

Library School Partnerships

Round 3: Invitation to Apply

Released: July 7, 2026

Deadline: August 1, 2026

Contact: info@librarieswithoutborders.us

An Invitation to Our Partners

We want to be direct about what has changed. Over the past several months, our team completed a structured lessons learned process covering every phase of LSP: planning, implementation, monitoring, and partnership management. We heard clearly, from our own staff and from the patterns in our work together, that the program needed to be strengthened.

Round 3 is a different program. The core mission is the same: connecting underserved students and families to library resources. But the partnership model, the scope, the expectations, and the timeline have all changed. We are sharing the full design here so you can decide whether this is the right fit for your library and your community.



What Has Changed



A grounding framework

Round 3 is built on Participatory Action Research (PAR). This means we are co-investigators in a shared research question, not a funder distributing resources. Every partnership produces a co-authored research artifact (a needs assessment, baseline study, or program evaluation) that belongs to both parties. You use it for your own grant applications and advocacy. We use it for program-level reporting.

Defined programming models

Instead of open-ended co-design, Round 3 offers two models. You select the one that fits your community and adapt it to your local context. This means partners in the same cohort share tools, materials, and learning, rather than each site building from scratch.



Fewer, deeper partnerships

The annual cohort is capped at six partners. We are also inviting partners from Rounds 1 and 2 into a sustained tier: three-year engagements at \$5,000 per year (\$15,000 total) designed to build long-form impact case studies. The logic is straightforward: we do not want to be in partnership so briefly. come in and jump out. We want to be around long enough to see sustained outcomes.

Fall start

Implementation begins in September 2026, aligned with the school year. This replaces the rolling or spring-start approach from earlier rounds.

Clearer expectations on both sides

Every MOU includes reciprocal commitments, a 90-day probationary period, a sustainability plan from week one, and named primary and backup contacts. We are asking more of our partners, and we are asking more of ourselves.





Programming Models

You will select **one** of these two models in your application. Within each model there is room for local adaptation, but the core structure, tools, and measurement approach are standardized across the cohort.



Model A: Awareness and Access

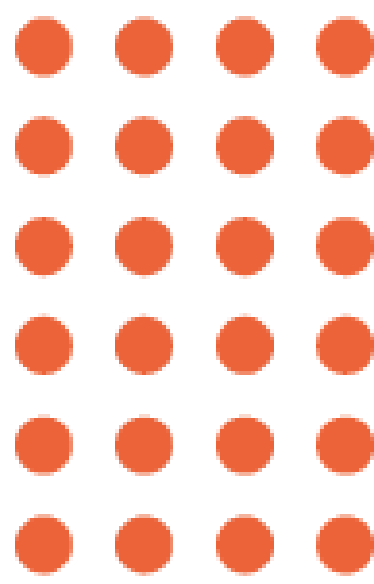
Library card drives, family engagement events, school-based outreach, and take-home materials that bring underserved students and families into active library use.

This model is for partners whose main gap is getting families and students through the door or getting materials into homes. Past examples include Greenfield Public Library's After Hours and community-involvement series, Kitsap's Lunchtime Library programming, Evanston Teen Services' Makers on the Move STEM programs in school, and Curtis High School x NYPL Staten Island's library visit incentivization program.

Model B: Accessibility Programming

Specialized collections, programming, and accommodations designed for students with disabilities, multilingual learners, or other access-barrier populations.

This model is for partners serving high concentrations of students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or populations with specific access needs. Past examples include Sunnyside sensory-friendly programming, Erie decodable collections for early and struggling readers, and assistive material provision.



The Research Component

Every Round 3 partnership, regardless of model, includes a **co-authored research artifact**. This is what makes the PAR framework operational, and it is one of the most significant changes from earlier rounds.

Stage	What it involves
Research question	Developed jointly with LWB at the design stage. Must be specific and answerable within the engagement period. For returning partners, the question can be a direct follow-on from your previous LSP work—tracking longer-term outcomes, deepening an earlier finding, or extending an intervention into a new population. This shapes your M&E plan and determines which instruments are used.
Instrument	LWB designs and provides the research tools: surveys, focus group protocols, observation guides, or self-tracking infrastructure (e.g., QR codes, circulation reports). You do not need to have research expertise coming in.
Data collection	Partner-led, with LWB technical support. Our M&E lead is embedded in every partnership from the proposal stage.
Output	A co-authored artifact: community needs assessment, program baseline study, or program evaluation. The format and scope are determined together. You own the artifact alongside LWB.



What We Ask of Partners

We are being upfront about what this partnership requires. These are not just application requirements. They are the commitments that define how we will work together.

