ILG research Bursary Proforma

April 2015.

(NB all boxes expand) (See pages 3 & 4 for instructions)

1. **Project Title (maximum 10 words)**

Information Literacy for Democratic Engagement (IL-DEM)

2. **Principal Investigator**

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3. **Co-Investigator(s)**

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4. **Partner(s)**

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5. Summary of the project – If the project is funded, ILG will use this in any publicity material or announcements. (300 of maximum 300 words)

The findings of this research will contribute to strategies to improve citizen engagement in the democratic process at community level.

Community Councillors are a vital link between local communities and higher levels of government in Scotland. They are generally 'ordinary people' who often find it difficult to understand their powers and responsibilities in their Community Councillor roles. They also face other challenges related to their interactions with information. For example, they struggle to keep on top of important developments that affect their local communities and fellow citizens, such as planning proposals. They also often lack the skills required to disseminate information and communicate news in ways that suit their constituents (e.g. by social media). This is not because they are not interested in using information and communication technologies in their roles. Indeed many Community Councillors wish to be involved with digital engagement, but they simply do not know where to start.

One reason why their knowledge is limited is that the majority of Community Councillors are no longer in formal education. Thus levels of information literacy amongst this group generally depend on lifelong learning, rather than schooling or training. This project will draw on existing research on information literacy and lifelong learning to frame a study that investigates the information skills and practices of Community Councillors, with a view to identifying strategies on how these may be enhanced. The research will also consider the role of public library staff in the training of Community Councillors, as well as broader issues related to public library services' role as related to the development of communities, social capital, and citizenship. This element of the study acknowledges the long-recognised part that libraries play in supporting citizenship – a role that is becoming more important as the austerity-driven spending environment throws more responsibilities onto local communities.

6.   **Risk assessment – Please state any risks you envisage on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being low and 5 being a high risk**

The areas that could impact on the success of the project are considered below:

- *Failure to focus on the core research question*: low risk level (1). The team is experienced in delivering research projects on time and to budget within the scope of the proposed work. This proposal is written in such a way that the milestones of the work are clear and relate tightly to the three main research questions (see section 9 below).

- *Failure to deliver useful findings:* low risk level (1). The team comprises three experienced researchers who have knowledge of, and expertise in, information literacy (both in theory and in practice[1]). In addition, careful sampling will ensure that different types of Community Councils will be represented in the study. For example, the data subjects to be interviewed in the study will come from rural areas as well as towns and the major cities, and Community Councils known to enjoy different levels of support from their local authorities will be included. Prior work on delivering research impact in library and information science projects completed by two members of the team in 2012[2] will also inform research design to ensure that its outputs and outcomes are valuable.

- *Lack of engagement on the part of Community Councils and Community Council liaison officers*: low risk level (1). The project team has an established relationship and strong credibility with Scottish Community Councils through engagement on previous research projects[3]. Around half the interviews will be held with individuals who have contributed to research work previously undertaken by the team.

- *Lack of engagement by library staff*: low risk level (2). All research team members have recently completed research projects[4] that have included library workers in Scotland and thus have existing relationships with this community. They have particularly strong connections with the public library service in Edinburgh, and connections here will help broker others throughout Scotland. (The project could be completed successfully without the direct involvement of library staff. However, their participation is desirable.)

- *Data loss/data protection*: low risk level (1). The research team is well versed in research ethics and data protection. Research data will be stored in a secure area of the University's servers accessible only by the team. Resulting data will only be published in forms that anonymise research subjects according to an agreed research data management plan.

- *Loss of key member of research team*: low risk level low (1). The research team members have overlapping skills and are able to support each other's work. Should a member of the team

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[1] For example, through delivery of training, and in engagement with theoretical perspectives as evidenced in previously published work.
[2] RiLIES: Research in Librarianship Impact Evaluation Study (2) (2012) http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/grants/grantid/13369279
[3] For example: DigiCC workshops (2015) http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/grants/grantid/13382910; Hyperlocal engagement (2014) http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/grants/grantid/13378665
[4] For example: Mapping the workforce (2014-2015) http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/grants/grantid/13379287, Training provision for the library, information and knowledge sector (2013) http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/grants/grantid/13374617, Research in Librarianship Impact Evaluation Study (1) (2011) http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/grants/grantid/13366679 and (2) (2012) http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/grants/grantid/13369279

unexpectedly be unable to complete the work (e.g. due to long-term illness) another researcher from the University will substitute the role.

