## PLP Innovation and Technology Opportunity Grant Program Application

Library Name: California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB)

Project Title: Sensory-friendly study pods

Select category you are applying under:

☐ Category A: Innovation and Technology Opportunity Grant

X Category B: Grant Replication Program

If Category B is selected, enter the name of the grant you are replicating:

Project Zenbooth: Opening Doors by Closing & Soundproofing Walls (Oakland Public Library, 2017-18)

1.      Please provide a one paragraph project summary.

The Tanimura and Antle Library at California State University, Monterey Bay was a state-of-the-art building when it opened in 2008. The building's atrium extends from the first to the third floor, and while aesthetically appealing, has the unanticipated effect of allowing noise to carry throughout the building. Many of our students work collaboratively in the library, and the colocation of classrooms and student services in the library building creates additional foot traffic and noise. While many students take the background noise in stride, our users with sensory sensitivities sometimes struggle to study in an environment with visual and aural distractions. The CSUMB Library has study rooms, but these are primarily designed for groups, are not soundproof, and have glass windows or doors that can lead to visual distraction. Sensory-friendly study pods would provide a critical resource for our neurodivergent students. We are proposing a pilot project with a single study pod that would allow us to assess the demand for the pod and the features that are most critical for our sensory-sensitive students, with the intention of acquiring additional pods in the future.

2.      Explain how this project fits with the library's strategic directions.

**CSUMB Library Mission and Values**

**Mission**

The CSUMB Library provides information resources, user-centered services, and an inviting, collaborative environment to foster intellectual curiosity, sustain scholarship and creativity, and inspire lifelong learning for the diverse community we serve. A sensory-friendly study pod for neurodivergent students aligns with the CSUMB Library's mission by providing a user-centered

service that meets the unique needs of its diverse community. By creating an inviting environment that reduces sensory overload, the pod fosters inclusivity, comfort, and collaboration, ensuring all students feel welcome. In addition, it supports intellectual curiosity, sustained scholarship, and lifelong learning by removing barriers that could hinder neurodiverse students' engagement with learning materials. This addition to the library demonstrates our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and creating a supportive space for all students.

**Values**

*Access*
- The pod is designed to minimize sensory distractions, creating a comfortable and focused environment that enables neurodiverse students to better access and utilize academic materials. This tailored space supports their academic, intellectual, and creative endeavors by ensuring that they have an inclusive environment that meets their specific sensory needs, allowing them to fully engage with the library's resources.

*Student Success*
- The pod provides a forward-thinking and creative solution to support the diverse needs of neurodivergent students. By offering a specialized space designed to reduce sensory overload, the library demonstrates its commitment to the success of all students, ensuring that those with sensory sensitivities have an environment conducive to focus and learning.

*Continuous Improvement*
- By adding a pod to our library, the library demonstrates its commitment to learning from its community and adapting services to better meet their needs. This initiative reflects a willingness to embrace new ideas and create innovative solutions that contribute to both professional and organizational growth, ensuring that the library evolves to serve all students more effectively.

*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*
- By providing a space tailored to students with sensory sensitivity, the library ensures that all individuals, regardless of their neurological differences, have equitable access to resources and a conducive learning environment. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging and acknowledges the importance of diverse identities and needs in the academic community.

3.     Please provide a detailed description of the proposed project including the population served and the demographics of that population.

The CSUMB Library serves approximately 6,500 students, as well as faculty and staff, and our weekly gate count average is over 10,000 entries per week. Forty-nine percent of our students

are first-generation college students, 50% identify as members of historically underserved racial or ethnic groups, and 29% are low income. While the actual number of students with disabilities is certainly higher, 835 students have registered with the Student Disability and Accessibility Center (SDAC). Seventy-three percent of these students (~610 students) identify as neurodivergent. The library has sought input from SDAC regarding the needs of their students, and they report students seeking soundproof spaces that are free from visual distractions. We have identified the Zenbooth as the most economical study pod that meets these needs.

The Zenbooth has a number of sensory-friendly features. It is soundproof, which is critical for students with auditory sensitivities, allowing them to focus without the distraction of ambient noise. The enclosed design minimizes visual stimuli, benefiting students who experience visual overstimulation or have difficulty filtering out visual distractions. This can be particularly helpful for individuals with ADHD or autism spectrum disorders. Users can adjust lighting and ventilation within the booth, empowering neurodivergent students to create a personalized sensory environment that suits their individual needs. The consistent, defined area of the booth provides a sense of security and routine, which can be comforting for students who thrive on structure and may experience anxiety in less defined spaces.

