

The Inside Scoop: Creating and Leading a National Forum

Bobbie Sartin Long^a, Ana Roeschley^b, Rebecca Teasdale^c, Emily Vardell^d, Jenny Bossaller^e
(Moderator)

^aEmporia State University, USA

^bUniversity of North Texas, USA

^cUniversity of Illinois Chicago, USA

^dEmporia State University, USA

^eUniversity of Missouri, USA

blong@emporia.edu, ana.roeschley@unt.edu, rteasd2@uic.edu evardell@emporia.edu,
bossallerj@missouri.edu

ABSTRACT

Have you ever thought about writing a grant to sponsor a national forum? Putting together a forum may be complicated, but it offers a unique experience to engage with and learn from the profession while substantially contributing to the field. Each grant has unique characteristics, from goals to participants to university support. Those differences will be infused in a discussion exploring aligning the project goals with the funding agency's goals, soliciting participation, finding speakers, event logistics, and creating an engaging product. The panel includes four representatives from three IMLS national forum grants who will provide the 'inside scoop' from grant conception through the final documentation. The speakers will give frank advice and discuss where their projects were successful and effective, as well as the difficulties they encountered. Our panelists will also engage the audience in a discussion on finding community and building forums for resilient scholarship in the wake of a changing federal funding landscape.

INTRODUCTION

Representatives from three grant-funded projects will discuss their experiences coordinating an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Forum. While IMLS is not currently a viable granting agency, the discussion of goals, logistics, and outcomes are widely applicable. The three projects are:

- 1) Libraries Advancing Community Learning to Reduce Substance Abuse (LACL), which was a two-day National Forum project that was held in May 2025, written with partners at the University of Missouri, Emporia State University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Kansas City Public Library. The LACL forum aimed to forge new paths that strengthen library programming around alcohol use disorder (AUD) and substance use disorder (SUD) recovery, using bibliotherapy and peer-to-peer learning circles. During the forum, attendees learned from experts in substance abuse treatment and harm

reduction, bibliotherapy, and library outreach. Small group sessions, which followed each presentation, provided participants with space to discuss and brainstorm how the session could be applied in their own contexts. Virtual participation was offered via Zoom. Following the forum, we wrote a white paper that is providing the foundation for a multilingual toolkit that can be used and adapted by any library.

- 2) The National Forum to Connect and Advance Library Makerspaces was an 18-month project led by the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, University of Illinois Chicago, and the Champaign-Urbana Community Fab Lab, in partnership with the American Library Association, Nation of Makers Library Makerspaces Working Group, and Library Makers. This IMLS-funded initiative brought together library professionals, educators, researchers, and makers nationwide to solidify and leverage current networks, projects, and expertise in library makerspaces and chart future directions. Through online forum activities, stakeholders engaged in dialogue, reflected on and consolidated existing knowledge, and envisioned the future of library makerspaces. The project resulted in a collaboratively developed vision and strategic direction for library makerspaces that will enhance the capacity of library makerspaces to meet the evolving needs of their communities while advancing the goals of the maker movement on a national scale.
- 3) The University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Information Science and the UNT Oral History Program hosted a series of forums to identify best practices and strategies to respond to challenges around building, implementing, preserving, and accessing community oral history projects. The project team convened librarians, archivists, oral history practitioners, public historians, community-based memory workers, and others working in oral history to identify good practices, share challenges and lessons learned, and prepare an actionable roadmap for building, implementing, preserving, and sustaining community oral history projects. The findings from the forums were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with individual librarians, archivists, and community-based oral historians to understand how community-based oral histories are created, preserved, accessed, and used in different settings. The project resulted in peer-reviewed presentations and publications, as well as a white paper summarizing the current state of the community oral history field and the ways in which cultural heritage institutions like libraries and archives can serve communities through oral history stewardship.

SESSION PLAN

The session will begin with short (5-10 minute) presentations from project representatives about their experiences drafting project proposal narratives, building realistic budgets, recruiting forum participants, and implementing their forums. Each representative will discuss their forum's unique purpose and outcomes, as well as the 'inside scoop' about what went well with their forum and the key difficulties they encountered. Our panelists will then discuss the possibility of finding community and building forums for resilient scholarship outside of federal funding.

Then, attendees will break up into small groups that will be facilitated by members of the grant teams. During the small group sessions, attendees will discuss their ideas and formulate questions. If needed, representatives will use prompts to move the conversation along and encourage attendees to share their thoughts. These include:

- If you have applied for this type of funding before, what did you wish you knew before this?
- In the wake of federal funding losses, what do you want to know about applying for private foundation funding?
- What are the most pressing issues in your research area that could be helped with collaboration?
- Keeping your field of research and practice in mind, what are the benefits and drawbacks of holding a virtual forum? What about if you were to hold it in person?
- Our field is a global one, yet federal grants tend to come with limitations on how and where funds can be spent. How can we design forums that include a multiplicity of voices, contexts, and ideas? Can we treat the shift away from US federal funding as an opportunity for more international collaboration?
- What models can we look to outside of our field to guide us in a time of transition for the field?

During the small-group breakouts, the facilitators will co-create a Google Doc with questions and ideas, to both encourage attendees to participate and to facilitate a productive discussion afterward. Finally, the forum project representatives will then engage in a question-and-answer session based on the small-group questions and any additional questions that arise during Q&A.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Information needs; Continuing education; Public libraries; Specific populations.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Grant writing and management; Engagement with the profession; Toolkit; Forum; Makerspaces; Oral history.

Copyright 2025 by the authors. Published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21900/j.alise.2025.1975>