



## **Museums for America**

Sample Application MA-10-18-0463-18  
Project Category: Learning Experiences

### **Brooklyn Botanic Garden**

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$250,000
Amount of cost share:	\$997,336

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Please note that the instructions for preparing applications for the FY2019 Museums for America grant program differ from those that guided the preparation of FY2018 applications. Be sure to use the instructions in the FY2019 Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

## **BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN: Abstract**

### **Expanding BBG's Welcome**

BBG respectfully requests \$250,000 for Expanding BBG's Welcome, a project that will establish a new institution-wide baseline for inclusively welcoming and serving visitors with special needs at Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

In the next two years, BBG will complete a decade long, multi-stage site refinement—the most significant in its 107 year history. This set of projects, contained within the Campaign for the next Century, has enabled the Garden to make major strides to address accessibility in the physical landscape of BBG's 52 acres—no small feat on a site that exists at two principal levels due to glacial formations. Each new area created or redesigned under the Campaign took into account a wide range of visitor needs and principles of inclusivity. However, landscape refinements are not all that is needed to truly welcome audiences with special needs: the institution has determined that it is time to focus on adding a new level of inclusiveness to programming and operations, with additional attention to communicating this improved level of service, in order to attract and serve audiences with special needs. As the final Campaign projects near completion, and with acknowledgement that that this is only the first set of steps to be taken over a period of years, BBG is centering inclusion and access as key drivers of the Garden's next strategic plan.

Expanding BBG's Welcome will address three major questions: How do we let people with varied needs know that we are ready and prepared to give them a good experience at the Garden? How do we provide a great visitor and learning experience for all visitors while they are at the Garden? And how do we assess our offerings to ensure they are effective and evaluate our ongoing progress in this area?

BBG's history of outreach and work towards inclusivity, including strides made in the past several years as targeted pilot programs and training to address visitors' special needs were developed, have all contributed to illuminating the work BBG still needs to do to ensure that people with varied needs feel welcome and can participate at BBG. This project connects to BBG's mission, strategic plan (goals 2 and 3 in particular), and core values, and is well-timed to address issues identified in NYC's first Cultural Plan (launched June 2017), which asks the city's cultural institutions to take significant steps to support people with disabilities in participating in NYC's cultural life. While making the Garden welcoming has been a founding principle, BBG has never taken the opportunity to make a deep and comprehensive investment in setting in place institution-wide practices, standards, and training related to serving visitors with special needs. Recent assessments and new partnerships have helped identify and prioritize needs and opportunities for Expanding BBG's Welcome. This project is designed to ensure that BBG takes significant steps forward to institutionalize best practices and create a foundation from which further steps can be taken over time.

Expanding BBG's Welcome will address priorities for increasing accessibility and inclusiveness at the Garden identified in work with community members, by past professional assessments, and learnings from new pilot programs. It will also be guided and informed by ongoing recommendations from (1) additional assessment, technical assistance, and resource development from consultants, (2) a new Best Practices Working Group, and (3) a part-time Access Coordinator (new position) to support this interdepartmental project along with project leads Sonal Bhatt, VP of Education and Interpretation, and Kate Fermoile, Director of Interpretation, and BBG's interdepartmental staff Access Committee (formed 2017).

This project will build capacity among staff, instilling best practices and training in welcoming and serving visitors and learners with a diverse range of activities. It will communicate an increased perception of BBG as ready to welcome audiences with a range of special needs. BBG will create tangible products including a website fully accessible to a range of assistive technologies, new pre-visit tools, interpretive and wayfinding materials, and new signage. Newly developed programs tailored to groups with special needs and refinements to make existing programs more inclusive will be integrated into BBG's programmatic offerings beyond the grant period. The project will also result in implementing a new structure of internal communication around access issues; a baseline understanding of best-practices for all front-line staff; and annual staff trainings developed for each department to be facilitated by supervisors, ensuring that Expanding BBG's Welcome becomes integrated into the Garden's ethos, operations, and budget beyond the project period. Thank you for your consideration.

## EXPANDING BBG'S WELCOME

Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) respectfully requests \$250,000 for Expanding BBG's Welcome, a project that will establish a new institution-wide baseline for inclusively welcoming and serving visitors with special needs at BBG.

### PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Expanding BBG's Welcome will dedicate significant institutional resources and attention to ensuring that the Garden—a world-class museum of living collections that welcomes nearly 1M visitors each year from around the corner and across the globe—sets and achieves a new standard for welcoming and serving visitors with a wide range of special needs. The project will build on recent early-stage work in this area, engaging professional consultants and a community of museum practitioners to craft strategies for BBG to be more inclusive. With their help, BBG will implement a new level of staff training, create tools and communications to welcome audiences, develop new specialized programs, and improve current programs to increase inclusivity. This project will also set steps to track progress and ensure that these changes and standards are integrated into the organizational culture and operating budget going forward.

