



# **National Leadership Grants for Museums**

**Sample Application MG-10-14-0067-14  
Project Category: Learning Experiences**

## **University of Washington**

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$140,066
Amount of cost share:	\$141,055

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

## Let's Talk: Meta-Conversations about Dialogue

From *Science Café's* to *Talking Circles* and *community forums*, dialogue-based programs have emerged as a promising and innovative strategy to “prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society” (IMLS Strategic Goal). Dialogue is increasingly used to facilitate learning around significant societal topics and to engage broader and often underserved audiences. The Coalition of Sites of Conscience conducts dialogue around topics such as racism, immigration, and religious intolerance. The Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network (NISE-Net) holds forums around energy, health care, and ethics related to nanoscale technologies. Most of this work has been project or issue-based and the focus of professional development materials and evaluation efforts has been limited to the impact of the specific project.

*Let's Talk* brings together professionals working with dialogue in STEM and history-based institutions for a ‘meta-conversation’ about what we know and don’t know. The project explores dialogue as an emerging and significant model of community engagement. The symposium will be informed by a Research Synthesis and will yield models and resources to inform planning, facilitating, evaluating and studying dialogue across the field. The project addresses the lack of a generalizable body of knowledge, the need for instructional theory and models to inform dialogue programming, and the opportunity to prepare future museum professionals in this emerging area of practice.

Advancing IMLS’s STEM initiative, this project integrates the work of cultural institutions with that of science museums, particularly around topics where content is embedded in societal questions. This innovative project is directed by PI’s Kris Morrissey (Director, Museology Program, University of Washington) and Robert Garfinkle (Director of Science and Social Change, Science Museum of Minnesota), supported by committed and experienced advisors and a professional evaluator (Randi Korn). Each brings extensive experience in designing, facilitating and evaluating informal learning experiences that engage communities around important issues. *Lets Talk* leverages significant past work, expertise and resources, resulting in a relatively low cost, high impact project. This collaborative effort promises broad impact on the field by grounding an emerging practice in research and theory.

**Audience:** Current and future museum professionals engaged with designing, facilitating or evaluating informal learning experiences in museums

**Goal:** Advance the capacity of the field to engage in planning, implementing, evaluating and studying dialogue programs that effectively engage broad audiences around significant societal topics.

**Activities:** 1) Analyze and synthesize what we know about dialogue programs; 2) Convene a cross-discipline Symposium, 3) Develop and share models and resources.

**Timeline:** October 2014-September 2016

## Let's Talk: Meta-Conversations about Dialogue

*"Museums are in an excellent position to help citizens integrate intellectual knowledge with personal values."* Kadlec, 2009

*"The future for informal science institutions is to become vital parts of the civic infrastructure of their communities, as well as remaining part of the educational infrastructure."* Garfinkle, 2009

### 1. Project Justification

To prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society, museums are expanding their educational role to include understanding how "...we can use knowledge to make the choices that impact our lives, our families, our communities, our country, and our world" (Bell, 2009). From science museums addressing climate change or Internet privacy to history museums engaged with immigration or religious tolerance, this role expands the educational mandate and potential of museums. It recognizes that knowledge is embedded within a societal and personal context and proposes that museums are uniquely situated to support the challenge of being an engaged citizen in a complex world.

Garfinkle suggests that this new role, sometimes referred to as *civic engagement* or *public engagement*, has the potential to "fundamentally shift the focus and the role of informal science institutions and their relationship to their community" (2009, p. 9). Public engagement has emerged in museums as a broad set of activities that go beyond the traditional role of outreach and are intended to forge more lasting and meaningful relationships with their communities. Dialogue efforts, usually involving citizens with each other or sometimes with subject-matter experts or policymakers, are a key activity in this engagement work. Examples of dialogue programs abound in museums in recent years. The NSF-funded Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network (NISE Net) involving over 400 museums has developed significant expertise, research and resources that engage adults and older youth in dialog and deliberation around societal implications of nanoscale science, engineering, and technology. Science Cafés are popular in a number of cities supporting conversations between scientists and the public in non-museum settings such as pubs. Topics are wide-ranging; examples include HIV/AIDS and cleaning up nuclear waste (in Portland), the end of universities and autoimmune diseases (in Denver) and the emotional lives of Crows and pesticides in our food (in Seattle). The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a network of institutions using places of memory to address human rights issues, is implementing a national initiative promoting structured and facilitated dialogue about immigration.

