

Program Overview – Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Inspire! Grants for Small Museums is designed to help small museums implement projects addressed in their strategic plans. The grant is a special initiative of the [Museums for America](#) program.

Applicants were asked to consider whether their organization is a good fit for this special initiative for small museums and discuss a range of attributes that describe their organization, including, but not limited to:

- size of the staff and volunteer corps;
- operating budget and sources of revenue;
- number and types of objects in the collection;
- size of facility and property;
- types and numbers of audiences served; and
- size relative to other organizations of the same discipline or within the same geographic region.

Grant Amount

\$5,000 to \$50,000. Cost sharing is not required.

Project Categories

There are three project categories within Inspire:

Lifelong Learning

IMLS supports the unique ability of museums to encourage exploration, analysis, and questioning for people of all ages and backgrounds and to foster discovery, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving. We welcome applications for projects that position museums as unique teaching and inquiry-focused institutions within today's formal and informal learning ecosystem. Successful projects will provide high-quality, inclusive educational opportunities that address particular audience needs. We encourage projects that support cross-disciplinary and inquiry-based methodologies and utilize current research in cognitive and behavioral science as well as best practices developed in museums and other informal learning environments.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- Developing enhanced museum resources that foster early, digital, information, health, financial, media, civic, and other types of literacies;
- Interpretive and educational programs, product development, and delivery;
- Exhibition development, design, and fabrication (non-construction);
- Digital learning resource development, design, and delivery;
- Programs designed for audiences of specific backgrounds, geography, or circumstances (for example, rural communities or persons with disabilities);
- Professional development/training for formal and informal educators;
- Learning partnerships with schools and development of museum resources and programs in support of K-12 school curricula;

- Learning partnerships with schools and other entities and development of museum resources and programs in support of career preparedness and workforce re-entry for all ages;
- Programs and partnership development for out-of-school audiences; and
- Program evaluation, visitor studies, and market analysis to guide the development, the redesign and/or effective delivery of learning experiences.

Community Anchors and Catalysts

IMLS promotes the role of museums as essential partners in addressing the needs of their communities by leveraging their expertise, knowledge, physical space, technology, and other resources. IMLS encourages applications for projects that empower museums to transform their roles in their communities from being community resources to being community anchors or catalysts. We welcome applications that strengthen a museum's capacity for improving social wellbeing such as through civic engagement and contributing to the creation of livable, sustainable communities. Successful projects will develop and implement new approaches to community collaboration to tackle local challenges. We encourage professional development opportunities for museum staff to understand and apply current practices in community collaboration and asset-based community development.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- Creating trusted spaces for community learning, debate, and dialogue;
- Building new partnerships to strengthen community connections through exhibitions, programs, and events;
- Conducting community-focused planning activities;
- Implementing audience-focused studies and evaluation;
- Applying cross-sector partnership development models and programs to define shared visions for community improvement; and
- Working with the community to create measures and gather information to understand project progress and impacts.

Collections Stewardship and Public Access

IMLS supports the role of museums of all types and sizes as trusted stewards of museum collections as the natural, cultural, artistic, historical, and scientific foundations of our shared heritage and knowledge. Through the careful and responsible management of collections and their associated documentation, museums facilitate access to information, ideas, and connections for people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests. We welcome applications for projects designed to maximize the long-term preservation of collections as well as those that seek to strengthen a museum's ability to manage and shape its collections through curatorial proficiency, the development of well-grounded policies, and project-based technical training for museum staff, volunteers, and interns. We encourage museums to contribute to shared, sustainable systems and networks to make their collections and associated resources more accessible, to facilitate discovery of collections and related information, and to deepen engagement with those collections.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- Planning for the management, care, and conservation of collections;
- Cataloging, inventorying, documenting, and registration of collections;
- Implementing and enhancing Collections Management Systems in a sustainable manner;
- Planning and initiating digitization activities, including creating digital tools, training, and platforms that allow expanded public access to and use of the museum's collection and related information;
- Developing partnerships that address barriers to accessing museum collections and related information;
- Conducting conservation surveys and assessments;
- Executing conservation treatments;
- Rehousing collections; and
- Planning and implementing environmental improvements (non-construction) for museum collections storage and exhibit areas.