



# Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

Sample Application MH-253119-OMS-23

## African American Museum of Iowa

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$68,592
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The African American Museum of Iowa will improve collections care and management by upgrading its storage environment and technology. Project activities include removing outdated shelving, installing new shelving units and a rolling ladder, and setting up a new work station for processing and cataloging collections. Once the museum collection returns from off-site storage, a paid student intern will support the project team in conducting condition reports, rehousing objects, adding location tags, and updating catalog records. The project will better protect and preserve the collection, improve staff efficiency in collection management, and support future educational opportunities the museum provides through its objects.

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.

## **African American Museum of Iowa**

### *Collections storage upgrade*

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#### **Narrative**

##### **1) Project Justification**

The AAMI's project to upgrade collections shelving and technology aligns perfectly with the IMLS\_AAHC mission to advance collections stewardship and access (Goal 3). Within that goal our project supports collections care and management (objective 3.1). If collection items are not cared for to the best of our ability, there will be a severe lack of material culture available to represent the history of African Americans in Iowa.

Since the opening of the AAMI, the shelving in collections storage has been woefully inadequate. In the early years of the Museum, the Curatorial department often lacked staff with background experience in collections management and had to rely on significant volunteer and intern assistance. While they did understand the need for a separate collections space with adequate temperature and humidity controls, there was a lack of knowledge of the extent of care collection pieces required long term and their unique housing and storage needs. Budget was also severely constrained. At the time the Museum opened in 2003, they were able to procure at low or no cost a set of warehouse shelving to organize and store the permanent and archival collections. Unfortunately, the shelves consist of wide grates that do not provide a flat continuous surface on which to place objects. The rounded profile of the grates leave indentations on box bottoms and does not allow unhoused objects to sit flat, compromising the integrity of the object itself. Flaking rust particles create difficulty in controlling dust and debris. There is also a significant lack of specialized storage such as rolled storage. Currently our quilt collection, though rolled and covered in muslin, rests on the grated shelving causing indentations. Artworks are being stored flat, taking up valuable shelf space due to lack of art racks. The shelving is not to museum industry standards such as those outlined by the National Parks Service (NPS) Museum Handbook and the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC). For example, the NEDCC 4.2 preservation leaflet promotes the use of powder coated steel storage furniture as a chemically stable solution for museum shelving. Additional requirements of rounded edges, lack of protrusions, and adjustable shelving are just some of the aspects of acceptable storage aiding in reducing risks in damage and loss to the collection and providing safer accessibility. Our current shelving is flawed in these respects and continues to put items at risk of damage and deterioration. Over the years the AAMI Curator has tried to update storage as possible through new flat files and cabinets but budget restrictions have kept the Museum from an update of this magnitude.

We are also in need of a new rolling ladder to safely gain access to the collection. The current ladder is rusted, difficult to maneuver, and the brake no longer adequately locks and is a safety hazard to staff while handling and storing collections. In addition, the Curatorial department computers have outlived their usefulness as the age of the technology has decreased the speed and storage capabilities. Our intern laptop is seven years old and is showing signs of age such as becoming increasingly slower. Our main collections computer is at least ten years old and cannot keep up with the continued multimedia additions to the collections database in the form of digital images and oral history videos.

The City of Cedar Rapids flood control system measures, which includes building a flood wall behind the Museum, is requiring changes to the Museum structure, more specifically, the necessity of moving the

## **African American Museum of Iowa**

### *Collections storage upgrade*

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Museum's front entrance and reconfiguring the main lobby. Because of the required alterations, the Museum decided to launch a \$5 million dollar Capital Campaign to include additional much needed upgrades to the rest of the existing structure. These upgrades will include the collections space from installation of a fire suppression system and fire sprinkler riser room to improvements to the HVAC system for a tighter control on temperature and humidity. The lighting in the collections space will also be upgraded as the current fixtures are difficult to maintain and lacking in the best energy efficiency. There is also the potential to have automatic sensors installed to control the amount of light used at any given time thus providing extra protection for collection objects. In order to carry out all of the changes occurring in collections storage, the collection needed to be moved to an off-site storage facility. This became a perfect time for one more improvement to the space, the installation of appropriate collections shelving.