BBG is now completing the most comprehensive landscape upgrade in its history. The completion of the decade-long *Campaign for the Next Century* brings many facets of the 107-year old Garden and its grounds beyond ADA compliance and into alignment with best practices in universal design.<sup>1</sup> From path changes to new graphic design standards and programs, every project of the Campaign took into account a wide range of needs and was guided by principles of inclusivity. In addition to adding a new level of inclusion through a Discovery Garden that is physically accessible and improvements to restrooms, entrances, and amenities to make visiting more comfortable, in the next three years BBG will complete three monumental projects (The Overlook, The Woodland Garden, and the Visitor Center Path) that each include new access routes between the highest and lowest points of BBG's 52 acres, creating gentle winding pathways and ramps to replace existing steep embankments, as well as beautiful new garden spaces for all to enjoy. Expanding BBG's Welcome will complement these major physical upgrades to the accessibility of the Garden, to ensure that BBG's operational practices are also prepared to welcome and serve many types of audiences with special needs.

BBG has a long history of fulfilling its mission to connect people to the world of plants by reaching out to audiences to encourage the use and enjoyment of the Garden through a wide array of programming (education programs for all ages, community greening programs, and family festivals appealing to diverse interests). In encouraging participation from communities with special needs, the Garden is determined to take the same approach, putting forward a proactive commitment to provide information and anticipate and fulfill visitor needs. Expanding BBG's Welcome will set the groundwork to make the communications, information sharing, and social environments at the Garden (and on [bbg.org](http://bbg.org)) as inclusive as the physical landscape.

### How were project goals and priorities identified?

This project connects to BBG's mission, strategic plan (goals #2 and #3 in particular), and core values, and is well-timed to address issues identified in NYC's first Cultural Plan (launched June 2017), that asks the city's cultural institutions to take significant steps to support people with disabilities in participating in NYC's cultural life. While ensuring that the Garden is welcoming has been a founding principle, BBG has never taken the opportunity to step back and make a deep and comprehensive investment in setting in place institution-wide standards, practices, and training related to serving visitors with special needs. BBG's history of valuing inclusivity, including strides made in the past several years as targeted programs were piloted and training for welcoming visitors with a range of needs was developed, has contributed to illuminating the work BBG still needs to do to ensure that people of all abilities feel welcome and can participate at BBG. Recent assessments and new partnerships have helped identify needs and opportunities for this project, designed as a significant step forward to institutionalize best practices and create a comprehensive foundation on which further improvements can be built. The project is informed by:

#### 1. Community feedback from visitors and ongoing work with specific constituent groups

Botanic gardens are by nature often attractive places for visitors with sensory limitations, ADHD, cognitive issues, or physical disabilities because they offer a wide variety of sensory and physical experiences. BBG's education programs

<sup>1</sup> The Campaign has also vastly expanded community connections and programming, and has been instrumental in laying groundwork for revenue strategies that will contribute to the financial stability of the institution for decades to come. See Strategic Plan section for details.

and tours, in which experienced educators work with both children and adults at all developmental and cognitive levels, have long included participants with special needs.<sup>2</sup>

- In 2016-2017, 12% of school groups registered for Exploration Tours self-identified as having students with special needs, though BBG believes the number to be much higher: in NYC, Integrated Classroom Teaching (ICT) classes that serve students with varied needs are the preferred format, and DOE policy discourages teachers reporting the status of these classes.<sup>3</sup> For a more in-depth BBG science program, Project Green Reach, teachers are asked in person to describe their class's needs. In 2016-2017, of 76 classes, 12% were self-contained special education classes and 18% were ICT classes; groups including students with special needs therefore made up fully 30% of participants.
- A 2017 assessment revealed that while many of BBG's Youth Education staff work with people with varied abilities, 90% feel that they don't have sufficient training. <sup>4</sup> This urgent staff need has helped to set program priorities.
- In September 2016, District 75, a New York City school district made up of 57 special schools designed to teach and help students in need of educational, vocational, and behavior support, began work with BBG on a year of training in service of the district's goal of creating self-led field trips and long-term science investigations at BBG. This partnership has been mutually valuable, with partners reporting learning gains in teachers and in their students, and BBG gaining training and direct insight into the needs and suggestions of District 75 teachers and administrators.
- Other long-time programs that have provided experience in working with constituent groups with special needs, include a decades-long partnership with a school for teens with autism through a weekly work-study program and visits to the Fragrance Garden, BBG's historic "please touch" space with braille signs. Opened in 1955, this garden is believed to be the first public garden in the world specifically designed for people with visual impairments.
- In addition, BBG listens to, tracks, and responds to comments from visitors through a contact number and email for the President's Office on the accessibility page of bbg.org. This direct feedback has helped organize and assess improvements as well as to suggest needed changes.
- The project will use this community feedback as a starting place and create a Best Practices Working Group to represent diverse perspectives in guiding, informing, and assessing the project and its progress, as well as continuing to survey staff, participants, and visitors to the Garden.

