



Museums Empowered

Sample Application ME-253271-OMS-23
Project Category: Organizational Management

Seattle Art Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$165,010
Amount of cost share:	\$165,360

The Seattle Art Museum will strengthen and support its staff by establishing a new organizational structure in the museum. Building on a previous IMLS grant to improve access to careers in the museum, this phase will address and dismantle barriers to career advancement within the museum. Project activities include collecting and analyzing data to understand the museum's current structure and identifying persistent practices that create barriers to advancement. Learning and growth opportunities for staff include training to develop equity skills and awareness as well as holding staff listening circles and creating a new evidence-based equitable institutional structure. The project will help build an organizational culture that is inclusive and welcoming to all museum staff.

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

Advancing Equity: Establishing New Organizational Structures for Today's Museum Seattle Art Museum

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Introduction: This grant project advances the Seattle Art Museum's (SAM) commitment to becoming a more welcoming museum by supporting and advancing traditionally marginalized populations in the museum field. IMLS funding will be instrumental in furthering SAM's equity work by giving us the opportunity to examine our own institutional practices through investing in strategic and sustainable efforts that challenge systemic racism. Ultimately, our goal is to build an organizational culture that is inclusive and welcoming to all SAM staff.

This project aligns with IMLS Museums Empowered **Goal 4, Organizational Management:**

Strengthen and support museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture, **Objective 4.1:** Develop comprehensive organizational learning opportunities that address one or more emerging priorities facing a museum, and **Objective 4.2:** Develop programs that address the specific learning and growth opportunities identified by staff needs assessments. To meet this goal's objectives, SAM will perform the following during the grant period:

- 1) Evaluate and analyze SAM's organizational culture by looking at staff data and surveys to identify areas of persistent systemic racism that may be creating barriers for BIPOC staff.
- 2) Provide EDI trainings and learning opportunities for all staff to build equity skills, growth, and awareness.
- 3) Establish new equitable institutional structures and policies that enable the museum to build an inclusive work environment. With this foundation, we will be well-positioned to launch new equity initiatives beyond the grant period.

Need, Problem, Challenge: An important focus of our EDI efforts at SAM has included increasing staff diversity. Currently, an IMLS funded project is supporting an initiative to expand our paid Emerging Arts Leader Internship program, which creates a pipeline aimed at improving access to careers in art museums, particularly for BIPOC individuals. While opening doors and developing more accessible pathways into the museum field is a necessary step, once employees are in a museum setting, we still must address the need to dismantle the long history of systemic racism that often creates barriers for BIPOC staff to advance their careers or even stay in the field.

In 2015 and 2018, the Mellon Foundation conducted a comprehensive survey of the ethnic, racial, and gender diversity of art museum staff across the United States as a way to measure and track change. Within these four years, national data showed that museums became more diverse (African-American curators doubled and BIPOC employees increased from 24% to 28%). However there was little change at the museum executive leadership level; in 2015 11% of senior leadership were people of color, and in 2018 this only went up by one percent. Leadership positions—defined by the Foundation as curators, educators, conservators, and museum leadership—consistently hold the highest barriers to entry for people of color, with this group identifying as 84% white, 4% African American, 6% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 3% two or more races. Mellon noted in their 2018 report that, “While trends in recent hiring are encouraging, certain parts of the museum appear not as quick to change, especially the most senior leadership positions.”¹ This trend is also supported by a 2019 study which found that once in the workforce, Black workers experience more turnover and lower rates of professional advancement, with fewer Black employees at each successive level of advancement, from entry-level to executive.²

¹ Westermann, M. (2019) *Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2018*, Mellon Foundation. Available at: <https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/art-museum-staff-demographic-survey-2018/>.

² Noel, N. et al. (2022) *The Economic Impact of Closing the Racial Wealth Gap*, McKinsey & Company. McKinsey & Company. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/the-economic-impact-of-closing-the-racial-wealth-gap> (Accessed: November 14, 2022).

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SAM's staff demographics have become more diverse in recent years, but they do not yet match our city's race/ethnicity in several categories. SAM staff is 67% white, 11% Asian, 10% Hispanic, and 3% Black; Seattle's population is 66% white, 16% Asian, 7% Hispanic, and 7% Black.³ Our Equal Employment Opportunity data demonstrates that overall BIPOC staff are proportionally represented across most levels of the organization. However, administrative support and service positions emerge as the most diverse, while first and mid-level manager and professional positions, which are often most correlated with internal advancement, are the least diverse. While more in-depth demographic analysis needs to be conducted during this grant project, these preliminary findings indicate that SAM needs to build better institutional support for early career BIPOC staff as they transition from entry-level into higher-level positions.

