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## **MTSU-led \$550K federal grant funds rural libraries' virtual reality training to help patrons explore career possibilities**

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** — Through a three-year, nearly \$550,000 federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and managed by **Middle Tennessee State University**, six rural Tennessee libraries will utilize virtual reality training to help their community residents explore employment opportunities.

Librarians recently came to MTSU for the daylong TransfrVR training with workforce simulations to provide more access to career development opportunities for people in their areas in Middle Tennessee.

MTSU faculty are conducting applied research to investigate virtual reality career exploration and training initiatives in rural public libraries and their role in yielding positive workforce outcomes for patrons, said **Chaney Mosley**, MTSU **School of Agriculture** assistant professor of agricultural education and Tennessee STEM Education Center associate director, who obtained the \$549,560 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Library partners in the Tennessee Regional Library System include Clay County Public Library in Celina, Altamont Public Library in Grundy County, Fentress County Public Library in Jamestown, Millard Oakley Public Library in Livingston (Overton County), Adams Memorial Library in Woodbury (Cannon County) and White County Public Library in Sparta. The training took place March 11 on campus.

### **About the project**

The project will survey and interview library patrons, staff and participants about their experiences with VR programming, including ways in which the experience

may be associated with workforce outcomes, including technical skills, industry credentials and new employment.

The project anticipates producing publications, presentations, podcasts, testimonials and a best practice guide to help share results and promote widespread adoption of VR programming in libraries for workforce development, benefiting under-skilled library patrons and staff, employers and communities.

The project will pursue “adults looking to make career transitions or enter/re-enter the workforce, veterans, teenagers, immigrants and refugees, individuals with disabilities and senior citizens, at no cost to patrons,” Mosley said.

“The target group for the project is under-skilled job-seeking library patrons. These individuals may lack access to the necessary resources to advance their careers, and as a result, experience limited opportunities for professional growth and financial stability,” he added.

Joining Mosley in the project are **Mary Ellen Sloane** with **James E. Walker Library**, **Kevin Ragland** with the **Tennessee STEM Education Center**, **Ying Jin**, formerly an MTSU psychology faculty member who is now at James Madison University in Virginia, and **Carly Altman**, a doctoral student in the **Math and Science Education** doctoral program in the interdisciplinary science education concentration.

Sloane, professor and science librarian, said the grant project “provides an exciting opportunity for MTSU to partner with the Tennessee State Library and Archives to assess library services and develop a model of workforce development programming that may be replicated nationwide.”

### **Federal support**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's libraries and museums. They advance, support and empower America's museums, libraries and related organizations through grantmaking, research and policy development.

“As pillars of our communities, libraries and museums bring people together by providing important programs, services, and collections. These institutions are trusted spaces where people can learn, explore and grow,” Institute of Museum and Library Services Director Crosby Kemper said. “The institute is proud to support their initiatives through our grants as they educate and enhance their communities.”

### **Librarians excited about possibilities**

- “MTSU and technology will allow the Cannon County community to drop into the library to discover what different jobs are like and the skillsets needed through

virtual technology experience,” said **Marsha Petty**, Adams Memorial Library director.

“Does a job use your strongpoints or would it be tedious for you?” she added. “The virtual technology will allow us to experience new worlds with a visit to the library and without the expense of travel or cost of classes.”

- “The White County Public Library is looking forward to this partnership with MTSU to bring VR to our patrons,” said Director **Cathy M. Farley**. “We are excited by the possibilities and eager to get started.”

- “This will be a great benefit to our Overton County citizens and we appreciate the opportunity to share this with them,” said **Judith A. Cutright**, Millard Oakley Public Library director.

“Advancements in technology are often hard to grasp and having this technology available at the library will be an advantage for those in our community that are unsure about its use,” she added. “Allowing them to try this technology while also using it to train for work is incredible.”

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### ***PHOTO CAPTIONS***

*Transfr VR training at MTSU1.jpg*

**EJ Presley with Transfr, a virtual reality company, makes a point regarding how to use the VR technology while addressing librarians from six rural Midstate counties recently in a Middle Tennessee State University Fairview Building classroom in Murfreesboro, Tenn. More than a dozen library representatives attended training to help their patrons utilize VR to enhance their careers and job prospects. A nearly \$550,000 federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services obtained by the MTSU School of Agriculture is a three-year plan to stimulate workforce development in the rural areas. (MTSU photo by Andy Heidt)**

*Transfr VR training at MTSU2.jpg*

**EJ Presley, far right, with virtual reality company Transfr, utilizes the VR technology to show attendees from Midstate rural libraries how to use the technology at a recent training workshop at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tenn. Through a three-year, nearly \$550,000 federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and managed**

**by MTSU, six rural Tennessee libraries will utilize virtual reality training to help their community residents explore employment opportunities. (MTSU photo by Andy Heidt)**

*Transfr VR training at MTSU3.jpg*

**Tammy Westergard, left, Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development's senior workforce development librarian-in-residence, assists Jacy Willis and Marsha Petty, both from the Adams Memorial Library in Woodbury, Tenn., with Transfr virtual reality training recently in a Middle Tennessee State University Fairview Building classroom in Murfreesboro, Tenn. Librarians from six rural Midstate counties attended the training that will enable their patrons to use the Transfr VR technology to pursue career opportunities. MTSU researchers are conducting applied research to investigate VR career exploration and training initiatives in libraries and their role in yielding positive workforce outcomes for patrons. (MTSU photo by Andy Heidt)**

*Transfr VR training at MTSU4.jpg*

**An attendee uses Transfr virtual reality technology at a recent one-day training session at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tenn. Through a three-year, nearly \$550,000 federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and managed by MTSU's School of Agriculture, six rural Tennessee libraries will utilize VR training to help their community residents explore employment opportunities. (MTSU photo by Andy Heidt)**

*Transfr VR training at MTSU5.jpg*

**Participants including Lily Woodside, center, from the White County Public Library in Sparta, Tenn., go through virtual reality training provided by Transfr recently in a Middle Tennessee State University Fairview Building classroom in Murfreesboro, Tenn. The training will help the librarians from six rural counties assist their patrons in pursuing job opportunities with the same VR technology. A federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services obtained by MTSU's School of Agriculture is aiding in the effort. (MTSU photo by Andy Heidt)**

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