



# Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Sample Application MH-00-13-0034-13

## Studio Museum in Harlem

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$128,000
Amount of cost share:	\$155,555

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

## **The Studio Museum in Harlem**

Institute of Museum and Library Services

Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

### **Building Blocks - ABSTRACT**

The Studio Museum in Harlem is requesting a grant of \$128,000 in support of Building Blocks, a staff development initiative that seeks to strengthen the Museum's institutional capacity and impact in the Harlem community and beyond. Building Blocks will formalize staff development and create a mechanism that allows the Museum to train, support and provide identified skill sets for its middle management team, increasing our internal efficiency and, more importantly, our capacity to serve a changing audience and growing visitorship.

The Museum is looking to develop a middle-management team that is adaptive and can respond quickly to change, internal and external. In recent years, we have encountered challenges as we continue to grow rapidly and middle-management positions are filled by staff with excellent knowledge of their field, but little formal leadership experience. Building Blocks will provide training in concrete skills such as planning, budgeting, assessment, program evaluation, collaboration and technology, helping staff to carry out a new community mandate that is sustainable. Support for Building Blocks would also help give alumnae of our institution the necessary skills and training to attain careers in the broader museum community. This resonates with our founding purpose to 'level the playing field' for people of color in the arts community.

As a staff development project, Building Blocks will be managed through Operations at Studio Museum, overseen by Deputy Director Sheila McDaniel. Over the 20-month period, it will function as an initiative carried out through HR. The Deputy Director will be supported by her team, including HR assistant Dennell Jones, Director of Technology Elijah Morgan and a new and dedicated staff position of In-Reach Manager, hired specifically to help carry out the initiatives attached to Building Blocks.

Thanks to both the final recommendations and audience data gathered by consultants Booz Allen Hamilton and LaPlaca Cohen, the Museum has baseline information and survey templates from which to carry out an evaluation of Building Blocks. At the start of the project, staff will take part in an online survey the results of which will be used for comparison at the conclusion of the project in 2015. To monitor progress during the implementation of the program, evaluations and surveys will be distributed to staff participants after the regularly scheduled management training sessions.

Relevant training curriculum and lessons learned from Building Blocks evaluation will be shared with our peers and partners through a variety of channels. A White Paper will be created and made available to other IMLS grantees, specifically mid-sized culturally specific institutions. We are also prepared to open up certain Building Blocks training sessions to our partners and peers in Harlem—discussions led by our Deputy Director and key staff will be held in the Museum theater and staff from Harlem cultural institutions will be invited to audit them.

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**NARRATIVE**

**Project Justification**

**The Studio Museum in Harlem is requesting a grant of \$128,000 in support of Building Blocks, a professional development initiative that supports the Museum’s work as a mentor and incubator of talent both within the institution as well as the larger art community. Formulated as a staff development project, Building Blocks will seek to strengthen the Museum’s institutional capacity and impact as a lifetime ‘resident’ of Harlem.** Originating from Stepping Stones, a 2008 IMLS-funded professional development initiative, Building Blocks incorporates lessons learned, as well as final recommendations from the consultant Booz Allen Hamilton, which carried out an extensive staff survey. Building Blocks will seek to formalize staff development by focusing on managers at the mid-level path, providing strong support systems, protocol and a training mechanism for this growing career track at the Museum.

In 2004, the American Association of Museums issued a report with high praise for the Museum’s “dynamic staff who execute a staggering array of public programs.” The report noted that the “major challenges currently facing the Museum include its ability to maintain a high level of programming in the midst of its growth.” Nearly ten years later, Studio Museum continues to feel the effects of a growth spurt that tests the abilities of a dedicated staff, many of whom are right out of college and/or have only worked at the Museum. The challenges are most significantly felt by a middle-management track, filled by staff with excellent knowledge of their field, but little formal leadership experience. For its part, the Museum has tried to keep pace with a growing visitorship (a 10% increase in the past year) and demand for our programs, by continuing to hire and expand our ranks. In the past year three new positions have been added, including Manager of Programs and Community Engagement, a School Coordinator, and a Family Program Coordinator, and for the purpose of this grant the Museum would create a new In-Reach Manager position to serve as the point person for the Building Blocks project.