The three stated objectives of this project each respond to a need that addresses the overall intent to retain and advance BIPOC employees:

- 1. Collect and Analyze Data:** With a rapidly evolving EDI field, there is limited data to help us understand what has been successful, where best to direct our attention, and what requires the most resources. While we can show how overall staff diversity has increased at SAM, we are interested in gathering a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the needs of our BIPOC staff and institution. In doing this, we can better examine our own structures and ways they may be contributing to persistent practices of systemic racism.
- 2. EDI Trainings:** During the pandemic, like many non-profit art organizations, SAM experienced high staff turnover. With new staff and a new post-pandemic workplace culture created by hybrid-work and other factors, it is important to offer renewed in-depth equity trainings that address the museum's current environment. These trainings are necessary for staff to develop equity skills and awareness as we build a more inclusive museum.
- 3. Establish Equitable Institutional Structures:** In order to improve the workplace culture and reduce existing institutional inequities that negatively impact BIPOC staff, we need resources and time to intentionally experiment with and measure impact of different policies, programs, and actions. In learning this information, we can establish evidence-based equitable institutional structures that foster the long-term development of a diverse and representative workforce. This foundation will support longer tenure and career growth for traditionally underrepresented staff and will also enable SAM to implement more impactful equity initiatives beyond this grant period.

History of SAM's Equity Work: Guided by our mission to *connect art to life*, our museum-wide commitment to equity over the years is key to SAM's evolution of creating a more inclusive organizational culture:

- Mid-1990's: SAM's racial equity work formally began with the formation of community advisory groups and partnerships with communities of color.
- 2015: SAM participated in a racial equity cohort, "Turning Commitment into Action," facilitated by Seattle's Office of Arts & Culture and Office for Civil Rights. Our participation led to the formation of SAM's Equity Team—a cross-departmental, staff-led group.
- 2016: Based on facilitated racial equity trainings for staff, board, and volunteers, the Equity Team created SAM's Racial Equity Plan, which is integrated into our Strategic Plan. *Equity* was added as one of SAM's core values.
- 2020: SAM established its first Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion senior leadership position, the third of its kind in art museums. Additionally, an Equity Task Force was convened to develop a series of equity-driven recommendations and goals for the museum; the Task Force later became a permanent board committee.

³ U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Seattle City, Washington (no date). Available at: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/seattlecitywashington> (Accessed: November 14, 2022).

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- 2022: SAM made the commitment to end the practice of unpaid internships as it created significant barriers, particularly for people of color. Furthering this commitment, we received an IMLS grant supporting our paid Emerging Arts Leader internship program.

With the museum's persistent efforts to advance equity, we have seen notable institutional change among staff and the Board of Trustees. Since 2015, BIPOC staff have increased from 20% to approximately 25%, and SAM's BIPOC board members have increased by 17%, currently making up 34% of the board. Our leadership team is 50% BIPOC and 50% women, with Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO Amada Cruz the only Latinx woman leading a large North American art museum. In 2021, Dr. Constance W. Rice was elected as Board Chair; she is the first Black chair in SAM's history and thought to be the nation's first Black woman chair of a major art museum as reported in *The Seattle Times*.

SAM's Strategic Plan states that "focusing more purposefully and strongly on racial equity" is a top priority. The museum's Racial Equity Plan (developed in 2016) is woven throughout the Strategic Plan's seven strategic directions, with the objectives of this project aligning with the goals to 1) Increase career development opportunities for employees; 2) Build effective pathways for people of color to careers in museums and the arts; and 3) Build an environment that is inclusive, equitable, and welcoming to SAM staff. Collectively, these efforts create a more resilient organizational culture.

We are currently developing a new Strategic Plan that will integrate directives formed by the Equity Task Force (now a permanent board committee, the "Equity Advisory Committee," comprised of community and board members, and led by SAM's Director & CEO and Director of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion). The Equity Task Force was formed in 2020 to examine persistent organizational racial inequalities and practices, resulting in the group developing recommendations in four departments—Human Resources, Curatorial, Development, and Communications and Marketing—which are a top priority in our new Strategic Plan. This proposed grant project directly responds to the Human Resources recommendation to "Create an inclusive work environment, with a focus on increasing retention of BIPOC staff." Steps to achieve this direct SAM to 1) Collect data to help inform future goals and metrics, 2) Provide equity and implicit bias trainings, and 3) Establish career development opportunities (see Supporting Document 1).