While terms such as *dialogue*, *civic dialogue*, *forums*, and *deliberative conversations* are increasingly popular in the verbiage of museum practice, there is no consensus around what each term means or the differences between them and the implications of those differences. However, there are significant and critical differences between, for example, a

*debate* framed to articulate differences in opinions about an issue, a *deliberative dialogue* designed to come to bring a group to consensus to inform policy, and a *dialogue* designed to develop empathy and understanding of different lived experiences or perspectives. The National Coalition for Deliberative Dialogue (NCDD) distinguishes *dialogue*, which is designed to share perspectives about “difficult issues we tend to just debate or avoid” from *deliberation* which emphasizes the importance of examining options and trade-offs to make better decisions and inform policy. Lehr et al. (2007) highlights the need for museums to distinguish between dialogue mechanisms that are intended to inform policy and those that are intended to promote engagement and understanding. Bell (2009) hypothesizes that there are significant differences between what might be viewed as a *public policy approach* designed to inform policy makers, a *dialogue and deliberation approach* designed to increase knowledge and advance deliberation skills, and a *social science approach* that integrates perspectives of societal implications, ethics and public policy into exhibits and programs. In the words of the Sites of Conscience website “Dialogue is more than talk.”

There is also limited information or discussion about the infrastructure or the institutional and field-wide investment needed to create and sustain dialogue-based programming. Bell (2009) identifies a critical question before the field: “What skills and practices does it take to conduct this kind of programming, and are museums able and willing to develop them?” Similarly, Davis, Gurian, and Koster (2003) observe that words such as ‘forum’ and ‘town hall’ have been added to museums’ missions, but without a widespread understanding of their weighty operational implications. The gap between the excitement around dialogue and the reality of a research-based practice of dialogue in museums is characterized by:

1. ***Lack of generalizable knowledge about dialogue in museums:*** Most dialogue-based initiatives exist within a disciplinary context and around specific issues with little aggregation or synthesis of what we are learning about dialogue across the areas of science and the humanities. A range of evaluation reports, most notably a synthesis of four years of NISE-Net programming, assess the impact of specific programs on their audiences. While they answer the question, “Did this program achieve its intended goals,” the methodologies aren’t designed to answer the broader questions facing the field such as “Does dialog work in informal environments? What does it look like?” As Lehr (2007) observes, “little consensus exists on the role and value of these ‘dialogue events’ – for event organizers, public participants, invited experts, or funding agencies”.
2. ***Lack of research-based instructional design models:*** Instructional design theory suggests that learning is a process composed of interrelated parts (Hodell, 2011; Dirksen, 2012). In the case of dialogue, some of the components or variables include *program goals* (consensus, community building, empathy, policy informing),

*audience* (intact groups, homogeneous groups, representative), *participant impact* (knowledge, insight, action, attitude), *use of content* (as a stimulus, independent of content) *nature of public opinion around topic* (consensus, contentious, segmented), and *facilitation style*. Identifying the components and how they relate to each other can create a framework or model that can be used as both descriptive tool (“This is what appears to be happening in this part of the dialogue.”) or prescriptive (“The nature of our audience and goals suggests that if we use this facilitation and recruitment process, the result will be this.”) While every dialogue will be unique and specific to its needs, descriptive models can provide prescriptive guidance.

3. ***Lack of sustainable plan for trained professionals in the future:*** There are relatively few professionals trained or knowledgeable in the complexities of planning or evaluating dialogue programs. In an evaluation of an ASTC forum workshop on dialogue, within the small group of participants, only 1/3 reported they were prepared to carry out a forum, mentioning lack of personal comfort and confidence as well as institutional infrastructure to support dialogue. Based on a web review in preparation for this proposal, Museum Studies programs are not preparing future professionals in dialogue and, although limited to a key-word search, a review of conference proceedings in the past five years found limited sessions and no workshops designed to build skills in dialogue. If dialogue becomes a staple of museum practice, the field will need to build an infrastructure to prepare individuals who are grounded in research and best practices.

