



## Museums Empowered

Sample Application ME-249358-OMS-21  
Project Category: Diversity and Inclusion

### Baltimore Museum of Art

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$250,000
Amount of cost share:	\$250,890

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:  
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/me-249358-oms-21>

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

## **1. Project Justification**

### **What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?**

The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) requests a grant of \$250,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support two years of an ongoing project to increase inclusive design and accessibility by developing staff competencies through a series of hands-on workshops and strategies designed to effect scalable and sustainable change. A cross-departmental project team made up of members from the BMA's senior leadership and Human Resources staff will be led by IMLS Project Director Gamynne Guillotte, Chief Education Officer. As an important cornerstone of the BMA's Diversity, Accessibility, Equity, and Inclusion (DAEI) work, the project addresses the high priority need to (1) increase all staff's baseline understanding of inclusive design and accessibility and how it applies to their role at the BMA; (2) develop practical tools and policies for implementing inclusive design within all BMA outputs, including public programs, digital and web access, exhibition interpretation, and visitor services; (3) create an evaluation system able to measure progress and build on lessons learned to increase the effectiveness of inclusive design at the BMA.

The BMA was founded on the belief that access to art and ideas is integral to a vibrant and healthy civic life. As this belief remains our core value, the Board of Trustees adopted a new strategic plan in 2018 that embodies a commitment to artistic excellence and social equity across all aspects of operation to create a museum welcoming to all. Equity and diversity are central to all strategic plan objectives, with the BMA developing an ambitious three-year DAEI plan to further its goal of creating the most equitable, just, diverse, dynamic, and relevant art museum possible for the City of Baltimore. The BMA has placed considerable emphasis on making the institution more welcoming to all audiences—diversifying exhibitions and programs to emphasize the creative output of artists of color, female artists, and others underrepresented in the traditional art historical canon. The BMA has made great strides in addressing the lack of race and gender diversity in its galleries and in successfully shifting its visitor demographics to better reflect those of the City. However, when evaluating this progress alongside the tenants of DAEI work, the BMA found a glaring absence in terms of accessibility. Anecdotal feedback from staff and visitors has made it clear that, while the BMA meets ADA requirements for exhibitions and public spaces, a barrier to entry remains for many visitors with disabilities. The BMA cannot meet its goal of being welcoming to all without thorough consideration of inclusive design and disability access.

In FY20, the BMA engaged Sina Bahram and Corey Timpson of Prime Access Consulting, Inc., (PAC) an inclusive design firm that has partnered with museums across the United States and Canada, to work on the development and implementation of an inclusive design and accessibility roadmap. PAC led place-setting workshops over two days in October 2020 for all staff on inclusive design tactics, lessons, and practical application for exhibitions, programming, digital installations, and in-person and remote audience engagement. Throughout FY21, the BMA will work with PAC to create a roadmap capable of ensuring the sustainable incorporation of an inclusive design and accessibility practice across the Museum. An Inclusive Design Working (IDW) Group, made up of a cross-disciplinary senior and junior staff from all departments, will be created by summer 2021. The group will meet twice a month and be integral participants in all grant-supported activities. Additionally, a Community Disability Advisory (CDA) Group, will be established by the start of the grant period, with BMA staff identifying and working with community stakeholders in FY21 to form the group.

Building on this work, the IMLS-supported project phase will include (1) continued twice monthly meetings of the IDW Group and participation in all workshops; (2) bi-monthly meetings of the CDA Group, with participation in select workshops; (3) a series of professional development workshops/activities designed to build staff competency in the creation of inclusive and accessible public programs and the implementation of two public programs; (4) skill building workshops/activities for in-house Marketing and Communications staff around all elements of digital accessibility; (5) skill building workshops/activities for cross-departmental staff

around inclusive interpretative practices for exhibitions and the application of lessons learned within two pilot exhibitions; (6) skill building workshops/activities for cross-departmental staff, with an emphasis on front-of-house staff, on best practices in accessible and inclusive welcoming strategies and communication methodologies, and the application of lessons learned within front-of-house spaces; (7) the creation of a set of inclusive design standards that address digital, physical, consent, and experiential inclusivity; (8) professional development through staff participation in annual Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disabilities (LEAD) conferences; (9) the formalization of inclusive evaluation metrics with a series of museum-wide Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) created to inform future work.

