

Libraries as Community Hubs



Cahokia Public
LIBRARY DISTRICT

The 2029 CODES cohort will partner with the Cahokia Public Library District to strategize innovative approaches to advocacy and outreach and assess equity in meeting the needs of the diverse community the library serves.

The Cahokia Public Library is situated in Cahokia Heights, Illinois, a city located east of the Mississippi River in the Greater St. Louis metropolitan area with a population of 17,894 residents. Cahokia's residents have been resilient while confronting severe socioeconomic and environmental inequities. With a city rich with history and a diverse community, the library seeks to promote a variety of programming and equitable efforts to open doors of accessibility for patrons. The mission of CPLD is to provide materials and services for community residents of all ages to meet their informational, recreational, and educational needs.

Libraries have always been crucial sites for information, but in the 21st century, they have become community hubs where people come together; public libraries offer social and civic services for their communities and fill equity gaps in communities for underfunded school districts. In a city like Cahokia Heights, the public library district must consider how best to serve the needs of a complex and diverse group of library patrons while facing a challenging funding landscape that often requires fast, creative thinking.

CODE Scholars will learn about the values and ethics of the profession from the American Library Association. Over the period of two years, the students will develop relationships with the Cahokia Public Library Director Mr. Devon Harris the Cahokia Public Library Programming Director and Ms. Arianna Norris-Landry. While the challenges of CPLD are emblematic of a greater global issue in valuing libraries, the needs of the people in Cahokia Heights are no doubt unique and plentiful. CODE scholars will help CPLD design frameworks to prioritize community needs using an equity lens and create assessments for programs and services. The teams of students can build upon Mr. Harris' advocacy efforts to increase visitor counts through a social media campaign or marketing materials. Mr. Harris also wants to address the "hope divide," the disconnection between the older generation who are passionate about the community and the younger generation. The goal for CODE Scholars is to support CPLD by increasing community engagement and participation across the city, and to design intergenerational programs to bridge the gap between older and younger generations.



CODES is a selective program offering full tuition for students who are Pell Eligible, historically underrepresented in their major, or among the first in their families to attend college. CODE Scholars collaborate with community partners with the goal of creating a more socially just world. They study and address the local shape of global problems and share their outcomes using digital humanities methods. CODES apply methods from various fields, including history, literature, anthropology, biology, and sociology, for example.