The African American Museum of Iowa (AAMI) respectfully requests funding to upgrade collections shelving and technology to protect and preserve the collection, support staff efficiency, and enrich the visitor experience and education the Museum provides through these objects.

Over the duration of the grant period, this project would result in: 1) upgrading storage shelving to better protect objects and prolong the investment of archival supplies; 2) upgrading technology, including a new desktop with increased storage capacity and a faster, more efficient intern laptop, 3) offer a paid internship for a college student to enable them to gain professional experience in working with a Museum collection.

The target groups of this project are the AAMI's 1) collections themselves 2) the Curatorial staff, 3) and the paid college intern. The collection will benefit from the very beginning and in the long term as better storage leads to better preservation of the AAMI's unique resources. The AAMI is a small museum, and Curatorial staff must balance the duties of collections management, creating exhibitions, preservation, and development daily. The upgrade will allow the Curatorial department to access materials quickly and safely, and better utilize the collection for exhibitions, research, and programming. Updated technological capacity will immediately improve the operations of the Museum by creating a more efficient and effective Curatorial department. The current Curatorial staff consists of the Curator & Collections Manager, Felicite Wolfe, and periodic interns. Ms. Wolfe spearheaded the need for new shelving and will be the project manager throughout. Having the collection off site for the next year will provide the best opportunity to transition to new shelving. Currently, the collections space has approximately 23,000cf of storage. The shelving update will increase capacity to approximately 32,000cf of storage or 39%. Being able to hire a paid intern will give a student a unique chance to introduce them to the field of collections management and encourage a new generation of museum professionals dedicated to the preservation of African American history.

The primary beneficiaries include the target group as the collection materials will benefit from stable shelving in perpetuity. Those working in the Curatorial department will find ease in retrieving and housing materials and safety in accessing them. There is enough growth planned into the shelving to keep the storage viable for decades. The shelving is modular with the ability to remove, alter, and add on to as storage needs change. Additional beneficiaries are ultimately the general public/Museum visitors who will be able to learn from the material culture the AAMI has to offer in perpetuity. The upgrade to storage

## **African American Museum of Iowa**

### *Collections storage upgrade*

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units will aid in long term preservation which in turn allows for increased longevity of collection to be used for exhibits and programming and social media. According to the AAMI 2021 annual report, between walk-in attendance and tour groups a total of 2,247 visitors had direct access to Museum objects in exhibits. Use of images of collection items and photographs for programming and traveling exhibits reached an additional 117,387 patrons. In addition, our online collections page has been accessed 1,815 times and research services page 525 times. In the past year our social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter platforms have a combined following of 10,600 and have reached 139,754 viewers. Online articles written about collection items have garnered much public interest. For example, an article written on the history of Aunt Jemima, with highlights of collection items, had 9,227 views, the 5th most visited page on our website over the past year.

#### **2) Project Work Plan**

March through November/December of 2023, the Museum will be undergoing construction and remodeling of the building. During this time, the collections space will be upgraded with new lighting and HVAC controls and the installation of a fire suppression system and a fire sprinkler riser room built within the collections space. While this is occurring, Curator and Collections Manager, Felicite Wolfe, project manager, will finalize the shelving schematic and individual storage units with the chosen vendor, Midwest Storage Solutions, so units can be ordered as soon as possible. Midwest Storage Solutions is Iowa's representative for SpaceSaver Storage, one of the leading companies for Museum storage solutions in the country. The vendor has estimated a 16 week lead time for shelving so ordering by July will ensure the units will be ready for installation at the end of 2023. After the order is finished and construction is continuing, the project manager will work on altering the current inventory spreadsheet and creating a damage report form and written procedures to be used by the intern. The intern job description will be finalized and sent to academic contacts at local colleges and advertised on job boards. Interview and hiring will also occur during this time frame. Once staff are able to return to the building between November/December of 2023, shelving will be delivered and installed, and the collection will be returned from off-site storage. The intern will come on board to be trained and work in tandem with the project manager to complete their 300 hours and successfully complete inventory and damage reports.