## **2. Professional Evaluations and Guidance**

- In completing the Garden-improvements, additions, and new amenities made possible by the Campaign for the Next Century, BBG has worked closely with the NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and United Spinal Association. These organizations have helped to create plans for increasing the physical accessibility of pathways throughout the grounds. They also made recommendations for improvements to wayfinding signage, many of which have been already been implemented, and others that will feed into the project activities.
- Design charrettes for the Discovery Garden, opened in 2015, were influenced by Carrie Banks, Supervising Librarian for the Child's Place for Children with Special Needs at the Brooklyn Public Library. Ms. Banks helped forefront accessibility in the planning and design process for this new learning garden: many of the exhibits and interpretive elements are consistent with principles of universal design, as the multi-sensory nature of the garden encourages the use of a full range of senses—providing a model for bringing this ethos into more programs.
- Since the Discovery Garden's opening, BBG has engaged Turnstile Studio to do basic assessments of the Discovery Garden programs and to observe programs for school groups, and to develop a new level of training in welcoming audiences that include children of all abilities for educators in these programs. The consultant assessed BBG's needs in these areas and provided capacity building resources including an introductory workshop for 25 volunteers and staff educators, a train-the-trainers lesson plan, best practices document, and a report with recommendations for next steps in preparing the Discovery Garden, other Children's Education programs, and the Garden in general to welcome and serve audiences with special needs. BBG has used this work to create training materials currently in

<sup>2</sup> See Attachment 3 for complete list of Education programs.

<sup>3</sup> NYC students with special needs come to the Garden in self-contained classes (where all students have a particular exceptional learning ability that requires an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and a lower teacher-to-student ratio) as well as in Integrated Classroom Teaching (ICT) classes (where students with IEPs are integrated in classes with students without). In BBG's partnership with District 75, all participating schools teach exclusively in the self-contained setting model.

<sup>4</sup> From Turnstile Studio's "Report and Recommendations for Welcoming Children of All Abilities at BBG"; see Attachment 1.

use.<sup>5</sup> Turnstile’s work also revealed the areas in which BBG volunteers and educators felt most prepared and unprepared, and the resulting recommendations helped to determine the scope of work for this project.

- Acting on the suggestions of Turnstile Studio for next steps, BBG will conduct an accessibility audit of bbg.org in spring 2018. The analysis, conducted by Level Access, will use both automated and manual functional testing with leading assistive technologies to determine if the site conforms to WCAG 2.0 Level A and AA standards. The audit will detail all elements of the website found to be inaccessible, prioritized in order of severity, noticeability, and tractability. During the project period, BBG will take the next steps to remediate these barriers to accessibility.

The recommendations from each of these professionals, as well as additional assessment by Turnstile Studio across the institution and specialized work by additional consultants, will inform the project activities and priorities.

### **3. Experience from current pilot programs**

In the past two years, BBG has designed and piloted two new programs crafted to address the specific needs of audience members: free seasonal Discovery Garden programming for children and families with a wide spectrum of special needs (“Discovery Garden Early Openings for All Abilities”) and a free monthly series of tours for adults coping with memory loss and their caregivers (“Memory Loss Tours”). These programs were designed with help from Turnstile Studio and Caring Kind memory loss experts. Piloting these programs has allowed BBG to begin developing audiences in these areas, conversing with members of the affected communities, and developing materials and techniques. Assessing these programs has helped BBG to build tools that will improve visitor experiences in other areas as well, and insights from this work have informed the planned project activities as well as contributing to BBG’s longer-term goals.

#### **How will this project affect BBG’s visitors and program participants?**

In conversations with community members and with teachers who serve students with special needs, one of the key takeaways has been that a significant reason audiences with disabilities do not frequent cultural institutions is that they don’t think institutions are ready for them. A key goal of this project is to be well prepared to welcome and serve visitors and program participants with special needs, and to signal this readiness clearly.

