



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-253370-OMS-23
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access

Midwest Miniatures Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$47,665
Amount of cost share:	\$0

Midwest Miniatures Museum will digitize and publish online the museum's collection of miniatures, including architectural scale models, dioramas, furniture, and paintings. The museum will hire a collections manager and additional staff to photograph items and conduct data migration to the museum's collections management system. Increased intellectual control of the project will improve collections care, increase internal accessibility to the collection, and mitigate the risk of handling the miniatures for research and exhibition purposes. As a result of the project, staff will make project metadata accessible to the public through the museum website.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Digital Product Plan

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

Narrative

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Program Goal/Project Category and Associated Objectives

Midwest Miniatures Museum (MMM) requests \$47,665 in grant support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) through its Inspire! Grant for Small Museums program to institute a twenty-month project to digitize the Museum's current collection of miniatures. During this process, MMM will complete the digitization by photographing collections items and entering the photographs and collections information into CollectiveAccess, an open-source, cloud-based collections management software that is used within a large consortium of local museums.

This project falls under the IMLS Goal 3: *Advance Collections Stewardship and Access*, specifically objective 3.2: *Promote access to Museum and Library Collections*.

MMM's mission is to provide universal access for the curious to explore the world of small-scale creation. To better fulfill its mission statement, MMM aspires to make its collection available to a global audience online through digital access.

Advancing MMM's Strategic Plan

This project directly relates to the second goal of MMM's strategic plan: ensuring that its collections of miniatures is exhibited, expanded, and accessible to a global audience. The strategic plan addresses the desire of the organization to digitize and launch the collection online by securing funding, photographing the collection, digitizing collection records, and implementing cloud-based data storage via CollectiveAccess. For the past five years, MMM has been working toward this goal by creating a Collections Management Policy, undertaking a full inventory before its move to a new location, and securing a location for collections storage that would allow enough room for a workstation to be created on-site. See attached Strategic Plan Summary included in the Supporting Documents.

Addressing Needs/Problems/Challenges

MMM has been specifically planning and working toward the implementation of this project for five years. The Museum originally began as a small volunteer-led organization to display the collections of a few founding members; MMM has been growing ever since. However, limitations in financial and personnel capacities have prevented digitization. This has created further limitations, especially during lockdowns and pandemic restrictions over the past few years. Much of its collection information is still in paper files, and images gathered over the years have been of variable quality and mostly used for collections management or promotional purposes.

Beginning in 2018, alongside its (now complete) search for a new location to house its collection and operations, MMM was introduced to CollectiveAccess. It was excited by the platform's potential for not only collections management but also for public-facing online access to digitized collection information and images. Since that time, MMM has obtained a full-time professional administrator, professionalized its operations and policies, conducted a full inventory of its collection, secured and relocated to a new location for both its operations and off-site storage, and rebuilt its website to be more current and user-friendly. At every stage, MMM considered and prepared for conducting this collection digitization project. It outlined its goals for the project in its strategic plan and ensured a storage space with the capacity to serve as a work area for the digitization process.

This grant project will open the doors for further access and future expansion of its digital and online offerings as MMM continues to grow.

The project will address three main needs as outlined below:

1. **Accessibility** – Miniatures are small and detailed and there are several access barriers for a variety of people, especially those with visual or physical impairments. Digital collections will allow for greater accessibility for those who have a difficult time with the small scale and other barriers to full enjoyment of the collection. Before the period of this grant, MMM will be implementing an accessibility project to fund a few tablets and headphones to be available as aids to guests, and this project will help expand the uses for these tablets to allow easy access to the digitized collection at the Museum as a supplemental aid.

Currently, MMM is limited by the size of its building and that of local partnering organizations to provide the entirety of access to its collection, with only around 10-20% available at a time. Miniatures are of international interest, and having a digitized collection published online will allow anyone to access it, even from across the globe.