7. Stakeholders

The stakeholders are as follows:

Institutions:

1. Community Engagement Team, Scottish Government. This team works to improve the context in which Community Councils operate and strongly supports efforts to develop the information literacy skills of community councillors.

2. The Improvement Service. This local authority funded body is currently engaged in work to support and improve the functions of Community Councils.

3. Public library services in Scotland. Community Councils are supported by public libraries, e.g. Community Council meetings often take place in public libraries.

Research participants:

4. Community Council members. These are elected representatives.

5. Community Council Liaison Officers. These are local authority officials charged with supporting Community Councils.

6. Other relevant officials who seek new ways to support their Community Councils.

7. Citizens who interact (now or in the future) with their Community Councils.

8. Public library staff.

8. Aims and objectives

The aims of the project are as follows:

1. To evaluate how Community Councillors (1) access and understand information on their duties and rights; (2) keep up to date with local developments of relevance to the communities that they serve; and (3) disseminate information to their communities, and to identify where future efforts need to be directed to improve the skills and practices of this group.

2. To test and validate a proposed model of information literacy for lifelong learning (Irving, Hall & Brettle, 2015).

3. To investigate the role of public library staff in the training of Community Councillors, as well as broader issues related to communities, social capital, and citizenship.

The objectives of the project are as follows:

1. To determine a project communication strategy (by the end of week 1).

2. To complete a literature review and framework for evaluation (by end of week 3).

3. To gather data (by end of week 6) from a representative sample of Community Councillors, Community Council Liaison Officers, and public library staff from across Scotland who support (or would be expected to support) the work of Community Councillors (identified in week 2).

4. To draft a project report for stakeholders that addresses the three research aims and identifies training needs (by end of week 9).

5. To draft an article for the *Journal of Information Literacy* on the basis of the completed project (by end of week 9).

6. To complete a 1000 word summary for the Information Literacy web site and the *Journal of Information Literacy* project report section (by end of week 9).

7. To raise chances of the completed research project having further impact, e.g. through continued contact and engagement with key stakeholders beyond the official project end date, identifying training recommendations for use by Community Council Liaison Officers, by extending the work through the delivery of presentations to a wider audience and/or applying for additional funding to develop this important work further.

9. Milestones

Week	Date	Main activities	Milestones
1	01/02/16	Start literature search and review Start recruitment of data subjects for empirical work Determine communication strategy Weekly project meeting 1	Communication strategy determined. Project blog post 1
2	08/02/16	Continue literature review and begin development of framework for evaluation Continue recruitment of data subjects for empirical work Weekly project meeting 2	Data subjects identified and interview dates set up by end of week 2 Project blog post 2
3	15/02/16	Continue work on literature review and framework for evaluation Design and pilot interview schedule Weekly project meeting 3	Literature review and framework for evaluation completed Complete pilot of interview schedule Project blog post 3
4	22/02/16	Refine interview schedule on basis of pilot feedback Weekly project meeting 4	Interview schedule prepared Project blog post 4
5	29/02/16	Conduct ~20 interviews in 4-8 Community Council jurisdictions (depends on outcomes of recruitment in week 2) Weekly project meetings 5 and 6	Data collection completed Project blog posts 5 & 6
6	07/03/16		
7	14/03/16	Data preparation and analysis Weekly project meetings 7 and 8	Data analysis completed Project blog post 7 & 8
8	21/03/16		
9	28/03/16	Drafting of project outputs: report for stakeholders, article for *Journal of Information Literacy*, 1000 word summary for the Information Literacy web site and the *Journal of Information Literacy* project report section Weekly project meeting 9 – to include project evaluation	Project report and journal article drafted, 1000 word summary completed Project blog post 9

10. Description (998 of a maximum of 1,000 words)

This research concerns information literacy and government. Its findings will contribute to strategies to improve citizen engagement in the democratic process at community level.

Governments invest in a range of resources - including trained information professionals - to support the exploitation of information channels for engaging their citizens. However, at the hyperlocal level (Community Councils in Scotland and Wales, parish councils in England) representatives are obliged to take on this role themselves, and expected to lead a number of activities that require well-developed information skills. For example, they need to be able to: assess the information needs of those that they serve; identify, access and evaluate information sources of potential value to their communities; and exploit, curate and communicate this information in an ethical and responsible manner. However, very few have received formal training in such practices as part of their roles.

