



Museums Empowered

Sample Application ME-253490-OMS-23
Project Category: Evaluation

Armory Center for the Arts

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$247,205
Amount of cost share:	\$247,768

The Armory Center for the Arts will improve the design and outcomes of its youth programs by developing a comprehensive approach to youth program evaluation. Project activities include engaging an evaluation consultant and hiring a part-time evaluation associate who, along with the project team will actively engage youth in the evaluation process to co-create evaluation protocols and techniques including a new arts-based, multisensory evaluation framework then piloting the new evaluation strategies on the museum's educational programs on a rolling basis. The project will equip museum staff with new insights to capture youth experiences in the arts and create a thriving culture of evaluation at the museum.

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

I. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

The Armory Center for the Arts respectfully requests a grant in the amount of \$249,954 over three years to develop and implement a new evaluation framework, *Armory Arts-Inspired Youth Program Assessment (INSPO)*, to bring artists from the periphery to the center of program evaluation, actively engage youth in the evaluation process, and help improve our organizational program outcomes. We seek to address both objectives of Goal 3 (Evaluation) of the Museum Empowered program.

First, to nuance, modify, and even break free of generally accepted assessment tools, our staff and teaching artists must understand them thoroughly. As we develop our arts workforce of program staff and teaching artists, a core team of staff, Armory teaching artists, outside artists, a youth development specialist, our evaluation lead, and youth representatives, will develop assessment tools for art programs that (1) give children from a variety of backgrounds more agency in their own storytelling, and (2) extend the creative process. At the same time, the Armory will introduce some conventional assessment tools that measure creative selfhood, self-efficacy, and joy in practice.

As practitioners as well as administrators, those of us who work in arts organizations know that the social sciences only take us part of the way. They give arts organizations valuable tools to define *certain* outcomes and measure them in ways that are validated within these fields. But for arts education to demonstrate its full value, and not be viewed merely as an instrument to achieve other educational goals, we must push our own creative boundaries when it comes to program evaluation. In smaller museums and art centers like ours, program evaluation often functions like a superficial superstructure. It parallels and brackets creative acts and relies mostly on an exam-like or inquisitorial framework. We seek to imagine an evaluation process that would lose none of its ability to measure changes in attitude and behavior, but that could also contribute materially to an art project and reach younger children in a way that honors their diverse, authentic forms of self-expression.

Strategic Plan Advancement: *INSPO's* approach to evaluation leads us toward fulfillment of Goals I through IV of our five-point Interim Strategic Plan. After nearly 20 years, the Armory adopted a new mission and vision in May 2022. “We envision joyful, healthy, and equitable communities shaped by imagination, creativity, and diverse voices,” the new vision reads. The intrinsic importance of “joy” demands a different kind of feedback process, as does engagement in the arts as a social determinant of health. As Armory Board member and co-chair of the strategic planning committee, Alice Fung has observed, “creativity starts with the agency to question and imagine change.” Our first Interim Plan Goal, *CLARIFY AND FORMALLY ADOPT ARMORY'S CORNERSTONES*, calls on us to implement the new mission and vision. The end products of our evaluation work will be a more accurate reflection of our core values and artistic approach.

Our proposed evaluation work goes to the heart of the second goal, *REIMAGINE AND RESTRUCTURE HOW THE ARMORY WORKS*. It proposes a new programmatic framework that “include[es] how we work with and support teaching staff.” We envision a panoply of roles for them, with distinct job descriptions, pay bands, and advancement opportunities. Their responsibilities will span teaching *and* research, community outreach, development of best practices, and peer mentorship and training. Our proposed Creative Think Tank is a tangible step in this direction and creates a vanguard of teaching artists who will shepherd our process. Moreover, our proposed professional development series advances our commitment under Goal II to “center[ing] the health & wellbeing of our staff through the spirit

of...curiosity...and joy.” Our proposed instructor, Patti Saraniero, Ed.D., with Moxie Research, has a history of working with arts organizations and will delve into arts-based approaches to data collection and ways to visualize data. The learning process will be fun and instructive.

In setting up non-traditional, multisensory data collection methods, we will contribute to Goal III, *INVEST IN INCLUSION, EQUITY AND MUTUAL BENEFIT*. A theory of change that is relevant to this project is the curb-cut effect. As society institutes programs and policies to improve conditions for a single vulnerable population, the benefits may ultimately reach a much wider group than originally intended.