Building Blocks is derived from the Museum’s awareness that in order to successfully carry out its role as a cultural anchor in a rapidly changing community, it must invest in its staff. The Museum is looking to develop a management team that is adaptive and can respond quickly to change, internally and externally. Concrete skills such as planning, budgeting, assessment, program evaluation, collaboration and technology are all areas that the Museum’s managers need to be versed in, in order to successfully carry out a new community mandate that is sustainable. Building Blocks will not only create a training program for current staff, it will create a template for an ongoing training curriculum that is sustainable amidst ongoing change. Building Blocks also acknowledges the Museum’s role as a leader in the field. Support for Building Blocks would help give alumnae of our institution the necessary skills and training to attain careers in the broader museum community. This resonates with our mission to level the playing field for people of color in the arts community, whether they are artists or administrators, providing opportunities for growth both within and beyond our walls.

The intended results of Building Blocks, spanning the initiative’s two-year duration, are to:

- develop a training curriculum, aligned with specific career or managerial requirements, populated with both internal and external courses that can realistically be supported by the Museum; and

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- Increase cross-departmental collaboration, goal and information sharing
- formalize training and development processes for all staff;
- make individual employee goal-setting and identification of job enrichment activities part of the regular performance assessment cycle;
- and task employees' managers with helping facilitate professional development opportunities and following up on progress.

The Studio Museum's growth has been a steady accumulation of strength and success. The last five years have seen dramatic changes for the institution, including investments in technology, increased program output, growing recognition and a visitorship reflective of the Museum's dual role as a global art institution with a culturally specific identity. Now, more than ever, we need to retain and properly train staff members to ensure that our growth continues intelligently and in a manner that is sustainable.

### **Project Work Plan**

*The Museum can improve staff development by enhancing the structure for training and development...Develop a training curriculum, aligned with specific managerial requirements.*  
-Booz Allen Hamilton, STEPPING STONES 2010.

In 2008, the Museum received funding from The Institute for Museum and Library Services in support of professional development which included a museum-wide staff survey carried out by the consultant Booz Allen Hamilton. The above recommendation by Booz Allen, came as a result of feedback from staff asking for more support in their roles as managers, and in the context of being given greater responsibility without adequate training or acknowledgement. The survey revealed that the middle management track, a relatively new one for the Museum, was where there existed the most expressed need. It is also the track that is charged with carrying out the institution's goals outlined in its current Strategic Plan, which seeks to "ensure [Studio Museum in Harlem's] rightful place as a premier cultural institution."

Middle Management at the Museum consists of approximately 13 positions across six departments, including Curatorial, Public Programs, Education, Development, Communications, Technology and Operations. For Building Blocks staff development will be organized from the standpoint of The Big Picture, Organizational Culture and Leadership. The initiative will focus on constructing an organizational calendar, offering management planning workshops, developing protocol and written training manuals, developing an Independent Study Process and Mentorship. Each serve as essential elements in supporting and strengthening this growing staff track. Certificates of Accomplishment will factor into training as Managers are expected to successfully achieve certain benchmarks. The Management Planning curriculum will be carried out in four sessions, beginning in November and leading up to the April budget presentation for the Board of Trustee's Finance Committee. Sessions would be broken down into Leadership; Planning and Fiscal management; HR Process and Supervision. Concepts such as Idea Sharing, Goal Planning, and New Program Development would be presented, along with such topics as budget; purchasing and negotiating; hiring, and interviewing and supervising staff. The Management Planning sessions would be carried out by the Museum's HR department in partnership with management consultant DKBWAVE Training and Consulting, who would collaborate on some of the presentations, as well as help transform the trainings into written materials.

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In addition to the Management Planning curriculum, quarterly trainings in Technology, i.e. beginner, intermediate, advanced Outlook; MS Office, Excel, Word and PowerPoint would be offered. Elective courses in Time Management; Incident Reporting; and Quality Assurance would be offered bi-annually by both current HR staff as well as outside consultants. As part of an Independent Study curriculum, on-line tutorials and help manuals would supplement elective courses as a way to offer managers options for professional development on their own time and in a preferred format. Finally, conference attendance would be a benefit made more readily available to the management team.

