



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application MA-25-19-0173-19
Project Category: Community Anchors and Catalysts

Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$50,000
Amount of cost share: \$40,000

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 FY2020 Inspire! Grants for Small Museums grant program differ from those that guided the preparation of FY2019 applications. Be sure to use the instructions in the [FY2020 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

The Peale Center for History and Architecture
IMLS INSPIRE! Grants for Small Museums ABSTRACT

The [Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture \(Peale\)](#) seeks funding to support its core program, [Be Here: Baltimore \(BHB\)](#), which is a cultural storytelling program offering an innovative way of gathering and stewarding Baltimore's heritage, and, in particular, shedding light on its deep, rich, and historically significant African American story and culture. (The Peale is a proud member of the Association of African American Museums in light of its history as home to Male and Female Colored School No. 1—the first African American school in Baltimore, 1878-1887.) Support is being sought to help the Peale continue its trajectory of effectiveness during a time of final, major building renovations wherein the Peale will take its programming even more deeply into the community as opposed to being based primarily “at home, on-site.”

The BHB program—piloted in summer 2016 by the Peale's Executive Director with the aim of helping create a more inclusive cultural record of Baltimore—resulted in the creation of 250 stories of Baltimore by a diverse range of “citizen storytellers” in just two months. That collection has grown to over 1,250 authentic stories to date offering new perspectives about the city, its places and history, and providing citizen knowledge for community members and visitors alike. Though intellectual property rights remain with the storytellers, this body of digital stories forms the core of the Peale's “collection,” along with the historic Museum building the Peale occupies, and is the focus of the organization's stewardship. BHB provides a welcoming, safe, open space for community expression and dialogue, encouraging community understanding of a multi-cultural shared history that is complex and layered with compelling and different perspectives. Through monthly storytelling events, story-recording stations, and celebrations of Baltimore's history, BHB workshops help bring attention to the city and full diversity to voices and issues facing different and entwined demographics. These stories and voices offer new narratives for the City that are being shared at home and around the world through cutting edge digital platforms, supporting creative place-making, cultural respect, and revitalization.

Through its storytelling workshops, BHB also helps under-served communities and young people develop valuable 21st century skills in digital content creation, research, writing, and public speaking—all valuable for use in creative and professional pursuits. BHB storytellers learn how to use smartphones and publicly available computers to record and publish their stories on free and open platforms to reach the largest audience possible. BHB places a particular emphasis on making content accessible to people with sensory and mobility disabilities to not only meet ADA requirements, but to ensure that the new digital experiences of Baltimore's heritage are inclusive and open to all. By publishing Baltimore's cultural stories on a wide range of platforms, BHB also helps “future-proof” the digital content to ensure it will continue to be accessible as technologies evolve.

This project has grown and, thanks in part, to partnerships Peale executive director developed with local NPR's Aaron Henkin, producer of WYPR's award-winning “Out of the Blocks” program, and with Nate Couser, host of The Artist Exchange Radio Show. In addition to hosting live storytelling events at the Peale, they have helped ensure that Baltimore's stories and the Peale's work are heard by their own significant global audiences.

Most importantly, this entire project demonstrates, and will be a replicable model for, the innovative and creative way museums can become a linchpin in working with other types of organizations and individuals, from different fields and walks of life, to further issues within its community in the 21st century.

The Peale Center for History and Architecture
IMLS INSPIRE! Grants for Small Museums NARRATIVE

Project Justification:

The [Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture](#) (Peale) seeks funding to support its core program, *Be Here: Baltimore* (*BHB*), which is a cultural storytelling program offering an innovative way of gathering and stewarding Baltimore's heritage, and, in particular, shedding light on its deep, rich, and historically significant African American story and culture. (The Peale is a proud member of the Association of African American Museums in light of its history as home to Male and Female Colored School No. 1—the first African American school in Baltimore, 1878-1887.) Support is being sought to help the Peale continue its trajectory of effectiveness during a time of final, major building renovations wherein the Peale will take its programming even more deeply into the community as opposed to being based primarily “at home, on-site.”