Project Need: This project represents the Armory’s commitment to “building back better” as part of our own recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns. During this difficult period, our emphasis was on sustaining programs in some meaningful form, and we de-emphasized evaluation during this period. We did not want to overburden teaching artists, students, classroom teachers or parents at a time when they were all adapting to new technologies and difficult forms of interaction. We understand that the profound disruption caused by the pandemic and the resulting impact on children’s social and emotional wellbeing necessitates us to imagine a new framework to evaluate and assess our programs beyond our limited former evaluation toolkit.

We see two challenges. The first is field-wide and structural. While we have gleaned some important findings from our own evaluations, which has typically consisted of pre- and post-program surveys, on the whole it is apparent that children and youth are not strongly invested in program evaluation. We attribute this in part to strategies crafted without children in mind as the primary end-users. Our own observation mirror that of Hall, Hume, and Tazzyman (2015), who noted,

“...in general, most evaluations for children are very similar to adult evaluations, where interaction is surrounded by arduous, possibly unappealing and frequently inappropriate evaluation instruments. This can all result in study attrition and incomplete data sets, which can greatly impact on the overall results and conclusions drawn from the evaluation.”

“Using traditional evaluation approaches with children can have serious implications, both for the child’s experience and the quality of data collected. A lack of engagement typically results in providing sub-optimal responses in questionnaires, with a high chance of satisficingand acquiescence bias....”

In American for the Arts’ *Creative Youth Development Toolkit, Landscape Analysis: Program Evaluation* (2019), Justin Jalea argues that, in creative youth development programs, “a re-evaluation of what counts as useful data and valid methodology is desperately needed....” He goes on to say that we must “refine the gamut of evaluative methodologies to make them more sound, convincing, approachable, and relevant to organizational needs....” He encourages “creative exploration of accruing and documenting evaluation data through artistic representation.”

In response, we propose evaluation activities that are more physically and relationally oriented, that encourage choice-making through sensorimotor activities and promote social skills. For example, students in a ceramics class might add a piece of clay to one of three pedestals, each of which would represent a specified emotion or learning outcome for the day. By the end of the multisession class, new sculptures would have emerged. The voice of every child should come through loud and strong, with opportunities to tell their own story.

We see the limitations in tools like our teacher survey for field trips. It is an 11-question instrument, nine of which ask for level of satisfaction using a five-point Likert scale. The last two are open-ended questions. It asks teachers to assign a value to “level of creativity with the art materials,” “overall level of participation” “content,” and “quality.” We are ready to pinpoint more precisely the skills and qualities we wish to cultivate in youth, in alignment with our newly defined values, mission, and vision. We must do so to gauge progress accurately. Arts exposure and artmaking are critical to “filling the well” for children at all times, but especially over the next few years as children marshal their resilience to overcome the setbacks of the last few years. Measuring wellbeing as a direct outgrowth of arts engagement is important for the Armory, important for society, and important for future advocacy for the arts.

INSPO carries extra relevance at this time, reflecting the Armory’s role in the 2022 cohort of Bridgespan’s *Leading for Impact* program. This two-year program will help our executive team increase our organizational impact and build a solid leadership team. As part of the program our staff are currently identifying an intended impact and developing an organizational theory of change, which will be completed in early 2023. We anticipate that the theory of change will help provide a framework for the development of *INSPO*.

Project Beneficiaries:

- Armory Studio Constituents: Initially, this project will benefit an estimated 700+ children between the ages of 6 and 12 who participate in on-site multi-session Studio art classes annually. Most children live in Pasadena, with others coming from surrounding cities, primarily in the San Gabriel Valley. They represent varied socioeconomic strata, as both tuition based instruction is available alongside needs-based scholarships for families that cannot afford class fees.
- Pasadena Unified School District Students: The next group that would be engaged – in Years 2 and 3 – will be Pasadena Unified School District students participating in our offsite free mixed media classes in partnership with the City of Pasadena. There are 17 elementary schools and three middle schools in the district. In 2021-22, more than 65% of all Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) students qualified for free and reduced-price meals; 13.8% were English learners. More than 80% are children of color, with Latinx students representing the largest share.
- Armory Off-site Community Program Constituents: Engagement of the Armory’s off-site Community programs constituents focus on low income children, teens, and system-impacted youth. Most of the young people who participate in the Armory’s community programs attend Title I schools that offer little or no in-school arts programming. Although they have not been involved in planning for the grant proposal, our plan seeks to have older youth as representatives on our Creative Think Tank team.
- Armory Program Staff and Faculty: Armory Teaching Artists will be offered sustained professional development opportunities, deepening their understanding of traditional and arts-based approaches to data collection and inclusive and participatory practices in evaluation. Armory administrative staff will be offered the opportunity to reflect together on program implementation, data, and assessment results, ultimately driving program improvements benefiting all Armory constituents.

