Museums for America Grants

Sample Application MA-245940-OMS-20
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh

Amount awarded by IMLS: $158,064
Amount of cost share: $158,064

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:
https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/ma-245940-oms-20

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Please note that the instructions for preparing applications for the FY2021 Museums for America grant program differ from those that guided the preparation of FY2020 applications. Be sure to use the instructions in the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.
Project Justification
The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh (CMP), in partnership with the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media (FRC), proposes Simple Interactions: Growing Positive Relational Practices Within and Across Informal Learning Institutions. We are requesting a grant of $158,064 from the Institute for Museum and Library Sciences to provide professional development to three regional informal learning institutions (ILI) focused on empowering human interactions that support the learning experiences unique to each ILI’s context.

Based in Pittsburgh, PA and Latrobe, PA, respectively, CMP and FRC are the places where Fred Rogers’ legacy has come to find a home. Both institutions share Fred’s philosophy that children, and the people around us, deserve to be treated with respect, dignity, and kindness. Our interactions with other people, no matter their length or depth, contribute to the environments in which we learn, work, and live.

Through this project, CMP and FRC will lead three local institutions through an iterative process of engaging in, adapting, and sustaining a professional learning experience grown out of FRC, Simple Interactions. This innovation, which is strengths-based, practice-based and grounded in developmental science, uses self-reflection and peer feedback to build better facilitation practices around interactions.

This proposal will address three aims that directly support the Institute for Museum and Library Services’ goal of Building Capacity within the Museums for America project category of Lifelong Learning.

- **Aim 1:** Grow the capacity of ILI staff to facilitate meaningful interactions with visitors, external partners, and one another through the Simple Interactions professional learning experience.
- **Aim 2:** Build a community of practice among regional ILIs to support the understanding and growth of positive interactions.
- **Aim 3:** Build CMP’s capacity to act as a resource for regional ILIs around positive human interactions and facilitation practices.

Audience Addressed
This project is focused primarily on ILI’s and the informal educators that support their programs. Delivering Simple Interactions to our Partner Organizations will build capacity among ILI staff across departments (e.g., education, exhibits, finance, human resources, marketing, facilities, and visitor services). In this relationship context, our goal is to support staff’s identification and understanding of positive interactions with visitors. CMP and FRC intentionally selected partner institutions that focus on different content areas and serve different populations. Partner Organizations include: 1) Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Garden, a mid-sized, urban botanical garden that serves visitors of all ages; 2) Westmoreland Museum of American Art, a small, rural art museum that serves adults and families; and, 3) Allegheny County Library Association, a widespread suburban network of libraries that serve visitors of all ages.

Additionally, this shared professional development experience will build a community of practice within and among organizations. This process will help ILI staff to see their own circle of influence in promoting positive human interactions. This project also serves CMP and its staff as a process to build their capacity to facilitate Simple Interactions and support growth across the region.

Statement of Need
Research from developmental, cognitive, and behavioral sciences all point to human relationships as the “active ingredient” of learning and development (e.g., Hamre, 2014; Li & Julian, 2012; Osher, Cantor, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2018). Human relationships are built from interactions, or moment-by-moment exchanges among individuals within a setting (Li & Julian, 2012). ILIs are rich with interactions between staff and visitors and these interactions transcend content, staff department, and visitors’ age. For example, a teaching artist might facilitate a young child’s learning about circuitry in a makerspace, a guide may have a conversation with an adult patron about an art piece, or a front desk staff might offer a warm welcome during the sale of an admission ticket. Indeed, research shows that facilitation, which takes into account in-the-moment responsiveness of staff, is integral to positive and impactful
learning experiences (Pattison et al, 2017; Pattison & Dierking, 2013). And, facilitation strategies that informal educators and staff use are a way to deepen the learning experience for visitors (Braud & Lelliot, 2017).

However, effective facilitation can be substantially more challenging than is generally appreciated (Larson, Walker, Rusk, & Diaz, 2015). In many cases, tools, materials, or space design may take priority over investment in facilitation in informal institutions. By focusing intentionally on subtle and profound types of human interactions, we have the potential to elevate the capacity of staff, across departments to identify, refine and ultimately enhance visitors' learning and experience.