Target Group and Beneficiaries: The primary target group is BIPOC staff at SAM. With 265 employees, BIPOC staff currently represent over 25% of our workforce (the race of approximately 12% of staff is not specified), with a higher proportion represented in frontline workers (museum admissions and security) and entry-level museum administrative roles. While this project will support all BIPOC staff, we are most interested in developing new policies or initiatives that successfully advance BIPOC staff into mid-level manager positions—this would include those staff who are new to the museum field or in first-level manager positions. Further, during BIPOC employee exit interviews, SAM has received feedback that staff would like to feel more supported and have more opportunities for advancement.

The beneficiaries of this project include SAM, as well as our audience and other art museums. The positive benefits for organizations to promote more diversity within their own staff are numerous.⁴ Studies have shown that diversity among teams boosts creativity and innovation, which is

⁴ Hunt, D.V., Layton, D. and Prince, S. (2021) *Why Diversity Matters*, McKinsey & Company. McKinsey & Company. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/why-diversity-matters> (Accessed: November 14, 2022).

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paramount in an art museum setting. A more diverse team creates a more open and inclusive work environment, boosting employee morale. Diversity at all levels, especially in manager and leadership positions, also helps cultivate mentorships among employees, which increases staff tenure. Further, we anticipate that the change and growth in culture from within will naturally shift the content of our programs and exhibitions in ways that better connect with our diverse region. Finally, as we analyze our own museum staff and dynamics, we will share the results of internal analysis with other relevant organizations, helping build precedent on how to move EDI work forward beyond reporting out demographic statistical changes.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

Timeline: Below outlines a general timeline of this three-year project, from September 1, 2023 to August 31, 2026. More details can be found in the "Schedule of Completion."

- **Year 1:** Courageous Conversation will lead Component 1 of its Racial Equity Systemic Transformation protocols with three sessions of initial EDI training, and Component 2 which involves two one-day EDI training for up to 200 staff. The Equity Consortium will conduct an Equity Factors Assessment to evaluate SAM's equity work to date. SAM will evaluate institutional structures that address the results of the Equity Factors Assessment.
- **Year 2:** Courageous Conversation will reconnect with SAM for Component 3 with three sessions to share the discoveries and best practices for furthering institutional racial equity. Based on recommendations from The Equity Consortium and staff feedback from EDI trainings, SAM will begin undertaking areas of internal and structural change that can be addressed immediately.
- **Year 3:** The Equity Consortium will return to evaluate and measure changes in our practices during this three-year project. SAM will develop a formalized long-term plan for implementing activities and initiatives that support BIPOC advancement and retention rates.
- **Year 1, 2, & 3:** Throughout the grant period, The Equity Consortium will facilitate Listening Circles for BIPOC staff. SAM will organize an Equity Guest Speaker Series, with two talks annually, addressing different equity topics and issues.

Activities: 1. Evaluating and Assessing our institution is essential to accurately identify barriers impeding the advancement and retention of BIPOC staff. Previously, we have primarily tracked demographic statistics to measure and show change. This project will undertake a more comprehensive review of our institution's practices and staff perceptions by looking at how stereotypes or implicit biases persist, and how they may be causing disparities. We will engage consultants to develop an evaluation framework measuring the impact of our efforts to date and our progress over the coming years.

First, **The Equity Consortium**, founded by Julia Ismael, will lead an Equity Factors Assessment by looking at four areas of equitable change: representation, economy, culture/practice, and systems. Museum staff will then participate in a survey. Based on both of these results, SAM will receive referrals with unique and specific next steps for areas of improvement. At the end of the grant project, The Equity Consortium will conduct another evaluation in order to track progress. By going through this process, SAM will gain a guide to best practices, connect with outside perspectives, participate in complex equity work, receive a roadmap detailing how to continue improving our equity work, and have a way to share equity practices with others.

Encouraged by the recommendation of the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture city-wide equity initiative, we have used the "**Continuum of Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization**" to identify and address issues of institutional structural racism (see Supporting Document 3). This document asks individuals to rank their institutions under the broad categories of "racial & cultural differences seen as deficits," "tolerant of racial and cultural differences" and "racial and cultural

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differences seen as assets.” We have now used this document in 2016, 2020, and 2022 to gather employee feedback and to measure staff perceptions. However, because of the lack of resources and staff time, these surveys have only been collected informally. We recently created a new Human Resources Specialist position who will be charged with facilitating this survey with more consistency and creating best practices for collecting and analyzing results. We want to ensure all staff voices are heard, including those for whom English is a second language and those without desk-based jobs, such as staff in security, facilities, and admissions, and the Specialist will be able to better facilitate this.