The Garden does not measure whether its visitors have special needs, although it will begin gathering this information from registered groups and classes. But with almost one in five people in the United States—a total of about 56.7 million—living with one or more disabilities<sup>6</sup>, this is a segment of the population BBG must be ready to serve. Some needs are visible, but many individuals have “hidden disabilities,” which may not be apparent to even a trained staff member. It is incumbent upon the Garden to communicate to visitors, regardless of their needs, that they are welcome and will have the tools and services to be comfortable at BBG. The 2017 CultureTrack Audience Study emphasized that visitor services are critical to the museum-going experience: visitors must be comfortable before they can engage in the content of the institution. Moreover, 59% of visitors with disabilities who go to a cultural institution and have a negative experience never come back<sup>7</sup>. BBG aims to provide all visitors excellent customer service leading up to and throughout their visit, by ensuring that the Garden and its front-line staff are prepared to welcome and accommodate a range of needs. For this project’s purposes, the definition of “front-line staff” is not limited to those employees in the Visitor Services department, but rather includes anyone who may have contact with visitors.

#### **Who will this project serve?**

While BBG’s long-term goal is to be a welcoming and comfortable space for people of all abilities, BBG recognizes the diversity of needs within the disability community. This project will begin with targeted efforts to identify and implement improvements to the communications, information sharing, and social environments that affect key constituent groups identified by community feedback and professional evaluators, particularly Turnstile Studio’s 2017 assessment, as likely to need significant accommodations during a visit to the Garden. These groups include individuals with developmental or learning disabilities, individuals who are blind or partially sighted, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, individuals with memory loss, and individuals with mobility impairments.

Currently, front-line staff at the Garden do not have formalized training in disability etiquette or in how to advise visitors to navigate the Garden if they have a mobility issue, how to take advantage of resources if they have a learning

<sup>5</sup> See Attachment 5 for the training manual.

<sup>6</sup> Via U.S. Census Bureau; includes disabilities related to sight, hearing and mobility, as well as cognitive disabilities and learning disabilities.

<sup>7</sup> <http://2017study.culturetrack.com/>

disability, or how to deal with other eventualities. Neither are there specific maps, other print materials, or a complete set of resources that can be accessed in advance of a visit that presents this information and tools. The Garden's website contains information about accessibility but many pages are not currently compatible and navigable using assistive technologies,<sup>8</sup> and information may not be presented in a way that signals to audiences with special needs that BBG truly welcomes the opportunity to accommodate them.

Older adults are one key visitor segment who will be affected by this project. At BBG, this growing demographic group<sup>9</sup> makes up a large part of the visitorship and program participation. Twenty-three percent of BBG's nearly 1M annual visitors are over the age of 55<sup>10</sup> and half of BBG's members are over 55.<sup>11</sup> Members, in particular, visit frequently and this group includes many of BBG's 700 active volunteers and continuing education participants. This demographic is highly likely to have mobility impairments (66.5%), be deaf or hard of hearing (40.4%), be blind or partially sighted (19.2%), or experience cognitive disabilities (28.8%). This project will develop key amenities and communications that serve this audience, as well as developing new tours and refining existing programming.

Children are another key population at BBG, through 12 different education programs that bring hands-on science and horticulture learning into classrooms and to participants at the Garden. Children under 12 make up more than ¼ of BBG's annual visitorship, with 250,000 visiting or participating in BBG programs each year. 13% of children in the K-12 population in the United States are identified as having a disability, with specific learning disabilities being the most prevalent (36%).<sup>12</sup> Given this rate of probability, it is incumbent upon BBG to have educators in all programs who can identify these needs and programs that can be modified as needed to serve learners with diverse, exceptional abilities. This project will help BBG's Education department to build on the experience gained through specialized training and programing piloted in the Discovery Garden throughout BBG's full range of Youth Education programs. It will allow educators in programs that are accommodating audiences with special needs to gain the tools they need, and help those programs that are not yet ready for students with special needs to identify and fulfil the opportunities to be more welcoming, inclusive, and accommodating.<sup>13</sup>

## PROJECT WORK PLAN

Expanding BBG's Welcome will address priorities for increasing accessibility and inclusiveness at the Garden identified in work with community members, by past professional assessments, and learnings from new pilot programs. It will also be guided and informed by ongoing recommendations from (1) additional assessment, technical assistance, and resource development from consultants, (2) a new Best Practices Working Group, and (3) a part-time Access Coordinator (new position) to support this interdepartmental project along with project leads Sonal Bhatt, VP of Education and Interpretation, and Kate Fermoile, Director of Interpretation, and BBG's interdepartmental staff Access Committee (formed 2017).

