Greetings. I am Kristine Alpi, President of the Medical Library Association (MLA) and University Librarian at Oregon Health and Science University in Portland, Oregon.  I am also a researcher, NIH reviewer and past study section member.

MLA is a nonprofit educational organization with 3,500 health sciences information professional members worldwide. MLA provides lifelong educational opportunities, supports a knowledgebase of health information research, and works with a global network of partners including the NIH National Library of Medicine to promote the importance of quality information for improved health.

Innovations for health come from all corners. MLA applauds establishing ARPA-H, which would accelerate the pace of breakthroughs to prevent, detect, and treat disease through synergistic collaborations. ARPA-H has the potential to support more inclusive approaches to team science, shared leadership, and ideas spearheaded by non-doctoral researchers than is common within NIH.

The more distinct and independent that ARPA-H is, the better for both ARPA-H and NIH, recognizing that communication among investigators and with the public, sharing data and tools, and ensuring transparent participation are essential. MLA agrees with recommendations that ARPA-H funding must not reduce investments in NIH’s base budget.  We also agree that bringing team science, effective project management, and robust infrastructure to all ARPA-H projects ensures each participant has maximal impact, regardless of the resources at their own institution or in their own communities.

Librarians can be the linchpin for a successful cycle of ARPA-H initiatives, from planning discovery to sharing findings for application to individual or community health. While many librarians already contribute to research, more are ready to share their expertise, if ARPA-H creates space for them. Librarians’ interdisciplinary perspective encourages broader partnerships by looking beyond typical institutions, identifying stakeholders that bring diverse viewpoints, and finding collaborators with skills and outlooks that complement the team’s strengths and weaknesses. ARPA-H should evaluate team potential in aggregate and focus less on individual team leaders or institutions.

Librarian involvement during the exploration of critical questions and the subsequent development of proposals can save researchers' time and avoid waste. To capitalize on existing knowledge, we recommend ARPA-H fund rapid exploration of critical questions through open dissemination of evidence synthesis, systematic and scoping reviews using librarian expertise. This central support for discovery through prior work, including funding to incorporate and translate global knowledge in languages other than English, will advance equity, inclusivity and broader applicability of findings.

ARPA-H’s focus on equity aligns with MLA’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We recommend ARPA-H require implicit bias training and ongoing feedback those who recommend projects for funding. Training on evaluating publications and their impact is essential to recognizing the value of participation by researchers who communicate openly or outside the scholarly communication environment. The language of “high risk, high reward” that is currently used to describe ARPA-H and NIH R21 applications requires a shared understanding of reward to bring us towards a better future.

MLA appreciates this opportunity to help the NIH envision the future of ARPA-H.  Please consider MLA your strong partner as you work to transform health for the benefit of all.  Thank you.