



## Museums for America

Sample Application MA-253396-OMS-23  
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

### New-York Historical Society

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$243,964
Amount of cost share:	\$288,704

The New York Historical Society will create the Tang Academy for American Democracy Digital Curriculum, a free digital curriculum that blends the study of civics and history for middle school students. Building on the successful in-person version of the program for New York City 6th graders, the new digital curriculum will transform lesson plans and museum content into a free resource that teachers across the country can use in their classrooms. Project activities include digital curriculum creation, testing and evaluation, and program marketing and dissemination. The project will increase student understanding of democracy, how it works, and how to make a change in a democracy, and it will build a network of teachers across the country committed to teaching about democracy.

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.

## Narrative

### I. Project Justification

The New-York Historical Society (New-York Historical) is pleased to present this proposal to support the creation of the **Tang Academy for American Democracy Digital Curriculum**, a free digital curriculum that blends the study of civics and history for middle school students. The curriculum will be based on New-York Historical Society’s groundbreaking residency program, the Tang Academy for American Democracy (“the Academy”), an ambitious in-person program that engages 6<sup>th</sup> graders in New York City in the history of democracy, the fragility of democracy, and the role individuals play in maintaining democracy today, focusing on democracy’s evolution from its origins in ancient Athens to the contemporary United States. The demand for this high-impact program, which reaches 3,000 students per year, is quickly exceeding capacity, with a growing number of requests coming from schools outside of New York. In order to expand the Academy’s capacity and geographic reach, New-York Historical plans to create a curriculum website that will transform the Academy’s dynamic lesson plans and museum resources into a freely available resource that teachers across the country can use to bring the program into their classrooms. This project will leverage not only the success of the Academy, led by the Education Division’s School Programs team, but also the expertise of its in-house curriculum developers and teacher professional development providers. In bringing together these three teams, we are confident that the project will reach many thousands of students, strengthening the teaching and learning of democracy – past and present – nationally.

We estimate the total project cost to be \$532,668, and respectfully request a grant of \$243,964 from the Museums for America program of the Institute of Museum and Library Services to develop and launch this innovative curriculum over the next three years. By creating a resource that brings museum education pedagogy and museum-based collections to school teachers and students across the country, with the overarching goal of developing a more active and engaged citizenry, the project aligns closely to Museums for America Goal 1 (Lifelong Learning), Objective 1.3 (Support In-School and Out-of-School Programs).

**Challenges to be Addressed:** According to a 2018 study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 24% of American 8th graders demonstrate proficiency in civics and only 15% are proficient in U.S. history. Studies show middle school is a critical time in child development, one that is marked by unsettling changes, including puberty, school transitions, larger class sizes, and new grading practices. Students are at high risk for disengagement: research suggests that it is during middle school that students decide whether they will continue to engage in academic learning through high school or not — a decision that has significant long-term consequences.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the fact that most 8th grade students are not proficient in either history or civics at the very moment that they have reached this academic threshold is disconcerting. If we, as civics educators, hope to turn the tide and engage students in meaningful civics learning, as well as help ensure their educational progression, we must address it in middle school.

New-York Historical started to address this challenge with the roll-out of the Academy in 2019, with significant support from a 2020 Museums for America IMLS grant. The [Academy](#) is a free, experiential, student-focused residency program that helps students draw parallels between democracy in ancient Athens and democracy in the early United States, and then trace the development of democracy in the U.S. through to the present. This civics- and history-focused program is infused with hands-on artmaking and historical inquiry methods proven

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Balfanz, Liza Herzog, and Douglas J. Mac Iver, “Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions,” *Educational Psychologist* 42.4: 223-235.

effective for early adolescents.<sup>2</sup> Classes of middle school students (most often, sixth grade) are in residency at New-York Historical for four days. Students are empowered to ask big questions, think critically, and take an active role in their learning and the political world around them. The program was designed in partnership with several key individuals, including former NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) Chancellor Carmen Fariña; the superintendents of NYCDOE Districts 2 and 5 (where the program was piloted); and Professors Marcus Folch and Roosevelt Montás of Columbia University.