The work plan is based on the current timeline provided by the general contractor/architect and city officials. The biggest risk in this project is potential delays in the building remodel that will in turn delay entering the building by the original completion date. This risk can potentially be mitigated by the AAMI director, general contractor, and architect in developing ways to adapt to construction delays. However, due to present supply chain issues across all industries, there may not be a way to alter the plan and the overall project timeframe will be pushed back but will still be completed. We will not know exactly if and when this will occur until we are further into the project.

Additionally, any supply chain delays could push the availability of the shelving back from its scheduled delivery time or the need to adapt the design to available parts to keep the project on track. One way to mitigate this is to have Midwest Storage Solutions order the products as soon as the final design is complete so the materials will be stored and ready when the installation phase begins. Currently, they are specifying 16 weeks to have the materials delivered and therefore will need to be ordered by July 2023.

## **African American Museum of Iowa**

### *Collections storage upgrade*

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If we are unable to find a student intern for the summer, the Curatorial department typically has at least one summer intern from Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, Iowa or the work will have to be done by Ms. Wolfe. Adamantine Spine, the moving and storage company currently housing the collection off-site has given the Museum nine months to file any damage claims. If unpacking would take longer than anticipated, they are willing to discuss extending that time period.

The main resources required to carry out the project activities are financial and that is why the AAMI is asking for AAHC to cover the financial cost of Phase 1 of this endeavor. Because of the extensive repairs and upgrades the Museum building will need, collections shelving does not rank highly as an immediate need and although budgeted, will likely be cut.

The total project is divided into two Phases:

#### Phase 1 (July 2023- June 2024)

- Work with vendor Midwest Storage Solutions to finalize storage layout
- Ordering of storage, laptop, desktop, and rolling ladder
- Project manager will develop the necessary forms, intern job description, and workplan.
- Midwest Storage Solutions will remove and dispose of old shelving and install new according to final drawings
- Adamantine Spine will deliver collection items back to the Museum
- A paid college intern will be interviewed, hired, and trained to carry out the following steps of the project:
  - Open all boxes, check inventory, visually assess, and create detailed condition/damage reports as needed
  - Re-shelve archival boxes, flat files, and magazines
- Project manager will attend IMLS designated meeting

#### Phase 2 (July 2024 - )

- Re-shelve objects
- Rehouse as needed
- Purchasing of additional packing and housing materials as needed
- Mark item tags with new location
- Update PastPerfect record with new location and condition/damage as needed

An inventory was completed and compiled in a spreadsheet as part of the preparation for the collections move. The inventory spreadsheet will be altered to include additional intern tasks to ensure all items have been returned and what, if any, damage has occurred. It will also be used during Phase 2 of the project to ensure all tasks will be completed. The Museum has approximately 3100 objects, 54 lf of magazines, and 600 lf of archival material. 95% of the archival materials and magazines will take little time to work through as they will be returned back to their original shelving that is not being replaced. This process should not take longer than two weeks. The materials will be checked against the inventory and shelved. If obvious damage has occurred to the boxes, it will be set aside and the damage assessed. The permanent collection items will take much longer to be processed. However, due to staffing restrictions and

## **African American Museum of Iowa**

### *Collections storage upgrade*

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departmental deadlines, a single intern on this project is all that can be managed at this time. Therefore the project needed to be divided into two Phases. The permanent collection is packed either individually or there are multiple items packed in a single box. Every item will have to be checked against the inventory database and visually assessed for damage. While the intern will be able to start the process, it is likely that some additional processing will still need to occur before Phase 2 can begin.