2. EDI Trainings are important for calling attention to implicit or unconscious racial bias across our institution. While SAM staff have undergone EDI training in the past, we understand that a single equity training is not a cure-all. We are interested in consistent trainings that both target skills development, involving building competency around equity and social justice, and equity awareness, such as transforming beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Additionally, with new staff and a new organizational culture that allows for some remote work, these trainings will be beneficial to all staff and our new work environment.

The organization **Courageous Conversation** will lead a large-scale EDI training for staff with a focus on equity awareness. With over two-decades of experience working with organizations around the nation, Courageous Conversation is a leader in the field. The goal of this training is to learn the Courageous Conversation protocols, which are meant to deepen interracial dialogue. Their Framework for Racial Equity Systemic Transformation helps individuals and organizations address persistent racial disparities intentionally, explicitly, and comprehensively. SAM employees will gain an essential literacy and consciousness to examine personal, professional, and organizational ways of being.

Grant funds support three components of the protocol, which will be conducted virtually over the project period. In year one, Courageous Conversation will conduct Component 1 “Setting the Stage,” involving three 90-minute sessions engaging 36 people in three groups—SAM’s leadership team, staff equity team, and BIPOC employees who have the most experience working for SAM. They will then lead Component 2 “The Exploration,” a full-day professional learning exercise for 200 employees (enough to include all full-time and part-time staff, and then some on-call and temporary staff) to gain a working understanding of racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. Lastly, in year three, Component 3 “The Return,” will reconnect with the three groups from “Setting the Stage” to discover the opportunities and challenges that have surfaced through this process.

Encouraging more skills-based equity development, we will offer Listening Circles facilitated by **The Equity Consortium**. A voluntary opportunity for up to 30 BIPOC staff per session and conducted three times a year, the Listening Circles will cover topics intended to strengthen confidence and gather tools for career advancement. This may include discussions focused on building self-advocacy skills, methods to overcome common roadblocks that may occur in a traditionally Eurocentric museum field, and ways to cultivate mentorships. This setting also provides a place for BIPOC employees from various departments, who may not typically work together, to have meaningful interactions. Creating this community can foster an important sense of belonging, improve satisfaction, and increase tenures.

Additionally, we will offer an **Equity Guest Speaker Series** biannually, open to all staff. During this three-year grant period, we will invite six guest speakers to address EDI topics in greater depth. Examples include a representative from the Seattle Office of Arts and Culture to discuss the “Continuum of Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization” and the city of Seattle’s equity initiatives; professors from local universities who are experts in race, equity, and social justice; and BIPOC local artists who have built successful careers.

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3. Establishing Equitable Institutional Structures will allow SAM to develop an organizational culture that is inclusive and welcoming to all staff. Throughout the grant period, SAM will create policies and Human Resources driven structures by responding to and building upon learnings gathered through evaluations, staff needs assessments, and EDI trainings. This may include new internal hiring policies, a commitment to providing yearly equity trainings, a foundation to create a staff mentorship program for BIPOC employees, or an organizational cultural change that encourages more open communication, such as new equity-informed policies for conducting meetings.

Risks: As this project relies on the results of evaluations and analysis, some elements can only be realized as we make discoveries along the way. While this may make it difficult to determine which specific activities are most valuable at this moment, this discovery process is foundational for the ultimate success of this project. As we work with the project's consultants, we will refine our project plan and activities to meet desired goals.

After going through challenges related to the pandemic, we must acknowledge external circumstances that are often out of our control. We are still financially recovering from closing our museum for nearly a year during 2020. Nationally, larger museums are reporting lower attendance, around 60% of visitors compared to 2019 levels, and SAM similarly is experiencing fewer visitors.⁵ With fewer visitors, a less active downtown due in part to Seattle's tech industry working remotely, as well as fears of a possible recession, there remains a lot of uncertainty. Our current national economic environment creates some caution, which may make it more difficult to develop meaningful long-term planning. However, the pandemic has prepared us well to navigate complicated scenarios and we are better positioned to be successful in difficult circumstances.

Project Team: Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Priya Frank, is the Project Director. She will provide oversight for the direction of this project, manage SAM's relationship with the project's consultants, and implement new equity learnings throughout the grant period. **Director of Human Resources**, Kathleen Maki, is key for supporting this project by providing context and information around employee data and demographics, as well as SAM's organizational structure. **Chief Operating Officer**, Jeff Draeger, is instrumental for coordinating staff to ensure the participatory elements of this grant project are accessible to all staff.

