



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-253384-OMS-23
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

Clyfford Still Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$209,235
Amount of cost share:	\$448,416

The Clyfford Still Museum will partner with community-based organizations to expand access to Art Crawl, a program for infants and their caregivers, to include museum-based sessions and programming in community-based early learning centers that reach audiences traditionally excluded from arts-based education experiences. Project activities include audience evaluation to learn from the community, improve quality, and ensure the programs are inclusive and culturally responsive; and updating the learning environment so that it creates a sense of belonging and well-being. The project will remove barriers to participation and help the community see the museum as a resource for infants and families and will result in welcoming art-based early childhood programming that provides opportunities for caregivers to impact their baby's learning by increasing language, literacy, and cognitive skills.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

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.

Clyfford Still Museum
Art Crawl: Growing and Learning with Our Community
Proposal Narrative

Project Justification

The Clyfford Still Museum (CSM) respectfully requests a three-year grant of \$250,000 from IMLS to support *Art Crawl: Growing and Learning with Our Community*. This project strengthens and expands access to *Art Crawl*, CSM's pilot program for infants and their caregivers launched in March 2022. Additionally, this project aligns with IMLS goal 1: to champion lifelong learning and objectives 1.1: to advance shared knowledge and learning opportunities for all.

How will the project advance CSM's strategic plan?

With IMLS support, CSM will pursue strategies to ensure that more members of our local communities, of all ages and from myriad backgrounds, can engage with *Art Crawl*. As we facilitate more equitable access to *Art Crawl*, we set the stage for children, families, and teachers who identify as BIPOC, dual language learners, and individuals with disabilities to develop lifelong relationships with the Museum, in keeping with our Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) aims outlined in our strategic plan.

What need, problem, or challenge will your project address?

CSM launched *Art Crawl*: a tour for infants and their caregivers in the spring of 2022 in response to needs expressed by young families and early learning educators in our community. In the summer of 2022, our state founded the Colorado Department of Early Childhood to provide services to young children, their families, and teachers. CSM instigated these initiatives based on expressed needs and the understanding that investing in young children is essential to successful, thriving communities. Countless sources state that the first years of life are the most important for shaping language skills, literacy, and social-emotional and cognitive development (Center on the Developing Child, 2007).

In the three years leading up to the launch of *Art Crawl*, we were developing an exhibition of Clyfford Still's work co-curated by young children (ages six months to eight years old) in our community. The exhibition development process involved partnerships with eight schools and early learning centers in our region and over 250 young children (over 50% of our partner schools received Title I or Head Start funding). Much of this work took place during the pandemic, which meant we met virtually with children and their educators to select objects, develop interpretation, and design programs for the exhibition. The object selection process was enlightening to infant teachers and museum staff. When presented with reproductions of Clyfford Still's work, infants as young as six months old expressed their preferences through facial expressions, extended looking time, grabbing, and vocalizing (see attached video links). This transformative project resulted in the *Clyfford Still, Art, and the Young Mind* exhibition (on view March 11 – August 7, 2022).

Throughout the creation of *Clyfford Still, Art, and the Young Mind*, our collaborators based in early learning centers (Catholic Charities Mariposa, Head Start at the Dagny Site, and Colorado State University's Early Childhood Center) and early childhood advocacy organizations (Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children and Colorado Head Start Association) expressed frustration about the lack of professional development and resources available for infant and toddler teachers, particularly in the arts. This perspective aligns with national movements (including Power to the Profession, spearheaded by the National Association for the Education of Young Children) that seek to raise the status of early childhood educators, particularly infant and toddler teachers. We heard that these educators are called "glorified babysitters" rather than teachers supporting children at the most critical stages of brain development. Studies show that 85% of brain growth occurs during the first three years of life, so we have an unmatched opportunity to impact brain development by supporting educators in early childhood settings. Following these conversations with infant teachers, we started to envision a program highlighting the importance of learning in the early years and the connections between looking at and discussing art and early language and literacy development.

Meanwhile, we heard from infant caregivers who expressed feelings of isolation during the pandemic. This sentiment was not unique to Denver Metro families but was a challenge facing young families everywhere during COVID's impacts of social distancing, sickness, and loss of life. We read many reports like one published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention on the mental health struggle by parents and caregivers, including anxiety and depression, trauma, stress, and suicidal thoughts (Czeisler MÉ, Rohan EA, Melillo S, et al., 2021).