An additional goal of this work is to break down barriers that may exist between ILIs that focus on varying content (i.e. art vs. environmental) or serve diverse populations (i.e. urban/rural, large/small, child/family/adult visitors). Focusing on human interactions as the “active ingredient” can be a connecting concept across ILIs and the foundation for a local system that encourages, enriches and empowers human relationships. A local system for professional development among ILIs can anchor and lead the development of a model for regional change.

Project Work Plan
Building on Prior Work
The project partners, CMP and FRC, are at the forefront of thinking about how to enrich and empower human interactions across contexts and in informal learning settings. CMP has served millions of children and families by providing experiences that inspire joy, creativity, and curiosity since opening over 35 years ago. In 2011, CMP created the MAKESHOP and, with generous Institute for Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS) support, has become a leader in the maker movement on both a local and national level. Throughout the development of the MAKESHOP, CMP has deeply invested in, and benefited significantly from staff training and reflective practice around facilitation. CMP has also published research supporting the importance of facilitation (e.g., Brahms & Wardrip, 2016; Grabman, Stol, McNamara, Brahms, 2019; Wardrip, Brahms, Reich & Carrigan, 2016) and it has become a leading provider of professional development for educators working in ILIs. The work around facilitation that began in MAKESHOP has now expanded across Museum departments to include Exhibits, Early Childhood and the Art Studio.

Since its founding in 2003, FRC’s primary initiative has been the development and adaptation of the professional learning experience, Simple Interactions (www.simpleinteractions.org). Simple Interactions (SI) offers a system-change approach and is based on the Active Ingredient Hypothesis, the theory that human interactions are the most critical aspect of any developmental context. In the contexts that it has been applied to thus far, typical sessions include reflection on videos or storytelling of adult-child or adult-adult interactions using the Simple Interactions Tool. This is a one-page reflection tool that breaks down developmental interactions into four domains: connection, reciprocity, inclusion, and opportunity to grow. The Simple Interactions innovation is a collaboration between Dr. Dana Winters at FRC, Dr. Junlei Li at the Harvard School of Education, and Dr. Thomas Akiva at the University of Pittsburgh. In two studies of SI in afterschool programs, participants reported that the professional development is engaging and motivating (Akiva, Li, Martin, Horner, McNamara, 2016; Akiva, McNamara, Colvin & DeMand, under review). In a randomized control trial of SI in out-of-school time programs, staff in the experimental group prioritized relationships significantly more than those in the control group (Akiva, et al., under review). Finally, studies of SI in both libraries and early childhood educational settings show that participation in the professional development can build a community of reflective practice among colleagues across organizations (Bowler, Akiva, Colvin, & White, 2019; Wanless & Winters, 2018; Shafer et al., under review). Simple Interactions is ready for localized scaling across diverse informal learning settings.

CMP is one of the most established Simple Interactions sites, incorporating the SI model into its staff training since 2015. Teaching artists shared that these conversations helped them reflect on their practice and develop a localized common language to identify and enhance their capacity for in-the-moment facilitation. From 2017-2019, Teaching Artists at CMP engaged in Simple Interactions during monthly professional learning meetings. This continued work was useful in onboarding new staff and improving in-the-moment facilitation of museum activities. Another benefit
of the Simple Interactions work at CMP was the creation of a community of practice across departments within the organization. Educators in the MAKESHOP and in the Studio, the Museum’s art focused exhibit, noted similarities across the two exhibits and formed professional relationships that enhanced their practice and improved their teaching. This cross-departmental sharing of practice reinforces the idea that Simple Interactions can support facilitation strategies in a variety of contexts.

Building on this work, CMP and FRC recently launched a museum-wide roll out of Simple Interactions. Throughout 2019-2020, every full-time CMP employee will be exposed to Simple Interactions with the goal of creating an organization-wide common language, adapted from the SI common language, as well as prioritizing cross-departmental relationships throughout the museum. In addition to providing critical professional development to the CMP staff, this pilot year will also inform the project team on strategies to build cross-departmental communities of practice that can be applied to other organizations. This forms a proof of concept as we partner with other learning institutions.

