



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application MA-15-19-0029-19
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

Gadsden Arts Center and Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$38,940
Amount of cost share: \$38,940

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Please note that the instructions for preparing applications for the FY2020 Inspire! Grants for Small Museums grant program differ from those that guided the preparation of FY2019 applications. Be sure to use the instructions in the [FY2020 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

Abstract

Lead Applicant: Gadsden Arts, Inc. (GACM)

Collaborators: Merri McKenzie (Folk Studies Scholar), Lydia Nabors (Archivist), Stephanie Metts (Founder, Florida Quilt Trail and Florida Quilt Museum), Valerie Goodwin (Quilt Artist), Exhibition Committee (community volunteers), Chattahoochee Main Street, Gadsden County Public Schools, Havana History and Heritage Society, Havana Main Street, Quincy Main Street, Goodwood Museum & Gardens, Museum of Florida History, Apalachicola Arsenal Museum, Gadsden Tourist Development Council, City of Quincy.

The Southern Quilting Project will address the following problems and needs: divisions between communities in our service area; limited museum-quality art exhibition projects offered within our region; limited art/culture enrichment available to school children and residents in our immediate community; lack of familiarity/comfort with art museums limits use and GACM's impact in the community; economically distressed cities and towns in our area need aesthetic improvement and tourism development. These problems and needs have been identified through GACM's 24-year history working to improve quality of life through art for people in this region.

High Level Activities:

The Southern Quilting Project will carry out the following high level activities from July 1, 2019 through August 1, 2020.

From the Cedar Chest: Generations of Southern Quilting exhibition of historic to contemporary handmade quilts that encompass multiple generations of quilting traditions from Gadsden, Leon, and Jefferson Counties from the 1830's to present day.

Big Bend Quilt Trail: a public art installation of murals, each representing a quilt block design drawn from the local community, created or sponsored by partner organizations and groups. Quilt Trail murals will represent quilt block designs also drawn from quilting traditions in Gadsden, Leon, and Jefferson Counties from the mid-1800's to present.

Interpretive and Engagement Programs: Southern Quilting Project – Share Your Story Blog, Facebook/Twitter #BigBendQuiltTrail “selfies”, quilt themed ArtZone art making activities, quilt making workshop(s); *From the Cedar Chest* exhibition – touch stations, quilting workshop, audio tour, audio/video online tour, interactive guided tours, staff presentations, Exhibition Guides, Teacher Packets; Big Bend Quilt Trail – quilt mural painting workshops, Quilt Trail Archive

Who and what will benefit from The Southern Quilting Project? The following populations fall within GACM's service area and will benefit from this project: the general population in the Big Bend region of Florida, school children (grades K-12), adults, senior citizens, ethnic or racial minority populations, low income and economically disadvantaged people, and rural populations. Cities/towns and organizations participating in the Big Bend Quilt Trail will also benefit from increased visitor traffic.

Intended Project Results: participants will have an increased understanding of the traditions, social and practical impacts, and commonalities among quilting traditions in the region; participants will have a greater familiarity and comfort level with using GACM as a lifelong learning resource; collaboration among organizations will yield a high impact cultural project that meets mutual goals and paves the way for future collaboration; tangible projects will remain as an archive for future reference; the Big Bend Quilt Trail will be evaluated as a shared community asset with further potential for cultural, educational, and tourism purposes.

Measures of Success in Achieving Results: attendance and participation statistics, survey responses, blog stories and photographs, online traffic (Audio/Video Tour, Quilt Trail Archive, Quilt Stories Blog), online comments, exhibition comments, visitor and membership trends, evaluation discussion with project collaborators.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

The Gadsden Arts Center & Museum (GACM), working with a diverse committee of community volunteers and strategic partners, will develop and implement the Southern Quilting Project, which will engage individuals, museums, organizations, and businesses from the broad community to envision, create, implement, and celebrate the tradition of quilting. Its two main components are the *From the Cedar Chest: Generations of Southern Quilting* exhibition at GACM and the Big Bend Quilt Trail, a public art project that spans the communities represented in the exhibition. Quilts selected for the exhibition represent multiple generations of quilters, from the 1830s to present day within our service area. Quilt Trail murals will represent quilt block designs with those same roots. Together, the exhibition and quilt trail will examine the practical and social value of quilting across generations, and highlight the common traditions, designs, and values across the diverse communities in our region. A variety of interpretive and studio programming designed for people of all ages and levels of experience will further engage participants.