These gaps are particularly significant in this emerging field of work because of the complexity and potential sensitivity of the work that dialogue is often embedded within. Programming around difficult topics has great social value but requires knowledge and skills to handle situations where differences of opinions or values may become amplified or feelings of inequity between groups may be intensified.

### **Intended Results**

- *Synthesis Paper:* Research synthesis of projects and evaluation reports of dialogue-based programming conducted in the past ten years across the domains of science, history, social science and art.
- *Dialogue Symposium:* Held in Seattle in August 2015, the symposium will encourage dialogue with approximately twenty professionals who are responsible for dialogue events in science and natural history museums, cultural history and other types of museums. Collaborative facilitated activities will discuss what we know and don't know, moving towards a model that can be used by individuals and organizations making decisions about dialogue programming.

- *Teaching Materials*: Resource frameworks and materials will be designed for Museum Studies academic programs and adapted for use by professional organizations, institutions and researchers and evaluators. Materials may include short video segments of interviews or conversations prepared at the Symposium.

### **Audience**

The primary audience is current and future museum professionals interested in and responsible for engaging audiences in informal learning experiences about important and relevant topics. This includes organizational leaders, educators, evaluators, community engagement staff as well as individuals and organizations responsible for preparing and supporting these individuals. Researchers and granting agencies will also benefit from this work as well as professional organizations involved in professional development.

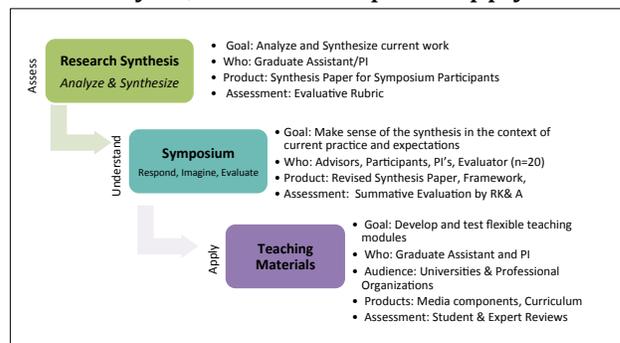
## **2. Project Work Plan**

The work plan for *Let's Talk* involves iterative processes within three stages: **Assess** (Analyze & Synthesize), **Understand** (Respond, Imagine, Evaluate), and **Apply** (Design, Develop, Disseminate). The key activities are aligned with these stages although the linear nature of sequencing activities belies the complexity and the integration of each process.

### **Synthesis Paper (Assessment Process)**

The project will start with an extensive literature review and synthesis of published and unpublished reports collected through strategic and comprehensive inquiries to institutions engaged in dialogue-based programming. A strong synthesis is an increasingly critical part of the research process, designed to explore trends and to describe the state of knowledge (Cooper, 2009). A synthesis is distinct from a meta-analysis, which attempts to apply quantitative measures to statistically measure or aggregate results. The synthesis does not involve statistical analysis of effect, but does involve significant synthesis beyond summarizing so that the description “is part of a new conceptualization of the issues” (Bazeley, 2013). The synthesis will be completed by an advanced graduate student in the UW Museology program with guidance from Kris Morrissey. Dr. Morrissey recently completed a synthesis of evaluation reports related to social issues (drawing from Informalscience.org) and will use that experience and approach as a model.

*Planning (Dec 2014/Jan 15)*: Identify criteria for selecting materials; identify and solicit materials that fit criteria; evaluate quality and alignment of studies with *Let's Talk* goals.



Analysis (Feb, 2015): Using NVIVO software, the Research Assistant will code all reports based on pre-determined variables (i.e. audience, impact goals, results) as well as code to capture emerging themes or trends not anticipated.