### **What other studies, plans, or best practices have you used in developing your project?**

Successful examples of in-gallery affordances at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and its related Coyote project, The Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum through the Smithsonian Accessibility Innovation Fund (SAIF) projects, the National Gallery of Art, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum have helped staff get a sense of what is possible in the BMA's galleries, while the BMA's successful programmatic collaboration with The Arc Baltimore, an organization supporting individuals with developmental disabilities, has been instrumental in expanding the project's scope to include public programs. As the project developed, PAC's commitment to situating accessibility work within larger equity frameworks made them the clear consultant choice. This shared commitment between PAC and the BMA was central given the Museum's broader DAEI work. The project has also been informed by consultations with Amanda Cachia, San Diego-based independent curator and critic whose works include *Curating Access: Disability Art Activism and Creative Accommodations*, and Carmen Papalia, a socially-engaged artist from within the disability community in Vancouver.

### **Who or what will benefit from your project?**

The project will benefit BMA staff and in-person and online visitors. Staff, interns, and volunteers from every department will participate in one or more of the scaffolded workshops/activities, learning how to incorporate inclusive design and accessibility into their job, whether the output is exhibitions, programs, or visitor experience. The project will benefit Baltimore's disability community, its arts community, and the space where they intersect. The BMA's primary public is the City of Baltimore, a majority minority city, and the larger Baltimore Metropolitan area which consists of more than 2.7 million residents. Across Maryland, approximately 21.5% of adults have some type of disability—a significant audience the BMA is not currently serving to the fullest.<sup>1</sup> The BMA recognizes that much work remains to be done to create a truly inclusive experience for visitors of differing abilities beyond having ADA-compliant facilities. By increasing its staff's capacity to create spaces and experiences that are welcoming to different kinds of bodies and abilities, the BMA is establishing multimodal pathways to the permanent collection and exhibitions that will benefit its visitorship as a whole.

### **How will your project advance your institution's strategic plan?**

In the BMA's strategic plan, the mandate to create and implement a comprehensive accessibility roadmap is explicitly listed within Key Result Areas for Education and Public Programs. Additionally, the project's implementation will reach across the following three main tenets of the strategic plan: (1) become a model of best financial practices for museums, maximizing use of the BMA's collection; (2) become a model for putting the values of excellence, equity, and inclusion into professional practice at every level; (3) become an indispensable part of the social and cultural fabric of the Baltimore region by increasing and diversifying our audience. The skills learned by BMA staff will enable them to work more efficiently and create a sustainable way to incorporate inclusive design into projects from beginning to end across all curatorial, educational,

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Disability & Health U.S. State Profile for Maryland, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/maryland.html>

administrative, and operational functions, emphasizing the role of equity and inclusion in all of the BMA’s work while embracing best financial practice. The project will also increase the BMA’s ability to be a relevant, listening, learning, contributing, and inspiring cultural resource for an increasingly diverse audience.

**How will your project address the goals of the Museums Empowered initiative?**

The project expands upon the BMA’s ongoing diversity and equity programmatic initiatives to enact greater structural changes within the institution that will have a dramatic effect on its ability to serve the public. The IDW group will be drawn from all areas—Marketing & Experience, Education, Curatorial Affairs (including exhibition installation, registration, conservation, and curatorial), Finance & Administration, and Advancement—to effect systemic, sustainable change. Professional development workshops planned throughout the grant will increase staff’s ability to create a truly inclusive environment across the BMA.

**How will your project align with the Diversity and Inclusion project category?**

Aligning with the Diversity and Inclusion category, the project will result in a thorough understanding of inclusive design and accessibility and its practical implications across all BMA departments, significantly increasing access and relevance for Baltimore’s disabilities communities and beyond. The project is an important part of the BMA’s commitment to live its mission through all phases of day-to-day operations for all audiences, moving beyond mere rhetoric towards measurable actions with measurable consequences.

**2. Project Work Plan**

**What specific activities, including evaluation, will you carry out?**

Together, the BMA and PAC will implement an ambitious professional development project designed to improve specific visitor-centered outputs. Four skill building modules will take place, one each for Public Programs, Digital Engagement, Interpretation, and Visitor Experiences. Each module will include workshops led by PAC, internal BMA staff working sessions, and a public output, such as a public program or prototypes of in-gallery didactics. While staff with pertinent roles will be identified for participation, workshops will be open to all staff, with accommodations made to allow for maximum participation. The IDW Group will take part in all workshop sessions and the CDA Group will take part in select sessions for each workshop module.

Activity 1–Inclusive Design Working Group Meetings: The newly created IDW Group, a cross-departmental group of approximately 15 senior- and junior-level BMA staff, will meet twice a month and participate in the Public Program Workshops, Digital Engagement Workshops, Interpretation Workshops, and Visitor Experience Workshops. Representing all BMA departments, the group will bring multiple perspectives and workflow considerations to inclusive design changes, the development of protocols for galleries and public spaces, and will play an important role in helping all departments—from obvious ones such as Exhibition Design to less obvious ones such as Finance—understand how their work impacts accessibility at the BMA.