A *From the Cedar Chest* Exhibition Committee, guest scholars, and three museums have contributed to developing the exhibition, while three Main Street organizations, museums, schools, and businesses are early Quilt Trail partners. Components of The Southern Quilting Project are symbiotic – the Quilt Trail will promote awareness of *From the Cedar Chest*, while the exhibition will inspire and engage more people with the Quilt Trail. Broad community engagement in all aspects of this project, from conception through development and implementation, will also establish and develop relationships between participants and GACM, increasing the organization's ability to bring meaningful learning experiences to the diverse audiences we serve.

The Southern Quilting Project serves the GACM mission to foster understanding and appreciation of the visual arts to improve the quality of life in Gadsden County and the region... enhance arts education, provide cultural opportunities, and stimulate economic growth in the community. Through this project, GACM will solve multiple problems in the immediate and regional communities, which have been identified through the organization's 24-year history of work in this community:

- Problem: divisions between communities. Solution: bring people from diverse communities together through this project to celebrates a creative tradition beloved by all communities that practiced it.
- Problem: limited quality art museum exhibitions with in-depth interpretive programming offered in this region, home to only two very small nationally accredited art museums. Solution: bring people and partners together to collaborate on a large, high quality, high impact project.
- Limited art and culture enrichment in Gadsden County Public Schools and the immediate community, which is among Florida's lowest ranked counties in terms of SES, health, and education performance measures (see Organizational Profile). Solution: engage the schools and local community groups with the design and implementation of the project to increase participation.
- Problem: lack of familiarity with art and museums limits participation and the impact of GACM in the local community. Solution: engage diverse groups with this project, centered upon a familiar art form, to develop relationships that facilitate ongoing participation and lifelong learning using museums.
- Problem: economically distressed cities/towns in Gadsden County. Solution: use murals to aesthetically improve historic downtown areas and instill a sense of pride, and the quilt trail to drive tourism.

From the Cedar Chest

From the Cedar Chest: Generations of Southern Quilting is an exhibition featuring historic to contemporary handmade quilts that encompass multiple generations of quilting traditions from Gadsden, Leon, and Jefferson Counties. It is the story of an art form that was utilitarian, keeping people warm; cultural, a tradition that told stories and preserved family histories through fabric; and social, bringing people together to quilt, form friendships, and share news. Quilt making has been passed down through generations of families, bridging gaps between generations, and finding commonalities between cultures. The title recognizes that in Florida, if not for the cedar chest, many of these quilts and their histories might be lost.

Narrative

The Curator and Exhibition Committee of quilters and quilt collectors shaped the vision of this exhibition and networked to identify prospective quilts from private collections and museums for exhibition. Integrating community voices into development of the exhibition is an essential part of this project. Actively engaging community members in exhibition development enhances the impact of the exhibition and creates shared authority and increased engagement (Koke & Ryan, 2017).

Big Bend Quilt Trail

The Big Bend Quilt Trail will be a public art installation of murals, each representing a quilt block design drawn from the local community, created or sponsored by partner organizations and groups. Public quilt trail projects have been demonstrated to have positive economic, social, and cultural impacts, including increasing tourism, strengthening networks and partnerships, increasing community pride through aesthetic improvement, and by celebrating local history and culture (Ohio Arts Council, 2008). The Quilt Trail will initially run through Gadsden and Leon Counties to promote *From the Cedar Chest* at GACM, and the exhibition itself will continue to inspire development of the quilt trail through the end of the project year.

Southern Quilting Project partners and resources include:

- 1) GACM staff members: Angie Barry, Curator; Grace Robinson, Executive Director (marketing and design); Anissa Ford, Education Director
- 2) *From the Cedar Chest* Exhibition Committee members Wendy Adams (Havana), Shirley Baker (Quincy), Penny Dehler (Quincy and Tallahassee), Ann Moreau (Quincy and Greensboro), Cynthia O'Donnell (Quincy and Greensboro), Eluster Richardson (Tallahassee), Patricia Spooner (Quincy)
- 3) Merri McKenzie, an artist with a Master's Degree in Folk Studies and a board member of the Florida Quilt Museum in Trenton, Florida, shared her knowledge of quilts from the area and will offer a presentation on the history of quilting in North Florida;
- 4) Lisa Barton, Director at the Museum of Florida History in Tallahassee, which has 66 Florida quilts in its collection; Jennifer Humayun, Director of the Goodwood Museum & Gardens, a plantation house museum; and Nashid Madyun, Director of the Meek-Eaton Black Archives at FAMU, selected quilts from their collections, ensuring varied communities that fit with the exhibition theme are represented;
- 5) Quilters Unlimited Guild in Tallahassee, a group of 2,000 local quilters dedicated to promoting knowledge and history of quilting, will promote the exhibition and offer quilting demonstrations;
- 6) Valerie Goodwin, a mixed media fiber artist who exhibits nationally and teaches at Florida A&M University, will give a presentation entitled "Cutting Edge Explorations in Quilting;"
- 7) Lydia Nabors, Archivist I, State Archives of Florida, M.A. in Historic Administration and Public History, will collect three oral histories from quilters represented in the exhibition or their descendants;
- 8) Stephanie Metts, the founder of the Florida Quilt Museum and the Florida Quilt Trail, shared valuable knowledge about starting a quilt trail;
- 9) Big Bend Quilt Trail partners (commitments to date), Havana, Chattahoochee, and Quincy Main Streets; Apalachicola Arsenal Museum, MOFA at Florida State University, and Goodwood Museum, Gadsden County School District, and businesses;
- 10) The book *Florida Quilts*, by Charlotte Williams, published in 1992, chronicling the Museum of Florida History's project to discover, document, and preserve the history of Florida through quilts. The book offers information regarding quilts created locally and traditions of the craft starting in Florida's territorial period.

The Southern Quilting Project advances many areas of the GACM Strategic Plan:

- Plan and implement two major museum exhibitions each year, representing national scope art with compelling social, cultural and historic content. Also educate people about creative output from our region, maintain outreach to collectors, engage visitors in exhibition interpretation, and ensure diversity in terms of content, mediums, styles, and subjects (Exhibitions, Goal 1, Objectives A-E).

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- Maintain informative interpretive programming that engages audiences with the exhibition to offer deeper knowledge and experience for 2,000 participants during the run of show. Apply self-guided and guided strategies and curriculum-correlated school materials. (Education, Goal 1, Objectives A-D).
- Operate the ArtZone as a gateway to using the museum and main exhibitions as a learning resource, serving 400 ArtZone participants during the run of show. (Education, Goal 2, Objectives A-B).
- Engage diverse members of the community in GACM programming through the “Always Reach Out” initiative - as participants, volunteers, program planners, ambassadors, members, and donors, increasing participation by 5% during the exhibition (Development, Goal 1, Objective A).
- Maintain varied media strategies for promotion (Marketing, Goal 1, Objectives B-C).
- Illustrate the need to maintain knowledgeable professional museum staff with competitive compensation to research and implement major projects by sharing project data with the Board of Directors and applying data to the updated Strategic Plan (Administration Goal 1., Objectives A-D).

PROJECT WORK PLAN

The Southern Quilting Project, with the *From the Cedar Chest* exhibition and the Big Bend Quilt Trail is in its piloting phase. It is a broad community engagement project that celebrates a beloved, community-based creative tradition. Accredited by AAM in 2016, and expanded to add the ArtZone maker space earlier this year, GACM is in transition from its origins as a community arts center to fully realizing its potential impact as an accredited art museum and as a leader in the region’s cultural community.

Primary project goals are to increase community ownership of the museum and its programs to increase area residents’ experience and comfort level with the museum, stimulate tourism, aesthetically improve downtown areas through public art, and further develop collaboration across the Big Bend region to facilitate larger cultural projects.

One risk, recognized during early visioning sessions to plan the project, is omitting or alienating any part of the community from representation or participation in the project. Deliberate efforts have been made to seek representation from diverse communities. This consideration will be an important factor in the final selection of quilts for the exhibition. A second risk is creating a public art project that becomes too large too quickly. GACM is working through established community partners such as Main Street organizations and museums in the region to establish the core framework of the Big Bend Quilt Trail to insure communication is sufficient to support thorough interpretation and promotion of the Quilt Trail in its first year.

Performance will be tracked through evaluation measures listed (see page 5) and reviewed by museum staff during weekly staff meetings so that adjustments may be made to ongoing marketing and engagement strategies, program content, or events.