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Under the umbrella of *BHB*, a compelling and extraordinary program has been developed entitled [#SayItLikeItIs](#), which invites students from Baltimore city to discuss schools and education—the successes, shortcomings, and opportunities for positive change. This program, designed by University of Maryland Associate Professor of Design, Audra Buck-Coleman, in partnership with the Peale is relevant for the Peale within the historical context of its role in Baltimore's education system and segregation. Participating

The Peale Center for History and Architecture
IMLS INSPIRE! Grants for Small Museums NARRATIVE

students create messages that responding to their experiences of Baltimore education and advocate their ideas for improving a system that is so critical to their success. Students publish participatory and interactive messages through their preferred digital and/or physical means and also communicate these through performances and a public summit to be held at the Peale on November 30, 2018. The students choose the most authentic ways to disseminate their messages based on the audiences they want to reach and the responses they seek. Through #SayItLikeItIs, contemporary students – tomorrow’s city leaders and citizens – gain experience and skills in communicating their experiences and articulating their visions for a better future. In the process, they learn about the origins of segregation in Baltimore’s school system through the Peale’s own history, and about 20th century segregated schools through the Maryland State Arts Council-funded “How We Got Over” project. Led by Mama Linda Goss, co-founder of the National Association of Black Storytellers, this series of stories records the experiences of elders in racially-segregated schools and their legacy in the lives of graduates today. The ultimate goal for the Peale, #SayItLikeItIs, and “How We Got Over” is to draw attention to specific circumstances and influence positive change for Baltimore. Through stories, a bridge to understanding differences and perspectives is provided in a city that has a long and arduous history of racial and socioeconomic inequality and tensions.

In the past two years, with growth and community recognition, *BHB* has become an anchor and beacon program for the city’s storytellers and culture-enhancing record keepers. Numerous local storytelling organizations, including Stoop Stories and WYPR’s award-winning Out of the Blocks series, have added their voices and stories to *BHB*. Local universities have also found the project to be a great way to get their students off-campus and talking to local residents about their stories; to date, Towson, Loyola, Morgan State, and Johns Hopkins Universities have contributed to the *BHB* project. In addition, MICA, Goucher College, JHU, Morgan State, and UMBC have created exhibitions and class projects at the Peale. The Peale’s Executive Director Dr. Nancy Proctor is currently teaching a course at Johns Hopkins University through the Museums and Society Program. The course, entitled “*From Treasure House to Production House: Exploring New Roles for the Museum in the 21st Century*”, invites students to go behind the scenes of the Peale as it reinvents itself for the 21st century as a production house for authentic stories of Baltimore and a laboratory for innovation in the cultural sector worldwide. Students work primarily with three sets of storytellers: expert historians and researchers; traditional griots and culture-keepers; and local public school students on the #SayItLikeItIs project.

This trans-generational and multi-sector collaboration is adding under-represented voices and stories to Baltimore’s cultural record, and participants are working to enable them to be heard on a wide range of platforms and media, transforming the nature of the museum in society from that of “treasure house” to “production house of culture.” *BHB* has already received significant support over the past two years from the Baltimore National Heritage Area Heritage Investment Grant (HIG), Johns Hopkins University Museums and Society Program, and the Dutch mobile company, izi.TRAVEL. The project is poised to reach new levels of public engagement by expanding its storytelling and recording stories workshops beyond the Peale’s walls even while use of the historic building is disrupted by renovation works.

The *BHB* project is closely tied to the Peale’s Strategic Plan, developed in early 2018, with its main identified goals as the following:

- **“Digital First” Collections**

- The Peale has adopted a “digital first” approach to collections, gathering “born digital” cultural stories and related assets as part of its efforts to create a more inclusive cultural record of the City. This

The Peale Center for History and Architecture
IMLS INSPIRE! Grants for Small Museums NARRATIVE

approach, maximizing current technology and forward thinking, is in the spirit of founder Rembrandt [Peale](#), who was a noted innovator, artist, and entrepreneur.