Based on our learnings from the *Clyfford Still, Art, and the Young Mind* exhibition and in response to feedback from families and caregivers, we launched *Art Crawl* in March 2022 as a pilot to accompany the *Young Mind* exhibition and address some of the challenges identified by our community. *Art Crawl* invites caregivers and their infants (birth through 14 months) to explore the Museum together. The goals for the pilot included:

- *Welcome* - For many participants, this will be their first museum experience with their baby. *Art Crawl* aims to demonstrate to families that the CSM is a welcoming place for them to spend time together.
- *Belonging* - “Having a sense of belonging is a fundamental need for human happiness and mental health (Maslow, 1958).” Designed as a monthly series, *Art Crawl* is an opportunity for participants to consider themselves integral parts of the CSM community.
- *Community Building* - Support systems for new caregivers are critical to foster caring and healthy environments for babies. This program aims to introduce caregivers with babies to each other and provides a shared vocabulary and opportunities to work together. According to a [2021 study by IMLS](#), museums are places people go to meet other people, learn new things, engage with the institutions’ collections, and enjoy themselves and the company of others. These trusted community institutions function as a “third place” (or “third space”) where people congregate outside of home or work in informal ways that build community.
- *Skill Building & Brain Growth and Development* - 85% of brain growth happens in the first three years of life, and the amount of loving words we hear makes a big difference ([Talk with Me Baby, University of Kansas Medical Center](#)). *Art Crawl* models talking tips provided by initiatives like Talk With Me Baby and [Language ENvironment Analysis \(LENA\)](#) to give caregivers concrete ways to engage with their babies while looking at art and in their day-to-day lives. By providing opportunities for language and communication reciprocity, families can discover they already have all the tools to support their baby’s language and cognitive development skills. Babies given time to initiate communication and respond to adult communication (serve and return) show significant neurodevelopmental gains compared to infants who do not have those experiences. Serve and return exchanges create the foundation for neurological architecture on which all further development is built ([Serve and Return, Harvard University](#)). Families can use the skills acquired in *Art Crawl* in self-guided visits to CSM or other museums and share their knowledge with friends and family members in their communities.

In the eight months that we’ve presented this program twice per month, we’ve reached capacity in nearly every session and learned that many of the caregivers heard about the program through word of mouth or doing an internet search for “things to do with my infant.” For *Art Crawl: Growing and Learning with Our Community*, we will begin the next chapter of this program by expanding the program offerings both in the Museum and off-site to address the needs of infant teachers in our community.

Who is the target group?

The target groups for *Art Crawl: Growing and Learning with Our Community* include infants, their caregivers, and infant teachers in the Denver Metro Area. We have designed this project based on the perspectives of CSM’s family audiences and partner infant teachers from our three early learning centers. Summative evaluation data from Trainer Evaluation has also informed how our exhibitions and programs support infant and adult learning (Trainer, 2022). In year one, we expect to engage 720 program participants (infants and their adults) at the Museum and four infant teachers from Catholic Charities Mariposa, a neighborhood early learning center that receives Title I funding. At least 10% of their students identify as having a disability, and many are dual language learners. In years two and three, we expect to engage 900 program participants on-site, 1,000 program participants in our community, and 40 infant teachers across Colorado.

Who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the project?

The long-term beneficiaries of this project include:

- The infant participants
- Their families and caregivers
- Infant teachers in schools and community-based learning centers
- Museum and other cultural educators who aspire to work with young families and infant educators in inclusive and culturally responsive ways

Leading experts are already writing about the model of community-driven infant programming developed at CSM on early childhood in museums, including Kathy Danko-McGhee (*Viewing Art with Babies*, Routledge, in press) and Sharon Shaffer (*Children, Museums, and Social Action*, Routledge, in press). We look forward to sharing information about the program design and execution and the program evaluation with museum and arts education professionals in the coming years.

General visitors of all ages who come to CSM also benefit from this project. Through the evaluation of *Clyfford Still, Art, and the Young Mind*, we learned that some of the gallery changes we implemented to make the exhibition more friendly to young families made the exhibition more friendly to MOST of our visitors, whether or not they were visiting with children. In fact, 67% of visitors to the Clyfford Still Museum during the run of *Clyfford Still, Art, and the Young Mind* expressed that the graphic introductions to gallery themes enhanced their experience. We estimate these changes will positively impact 26,800 (from an average of 40K) visitors per year.

Project Work Plan

What specific activities will you carry out, and in what sequence?

We organized the following work plan according to four components of the project: Learning with our Community, Growing with our Community, Enriching the Learning Environment, and Evaluating and Sharing the Results.

Learning with Our Community: Improve the quality and inclusivity of the Art Crawl program -- Listening to our community will be key to making Art Crawl more inclusive and culturally responsive.