CMP, in partnership with FRC, is requesting IMLS funding to support the next phase of growing Simple Interactions in informal learning organizations across our region. We believe that the Simple Interactions approach can improve and deepen how staff interact with visitors, external partners, and colleagues. The use of a common language through shared experiences will help institutions, across a variety of disciplines, connect around a common key feature inherent to their work: human interactions. CMP will provide essential leadership among regional institutions to support and grow this work.

**Project Goals and Strategic Relevance**

Through this project, we aim to: 1) Grow the capacity of ILI staff to identify, refine, and facilitate meaningful interactions with visitors, external partners, and one another through the Simple Interactions professional learning experience; 2) Build a community of practice among regional ILIs to support the growth of positive interactions; and, 3) Build CMP’s capacity to act as a resource for regional ILIs around positive human interactions and facilitation practices.

CMP and FRC are hopeful that after this grant project, the delivery of the SI professional learning experience can be expanded regionally and nationally. CMP has had proven success using a cohort model for national projects where participating organizations are part of a wider community of practice supported by the core CMP / FRC team. Through a previous partnership with Maker Ed, CMP established makerspaces and provided facilitation training to over 200 schools, libraries, and community education centers across North America.

Through decades of community development work and a commitment to research in informal learning spaces, CMP has emerged as an anchor and resource for the community, as well as a leader in thought around informal education practices. At its core, this project supplements the Museum’s mission and strategic policy to provide innovative museum experiences and the highest quality program facilitation possible while deepening its relationship with the people and organizations that make up its local and ILI community. The Museum is leading by example with its investment in SI for its own staff. In an effort to be a Resource to its community (SP-7 from Strategic Plan) and a Catalyst for Positive Change (SP-22), disseminating SI to other ILI’s is critical to building a community of practice around effective human relationships.

The CMP/FRC team will build capacity of ILI staff through Simple Interactions professional learning experiences, directly serving IMLS’ strategic goals. As we share the Simple Interactions innovation with practitioners across the region, we will support individual organizations to adopt and adapt Simple Interactions to meet their local needs. We will also host in-person partner meetings through which ILIs can engage in dialogue around positive interactions using a cross-cutting framework, the Simple Interactions Tool.

Finally, our three aims address the Museum for America program category of Lifelong Learning. In the proposed project, CMP will become a regional hub for supporting Simple Interactions work in the informal learning context.
FRC will scaffold CMP staff to facilitate Simple Interactions so that CMP can offer professional learning experiences and support communities of practice for other organizations in the region. By building and adapting a common language and focusing on interactions, CMP can bring together ILIs diverse in size, geographical location (rural vs. urban), and content to strengthen community connections. This type of collaboration will be new to informal learning in this region, effectively creating an SI facilitation model and Tool Kit that can be adapted regionally, and perhaps nationally, across learning contexts.

**Project Activities**
Across the two years of this grant, we will engage in three primary project activities described below.

**Activity One: Institution-Wide Simple Interactions Professional Learning Experiences**
In September 2020, FRC and CMP will host an in-person kick off meeting, including staff and leadership from all partners. In addition to building relationships across partner sites, this meeting will serve as an introduction to Simple Interactions and the primary planning meeting for the next two years of the grant cycle. In this meetings, partners will have the opportunity to share and reflect on their organizational cultures and facilitation practices in order to inform how the FRC and CMP teams interact with that organization’s staff.

Throughout the two project years, the CMP/FRC team will lead Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, the Westmoreland Museum of American Art, and the Allegheny County Library Association through the Simple Interactions Tool and learning process. We will work with each partner organization, one at a time, repeating an iterative cycle of participating in, adapting, and sustaining Simple Interactions.

Each Partner Organization cycle will begin with a half-day meeting with identified leadership at the partner institution. At this meeting, the organization’s leaders will participate in a more in-depth overview of the Simple Interactions process and discuss relevant logistics for their context as they plan ahead for the project. In particular, CMP/FRC will work with the partner organization to plan for their staff to participate in three Simple Interactions professional learning opportunities: **Foundations, Reflections, and Transformations**.