- **Community-led Programming**

Programming at the Peale is developed by creators and culture-keepers from Baltimore's communities in a grassroots-up rather than top-down curatorial process. Baltimore and the surrounding regions are rich with artists and creative practitioners. It is in the spirit of the Peale family's artistic legacy for the Peale to support and promote local arts. Artists and storytellers have found the Peale's architecture and wide-reaching history inspiring, with multiple points of connection to current issues from fine art, natural history, showmanship, the history of museums, education, and segregation, to urban studies, civics, and the history of industry and innovation in Baltimore.

- **From Treasure House to Production House of Culture**

The Peale's programs, developed with Baltimore's communities, enable participants to develop 21st century storytelling and digital media production skills that they can use elsewhere in their creative and professional practices. They also position the Peale as not just a steward but an active platform for the ongoing production of culture by citizens and participants.

- **A Platform for Innovation in the Cultural Sector**

The Peale's strategic approaches are innovative and promise not just to transform the Peale, but also to create models that can help other cultural institutions become more relevant, accessible, and sustainable in the 21st century

Project Work Plan:

BHB is in its "scaling" (<https://www.imls.gov/blog/2018/06/biscuits-vs-granola-innovative-ways-libraries-archives-and-museums-scale>) stage, increasing quantity of production and impact while maintaining quality of program with a tested programming model.

Going into 2019 and through early 2020, the Peale will be working on and completing its final building renovations and has been gearing up for the last year and a half to build community recognition, partnerships, and support so that its programming continues to grow during intermittent building access July 2019 through early 2020.

Executive Director of the Peale, Dr. Nancy Proctor, is the founder and project manager of the *BHB* program. *BHB* is inspiring and instigating positive change in the community through communication, generating understanding, and giving voice equally to often marginalized community members. It is anticipated to be impactful not only in Baltimore by helping change the narrative about a complex city and its history, but as an example for the field of using an historic community museum to innovate and impact contemporary positive change. The project is intended to be replicable and exemplary, with key project staff open and available to their fields and other colleagues to explain, clarify, and share project design, lessons learned, and real outcomes.

Key project individuals:

Dr. Nancy Proctor was appointed as the inaugural director in February 2017 by a unanimous vote of the Peale Board of Directors to lead the organization's transformation into the 21st century. She was chosen due to her expertise, experience, and vision of excellence in collaboration, engagement, and innovation. She is a renowned innovator and creative visionary for cultural institutions, including via technology, funding streams, and a leader in the museum field regarding innovative engagement and representation of underserved voices. Proctor has her PhD in Art History, specializing in 19th century American art. Previously, she served as Deputy Director

The Peale Center for History and Architecture
IMLS INSPIRE! Grants for Small Museums NARRATIVE

of Digital Experience and Communications at the Baltimore Museum of Art and, before that, as head of Mobile Strategy at the Smithsonian Institution. She is co-chair of MuseWeb (MW)—formerly [Museums and the Web](#)), which produces the international N conferences dedicated to innovation in the cultural sector—and lectures and publishes widely on technology, accessibility, and transformation in museums. To address relevance today for institutions and their audiences, Proctor and her MW colleagues launched the MuseWeb Foundation and its flagship *Be Here* program in Baltimore in the summer of 2016.

Nate Couser is host of [The Artist Exchange Radio Show](#) and producer of BHB stories at the Peale Center. He oversees the recording and sound engineering of the BHB stories as well as their publication on his own radio show and other social media platforms. Nate also conducts BHB workshops at the Peale and around the city. A graduate of Coppin State University, Nate is trained as an actor and director. He is known for his work with Annex Theater and El Mondo in Baltimore, as well as his production of the Baltimore-authored play, *Footprints*, at the Peale in May 2018 with an immersive exhibition, “Standing Room Only.” Nate recently presented on using digital tools for community engagement as part of a panel at the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums Conference, alongside representatives of the National Association of African American History and Culture and the Brooklyn Historical Society.

Audra Buck-Coleman is a PhD candidate and an Associate Professor of Design at the University of Maryland. She holds an MFA in design from Cranbrook Academy of Art and a Bachelors of Journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She developed and piloted BHB #SayItLikeItIs for the Peale. Over the course of her professional career, Buck-Coleman has written, art directed, curated, designed, authored, and directed numerous design projects, including *Sticks + Stones*, an international multi-university collaborative that investigates labeling and stereotyping in graphic design. Recently Buck-Coleman’s design work has become more focused on the social impact and ethical considerations of the design practice—an excellent fit for the Peale and its goals. These concerns permeate her design research as well as her design pedagogy. Buck-Coleman’s printed and motion projects primarily address issues of homelessness and sustainability.

