

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

hang@mfab: Houston•Art•New•Generation

Attachment 1: Narrative

Assessment of Need

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), is seeking a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services “Grants for Learning Labs in Libraries and Museums” project, funded jointly by the IMLS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, in support of the planning and design of *hang@mfab: Houston•Art•New•Generation*, a Learning Lab for young people (primarily between the ages of eleven and seventeen) that the MFAH plans to open in 2013-2014. A grant, if awarded, would allow the MFAH to carry out research and planning activities that will establish a solid foundation for launching *hang@mfab*, and generate a model that can be used by art museums across the country to develop their own Learning Labs. *Hang@mfab* will strengthen the MFAH’s ability to serve the public and the field, furthering the museum’s service mission by taking full advantage of the museum’s resources to provide unbounded opportunities for educating and inspiring people of all ages.

Established in 1900 as an education initiative to bring art to Houston public schools, the MFAH is committed to preserving the vision of its founders. The growth of the museum and its collection has been paralleled by an increased commitment to education and to offering engaging opportunities for people to enjoy, appreciate, and learn about art. Each year, more than 1,000,000 individuals participate in the museum’s innovative educational programs, including more than 75,000 middle- and high-school students. The Glassell Junior School, part of the MFAH’s Glassell School of Art, offers year-round art instruction to children ages four to eighteen. The planning and design phase for *hang@mfab* will bring together the MFAH education department and the Glassell School of Art, joining their core missions to engage all audiences with art and provide people of all ages the opportunity to be creative, explore new media and techniques, and forge new connections to the museum and its collections. Please see Attachment 6 for the full MFAH Organizational Profile.

The immediate audience for the *hang@mfab* grant project comprises middle- and high-school youth, along with their parents and representatives from MFAH community partners, who will participate in the planning, design, and pilot phase of the project. Given the MFAH’s current audience, many of the young people who will benefit from the establishment of a Learning Lab will be drawn from the student population of the Houston Independent School District—the largest public school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States—which has forty-two middle schools that serve nearly 34,000 students and fifty-five high schools that serve more than 47,000 students. Nearly 80% of Houston ISD students are considered Economically Disadvantaged (meeting federal criteria for free and reduced-price lunches), and more than 63% are considered “at-risk.” International research indicates that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds have less access to computers and few opportunities to learn technology skills outside of school¹. Furthermore, studies conducted in Texas indicate that urban school districts have marginalized computer education due to the absence of software, instructors’ lack of knowledge, and the high ratio of students per each computer². The MFAH Learning Lab will help bridge the digital divide by offering young people the chance to master the most current and basic software, and learn from a knowledgeable instructor in a setting with ample equipment that allows them to experiment on their own or in a peer group.

The MFAH education department and the Glassell School offer a number of programs for young people that take place during the school day, after school, and on weekends. Current museum education programs focus on learning, social development, and art instruction, and present the museum as a communal space for exploration, using art as the impetus for dialogue and expression. Community partnerships are a critical part of the success of these programs, and help develop and maintain the museum’s audience. For example, the MFAH’s after-school programs for young people with Houston ISD, Project GRAD and the YMCA of Greater Houston, demonstrate community partners’ recognition of the need for such programs and their belief in the MFAH as a meaningful place for young people. Please see Attachments 11 and 12 for community partner Letters of Support and descriptions of museum programs. Over time, the MFAH has also worked to address the needs and learning styles of “digital

¹ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, “Learning: Computer Access in Schools” <<http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.it.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=28>>

² Applied Research Projects, Texas State University-San Marcos, “Exploring the Facts of the Digital Divide in Texas Public Schools Grades K-12” <[1](http://ecommons.txstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=arp&sei-redir=1#search=%22texas%20schools%20digital%20divide%22.></p>
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natives³” in its education programs by using new technologies, program practices, and activities. The museum will apply the knowledge gained from administering its education programs to the development of *hang@mfab*.