Activity 2–Community Disability Advisory Group Meetings: With members identified in FY21/early FY22, the CDA Group will begin meeting every other month in fall 2022. With approximately ten members from the local community, the group will be purposefully built around differences of ability and perspectives, especially as this relates to intersectionality (e.g. community members of color with differing abilities, caregivers, and other marginalized/traditionally underserved groups). A particular emphasis will be placed on recruiting members from the intersection of Baltimore’s arts and disability advocacy communities. The CDA Group will offer perspectives about upcoming exhibitions, programs, and approaches to inclusivity and accessibility, participating in at least one session per workshop module. All participants will be compensated with grant-

funded honorariums for their time and will commit to a one-year term. The group will help shape the BMA’s ongoing efforts to maintain a sustainable approach to inclusivity for years to come.

Activity 3–Public Program Skill Building: This module will focus on reimagining the BMA’s public programs through a lens of inclusion. PAC will lead two workshop sessions (first multi-day session: March 2022; second: September 2022) for staff from Education, Marketing & Visitor Experience, and Curatorial, as well as the IDW group. Workshops will be hands-on to tackle a variety of practical accommodations for visitors with varying needs, including accessibility affordances such as captions, audio description, inclusive seating, and sign language interpretation, and establishing accessible presentation guidelines and norms. Workshop participants will design and implement two pilot public programs in collaboration with the CDA Group (first program: June 2022; second: December 2022), with staff working sessions taking place between PAC workshops and each public event. The following three standards will be in place here and for all other modules: the same staff members will participate in both workshop sessions to allow them to build on lessons learned from the first pilot output, staff will collectively determine the session schedule, and PAC will provide coaching as needed.

Activity 4–Digital Engagement Skill Building: The BMA is rebranding and relaunching its website, artbma.org, which is anticipated to go live spring 2021. Evaluating artbma.org against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) V2.1 at levels A and AA, PAC has and will continue to consult with the BMA’s in-house web development team on ways to optimize the site’s digital affordances, providing actionable use cases and “homework assignments” to improve functionality throughout the grant period through both an asynchronous review of web accessibility and detailed remediation advice. A series of workshop sessions will take place in 2022 (first multi-day session: January; second: September). Designed for Marketing and Communications staff, and with select participation from the IDW and CDA Groups, they will address issues around implementation details, content considerations, workflow modifications, and procurement practices to enable staff to build and use accessible technological solutions for all visitors. Workshops will also address other BMA-specific technology projects, such as its web-based tour application Go Mobile and social media channels.

Activity 5–Interpretation Skill Building: Inclusive interpretation practices, such as visual description, are a key element of how to compose an inclusive and welcoming experience at the Museum. This module will bring together staff from Curatorial, Exhibition Installation, Education, Marketing & Visitor Experience, and Finance & Administration, alongside the IDW Group and select participation by the CDA Group, for PAC-led workshop sessions (first multi-day session: February 2022; second: March 2023) with hands-on activities in visual description, tactile affordances, sign language-centered content, disability-focused explorations of context, and a variety of multisensory approaches. Staff will continue to meet in working sessions to pilot skills learned in the design and installation of two exhibitions—first, a single media, one-room exhibition to open in September 2022; second, a larger, multi-media one to open in July 2023. The roadmap currently being refined will dictate the final pilot exhibition selections and will be determined in advance of the grant period’s start.

Activity 6 – Visitor Experience Skill Building: Interactions between BMA staff and the public, especially if a visitor identifies as having a disability, are arguably the most vital component in the Museum’s discourse with various communities. All staff will participate in two PAC-led workshop sessions (first multi-day session: March 2022; second: March 2023) on best practices for accessible and inclusive welcoming strategies, communications methodologies, and level-setting. Topics will be tailored for front-of-house staff, who have an overwhelming desire to help but wish to know how best to assist and not offend or cause harm. Such knowledge transfer will also include best practices around the kinds of affordances the BMA can offer to visitors to

enhance the inclusivity of their experience both remotely and on-site, with hands-on activities and subsequent staff working sessions that address practical applications for messaging, path of travel, and gallery experience.

Activity 7–LEAD Conferences: Three cross-departmental BMA staff will attend the LEAD Conference, organized by The Kennedy Center, in August 2022 and 2023. LEAD brings together between 400 to 600 access professionals and the community built around accessibility in the arts for capacity building and to facilitate a community of practice for attendees. BMA staff will participate in both 2022 and 2023 to share out their own access experiences and approaches as well as learn from the larger community.

