2026-9198 NEA Big Read

Application ID

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Application Type

NEA Big Read

Organization Information

Delaware Division of Libraries
121 M.L.K. Jr Blvd N
Dover, DE 19901-3638
Phone: 302-739-4748

Mission Statement

The mission of the Delaware Division of Libraries is Library Development – we help libraries evolve. Delaware Libraries support individuals and communities in achieving their full potential.

Annual Operating Budget

$10M+

Location Designation

Metropolitan

Applicant

Susan Elizabeth Cordle
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Publicity name

> What should we call your organization when we conduct any future publicity?

Delaware Division of Libraries

Project Summary

> Please provide one to two sentences that summarize your project in plain, easy to understand language. This description will be displayed publicly when the grantees are announced.

The Delaware Division of Libraries will partner with Delaware's 33 public libraries to launch "Delaware Reads!" featuring the book Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver and activities for all ages. The kickoff event will include a panel discussion of the novel, with a potential Q&A including Kingsolver. Delaware Reads! and NEA Big Read programming will feature a Community Exhibition at the Biggs Museum of American Art, poetry workshops in each county, environmental programs, drug addiction education with naloxone training, book discussions, and history programs on Caesar Rodney's Ride and the Declaration of Independence, with school partnerships extending engagement statewide.

Short description

> Please write a brief, one-paragraph, high-level description of your project. Cover the key highlights of your project and the minimum programming requirements as stated in the application guidelines.

The Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL), working with public libraries and community partners statewide, will offer Delaware Reads!. Centered on the themes of Barbara Kingsolver's novel Demon Copperhead, the program invites participants across the state to explore the nation's culture and history. DDL will purchase 2,000 copies of the novel to distribute to each of the state's participating 33 public libraries, which will host book discussions. Additionally, DDL will add book kits to the catalog for book clubs and schools to check-out. The kits will feature discussion questions and conversation prompts to support engagement and classroom use.

Delaware Reads! will launch with a virtual visit from the author, pending agreement. If unavailable, the kickoff event will feature a panel discussion. DDL will partner with the Biggs Museum of American Art to host an exhibition, "The Shape of Us: Exploring Identity and Place," encouraging residents to submit original work for review, with selected pieces featured in a public exhibition.

The Delaware Archives will present the program "Independence or the Bayonet," exploring Delaware's role in the Revolutionary War. Additional programs will be offered in partnership with the Delaware Institute for the Arts in Education (DiAE), the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), and Delaware Health and Social Services (DHSS). Programming will include art workshops, poetry readings, Delaware's environment, and discussions on mental health and addiction. To engage younger readers, multiple public libraries will host a "Welcome Home" story time celebrating many types of families, including foster and adoptive families.

Prior grant recipient?

> Have you received a grant from Arts Midwest before?

No

Project Start Date

> When will the project begin?

03/01/2027

Project End Date

> When will the project end?

06/12/2027

Book Title

Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver

Book quantity

> Approximately how many books do you intend to order for your programming?

2000

Requested Amount

> What is the grant amount you're seeking? Please refer to the application guidelines for minimum/maximum limits. This field will automatically round to the nearest $10 increment.

$20,000

Proposed number of partner organizations

41

Proposed number of book discussions

> Must be at least 3

15

Proposed total number of events (including book discussions)

34

Anticipated adults served

> An estimate of individuals 18 and older to be served by the project.

2,000

Anticipated youths served

> An estimate of individuals 17 and younger to be served by the project.

500

Anticipated total participants

> This will auto-calculate based on your responses above and after you click the "Save" button.

2500

Organization description narrative

> Tell us about your organization and the values that drive its work.

The Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL) provides leadership and support for the ongoing development of Delaware's statewide library consortium, which encompasses 33 public libraries, two bookmobiles, and a network of academic, school, and special libraries. These institutions are unified under the Delaware Library Catalog (DLC), a shared statewide system that ensures seamless access to materials, digital resources, and services for all Delawareans.

This year marks 125 years of libraries in Delaware, a milestone that highlights more than a century of growth, innovation, and community service. Over the past 125 years, DDL has helped expand library services across all three counties, supporting both major renovations and the construction of new library buildings. Recent examples include the opening of the Duck Creek Library in 2025, the anticipated opening of NOMA East in 2026, and the new Newark Free Library scheduled for 2027. These projects reflect DDL's commitment to strengthening library infrastructure and ensuring that Delawareans have welcoming spaces where communities can connect and grow.

