



Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

Sample Application MH-00-14-0020-14

Maryland African American Museum Corporation

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$69,674
Amount of cost share:	\$72,266

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture (Maryland African American Museum Corporation)

ABSTRACT

In accordance with and in support of its mission to be the premier experience and best resource for information and inspiration about the lives of African American Marylanders, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture (Lewis Museum) is seeking funds from IMLS' Museum Grant for African American History and Culture to support the Bridge to Museums Initiative (BMI). The requested funds will be dispersed across three target areas from 9/1/2014 - 8/31/2016 and will support the hiring of a curatorial graduate student intern (an 8-month position in Year One) that will work closely with the Chief Curator and the Assistant Curator and assist in the day-to-day curatorial operations, administration and research. The intern will also have multiple opportunities to gain knowledge in Collections Management and Exhibition Design by assisting in the production of temporary Special Exhibitions and planning for the Museum's Tenth-Anniversary. This internship continues the Museum's goal to attract new staff to African American museum practice and provide them with the expertise needed to sustain them in the field. The BMI will also establish a Postdoctoral Fellowship in African American History (a 10-month position in Year Two) in collaboration with the Center for Africana Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). The Fellow will spend a majority of their time working with the Chief Curator at the Lewis Museum and will have library privileges and an additional work space at the Center. In addition to receiving hands-on learning in curatorial practice and collections, the Fellow will research and write articles primarily for the general public that focus on topics in African American history, museum collections research, and upcoming exhibitions; and will host two public talks that highlight civic and cultural engagement as related to their Museum research. Finally, the BMI will establish a Professional Development Fund (a two-year initiative) that will allow staff at all levels to take advantage of training programs pertinent to their areas of expertise, from collections care, to donor management systems, to museum shop integration, to scholarly topics in African American history, as offered through national and regional conferences for museum professionals. These three projects—though they are all behind the scenes—will help to improve the quality of the Museum experience for the patrons by bolstering and strengthening the talent and expertise of its staff. The BMI is uniquely crafted to help to bridge the gap between scholars, the local community and the Museum by establishing partnerships and hosting opportunities for community engagement and intergenerational conversations. The Museum understands that at this critical time, on the eve of its Tenth-Anniversary, we must work harder to strengthen the internal core of the organization so that we can better serve our audiences. The BMI is the next step in the Museum's long-term commitment to bringing Maryland African American history and culture to life through its permanent galleries, educational programs, and its experienced and talented staff.

By the end of the BMI, three benchmarks will have been met: the Curatorial Intern will have gained hands-on experience working in a museum and will be prepared to work in a museum in an entry-level research and support position; the Postdoctoral Fellow will have advanced their scholarly research, hosted two community talks and a presentation to the staff, and will be well-equipped to work as an Assistant Curator; and, the Museum staff, after two years of multiple professional development experiences, will have hosted mini-workshops for their colleagues to share what they have learned and will actively seek to assume positions of leadership within the various museum associations.

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Project Justification

In accordance with and in support of its mission to be the premier experience and best resource for information and inspiration about the lives of African American Marylanders, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture (Lewis Museum) is seeking funds from Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Museum Grant for African American History and Culture to support the Bridge to Museums Initiative (BMI). The requested funds will be dispersed across three target areas from September 1, 2014 – August 31, 2016 and will support the hiring of a graduate student Curatorial Intern that will work closely with the Chief Curator and the Assistant Curator and assist in the day-to-day curatorial operations, administration and research. Additionally, the BMI will establish a Postdoctoral Fellowship in African American History in collaboration with the Center for Africana Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). Finally, the BMI will establish a Professional Development Fund that will allow staff at all levels to take advantage of training programs pertinent to their areas of expertise, from collections care, to donor management systems, to museum shop integration, as well as participate and present at national and regional conferences for museum professionals.

These three projects—though they are all behind the scenes—will help to improve the quality of the Museum experience for the patrons through bolstering and strengthening the talent and expertise of its staff. The BMI is uniquely crafted to help to bridge the gap between the burgeoning scholars, the local community and the Museum by establishing partnerships and hosting opportunities for community engagement and intergenerational conversations. The Museum understands that at this critical time on the eve of our tenth anniversary, we must work harder to strengthen the internal core of the organization so that we can better serve the community. The BMI is the next step in the Museum’s long-term commitment to bringing Maryland African American history and culture to life through our permanent galleries, special exhibitions, educational programs, and experienced and talented staff.