Year 1:

- Collaborate with infant teachers at Catholic Charities Mariposa Early Childhood Education Center to:
 - Co-design *Art Crawl in Community*, a mobile version of Art Crawl for community sites and early learning centers.
 - Co-develop teacher and family resources.

Year 2:

- Host professional development opportunities for partners, families, and early childhood educators with national early childhood expert

Growing with Our Community: Remove access barriers -- Ensure our community knows that the Clyfford Still Museum is a resource for infant and family programming.

Year 1:

- Deepen our robust partnerships with Language ENvironment Analysis (LENA) program administered through Denver Public Library (DPL):
 - Add Art Crawl to the roster of DPL's community programs.
 - Co-present at community events for young families and early childhood teachers.
- Hire a full-time bilingual request coordinator and educator to support our engagement efforts in communities

Year 2:

- Build new partnerships and deepen our existing partnerships with community organizations (including those serving immigrant communities and new Americans) that support birth, early childhood, and early childhood education, including two additional Catholic Charities sites: Child Development Center and Marjorie Reed Mayo.
- Facilitate *Art Crawl in Community* in community sites and early learning centers.
- Co-present with DPL at community events for young families and early childhood teachers.

Year 3:

- Facilitate *Art Crawl in Community* in community sites and early learning centers.
- Co-present with DPL at community events for young families and early childhood teachers.

Enrich the Learning Environment for Young Families at the Clyfford Still Museum -- The design of *Art Crawl* program spaces (The Making Space and the galleries) is critical because it contributes directly to learning by creating a sense of belonging/well-being, fostering community building, and reflecting the cultures of the participants who use the space (Edwards, C. P., Forman, G., & Gandini, L., 2012). A recent evaluation confirmed that designing for our youngest visitors enhances the Museum experience for all of our visitors (Trainer, 2022).

Year 1:

- Update the Clyfford Still Museum's interactive art studio, The Making Space, to include child-sized furniture and multisensory and multilingual materials.
- Include family-friendly graphics and labels in each exhibition.

Year 2:

- Include family-friendly graphics and labels in each exhibition.

Year 3:

- Include family-friendly graphics and labels in each exhibition.

Evaluate and Share the Program Model and Impacts -- Formal evaluation is essential to understand the impacts of infant programming. This longitudinal study will be the first of its kind for our field.

Year 1:

- Collaborate with Trainer Evaluation to establish three-year longitudinal study plans; IRB obtained
- Begin Art Crawl focus groups.

Year 2:

- The longitudinal study continues.
- Christina Gillanders analyzes first-year data to advise CSM on how to attract and retain Latino and immigrant families.

Year 3:

- The longitudinal study concludes; Trainer Evaluation produces a report with Cristina Gillanders.
- Consultants and CSM staff publish and present the results of the longitudinal study.
- CSM staff publish and present on a community-driven infant programming model.

What are the risks to the project, and how will you mitigate them?

Ensuring cultural responsiveness in museum programming is a complex and evolving process. We know that a few community partners cannot represent the full diversity of the Denver Metro Area. We mitigate the risk of not appropriately meeting multiple communities' needs by working closely with diverse internal staff, community consultants, and partners. CSM will also consult data collected from participants to inform course corrections as needed.

Turnover amongst key internal and external staff and stakeholders is always a risk to the success of a project. In the past, staff turnover at partner organizations has necessitated multiple meetings with new staff to garner project support and develop relationships, which delayed project timelines. CSM has worked to mitigate this risk internally in several ways: involving staff at every level within the education department and offering competitive salaries, benefits, and annual wage increases to CSM employees. To mitigate this risk with our partner organizations (Catholic Charities and Denver Public Library), CSM's senior educator and community engagement specialist has developed relationships with multiple staff in addition to our main point of contact.

Who will plan, implement, and manage the project?

Nicole Cromartie, CSM's director of education and programs, will be the project director and will focus on strategy, research, evaluation, and management of project progress. Cromartie has successfully overseen the implementation of multi-year projects at CSM and previous organizations. She has over 15 years of experience working in museum education and has written and presented extensively on early childhood and museums.

Lisa Roll Moore, senior educator and early childhood specialist at CSM, will serve as project manager and focus on program design, development, and implementation. Roll Moore brings expertise and experience in teaching young children and young children with disabilities and led the pilot phase of the Art Crawl program.

Quána Madison, senior educator and community engagement specialist at CSM, will advise on and coordinate collaboration with our community partners, primarily with, but not limited to, Catholic Charities and the Denver Public Library. Madison will also coordinate community engagement and connection opportunities like Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Conference, The Colorado Breastfeeding Coalition Breastival, and Head Start Extravaganza.