### Guiding Structures

The Garden has elected to engage **Turnstile Studio** to support the full project period. Turnstile was selected both for its excellence and experience<sup>14</sup> and to build off their past work for BBG. In 2016-2017, Turnstile was contracted to assess BBG educators' level of comfort and experience working with special needs audiences, and help improve educators' practice by providing trainings and suggesting program adaptations. After implementing these trainings and program adaptations, visitor feedback has indicted positive progress. Also at that time, Turnstile identified and prioritized next steps which will be undertaken during the project period.

For Expanding BBG's Welcome, Turnstile will begin by broadening its assessment of staff capacity to all departments within BBG, since virtually every staff member has the potential for visitor interactions. Not only will educators and tour guides receive more training, but Security, Visitor Services, Public Programs, Horticulture, Facilities, Development, and Marketing staff will receive introductory workshops on best-practices for facilitating access, tailored to their individual roles, to ensure that all have a strong foundation for their respective roles and interactions with visitors. Turnstile will also

<sup>8</sup> Including screenreaders, tactile output, magnification software, use assistive technologies, or captioning for audio.

<sup>9</sup> According to U.S. Census Bureau figures, Baby Boomers are 25% of the US population, and by 2020 there will be more people over the age of 60 than under the age of 30 in the U.S.

<sup>10</sup> From a 2015 Visitor Survey Conducted by Slover Linett Audience Research

<sup>11</sup> From a 2015 Membership Assessment conducted by Sherman Consulting Group

<sup>12</sup> According to the National Center for Education Statistics: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgg.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp)

<sup>13</sup> Many classes visiting BBG also include a significant number of English language learners; some of the same modifications (emphasizing hands-on inquiry) can be helpful for connecting with these students.

<sup>14</sup> See Budget Justification for background and Attachment 2 for proposal.

gather baseline data and identify specific goals and opportunities for further professional development, resource development, and program development, to take place in years two and three. The continuity provided by work with Turnstile Studio throughout the project, as well as the plan to engage a broad base of BBG staff, will mitigate the risk of unforeseen staff change negatively affecting the project. Additional consulting will be provided by **Level Access**, **Caring Kind**, **American Horticulture Therapy Association**, and **Lighthouse Disability** in their various areas of expertise.

As a second guiding structure, BBG is creating a **Best Practices Working Group**, comprised of ~8 individuals who represent a range of expertise and experiences with access and inclusion, primarily professionals who work in museums or cultural institutions with accessibility programs recognized for excellence<sup>15</sup>. This group will meet bi-annually, mediated by Turnstile Studio, and will bring a diversity of perspectives to bear in questions that arise. The range of expertise and experience included will mitigate the risk of underrepresenting particular needs or perspectives. The group will assist in setting goals and assessing progress, and help develop materials and tools through focus group discussions.

Finally, in order to create a structure for the long term sustainability of this work and lift progress toward inclusion in individual departments to the institutional level, BBG will hire a 2-day-a-week **Access Coordinator** for the project's duration. The Coordinator will work under the project leads as point-person for Accessibility at BBG and be responsible for helping to create a structure for internal communications among departments. He/she will help schedule and supervise staff trainings and meetings; plan convenings of the Best Practices Working Group; help with the assessment process; oversee special programming; liaise between departments; and support BBG's staff Access Committee.

### **Project Activities**

Project activities will be based on recommendations from Turnstile Studio's 2017 assessment, recommendations made by United Spinal Association, pending recommendations from Level Access, pending recommendations from Turnstile during the project period, and needs expressed by BBG staff and community members.

### **Year 1**

Building organizational capacity by establishing the guiding structures described above will be a fundamental part of the work of Year 1. In addition to this, Turnstile will conduct baseline assessments of areas of greatest need for accessibility in the respective departments and programs participating in trainings.<sup>16</sup> BBG will set concrete goals as a result of these findings and with input from the Best Practices Working Group (participation in the Working Group is being solicited in advance of Year 1, with an orientation in fall 2018 to BBG and its programs).

Senior staff, project leads, and the Access Coordinator will prepare for training staff with learning activities including AAM Webinars, attending the Leadership Exchange in Arts Disabilities Conference, and using the Best Practices Working Group as a resource. Turnstile will then conduct 2-hour introductory trainings for each department that address best-practices for helping visitors with a range of special needs to navigate situations at the Garden.

At the same time as BBG is building its staff's capacity to be more welcoming in these ways, it will also take steps to make its website, bbg.org, more welcoming. The website of an organization is often the unacknowledged first step toward a visit, and if the information and presentation does not signal that the museum is accessible, a potential visitor can be turned away there and then. The first phase of activities to improve bbg.org will ensure the website is navigable by people using assistive technologies. Following the spring 2018 web audit, Level Access<sup>17</sup> will return during the project period to support the development of a rulebook for accessible content and coding specific to BBG's needs and develop new website templates, and BBG will hire a temporary web editor to update existing web content.

