



# Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

Sample Application MH-253143-OMS-23

## Whitney Plantation

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$98,800
Amount of cost share:	\$3,000

The Whitney Plantation will expand its educational outreach to local and national audiences by implementing a distance learning program and community engagement program on the history and legacies of enslaved Africans, African Americans, and Creoles of Color in Southeast Louisiana. Engagement activities with local audiences will include a Teacher Open House, a Juneteenth Community Day, hosting the Slave Dwelling Project, and developing the “Museum in a Box” program, which will explore slavery through the lens of history, art, and science for offsite learning. The project will support a Digital Programs Coordinator, who will develop and implement virtual programs and associated outreach to national audiences. These accessible educational programs for both traditional and nontraditional learning spaces and audiences will further build the capacity of Whitney Plantation as an innovative museum that narrates the history of slavery from the perspective of enslaved people.

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.

**Proposal Narrative:**

Sharing the Story of Louisiana's Enslaved People through Educational Outreach at Whitney Plantation

**Abstract**

The proposed project at The Whitney Institute (dba Whitney Plantation) seeks funding to support educational outreach to Southeast Louisiana and beyond through community programming and the hiring of a Distance Learning Coordinator who will manage two virtual programs. An innovative museum that narrates the history of slavery from the perspective of enslaved people, Whitney is currently developing several programs that will allow the site to tell a larger story to an even larger audience of students, teachers, and learners of all ages. The project can be divided into two sections: Local Outreach and National Outreach. Within Local Outreach, funding will support a Teacher Open House, Juneteenth Community Day, hosting the Slave Dwelling Project, and developing the "Museum in a Box" program, which will explore slavery through the lens of history, art, and science, for offsite learning. Under National Outreach, funding will support the hiring of a Digital Learning Coordinator, an educator who will implement the in-development virtual tours to a national audience. With program development funded through the Telling the Whole History grant program by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the tours will use a combination of 360 images, videos, never before shared research, and primary sources to highlight the life story of an African American woman enslaved at Whitney Plantation while covering several decades of the high of chattel slavery in the US South and the Civil War. The need for this project is threefold: to continue to highlight and center the variety of Black experiences under slavery in the United States, including those of Black women living at the intersection of race, class, and gender, (2) to provide an accessible entry model into this history for classrooms and learners who are unable to visit Whitney Plantation in person, and (3) to support Whitney in its educational mission to share the stories of enslaved people in Southeast Louisiana and the larger United States. In Year One, the Digital Learning Coordinator will be hired, trained, and will launch the completed virtual tour and learning programs and the local outreach programs will be planned, implemented, and evaluated. In Year Two, the Digital Learning Coordinator will continue to deliver virtual programs to a National and Local audience, with evaluation support from the Director of Education and Education Manager, while select local outreach programs will continue with Whitney Plantation funding alone. This project will benefit multiple groups, including potential visitors to Whitney Plantation, local stakeholders such as libraries, community centers, and other cultural institutions, 5-20 teachers and students, other learners interested in virtual learning, and Whitney Plantation. Project success will be assessed through the successful booking and delivery of the tours, documented visitor responses, program attendee surveys, and teacher feedback.

**Project Justification**

**Program Goal and Objectives** The proposed project at The Whitney Institute, doing business as [Whitney Plantation](#), will address Goal 1: "build the capacity of African American museums and their ability to serve their communities" and Goal 2: "Support the growth and development of museum professionals at African American museums." Its primary Objectives include **1.1** (Develop, enhance, or expand public programs, exhibitions, and/or school programs), **1.2** (Enhance professional management), **2.1** (Develop and implement internship, fellowship, and mentoring programs structured to support emerging professionals entering the museum field). Whitney Plantation seeks funding to create a position that will help develop and deliver two virtual programs focusing on the history of slavery in south Louisiana before, during, and immediately after the Civil War, and the legacy of chattel slavery on both Louisiana and the larger United States. Located in St. John the Baptist Parish, 45 miles above New Orleans, Whitney stands apart from other plantation museums along the lower Mississippi River because it narrates the site from the perspective of the enslaved people who lived, toiled, and died there rather than from the perspective of enslavers. Since opening in 2014, Whitney Plantation has attracted over 400,000 visitors, most seeking an unvarnished history of slavery made vivid by the testimonies and stories of enslaved people themselves. This project will build on current projects to enhance and expand Whitney's K-20 engagement and make the story of slavery accessible to long-distance audiences.