The focus of **Foundations** is to adapt the established common language around SI to the unique organization, and create an institution-wide culture focused on enriching human interactions. To do this, the CMP/FRC team will create learning opportunities for the entire ILI staff to think about how they encourage, enrich, and empower human interactions in their institution. Foundations will include three 90-minute learning sessions focused on the language and conceptual foundation of Simple Interactions using stock videos and research that support the importance of human interactions. Staff will also think about integrating the focus of interactions into the culture of the institution - through how they interact with visitors, external partners, as well as how they interact with one another.

The **Reflections** professional learning sessions will focus on everyday interactions in authentic environments and will include approximately half of the ILI staff who are interested in a deeper look at local interactions. Across three 90-minute learning sessions, participants will engage in ongoing reflection on their own practice and the practice of their colleagues using local video, collected by the CMP/FRC and the Simple Interactions Tool. The goal is to deepen the participants’ understanding of how interactions look at their organization and to promote strengths-based reflection around the practices, programs, and policies surrounding human interactions.

The **Transformations** professional learning sessions will extend the learning from the first two Simple Interactions opportunities. This will be for a smaller group of ILI staff to address a particular area of growth. Across five 90-minute sessions, participants will identify an individual problem of practice or institutional growth area and then iterate related “try-it-out” projects. Try-it-out projects include small tweaks to everyday practice or tests of change focused on encouraging, empowering, and enriching human interactions across different levels of their institution. These projects are grounded in theories of improvement science, which posits that organizational change can occur by iterating on small design experiments (adapted from Improvement Science; Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu,
These design experiments may be as simple as rearranging furniture to enhance parent-child interactions or as complex as a facilitation guide that provide prompts for discussion around a particular art experience. Participants will use their experiments to work towards transforming and sustaining change in their own practice and within their organization.

After each professional learning experience group (Foundations, Reflections, and Transformation) is complete, the CMP/FRC team will host a check-in meeting at which we will reflect with the partner institution leaders about what was useful and what we might adapt for the subsequent professional learning experiences. We will also engage in formative evaluation activities that will inform how each subsequent cycle is planned and implemented.

At the end of project year two, we will host all three partner institutions to evaluate successes, challenges and local adaptations of the professional learning experience and facilitate reflection activities on the organizational and regional changes we may have experienced related to this project. We will also plan for sustainability of the regional community of practice and create a plan for how CMP will support and push forward this work.

Activity Two: Developing CMP as Community Resource

CMP and FRC will partner throughout the project to build the infrastructure at CMP to become an anchor and catalyst in supporting the growth of SI in the regional informal learning community. Having a regional hub for this work will help to break down barriers across organizations. CMP already plays a central role in the regional informal learning context and can be a leader in supporting and sustaining this work (Akiva, Hecht, Osai, 2019).

Through the activities of the proposed IMLS grant, we will intentionally sequence the facilitation of partner organizations to scaffold and build CMP capacity. Currently, FRC is leading Simple Interactions with all CMP staff. Through each subsequent cycle with our Partner Organizations, CMP will take on a greater role in leading the process. FRC and CMP will hold regular check-in meetings for FRC to provide feedback on CMP’s facilitation strategies in teaching SI. Through this progression, we will build capacity of CMP staff to facilitate Simple Interactions with other ILIs in the region.

At the end of the two project years, we will host one regional Simple Interactions summit. At this meeting, we will disseminate resources and lessons learned from the project with other informal learning organizations in the community. Each partner institution will lead a session describing the impact of their Simple Interactions work and select participants will share their try-it-out projects. At this convening, the CMP/FRC team will also facilitate sessions around how the regional informal learning community can work towards encouraging, enriching, and empowering human interactions in our institutions and across our region.

Activity Three: Toolkit and Resource Development

Throughout the project, CMP and FRC will partner to create a toolkit that will promote positive human interactions specifically tailored for informal learning contexts. The toolkit will include activities or thinking routines to promote reflection and will be freely available online. Additional resources will include a video library of exemplar visitor-staff interactions and a white paper collaboratively written by CMP and FRC. The toolkit resources will be created, prototyped with partner organizations, and iterated on throughout the grant period with the goal of dissemination by the end of Year 2. We will disseminate resources regionally at our final convening for local informal institutions and nationally at conferences for the museum and libraries fields.