Achieving success in today’s global, information-based, and entrepreneurial society requires that young people acquire digital media skills, experience the world outside of the classroom, and develop the ability to clearly express themselves. In Houston, many young people do not have the chance to build these skills, but the MFAH is uniquely positioned to offer them the opportunity to do so. In line with current research and practice in the field of youth and digital media learning, *hang@mfab* will employ innovative and meaningful new media approaches for young people to generate their own content as they engage with art, the humanities, and other interests, analyzing the ways in which different media and disciplines intersect in their lives. *Hang@mfab* will be an investment in the future, utilizing the diverse resources embodied in the MFAH while providing access for all young people to build skills and confidence, and positioning the art museum as a place for lifelong learning.

At present, few non-contemporary art museums in the United States offer programs or resources that combine the use of traditional and 21st-century digital tools, explore creativity and self-expression, and are driven by the interests and needs of the young people they serve. Furthermore, fewer art museums successfully apply the HOMAGO (hanging out, messing around, and geeking out) approach to building these programs and resources, and therefore are not offering opportunities specific to the present skill and interest level of their audience. By applying the HOMAGO approach, along with lessons learned from the YOUmedia Learning Lab, other art museums, and current research, the MFAH project team seeks to identify and apply best practices for executing the Learning Lab model in an art museum, where the main focus of outreach activities and public programming is to bring people of all ages into the galleries to engage with original works of art. In addition to informing the planning and design of the MFAH Learning Lab—and the pilot phase of *hang@mfab*—the work done by the MFAH during the grant period will provide museum educators throughout the field with successful strategies for establishing their own Learning Labs, serving as a blueprint for applying the ideas and philosophies behind best practices in digital media education to an art museum setting.

Project Design

The MFAH respectfully requests grant funding in the amount of \$98,325 in support of the planning and design phase for *hang@mfab*, which will be carried out from January 1, 2012, through June 30, 2013. Initial planning for *hang@mfab* has generated a program concept that aims to deepen young people’s engagement with the museum, with technology, and with their peer community, while offering ways in which youth can participate in interest-driven activities. One of the goals of the *hang@mfab* planning and design phase will be to explore how to encourage young people to progress to the deepest levels of immersion through *hang@mfab* activities, providing skills and knowledge to young people interested in moving from “hanging out to geeking out.”

The MFAH project team is comprised of members of the museum’s education department and the Glassell School of Art. Collectively skilled in art museum education, digital media, community engagement, and evaluation and assessment, the team will be augmented by Dr. Marianna Adams, president of Audience Focus, Inc., and Dr. Scott Sayre and Kris Wetterlund, of Sandbox Studios, who will serve as consultants throughout the duration of the project. Please see the Project Resources section of the narrative and Attachments 7 and 8 for further information.

The MFAH project team envisions developing a Learning Lab at the museum (*hang@mfab*) that will provide a safe and welcoming physical space where young people can socially engage in pursuing their own interests through digital media; multimedia tools available will include portable touchscreen tablets and a prototype workstation equipped with drawing, video, audio, and photography applications. *Hang@mfab* participants will receive a membership card that will include free access to the museum (public spaces and un-ticketed exhibitions, as well as the Learning Lab) and an invitation to become part of the museum-hosted dedicated *hang@mfab* online community.

The MFAH will seek to achieve the overarching grant goals by combining best practices in the field of museum and technology education while applying those goals in an art museum setting. The evaluation plan will be based on an approach developed in 2000 with Dr. Adams of Audience Focus, Inc., (then the Institute for Learning Innovation), and will examine the two primary goals established for the *hang@mfab* Learning Lab: to learn about

³ People who have grown up with computers, video games, and the Internet; from “SEA CHANGE: Museums Must Prepare for Demographic Shifts” by Betty Farrell and Maria Medvedeva, from the September-October 2010 issue of *Museum* magazine

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oneself, digital media, and art, and to examine the experience of conducting that work outside of school, in a museum setting, with a mentor and a community of peers. More specifically, *hang@mfab* goals can be assessed in terms of learning and social/situational goals; learning goals include: looking at art more carefully and thoughtfully, forging new connections with existing knowledge, and increasing curiosity about art and digital media. Social/situational goals include: seeing the museum as a place to learn and have fun, sharing one's ideas and experiences with mentors and peers, and gaining confidence in one's ideas and abilities.