Prior research has uncovered a democratic deficit at the level of hyperlocal government that could be addressed with attention to the information literacy of representatives. For example, around just 10% of Scottish Community Councils have active online presences that facilitate dialogue with citizens (Ryan & Cruickshank, 2014). Other findings indicate that poor information literacy is a contributing factor to the democratic deficit at the level of hyperlocal government. There are three main information challenges that Community Councillors face: (1) accessing and understanding information on their duties and rights; (2) keeping up to date with local developments of relevance to the communities that they serve; and (3) disseminating information to their communities through appropriate channels (e.g. many citizens use the web and social media as a major source of local news, whereas many Community Councils do not use such channels at all).

This work will explore how to address the problems experienced by Community Councillors in developing adequate levels of information literacy to execute their roles as part of the democratic process. It will focus primarily on the skills and practices that Community Councillors need to develop so that they are well-positioned to build and maintain digital information and communication channels (such as web sites, Facebook, and Twitter) as community engagement platforms.

Many Community Councils hold their meeting in public libraries. This gives a reason to explore how public libraries contribute to the building of citizenship within local communities. Although secondary to the main theme of information literacy and citizen engagement, this strand of the project will add value to the work. For example, it will provide evidence and an assessment of how public libraries contribute to communities, as well as the development and maintenance of civil society, by supporting Community Councillors (e.g. through training). Such findings will be contextualised against research on social capital and public library services (e.g. Goulding, 2013).

This work will consider three key research questions:

RQ1: What are the current practices of Community Councillors in exploiting information channels for engaging citizens in the democratic process?
Addressing this question will allow for an evaluation of how Community Councillors (1) access and understand information on their duties and rights; (2) keep up to date with local developments of relevance to the communities that they serve; and (3) disseminate information to their communities, and identify where future efforts need to be directed to improve the skills and practices of this group.

RQ2: What are the relationships between (1) information behaviours, (2) literacies (skills and capabilities), (3) resources, and (4) knowledge and experience, in the acquisition of information literacy amongst Community Councillors?

Addressing this question will provide an opportunity to test and validate a proposed model of information literacy for lifelong learning (Irving, Hall & Brettle, 2015).

RQ3: What are the actual, and envisaged, roles of public library services in supporting the work of Community Councils, particularly with reference to the acquisition of information literacy amongst Community Councillors?

Addressing this question will permit an investigation of the role of public libraries in the training and support of Community Councillors, as well as broader issues related to communities, social capital, and citizenship.

The findings will be set against a literature review on information literacy in the context of government in general, and democratic participation in particular. As well as informing the design of the empirical work, this will deliver to stakeholders a distillation of extant knowledge on information literacy within the sector. Where possible, the findings of the literature review and the research project will be related to existing frameworks/models that focus on information literacy in (a) the workplace and (b) lifelong learning. This will add to the value to the existing frameworks/models, and help test and validate existing theoretical perspectives. It is anticipated that the work will thus be valuable to practitioners in two constituencies – elected representatives and information professionals – and will deliver high impact in a range of settings.

With its focus on democratic participation government, this work is innovative: the broad base of information literacy research is found elsewhere, generally favouring studies in formal education settings where links between information literacy and teaching are apparent. While noting some significant exceptions (e.g. Lloyd, 2011; Crawford & Irving, 2013), traditionally less attention has been paid to information literacy in the workplace: Williams, Cooper & Wavell (2014) cite just 41 publications of significance to this theme. It is also worth noting here the general profile of Community Council members. They mainly comprise middle-aged and retired people who have typically acquired their information skills in the course of their work, at training events for Community Councillors, or in their personal lives. The context of their information literacy developments is thus one of lifelong learning, which is less commonly explored in information literacy research and merits greater attention (Irving, Brettle & Hall, 2015).

Ultimately the project will contribute an evaluation of how Community Councillors can best learn to undertake an important aspect of their roles as public representatives, and as intermediaries between citizen and civic organisations. This will contribute to formations of policies and strategies on the support and training of elected representatives at local and national government levels.

11. Dissemination strategy (419 of a maximum of 500 words)

Dissemination during the project

1. *Blogging and tweeting from researchers' own accounts*: All three researchers maintain their own blogs[5] and are regular tweeters[6], with a combined follower community of over 3000. They will deploy a communications strategy to ensure that at least one blog post a week is produced, with a total of at least 3 posts published per blog over the course of the project (i.e. 9 different blog posts in total, 3 authored by Hall, 3 by Cruickshank and 3 by Ryan, each on different aspects of

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[5] Hazel Hall: http://hazelhall.org; Peter Cruickshank: http://spartakan.wordpress.com; Bruce Ryan: http://bruceryan.info/

[6] Hazel Hall @hazelh; Peter Cruickshank: @spartakan; Bruce Ryan: @myceliumme_CC

the study). Traffic will be driven to the blog posts by Twitter and other postings elsewhere (e.g. LinkedIn). It is hoped that the nature of the blog posts will encourage debate and thus anchor the project and its outputs in the 'real' world.