Activity 8–Development of Inclusive Design Policies and Protocols: To ensure the BMA documents and commits to the expectations it sets for itself and its vendors, BMA staff will work with PAC to co-develop a set of inclusive design standards, to be in place by the grant’s end. These standards will address digital and physical content, as well as experiential inclusivity. They will be specific and actionable, not notional. They will be evaluated by the CDA Group, and ultimately codified into the operational standards and policies of the BMA. They will also have a sustainability approach developed for them so as to keep them relevant and accurate.

Activity 9–Evaluation: An important deliverable of this project will be quantifiable measurements and evaluation of the BMA’s current accessibility posture in order to improve outputs year over year. The BMA will work with PAC throughout on formalizing metrics around inclusion to a series of museum-wide Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), with data gathered in real-time throughout the grant and KPIs informing future resourcing and reporting. Midway through the grant, Slover Linett Audience Research will discuss measures of success and provide an evaluation framework to carry through Year 2 and, at the grant’s completion, will conduct a summative assessment on the project’s impact on staff, the CDA Group, and pilot-output test users.

**What are the risks to the project; have you identified ways to monitor or mitigate risk in the work plan?**

The work plan requires a high level of commitment from all participants. Careful consideration will be given to workshop logistics to ensure the maximum number of staff may participate, whether online and/or in-person. Sequencing of workshops, working sessions, and deliverable dates for hard outputs has also been designed to allow for maximum iterative learning. On the community-side, BMA staff will invest significant time in FY21 to assess interest/commitment levels from potential partners, such as those at The Arc Baltimore and Make Studio, which empowers artists with disabilities. One-year commitments will be required of CDA Group members and annual honorariums provided in consideration of their time. To minimize the risk of trust being broken, BMA project staff will continuously assess partner expectations and correct course accordingly.

**Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?**

As a high-priority part of the BMA’s DAEI work, it will be planned, implemented, and managed by a cross-departmental team of senior staff from Education, Marketing & Visitor Experiences, Curatorial Affairs, and Finance & Administration, with assistance from Human Resources staff. Project Director Guillotte will provide programmatic and budgetary oversight and ensure benchmarks are met according to the schedule of completion, coordinating with staff from Finance & Administration and Advancement. PAC will work closely with the project team on implementation and Slover Linett will provide key evaluation work mid-way and at the end.

**How is the project team organized and structured in a way that is equitable and mutually beneficial?**

The project team reflects every area of operation at the BMA, while the creation of the IDW Group and CDA Group emphasizes the central role of equity in the project’s implementation. It will be crucial for all voices at the BMA to be a part of this process as the Museum builds a sustainable approach to inclusivity and

accessibility. The establishment of the CDA Group in particular underscores the BMA’s intention to walk the talk of inclusion, with any changes at the BMA informed by community stakeholder participation and feedback.

**When and in what sequence will your activities occur?**

Year One—September 1, 2021 to August 31, 2022: If awarded, IMLS funds would support the implementation phase of accessibility work begun in FY21. This would include bi-weekly IDW Group meetings; bi-monthly CDA Group meetings; ongoing web development work and the first PAC-led Digital Engagement workshops in January 2022; the first PAC-led Interpretation workshops in February 2022 and ongoing staff working sessions in anticipation of the first pilot exhibition (opening Year 2); the first PAC-led Public Program workshops in March 2022, ongoing working sessions, and the first pilot public program in June 2022; and the first PAC-led Visitor Services workshops in March 2022 and ongoing working sessions. Concurrent throughout will be the development of inclusive procedures and protocols, with Slover Linett conducting an interim review and evaluation planning. Finally, BMA staff will participate in the August 2022 LEAD Conference.

Year Two—September 1, 2022 to August 31, 2023: The first pilot exhibition will open in September 2022, with ongoing working sessions for the interpretation group, a second set of PAC-led Interpretation workshops in March 2023, and the opening of the second, larger pilot exhibition in July 2023. This year will also include the second set of PAC-led Public Program workshops in September 2022, with ongoing working sessions culminating in the second pilot public program in December 2022; the second set of PAC-led Digital Engagement workshops in September 2022, with ongoing work/spot checks through December 2022; working sessions for visitor services engagement will continue through the second set of PAC-led Visitor Services workshops in March 2023, with final working sessions and implementation through July 2023. Iterative changes will inform a set of inclusive procedures and protocols to be formalized by the grant’s end. Slover Linett will conduct a summative assessment in July/August 2023, documenting internal culture change. In August 2023, a final impact report will be shared with the Board and BMA staff will once again participate in LEAD.