The Zenbooth also aligns well with the CSUMB Library's commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility. Zenbooth's manufacturing process prioritizes waste reduction and uses renewable resources, such as particle board from recycled materials. The study pods are built for long-term durability, leading to less frequent replacements, and with a process that repurposes off-cut wood into shipping pallets for the booths, maximizing the use of materials and reducing waste. Zenbooth partners with Greenspark to support reforestation initiatives, and plants a tree for every booth ordered.

We are particularly committed to providing study spaces that meet the needs of our neurodivergent students given the impact of library study rooms on student success. In 2023, the CSUMB Library conducted a value study that used hierarchical regression models to determine how the use of our library contributes to different measures of student success. We found that for every additional hour of library study room reservation, a student's unit completion rate (the percentage of enrolled units that are completed) increased by 0.6% ($\beta$=.006, $p<.001$). For every additional hour of study room reservation, a student's cumulative GPA increased by 0.009 ($\beta$=.009, $p<.001$), and their likelihood of graduation/retention increased by 7.3% ($\beta$=1.073, $p<.001$). It is clear that our study rooms have an impact on student performance, and we are enthusiastic about the prospect of offering neurodivergent students a space that better meets their needs. We will continue to work with the Student Disabilities and Accessibility Center once the study pod is installed to help increase awareness and use among this target population.

We propose to use PLP funding toward the purchase of a Zenbooth Quad, the Zenbooth product that is ADA compliant for wheelchair accessibility. We are considering this to be a pilot project, in which we evaluate the demand for the study pod and collect user feedback on its features. If

the study pod is as popular as we anticipate, we will seek additional funding sources to acquire additional pods. Because the PLP funding will not cover the entire cost of a Zenbooth Quad, we will pursue additional funding to cover the remaining cost (similar to the Oakland Public Library's grant that we are replicating). Our most promising secondary funding source is CSUMB's Student Fee Advisory Committee, which allocates money collected from student fees to projects that are important to students. While funding the whole booth would exceed their limit, the difference between the PLP grant funding amount and the cost of the Zenbooth is within their scope. Additional funding sources that could cover this difference, or possibly fund a second study pod, include the Ford Family Foundation and the Mellon Foundation. In the case that we are not able to secure additional funding by the end of the PLP grant cycle, our plan would be to purchase a smaller Zenbooth product that would be fully covered by PLP funding and to continue to seek funding for a second, ADA accessible study pod.

4.      What are the goals and objectives of the project?

**Goals**

The main goal of bringing a sensory-friendly study pod into the library is to improve student success for neurodivergent students by providing a supportive environment that minimizes sensory distractions, allowing for better focus and engagement with academic materials.

**Objectives**

- Provide a dedicated, quiet space designed to minimize sensory distractions, making the library environment more accessible and welcoming for neurodivergent students.
- Contribute to student success by fostering an environment that reduces sensory overload, enabling neurodivergent students to better focus on their academic tasks and improve their overall well-being.
- Promote a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion by recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by neurodivergent students.

5.    Please include your project timeline (include detail of activities).

| Activity | Nov - Dec 2024 | Jan 2024 | Feb 2024 | Mar 2024 | Apr 2025 - Jun 2026 | Jul 2026 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Secure additional funding | X | X | | | | |
| Execute preliminary purchasing paperwork | | X | | | | |
| Order a Zenbooth | | | X | | | |
| Install the Zenbooth and add it to the existing online reservation system for study rooms | | | | X | | |
| Create and post promotional materials for Zenbooth | | | | X | | |
| Monitor the number of hours the Zenbooth is used | | | | X | X | X |
| Collect voluntary Zenbooth user feedback | | | | X | X | X |
| Evaluate and report on the success of the Zenbooth | | | | | | X |

6.    Please indicate how you will evaluate the success of your project.

The study pod will be added to our existing online reservation system for study rooms. This system allows us to track the total number of hours that the study pod is reserved during the semester, and the number of unique users. We will consider the pilot successful if during the 2025-26 academic year (the first full year of implementation) the study pod is reserved for 50% or more of the hours it is available, and if it is used by at least 60 unique users (approximately 10% of our neurodivergent students). A successful pilot will prompt the pursuit of additional funding to acquire a second study pod. In addition to usage data, we will also collect user feedback through a Google Form that users can access by scanning a QR code posted in the study pod. The form will include questions about how satisfied users are with the study pod

features and the ease of reserving the pod, and will also allow open-ended comments. We will continue to seek input from the Student Disability and Accessibility Center to gauge their perspective on how well the study pod is meeting the needs of their students.