The Museum typically has the best success at filling internship positions during the Summer (Mid-May to end of July). Internship advertising and interviews will be conducted in the late winter-early spring to be finalized by start in Mid-May. An intern will work 30 hours a week for 10 weeks for a total of 300 hours to complete Phase 1 of the project. The most important step is to check all objects for damage that may have occurred during the moving process in order for us to be able to file a claim. Our time frame for doing so is nine months after the move. Phase 2 will be completed by the Curator & Collections Manager and any additional interns we can obtain during the fall 2024 and spring 2025. Fall and winter is a slower time for staff and a large chunk of Phase 2 can be completed at this time.

The ability to track progress for ordered materials (shelving, ladder, and technology) will be based on availability of materials and communication with vendors on a regular basis. Intern progress will be tracked using the inventory spreadsheet. Additional columns will be added to keep track of each item as it's checked for its return, any damage noticed, that a damage report was filled out, photographs taken, and so on.

### **3) Project Results**

The current issues of the need for better collections shelving and upgraded technology in the Curatorial department has been a financial challenge for the Museum. Through funding provided by the AAHC, the installation of upgraded shelving and technology can be easily rectified to the benefit of the collection and the Curatorial department as a whole. These upgrades will ensure a safer environment of collection pieces and a more efficient work environment for staff. The AAMI's project to upgrade collections shelving and technology promotes the advancement of collections stewardship and access of its collection. The AAMI is committed to be accountable stewards of African American history in Iowa including the material culture we have been entrusted to preserve. This commitment to preservation will ensure that the public and the state will benefit from the education the Museum provides through these objects.

The Curatorial staff will feel there are better safety controls over the collection as well as an increase in personal safety when removing and returning items to shelving. Updating technological capacity will save staff time when accessing digital records and processing collections immediately improving the efficiency of the Curatorial department. A paid intern will be able to receive new knowledge and skills in learning how Museum collections are cared for in a real world environment.

One of the target groups of this project are the collections items themselves. For close to 30 years, the collections shelving has been inadequate. Shelving with deep grates are a detriment to the collection items through indentations on box bottoms and pressure points on un-housed items, as well as an unstable foundation for the items to sit firmly. Flaking rust particles create difficulty in controlling dust and debris.

## **African American Museum of Iowa**

### *Collections storage upgrade*

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Adding flat powder coater shelving will keep all objects, whether housed or not, on a firm level foundation without severe pressure points. The ability to have specialized storage such as racks for art works will free up general shelving space and provide better protection from dust and lighting sources. Rolled storage will allow quilts, banners, and other textiles to hang and not be subjected to pressure points from the grates and the weight of the tube and textile itself. The storage will vastly improve the overall preservation and longevity of the collection as better storage leads to better preservation of the AAMI's unique resources.

By project completion all collection items will have been re-housed and re-organized on new museum standard shelving. The project will also allow a paid student experience with museum collections and the work involved in caring for collections.

The majority of what the grant will cover is the collections shelving which will be self sustainable for decades. Upkeep of improved technology and network capacity acquired will be sustained with funds from the operating budget, absorbed as an incremental expense. Any re-housing materials we may need will be determined as the project progresses. The Curatorial budget for the year will be approximately \$2,000.00 in 2024 to accommodate the need. Promotion of grant funding and project results will also be shared with the museum's constituency through its website, social media accounts, and its triannual newsletter.

**African American Museum of Iowa**  
*Collections storage upgrade*

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**Schedule of Completion**

	2023						2024						
	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
<b>Activity</b>													
Finalize overall space planning of shelving and quantity of individual units	X												
Order shelving	X												
Collections room construction (installation of fire suppression system, fire sprinkler room and lighting and HVAC upgrade )	X	X	X	X	X	X							
Delivery of shelving and ladder (Dependant on which month construction is finished)					X	X							
Removal of old shelving and installation of new (dependant on which month construction is finished)						X							
Collection items delivered from movers (Dependant on which month construction is finished)						X	X						
Advertising, interviewing, and hiring and of intern							X	X	X	X			
Develop work plan, job description, forms, and tracking sheets for intern		X	X										
Train and aid intern in completing work											X	X	X

**African American Museum of Iowa**  
*Collections storage upgrade*

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