DDL also provides high-quality programs and statewide services that enrich the lives of Delaware residents. Alongside the year-round literacy and enrichment programs it offers to libraries, DDL coordinates a statewide performer or program each summer to support the Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) and help combat the "summer slide" many students experience. In Summer 2025, DDL sponsored and coordinated engaging programs by the Delaware Aerospace Foundation (DASEF) and graphic novelist Orpheus Collar, both of which aligned with CSLP's Color Our World theme. Their STEAM-based activities and creative arts programs offered meaningful learning experiences for children and families across the state.

Beyond programming, DDL provides a wide array of critical statewide services. These include statewide internet access—with some libraries extending Wi-Fi beyond their buildings for after-hours use—along with MiFi hotspots and Chromebook lending to reduce digital barriers. Delaware is also proud to be one of the first states to offer Dolly Parton's Imagination Library statewide at no cost, as well as an early participant in the bilingual Imagination Library program, helping ensure that every child from birth to age five has access to free, high-quality books delivered directly to their home.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate DDL's dedication to advancing literacy, supporting lifelong learning, and connecting communities across the state.

Theme statement

> Provide a rationale for your chosen NEA Big Read book and your plans for using the theme (America250) in your programming.

The novel Demon Copperhead centers on a child born in rural Appalachia who navigates foster care, addiction, and the realities of economic instability. America250 is not just a celebration of the nation's founding. It is an opportunity for Americans to explore how the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness have been realized and where it continues to fall short. As the country has grown, the idea of freedom and opportunity has expanded with it. The novel examines how systems meant to protect citizens and residents, like health care, foster care, labor, and education, can fall short. DDL's programming will ask participants to consider the nation's history and its unfinished work.

The novel's themes resonate deeply in Delaware. According to the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), Substance Use Disorder affects more than 17% of Delawareans aged 12 and older, with rates nearing 30% among young adults aged 18–25. Despite recent progress, Delaware ranked second in the nation for overdose death rates in 2024. Issues related to mental health and addiction affect Delawareans across regions, ages, and backgrounds.

Family instability remains a significant challenge. The Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families reports that over 500 children in Delaware are in foster care at any given time, and more than 16% experience three or more placements within a single year. These realities echo the experiences depicted in Kingsolver's novel and underscore how early trauma can shape an individual's trajectory.

Our America250-aligned programming will encourage participants to consider how communities can better support young people and families—past, present, and future. Book discussions will provide space for readers to process difficult topics and connect the story to their own experiences. Art and poetry workshops will invite participants to reflect creatively on how place, environment, and community shape identity.

Educational programs offered in partnership with Delaware Health and Social Services will deepen public understanding of mental health, addiction, and Delaware's response to the opioid epidemic, while connecting residents with available resources. The Delaware Public Archives and the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control will ground the novel's themes in local history and environmental context, reinforcing Delaware's role in the nation's story.

Youth and family programming, including intergenerational storytimes, will ensure conversations about resilience, belonging, and community care remain accessible to all ages—advancing the America250 goal of reflection, inclusivity, and civic engagement.

Programming description

1. Describe your programming plans in detail, including types of activities and locations, and the involvement of local talent (e.g., writers, artists from other disciplines, teachers, field experts) and art works (e.g., companion books, films, visual art, etc.). Be sure that your plans meet the minimum project requirements. Be sure that your plans meet the minimum project requirements outlined in the guidelines. 2. Explain how your programs meet your goals and the goals of the NEA Big Read: to inspire meaningful conversations, celebrate local creativity, elevate a variety of voices and perspectives, and build stronger connections in each community. Explain how you plan to assess those goals to determine if they are met.

Delaware is small but singular—its place in the nation's history was sealed when it became the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution. Delawareans take pride in their nickname, "The First State." It represents an early commitment to democracy that continues to shape its residents today. The Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL) will lead a statewide NEA Big Read centered on Demon Copperhead, which will bring literature, art, history, education, and community conversation. The Big Read events will offer participants the opportunity to reflect on Delaware's historical significance and to inspire the next generation to continue the promise of a "more perfect union."

DDL intends to host a statewide kickoff event on Thursday, April 1, 2027. Barbara Kingsolver has been invited to present a virtual author talk. Libraries in each of Delaware's three counties have agreed to serve as anchor locations to host watch parties and facilitate conversations. In the event Ms. Kingsolver is unavailable, DDL will instead host a moderated panel discussion, "The American Promise Revisited." Panelists will include a literature professor, community advocate, and public health expert. The kickoff event will begin a larger conversation about American identity and resilience.

As part of the program, DDL will distribute 2,000 copies of the novel to libraries, book groups, and community partners. 10 public libraries have agreed to host community book discussions, and five more have tentatively committed. The free distribution of books increases the likelihood of statewide participation. Using the themes in the book as a starting point, discussion leaders will ask participants to consider how America's promises have evolved over 250 years and have been experienced differently across communities.