**Needs Problems and Challenges** The need to expand educational outreach, including distance learning programs right now is threefold. **First**, in centering the experience of enslaved people in the plantation museum setting, the Whitney has developed exhibits related to topics such as family and labor. The museum also has not been afraid to foreground comprehensive evidence of the violence of the system of slavery. While curators have traced specific individuals and families enslaved there through the archives and highlighted those stories for visitors, the interpretive experience at Whitney has not given adequate attention to maroons and freedom-seekers, which is a major topic of interest among its visitors, particularly as they seek to link present-day struggles for civil rights with the past. **The proposed project will translate these exhibition and interpretative materials into two virtual tour programs that will allow more people to access the history shared at Whitney Plantation from anywhere.** The museum is currently creating the two distance learning programs, utilizing a combination of 360 images, 2D images, primary archival sources, moving images, and historical research that elevates the story of an enslaved woman who lived and worked at the site. By telling a uniquely intersectional story, Whitney Plantation will help learners understand the nuances of slavery in Louisiana, the US South, and the US nationally, and how that history connects to our current world.

**Second**, IMLS funding will help the museum to continue to bounce back after unexpected crises. The Whitney was just beginning to build out its education department (with the hire of Amber Mitchell as Director of Education in June 2021) when it suffered major damage from Hurricane Ida in Fall 2021. With damage to several important structures and Whitney staff diverted to the financial and rebuilding emergencies brought by the hurricane, our educational outreach stalled. Through 2022, we have been able to start to return to pre-pandemic school tours, with a focus on sustainable, accessible education access. However, Whitney Plantation has never had the capacity to dedicate time to reaching a national audience. Now that onsite education and staff capacity continues to grow, our next focus is offsite programming in digital spaces and building local community outreach. **The education effort will focus on two areas: virtual tour delivery and local outreach programming.** The virtual tour program, whose development has been funded by the National Trust For Historic Preservation's Telling the Full History program, will be supported by a part-time Digital Learning Coordinator, who will manage the virtual program, deliver program content, and assist in the development of future digital content. Local outreach programming includes a Museum in a Box program that will use objects, 2D materials, and other interpretative supplies to bring elements of Whitney Plantation to schools, libraries, and other sites, in order to reach new audiences who are unable to join us onsite. Additional the local outreach program includes funding for one Teacher Open House where we will open the site for to teachers for free in order to share with them our classroom materials and offerings, materials for our 2023 Juneteenth Community Day where we will open the site to all members of our community for free in celebration and remembrance of the ending of slavery in the United States, and, lastly, funding for programming in partnership with the Slave Dwelling Project, a national nonprofit dedicated to sharing the history of slavery through the spaces where enslaved people lived.

**Third**, these programs will allow Whitney to continue to enhance and expand content related to Black resistance to systems of oppression and center Black joy. Whitney's interpretation of slavery complicates traditional narratives that push African and Black thought and feelings to the periphery. By working to change that narrative not only through physical visits to our site, but also through virtual engagement and local outreach, we can expose more audiences to rethinking how we know what we know about enslaved people and challenge them to think critically about history, its preservation, and how we engage with this history and its legacies. The proposed outreach programs are entirely unique opportunities to share Black history in new ways to new audiences and can serve as a model for other sites looking to meet evolving visitor demands and expectations that center on issues of racial justice. Whitney Plantation will thus continue to be an innovator in the public history of Black America. Like Whitney's permanent exhibit and on-site interpretation, these programs will focus on Black personhood, placing enslaved and self-liberating people where they belong: right at the center of the story and help audiences of all kinds better understand that story and their place within it.

