

**JOSEPH F. SHUBERT LIBRARY EXCELLENCE AWARD APPLICATION**

Please check one category only: **Individual Library**

**NAME OF LIBRARY OR LIBRARY CONSORTIUM (SYSTEM):** The New York Public Library (NYPL)

**PARENT INSTITUTION:** (none)

**ADDRESS:** 455 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016

**CONTACT NAME:** Shauntee Burns, Outreach Specialist

**PHONE NUMBER:** (212) 340-0916

**SIGNATURE:** Ann Thornton  
CHIEF LIBRARIAN/DIRECTOR

**For Consortia applications:**

**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_  
CHIEF OFFICER

**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_  
CHIEF OFFICER

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Your nomination for a project/achievement that occurred within the last 2 years should include your responses to the following 4 questions:

1. a) Briefly describe your library or library consortium (system) and its community. Provide information about size, budget, type, users. b) Briefly describe your project/achievement.
2. How did you identify the user need(s) for your project?
3. What did your library or library consortium (system) do to respond to that (those) need(s)? What challenges were met?
4. What impact did this project have on your users and/or your community? Supply quantifiable data if appropriate.

Please limit your narrative to no more than 4 pages. Please send 4 copies of each application, and include 4 copies of any attachments, to the following address by the deadline of *June 1, 2011*.

Regents Advisory Council on Libraries  
*Joseph F. Shubert Library Excellence Award*  
 c/o Paula Paolucci  
 New York State Library  
 10C34 Cultural Education Center  
 Albany, NY 12230  
 518-474-5930; ppaolucc@mail.nysed.gov

3/11/11

**1a) Briefly describe your library or library consortium (system) and its community. Provide information about size, budget, type, users.**

The New York Public Library (NYPL): inspiring lifelong learning, advancing knowledge, and strengthening communities. NYPL is a true New York City icon; it represents the City's cultural brilliance, serves the neediest of its residents, and embodies the enduring principle that democratic access to knowledge is the key to lifelong success. Each day, thousands of patrons log on to [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org) or visit one of its four world-renowned research centers, or one of its 88 neighborhood libraries located in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, to take advantage of its expansive resources and expert guidance – all completely free of charge. NYPL's branch and research libraries provide free access to their resources, services, programming, and exhibitions to more than 16 million people each year. For fiscal year 2011, the NYPL has a total operating budget of \$257.4 million; the budget for branch libraries alone is \$138.8 million.

**1b) Briefly describe your project/achievement.**

The Homework NYC project is a collaboration between New York City's three public library systems – NYPL, Brooklyn Public Library (BPL), and Queens Library (QL) – and the Department of Education (DOE). The project provides homework help with a groundbreaking interactive Dial-A-Teacher app. An app is an application that can be added to a webpage or cell phone to perform a specific task (e.g. calculator, weather forecast, etc.). Four nights a week, the online program connects students and teachers in real time through a secure digital whiteboard. A student in need of help types into the app "I have a homework question." The teacher provides a link in response. When the student clicks on the link, it opens up into a virtual whiteboard. The student then types his/her question, uses a mouse or a stylus to draw a math problem on the screen, or imports documents, such as a scanned page of homework, to the whiteboard. The teacher instantly sees the problem and provides feedback by typing a suggestion, adding to the drawing, or pointing the student to other websites. HomeworkNYC is funded by a three-year Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant.

The IMLS fund supports the work of an outreach specialist, Shauntee Burns, who promotes the Library's electronic resources to an audience of teachers, parents, and students throughout the five boroughs of New York City. Ms. Burns works closely with youth services staff in the project partner libraries, with teachers and librarians in New York City schools, and with NYPL digital staff in order to produce a high-quality web presence for teachers and parents. HomeworkNYC.org helps educators and parents throughout New York City understand how students use web 2.0 tools for homework and also provides resources which enable them to support student homework and research needs.

**2) How did you identify the user need(s) for your project?**

"HomeworkNYC: A Decentralized Approach to Homework" is a three-year Institute of IMLS funded project that was awarded following a planning grant that examined the research habits, homework needs, and online search habits of teens and tweens. The planning grant revealed that that students don't necessarily look to libraries for

homework help but routinely turn to Google searches or Wikipedia articles. Students do not often realize that information from Google or Wikipedia is not necessarily reliable, which can result in confusion or incorrectly completed work. The findings of the planning grant led to the conclusion that, in order to provide quality homework help for teens, the service needs to meet teens where they are at – on their computers and social networking sites – instead of relying on teens to come to a specific, physical location.

**3) What did your library or library consortium (system) do to respond to that (those) need(s)? What challenges were met?**

After analyzing the results of the planning grant, NYPL, BPL, QL and the DOE decided to take homework help resources 2.0 by making homework apps. The term “web 2.0” is associated with web applications that promote participation and collaboration. Instead of relying on a destination webpage, HomeworkNYC apps go where the students are. “This will make it easy to reach out to the public library without having to go to the public library,” says Barbara Stripling, director of library services with the New York City Department of Education.

Students played a pivotal role in the creation of the apps. During the research phase, young adults provided librarians with information about their homework needs and practices and made suggestions about how libraries could better support them. During development, the students gave more feedback to help guarantee that the apps developed will support students as they work on projects specific to school assignments. In addition, a constant flow of teen feedback has ensured the flexibility to adjust to the rapidly changing use of technology in their lives. Throughout this process, focus groups with teens were held in all five boroughs and students were encouraged to complete surveys (surveys were available on paper and online, using Survey Monkey).

The development of apps to find and use materials for homework help is the first component of HomeworkNYC. The planning grant also brought to light the fact that adults in the lives of tweens and teens are not generally aware of how technology can support learning. This led to the development of a website that provides adults – parents, teachers, and librarians – with information about the positive uses of technology (particularly web 2.0 technologies and social networking) in students’ lives in and out of the classroom, this is the second component of HomeworkNYC. In order to help inform adults about digital homework help resources for students, the New York Public Library’s outreach specialist gives talks about the positive uses of technology and demonstrations of the project website at schools, libraries, and community centers.

**4) What impact did this project have on your users and/or your community? Supply quantifiable data if appropriate.**

The HomeworkNYC app was engineered specifically to help New York City youth in grades 6-12. NYPL’s outreach specialist plays a key role in disseminating information about the library’s tools and purpose to the City’s public, private, and parochial school students, educators, and administrators. In addition, the specialist works with public librarians throughout New York City to institute HomeworkNYC Apps as a primary

homework help tool for students age 13 and older. Since the launch of the app in 2010, NYPL's outreach specialist has conducted over 1,500 visits to schools and reached over 45,000 students and 30,000 teachers with information about how to use the app. Teachers who work on the interactive whiteboards handle 150 inquiries a week, triple the number handled a year ago.

The HomeworkNYC app is the first program of its kind in the United States. A second generation of the app is in development and will be available open-sourced, which will allow other libraries to adopt this homework help model. Many public and school libraries have shown interest in the app and have asked for the updated code. NYPL will provide all updates on the HomeworkNYC website and publish the new app information via professional journals. For New York City public schools, the apps dovetail perfectly with the push toward increased use of digital tools in the classroom.

One major success of the HomeworkNYC project has been to demonstrate that it is possible for libraries to design homework help that is deliverable rather than destination based. The New York Public Library meets students where they are and uses 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to bolster academic achievement.