Initial analysis of the Academy pilot showed significant student gains in both understanding and interest in four categories: history of democracy; ancient Athenian democracy; American democracy; and the relationship between Athenian and American democracies, with that last item showing the most significant gain in understanding—an impressive four-point improvement on a scale of 1-10. Ultimately, the Academy demonstrates to students that a critically-engaged understanding of history is crucial to both comprehending the present and shaping a better future. In learning to analyze historical materials—ancient artifacts, visual art, written documents, and cultural ephemera—students learn to ask incisive questions that inform their understanding of and engagement with the world around them.

While we wish we could invite every student to participate in our program in person, limitations of time and space prevent our ability to do so. In addition, the need for high-quality civics education that clearly links to social studies standards in thoughtful ways is not limited to the New York City metropolitan area. We therefore seek to translate the Academy’s in-person experience to a new online format that will allow any teacher or student to access our content free of charge, and bring the lessons and principles of the Academy into their school community. Much like the in-person program, the materials within the digital curriculum will explore the topics of ancient history, American history, and contemporary American civics. It will provide critical support to social studies educators, who face increasing pressure to improve student performance in the areas of civics and history, through the use of museum and library materials and museum education-inspired strategies, including historic inquiry, simulations and role play, artmaking, and group problem-solving.

**Target Audience and Beneficiaries:** New-York Historical will create the digital curriculum with the Academy’s target audience – middle school learners – in mind. We have chosen this area of focus for the reasons outlined above: middle school is a pivotal moment in a young person’s education journey. In addition, many students across the country study both the ancient world and U.S. history at some point in their middle school years, and many middle school teachers are asked to lead classes on ancient and U.S. History during their career: it is not uncommon for a middle school teacher to be moved between 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades from year to year.

Targeting the middle school level will also allow elementary and high school teachers to use the materials with limited adjustments. We have experience in this area: our [Women & the American Story](#) curriculum is written with an 8<sup>th</sup> grader in mind, and we frequently receive feedback from elementary and high school teachers that they are able to utilize the site and make the materials applicable to their students' levels (see Supporting Document 2 for examples of our digital curricula). To that end, while we will focus our preliminary research on middle school curricula and consult most closely with middle school teachers, we will seek input from educators and curricula that reach the full span of K-12 with the goal of developing something that has a wider reach. Curricular instructions and welcome content will address classroom teachers directly, and background essays exploring the historic content in more depth will be written for teachers (see Supporting Document 1 for example curricula).

---

<sup>2</sup> Danielle Linzer and Mary Ellen Munley, ed. Ellen Hirzy, *Room to Rise: The Lasting Impact of Intensive Teen Programs in Art Museums* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2015). <https://whitney.org/education/teens/room-to-rise>.  
*Museums for America – 2023 – Narrative*

As we do on all of our curriculum projects, we will begin the process by soliciting feedback from teachers. Thanks to the success of *Women & the American Story*, we have a growing national network of teachers who are familiar with and supportive of our work. We will invite teachers to complete feedback surveys and participate in focus groups and combine this with feedback we receive from teachers participating in the Academy in New York to ensure we are being responsive to our target audience's needs throughout the project. We will also ask select teachers to pilot lessons in their classrooms and share their experience using the materials so that we can continually make adjustments to and strengthen the site. We will also provide training to teachers who wish to receive additional support in how to use the materials and implement the Academy in their own classrooms.