2. **Staff and partnering organizations** – With the use of a collections management software (CMS) and digitized collection, MMM staff will be able to easily share information within the organization and with its partners. As an example, Loutit District Library, located only a block away from MMM, has requested additional information about MMM's collection and could become an excellent source for people wishing to learn more about the collection or browse further. The digitized collection will aide in planning exhibitions. Once all records are in one place, it will also aid staff hoping to identify any flaws in documentation such as areas with little or missing information, unknown items or items of unknown status which need to be formally accessioned, items which may not fit MMM's collecting standards and which may be subject to deaccessioning and transfer to another collection or some other means of disposal.
3. **Preservation of information** – Placing information about the collection and high-quality images in one place with a plan for maintaining and backing up the information regularly will help preserve data and prevent loss that can happen to physical files or other digital files. By digitizing the collection, MMM will help preserve information well after its current board and staff have left the organization.

More detail about the types and number of collections items can be found in the Organizational Profile alongside a description of what 'miniatures' means in the context of MMM's collection. Because the collection is somewhat niche, sample images of the types of items that fall under the scope of this project will be included in the supporting documents to supplement this application.

Target Groups and Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries and target groups of this project includes all guests to the Museum, including those with visual or physical impairments; staff, board members, and volunteers within the organization; other partnering organizations; and people local and international who have interest in miniatures or the museum for entertainment and research purposes. More specifics about these target groups can be found in the Organizational Profile portion of this grant application. This project has been developed with input from individual members of the groups listed above including staff, volunteers, guests, miniaturists (persons who make and/or collect miniatures as a profession or hobby), and local partnering organizations, and the expected results have been met with enthusiasm by all.

Specific Activities

Hanna Steinmann, MMM Administrator, will take on the role of Project Director and be responsible for the management and planning of the project. A temporary, full-time Collections Manager will be recruited and hired at the beginning of the grant period. The Collections Manager will assist with planning and be responsible for the implementation of the project.

MMM will recruit, hire, and train staff to assist with the inventory project. The first three months of the project will be dedicated to hiring and training a Collections Manager. During this time, the Collections Manager and the Project Director will work together on MMM's plan and goals for the project.

- 1) **Hiring a Collections Manager:** The Project Director along with members of the Board of Directors will form a committee to recruit and hire a Collections Manager who will be responsible for implementing most of this project. MMM will seek out recruits with experience with photography/digitization and preferably with experience in CollectiveAccess or comparable collection management software.
- 2) **Training staff:** Once hired, the Project Director will train the Collections Manager to familiarize them with the collection, the workspaces, and specify the plans for the grant project.
- 3) **Recruiting and hiring additional staff:** Part-time, temporary Collections Handlers or volunteers will be required to help move heavier items in the collection. They will be recruited and trained as needed over the course of the grant period.
- 4) **Setting up:** The Collections Manager will begin by creating a workspace within MMM's off-site storage facility. MMM leases space from a locally headquartered company, Harding Energy, only a mile away from the Museum. MMM has already begun working with staff at Harding Energy to create an appropriate space for the implementation of this project by ensuring enough space to conduct grant activities and access to electrical outlets. Staff at Harding Energy have also promised access to pallet jacks and other moving equipment already located onsite.
- 5) **Photographing collections in storage:** The digitization process includes unpacking structures and moving them to the photography area, utilizing assistants, volunteers, and moving equipment as needed; unpacking furnishings and accessories and arranging them within the structures; photographing the item from multiple angles and detail shots when appropriate; repacking furnishings and accessories; and repacking structures and relocating them to storage locations.
- 6) **Photographing collections on display:** Some items will be on display at the Museum during the grant period. They will need to be photographed onsite. This process will be done by removing glass/plexiglass covers, relocating items to a photography area or setting up photography equipment around larger items as needed; photographing items from multiple angles and detail shots when appropriate; and replacing items and glass/plexiglass covers. MMM may be closed during part or all of this process as needed. Care and efficiency will be important to minimize disruption to Museum activities.
- 7) **Editing and uploading information and images to CollectiveAccess.** Images will be edited as needed using Adobe Photoshop or other appropriate photo editing software. Information about collection items will need to be entered into CollectiveAccess and images uploaded. This process may be ongoing during the photography process in order to protect MMM from potential loss of digital images.
- 8) **Setting up digital access online through Pawtucket2 Web Publishing Software:** The final step will be to publish digital access to its collection through its website. MMM may request assistance or input from

Bluefire Media (a local web design and development company that designed MMM's current website and helps to maintain it) and input from Whirl-i-Gig (CollectiveAccess' development team) or other organizations who utilize CollectiveAccess as needed during this process.