DDL will partner with the Biggs Museum of American Art to host an art exhibition, The Shape of Us: Exploring Identity and Place, inviting Delaware residents to submit original works inspired by the themes of the novel. Submissions will open in March, with artwork due by Friday, April 16. Selected works will be announced on Friday, April 30, 2027, and featured in a free public exhibition scheduled for a Saturday in May 2027. The exhibit creates a space where diverse interpretations of the American experience in Delaware are shared and celebrated.

Libraries will offer hands-on art workshops, Layered Stories. Using mixed media, participants create a canvas that represents home, heritage, or a sense of belonging. The workshops will serve both as

standalone community programs and an opportunity for participants to contribute original work to the Biggs Museum's art exhibit. Additionally, New Castle County Libraries has agreed to provide a poetry workshop, Finding Voice, followed by a poetry reading.

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) and the Delaware Public Archives will further connect the themes of the novel to Delaware's history and environment. The Archives will offer "Independence or the Bayonet," an engaging program highlighting Delaware's role in the signing of the Declaration of Independence. DNREC will offer, "Place, Land and the American Story," exploring how land, water, and natural resources have shaped the state's communities and future conservation.

To engage younger audiences, 3 public libraries have agreed to host a storytime, "Love Makes a Family." This storytime uses picture books and shared activities to help children understand that love, care, and connection are what make a family. DDL has an established partnership with more than 60 Delaware schools that participate in the Delaware Library Catalog. Through this collaboration, schools in each county will integrate related classroom discussions, activities, and readings, as well as distribute materials and encourage participation among students and families.

Civic responsibility and community care are core American values. From March through June, DDL will offer multiple dates for health educators to lead sessions on drug addiction awareness and naloxone training.

While the programs are geared primarily to Delaware residents, they are open to residents of nearby states. To maximize accessibility, an ASL interpreter will be available upon request. Virtual and recorded programs will include closed captioning.

To measure the success of its Big Reads program, DDL will use surveys and feedback forms to gauge participant engagement and learning outcomes. Staff will collect attendance numbers to measure participation across the state. Finally, library staff will collect participant testimonials for examples of community impact.

Project partnerships narrative

> 1. Describe your partnerships with libraries (as applicable) and community organizations. Indicate if these are new partnerships or describe your history of working with these partners. 2. Explain the role each partner will play in your program.

The Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL) is uniquely positioned to coordinate statewide partnerships that expand access to literature, arts, culture, and lifelong learning for all Delawareans. Because all 33 public

libraries participate in the Delaware Library Catalog (DLC), DDL maintains long-standing relationships with every public library system in the state. This unified structure allows programs to extend naturally across all three counties, supporting shared promotion, coordinated scheduling, and the seamless distribution of materials. Together, Delaware libraries function as a collaborative network rather than isolated institutions.

For this initiative, DDL will build on these established partnerships while introducing new collaborations aligned with the program's themes. All 33 public libraries will serve as central hubs for book discussions, community events, workshops, and exhibitions. They will promote the program locally, host activities, and provide accessible spaces for residents to gather and explore literature and the humanities.

A key cultural partnership will be with the Biggs Museum of American Art, extending DDL's history of working with arts institutions statewide. DDL and the Biggs will co-lead a statewide art contest and community exhibition centered on the theme "How Place Impacts Identity." The Biggs will provide curatorial expertise, manage submissions, and host the exhibition, offering Delawareans of all ages a creative opportunity to consider how place influences identity at both personal and community levels.

The Delaware Public Archives will contribute essential historical context through the program "Independence or the Bayonet," an engaging presentation focused on Delaware's role in the signing of the Declaration of Independence and Caesar Rodney's historic ride. To ensure broad access, the Archives will present this program in all three counties, helping residents explore how Delaware's early history continues to shape civic identity and the state's cultural narrative.

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) will strengthen the project's environmental and place-based components. Through workshops, DNREC will guide participants in examining the connections among landscapes, ecosystems, environmental stewardship, and the program's overarching themes.

Partnerships with Delaware schools will extend the program beyond library walls. DDL's longstanding collaboration with school librarians and educators will support classroom discussions, activities, and readings connected to the initiative. Schools will help distribute materials and encourage participation among students and families.

Additional community partners will contribute programming that supports public health and creative expression. Health educators will lead sessions on drug addiction awareness and naloxone training—issues of significant importance to communities across Delaware. Poetry workshops will offer opportunities for creative reflection, while the Delaware Institute for the Arts in Education (DiAE) will provide arts-integrated programming that links literature with performance and visual art.