Other long term beneficiaries also include our Learning community partner, New Children’s Museum in San Diego, and partners across the arts education field who we will share our project findings with at the Year 3 culminating convening.

II. PROJECT WORK PLAN

INSPO will take place over three years (September 2023 - August 2026) with a work plan structured in four distinct stages. Please see the Schedule of Completion for additional information on specific activities.

Phase I: Building Our Team and Tool Box The project will launch in September 2023 following contract execution with Moxie Research who will help our team identify our questions and structure our research and evaluation methods. We will then begin forming our Creative Think Tank which will serve as *INSPO*'s central brain trust. It will bring together specialists in program evaluation, Armory teaching artists, one or more social practice artists, Armory youth program participants, and a child development specialist to co-create evaluation protocols and techniques. Over the course of regular bi-monthly Think Tank meetings and a Year 1 culminating retreat, the group will discuss promising techniques in cultural institutions and will begin brainstorming a new arts-based non-traditional, multisensory evaluation framework.

Simultaneously, Armory staff, most members of the Creative Think Tank, and Armory teaching artists will take part in a 15-hour virtual professional development series provided by Patti Saraniero of Moxie Research, the goals of which will be to (1) understand basic evaluation vocabulary and terms; (2) understand foundational elements of a program evaluation, including a logic model; (3) understand traditional and arts-based approaches to data collection; (4) understand inclusive and participatory practices in evaluation; and (5) develop confidence and competence in sharing evaluation data and findings.

In Year 1, the Armory will hire a part time Evaluation Associate to begin collecting program participant and visitor data for evaluations of Armory programs, and this role will play an integral role in operationalizing *INSPO* into our daily Armory practice as the project advances. The Evaluation Associate will administer both traditional surveys, keeping detailed logs of survey activities and encouraging visitors and students to participate in non-traditional, creative evaluation strategies. We envision the position will work on a variable schedule, based on project needs.

A new learning community centered on innovations around teaching artists in museum settings will begin in Phase I with a partnership between San Diego's New Children's Museum and the Armory. Our approach to contemporary art and youth engagement is already closely aligned and the New Children's Museum has committed to being a learning partner for this project. We plan to foster exchange between the two institutions through study trips to each other's sites. Our staff – the executive director, program staff, and representatives of the *INSPO* Creative Think Tank – will visit San Diego in Year 1 to meet with the museum's staff and engage in onsite observation. This work will continue the Armory's longstanding commitment to building learning communities as strategies to devise cross-sector solutions and accelerate growth within sectors. For example, the Armory was a founding member of the Arts for Healing and Justice Network, and hosts an annual convening for regional arts service providers working with system-impacted youth.

Phase II: Large-Scale Interventions/Studio Program Pilot: As the Creative Think Tank team continues their professional development and brainstorming, they will develop their two or three big ideas for children's evaluation activities initially centered on the Armory's on-site Studio program. Toward the end of Year 1, an outside fabricator will begin to fashion the objects that will be needed to carry out those evaluation schemes, which will carry across different classes and will be tested over a period of two years. For the example mentioned above of clay sculptures, the fabricator would create the pedestals

and perhaps signage. If each child were to be issued his/her/their own “creativity chest” to be filled slowly during the course, we might fashion the chests themselves or objects for the chests.

Other interventions might just require supply purchases rather than fabrication. For example, the teaching artist for each class could create a set of anchor charts. In K-12 classrooms, this handmade poster results from collaboration between students and their teacher as they capture learning objectives, becoming an extended-use visual reference point. One anchor chart might focus on the artistic objectives; another would capture the social-emotional learning along the way. The teacher would give time and space at the end of each class to discuss how conflict was resolved, moments when students were proactive in helping each other, and other such moments. By the end of the final session, a large-scale work on paper would be a powerful form of self-evaluation by students, with a teacher’s colorful illustrations. Some interventions might rely on cell phone features. If we were to organize brief peer-pair critiques at the end of class, recording features on phones held by volunteers could give evaluators real insight into students’ perceptions while also reinforcing the idea that one is also responsible for the learning of one’s peers (cf. Freedman, 2013).

Phase III: Schools, Exhibitions and Community and piloting

During the piloting of new assessment tools for the Studio program, we will begin reflecting on and refining knowledge and skills garnered in Year 1 and will begin applying them to the Armory’s Schools and Exhibitions programs. In Year 2, the Creative Think Tank team will consider new ways to elicit information from children about their experiences of artmaking in our Schools program. For instance, Priscilla Wohlstetter of Columbia University’s Teachers College, with whom we have worked previously, has recommended the use of the Leuven Scale for Well-Being and the Leuven Scale for Involvement. Developed in 2005 by a team led by Dr. Ferre Laevers at Leuven University’s Research Centre for Experiential Education, this assessment offers a teacher or an outside evaluator a precise description of functioning at each of five levels to guide observation of individual children. We anticipate training our team and instituting the use of the Leuven or a similar validated scale, with these activities falling into Years 2 and 3.