Planning & Implementation Timeline (When / Who)

The Director will manage and track project progress with weekly staff meetings during planning and the *From the Cedar Chest* exhibition and biweekly staff meetings for the Quilt Trail.

- 1) Finalize works list and loans for the exhibition (July 2019 / Curator, Exhibition Committee)
- 2) Distribute Big Bend Quilt Trail packets to prospective partners (July-December 2019 / Curator)
- 3) Schedule exhibition-related events and programs (July-September 2019 / Curator, Director, Ed. Director)
- 4) Collect Oral Histories (July-August 2019 / Archivist)
- 5) Develop marketing plan and materials (July-September 2019 / Director)
- 6) Develop and produce interpretive materials (July-August 2019 / Education Director with staff support)
- 7) Confirm Quilt Trail participants, collect/post information (July 2019-May 2020 / Curator)
- 8) Send advance materials to school teachers (August 2019 / Education Director)
- 9) Prepare docents to tour the exhibition (August-September 2019 / Education Director)
- 10) Install the exhibition, interpretive props, touch stations, story stations (Aug.-Sept. 2019 / Curator, Ed. Dir.)
- 11) Exhibition and Quilt Trail open to the public (September 2019 / Staff, Volunteers, Project Partners)
- 12) Implement programs and events (September 2019-July 2020 / GACM Staff, Volunteers, Project Partners)

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- 13) Review/post/share visitors' quilting stories (September 2019-June 2020 / Curator, Website Contractor)
- 14) Collect evaluation data (September 2019-June 2020 / Curator, Education Director, Director)
- 15) Periodically review data, discuss, adjust strategies (September 2019-June 2020 / Curator, Education Director, Director)
- 16) Post-project evaluation – review data, discuss impact and future use and development of the Quilt Trail in conjunction with exhibitions/programs/events (July 2020 / GACM Staff, Project Partners)

Interpretive Programs Detail

Interpretive and exhibition-related studio programming for major exhibitions is designed to accommodate the diverse communities served by GACM. Exhibition committee input and evaluation of GACM programs from prior exhibition projects informs selection and design of these programs for people of all ages and levels of experience, which are also, when appropriate, rooted in didactic or discovery-based learning theories.

- 1) GACM will include **artifacts** from local collectors to bring physicality of the art form to the museum visitor and connect the visitor to the tradition of quilt making. Several cedar chests will be on display with information about their unique preservation properties throughout history, which have extended the lives of antique quilts in the harsh Florida climate. Also on display will be a vintage Singer treadle sewing machine, a thimble rack, sewing baskets, and partially constructed quilt squares.
- 2) With research collected by staff, the exhibition committee, and from the institutions from which quilts were borrowed, *From the Cedar Chest* will present **didactic labels**, intended to provide audiences with a scaffolding for viewing the quilts while encouraging thought and discussion. For example, one label may incorporate information on quilt materials and process, historical context, and discussion prompts regarding the utilitarian versus artistic qualities of quilting. By incorporating both didactic, expository learning theories and discovery-based learning theories into labels, Gadsden Arts encourages both passive and active learning, and both specific content to be learned in the exhibition as well as and exploration of personal interpretations. (Hein, 1998).
- 3) GACM will produce an **audio tour** that will be provided to visitors at no additional cost, and published in perpetuity on YouTube with accompanying photos/videos of the galleries.
- 4) A major factor in quilt-making is tactile - quilts were meant to be used and touched. **Touch stations** will be an important educational tool to allow visitors to participate in the tactile experience of quilting, as well as the visual and historical experiences, while also protecting the quilts on display.
- 5) GACM will hire Lydia Nabors, Archivist to collect 3 **oral histories** as part of exhibition research, a component to be used in audio tours and wall labels, and saved in oral history repositories, with the interviewee's permission.
- 6) As with every exhibition, GACM will offer **guided tours** to visitors, encouraging thought and discussion using inquiry-based touring methods. In opening dialogue with visitors, GACM staff and docents work towards creating “an experience” with art—something separate from day-to-day life, as a deep and satisfying sense of understanding (Dewey, 1934). Rooted in constructivism (Hein, 1998), instructors guide visitor engagement with artworks as a beginning, not an end (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011), empowering visitors to make their own meaning.
- 7) **Staff Presentations** will be offered about the exhibition on opening day and during the run of show.
- 8) GACM will offer a **Share Your Story Blog** with text and pictures submitted via two iPad story stations at the museum, or online, about visitors' quilting traditions. Story stations will also display submissions for visitors. The Blog will be shared and archived using the museum website and promoted via Facebook. Participatory components of museum exhibitions “make relationships among staff members, visitors, community participants, and stakeholders more fluid and equitable. They open up new ways for diverse people to express themselves and engage with institutional practice” (Simon, 2010). The iPad stations will also provide an avenue for visitors to share exhibition and quilt trail feedback.
- 9) GACM will offer a **community quilt-making workshop**. Each attendee will be invited to make at least 1 quilt block. The resulting quilt will be donated to a local social service nonprofit (for example, Big Bend

