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Hartford Public Library Selected for American Library Association Community Engagement Initiative

Library to receive nearly \$60,000 in training and services as part of Libraries Transforming Communities Public Innovators Cohort



Hartford, Connecticut (April 23, 2014) — The American Library Association (ALA) has selected **Hartford Public Library** as one of 10 public libraries that will undergo an intensive 18-month, team-based community engagement training program as part of the Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC) Public Innovators Cohort.

The cohort, selected through a highly competitive peer-reviewed application process, is part of ALA's LTC initiative, a national plan to help librarians strengthen their role as core community leaders and change-agents.

Through in-person training, webinars and coaching — valued at \$50,000 — a team of five Hartford Public Library staff members, led by CEO Matthew K. Poland, will learn new community engagement techniques and apply them to challenges in the City of Hartford. The library will also receive an \$8,000 cash grant to help cover the cost of new community-engagement work.

“Libraries are at the heart of the community, and civic engagement is at the heart of where the public library is going in the 21st century. We are this democratic place where opinions are heard, resources are universally available, everyone is welcome, and programs are offered about things that matter in the community,” says CEO Poland. “Successful civic engagement requires a combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make a difference in the community so we look forward to developing our competencies through this wonderful opportunity.”

The selected libraries represent the range of American communities in terms of size, location, ethnic and racial diversity and socioeconomic status, and they all face challenges including illiteracy; unemployment; a “digital divide” in access to information technology; an influx of new and immigrant populations; and disparate access to services.

Other members of the LTC Public Innovators Cohort include:

- Red Hook (N.Y.) Public Library (pop: 1,900)
- Columbus (Wis.) Public Library (pop: 5,000)
- Knox County (Ind.) Public Library (pop: 33,900)
- Suffolk (Va.) Public Library (pop: 85,000)
- Springfield (Mass.) City Library (pop: 153,000)
- Tuscaloosa (Ala.) Public Library (pop: 195,000)
- Spokane County (Wash.) Library District (pop: 255,000)
- San Jose (Calif.) Public Library (pop: 980,000)
- Los Angeles (Calif.) Public Library (pop: 3.8 million)

“Public libraries have long served as trusted and treasured institutions, and librarians today can leverage that strong position for the betterment of their communities,” said ALA President Barbara Stripling. “As a longtime champion of library-led community engagement and innovation, ALA is primed to provide the tools and support that will enable librarians to more effectively fulfill this vital role.”

In partnership with The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, Libraries Transforming Communities addresses a critical need within the library field by developing and distributing new tools, resources and support for librarians to engage with their communities in new ways. Libraries Transforming Communities is made possible through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Libraries Transforming Communities is grounded in The Harwood Institute’s approach of “turning outward,” which emphasizes changing the orientation of institutions and individuals from internal (institutional) to external (community-facing).

About Hartford Public Library

As a finalist for the 2014 National Medal from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, Hartford Public Library has been recognized as national leader in redefining the urban public library in the 21st century as an innovative and stimulating place where people can learn and discover, explore their passions, and find a rich array of resources that contribute to a full life. Hartford Public Library provides free resources that inspire reading, guide learning, and encourage individual exploration. Serving the residents of Hartford and beyond at its nine branches and Downtown location, Hartford Public Library receives more than 860,000 visits per year from adults, children and families seeking early literacy opportunities, work skills training, civic engagement, arts enrichment, and so much more. Visit hplct.org.

About the American Library Association

The American Library Association is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with approximately 58,000 members in academic, public, school, government and special libraries. The mission of the American Library Association is to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.

About The Harwood Institute

The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation is a national nonprofit organization based in Bethesda, Md., that teaches and coaches people and organizations to solve pressing problems and change how communities work together. The institute is guided by Richard C. Harwood, whose transformational work during the past 25 years has spread to thousands of communities nationally and worldwide, from small towns to large cities.