We are the second largest museum of African American history in the United States and though we are less than ten years old, we have already established ourselves as a premier archival and cultural site that actively collects, preserves, interprets, documents, and shares the history and experiences of African American Marylanders, as well as exhibits and presents the breadth of African American art and culture. The Museum has been committed to working closely with national and international scholars and researchers providing them with in-house access to the Museum’s Resource Center and its programs in genealogy and oral history. Before the Museum opened its doors in 2005, we began providing internships in all departments. We have partnered with other organizations to create project specific paid internships in collections care and management (with the National Park Service Cultural Resources Diversity Internship Program), curatorial research (with Morgan State University, via an IMLS grant to Morgan), and in exhibition development (with Maryland Institute College of Art). The Museum seeks to expand its contribution to the academic community, and particularly to participating in the production of new knowledge in African American history by

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engaging with scholars at local universities such as Johns Hopkins University and University of Maryland Baltimore County. Finally, as the Museum continues to grow, the staff understands that in order for it to continue to be a hub that attracts and retains talented staff, financial support must be made available for staff members to participate in job-specific training workshops, professional development programs, and attend museum industry conferences.

At the end of FY 2013 (June 2013), the Museum was moving in a positive direction, as evidenced by the ability to seek and fill previously vacant leadership positions in Marketing and Development. Staff at all levels, including those involved in front desk, facilities, security, educational, and curatorial operations, re-committed the museum to actively practicing our passion for serving our communities—local, state, regional, national, and international. Our reflection was creative, visionary, and energizing. We planned ways in which our exhibitions and programs could have a greater impact, including by increasing our community engagement, relevance, and scholarly contribution to the field of African American studies. The BMI builds upon our commitment to being a community anchor for cultural opportunities, historical research, and public engagement. Our proposal seeks to attract and retain professionals to African American museums and to strengthen the knowledge, skills, and other expertise of current staff at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum.

Project Work Plan

The Chief Curator, Michelle Wilkinson, will plan, implement, oversee, and manage the activities related to the Bridge to Museums Initiative, which includes the hiring and mentoring (along with the Assistant Curator) of a graduate student Curatorial Intern; selecting, mentoring and training a Postdoctoral Fellow; and providing oversight for a Professional Development Fund for staff training and internal mini-workshops.

Chief Curator Michelle Wilkinson, who is also the Museum's Director of Collections and Exhibitions, received her Ph.D. from the Graduate Institute in Liberal Arts, with a specialization in African American Studies from Emory University in 2001. She is a 2012 Fellow of the Center for Curatorial Leadership. Her curatorial experience includes work at the Studio Museum in Harlem and National Gallery of Art, where she served as the expert scholar in African American studies and visual art for a comprehensive exhibition on Romare Bearden. She further honed her experience by working as an Exhibition Consultant at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC. Since arriving at the Museum in 2007, Wilkinson has curated over 15 exhibitions, including *A People's Geography: The Spaces of African American Life* and the critically *Material Girls: Contemporary Black Women Artists* (winner of "Best Exhibition 2011" in *Baltimore Magazine*). Her work in African American studies coupled with her experience supervising curatorial staff will allow her to successfully oversee the Postdoctoral Fellowship, the Curatorial Internship, and the Professional Development Fund.

Additional project personnel will include Assistant Curator Asantewa Boakyewa, who will mentor both the Fellow and the Intern. Prior to joining the Lewis Museum staff, Boakyewa worked as an administrator at Johns Hopkins' Center for Africana Studies,

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where she administered grants and fellowships; hired, trained, and supervised undergraduate and graduate students; and developed and coordinated multiple complex year-round research and training institutes and artist residencies for the Center. She has also served as a Library Specialist with Johns Hopkins University conducting research in the archives of the *Afro-American Newspapers*. Boakyewa has guest curated independently and served as a Curatorial Assistant, working with Michelle Wilkinson on the Museum's *Material Girls* exhibition.

At various points throughout the project, the Chief Curator will involve other members of the Lewis Museum staff including Lisa Crawley, the Resource Center Manager and Dr. A. Skipp Sanders, Executive Director, both of whom will serve on the Postdoctoral Fellowship Selection Committee. Since the Center for Africana Studies is serving as an additional host site for the Postdoctoral Fellow, the Chair of the Center, Dr. Tyson King-Meadows, Ph.D., will serve on the Postdoctoral Fellowship Selection Committee. Additionally, Dr. Karsonya Wise Whitehead, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Communication and African and African American Studies and a member of the Museum's Education Task Force will also join the Selection Committee.

With the Professional Development Fund, since the monies are limited, Wilkinson has requested information from staff regarding the most significant conferences (and those which carry the most relevant workshops) for their positions. The list of conferences reflects staff preferences, as well as balances the professional development needs among multiple departments to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to attend a workshop, present a paper, or participate in sessions at a conference in their area of expertise.