As a staff development project, Building Blocks will be managed through Operations at Studio Museum, overseen by Deputy Director Sheila McDaniel as part of the HR effort. The Deputy Director will be supported by her team, including HR assistant Dennell Jones, Director of Technology Elijah Morgan and a new and dedicated staff position of In-Reach Manager, hired specifically to help carry out the initiatives Building Blocks. Probably the most important 'takeaway' from Stepping Stones in 2008 was the decision to absorb the responsibilities of a dedicated person managing the project among existing staff. For Building Blocks we have taken that lesson to heart and made the position of In-Reach Manager a required component to the project. The In-Reach Manager position will serve as the point person for Building Blocks, communicating the projects goals internally, coordinating among the various departments, and ensuring the outcomes of the initiative, including the building of a professional development infrastructure at the Museum.

The timing for Building Blocks is also opportune. In addition to demographic shifts taking place within Harlem, there is also a Leadership change occurring among the Harlem Culturals. The Studio Museum in Harlem is emerging as a 'elder' in the shifting landscape and requests for greater involvement and mentorship have increased. Building Blocks provides a vehicle for collaboration and outreach in a meaningful way. As a result, the Museum will open up certain Building Blocks training sessions to our partners and peers in Harlem—discussions led by our Director and key staff will be held in the Museum theater and staff from Harlem cultural institutions will be invited to audit them. This will allow us to share the learning content of our project and our anecdotal assessment of the initiative and lessons learned. Also, an evaluation in the form of a White Paper will be shared with peers and partners through a variety of channels, including the convening for IMLS grantees.

### **Project Results**

Building Blocks aims for an institution that is more adaptive to internal and external changes; supervisors with stronger professional skills that will be valuable throughout their careers; a management structure conducive to effectively and efficiently carrying out the Museum's mission; and the technical capacity to deliver our programs and services to the community. The program focuses on three principal outcomes:

- Increased leadership skills among the Museum's middle-management staff
- Increased presence as an incubator for talent into the arts community
- Increased engagement with our audience, especially within Harlem

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The project is an investment in the human capital of the Museum, an opportunity to develop a leadership pool and increase staff engagement. We realize that middle-management within the Museum's HR continuum needs to be addressed. Although the Museum by some standards is considered small, we are still large enough that we do support an entry, mid and senior level hierarchy, which requires an expanded and dedicated HR effort. In some ways, the institutional leap from the year 2000 to 2005, when the Museum's budget doubled, still impacts our efforts around capacity, staffing and infrastructure—and the middle manager track is where the growth spurt is still most significantly felt. Building Blocks will address this challenge not only by increasing middle-manager confidence through leadership training, but by defining the role and importance of middle-managers in the Museum's work.

The project also contributes to our goal of fostering new talent within the arts community. The outcome of our earlier IMLS-funded Stepping Stones reflects our success as a training ground for administrators of color in the field—several interns from the program are now on staff at the Museum including other leading art institutions, a testament to the value and excellence of our mentorship programs. Building Blocks follows this model, but focuses on the next level of administrators, locating, mentoring and supporting the next generation.

Most importantly, Building Blocks will help us to better serve and engage with our audience, progressing “from curatorial excellence to institutional excellence” as we move to the next chapter in the Museum's current strategic plan. As the Museum seeks to make its walls more ‘porous’ and engage new audiences, it needs a staff able to articulate a unified message, and a management team able to independently steer their individual departments towards a unified goal. With a structure in place that takes into account realities such as staff turnover and a shifting organizational map, the Museum will be able to strengthen and expand programming to meet community needs, to weather and capitalize on inevitable changes, and to pursue our strategic goals:

- To continue building a world-class museum that will enhance and perpetuate Harlem's status as a major cultural hub and destination;
- To increase sustained public participation in our programs through the dynamic exhibitions and programs that fulfill our mission;
- To enhance relationships with diverse communities both within and outside of Harlem; and
- To continue building a reflective education practice that makes art relevant for all visitors and moves beyond exposure to long-term engagement.

Thanks to both the final recommendations and audience data gathered by consultants Booz Allen Hamilton and LaPlaca Cohen, the Museum has baseline information and survey templates from which to carry out an evaluation of Building Blocks. At the start of the project, staff will take part in an online survey the results of which will be used for comparison at the conclusion of the project in 2015. To measure progress during the implementation of the program, evaluations and surveys will also be conducted at regular intervals and after regularly scheduled training sessions.