Commitment	What this means
Programming model	Select Model A or Model B. Your proposal should describe how you would adapt the model to your community, not propose an entirely different project.
Research question	Define a specific, answerable research question connected to your selected model. If you participated in an earlier round, your question can build directly on that work—continuing a line of inquiry, measuring longer-term outcomes from a previous intervention, or deepening a finding that surfaced during your partnership. We will refine the question together during onboarding, but the direction should be clear at the application stage.
Baseline data	Collect and submit baseline data with your proposal. This might be current library card enrollment rates, circulation numbers, event attendance, or demographic breakdowns. The point is to establish baseline metrics and to determine the library’s data collection capacity, and commitment to the process.
Cost-share	Name and quantify an in-kind or budgeted cost-share in your application. This can be staff time, space, materials, or direct budget. The purpose is to ensure your institution has committed resources and that your leadership supports the partnership.
Two contacts	Name a primary and a backup contact in your application. Both must participate in onboarding. If either contact leaves during the engagement, a succession and handoff protocol will apply.
Sustainability plan	Begin thinking about what your library or school will own independently at the end of the engagement. Round 3 is designed for sustained presence, not short interventions. We are structuring partnerships so that LWB is around long enough to see the impact, and so that when the engagement does close, the work continues because your team has been absorbing it all along. A written transition plan is developed in the first month.
90-day probation	The first 90 days of the partnership are probationary, with named milestones. If milestones are not met, the partnership can be restructured or closed.



What LWB Provides

- **Programming infrastructure and model-specific toolkits** (templates, materials, and implementation guides) for your selected model.
- **M&E tools and technical support** including a dedicated M&E lead embedded from the proposal stage through close-out.
- **Research design support:** Instrument development, data collection planning, and co-authorship of the final artifact.
- **Peer learning across the cohort:** Structured opportunities to share what is working across partner sites using the same model.
- **Operational capacity during the engagement period:** Coordination support, material development, and implementation troubleshooting.
- **Funding support for direct program costs:** Sustained tier partners receive \$5,000 per year for three years (\$15,000 total) toward implementation. Annual cohort funding is confirmed in the MOU.



Timeline

Date	Milestone
July 7	RFP released to current and former LSP partners.
July 14	Optional Q&A call for interested applicants. Details to follow by email.
August 1	Applications due.
August 4-15	Application review and selection. Short conversations with finalists as needed.
August 18	Selections announced.
August 18-31	MOU development and signing. Onboarding begins.
September 2026	Implementation begins, aligned with the school year.
November 2026	90-day probationary milestones reviewed.
June 2027	Annual cohort Year 1 close-out. Sustained tier partners continue into Year 2 of 3.

Eligibility

This is a closed RFP. Only libraries and schools that have participated in LSP Rounds 1 or 2 are eligible to apply. We are limiting this round to previous program participants.

Applicants must serve a school or community that meets the equity framework indicators listed below. If you are unsure whether your site qualifies, contact us before applying and we will work through it together.

Indicator	Requirement
Title I status	The partner school or primary service area must have Title I designation.
Free or reduced lunch	The school or service area should demonstrate a significant proportion of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.
Multilingual learners and/or IEP %	Especially relevant for partners applying under Model B (Accessibility Programming).
Library access	The community should be underserved in terms of library infrastructure, programming availability, or geographic access.

How to Apply



Submit the following by **August 1, 2026**, via our website. You can do a direct narrative or a polished presentation. We are looking for specificity, not length.

1. **Your selected programming model** (Model A: Awareness and Access, or Model B: Accessibility Programming) and a brief description of how you would adapt it to your community.
2. **A draft research question** connected to your selected model. It does not need to be final, but it should show the direction of your inquiry. If your question builds on previous LSP work, describe the connection.
3. **Baseline data** relevant to your proposed work. This could be library card rates, circulation data, event attendance, demographic breakdowns, or similar. Include the source and collection date.
4. **A cost-share commitment** naming what your institution will contribute (staff time, space, materials, or budget) and an approximate value.
5. **Primary and backup contacts** with name, title, email, and phone for each. Both should be aware of and supportive of the application.
6. **A brief sustainability statement** describing what your library or school would own independently at the end of the engagement. One paragraph is sufficient.
7. **Any relevant context** about your community, your prior LSP experience, or changes at your institution since our last partnership that would help us understand your current situation.

Applications will be reviewed by the full LSP team. We may reach out for a short conversation during the review period. Selections will be announced by August 18.





A Note from Our Team

We learned a great deal from Rounds 1 and 2, and much of what we learned came from working with you. Some of what we are changing reflects feedback and lessons that came directly from you.

Round 3 asks more of everyone. We are asking you to collect baseline data, commit institutional resources, define a research question, and plan for sustainability from the start. In return, we are committing to a clearer structure, better tools, a dedicated M&E lead from day one, a research artifact that has real value for your own work, and the sustained presence to see the impact in your communities.

If this sounds like the right fit, we would welcome your application. If you have questions or want to talk it through before applying, reach out to us at info@librarieswithoutborders.us

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