**Strategic Plan:** The New-York Historical Society, founded in 1804, is dedicated to increasing worldwide understanding of American history, art, and civics. As New York's first museum and an internationally renowned research library, New-York Historical is a preeminent center for new scholarship in the humanities, and a leading provider of lifelong history education. This project aligns with two major pillars of New-York Historical's current strategic plan, which is built around six museum-based academies that leverage our collections, exhibitions, and deep experience in education to ensure that as broad an expanse of the public as possible is well-informed about American history. Strengthening democracy education, through the establishment of the Academy for American Democracy program, is one of these pillars. The other is supporting classroom teachers through the facilitation of high-quality teacher professional development and the distribution of digital curriculum materials.

New-York Historical has already significantly invested in both of these pillars. The Academy for American Democracy is the backbone of our current capital campaign, which includes the creation of two additional classrooms specifically dedicated to this program. Since its launch in 2019, the Academy has grown into a thriving program that anchors our K-12 humanities education offerings: Academy residencies currently serve over 3,000 students each year. In terms of curricula and professional development, New-York Historical has long generated a robust and growing library of curriculum materials inspired by our collections and exhibitions and makes them freely available to teachers around the country. Our *Women & the American Story* curriculum website, which was made possible by a Museums for America grant and serves as the inspiration of this new project, has reached nearly 800,000 unique visitors since its launch in 2018. Through professional development workshops, conference presentations, and a newly-formed Teacher Ambassador training program, New-York Historical has brought *Women & the American Story* and dozens of other digital curricula to teachers in all 50 states and abroad. Our incredible success with both the Academy and the *Women & the American Story* project, which are both core to New-York Historical's strategic plan, provide us with a solid foundation upon which to build this exciting new project.

## II. Project Work Plan

**Project Scope:** By creating a digital curriculum version of the Academy, New-York Historical will extend its reach, and empower thousands of students across the United States to engage in thoughtful conversations about democracy, from ancient Athens to America today. The curriculum will support students – particularly, but not exclusively, middle school students – and their teachers, who are already grappling with the core questions of the Academy: *What is a democracy? How does a democracy work? How do you make change in a democracy?*

The curriculum will align with the ten core lessons of the Academy residency program, which treat Ancient Athens and the United States as case studies in participatory forms of government. Each lesson is grounded in either Ancient Athenian or American history, and explores how themes and topics such as power, citizenship, voting, slavery, freedom, justice, and activism were manifested. As students compare these two forms of democracy, they participate in simulations and collaborative assignments that force them to consider both the ideals and the imperfections of democracy, and grapple with their role as citizens of a democratic nation that

continues to evolve. The curriculum will include all of the residency's most popular and dynamic activities, in which students analyze historic objects, translate speeches, debate and vote on issues, recite theatrical monologues, and create art, all while reflecting on the importance of civic engagement.

In addition to aligning with the Academy's content, the curriculum will also provide teachers with pedagogical strategies for replicating New-York Historical's inquiry-based methodology. This learner-centered approach empowers students to master the skills of a historian: carefully *observing* what they see or read; *interpreting* the details they've collected through observations; and *inferring* what those interpretations tell them about the past and present.

New-York Historical has over a decade of experience creating curriculum materials intended to distill complex ideas and content into a format that teachers can use to bring these topics into their own classrooms without the presence of an outside museum-trained educator. All of our curricula are aligned with local and national standards in history and civics – most notably, the recently-released Educating for American Democracy Roadmap, an inquiry-based, nonpartisan framework for elevating history and civics learning in K-12 classrooms – and offer tailored content appropriate for each grade level.

New-York Historical will create a bespoke website, similar to the one we created for *Women & the American Story* ([wams.nyhistory.org](http://wams.nyhistory.org)), to host the Academy curriculum. The site will include primary sources from New-York Historical's robust collections, as well as from partner institutions; background information to support teacher and student learning; vocabulary lists; scholar essays; suggested activities; and guidance for either replicating the Academy in the classroom or using the Academy's core principles to design original classroom lessons. In addition, the website will host the Academy's growing video library (<https://nyhistory.org/education/educational-videos>) and offer information on how teachers can participate in ongoing virtual and in-person professional development opportunities. The curriculum website will be available for free, with no registration required. This will minimize any barriers to entry and ensure that as many teachers as possible utilize the site.