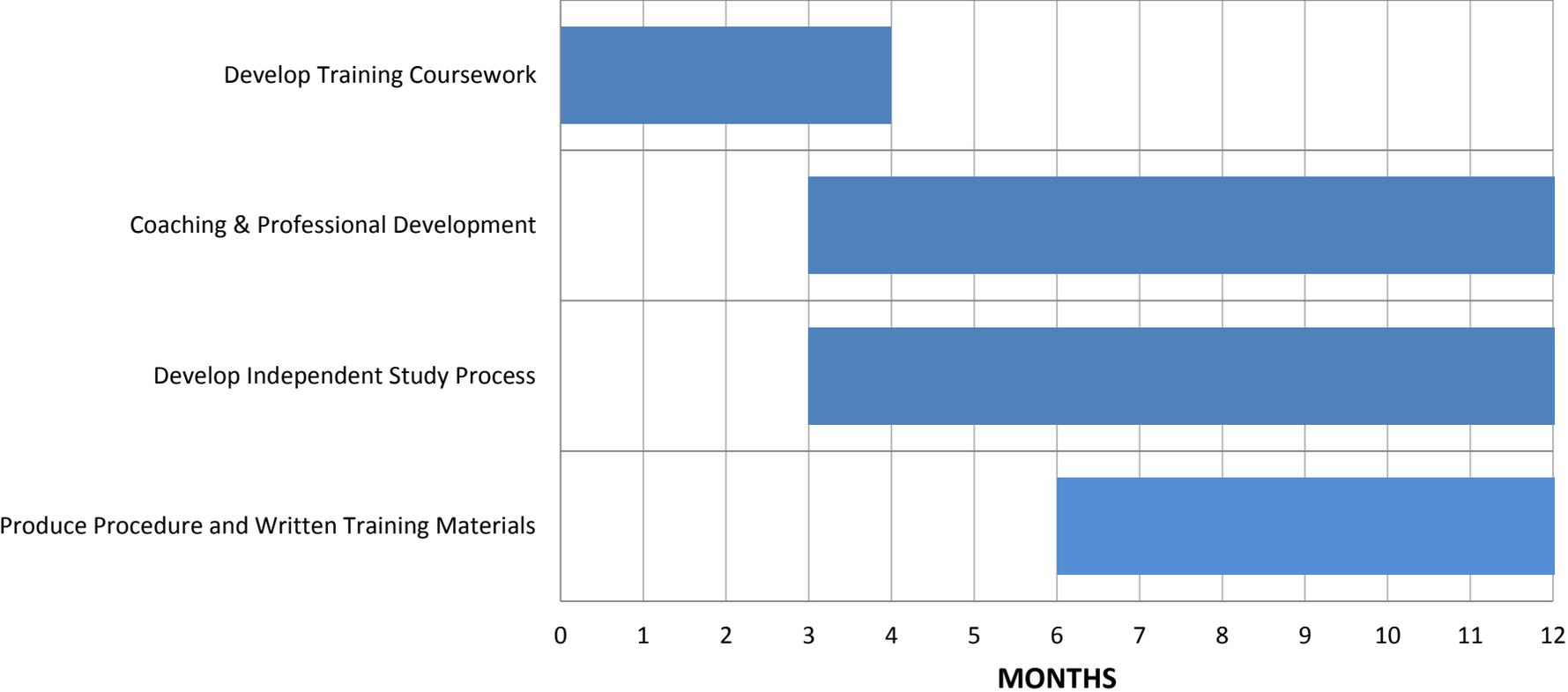
In order to ensure the sustainability of the project, in addition to acquiring written materials at the conclusion of the grant period, managers will also be asked to lead trainings as part of their jobs. During the Museum's bi-monthly new staff orientations, managers will be required to give

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presentations on topics relating to their respective roles within the Museum, i.e. Collection Management, Social Networking, Fundraising, to name a few.

At the conclusion of the grant the Museum would like to be in a position where we can move forward on the directives of the Museum's leadership, including that of our Board of Trustees. The impact internally will be a more stable working environment, increased capacity to adjust to change, and a more satisfied staff that benefits and learns from the strengthened skills of middle-management. The impact for our community will be a world-class museum that will enhance and perpetuate Harlem's status as a major cultural hub and destination; increased public participation in our programs; strong partnerships with cultural and community service organizations both within and outside of Harlem; and an education practice that makes art relevant for all visitors and moves beyond exposure to long-term engagement.

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**Schedule of Completion Year 1**



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