In Years 2 and 3 we anticipate the “curb-cut” effect of the project extending beyond our initial focus on children and youth to reach our Exhibition program, where program staff will have been trained on arts-based approaches to data collection and will explore opportunities to capture visitor experiences more creatively. This work will be particularly timely as we launch *From The Ground Up* in late 2024, a large-scale exhibition as part of the Getty’s regional Pacific Standard Time: Art/Science/LA initiative.

Phase IV: Project Dissemination and Operationalization

The project will close out with a summative evaluation report prepared by Moxie Research, laying the foundation for how our new evaluation framework will be operationalized beyond the grant period. Project partners including the Creative Think Tank team will share out our learnings in a variety of different settings, including a presentation of findings to the New Children’s Museum in San Diego and through a field-wide convening for arts organizations at the Armory.

Project Risks: This project presumes that (1) an artist-led and youth-engaged development process will yield innovative ways of measuring and collecting data on youth wellbeing and less easily measured states of being like joy, (2) include student voices more equitably, and (3) engage more students than traditional forms of evaluation that derive from adult response vehicles. It is possible that the Creative Think Tank will falter initially because it does not have the right member composition. If the members are stymied because they lack a certain kind of expertise, the Project Director will seek out new

members to round out the group. Another concern is that the relatively young student representatives might not feel comfortable with the group dynamic or their schedules may be more difficult than those of the adult representatives. It may be that Armory staff will need to share ideas generated in the Creative Think Tank in a different way with youth stakeholders, either through one-on-one discussion or within a peer group.

Both (2) and (3) are premised on students' interest in engaging if our evaluation vehicles are physically oriented, stimulating, and fun. A concern for us is the high levels of student anxiety and apathy that have emerged in classrooms around the country as the pandemic recedes. Will these attitude shifts persist or are they just temporary? Will we need to adjust our operating assumptions about student motivation? Our commitment over the course of this project is to listen closely to youth and help them articulate their needs and suggest course corrections of their own as we all work together.

Project Management: Armory Vice President of Programs, Karen Satzman, will serve as the project director and will oversee project management. Since the first phase of *INSPO* will focus on the Studio program, Studio Director Julianne Fusello will be our initial internal lead. As she is a practicing artist who is thoroughly committed to creating, in her words, "impactful programming and experiences for students of all ages," she has the right orientation for this work. A new hire, the Evaluation Associate, will assist with data collection and analysis. In years two and three the Community Programs Director and Director of Exhibition Programs/Chief Curator will lead their respective teams in integrating *INSPO* into their program assessment.

Moxie Research's Patti Saraniero will help our team identify our questions and structure our research and evaluation methods. Her background is very well-suited to this project, as she focused in graduate school on the development of creativity in early adolescence. As she has stated, "it is often challenging to precisely measure our environment when we consider experiences, emotions, and creative ideas." For The Wonder Sound installation at the New Children's Museum, Moxie Research captured students' impressions with student-held GoPros for tight spaces where they could not be observed easily. Saraniero will join us for project planning and management, with consultation and support throughout our pilot. She will lead the data analysis, guiding the Evaluation Associate, and preparing an annual evaluation report.

Project Team Organization: We intend to have an equitable project leadership structure. Creative Think Tank members will have the authority to make programmatic decisions about evaluation design.

Resources: The Armory requests a grant of \$249,954 and will contribute \$250,518 in matching funds through a combination of in-kind and cash support, including a recently confirmed three year general operating grant of \$1.3M from the Perenchio Foundation. The Armory has never planned comprehensively for program evaluation and never attempted to infuse its assessment processes with the same kind of creativity that guides everything else we do. First and foremost, we need an experienced and imaginative thought partner, and we feel confident we have found one in Moxie Research. This is the single largest project expense. Artist and teaching artist involvement at each stage of *INSPO* is vital as well. And this time must be well-compensated. Although not yet certified by Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), the Armory aspires to meet its minimum payment standards. By creating the position of Evaluation Associate and combining this individual's time and talents with those of the Armory's Program Directors and Vice President of Programs, the Armory has anticipated and accounted for additional staff capacity needed.