With the Curatorial Internship, the Postdoctoral Fellowship, and the Professional Development Fund, the BMI will have three independent projects that help to fuel and rejuvenate the Museum and our staff:

a) Curatorial Intern (\$9600): During Year One, the Curatorial Intern(s) will work closely with the Chief Curator and the Assistant Curator over an eight-month period, based on the academic year. It may be possible for the intern in the fall to continue in the spring semester; if not, there will be a new intern in the spring. The intern will be a graduate student (masters or doctoral level) who is concentrating in African American History or Studies, American Studies, museum studies, or in a related area. The intern also will have opportunities to gain knowledge in Collections Management and Exhibition Design, by participating in weekly department meetings and, in a limited way, contributing to ongoing projects led by the Registrar and Collections Manager and the Exhibits Manager, who are the other staff members within the Department of Collections and Exhibitions. The intern will also provide hands-on assistance in the production of a temporary special exhibition, *Tom Miller: Collector's Edition*, about the African American artist known for his painted furniture. The exhibition brings together the holdings from disparate collections from across the country that include the late Maryland artist's oeuvre; this loan-based exhibition will provide opportunities for the intern to learn about the curatorial and registration functions of museums. The intern will

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also attend the Association for the Study of African American Life and History Conference with the Assistant Curator, and will help with a small reinstallation project in the museum's permanent exhibition galleries planned for the Museum's tenth anniversary. This internship continues the Museum's practice of introducing new scholars to museum professions generally and to an African American museum specifically, while providing them with the expertise needed to sustain them in the field.

b) Postdoctoral Fellowship (\$37,500): During Year Two, the Postdoctoral Fellow (who will be selected in the spring of 2015) will join the Chief Curator and begin training as an Assistant Curator. This is a ten-month position for a scholar who specializes in either African American history, African American Studies, African Diaspora Studies or a related area—these are critical areas that will assist the Museum as it seeks to remain current and connected to what is happening in the fields of African American history and African Diaspora Studies. This is a unique Postdoctoral Fellowship, as the Fellow will a majority of their time working onsite with the Chief Curator at the Lewis Museum and a portion of their time (up to 20%) researching, writing, and working on their own projects with the support of local universities and programs, such as the Center for Africana Studies and the University of Maryland, Baltimore Country, where the Fellow will have library privileges.

In addition to learning about museum practice, the Fellow will participate in curatorial and collections-based research; in particular, the Fellow will work with staff in producing the special exhibition, *Ruth Starr Rose and the African American Community on Maryland's Eastern Shore*. The Fellow will research and write articles primarily for the general public that focus on topics in African American history, or highlight museum collections and upcoming exhibitions. The Fellow will host two public talks that bring their Museum research into the public sphere. These talks will be coordinated with local civic and cultural organizations, providing a link between the Museum and its diverse audiences. At the end of the Fellowship, the Fellow will host one internal workshop for staff members at the Lewis Museum highlighting the projects that they worked with throughout the year.

c) Professional Development Fund (\$15,074): Over the two-year grant cycle, the BMI will establish a Professional Development Fund that will support various staff members so that they can attend workshops, present papers, and generally participate in national and regional conferences for museum professionals, including but not limited to the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), the Association of African American Museums (AAAM), the Mid-Atlantic Museums Association (MAAM), the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), and the Small Museums Association (SMA) conferences. Selected staff will attend various conferences and will be charged with the responsibility of sharing with they have learned with their colleagues and with finding ways to integrate this material into the Museum. Staff will also be encouraged to assume leadership roles within these organizations as the Museum continues to actively seek out partnerships with Museums around the state and around the country.

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Project Results

By the end of the Bridge to Museums Initiative, three benchmarks will have been met: the Curatorial Intern will have gained hands-on experience working in a museum and will be prepared to work in a museum in an entry-level research and support position; the Postdoctoral Fellow will have advanced their scholarly research, hosted two community talks and mini-workshop for the Museum Staff, and will be well-equipped to work as an Assistant Curator; and, the Museum staff, after two years of multiple professional development experiences, will have hosted mini-workshops for their colleagues to share what they have learned and will actively seek to assume positions of leadership within the various organizations.

These benchmarks adequately address and satisfy the following IMLS target areas: to promote museums and libraries as strong community anchors that enhance civic engagement, cultural opportunities, and economic vitality through attracting and retaining professionals with the skills needed to strengthen African American museums (Postdoctoral Fellow and Curatorial Intern); attracting new staff to African American museum practice and providing them with the expertise needed to sustain them in the museum field (Postdoctoral Fellow and Curatorial Intern); developing or strengthening knowledge, skills, and other expertise of current staff at African American museums (Professional Development Fund).