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Hospice). This program encourages visitors to reflect on the collaborative aspects of quilt making and experience the process of creating a quilt.

- 10) **The ArtZone** is a drop-in makerspace at GACM designed for visitor engagement, opened in 2018, inspired by similar museum spaces. During this project there will be several art and quilt activities to connect learning about quilts to making quilts. Projects will emphasize material, process, pattern, and collaboration. The ArtZone allows families and visitors of all ages to create art with real art materials, and to bridge learning, making connections between making art and learning about art. Additionally, the ArtZone offers a fun, less intimidating way of engaging families, since “many potential audiences see [museums] as intimidating and exclusionary” (Samis, 2017).
- 11) **Exhibition Guides** – printed guides for visitors of all ages to learn exhibition-based concepts.
- 12) **Teacher Packets** – lesson plans and teacher workshop; teach pattern (connect with math and art) and writing (quilt stories). Pre-visit and post-visit activities surround a museum visit with interactive guided tours and art making while at GACM.
- 13) **Quilt Trail Archive** – will offer an online map of quilt locations, information about each quilt, a special hashtag #BigBendQuilts and a widget for visitors to share photos of themselves with Quilt Trail murals.

Project Evaluation

GACM implements empirical and narrative evaluation methods to evaluate relevancy and effectiveness:

- 1) Attendance – daily visitor count, program participation, and event attendance;
- 2) Exhibition Comment Book;
- 3) Membership trends;
- 4) Guest Register reflecting visitor origins and collecting email addresses;
- 5) Online traffic (Audio/Video Tour use, Quilt Trail Archive visits, Quilt Stories Blog entries and visits)
- 6) Online comments via Instagram and Facebook;
- 7) Participant materials submitted (quantity and content) – Quilt Stories, Quilt Trail Selfies;
- 8) Surveys collected from program participants and project partners;
- 9) Verbal visitor feedback collected by Visitor Services staff;
- 10) Visitor survey cards collected from exhibition and ArtZone visitors.

PROJECT RESULTS

One of the larger goals of GACM is to achieve an attitude shift regarding our museum from “that’s not for me” to “I go to museums.” This shift transforms each person into a lifelong learner who has all museums and their rich contents available to them as a resource. GACM aims, through this community-developed, community-wide celebration of quilting, a traditional art form widely beloved in our region, to increase comfort and ongoing engagement with the museum. GACM will also continue to engage with project partners in larger collaborative projects to achieve higher quality, higher impact projects.

Performance measures for participants in the *From the Cedar Chest* exhibition and quilt trail project will be: to gain an increased understanding of quilting traditions in our community; understand social and practical impacts of quilting; identify commonalities among quilting traditions; and gain increased confidence using GACM as a lifelong learning resource. Primary tools to measure these results will include print surveys collected following presentations and group tours, digital surveys collected via ipad and online, staff notes regarding visitor comments, and partners’ surveys and comments.

Tangible products remaining following the close of the Southern Quilting Project will include print and digital interpretive materials, the quilt stories blog, audio/video exhibition tour, and oral histories, which will remain on our website as a record of the project. The Big Bend Quilt Trail, which will grow and develop throughout the project, will be evaluated in July 2020 by all Quilt Trail partners. We will meet and discuss the impact(s) of the Quilt Trail and its possible further development for cultural, educational, and tourism purposes, and distribute a partners’ survey to gather impact information. It is possible that an ongoing roster of partners’ exhibitions, events, and workshops could continue to develop out of this project.