The time and funding afforded by a Grant for Learning Labs in Libraries and Museums would allow the MFAH to develop a project with three overlapping phases: 1. A Discovery Phase, to allow the project team to assess MFAH community needs and interests and national best practices; 2. A Think Tank Phase, to bring together community decision makers and national experts to determine goals and a plan of action for *hang@mfab*; and 3. A Pilot Phase to allow the project team to offer and assess *hang@mfab* prototype experiences. During the planning and design phase of *hang@mfab*, the MFAH will:

- carry out research related to building a community at the MFAH that utilizes visual art and digital media learning to help young people acquire digital media skills, and produce an evaluation of the planning and design of *hang@mfab*
- use existing spaces on the MFAH campus to select and design the physical Learning Lab for *hang@mfab* (spaces include the Kinder Foundation Education Center in the Caroline Wiess Law Building and the technology classroom space in the Glassell Junior School)

Discovery Phase: From January 2012 to June 2013.

The MFAH will conduct research during the Discovery Phase, which will run throughout the entire grant period. Alongside the research component of the Discovery Phase, the MFAH project team will work throughout the grant period to develop the audience for *hang@mfab*. The museum will identify selected research participants (middle- and high-school youth, their parents, and adults currently leading after-school programs) who will take part in a series of focus group meetings, pilot programs, and events conducted by the MFAH. As museum educators, the MFAH project team members have the training, experience, and expertise needed to engage young people in art programs and activities; the Discovery Phase would allow the staff the time and resources to ensure that the Learning Lab meets the needs and interests of young people in the Houston community and also utilizes best practices in digital media education. As such, a primary aim of the Discovery Phase will be to work with the consultants at Audience Focus, Inc., and Sandbox Studios to gain an increased sense of why young people choose to hang out where they do and how to make the MFAH one of the places they choose to hang out.

The MFAH project team will work closely with Dr. Marianna Adams of Audience Focus, Inc., to provide insight on how young people, parents, and others perceive the museum as a social place for learning and share participants' general perceptions of art. Dr. Adams will work throughout the grant period, generating research from additional focus group meetings, conversations with *hang@mfab* participants, and from written feedback by establishing a temporary online forum (collaborative blog) in spring 2012 to serve the project until the launch of the dedicated *hang@mfab* online community. The MFAH will also work with Dr. Scott Sayre and Kris Wetterlund of Minneapolis-based Sandbox Studios, who will serve as technical consultants for the *hang@mfab* project. Given their knowledge and experience with art museum education, Sandbox Studios will provide the MFAH project team with insights into trends and best practices in digital learning, and work with the focus groups to determine local attitudes and interests in digital learning to help inform and develop the content framework for the project.

The final component of the Discovery Phase will be to build interest in *hang@mfab*. To increase young people's comfort level and familiarity with the MFAH, the museum will offer complimentary museum membership cards, which will help the MFAH provide the project team opportunities to engage a broader range of young people to help shape the development of the Learning Lab. This, combined with the focus group conversations and work with consultants, will help the MFAH project team members revise and determine an initial set of goals and objectives for *hang@mfab*. It is expected that the goals of the initiative may change as front-end evaluations are analyzed; initial focus group meetings will help inform and determine the content of later focus groups. The museum will host initial focus group meetings in early 2012, which will seek to gauge youth interest in the project, assess prospective *hang@mfab* participants' current engagement with digital technologies, and identify and begin to address potential logistical issues (transportation, accessible hours, etc.). Subsequent focus groups, planned for fall

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2012 and spring 2013, will build on the initial meetings and explore how to successfully promote *hang@mfab*, attract participants, and determine how to ensure that *hang@mfab* provides informal learning experiences that emphasize curiosity and lifelong learning. MFAH project team members also hope to learn how the museum can reach out to and provide a welcoming space for young people who are not already involved in the museum, who would begin their involvement with the MFAH by “hanging out” in the Learning Lab.