Human Resources Specialist, Ellie Vazquez, joined SAM in 2022 and is the first to hold this new position. She will manage everyday coordination and logistics associated with this project. Specific duties related to the grant project include, among others: source and coordinate staff EDI and implicit bias trainings; develop resources for retaining staff; conduct anti-racism surveys, including the "Continuum of Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization"; and establish career development opportunities for staff to build skills and experience toward future promotion (see Supporting Document 2 for a job description).

PROJECT RESULTS

In recent years, the museum has primarily placed attention on increasing rates of BIPOC applicants and hires. This project will, for the first time, focus on retaining and advancing SAM's BIPOC staff. While the three-year grant period is not long enough to demonstrate significant long-term change, we look forward to gaining well-researched and measured approaches that will help us establish equitable institutional structures that create greater impact over time.

⁵ Small, Z. (2022) *Once-Promising Attendance Figures at U.S. Museums Have Plateaued, Revealing the Pandemic's Enduring Grip on the Cultural Economy*, *Artnet News*. Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/us-museum-attendance-figures-2142562> (Accessed: November 14, 2022).

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With the activities offered through this grant—EDI trainings, Listening Circles, and other learning and growth opportunities—we expect to see change for both the target group (BIPOC employees) and the beneficiaries (SAM, our museum audience, and other museums). It is our goal that as a result of this project, BIPOC employees will:

- Report that they perceive an increase of institutional support (measured by comparing employee evaluations at the beginning and end of the grant period);
- Gain more tools and resources that will enable them to advance in their careers;
- Aspire to become leaders in the museum field with the self-assuredness and knowledge that these roles are achievable; and
- Develop a strong connection and engagement with the museum, particularly feeling a sense of belonging and pride.

Institutionally, SAM will:

- Gain an evidence-based understanding of how to best support BIPOC employees;
- Possess a roadmap that counteracts practices in systemic racism and institutional bias;
- Establish repeatable user-friendly surveys we can perform year-to-year to better track and observe trends; and
- Build an inclusive museum with staff demographics more reflective of our region and with more BIPOC employees proportionally represented at all professional levels.

We value building a more welcoming museum, both internally and for our visitors. As a result of better supporting our BIPOC employees, SAM's audiences will experience more diverse artwork and art narratives that speak to the perspectives of our region. Additionally, other museums and organizations will benefit from the project's data and findings. We will share our learnings to help other institutions continue advancing their own equity goals. This collaborative approach benefits the whole museum field and increases positive employment opportunities for BIPOC communities beyond our museum setting.

Project Sustainability: SAM has a proven history and commitment to museum-wide equity work, which has only strengthened through the years. Even amid difficult times, such as during the worst of the pandemic, we ramped up our equity work, for example, by creating a new Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion position and activating the board to support these efforts in new ways. To advance this urgent work, we have secured new restricted funds from board members and agencies, including from IMLS. This proposed project is critical to our next phase of growth, as it will provide dedicated resources for evaluation, planning, and strategic review.

With newly collected data, an organizational staff culture with a common understanding of equity skills and awareness, and established equitable institutional structures, we will be well-equipped to better support efforts for retaining and advancing BIPOC staff. At the end of the grant period, we will have established a new foundation from which we can confidently launch new large-scale equity initiatives. Potential initiatives developed from the outcomes of this project may include: building a formal mentorship program aimed at supporting BIPOC employees, particularly those early in their careers; creating affinity groups; providing consistent skills-building equity trainings; or continuing moderated listening circles. By prioritizing those from traditionally marginalized backgrounds as an essential part of a resilient and impactful museum, this project is critical for advancing our equity efforts and in creating change that meaningfully strengthens the museum field.

Seattle Art Museum
Advancing Equity: Establishing New Organizational Structures for Today's Museum
 Schedule of Completion

Activities	Year 1												Year 2							
	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	March 2024	April 2024	May 2024	June 2024	July 2024	Aug 2024	Sept 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	March 2025	April 2025
Confirm contracts with EDI consultants: Courageous Conversation and The Equity Consortium	█	█																		
SAM gathers relevant data and participates in equity survey			█	█	█	█														
The Equity Consortium conducts initial Equity Factors Assessment and provides recommendations						█	█	█												
Continuum of Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization staff survey											█									
Listening Circles for BIPOC employees			█				█				█				█					█
Equity Guest Speaker Series			█						█						█					
Courageous Conversation Component 1						█														
Courageous Conversation Component 2										█										
Courageous Conversation Component 3														█						
The Equity Consortium final Equity Factors Assessment																				
Identify and plan next steps based on recommendations and project evaluation results																				