Project Management

CMP’s Director of Education, Robert “Chip” Lindsey, will support long-term project strategy, visioning, and dissemination. Alison Bank, Learning and Research Project Manager, and Will Tolliver, Manager of Early Childhood Learning, will oversee the implementation of this project including building relationships with partner organizations, facilitation of Simple Interactions sessions and partner meetings, and logistics throughout the grant. FRC’s Director of Simple Interactions, Dr. Dana Winters, and Senior Research Associate, Dr. Annie White will partner with CMP to lead facilitation of Simple Interactions sessions and partner meetings as well as all conduct
evaluation activities. In addition, FRC’s graphic designer, Kate Luchini, will be the primary designer of tools and resources. University students from FRC will also help to curate video footage and select exemplar clips. Dr. Thomas Akiva will advise on the project as a whole and especially on project evaluation.

**Project Evaluation**

**Continued Formative Evaluation and Resource Development**
Throughout the grant, we will collect formative evaluation data to inform subsequent cohorts of Simple Interactions with partner organizations. Data includes:

- **Video exemplars:** We will collect local video of consenting visitors interacting in each organization. FRC university students will view raw footage looking for positive interactions. We will use these videos during workshop sessions and we will also catalogue exemplar clips to create a video library for each organization.
- **Workshop session artifacts:** During each Simple Interactions session, we will collect artifacts such as notes and group discussions. Information gleaned from these artifacts will help us understand what is useful and what needs to be changed for future groups.
- **Participant reflection sheets:** In the Simple Interactions Intensive groups, participants will respond to writing prompts designed to elicit reflection about their learning and growth. We will analyze these reflections to understand more about the learning processes of participants.

**Summative Evaluation and Sustainability/Adaptability Planning**
Summative evaluation will occur at the end of each partner cycle as well as at the end of the project. Data includes:

- **Interviews and focus group discussion:** We will conduct interviews and focus groups with select participants from each organization including questions about individual change, organizational change, and community change.
- **Post-survey:** We will distribute surveys that ask about satisfaction, relational practices, and individual learning.

**Final Project Evaluation**
We will center our evaluation activities on three main questions: 1) **To what extent did the CMP/FRC team successfully implement project activities?** To address this question, CMP/FRC will track project activities. This includes counting the number of attendees during professional learning experiences, total hours of attendance for participants, and detailed reflections from facilitators throughout each cycle. 2) **In what ways does the implementation of Simple Interactions impact organizational culture within an institution?** In particular, we will investigate how staff perceive their roles and their organization, how staff connect across departments, and if there is evidence of organizational change (e.g., increased collective efficacy, prioritization of staff-visitor interactions, altered institutional operations) after participating in SI. 3) **In what ways does the implementation of Simple Interactions impact a regional community of practice?** To address this question, we will look for evidence of systems-level change in the region, track how relational practices may provide a connection point across institutions, and document any shifts in regional capacity and culture. CMP’s established Learning and Research Department has extensive expertise in program evaluation. The CMP/FRC team will consult with Dr. Akiva, a longtime research and evaluation partner of both CMP and FRC.

**Project Timeline**
Beginning in September 2020, the CMP/FRC team will host the initial cross-organization partner meeting at CMP. From October 2020 - May 2021, the FRC will lead three professional learning experiences (Foundations, Reflections, and Transformations) with the Westmoreland Museum of American Art, with the support of CMP. From May 2021 - November 2021, the CMP/FRC team will co-facilitate three Simple Interactions experiences with the Allegheny County Library Association. From November 2021 - May 2022, the CMP team will lead three Simple Interactions experiences with Phipps Conservatory and Botanic Garden, with the support of FRC. The CMP/FRC team and leaders from the Partner Organization will meet before and after each group (four times total). In addition, the CMP/FRC team will collect data for formative evaluation as well as iterate on resource development throughout each cycle. In May 2022, CMP/FRC will host a final cross-organization partner meeting at CMP to discuss reflection and sustainability.
Beginning in May 2022 through the end of the grant period, the CMP/FRC team will engage in summative evaluation of the full project in addition to supporting Partner Organizations with their sustainability plans. By the end of August 2022, CMP and FRC will co-publish their suite of resources, including the white paper, the video library, and the collection of activities and thinking routines. Each piece of this Tool Kit will be prototyped and iterated upon with each Partner Organization to reflect their specific context and needs.