Think Tank Phase: From spring 2012 until June 2013.

During the Think Tank phase, running concurrently with the Discovery Phase and the Pilot Phase, the MFAH will gather additional information and conduct field research, while also training the MFAH project team, and hiring and training two artist/mentors, who will ultimately oversee the daily operation of the Learning Lab. Sandbox Studios and Audience Focus, Inc., will continue to work with the MFAH project team to develop reflective practitioner skills to utilize when conducting site visits and attending professional conferences.

The MFAH project team will visit multiple cities to bring together best practices in art museum education, and to analyze how existing digital media labs and learning spaces for young people at applicable universities, museums, and libraries teach technology, inspire creativity and self-expression, and create a communal and comfortable atmosphere for young people. The site visits will complement and coincide with project team members' participation in the grantee meetings in Washington, DC, and Chicago organized by the Urban Libraries Council and the Association of Science-Technology Centers. In addition to connecting with colleagues in these cities, the project team proposes site visits to San Diego and Austin. For a complete list, please refer to Attachment 5.

A major component of the Think Tank Phase will include the hiring and training of two artist/mentors; training will include MFAH orientation, learning and review of pedagogical strategies for engaging young people, and other professional development activities. The museum will certainly rely on the expertise of current MFAH teaching staff, but the project team also seeks to recruit artist/mentors with experience in technical skills and digital media processes. Two artist/mentors will be recruited at the outset of the grant period and will work with the MFAH project team to: conceptualize, design, and teach the technical skills and processes to use digital media; use and apply modern technologies to help young people engage with art; and function as mentors and guides.

The MFAH welcomes the challenge of applying the Learning Lab concept in a museum setting, and will seek to integrate the unique assets available to the museum into *hang@mfab*, including the museum's encyclopedic collection and supplemental resources available through the museum's International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA), the Hirsch Library, and the archives. The Think Tank phase will assist the MFAH project team in assessing and planning for the Pilot Phase, including researching, assembling, and learning about appropriate hardware and software. The Digital Media Academy of Austin will visit the museum and provide on-site training for *hang@mfab* team members in fall 2012, in addition to working closely with the museum throughout the entire *hang@mfab* planning and design phase. Information gathered during the Think Tank phase will also help determine the content and specific needs of the three proposed pilot formats to be tested during the Pilot Phase.

Pilot Phase: Begins in spring 2013.

The Pilot Phase will aggregate the knowledge gained during the Discovery and Think Tank Phases. The MFAH project team plans to host an awareness-building event in January or February of 2013 to generate interest in the project, and invite young people, parents, and other interested parties to visit proposed Learning Lab spaces, engage with artists and other speakers who explore the intersections between technology, creativity, and art, and provide an opportunity for young people to see how they might participate in *hang@mfab*. A temporary *hang@mfab* collaborative blog will premiere at this time, allowing for online interactions between participants and artist/mentors, generating interest in the program, offering a forum for expressing ideas, sharing projects, and acting as a prototype for the future dedicated *hang@mfab* online community. Event attendees will be invited to come back to experience the three pilot concepts of *hang@mfab*.

Building on the existing and successful program models currently offered by the MFAH education department and the Glassell School, the MFAH project team is currently considering implementing three pilot concepts in the spring of 2013. The pilot concepts reflect the phases of the HOMAGO model: the Day Pass (Hanging Out prototype), the 3 Day Pass (Messing Around prototype), and the 8 Day Pass (Geeking Out prototype).

The Day Pass model will debut during spring break of 2013, and will introduce the Learning Lab concept to

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young people, parents, teachers, and focus group participants. The museum will offer drop-in/open hours, allowing young people to visit and experience the open-ended digital media learning available through *hang@mfab*. Artist/mentors and MFAH staff members will give visiting young people opportunities to utilize *hang@mfab* technology and equipment while developing digital media skills by creating projects inspired by their own interests. The MFAH project team will also assess how the young people choose to participate in the Day Pass: who is visiting and when, how are the young people responding to and utilizing the different project spaces under consideration for the permanent Learning Lab space, and how the young people react to and use the *hang@mfab* technology. The research from the Day Pass model will help inform later pilot models.