The Access Coordinator will manage the development and administration of surveys and evaluations for staff trainings and relevant programs, monitor progress toward goals through measures of participation and satisfaction, and coordinate internal communication and sharing across departments.

Finally, in Year 1, BBG's Memory Loss Tours pilot program will be assessed by Caring Kind, New York City's leading expert on Alzheimer's and dementia caregiving, as well as by a horticulture therapy expert from the American Horticulture Therapy Association. Caring Kind has worked with BBG in the past and with many other museums in this

<sup>15</sup> See Attachment 3 for list of committed participants and prospects

<sup>16</sup> Includes Visitor Services, Marketing, Horticulture, Facilities, Membership, Development, Education, Interpretation, Public Programs, Security.

<sup>17</sup> See description of firm in Budget Justification

capacity; the Horticulture Therapy expert will add expertise specific to working with plants. Together, the consultants will craft a formal set of suggestions for program refinements and next steps in capacity building.

## Year 2

In Year 2, Turnstile will continue its work by presenting trainings for each department once more, with refinements based on experience and more specific content. Turnstile will develop resources or modules that can support continued professional development for security guards, visitor services staff, and other frontline staff as part of their year-round training. In addition, Turnstile will design and moderate an accessibility-focused panel discussion for all staff featuring experts from the Best Practices Working Group, followed by breakout sessions for staff who work in Security, Visitor Services, and Education to provide additional recommendations based on their real-life experience.

With the structural part of the website update in place, BBG's Interpretation, Web, Editorial, and Design departments will develop and present additional web content to help welcome visitors of different abilities. Pages by audience type will be created that each include tips for that audience based on their specific challenge, as well as guidelines, listings of recommended programs and activities, and a sensory map—a map that highlights quiet places and sensory experiences so that visitors may moderate their experience of BBG. Social stories—a tool to help individuals on the autism spectrum prepare for social interaction and public events—will be created to introduce potential visitors to the experience of participating in guided school programs, self-guided school programs, and a general visit to the Garden.<sup>18</sup>

The interpretation team will also be creating materials to help individuals navigate the Garden during a visit to BBG. These include improvements to wayfinding and signage, new tactile maps, large print materials, and the purchase of assistive listening devices and tactile materials for tours. New printed maps that point out accessible routes, as well as signs cueing visitors to what lies ahead, will be created concurrently with the completion of three major capital projects that open up new accessible routes through the Garden. This work, as well as the web content, will be done with support and feedback from participants, Turnstile, and the Best Practices Working Group. It will take into account considerations for individuals with developmental or learning disabilities, individuals who are blind or partially sighted, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, individuals with memory loss, and individuals with mobility impairments.

Finally, in Year 2, Turnstile will conduct in-depth assessment and reports of K-12 education programs and BBG's youth development programs, with recommendations for how to accommodate participants with disabilities (particularly learning disabilities) given specific program constraints and activities. The Best Practices Working Group will meet bi-annually for half-day sessions to assess progress and suggest course corrections. The Access Coordinator will continue to manage the development and administration of surveys and evaluations for staff trainings and relevant programs, to monitor progress toward goals through measures of participation and satisfaction, and to coordinate internal communication and sharing across departments.

## Year 3

With accessible website and supportive web content, new interpretive materials and signage, frontline staff training, and key program improvements in place, Year 3 will bring a marketing push to communicate BBG's improved capacities.

Instead of directly training BBG staff, in Year 3 Turnstile will deliver support for internal trainings for all supervisors, with a "train-the-trainers" session and resources to ensure that this learning stays part of BBG culture beyond the project period. Turnstile will also deliver presentations to directors summarizing results of pre-training surveys, insights, and goals for areas of improvement for the Visitor Services, Security, K-12 programs, and youth development programs in particular. At this time, program- and area-specific improvements suggested by Turnstile's assessments in the past two years and by the Best Practices Working Group will be embarked upon one by one, in an order determined by need, feasibility, and impact. These will include modifications to K-12 education programs, youth development programs, and other current programming based on the previous years' assessments, as well as the creation of some or all of the following new programs: touch tours, American Sign Language tours, and visual and audio narratives to introduce sight- and hearing-impaired audiences to the Fragrance Garden and Discovery Garden.

Year 3 will also see the implementation of much-needed improvements in the Fragrance Garden. These improvements will be determined with members of the Best Practices Working Group and consulting from Lighthouse Disability, but will likely include the creation of more modern and accurate signage to replace aging braille plaques, as well as the

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<sup>18</sup> See Attachment 2 for sample materials.

development of a workplan for the curator of this area that integrates the concerns of interpretive programs (Memory Loss Tours and tours for the visually impaired, which often use this “please touch” garden) into planting plans.