Review and Revise (March): A Critical Review of the Synthesis using an Evaluative Rubric will be completed by the Advisors before distribution and then by Symposium participants.

## **Dialogue Symposium**

The Symposium will convene museum professionals who are engaged in facilitating, evaluating or studying dialogue-based programming, joined by the Advisors, the PI's, the Research Assistant who produced the synthesis and the RA selected to develop instructional resource materials in the second year based on the outcomes of the Symposium. Participants will be selected through invitation of professionals active and visible in this work as well as a call for applications and a selection process that will consider commitment to and involvement in dialogue and potential contribution to the Symposium. A small number of professionals were approached during the development of this proposal to assess interest and although not necessarily a predictor, the responses were strong and positive. Seattle was selected as the host site for several reasons including the support offered by the University of Washington (i.e. all meeting sites provided as part of institutional overhead) and the presence of two institutions with a history of dialogue– the Wing Luke Museum and Pacific Science Center. The symposium will discuss, critique, expand and organize the information probably around the key variables related to dialogue programming– dialogue methods, facilitation styles, evaluation methodologies and results, audiences and professional development.

### Potential Structure of Symposium

Day One will start in mid-afternoon to allow for inbound travel and will focus on developing a level of group comfort and a shared understanding of the Research Synthesis. A contemplative visualization activity will provide participants a chance to individually respond to key ideas in the synthesis. A debriefing session will summarize the comments and review the agenda and goals.

Day Two might start with a *World Cafe* to identify areas of consensus and emerging ideas followed by small discussion groups to evaluate and organize recommendations. The process of a *World Cafe* follows a research-based format designed to comfortably but critically explore 'questions that matter' where collaborative thinking can make a difference. Participants rotate through several tables where groups are intermingled and each group builds on the thoughts of the previous group with the guidance of a facilitator. The Museology Program and several Advisors have used this approach. In the afternoon, working groups will focus on components of dialogue (facilitation, evaluation, recruitment and preparation, professional development), focused on the models and materials to be developed. A graduate student from the Department of Communication will provide technical support to videotape and edit interviews or conversations with participants as resources for the teaching materials.

Day Three will start with a review of activities over the past two days and an overview and discussion of the ways the results of the symposium could be used and shared. After a coffee break, Randi Korn, the outside evaluator, will facilitate a Learning Circle (described in evaluation section) to discuss participants' perspectives of the potential impact of the symposium and the associated materials on the field. A graduate student will be selected to work with Korn to document and summarize discussions. The PI's, Advisors and Evaluator will debrief in the afternoon.

### **Teaching Models and Resources**

In the fall of 2015, the results of the Symposium will be applied to the development of teaching materials developed by an advanced graduate student with experience in dialogue and instructional design. The graduate student will work closely with Kris Morrissey who has extensive experience in instructional design and teaching, with input from Advisors and co-PI Robert Garfinkle (whose graduate work was in instructional design). The materials will be structured in small modules that can be adapted to fit different needs of universities (i.e. an exhibit, evaluation or education class) or professional organizations or institutions considering dialogue. The materials may include visual models and charts, PowerPoint presentations, short video segments, checklists and recommended readings. The materials will be pilot tested in a winter 2015 course on dialogue. The Museology Program offered an experimental course on dialog in fall 2013 taught by the same instructor (Diana Falchuk) and the course generated high interest and positive evaluations from students. All teaching resources will be shared nationally.

**Dr. Kris Morrissey (PI)** is Director of the UW Museology Graduate Program. She became interested in dialogue over ten years ago, conducting "Designing for Conversation" workshops (with Deborah Perry) at national conferences for Visitor Studies Association and American Association of Museums. She is the founding editor of the two peer-reviewed journals– *Visitor Studies* and *Museums & Social Issues*. *Museums & Social Issues* focused two issues on the role of dialogue in museums: *Civic Dialogue: Let's Talk* in 2007 and *Science and Civic Life* in 2009 (Guest-edited by co-PI Robert Garfinkle). Morrissey will contribute 25% of her time for two years as part of the cost share. She will provide project management, oversee the research synthesis, coordinate pilot testing of curriculum and participate in all major activities.