To deepen the literary experience, DDL is pursuing a virtual author visit. If an author is not available, a panel of subject-matter experts and community representatives will engage participants in a discussion of the book's themes through a Delaware-centered lens.

Through these long-standing and newly developed partnerships, DDL will deliver a robust, statewide humanities program that reflects Delaware's diversity, history, environment, and creative culture.

Describe the community your program impacts

> Please describe the community you plan to reach with your programming with details about the underserved group(s) you intend to reach.

The Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL) serves the entire state of Delaware through a unified library consortium that includes 33 public libraries, as well as academic, school, and special libraries, all connected through the Delaware Library Catalog (DLC). This statewide system ensures every resident—regardless of location—has seamless access to shared materials, digital resources, and programming. Delaware's population, estimated at 1,051,917 as of 2024, represents a diverse mix of ages, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic needs. The state is 66.9% White, 24.2% Black/African American, 11.7% Hispanic or Latino, 4.8% Asian, 0.8% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 3.2% multiracial, with 20.3% of residents under 18 and 21.8% over age 65. Additionally, 9.6% of residents live in poverty, meaning programming must be inclusive of families, seniors, multilingual households, education levels, and individuals facing economic challenges.

Because all Delaware libraries operate under a shared catalog and coordinated statewide services, this program will reach community members across all three counties through library-hosted events, partnerships with schools, humanities and arts programming, and collaborations with organizations such as the Biggs Museum of American Art, the Delaware Archives, and DNREC. The program intentionally places events and discussions in rural, suburban, and urban locations to ensure equitable access regardless of geography. Partnerships with local schools will extend participation into classrooms, allowing students and educators to connect program themes to curriculum and grade-level standards. Delaware's strong educational foundation—91.4% high school completion and 35.3% bachelor's degree attainment—supports broad engagement with literary, cultural, and humanities programming across the state.

DDL will engage the community through coordinated statewide promotion in libraries, direct communication with school districts, and collaboration with community partners. Because all 33 public libraries are connected through the Delaware Library Catalog, program information can be shared broadly and consistently, reaching individuals who may not be traditional library users. The program's focus on shared reading, author events, discussions, and creative arts experiences encourages

participation from families, working adults, seniors, and students, fostering meaningful dialogue and a sense of statewide connection.

To ensure full participation, events will be offered in accessible library spaces across the state, with accommodations available upon request. Virtual and hybrid participation options will be provided so individuals with mobility challenges, homebound residents, and caregivers can join remotely. All recorded or online sessions will include captioning to ensure clear communication for individuals who prefer or require text-based access. Library staff are trained to assist patrons who need additional support, and materials will be provided in accessible formats where possible to ensure inclusivity for individuals with visual, auditory, or cognitive disabilities.

Through its coordinated statewide structure, community partnerships, and commitment to inclusive participation, DDL ensures that programming reflects and serves Delaware's diverse communities—connecting residents of all ages and backgrounds through shared stories, cultural exploration, and lifelong learning.

Budget

Expense Description	Paid by Grant	Paid by Applicant	Paid by 3rd Party	In-kind	Total Match
2000 Copies of the Demon Copperhead (10.78/Copy)	$10,780.00	$10,780.00	$0.00	$0.00	$10,780.00
Barbara Kingsolover Virtual Author Visit	$5,000.00	$5,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$5,000.00
Staffing - planning and implementation	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$4,000.00	$4,000.00
art and workshops)	$500.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Supplies for Books Kits	$0.00	$300.00	$0.00	$0.00	$300.00

Honorariums panel members (if needed for alternative kick-off event) or other partners	$500.00	$1,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000.00
Marketing - Facebook Ads	$500.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Marketing - Posters	$200.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Marketing - Bookmarks and Postcards	$300.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Auditorium/AV Equipment Rental - Author Presentation	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,500.00	$1,500.00
Books or other supplies for schools	$2,220.00	$2,220.00	$0.00	$0.00	$2,220.00
Art Exhibition Supplies	$0.00	$700.00	$0.00	$0.00	$700.00
Total Project Expenses:	**$20,000.00**	**$20,000.00**	**$0.00**	**$5,500.00**	**$25,500.00**

Use this space to offer more detail about your budget

Certify

I certify on behalf of my organization that the information provided in this application is true to the best of my knowledge. Furthermore, I certify that: - My organization is eligible to receive federal funds and not delinquent in the repayment of Federal debt. - My organization is a unit/division of government, a Federally-recognized tribal government, an institution of higher education, or a 501c3 nonprofit. - My proposed activity space(s) are accessible to people with disabilities. - My project budget does not include match from another federal source. - My organization does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.); on the basis of age, in accordance with the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq.); on the basis of sex, in any education program or activity, in accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.).

◉ I certify