Dissemination of project work will occur at conferences in June 2021 and May 2022 in addition to a region-wide convening hosted by CMP/FRC for informal institutions in the region.

Project Results

Sustainability Plan

Each organization will create a plan for sustaining the concepts and practices learned through the Simple Interactions professional learning experience. CMP will provide ongoing support to each organization as they create and implement this plan. In addition, CMP will be equipped to facilitate Simple Interactions with additional ILIs as well as disseminate the resources and tools created for this project.

Outcomes

The intended outcomes of the proposed project are organized around our three aims. In our first aim, our goal is to grow the capacity of ILI staff to facilitate meaningful interactions with visitors, colleagues, and external partners through the Simple Interactions professional learning experience. Outcomes related to this aim include:

- Staff knowledge about relational practices and their importance as measured through surveys and by analyzing language used during interviews and focus groups.
- An online toolkit, including:
  - a selection of activities and thinking routines around the SI work;
  - a video library of exemplar clips from each organization, and;
  - a white paper detailing key findings of the project.

In our second aim, we hope to build a community of practice among a regional cohort of ILIs to support the growth of positive interactions. Outcomes related to this aim include:

- Development of a community of support throughout the Southwestern Pennsylvania region for participating ILIs.
- The continued sharing of knowledge, skills, and practices across a regional community of participating ILIs.

Our third aim is to develop CMP as an anchor and catalyst for supporting professional learning around positive interactions across ILIs in the region. Outcomes related to this aim include:

- Development CMP as a resource to support communication and adaption of Simple Interactions professional learning in informal learning contexts.
- Creation of resources and tools for CMP to disseminate to other ILIs in the region.

Sharing Project Results

CMP and FRC will work together throughout the project to create shareable tools and resources about strengthening positive interactions in informal learning settings. These tools will be available publicly for free download from the Simple Interactions website and the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh’s website, www.pittsburghkids.org. In addition, the CMP/FRC team will work together to write a white paper, which will be published on each institution's website. FRC and CMP will create exemplar video libraries to share with partner organizations. CMP will share the project with the museum and informal education field through presentations at conferences. FRC will also share the project results with other fields, including early childhood, youth programming, and K-12 education during national speaking engagements.
### Children's Museum of Pittsburgh - IMLS MFA FY2020: Year 1

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<td>CMP &amp; FRC Monthly Planning Meetings</td>
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<td><strong>Activity Two:</strong> FRC provides feedback on session facilitation to CMP</td>
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<td><strong>Allegheny County Library Association (ACLA), continued</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity One:</strong> Transformations (sessions and debriefs)</td>
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<td><strong>Activity One:</strong> Half-day debrief meeting with select participants from ACLA</td>
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<td><strong>Data Collection:</strong> Survey all cohort participants, interview a sample of participants, editing and analysis of videos for video library</td>
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<td><strong>Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity One:</strong> Half-day meeting with identified leadership (partnership learning model, adaptation plan from beginning, cohort planning)</td>
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<td><strong>Activity One:</strong> Foundations (sessions and brief)</td>
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<td><strong>Activity One:</strong> Reflections (sessions and brief)</td>
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<td><strong>Activity One:</strong> Transformations (sessions and briefs)</td>
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<td><strong>Activity One:</strong> Half-day debrief meeting with select participants from Phipps</td>
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<td><strong>Final Evaluation &amp; Dissemination</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity Four:</strong> Summative, including half-day debrief with partner organizations to reflect on learning, sustainability, and adaptations of the project plus half-day regional SI convening to share work with other organizations interested in SI</td>
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<td><strong>Evaluation:</strong> Interview leadership across museums</td>
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<td><strong>Support sustainability efforts across museum partners</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Activity Three:</strong> Toolkit development, including iterative design and testing of resources and creation of video library</td>
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<td><strong>Writing and dissemination (ACM 2022 and AAM 2022)</strong></td>
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