Key grant activities include:

July 2019: *BHB* Producer/Project Coordinator hire

July 2019: Evaluation – project review and study design, data collection training

August 2019 Evaluation: data quality review and coding support

Aug – Dec 2019 / Feb – Jun 2020 Monthly Storytelling Workshops: 10 / year

August – December 2019 / February – June 2020: Monthly Storytelling Celebrations and "Shares"

April 2020: *Museums and the Web* annual conference – relevant thematic presentation of program

May 2020: AAM annual conference – relevant thematic presentation of project

May – June 2020: *BHB* exhibition @ Peale Center

June 2020: Evaluation – review and interpretation resulting in Impact Assessment Report

Necessary resources for the project include the oversight of the project by *BHB* founder and Peale Executive Director, Dr. Nancy Proctor. With this grant, she will be able to hire a much needed producer/program coordinator to work with the many partners—storytellers, artists, non-profit organizations, educational, and government partners—throughout the city to deliver the *BHB* program during the Peale’s major renovations, ongoing in late 2019 and into early 2020. In addition, this grant will enable the Peale to add a digital registrar and data manager to its team and invest in evaluation expertise to ensure that we can accurately report the impact of our storytelling programs within Baltimore’s communities, and beyond, as well as steward the *BHB* stories for their long-term preservation and dissemination.

The Peale Center for History and Architecture
IMLS INSPIRE! Grants for Small Museums NARRATIVE

The Peale will track progress of the program both informally and formally itself, through surveys and feedback from participants and stakeholders, as well as engage a professional museum evaluator to help establish formal data collection and train the Peale program coordinator and digital registrar to collect such, check on data quality and recommend adjustments, and evaluate and summarize data at the end of the grant period.

Project results will be shared at two, minimally, conferences throughout the grant period with those being the annual MW and American Alliance of Museums conferences. As well, if the opportunity and timing allows, the executive director will present at the annual Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums conference. The executive director also currently works closely with the postsecondary sector in Baltimore, including with Johns Hopkins University, Morgan State, and University of Maryland, to develop and teach from this program; this will continue throughout the grant period, providing opportunities to discuss the project with the education community and next generation field and community members.

Project Results:

This project is built on the experience, expertise, and vision of the Peale's Executive Director, Dr. Nancy Proctor. She has spent a great deal of time working with the community—storytellers, cultural professionals, community members, education partners (secondary and post secondary)—to establish, first, the relevancy of the focus of the program, and, second, a viable network to grow the program. There are many rewarding outcomes of the *BHB* program with the most significant and obvious being its impact on the:

- cultural history of the City of Baltimore;
- storytellers and oral historians;
- families and inter-generational program participants;
- students, i.e., next generation community leaders and members.

Tracking and evaluating implementation and impact will not only help inform the Peale, thereby its programming, but also other organizations who may undertake like projects, using this one as a model. Tracking and evaluation will include input from the storytellers and presenters as well as the program audiences. Having an experienced museum evaluator specialist to guide this part of the project and train the Peale program coordinator and digital registrar will bring excellence to qualitative and quantitative data collection, interpretation, and dissemination.

During the Peale's final, major renovations late 2019 and into early 2020, this IMLS grant would help catapult the *BHB* program to greater visibility as well as heightened impact across the city as it immerses more deeply in community neighborhoods and sites. At the same time, it will enable the Peale to attract support from other funders for lasting sustainability, which is the ultimate goal. Sustainability allows the Peale to continue to provide a platform for voices that need to be, and should be, heard in conversation of the rich historic story of the city as well as today's major city and social issues.

Most significantly, this entire project demonstrates, and will be a replicable model for, the innovative and creative way museums can become a linchpin in working with other types of organizations and individuals, from different fields and walks of life, to further issues within its community in the 21st century.