### ***Grant Period Activities:***

Phase 1: Consultation and Initial Planning – Fall 2023-Spring 2024: The project timeline will start with an initial set of planning meetings that will involve several key players: Academy staff; New-York Historical curriculum developers; New York City public school teachers who have participated in the Academy; teachers outside of NYC that have used other New-York Historical curriculum materials; and scholar advisors. Within six months, a final outline will be in place.

Phase 2: Writing and Production – Spring 2024-Spring 2025: The curriculum writer will then begin formal research and writing. Although the curriculum will closely align to the Academy's lesson plans, additional research and content will need to be generated to ensure teachers new to this content can successfully implement it. In addition, New-York Historical will need to provide digital versions of our museum collections and the Academy's interactive touch objects. The curriculum writer will also generate background essays to provide even deeper content exploration for teachers and other visitors. Units will be copyedited and reviewed by scholars before finalized.

Phase 3: Website Development – Spring-Summer 2025: Phase three will run concurrently with Phase 2 and focus on the development and building of the website with our outside partner, Use All Five (see below). This will include stress testing by New-York Historical staff and select teachers. See supporting document 4 for a draft work plan for this stage from Use All Five.

Phase 4: Launch, Distribution, and Assessment – Spring 2025-Summer 2026: Following the official website launch at the start of the 2025-2026 school year, New-York Historical will embark on a robust dissemination

campaign, designed to reach teachers in all 50 states, following in the footsteps of our incredibly successful *Women & the American Story* project and outreach efforts. The outreach will include social media pushes and e-blasts to our list of 14,000+ educators and the even larger institution-wide list; targeted paid advertisements on education outlets such as *Chalkbeat*; in-person and virtual workshops for teachers; and presentations at national conferences, with a specific emphasis on both presenting and tabling at the National Council for Social Studies conference in December 2025. New-York Historical staff will also attend in December 2024 to pilot select resources during a planned presentation.

This phase will also include a more in-depth teacher training program, which we will pilot twice in Winter/Spring and Summer 2026. Participants in the training program will attend a series of sessions, led by New-York Historical staff and featuring our scholar advisors, focused on preparing to bring the Academy's resources into the classroom. These teachers will allow us to collect more in-depth feedback on the project and prepare for the roll-out of a more extensive training program post-grant.

**Risks:** Foreseeable risks to the project include loss of project continuity due to staffing changes; variable applicability of program resources to teachers working across a wide range of contexts; challenges in aligning the curriculum with contemporary scholarship in the field; and technological issues in maintaining the website post-build. Because this project is based on a successful student program (the Academy) and an equally successful curriculum project (*Women & the American Story*), New-York Historical is confident that it is mitigating most of the risks of this project. We have done much of this work before. By ensuring that staff members work together as a team, we will minimize challenges that will arise by the departure of a particular staff member. In addition, by working closely with multiple scholars and teachers, we will ensure our content is accurate, reflective of current scholarship, and sensitive to the current needs of educators and students. By working with a web developer (see below) that has an ongoing relationship with New-York Historical, we are also limiting the number of technological challenges we may face in maintaining the website post-grant. As in previous projects, Use All Five will work closely with New-York Historical's IT team, as well as the Education Division staff who will maintain the site's content, to orient them to the structure of the site and develop a set of best practices for maintaining it in the long term.