The Best Practices Working Group will meet bi-annually for half-day sessions, to make final assessments toward progress and suggest next-steps. The Access Coordinator will continue to manage the development and administration of surveys and evaluations for staff trainings and relevant programs, to monitor progress toward goals through measures of participation and satisfaction, and to coordinate internal communication and sharing across departments until the end of the year, when they will pass this over to Interpretation staff. Turnstile will end their engagement by delivering resources for internal trainings and recommendations for next steps. BBG staff will attend the American Association of Public Gardens annual conference to share learnings within the field, as well as sharing with the Museum Access Consortium.

## PROJECT RESULTS

- **Performance Goal #1: *Train and develop museum and library professionals.***

Staff will receive ongoing trainings to enhance their capacity to welcome and serve visitors of all abilities. Turnstile Studio will do a baseline assessment and assist the Access Coordinator in surveying staff across all departments annually to gauge the efficacy of trainings and the knowledge gains. The goals: Staff across departments feel comfortable in advising and/or accommodating visitors with a range of disabilities as relevant to their position; Staff in the most visible front-line positions (Visitors Services, Security) feel expert at advising or accommodating visitors with a range of disabilities; Staff in Education feel comfortable or expert teaching or accommodating visitors with a range of disabilities, according to their level; Supervisors feel comfortable or expert in advising their staff on how to serve visitors with disabilities; Supervisors feel they have the capacity and tools to continue to train staff going forward.

- **Performance Goal #2: *Develop and provide inclusive and accessible learning opportunities***

Learning opportunities will be made inclusive through resources and materials that facilitate access. These materials (maps, signage, social stories, visual schedules, informative web pages, large print materials, assistive listening devices, visual supports, etc.) will be assessed for suitability by the Best Practices Working Group. But the main goal is effective use, and the use of materials will be measured by tracking metrics for the web-pages on which online resources are housed, and tracking the distribution of physical materials by BBG’s staff.

Learning opportunities available to drop-in visitors will be made inclusive through Visitor Services modifications (training and pre-visit communications) with a goal of increased attendance by special needs audiences. This will be measured based on tracking participation and satisfaction in registered school groups and adult groups who self-identify as having special needs, as well as by anecdotal evidence. Increased participation will be the measure of whether BBG is signaling its increased readiness.

Learning opportunities will be made inclusive through program modifications (in Education programs, youth development programs, tours, etc.) The success of these modifications will be measured through increasing participation by disabled populations, as reported by staff, and by participant satisfaction measured through surveys.

New accessible learning opportunities will be developed (ASL tours, touch tours, etc.) The goal of these programs is participation and satisfaction, so participation will be tracked and participants surveyed about their experience, and refinements made.

Existing specialized learning opportunities for disabled audiences (Early Openings for All Abilities, Memory Loss Tours) will be refined and continued. The goal of these programs is participation and satisfaction, so participation will be tracked and participants will be surveyed about their experience, and refinements made.

This project will result in knowledge gains among staff and an increased perception of BBG as ready to welcome audiences with a range of special needs. BBG will create tangible products including a fully-accessible website, new pre-visit tools, interpretive and wayfinding materials, and new signage. Newly developed programs tailored to groups with special needs and refinements to make existing programs more inclusive will be integrated into BBG’s programmatic offerings and budgeting process beyond the grant period. The project will also result in implementing a new structure of internal communication around access issues; a baseline understanding of best-practices for all front-line staff; and annual staff trainings developed for each department to be facilitated by supervisors, ensuring that Expanding BBG’s Welcome becomes integrated into the Garden’s ethos, operations, and budget beyond the project period. Thank you for your consideration.

## **EXPANDING BBG'S WELCOME : Schedule of Completion**

### **Pre-Project Activities**

- Level Access will complete accessibility audit of bbg.org and identify needs
- BBG interdepartmental staff Access Committee meets quarterly
- Museum professionals and experts in inclusion will be confirmed for participation in Best Practices Working Group
- Garden will continue to cultivate audiences through pilot programs and continue surveys to learn more about these audiences