Mitigating Project Risks

One risk to the project is loss of data due to malfunctioning equipment or mismanagement of digital data. This risk will be mitigated by frequently backing up data to an external hard drive and storing backups offsite, and by uploading information to CollectiveAccess or another cloud-based hosting service.

Another risk is potential damage being found to crated exhibits from MMM's recent move. Miniatures can be very fragile, even when carefully packed, and condition reports were not completed on many items post-move. Damage is also possible when unpacking and/or moving collection items. If damage is found, it will be assessed, and staff and volunteers may choose to repair small damage at the time or may choose to either bring in additional help to make repairs, digitize the item with existing damage, or exclude the item from the project until a decision is made about the state of the item.

Changes in staff would require additional training time which would add to the project's timeline but would not prevent its completion.

Planning, Implementation, Management, and Necessary Resources

MMM's Administrator, Hanna Steinmann, will act as Project Director and devote around 10% of their time to the management and planning of the project. Other staff to be hired for the project include a part-time Collections Manager responsible for the implementation of the project, and additional part-time assistants, Collections Handlers, who will work as needed to move larger pieces, plexiglass coverings, and other furniture and items.

Large structures will take the most time to photograph, an estimated 6-12 hours each depending on the number of individual items that will need to be unpacked and arranged within the structure and repacked upon completion. Small Structures and Room Boxes will likewise vary greatly due to similar factors as above, an estimated 3-6 hours each. Collections of individual items will take an additional estimated four months to photograph. In total, a full year will be dedicated to photographing the collections, allowing four months for each category of collections. Three months are allotted for preparation, and five months for finalization including editing images as needed and uploading information and images into CollectiveAccess. In total, the project will require twenty months to complete.

Additional resources needed include photography supplies to set up a portable studio for digitization, workstation supplies so staff will be able to work on a laptop from wherever necessary within the two buildings, and cloud-based hosting for CollectiveAccess.

Tracking Progress

The Project Director and Collections Manager will review their plan and timeline on at least a monthly basis to assess progress through quantitative and qualitative goals, make adjustments, and discuss ways to increase efficiency and quality. The Board of Directors will be updated monthly at their regular Board meetings or more often as needed.

PROJECT RESULTS

MMM is committed to the achievement of its goals for the collection digitization project. The display of miniatures is essential to MMM's mission. However, due to current constraints of space, approximately 80% of its collection is in storage. By digitizing these items and having them available through CollectiveAccess, it will

allow for increased public viewing of the images and access to information about all items in the permanent collection.

Intended Results

This project will result in the majority of the Museum's current collection, including information about the collection, becoming publicly and digitally available on MMM's website through CollectiveAccess, thus addressing the three core needs mentioned above:

- 1) ***Accessibility*** – The resulting published digital collection will allow greater accessibility for guests – including those with visual and physical impairments and those with other barriers preventing travel to the Museum's physical exhibitions – and other individuals interested in accessing the collection beyond and in greater detail than what can currently be displayed in-person.
- 2) ***Staff and Partnering Organizations*** – The use of an easily accessible collections management system will allow for greater inter- and intra-organizational development including planning of exhibitions and other published content both digital and physical (such as social media content, advertisements, newsletters, etc.)
- 3) ***Preservation of Information*** – By following its Digital Products Plan, MMM will create and maintain digital images, information, and metadata that will be preserved through regular maintenance such as backups and cloud storage. This will help protect collections information from loss and minimize risks to vital data.

Changes in Knowledge, Skills, Behaviors, and/or Attitudes as a Result of the Project

Beneficiaries will be able to increase their knowledge of the museum and its collection through greatly increased accessibility of information. By having everything in one place and available online through MMM's website, target groups will no longer need to go through staff to access collections and information about collections currently in storage. It will create less burden on staff and increase knowledge of the Museum and its collection.

