Medical Library Association Comments to the National Library of Medicine
Re: RFI on the [Request for Information (RFI): Evolving the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (UG4)](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-LM-19-005.html)
Submitted:  12/2/19

## Introduction

These Medical Library Association (MLA) comments respond to the RFI: Evolving the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NOT-LM-19-005). MLA furthers NLM’s mission to ensure that all health professionals, researchers, educators, and the public have access to NLM’s vast resources that enhance the health of our nation. MLA also supports NLM and NIH efforts to understand and eliminate health disparities between minority and majority populations.

We are pleased to see that the NLM Strategic Plan focuses on advancing data science; supporting health in clinical systems and promoting clinical system technologies; and delineating partnerships and user-community engagement as topical threads for planning. These are all important strategic priorities for the health sciences library community at large. MLA considers itself a strong collaborative partner in helping NLM further these strategic goals.

These comments were developed by MLA members who are or have been actively engaged in the work of the NNLM. They are grouped to address priorities, strategies, and partnerships; outreach and training programs; and structure and service coordination.

## Priorities, Strategies, and Partnerships

**Research Data Management and Data Science**

Both MLA and the current NNLM support medical librarians in developing a solid knowledge base to undertake new and emerging roles that support the data-centric research missions of their organizations. It is important that NLM continues to develop and fund initiatives that expand librarians’ data science knowledge and expertise in a variety of institutional settings, including hospitals, research centers, and consumer health information centers.

[As the NNLM NER e-Science Research Support Committee has pointed out,](https://nnlm.gov/sites/default/files/ner/files/Researcher%20Portal%20Committee%20White%20Paper%20on%20Supporting%20Researcher%20Needs%20-%20Appx%20B%20Redacted.pdf) <<https://nnlm.gov/sites/default/files/ner/files/Researcher%20Portal%20Committee%20White%20Paper%20on%20Supporting%20Researcher%20Needs%20-%20Appx%20B%20Redacted.pdf>> libraries planning to offer data services need to develop service areas that align with the needs of their researchers. ***It is essential that training opportunities exist to educate librarians to partner with researchers in data management.*** However, research and research data take many forms across the spectrum of health organizations. Research includes bio-medical bench science and clinical trials, but also includes small studies related to the hospital environment such as quality improvement, health services, patient satisfaction, and other studies at an organizational or community level.

NLM and the NNLM have developed and fostered training for librarians to develop knowledge services in academic centers and hospitals for decades. ***Now that research data are actively being reused to advance healthcare, it’s important that the knowledge and skills to manage and appropriately use data are embedded into multiple health organization types and that medical libraries and librarians have the education and training needed to contribute to their institution’s data management and use goals.***

**The Need for Continued Support for Hospital and Clinical Library Services**

Because NLM’s *overarching priority* is to advance progress in medicine and improve health, NNLM partnerships and memberships must continue to include hospitals and clinical organizations. ***NLM and NNLM should engage hospital libraries and encourage hospitals to have libraries to promote a conduit to efficient information dissemination and training.*** [Research has shown](https://doi.org/10.1111/hir.12036%3B%20http%3A/dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12911-017-0510-9) that health professionals still struggle to find health information even with electronic resources at their fingertips.  <https://doi.org/10.1111/hir.12036>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12911-017-0510-9>  Given the current changing healthcare landscape of hospital mergers and closures, many hospital libraries have closed. In this context, some health care providers and patients now have reduced, or lost, access to credible, evidence-based health information resources.  *Health care professionals, especially those working in settings with no information resources or services, possibly constitute a new underserved population.* ***We recommend focusing on this emerging underserved population, especially within the context of NLM’s efforts to overcome health disparities between majority and minority populations.***

### Strategies

MLA recommends the following strategies for partnering with hospitals and libraries:

* NNLM should partner with hospitals by identifying, recognizing and intentionally engaging them on a state or region wide basis to renew and revitalize its engagement with hospitals and hospital libraries. There needs to be an emphasis on training health information professionals to find  research-validated information that supports evidence-based practice.
* NNLM should support research and scholarship to fund projects that identify ways in which library collections and services impact health professional life-long learning.
* The NNLM should provide funding to support the development of  ‘resource libraries ’ where information users can access free tools and resources that have been gathered or created for their specific needs. This will promote better use of NLM’s health information, as well as outreach efforts to community hospitals and providers. NNLM educational sessions relevant to hospitals should be directed to both librarians and  hospital administrators.

