

Fall 2009

Dear Colleague:

Enclosed please find sample narratives, schedule of completion and summary budget forms from 21 successful applications from the 2008 and 2009 IMLS Museums for America (MFA) grant competitions. These samples represent different types of projects from successful grantees in the three categories: Engaging Communities, Building Institutional Capacity, and Collections Stewardship. They emphasize ties to the organizational strategic plan, sustainability, and the long term benefits to the institution and its community. Each of the samples was selected to illustrate a specific aspect of a good application, as described below:

Engaging Communities

Brooklyn Botanic Garden is an example of a project that clearly communicates what the Garden wants to accomplish; their approach is visionary on every level. The proposal is well written and the project demonstrates a deep sense of community.

Dallas Museum of Art is an example of a proposal that clearly ties the project to the Museum's strategic plan and mission. The proposal is compelling and well documented and the project shows a true sense of commitment to teachers and students.

Heritage Plantation of Sandwich is as an example of a project that is well written with demonstrated community support. The project fulfills the goals of the institution in building new audiences, increasing intellectual access to underutilized resources, and promoting lifelong learning.

Madison Museum of Contemporary Art is an excellent example of a well written project that documents an impressive and ambitious project that will have a large impact on the Museum's targeted audience while helping to further institutional capacity.

Mint Museum of Art is an example of a project that clearly ties to a particular age group and families. The project includes excellent evaluation procedures and the budget is very modest. This project aligns with the Museum's strategic plan and their move to a new space. Input from their community is exceptional. This project is a great example of a museum as a community center.

Stearns County Historical Society is an example of a project that shows a thorough grasp of integrating goals into a comprehensive action plan. The project also shows excellent community involvement including an impressive list of partnerships.

Utah State University Museum of Anthropology is an example of a project that provides strong justification of its impact not only on the public and students but on a growing ethnic community through bilingual opportunities. The project builds on an already successful program, increasing the basis for the project's success.

Building Institutional Capacity

International Center of Photography is an example of a well-planned, thoughtfully-considered project. The project ties nicely to the Museum's strategic goals and long-term growth and gave the project's reviewers confidence that the results will enhance institutional capacity.

Bostonian Society is an example of a well-written and clearly designed project. This project shows a clear understanding of the current and future needs of the Society regarding the interpretation of Boston, and exhibits a cohesive approach on multiple levels – staff, board, and other institutional partners – to address these current and future needs.

Children's Museum of Rutherford County is an example of a straightforward approach to enhancing existing technology to build capacity by improving the museum experience for their visitors. This project clearly ties to the Museum's goals and will provide important demographic information to better understand and serve their community.

James & Meryl Hearst Center for the Arts is an example of a straightforward, well-developed project design. This project exemplifies a creative approach to planning and has great potential to effect systemic change at the Center.

National Maritime Center is an example of a carefully designed and well thought-out project that will effect systemic change. The project's goals and outcomes are clearly established and well defined. The plan for evaluation and adjustment are strong.

Oberlin Heritage Center is an example that identifies excellent plans for sustainability and shows strong ties to its community which this project will continue.

Homer Society of Natural History is an example of a well-written and finely detailed planning project. This project is a model of going out into the community, establishing the needs of the community, and then trying to meet those needs.

Collections Stewardship

Center for Book Arts is an example of a proposal that clearly ties the goals of their project to the MFA goals and shows how this will increase capacity long-term. A convincing case is made for how digitization of their collections will provide a rich source of educational material to a broad range of students, scholars, and life-long learners.

Denver Museum of Nature and Science is an example of a project that is very clearly presented, exhibits strong design, and advances the objectives of the strategic plan that will lead to systemic change within the institution. This project is a good example of putting together an excellent team to accomplish the intended goals.

Franklin County Historical Society is an example of a project that understands its community and involves them in the strategic planning process. The project aligns very nicely with the Society's strategic plan.

Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota is an example of a project that is clearly laid out, detailed, very nicely tied to strategic planning goals with excellent justification for scheduling, materials, budget and projected staffing levels. A compelling case is also made for the impact of this project on the museum staff, students of design, and lifelong learners with internet access.

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts is an example of a project that is clearly identified as a priority within the institutional strategic plan, is well-conceived and thoughtfully planned, and includes a strong work plan, clear budget, and well-qualified staff.

Missouri State Museum is an example of a project that is very clearly presented, exhibits strong design, and advances the objectives of the strategic plan that will lead to systemic change within the institution. This project is a good example of identifying a problem with collections records and then developing a clear plan to establish firm intellectual control over its collections.

Santa Barbara Botanic Garden is an example of a museum that clearly ties the goals of their project to the MFA goals and shows how this will increase capacity long-term. The project budget and project design are beautifully detailed, and the case for library involvement is exceptional.

I hope that these sample narratives will be useful to you as models for structuring a proposal for your institutional needs. Please contact either Sandra Narva at (202) 653-4634, snarva@imls.gov or Steve Schwartzman at (202) 653-4641, sschwartzman@imls.gov if you have any questions. We would be happy to assist you and discuss any questions you have as you develop your proposal. The application deadline for the 2010 Museums for America grant program is: November 2, 2009

Applications for MFA are available from the grants.gov website (www.grants.gov). We look forward to receiving your application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S.B. Schwartzman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Steven B. Schwartzman
Senior Program Officer

Sandra Narva
Senior Program Officer