7.　　　Please detail your project budget. (Note: Indirect costs are not allowed).

The Zenbooth model we plan to purchase is $18,478.33 including shipping, installation, 10" kick door for ADA compliance, and taxes (see photo.) We will seek additional funding for the $6,478.33 that would not be covered by PLP funding.

- $14,145 - Zenbooth Quad (includes anticipated 5% discount for educational institutions)
- $1,600 - Shipping
- $806.29 - California State Tax
- $33.90 - Monterey County Tax
- $201.57 - Seaside City Tax
- $67.19 - Monterey County District Tax
- $134.38 - Monterey County Local Tax
- $1,490 - Professional Installation

**ZENBOOTH**　　Products ⌄　Who We Serve　Compare　Sustainability　FAQs　Cc



**Zenbooth Quad**
$14,890.00

*Starting at $314/month\**

Color Finish:  Maple Exterior/Maple Interior

Manufacturing Speed:  🧘 Standard - Ships within 30 days

🧘 Standard - Ships within 30 days

🚀 RUSH - Ships Next Week (+$900)

Should additional funding be unavailable, our alternate purchase proposal is as follows: $10,635.50 including shipping and installation of Zenbooth Duo.

- $8,445.50 - Zenbooth Duo (includes anticipated 5% discount for educational institutions)
- $1,300 - Shipping
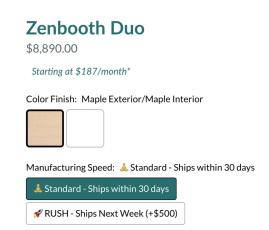- $890 - Professional Installation

ZΞNBOOTH     Products ⌄     Who We Serve     Compare     Sustainability     FAQs     Contact

## Zenbooth Duo
$8,890.00

*Starting at $187/month\**

Color Finish:  Maple Exterior/Maple Interior

Manufacturing Speed: 🧘 Standard - Ships within 30 days

🧘 Standard - Ships within 30 days

🚀 RUSH - Ships Next Week (+$500)

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8.      Please indicate how the project will be sustained after the grant term is over.

The library anticipates few ongoing costs for the Zenbooth. Any necessary maintenance will be performed by our institution's facilities team. After piloting the initial pod, the library will consider applying for additional funding from the Ford Family Foundation and the Mellon Foundation to implement additional sensory-friendly study pods.

**Complete Only for Category B Grants:**

9.      Explain what grant was selected to replicate and why.

We selected the Oakland Public Library's "Project Zenbooth" grant to replicate because they have successfully implemented study pods in two of their library branches. While our project is very similar, in that it attempts to meet patrons' competing needs for privacy and collaboration, the population our library serves is distinct. They anticipated their users needing study pods in order to have private conversations, work remotely, and even conduct storytimes with incarcerated parents. The features of the Zenbooth that make these activities possible also serve the needs of our population, which are to have a sensory-friendly environment for studying free from distractions. We have drawn on their timeline to create our own, and concur with their (implicit) assessment that Zenbooth is the preferred product to meet the needs of library users.

We contacted the Oakland Public Library to see what their experiences with the Zenbooth have been and whether they could share the lessons they have learned. They report their Zenbooth

being very popular, with at least 3-5 uses per day. Similar to what we are proposing, they use an online reservation system. They provided some valuable tips, such as ideal positioning for proper ventilation and the desirability of providing a trash can inside the pod. We also consulted with the Monterey Public Library, which has a different brand of study pod, and found that one of its features would not be practical for our context, affirming our decision to use the Zenbooth rather than an alternate vendor.

10.     If there are changes or enhancements to the original grant, including budgetary changes, please detail the changes and your rationale for making them.

The pricing of Zenbooths, while still competitive compared to similar products, have increased since the Oakland Public Library received their grant in 2017. Similar to their grant proposal, the PLP funding will not cover the entire cost, and we are actively seeking additional funding, as noted above.