**Project Team:** This project will be a truly collaborative effort, bringing together experts from our student program, curriculum development, and teacher training teams. Leslie Hayes, Vice President for Education, will serve as the Project Director and final editor of all content. Allyson Schettino, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, will serve as the lead curriculum writer. Hayes and Schettino served as curriculum developers and writers for the *Women & the American Story* project and are well-poised to lead this work. Leah Charles-Edouard, Associate Director of School Programs and the Academy, will advise the team as the Academy expert, ensuring that the curriculum is a faithful extension of that program. Schettino and Charles-Edouard collaborated on the original design of the Academy, and their deep institutional knowledge about the choices made in designing that program will be invaluable to this project. Dr. Kelly Aliano, Manager of Special Projects, will serve as the Project Manager for the grant. She will oversee workflow, reporting, consultant relationships, website launch and management, and project performance assessment. Molly DePippo, Manager of Professional Learning, will lead all teacher professional development and conference participation. Finally, New-York Historical will hire a part-time, temporary Project Assistant to provide necessary research and content upload support.

New-York Historical will engage a range of scholar advisors to help on this work. Dr. Roosevelt Montás, Senior Lecturer in American Studies and English at Columbia University, and Dr. Marcus Folch, Associate Professor of Classics at Columbia University, have served as scholar advisors to the Academy since its pilot, and will serve as the lead advisors on this project. They will provide guidance on the content, ensuring that everything we present to teachers is accurate and grounded in research. Given that the scope of the Academy is quite vast, covering Ancient Athens, as well as touchpoints in American history from the Founding Era through the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, New-York Historical will bring in up to six other scholars in the fields of Greek and American History to advise on the project, review materials, and suggest resources for inclusion in the final curriculum.

New-York Historical will work with Use All Five, a Los Angeles-based web design studio, to design and build the curriculum website. Use All Five created the current New-York Historical Society website, which launched in 2021. Since then, they have designed two curriculum microsites for the Education Division (<https://www.nyhistory.org/meet-the-presidents/curriculum> and <https://www.nyhistory.org/our-composite-nation>). They know New-York Historical's staff, style, and approach to curriculum development. By working with Use All Five, we will be able to build upon our previous collaborations and work more efficiently.

**Timeline and Resources:** New-York Historical projects that this is a three-year project, from initial consultations to completing the first year of dissemination and teacher training. The largest portion of the budget is staff time, including the much-needed addition of a Project Assistant who will be solely focused on the curriculum's development and launch. Additional resources include scholar, web developer, and copyeditor consultants, as well as consumable materials for teacher workshops, promotional materials to generate excitement about the curriculum, and marketing and distribution funds.

**Tracking Progress and Measuring Success:** The New-York Historical Education staff will undertake formative and summative evaluations of the project. We will host early focus groups and disseminate surveys nationally during Phase 1 and gather teacher feedback as we are finalizing curriculum writing in Phase 2. To evaluate the curriculum's success post-launch, the Project Team will create and administer assessment tools in partnership with teachers locally and nationally:

- Web-based surveys for teachers who access the curriculum online that will capture user satisfaction with the usefulness and relevance of the materials;
- Surveys and interviews with participants in our various teacher professional development and training programs designed to capture their comfort and familiarity with the content on the site;
- Collection of website metrics, including total usership, length of visits, and returning visitor rates.

### III. Project Results

**Performance Measurements:** Through this initiative, New-York Historical will **develop and launch a dynamic, inclusive, and freely available learning resource that can be used by teachers to increase students' understanding of three key questions: *What is a democracy? How does a democracy work? How do you make change in a democracy?*** During the grant period, New-York Historical will seek to build a vibrant network of teachers who access the Academy's materials and use them in their classrooms. This will be measured by monitoring website traffic, tracking attendance at conference and teacher workshops, and surveying website visitors and conference/workshop participants to find out how they are using the materials in their classrooms. We will measure success against the quantitative benchmark of reaching 50,000 unique users across 50 states within one year of launch. We will also seek to qualitatively measure teachers' use of the resources in the classroom through surveys that ask them to share how they use the material, the impact on their students, and the content and strategies they have learned from our website. We will also invite teachers to submit examples of student work to further assess impact. New-York Historical staff will regularly review quantitative and qualitative data throughout the final year of the project to determine the website's effectiveness and develop a longer-term revision and dissemination plan, as needed.