**What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?**

Substantial commitments of financial and human resources will be required. The BMA has made the initial investment, hiring PAC in January 2020 to develop two days of workshops and to collaborate on a five-year accessibility roadmap. IMLS funds, if awarded, will support years two and three of this work, including two years of consulting fees for PAC and Slover Linett and honorariums for the CDA Group. Grant funds will also support staff and consultant travel and hard costs required to pilot real-world outputs within each module, such as public program signage and speaker/artist honorariums, American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, Computer Assisted Real Time (CART) Translation, large-format labels, retroactive video captioning, etc. Staff across the BMA (approximately 170 full-time staff/year) will contribute substantial time to the project as well.

**How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?**

Monthly check-in meetings with the Project Director and project administration team will monitor progress and allow for troubleshooting to ensure a successful completion. Midway through, Slover Linett will help formalize an evaluation plan to assess progress to date and document lessons learned. Staff attendance figures and workshop/training session frequency will be used to track internal progress. For pilot outputs, the BMA uses web-based project management systems, such as Wrike and AirTable, to track activities for program/exhibition implementation. The completion of inclusive design activities will be built into these tools to track progress.

**How and with whom will you share your project’s results?**

Pilot exhibitions, programs, etc. will share project results with all visitors as real-world applications of lessons learned by staff. Slover Linett will facilitate a summative assessment of staff, CDA Group members, and pilot

test users to document internal change at the grant period's end, and project staff will create a final impact report on the methodology, best practices, and lessons learned. Both documents will be used to inform future best practices for inclusive design and accessibility at the BMA. Results from the final impact report will also be shared with the Board, the CDA Group, and colleagues and peer institutions. Project team members will also present at national conferences, such as LEAD and the annual Association Alliance of Museums conference.

### **3. Project Results**

#### **What are your project's intended results and how will they address the need you have identified?**

The primary intended result is to enable BMA staff to create a sustainable, evergreen approach to incorporating inclusive design and affordances for differing abilities into the design, creation, and implementation of all visitor experiences. Through the pilot outputs, the BMA will show its commitment to making visitors with disabilities feel welcome while making the benefits of inclusive design visible to all. Ultimately, the project will result in more multi-layered experiences for all visitors, not just those who identify as having a disability.

#### **How will knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes of the intended audience change?**

The project is designed to have a dramatic impact on the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of staff across the Museum. With all BMA staff participating to some extent in the skill building modules, the integration of inclusive design and accessibility throughout all aspects of the Museum will become an automatic consideration in employee's workflow. The two-year timetable enables deep and sustained dives into specific topics and the time and space to pilot real-world applications, learn from them, and re-pilot adapted solutions. With continual touchpoints of coaching and workshops planned with PAC and interim and end evaluation work by Slover Linett, the BMA will develop the internal capacity to sustain a comprehensive inclusive design methodology.

#### **What data will you collect and report to measure your project's success?**

Project staff will collect attendance data for all internal/external events, as well as participant feedback via post-event email surveys. The BMA will work with PAC to develop key KPIs to measure the project's progress. Surveys and feedback from staff, volunteers, interns, pilot test users, and the CDA Group will be collected throughout to capture feedback in real time. Summative data collection/interview at the project's conclusion will gauge a potential shift in the BMA's internal culture and its perception within the disability community.

#### **What tangible products will result from your project?**

Project lessons learned will inform and refine the FY21 accessibility roadmap. A high-level summary report will be created by Slover Linett and a final impact report will be created by the project team and the IDW Group. There will be visitor-centric outputs for each skill building module, including two public programs; a more accessible artbma.org with appropriate microdata and visual descriptions for images, as well as accessible social media posts; new in-gallery interpretation in the form of visual descriptions, large-format labels, and other affordances; and more accessible wayfinding methodologies in all front-of-house spaces.

#### **How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project?**

The BMA believes unequivocally that museums exist to serve their full communities and is committed to sustaining the project's benefits in perpetuity to best serve visitors of all abilities through thoughtfully designed, engaging, and impactful experiences with art and artists. Following the grant's completion, the identified evaluation plan and KPIs will continue to measure progress, allowing staff to make iterative changes to programmatic or operational elements as needed, with select KPIs incorporated into annual staff performance reviews. Feedback from CDA Group members and pilot test users will be used to inform the next phase of implementation, as the BMA continues to incorporate inclusive design into all visitor experience outputs and begins to address back-of-house affordances in the third phase of work.