## **Target Groups**

**5-12 Teachers and Students** The primary audience for the project includes 5 through 12 grade students and teachers looking to enhance and support their learning of slavery in the United States. Teachers will be able to book a session with the Digital Learning Coordinator, who will walk the students through a formatted virtual program that meets state and national standards. Teachers locally will also be able to continue to engage with Whitney Plantation through a free Teacher Open House in 2023, where we will share what resources we have available, take them on a tour of the site, and work to build out continued interactions with them through our Museum in a Box program.

**Adult Learning Groups** The Whitney Plantation serves a broad audience. Visitation rose steadily in the first five years of operation from 2015-2019 prior to the pandemic. In its first full year of operation, the museum greeted 35,000 people. In 2019, visitation was just over 100,000. Visitors range in age, but the greatest share of visitors -- 48% -- are young adults between the ages of 19 and 34. Visitors' diversity in terms of race and geographic region demonstrates that Whitney's key audiences include all Americans and many international visitors. Just over 30% of the museum's visitors are African American, 46% are White, and Asian, Latinx and Native American people make up the remainder of the visitors. Sixty percent (60%) of the museum's visitors live more than 120 miles from Whitney Plantation, while over 20% live outside the United States. These numbers will only continue to develop with the addition of virtual tour programming and local outreach programs.

**Descendant Communities** The parishes on either side of the lower Mississippi River are home to historically Black communities descended from those once enslaved on River Road plantations. Given the size, number, and close proximity of slave labor camps in this region before the Civil War [[see Norman's Plantation Map, 1858](#)], descendant communities with a stake in the narratives Whitney shares with the public go far beyond direct descendants from one plantation. Thousands of Black residents throughout south Louisiana, including New Orleans, trace their family histories to enslaved people living in the riverfront parishes between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. This project will create additional space for the museum to collaborate more deeply with the region's descendant community and share their stories with local youth and national audiences.

## **Beneficiaries:**

In addition to the target groups above, long-term beneficiaries include these stakeholders and constituencies.

**Whitney Plantation-** As part of Whitney Plantation's strategic goal to focus on black perspectives of slavery--especially resistance-- and strengthening our educational offerings and resources, participation and collaboration in this project is an essential move forward. Staff at Whitney will be able to continue to expand educational experiences for public audiences while building sustainable growth practices for our Education department internally. Growing Educational outreach will give the museum a larger foundation on which to continue to develop our robust education program aimed at youth, teachers, and others interested in expanding their knowledge of slavery and resistance.

**Peer Institutions and Museums-** More broadly, Whitney Plantation has made a successful intervention in the contested space of plantation museums. Most such sites have practiced what [two of the most systematic observers of these spaces](#) concluded was best described as "symbolic annihilation" of the enslaved people who comprised the vast majority of the people who lived and often died in those spaces. Whitney has made it clear through its existing displays that the violent exploitation of the hundreds of people enslaved at the Whitney Plantation was the basis for the plantation's wealth. Whitney Plantation returns the focus of interpretation to those people. Museum professionals, donors, and supporters who are interested in transforming the interpretation of slavery in historic spaces will be interested in how Whitney Plantation

## Whitney Institute 4

extends that model in a digital format and how community engagement can serve as a major part of interpretation and education. They also will gain tools to support a shift from histories of the planter class towards more accurate interpretations of the sites as spaces of slavery and resistance. This emphasis will deepen and widen the museum's audience while serving as an adaptable model for other sites.

**Digital Learning Coordinator-** The Digital Learning Coordinator position will allow Whitney Plantation to develop a completely new job position and place efforts towards growing our online presence. Additionally, because this position is entry-level, Whitney is also creating a new opportunity for a dedicated person to enter the field of public history and gain experience on the cutting edge of the museum field. As house museums, presidential plantation homes, and other historic sites dramatically revise and re-envision the narratives of the places they occupy, this person will be center stage in formatting a groundbreaking project that will allow them to tell new stories and expand their professional abilities exponentially.