**Robert Garfinkle (co-PI)** is Project Leader of the Science & Social Change Initiative at the Science Museum of Minnesota. He was the project lead of the AAM award-winning exhibit *Race: Are We So Different?* He has experience across multiple projects and models in museum dialogue programs. Robert will lead the development of the Symposium, review and edit both the research synthesis and the instructional design curriculum, and work

with PI Morrissey on all program activities. He has a M.S. in Instructional Systems Design from Indiana University.

**Advisors:** The Advisors were strategically selected for their leadership roles in the field and their communities, and their expertise and experience with key aspects of the project. They bring experience grounded in science-based institutions, cultural organizations and qualitative research. The American Alliance of Museums suggests the value of both national experts and local individuals “in the trenches” who can give a more practical review of materials and commit to piloting parts of your project. We followed this strategy with our Advisors from both national and local leadership positions and from practice and research. **Sarah Pharaon** is Program Director, North America of International Sites of Conscience, overseeing the *National Dialogues on Immigration Project*. She has a graduate degree in Museum Studies and is a Lecturer with the Museum Studies Program at Seton Hall University, bringing a perspective of the needs of the field and the university. **David Sittenfeld** is Program Manager of Forums at Museums of Science, Boston, an active member of the NISE-net and is completing his phd in community-based participatory research methods for community engagement. **Cassandra Chinn**, Deputy Executive Director of the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience brings significant leadership skills and expertise in community based exhibits and programs and the Wing Luke is a member of the Coalition of Sites of Conscience. **Leslie Herrenkohl**, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at University of Washington, has strong interest and experience with research in informal environments and was on the Advisory Board for National Academy of Sciences volume on Learning Science in Informal Environments. She will play a strong role in the oversight of the Research Synthesis.

**Professional Staff:** Additional Support comes from Museology Program Assistant **Andrea Cohen** who has planned and organized dozens of Museology events involving travel, accommodations, food, and room reservations and **Diana Falchuk**, who brings museum and teaching experience and training in dialogue to pilot test the materials in a course.

### **Sharing**

The focus of the dissemination will be to provide models and research-based resources that situate dialogue at the national level as an emerging and significant new form of informal learning. The sharing strategy has four foci:

1. Real-time face-to-face sharing of results and products through sessions and workshops proposed to ASTC, AAM and VSA.
2. Peer-reviewed journals: An extended version of the research synthesis and discussion will be submitted to journals such as *Curator* and *Museums & Social Issues*.
3. Leveraging National Resources: A summary of the project and products will be submitted to different areas of the Informal Commons website and other forums.

4. Peer-to-Peer: The project’s participants will prioritize and value correspondence and conversations with interested institutions and individuals and the Symposium will include a discussion on how to share results.

### 3. Project Results

The intended results were conceptualized and articulated around a framework called *Generic Learning Outcomes (GLO’s)* developed in the UK to identify benefits that people gain from interacting with museums, libraries and archives. We selected GLOs to guide our assessment because of the nuanced definition of learning, the substantial supporting documentation for measuring these impact categories, the resonance with other outcome frameworks and the application across both museums and libraries.

The GLO’s identify learning as:

- A process of active engagement with experience
- What people do when they want to make sense of the world
- Development or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, values, ideas and feelings



### Intended Results

The project intends to develop models and resources that advance the ability and capacity of museum professionals to engage their communities in thoughtful and productive dialogue about issues and topics that are relevant to individuals, families, communities and informal learning institutions. The primary audiences for the project include:

1. Professionals currently engaged in planning, facilitating, evaluating or studying dialogue-based programming in museums, and
2. Future professionals and the faculty who prepare them through university programs.

Outcomes Categories	Learning Objective: Participants will ....
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand range of ways museums have and can engage audiences through dialogue</li> </ul>
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciate the value of past research in making decisions about dialogue.</li> </ul>
Behavior & Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in the planning, facilitation or evaluation of dialogue-based programming using knowledge gained from project.</li> </ul>

## **Measuring Success**

The evaluation plan measures the success of each component through product-based assessment, but more particular evaluative attention is focused on the Symposium as a measure and predictor of the validity, usefulness and success of the full project.