Resulting Products

The result of the project will be the digitization of MMM's collection of miniatures. These results include high-quality digital images, utilization of a collections management software, digitized collections information, and user-friendly online collection access. It will also include digital backups for all of the information gathered and digitized, including images.

Sustaining the Benefits

Beyond the IMLS grant period, MMM is committed to continuing the digitization process as new works become available and as its miniatures collection expands. MMM will continue its subscription to cloud-based server space if needed, regular updates and backups of its digital collection, and maintaining its user-end digital access through its website.

Completion of this IMLS-funded project will have positive implications for MMM in the future. It is worthy of note that MMM is in the process of acquiring, through interorganizational transfer, a large, world-renown collection of miniatures from a museum in another state. The quality of many pieces in this additional collection is unmatched, but the size of both the collection and some of the individual items within it exceed the current capacity of MMM to display it all. This collection is well-known among miniatures enthusiasts but is not digitally available. MMM plans to take what it learns from this initial project to undergo the same process with this additional collection.

Activity	2023				2024												2025			
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Hiring Collections Manager, Training, Planning, Set-Up	3 Months																			
Hiring and Training of Additional Staff (as needed)	As needed																			
Photographing				12 Months																
Editing Images																4 Months				
Entering Collections Information and Images into CollectiveAccess																5 Months				
Publishing of MMM's Digitized Collection to its Website																			2 Months	

Digital Products Plan

Midwest Miniatures Museum (MMM) will photograph its collection items to produce high-quality digital images. These images, accompanied by collections information, will be uploaded to CollectiveAccess, a free, open-source software for cataloguing and publishing museum and archival collections. The resulting products will be made available to the public, free of charge, through MMM's website.

TYPE

This project will produce both master images (TIFF files) of permanent collection items as well as derivative images (JPEG files) for web access to be uploaded to CollectiveAccess. There will be at least one of each file type for every item included in the project. Many items will require multiple images due to their three-dimensional nature. Master files will be stored as large, uncompressed TIFF files at a resolution of 300ppi - 400ppi and 16-bit depth, AdobeRGB color space. This will result in high-quality images from which derivative files can be made for both print and web. Derivative files will be made for use on CollectiveAccess in lossy JPEG file format, 8-bit depth, sRGB color space. Hi-res derivative images will be 800px - 1000px wide, while thumbnail derivative images will be around 100px - 200px wide.

MMM will use the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set standard to produce metadata for its images, and the content will be based off the Getty's Art and Architecture Thesaurus.

AVAILABILITY

Digital content created from this project will be added to CollectiveAccess and shared through their public web-access application, Pawtucket2. This web application will be shared through the MMM's website. The application and images will be available free of charge on all standard web browsers and will be accessible through MMM's website.

ACCESS

Digital content for objects not under copyright protection or for which the museum holds the copyright will be available for use through a Creative Commons license. This license will clarify any restrictions or lack thereof that the Museum has placed on the image. The license will be explained on the Museum's website alongside the hi-res images.

The Museum plans to waive any copyright it may have to the images created during this project and allow their non-restrictive use if the Museum has legal right to do so. These terms and conditions will be communicated to users on the Museum's website where images and information cataloged in CollectiveAccess will be shared.

SUSTAINABILITY

Master files will be saved on a dedicated external hard drive purchased with IMLS funds for the purpose of this project. They will be backed up either on Museum computers and/or in a cloud-based storage system. The Museum will purchase appropriate cloud storage or digital asset management software for these files as appropriate. Derivative files will be uploaded to CollectiveAccess. The Museum is requesting funding for a cloud-based hosting package from Whirl-i-Gig to store these files for the duration on the grant period. Once the grant period has ended, the Museum will take over the monthly funding of the cloud-hosting package if necessary. Copies of the Derivative files will also be backed up on the external hard drive or on a dedicated flash drive.

CollectiveAccess has some features of a digital asset management system. Metadata will be preserved through CollectiveAccess. The procedures and thesauri used during this project will be recorded and used for the creation of any future metadata.