## Project Work Plan

### Year I, Part 1-2: July-December 2023

The Digital Learning Coordinator position is posted, interviews are conducted, the applicant is hired, and on-boarded. The Coordinator is trained on distance learning programs. The Education team works to implement a marketing strategy and starts to deliver distance learning tours. The education team works to confirm aspects of outreach programs, including ordering supplies, working with graphic artists, and communicating with partners to confirm dates. Whitney Plantation holds its first Teacher Open House in September 2023. The education team starts to deliver Museum in a Box program in Fall 2023. Slave Dwelling project events happen in October 2023.

### Year I, Part 3-4: January 2024-June 2024

DLC continues to deliver distance learning programs with support from the Director of Education and Education Manager. Whitney Plantation's Juneteenth Community Day event happens in June 2024. Museum in a Box Program continues.

### Year II, Part 1: July 2024

Director of Education, Education Manager, and DLC work to evaluate Year One of the Distance Learning Program and adjust as needed.

### Year II, Part 1-2: August-December 2024

DLC continues to deliver distance learning programs with support from the Director of Education and Education Manager. Museum in a Box Program continues.

### Year II, Part 3-4: January-June 2025

DLC continues to deliver distance learning programs with support from the Director of Education and Education Manager. Museum in a Box Program continues. Final evaluation of Digital Learning Coordinator by July 2024.

**Risks and mitigation** One risk to the project could be unexpected personnel changes. All parties would have to be replaced by a hiring process. While this might delay the project for a few months, we believe that a strong work plan and the continued efforts of other participants would keep the project moving forward. Another risk is extreme weather events. However, the creation of projects that "live" digitally, as well as being able to plan rain dates to mitigate those risks will be helpful, and the Whitney Plantation's properties are insured.

## Personnel and Resources Needed

Whitney Institute 5

**Amber Mitchell** is the Director of Education at the Whitney Plantation. Amber will serve as the overall project manager for Whitney Plantation, ensuring that both the Museum and its collaborators are meeting the goals of the grant budget, the goals of Whitney Plantation, and the overall community. She will ensure that the growing Education team will be prepared to engage visitors and students on the projects, creating a first-class educational experience for onsite learners.

**Rev. Kalie Dutra** is the Education Manager at Whitney Plantation. Kalie will assist in the development and management of the distance learning program, creating policies and procedures. She will also serve as support for the Distance Learning Coordinator as needed.

**To be hired:**

The **Distance Learning Coordinator** will execute and deliver the distance learning program for Whitney Plantation's Education team. In a part-time role, the position will work with the Director and Manager to determine the best strategies for the delivery, marketing, and execution needs for the program, as well as serve as the face of Whitney Plantation to the hundreds of students anticipated to participate in these programs starting in September 2023. This role will be hired in July 2023.

**Tracking Progress:** Whitney Plantation's education team meets weekly to keep each other informed about current efforts. This will continue throughout this project, with more meetings as needed to move the program forward.

**Project Results:** Our aim is to assist in the transformation of public understanding of the history of slavery and its legacies through distance learning and offsite engagement. With a focus on the daily refusal of enslaved people to endure bondage, combined with individual stories of some of the thousands of people who resisted their enslavers by escaping, we will enrich and sometimes counter what the public thinks they know about the history of slavery in the United States.

The benefits of this will be far-reaching. We have already witnessed the transformative power of Whitney Plantation and its focus on the experiences of enslaved people for onsite visitors. Visitors take what they learn at Whitney and begin asking questions about the enslaved experience at other sites. Through Whitney, they see the silences and inadequacies of more traditional means of telling the history of slavery through sites and historic homes. But the experience also influences how they see racial struggles in the present day, as proven by consistent feedback from Whitney's visitors. Visitors to Whitney thus become an integral part of the transformation of public history surrounding chattel slavery. We build on that success by reaching audiences outside of our traditional visitors through the distance learning program and community outreach to deepen public understanding of how resilience and resistance shaped enslaved people's daily lives and will offer a means to communicate these new stories to visitors young and old.

**Products.** The two-year grant will include the following:

- Hiring of a Distance Learning Coordinator to deliver virtual programs for two years
- Creation of the Museum in a Box program
- Support for a Teacher Open House to share our materials with local 5-12 educators
- Support for local community programs include the Juneteenth Community Day and Slave Dwelling Project program.



