously got trained and have stayed familiar with the Google interface. Training to reinforce the in-branch technology suite plus these new mobile devices will get extended to all staff via a recorded Niche Academy video. Staff can also schedule a one-on-one appointment with a tech-team member to get additional coaching on how to troubleshoot common patron questions. Staff will disinfect devices upon return, ensuring the battery gets recharged, and will examine the peripheral equipment for reuse.

Service Options: The Chromebooks availability will get displayed via the library's catalog collection. Patrons can reserve a device online, in-person, or over the phone. Depending on the comfortability of the lender, the pickup of devices can occur curbside or from public service desks. If a patron cannot visit a branch because of accessibility barriers, they can designate a person to collect the device on their behalf. Alternatively, staff will set up roaming pickup locations using existing system vehicles and travel throughout the community where pre-arranged holds can get checked out based on appointments.

2. <u>Future model sustainability and support</u>: How will you demonstrate tangible, successful results from the project, including how sustainability can be achieved to continue to develop and provide hybrid service options? As part of your response, please directly address how you will handle any ongoing costs beyond the grant period. (0-10 points)

Capturing Metrics: The library system will keep circulation statistics on loaned Chromebooks and on the duration length within the defined lending period. Library users can join a waitlist for an item, and we will limit renewals based on community needs; for library guests who are not cardholders, making them ineligible to take a Chromebook home, any available devices can get used inside the branches during operational hours.

Predicted Outcomes: Given the popularity of our existing loans of mobile hotspots, the library system expects the Chromebook extension program to be in high-demand. On average, the loaned hotspots have a waiting list of forty patrons and we have two-hundred units in circulation. The wait time is less than a week for those on the waitlist. We predict Chromebooks will have a similar turnover, making them one of the top twenty-five items loaned within a year. As planned with the hotspots, each branch will have two "lucky day" Chromebooks, which have a lessened loan period of ten days to keep up with demand to satisfy community needs. Other Chromebooks on loan will get borrowed for three weeks, the same amount as the hotspots.

Sustainability: Partnering with the State Department of Labor and the County Social Services department, we can gain economical backing to replace damaged Chromebooks and share responsibility of internet payment to provide this service long term. To grow the platform more, we'll expand into schools to support youth's suffering through the digital divide, providing more resources for high school students applying for further education and first-time job placement.

Ongoing Costs: Additional funds can get saved in allocation from our technology and equipment budgets from our annual tax allowance in future years to sustain the program. We will continue to monitor library trends around technology and implement changes as they will support and grow this offering. Licensing and filters will have annual fees to plan for from our budget.

3. <u>Staff support</u>: What training and professional learning will this project provide to staff to support the development of their knowledge base and skills to provide hybrid service options? (0-4 points)

Staff Training: During the three-month work-from-home period when the library system was unavailable for in-person service points, staff who did not have the technology at home got loaned Chromebooks already owned by the library system. These devices were familiar to staff because they had maintained and set them up for patron's to use in the branches. The work-from-home period better trained all staff on virtual platforms, as training opportunities and meetings were regular occurrences. With the addition of these new Chromebooks provided through the grant, the library system will expand our ask-a-librarian digital platform, adding technology troubleshooting to our repertoire of services offered. This will strengthen our staff's education on public technology use, illustrating the community needs of digital literacy so we can plan for future programming around technology topics.

Staff Skill-building: We'll cross-train our personnel so the services they offer in-person when assisting with the public computers have no gaps when moving to the virtual environment. Virtual meetings, maintaining digital calendars, and appointment schedulers will become more comfortable for the

staff. Staff will research and learn trends in nationwide labor hiring and best practices for resume writing to better the chances of their community members to get chosen for jobs.

Community Impact: Providing Chromebooks to residents also empowers the lender to enroll in higher education pursuits. According to the Somerset County, NJ analysis of census data in 2013, only 52% of residents hold a bachelor degree. The best-paying jobs in the county are in management positions, which require advanced degrees. Lenders of Chromebooks can use the devices to enroll in distance-learning collegiate or certificate programs and the library can assist in tutoring and homework help.

4. IMLS priorities: How does the project align with at least one of the IMLS spending priorities? IMLS spending priorities are listed below. (0-6 points)
   a. Support digital inclusion efforts to enable libraries to reach residents particularly in support of education, health, and workforce development needs
   b. Provide rapid emergency relief
   c. Support library services that meet the needs of their communities
   d. Reach tribal and museum partners best positioned to assist with pandemic response efforts

To support bullet point A: This project enables our library to reach residents particularly in need of support for workforce development. It also supports the library to meet the needs of our community by getting one of our most popular in-person resources, technology, into the individual users' homes, where they can use the equipment with more privacy and on their timeline.

To support bullet point C: According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Quick Facts, 92% of homes in Somerset County have a computer with internet access. Yet, only 68% of those eligible and aged 16 or over hold a steady job. The disparity between owning equipment with internet access and knowing how to use it continues to affect the county in economic, socio-political, and educational ways. Library staff can narrow the disparity gap and maintain relations with the community by providing tech help and loaning equipment.

5. Project reach potential: How will your project have regional or statewide impact and/or how can the results of the project be shared or replicated by other libraries in the state? (0-10 points)

Regional Impact: We aim this project to help users gain employment. Successful deployment will boost the economy, help build small businesses, and promote further education through digital literacy and technology fluency.

Statewide Replication: An overview of the project can get shared with the NJ State Library, and presentations about the success can get shared at the NJLA annual conference so other libraries can replicate our model.

Statewide Impact: According to the Central Jersey Housing Resource Center (CJHRC), low-income and temporary housing needs are at an all-time high in 2021 because of the Coronavirus pandemic. The loss of employment and housing are directly tied together in trends. The CJHRC has moved to a virtual appointment platform, no longer meeting with citizens in-person to determine their needs. Other counties and regions in NJ are more affected by the housing shortage than Somerset County.

Through reciprocal borrowing, lending Chromebooks to allocate for virtual appoints will help aide some hardships on community support services and those affected by lost housing.

6. Equity: How will your project reach historically underserved populations and/or those disproportionately affected by the pandemic? (0-10 points)

Underserved Populations: Technology equipment is expensive and not found in every household. This Chromebook lending project helps close the gap between those with means and those without, evening the playing field of who can apply to jobs only posted online. Helping adults with children gain employment also boosts learning outcomes for students. It is unrealistic to expect children who got loaned technology equipment from their school to share those devices with others in their household who are seeking employment or trying to work from home.

Disproportionately Affected County Residents: According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Quick Facts, In Somerset County, 4.8% of residents live in poverty. For the 15 municipalities the library system serves, the number range of affected residents living in poverty is from 2.2% to 13%. The library's outreach initiative has aimed to support those community members through a series of job hunting resources and small business toolkits. Chromebooks for at-home use extend that initiative.

Those affected by the pandemic: In estimates from Data USA in 2019, the poverty rate in Somerset County grew 9.55%, while the median income declined by 8.07%, and the median property value grew by 0.962%. With the loss of jobs, educational constraints from virtual consortiums, and the inflation costs because of the pandemic, the public library investing in technology to support the residents boosts productivity and invests in the communities we serve.