The 3 Day Pass model will be offered in the spring as a flexible pass for three consecutive visits, and will encourage participants to move towards the “Messing Around” stage and give the museum the opportunity to experiment with offering young people a chance to create their projects over time. 3 Day Pass will build on the success of the museum’s current high-school program *Discovery Through Art*, a multi-visit program model where high-schoolers visit the museum three to six times and participate in tours of the galleries and art-making experiences. For the *hang@mfab* 3 Day Pass, artist/mentors will guide visiting young people through the creation of digital media projects. The participants will be given their own temporary account or drop-box so they can continue working on their project each day. The artist/mentors will be on hand to answer participants’ questions, instruct them in the use of new or unfamiliar software programs, and offer encouragement and feedback as young people explore inspiring ways to use digital media.

The 8 Day Pass model will offer a chance to progress to the “Geeking Out” stage through a flexible series of consecutive visits. For 8 Day Pass, artist/mentors will offer specific technology or art-based creative exercises that will develop young people’s interests and assist them with their projects. With the added time and information afforded by the 8 Day Pass, participants will be able to create a larger-scale digital media project.

Project Goals and Impact

At the conclusion of the planning and design process, the MFAH will have developed a sustainable plan to host a place where MFAH and community resources come together to provide innovative ways for young people to visit the museum and engage with art that capitalizes on their social and learning preferences and re-imagines youth engagement with art museums for the 21st century. *Hang@mfab* will combine: the technical knowledge required to produce digital media projects; the importance of self-expression and creativity, and; use of the museum and its collection as sources of inspiration. *Hang@mfab* will serve young people on multiple levels, helping them to become progressive, productive, and creative forces in society by encouraging them to explore and nurture their talents, interests, and aspirations while acquiring and developing the skills needed to succeed in their academic and future professional lives. Beyond supporting young people’s attainment of essential proficiencies, the initiative will also establish what MFAH staff members hope will be a lifelong relationship between *hang@mfab* participants and the museum.

In May and June 2013, the MFAH project team will work with Dr. Adams to produce a written evaluation of the design and planning phase for *hang@mfab*, which will help determine if the museum has met the following learning objectives and outcomes. Through *hang@mfab*, participants will:

- learn and become comfortable with a range of digital media software; the museum will offer instruction for a range of learners with varying levels of familiarity
- practice self-expression and creativity, conveying thoughts, ideas, and attitudes using digital media
- understand how artists from a range of time periods and places have used objects to express their thoughts, ideas, and attitudes; use their work as inspiration for digital media projects
- recognize the museum as a place for them and a place for lifelong learning
- meet a mentor—an instructor who is knowledgeable in the latest digital media teaching strategies and software; connect with an adult who shares new and similar experiences and is not a teacher or parent
- be provided a space with basic and latest software and access to computers for individual work

The evaluation will generate a long-term sustainability plan, which will be used to formally implement the results in the official launch of *hang@mfab*; the evaluation will also be made available for use by other art museums planning a Learning Lab.

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As the grant period ends and the project moves into the delivery stage, the MFAH will begin to actively promote the program through word-of-mouth, social media, the MFAH Web site, and more traditional advertising and promotions (news releases, brochures, cards, etc.). It is anticipated that *hang@mfab* will formally launch in the fall of 2013 with a public event that will include a tour of the Learning Lab, an exhibition/presentation of youth work created during the planning and design phase, an introduction to the artist/mentors, and the announcement of the official schedule of *hang@mfab*. It will also mark the launch of the dedicated *hang@mfab* online community, which will comprise a public section—with information about program hours, upcoming workshops and courses, and selected member content—and a social learning network that will serve as the online community for *hang@mfab* participants and artist/mentors.