**One Health
*NNLM should consider addressing the relationship between humans and animals or*** [***One Health***](https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/index.html)[***https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/index.html***](https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/index.html)***, and within that context, veterinarians who often have no information resources.*** While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has some materials and education on this topic, the CDC does not have the reach of the NNLM to provide education and provide a concentrated training in these vital issues.

Current areas where the NNLM could help support services, resources and training include:

* Providing more educational material on [zoonoses](https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/index.html) which is the Infectious diseases from animals spread to humans. “6 out of every 10 infectious diseases in humans are spread from animals.” <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/index.html>;
* Providing resources about mental health and the human-animal bond (e.g., health advantages to having pets or companion animals, reluctance of people to take advantage of social services such as shelters because of bond to animals that cannot also be accommodated e.g., homeless shelters, evacuation shelters) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12888-018-1613-2>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0894318418774901>;  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0179494>; and
* Working to provide information services on One Health to veterinarians, public health providers and epidemiologists (especially in rural populations). With these services tied to libraries they can provide resources and training to help educate populations on food supply contamination, antimicrobial resistance, zoonoses, and medical physicians and other healthcare practitioners who may not be as well trained in zoonoses or parasitology.

## Outreach and Training Programs

NNLM outreach and training programs are instrumental in enabling health sciences librarians to effectively and efficiently utilize NLM’s databases and products.

**Train the Trainer Programs**

NNLM’s Train the Trainer programs provided a high level of excellence, offering practical step-by-step training on the use of NLM products and services. ***We recommend reinforcing the importance of this type of teaching and training, and to include an assessment and evaluation component for all these programs.*** As programs have been eliminated librarians report the need to re-introducing the original Train the Trainer concept to support the needs of health sciences librarians new to the profession. Library school curriculum offers limited to no training programs of this type and NNLM’s role in this regard fills a vital need. This will help recruit and train health sciences librarians in an age where there are fewer and fewer schools that offer medical library curriculum and training.

**Feedback Mechanism for New NLM Developments**

***MLA recommends the need for training in the use of the new PubMed interface.*** To support a smooth and efficient transition in the use of new products, MLA recommends engaging a cross section of librarians throughout the development and pilot testing period. Including practicing librarians throughout the development process will help avoid delays and frustrations as information professionals learn and adapt to the use of new systems and processes. It also will ensure that health professionals continue to have access to timely, relevant, and accurate health information, especially at the point of care. As NLM’s partner, the Medical Library Association welcomes the opportunity to support the continued growth, use, and access to NLM’s vast repository of resources.

## Structure and Service Coordination

**New Data Office**

MLA recommends re-envisioning the current NNLM organizational structure to align with NLM’s Strategic Plan and the needs of current and future NNLM initiatives. There has been a major push to develop a data-savvy and data-ready workforce. Both MLA and NNLM have created continuing education courses to address these needs for information professionals, but a coordinated effort is needed to facilitate this pipeline. ***We recommend adding a new Data Office and coordinating the education and training component of this office in partnership with the Medical Library Association.*** In addition, we envision this office becoming the successor to the current Evaluation Office to support internal data needs, including evaluating programs and reporting statistics.

**New Model for Funding Support**

***As NNLM continues to develop new partnerships with other federal agencies to fund projects such as the NIH All of Us Research Program and the NLM HIV/AIDS Community Information Outreach Program, providing each Regional Medical Library (RML) with equitable allocation of grant funds would increase the number of outreach opportunities to historically under-represented populations.*** Each region has unique populations and health information needs that can be addressed by providing appropriate funding for identified aims. The funding model needs to be flexible to support NNLM engagement activities as specified in the RFI. For example, there is limited opportunity for new partners to be awarded funding. The funding allocation for each region needs to anticipate cost for marketing and building community networks. An additional funding strategy would be to determine budgeting for both long-term and short-term outreach initiatives.