2. *Blogging and tweeting from others' accounts:* The team expects that its followers and other contacts in the library and information science, information literacy, and local democracy fields will contribute to further dissemination over social media. It is anticipated that project stakeholders, including Community Councillors, Community Council Liaison Officers and library staff will be keen to publicise the work on their web sites and through their Twitter feeds[7]. In addition, the project will be profiled on the home pages of the Institute for Informatics and Digital Innovation[8] at Edinburgh Napier University, where the three researchers are based.

At the end of the project

3. The project team will produce a report for stakeholders, an article for *Journal of Information Literacy*, and a 1000 word summary for the Information Literacy web site and the *Journal of Information Literacy* project report section. Requests will be made for Community Council Liaison Officers to disseminate the report to the 1,100 active Community Councils in Scotland, and for the report to be posted on the national web site for Community Councils.

4. Opportunities for presenting the completed work to a wider audience will be pursued. For example, the timing of the project is such that it should be possible to make a submission to the Annual meeting of the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIST) 2016 which takes place in Copenhagen in November 2016 (paper submissions are due 17 April 2016, and posters are due by 24 June 2016). (The cost of participation at such events will be met from University funds.)

12. Outputs

1. Report for stakeholders

2. Article for *Journal of Information Literacy*

3. 1000 word summary for the Information Literacy web site and the *Journal of Information Literacy* project report section

4. Anonymised datasets will be placed in open formats on Edinburgh Napier University's data repository

5. Other possible outputs will depend on opportunities that arise following the end of the project, as noted above.

13. Evaluation strategy (216 of a maximum of 500 words)

Progress will be monitored through weekly meetings of the researchers to check that the project is on target, as noted in the schedule presented in Section 9 above. These project team meetings will be open to the main contacts from the project partners: the Scottish Government Community Empowerment Team and the Improvement Service. While the project is deemed too small to merit a project board, it is hoped that these contacts will serve in an advisory capacity to the researchers.

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[7] For example, http://leithcentralcc.co.uk, http://lhncc.co.uk, http://www.ntbcc.org.uk, https://twitter.com/leithcentralcc, http://www.communitycouncils.org.uk, https://khub.net/group/scottish-community-councillors-online, https://khub.net/group/wjebgordwr
[8] https://intranet.institute.napier.ac.uk/iidi/main

The findings of the project will be evaluated against extant knowledge on information literacy and democratic engagement as summarised in the literature review completed in week 3 and the associated framework for evaluation.

The management of the project will be evaluated at the weekly project meeting in week 9. Here the project and its outputs will be reviewed against the project plan as articulated in this proposal.

Long-term evaluation of the project will be possible through monitoring uptake of the recommendations in the main project report by stakeholders, and the impact of these on policy. It is the ambition of the researchers to see the output of this work make a difference in practice so that improved information literacy amongst Community Councillors results in increased democratic engagement of Scottish citizens at the level of hyperlocal government.

14. Financial breakdown

Item	Covers	Cost
Labour	41 days of project team members' time	£9,282
Travel and subsistence	To support interviews with community councillors, community council liaison officers, and library staff at up to 8 locations	£386
Total		**£9,668**

15. References

Irving, C., Brettle, A., & Hall, H. (2015). How can information literacy be modelled from a lifelong learning perspective? Paper presented at *Information: interactions and impact 2015*, Aberdeen, 23-26 June 2015.

Crawford, J. & Irving, C. (Eds) (2013). *Information literacy and lifelong learning: policy issues, the workplace, health and public libraries*. Oxford: Chandos.

Goulding, A. (2013). The Big Society and English public libraries: where are we now? *New Library World 114*(11/12), 478-493.

Lloyd, A. (2011). Trapped between a rock and a hard place: what counts as information literacy in the workplace and how is it conceptualized? *Library Trends 60*(2), 277-296.

Ryan, B. M., & Cruickshank, P. (2014). *Community Councils online: the 2014 survey*. Edinburgh. Available at: http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/publications/publicationid/13379605

Williams, D, Cooper, K. & Wavell. C. (2014). *Information literacy in the workplace: an annotated bibliography*. Aberdeen. Available at www.researchinfonet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Workplace-IL-annotated-bibliography.pdf