*Research Synthesis:* An evaluative rubric will be developed by the PI's in collaboration with the external evaluator to assess the comprehensiveness, validity, generalizability and most important, usefulness to the field. All participants in the Symposium (including Advisors) will evaluate the synthesis using this rubric. Results will inform the final version of the synthesis.

*Educational Materials:* The materials will be pilot tested in a graduate course on dialogue at the University of Washington. The course will be evaluated using university course evaluation forms adapted to delineate responses to the materials. Two Museum Studies professionals not associated with the University of Washington will conduct a critical review of the materials and the course evaluations and make recommendations for edits and for dissemination strategies for other academic programs.

*Symposium:* The success of the Symposium will be assessed through a collaborative dialogue-based approach facilitated by Randi Korn and based on the concept of *Learning Circles*. The term 'learning circle' reflects the traditional and informal practice of organizing and honoring collective wisdom to build, share, and express knowledge through a process of open dialogue and deep reflection with a focus on a shared outcome (Cohen, 2006; Reil, 2013). The reflection will be constructed around guiding questions focused on the impact goals of the project. A UW Museology graduate student will be selected to serve as a facilitation assistant and will work with Korn on documenting and synthesizing the discussion. This opportunity provides a rich mentoring experience for a graduate student while maximizing the attention and focus of the facilitator. Questions to be explored might include:

1. Did the synthesis prepare you to enter the conversation with a broad knowledge of the current activities around dialogue across the museum field?
2. What significant areas of consensus and insight do you think the group shared?
3. As a result of the symposium and the Research Synthesis, do you feel more confident in your ability to effectively plan, facilitate, evaluate or study dialogue programming?
4. As a result of the symposium, are you more familiar with other professionals and professional resources that might advance their work?
5. What important topics, perspectives or voices did the Symposium miss?

## **Sustaining the Benefits**

The Science Museum of Minnesota and UW's Museology Program have a history of sustaining and leveraging the intellectual results and products of initiatives. UW was funded in 2007 for *New Directions in Audience Research and Service*. The project is now

fully-funded through internal sources and has engaged over 130 graduate students in evaluation training and completed and published 37 studies at different sites. The Let's Talk project may follow the New Directions model with trained students providing Dialogue Facilitation services to local museums around particular exhibits or topics. The results of the project will be sustained and hopefully adapted, expanded and edited through the broad dissemination, the development of a permanent course on Dialogue at the University of Washington (with materials shared with other museum studies program) and the initiation of conversations across areas of museum practice.

### **Summary**

This rich collaboration affords an opportunity to reflect on and articulate where the museum field can go with dialogue work. The project expands the notion of community engagement and harnesses significant expertise in research and practice to advance the capacity of current and future professionals to thoughtfully and deliberatively use the strategy of dialogue.

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### **Website References**

- Coalition for Sites of Conscience [www.sitesofconscience.org/](http://www.sitesofconscience.org/)
- Inspiring Learning Framework (GLO's) <http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/>
- National Issues Forum. [www.nifi.org/](http://www.nifi.org/)
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation NCDD.org
- NISE Network; Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network <http://nisenet.org/>

Schedule of Completion				
YEAR One (Oct. 2014-Sept 2015)				
	Oct-Dec.	Jan.-Mar	Apr-June	July-Sept
Confirm workplans, timelines and lines of responsibility, hire Research Assistant				
Advisors phone conference				
Preliminary draft of Research Synthesis/lit review				
Research synthesis completed and distributed				
Symposium in Seattle				
Evaluation of Year One and Advisors phone conference				

Schedule of Completion				
YEAR Two (Oct. 2015-Sept 2016)				
	Oct-Dec.	Jan.-Mar	Apr-June	July-Sept
Develop Resource/teaching materials with RA				
Presentation of Synthesis at ASTC				
Outside review of materials				
Pilot Test Course at University of Washington				
Final Evaluation and debrief with advisors				
Presentations at conferences (VSA, AAM)				