**Disseminating Results:** New-York Historical is well equipped to disseminate this curriculum to teachers nationwide, as it has a growing national network of teachers who use our curriculum materials in their classrooms, over 14,000 (and counting) teachers on its mailing list, and access to thousands more teachers through annual participation in the National Council for Social Studies Conference, National Council for History Education Conference, the Educating for American Democracy resource network, and the National Museums for America – 2023 – Narrative

Humanities Center's Open Educational Resources (OER) platform, among other networks. In addition, we have recruited eighteen national partners (six cultural institutions and twelve school districts) through our *Women & the American Story* dissemination work, all of which have expressed interest in expanding these partnerships to include additional curriculum materials and support our civics work. We have already received inquiries from schools across the country interested in bringing the Academy into their classrooms, and have a growing number of teacher advocates across the country, who have participated in our teacher ambassador program and our NEH summer institutes. These teachers are leaders in their communities and excellent advocates for bringing new materials - like the Academy curriculum - into their local schools and classrooms.

***Project Sustainability:*** The Academy for American Democracy residency program is constantly evolving in response to student and teacher feedback and changing scholarship. As such, the digital curriculum version of the Academy will also be an ever-changing resource that is continually refreshed and updated over time. Following the grant period, we will enhance and revise the content based on the latest scholarship and in response to teacher feedback. In this way, it will be dynamic and evolving, offering teachers an accurate reflection of the Academy program that is delivered to New York City students within our Museum each school year. Further, it is our aim to share our results and findings with peer museums through presentations at national museum and educational conferences, and participation on panels and committees seeking to advance the field of civic education, both throughout and long after the conclusion of the grant period.

In addition to ensuring proper maintenance of the website and its content, New-York Historical will actively continue to expand the website's national network of users, and focus its efforts on measuring student outcomes from the curriculum's use. In addition to continuing to offer one-off teacher workshops and conference presentations, New-York Historical will seek funding to transform the training program pilot into an annual training program that runs multiple times per year for teachers from across the country, ensuring effective and ongoing use of the website's materials.

Staff	Year 1 (Sept 2023-August 2024)												Year 2 (Sept 2024-August 2025)												Year 3 (Sept 2025-August 2026)												Post-Grant
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	
<b>Phase 1: Consultation and Initial Planning</b>																																					
Consultations with Scholars	Project Director, Program Staff, Curriculum Writer																																				
Consultations with Teachers	Project Director, Program Staff, Curriculum Writer																																				
Hire Project Assistant	Curriculum Writer, Project Manager																																				
Initial Research and Exploration	Curriculum Writer																																				
Initial Outline Completed	Curriculum Writer																																				
<b>Phase 2: Writing and Production</b>																																					
Research	Curriculum Writer, Project Assistant																																				
Writing and Editing	Curriculum Writer																																				
Scholar Review	Curriculum Writer																																				
Copyediting	Curriculum Writer, Project Assistant																																				
<b>Phase 3: Website Development</b>																																					
Consultation with Web Developer	Project Director, Program Staff, Curriculum Writer																																				
Initial Design	Web Developer																																				
Website Construction	Web Developer																																				
Content Upload	Web Developer																																				
Testing and Final Review	Project Director																																				
<b>Phase 4: Launch, Distribution, &amp; Assessment</b>																																					
Pilot test in Select Classrooms	Project Manager, Program Staff, Curriculum Writer																																				
Website Launch	Project Manager																																				
Distribution and Promotion	Project Manager																																				
NYC-based Teacher Workshops	Manager of Professional Learning																																				
National Council for Social Studies	Project Director, Project Manager, Curriculum Writer																																				
Pilot Teacher Training Cohort	Manager of Professional Learning																																				
Evaluation and Assessment of Results	Project Manager																																				
Revise as Needed	Curriculum Writer																																				