We recognize that the Bridge to Museums Initiative is a short-term solution for our long-term goals, but as we move forward, we will use this experience as a model for funding and implementing an annual Postdoctoral Fellowship program (possibly through outside sources). Since we regularly host Curatorial Interns and support professional development on a limited basis, our plan is to be able to continue to provide these opportunities at comparable funding levels to those requested in this grant.

YEAR ONE: SEPTEMBER 1, 2014 – AUGUST 31, 2015

Curatorial Intern:

September 2014 – July 2015: Hiring and Internship Cycle

1. September 1st – 19th: Advertise for Curatorial Intern; Interview and Hire Curatorial Intern
 - a. Applications accepted on rolling basis until September 19th
 - b. Chief Curator and Assistant Curator will interview and make a hiring recommendation to the Executive Director
2. September 24th – 28th: Attend the Association for the Study of African American Life and History Conference with Assistant Curator
3. October 1st: Curatorial Intern begins (20 hours per week) and assists with small installation project in Museums' permanent exhibit
4. Spring 2015: Assist in producing a special exhibition, "Tom Miller: Collector's Edition"
5. June 30th: Curatorial Internship ends

Postdoctoral Fellow:

September 2014 – August 2015: Advertising, Selection, and Relocation

1. September 1st - December 12th: Advertise for Postdoctoral Fellow
2. January 15th: Application cycle ends
3. February 1st – 20th: Review Postdoctoral Fellow Applications
 - a. Postdoctoral Fellow Selection Committee: Lewis Museum: Executive Director, Chief Curator (Chair), Assistant Curator; Resource Center Manager; Chair and Associate Professor of Africana Studies, UMBC; Assistant Professor of Communication and African and African History
 - b. Committee will recommend three finalists to be interviewed and hired by the Executive Director, Chief Curator, and Assistant Curator
4. March 1st – 15th: Interview and Select Postdoctoral Fellow
 - a. Interviews will be conducted by phone or Skype unless the applicant is located within the Baltimore metropolitan area
5. April – August: Assistant Curator will administer for the Postdoctoral Fellow (process paperwork, organize contracts, set up health care, etc.)
6. July 1st – August 15th: (If necessary) Postdoctoral Fellow relocates to Baltimore, MD

Staff Professional Development

1. August 6th – 9th: Association of African American Museums Conference
 - a. Attending: Executive Director, Chief Curator, Assistant Curator, Education Program Coordinator
2. September 17th – 20th: American Association of State and Local History Conference
 - a. Attending: Chief Curator, Resource Center Manager
3. September 24th – 28th: Association for the Study of African American Life and History
 - a. Attending: Assistant Curator, Curatorial Intern
4. February 16th – 18th: Small Museums Association Conference
 - a. Attending: Visitor and Volunteer Services Manager

YEAR TWO: SEPTEMBER 1, 2015 – AUGUST 31, 2016

Postdoctoral Fellow:

September 2015 – June 2016: Fellowship Cycle

1. September 1st: Postdoctoral Fellowship begins
 - a. Postdoctoral Fellow will work with Assistant Curator throughout the Fellowship Cycle to receive approval to purchase \$1,500 worth of research materials (books, conference registrations, academic subscriptions, and modest travel to and from various research sites) – Stipend must be used by May 30th, 2016.
 - b. Health Insurance stipend begins
2. Fall 2015
 - a. Assist Chief Curator and Assistant Curator in producing a special exhibition, “Ruth Starr Rose and the African American Community on Maryland’s Eastern Shore”
 - b. Attend the Association for the Study of African American Life and History Conference with Chief Curator and Assistant Curator
3. January 2015: Present first community talk on various forms of African American history that are represented in the museum's permanent exhibition, including politics, community history, intellectual history, education, and American enslavement
4. June 2015: Present second community talk on various forms of African American history that are represented in the museum's permanent exhibition, including politics, community history, intellectual history, education, and American enslavement: June
5. June 30th, 2015: Postdoctoral Fellowship ends

Staff Professional Development

1. April 24-26: Mid-Atlantic Archives Regional Archives Conference
 - a. Attending: Resource Center Manager
2. April 26-29: American Alliance of Museums Conference
 - a. Attending: Assistant Curator, Visitor and Volunteer Services Manager, Registrar and Collections Manager
3. August 2015: Association of African American Museums Conference
 - a. Attending: Executive Director, Chief Curator, Education Program Coordinator, Director of Marketing
4. September 21st – 27th: Association for the Study of African American Life and History
 - a. Attending: Chief Curator, Postdoctoral Fellow
5. October 2015: Mid-Atlantic Museums Association Conference
 - a. Attending: Visitor and Volunteer Services Manager