### **Year 1**

- BBG will hire Access Coordinator, who will schedule and supervise staff trainings and meetings; plan convenings of the Best Practices Working Group; help manage the assessment process; oversee special programming; liaise between departments; and support BBG' staff Access Committee
- Best Practices Working Group will be introduced to BBG and meet twice, helping to establish goals and develop evaluation processes and metrics.
- Turnstile Studio will assess staff capacity and needs to welcome visitors in all departments
- Senior staff, project leads, and the Access Coordinator will prepare for training staff with learning activities including AAM Webinars, attending the Leadership Exchange in Arts Disabilities Conference, and using the Best Practices Working Group as resources.
- Turnstile will then conduct 2-hour introductory trainings for each department that address best-practices for helping visitors with a range of special needs to navigate situations at the Garden
- Turnstile will gather baseline data and identify specific goals and opportunities for further professional development, resource development, and program development, to take place in years two and three.
- To bring bbg.org to be navigable by people using assistive technologies, Level Access will be contracted to support the development of a rulebook for accessible content and coding specific to BBG's needs, Level Access will develop new website templates, and BBG will hire a temporary web editor to update existing web content.
- BBG's Memory Loss Tours pilot program will be assessed by Caring Kind, New York City's leading expert on Alzheimer's and dementia caregiving, as well as by a horticulture therapy expert from the American Horticulture Therapy Association. Together, the consultants will craft a formal set of suggestions for program refinements and next steps in capacity building.

### **Year 2**

- Turnstile Studio will once again deliver more tailored training to all departments' staff, with refinements based on experience and more specific content.
- Turnstile will develop resources or modules that can support continued professional development for security guards, visitor services staff, and other frontline staff as part of their year-round training.
- Turnstile will design and moderate an accessibility-focused panel discussion for all staff featuring experts from the Best Practices Working Group, followed by breakout sessions for staff who work in Security, Visitor Services, and Education to provide additional recommendations based on their real-life experience.
- Best Practices Working Group will meet twice, guiding the design of accessible interpretive materials and tools.
- BBG's Interpretation, Web, Editorial, and Design departments will develop and present additional web content to help welcome visitors of different abilities, including pages by audience type that include tips for each audience based on their specific challenge, as well as guidelines, listings of recommended programs and activities, and a sensory map. Social stories will be created to introduce potential visitors to the experience of participating in guided school programs, self-guided school programs, and a general visit to the Garden.

- The interpretation team will also be creating materials to help individuals navigate the Garden during a visit to BBG. These include improvements to wayfinding and signage, new tactile maps, large print materials, and the purchase of assistive listening devices and tactile materials for tours.
- New printed maps that point out accessible routes, as well as signs cuing visitors to what lies ahead, will be created concurrently with the completion of three major projects that open up new accessible routes through the Garden.
- Turnstile will conduct in-depth assessment and reports of K-12 education programs and BBG's youth development programs, with recommendations for how to accommodate participants with disabilities (particularly learning disabilities) given specific program constraints and activities.
- BBG will develop participant survey components to evaluate the Memory Loss Tours program.
- The Best Practices Working Group will meet bi-annually for half-day sessions, to assess progress and suggest course-corrections.
- The Access Coordinator will continue to manage the development and administration of surveys and evaluations for staff trainings and relevant programs, to monitor progress toward goals through measures of participation and satisfaction, and to coordinate internal communication and sharing across departments.

### **Year 3**

- With accessible website and supportive web content, new interpretive materials and signage, frontline staff training, and key program improvements in place, Year 3 will bring a marketing push to communicate BBG's improved capacities.
- Turnstile will deliver support for internal trainings for all supervisors, with a "train-the-trainers" session and resources to ensure that this learning stays at part of BBG culture beyond the project period.
- Turnstile will also deliver presentations to directors summarizing results of pre-training surveys, insights, and goals for areas of improvement for the Visitor Services, Security, K-12 programs, and youth development programs in particular.
- BBG will implement modifications to K-12 education programs, youth development programs, and other current programming based on suggestions to improve inclusivity and develop corresponding surveys
- BBG will create new programs including: touch tours, American Sign Language tours, and visual and audio narratives to introduce sight- and hearing-impaired audiences to the Fragrance Garden and Discovery Garden.
- BBG will make much-needed improvements in the Fragrance Garden, determined with members of the Best Practices Working Group and consulting from Lighthouse Disability, likely including the creation of more modern and accurate signage to replace aging braille plaques, as well as the development of a workplan for the curator of this area that integrates the concerns of interpretive programs into planting plans.
- The Best Practices Working Group will meet bi-annually for half-day sessions, to make final assessments toward progress and suggest next-steps.
- The Access Coordinator will continue to manage the development and administration of surveys and evaluations for staff trainings and relevant programs, to monitor progress toward goals through measures of participation and satisfaction, and to coordinate internal communication and sharing across departments until the end of the year, when they will pass this over to Interpretation staff.
- Turnstile will end their engagement delivering resources for internal trainings and recommendations for next steps.
- BBG staff will attend the American Association of Public Gardens annual conference to share learnings within the field, as well as sharing with the Museum Access Consortium.