Progress Monitoring: The Vice President of Programs, along with key staff, will ensure that the initiative

stays on track and on schedule. In addition, the Executive Director uses a tracking tool in the form of a dashboard that is used on a daily, weekly, and monthly schedule to assess progress. The Performance Measurement Plan and an accompanying logic model will help guide project goals and learning outcomes, with regular updates to these documents over the course of the project.

III. PROJECT RESULTS

Intended Results: This project will train Armory program staff alongside an arts workforce of over 50 teaching artists in evaluation methodology, yielding:

- New insights into ways to capture youth experiences in the arts;
- More rigorous and nuanced teacher assessment of student performance, which can then be used to refine programs that serve historically overlooked and underserved communities in Southern California;
- Enhanced capacity to measure social emotional learning outcomes;
- Improved visitor experiences based on enhanced evaluative data of our exhibition program.

Changes in Skills/Behavior: As a result of this project, a highly influential museum/arts education organization - the Armory - will demonstrate the feasibility of creating a thriving culture of evaluation. We anticipate the following changes in skills, behavior, and attitudes:

- Armory students will engage in program evaluation as a joyful and creative experience with elements of self-expression;
- Armory program staff will increase their understanding of foundational elements of program evaluation, including a logic model. Program staff will also become fluent in non-traditional arts based evaluation resulting in more informed programmatic decision-making;
- Teaching artists will be increasingly centered in Armory culture, through investment in professional development teaching artists will be consistent in the application of evaluation tools and techniques and will practice them with fidelity;
- Greater empowerment for youth who participate in the evaluation as well as those who generate them, giving diverse participants more agency in their own storytelling.

Products: The new evaluation practices will be the primary product. The evaluator will document the evolution of these practices thoroughly, with a final set of recommendations for the New Children's Museum and other institutions that might have an interest in adopting these practices. This project meshes well with work underway in Los Angeles County - the nation's largest county - led by the Los Angeles County Arts Education Collective established in 2002 by the LA County Board of Supervisors. In 2022, it introduced a Creative Wellbeing Curriculum Guide with best practices for culturally relevant, healing-centered youth arts education. The Armory anticipates that *INSPO's* results will be of interest and that the Collective will give us a platform for sharing results, as one of its functions is to support shared learning opportunities. Through presentations at both the New Children's Museum in San Diego and at a field-wide convening at the Armory, we will disseminate findings and look for feedback that could suggest future directions for our project.

Sustainability: Because this project is rooted in the spirit of the Armory and the creative endeavor, we envision that it will take on a life of its own. With a new structure that gives teaching artists more responsibility and authority over a variety of museum and educational functions, they will have the compensation and scope to sustain current practices and introduce new ones. The Evaluation Associate role will help ensure *INSPO* is operationalized into our organizational practice beyond the conclusion of the period of performance. The Armory's programs will continue to be national models and give the next generation the creative head start for personal wellness and success in academic and artistic endeavors.

Armory Center for the Arts - Armory Arts-Inspired Youth Program Assessment (INSPO)
 Schedule of Completion

	2023-24											
	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
Contract executed with Moxie Research	█											
Study trips to/from New Children's Museum		█										
Evaluation Associate hired and onboarded					█	█						
Project Evaluation Plan completed		█	█									
Recruit Creative Think Tank members (incl. external artists)	█	█										
Creative Think Tank meetings		█		█		█		█		█		█
Teaching artists INSPO Orientation						█	█	█				
Evaluation Professional Development series			█	█	█	█						
Contract executed with outside fabricator						█	█					
Fabrication of items for youth evaluation activities								█	█			
Pilot begins for onsite Studio Art Program										█	█	█
On-site evaluator observations of INSPO activities										█	█	
Creative Think Tank retreat												█
Data analysis for Year 1												█
	2024-25											
	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
Professional Development refresher training	█											
Host study trip for New Children's Museum @ Armory			█									
Contract with Leuven Scale (or equivalent) trainer	█	█										
Creative Think Tank meetings		█		█		█		█		█		█
Training in Leuven Scale administration			█	█								
On-site Studio Art Program pilot continues	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Pilot expands to Schools Program					█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Pilot expands to Exhibition Program	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Formative evaluation report										█	█	█
	2025-26											
	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
Professional Development refresher training	█											
Leuven Scale observations continue			█	█			█	█				
Creative Think Tank meetings		█		█		█		█		█		█
On-site Studio Program pilot continues	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Off-Site Community Program pilot begins					█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Exhibition Program pilot continues	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Schools Program pilot continues	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Summative evaluation report					█	█	█	█				
Presentation of findings to New Children's Museum												█
Host Field-Wide Convening to share project										█		