Luisa Zamora, half-time bilingual museum educator, **Marisa Brown**, half-time museum educator, and bilingual adjunct museum educators (one existing and two new hires in year one, job description attached) will facilitate Art Crawl programs at CSM and community sites.

Bilingual request coordinator and educator, to be hired (job description attached) will field all Art Crawl requests from our community and coordinate visits and accommodations as needed.

What time, financial, personnel, and other resources are needed to carry out the activities?

Through the *Clyfford Still: Art and the Young Mind* exhibition planning and execution and the launch of the pilot *Art Crawl* program, CSM forged strong partnerships and built a foundation to expand our programming to engage infants and caregivers throughout our community. A three-year grant from IMLS will provide the time horizon needed to strategically grow the program's reach and provide meaningful evaluation data. Increased financial resources provided through the grant will allow us to increase the number of programs offered in the Museum and the community, engage new partners, and complete a formal evaluation of the program. To achieve the growth proposed over the next three years, we will need to add two bilingual educators and a bilingual program coordinator.

How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?

At the Clyfford Still Museum, we use Asana, a web-based project management system, to track progress, identify blockers, and collaborate internally and externally. If awarded the Museums for America grant, the project director and project manager will create an Asana project, including project timelines, milestones, and tasks. Asana will be the consistent tool to track progress toward achieving our intended results.

Additionally, we will coordinate quarterly meetings with internal and external stakeholders to assess if we meet community needs. These meetings will be an opportunity to share attendance numbers, milestones, results from post-program surveys, and anecdotal feedback from stakeholders.

Annually, Trainer Evaluation will share in-progress data from the longitudinal study to inform annual reports developed by the project director and project manager.

Project Results

What are your project's intended results, and how will they address the need, problem, or challenge?

Art Crawl addresses a widespread yet underrecognized systemic barrier in the early learning environment. Namely, young children and their families have historically been excluded from art museum spaces and potential art-based early learning opportunities (where CSM is leading the way). Through collaboration with community partners and the co-development of lessons, we will create more access to Art Crawl and the Clyfford Still Museum for teachers and families with very young children. Family-friendly updates to our interactive art studio, The Making Space, and consistent, accessible gallery interpretation will improve the program and make the Museum more inclusive and meaningful for all visitors.

In addition to providing welcoming art-based early childhood programming, we provide opportunities for caregivers to impact their baby's life-long learning. Infants need to hear conversational language, specifically for them to build strong neural pathway connections. Serve and return language experiences increase language, literacy, and cognitive skills throughout childhood development, including IQ scores. Individuals with these early language experiences do better in school, are active community members, and create lasting, important social relationships ([LENA](#)). Through collaboration,

shared professional development opportunities, and publishing, CSM aims to raise the status of early childhood education, particularly the role of infant educators.

Finally, by developing a new model of engagement with the community and our youngest audiences, we strive to change the fields of infant education in cultural organizations that serve young families.

How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the target group change?

Art Crawl participants will report that they:

- Feel welcome in the Clyfford Still Museum and are likely to repeat visits/engagement with their infants;
- Will consider museums and other cultural organizations as meaningful sites to engage with their infants;
- Are included in a system of support and mutual connection with other caregivers;
- Acquired skills to self-guide visits at CSM and other museums with their infants and increased their self-confidence in talking about art with their young children;
- Incorporate concrete skills and talking tips for engaging with their babies while looking at art and in daily life (based on Talk With Me Baby and Language ENvironment Analysis).

Outcomes for infant educators collaborating with *Art Crawl in Community* will include:

- Gaining curricula and program ideas for engaging infants with art-based lessons in their classrooms;
- Gaining knowledge of how to speak to infants when engaging with art objects;
- Feeling included in a system of support and mutual connection with other infant teachers in formal and informal settings;
- Collaborating with the CSM staff for future infant field trips and family events.

What products will result from your project?

Through collaboration with infant professionals, we will create an arts-based educational resource for infant teachers to use in their classrooms and with their students' families. This resource will incorporate activities to engage infants, suggestions for materials, ways to increase language spoken to the infants, examples of serve and return, and vocabulary to introduce while looking at art.

This project can model practical, integrated approaches to early childhood education and equity/access for museums, community centers, and early childhood centers. We'll share learnings by publishing a white paper on early childhood museum experience, sharing evaluation results in peer-reviewed publications, presenting to professional associations, and engaging with diverse stakeholders.

How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project?

Art Crawl: Growing and Learning with Our Community will expand our capacity to best serve our community through infant programming. IMLS grant funds will support the staff and consultants we need to help us rethink and re-envision access to our programming and responsiveness to our community. The program evaluation, in particular, will help us better understand how we can foster a sense of belonging amongst Art Crawl participants.

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