The outcomes and products of the planning and design phase of *hang@mfab* will be key components of the continued growth of the MFAH's commitment to education in the broadest sense. The success and effectiveness of the planning and design process will be measured by the number of young people who become and—more importantly—remain involved with *hang@mfab*, the release of the evaluation report, and whether the planned timeline for opening the physical Learning Lab space, launching the online component, and offering *hang@mfab* to the general youth population is met.

Project Resources: Budget, Personnel, and Management

To ensure its success, planning and design for *hang@mfab* has been fully integrated into the MFAH education department. The MFAH has assembled a team of highly qualified staff members to manage and perform the grant activities. Please refer to Attachment 7 for additional information about key personnel.

- Jennifer Beradino, Kinder Foundation Education Center manager (30% time commitment), will serve as project director as well as an evaluator, and will manage the focus groups and artist/mentors.
- George Ramirez, manager of digital media (30%), will supervise the acquisition of technology for use in the Learning Lab, and serve as the contact for Sandbox Studios.
- Jennifer Cronin, associate director, Glassell School of Art (10%), will assist in overseeing artist/mentors, and participate in audience development and research.
- Lindsey Smith, school programs manager, and Lauren Fretz, student programs coordinator (10% each), will assist in audience development, interpretive content development, and serve as senior lead teachers.
- Open position, curriculum coordinator (10%), will assist with the selection of a physical space for the Learning Lab, promote the project, and develop initiative programs, activities, and materials.
- Dr. Victoria Ramirez, W.T. and Louise J. Moran Education Director (5%), will oversee the MFAH project team as well as project finances.
- Open positions, 2 artist/mentors, will function as mentors and guides for program participants, while teaching young people the technical skills and processes to create digital media projects.
- Dr. Marianna Adams, president of Audience Focus, Inc., will serve as consultant for the MFAH project team, providing them with the attitudes and perceptions of young people, parents, teens, and others in regards to the museum as a social place for learning and art as a means for individual discovery.
- Dr. Scott Sayre and Kris Wetterlund, Sandbox Studios, will serve as technical consultants for the MFAH project team, providing them with national trends and practices in digital learning, as well as working with focus groups to determine local attitudes and trends in digital learning.

Budget

Expanding the museum's offerings for young people, in particular the development of programs and resources that engage young people out of the school context, is an education priority at the MFAH. As such, the Board of Trustees is committed to providing the resources necessary to realize the initiative. The museum's commitment to education has led to steady growth in the museum's allocation of staff and annual operating funds committed to carrying out daily activities and implementing initiatives related to education. The MFAH requests \$98,325 in support of training and salaries for two artist/mentors, consultant fees (Audience Focus, Inc., and Sandbox Studios), research related travel, travel expenses for Audience Focus, Inc., youth membership cards, staff training, focus group meetings, an awareness building event, related promotion costs, and the acquisition of technology for the Learning Lab. The MFAH will share the cost of the project with \$114,638 budgeted for staff salaries and benefits, research travel, registration fees for the 2012 Museums and the Web conference, and additional travel for Audience Focus, Inc. Please see Attachments 2-4 for additional budget information.

BUDGET FORM - PAGE FOUR

Section B: Summary Budget

	\$ IMLS	\$ Cost Share	\$ TOTAL COSTS
1. Salaries and Wages			
2. Fringe Benefits			
3. Consultant Fees			
4. Travel			
5. Supplies and Materials			
6. Services			
7. Student Support			
8. Other Costs			
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS (1–8)			
9. Indirect Costs			
TOTAL COSTS (Direct and Indirect)			

Project Funding for the Entire Grant Period

1. Grant Funds Requested from IMLS	<input type="text"/>
2. Cost Sharing:	
a. Cash Contribution	<input type="text"/>
b. In-Kind Contribution	<input type="text"/>
c. Other Federal Agencies*	<input type="text"/>
d. TOTAL COST SHARING	<input type="text"/>
3. TOTAL PROJECT FUNDING (1+2d)	<input type="text"/>
% of Total Costs Requested from IMLS	<input type="text"/>

* If funding has been requested from another federal agency, indicate the agency's name: