



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-10-17-0269-17

Project Category: Learning Experiences

Funding Level: \$5,000 – \$500,000

Briar Bush Nature Center

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$121,086

Amount of cost share: \$157,864

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 FY2018 Museums for America grant program differ from those that guided the preparation of FY2017 applications. This year, the maximum that may be requested from IMLS is \$250,000. Be sure to use the instructions in the FY2018 Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

Friends of Briar Bush
Application to IMLS Museums for America
December, 2016

Abstract

The Friends of Briar Bush request funding from the IMLS to implement designs for permanent exhibits in the Griscom Bird Observatory designed through IMLS planning grant MA-11-15-0180-15. Exhibits will help visitors observe and learn about birds and their importance to ecosystems and biodiversity, facilitate visitors' participation in citizen science by recording their observations, and encourage visitors to create their own backyard habitat.

The current Griscom Observatory is a cottage that was repurposed from the founders' home with dioramas and several small exhibits. While the cottage is a valued community resource for bird watching, its potential as a viable teaching space has not been realized. The interior exhibits have not been updated in many years. Staff, volunteers, members and visitors alike have expressed an understanding of the need to maximize its potential. Getting public input was crucial to the planning process and was done through focus groups and individual meetings with staff, volunteers, members and visitors.

In this second phase of the project, the Friends of Briar Bush will implement the exhibit fabrication. From October of 2017 to April of 2018 we will dismantle current exhibits in the Griscom Bird Observatory and renovate the space to prepare for the installation of new, permanent exhibits. During this time, contractors will be fabricating the exhibit components. We expect to install the new exhibit components in September and October of 2018. Then, from November of 2018 through September of 2019, we will evaluate and refine exhibit components. We want to capture seasonal audiences such as school students and summer camp participants to ensure our evaluation is comprehensive.

This project will benefit visitors by helping them understand birds and their importance to the world, allow them to participate in citizen science by asking them to log their bird sightings, and encourage them to create backyard habitats that will encourage a sustainable ecosystem. The project will benefit staff and volunteers by providing a more substantive teaching space; and the project will benefit the greater scientific community by providing access to data submitted by Briar Bush visitors.

The tangible result is the installation of permanent exhibits that are informative, engaging, and interactive-- and ultimately move people to action.

Once the new exhibits are installed, we plan to pre and post-survey visitors, volunteers and school children in a systematic, comprehensive way. Because we provide a good deal of programming on site for audiences from two-year-olds and their parents to senior adults, we have an advantage in getting tangible feedback. We can create surveys geared toward various audiences, and present the surveys as an adjunct to programming.

1. Project Justification

What do you propose to do?

Having successfully designed a plan for new, permanent exhibits in Briar Bush Nature Center's Griscom Bird Observatory with IMLS grant MA-11-15-0180-15, the Friends of Briar Bush will implement designs and install exhibits in this space, which has not been updated in many years. Exhibits will help visitors identify and learn more about birds (in part as a portal to the greater natural environment), enable visitors to participate in citizen science, and encourage them to create their own backyard bird habitats.

What need, problem, or challenge will the project address?

While Briar Bush Nature Center is established in Abington Township and Montgomery County, PA as the foremost site for environmental education, some of our exhibits need updating. The Griscom Bird Observatory is unique in that it is a cabin that mimics the home of Briar Bush's original habitants, Florence and Everett Griscom, and is treasured in the community as a haven for comfortable bird watching looking outside through a 29 foot-long window to a feeder garden and stream. The Observatory is also used by school and other groups for formal programs. We recognize that the space's potential as a place of self-directed learning and engagement has not been realized. The space has not been updated in years, and members of the community have voiced the need to maximize its potential.

The IMLS grant awarded to the Friends of Briar Bush in 2015 allowed the creation of a comprehensive exhibit plan that was designed with the following goals in mind:

1. Excite and educate people about birds and provide the basics of bird identification;
2. Enable people to participate in citizen science by encouraging them to log their bird sightings, which will be transferred by Briar Bush staff to eBird (an international data collection system jointly sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology)
3. Illustrate the history of Briar Bush and its relation to birding and natural history conservation;
4. Model methods, plantings and landscaping that encourage visitors to create their own backyard bird habitats that promote sustainability and a wide host of visiting wildlife.

Who or what will benefit from the project?

This project will benefit visitors to Briar Bush Nature Center, volunteers, staff members, and the greater scientific community. During the planning process, we held focus groups and conducted volunteer, staff, stakeholder, and visitor interviews to determine how to move forward with exhibits in the Griscom Bird Observatory. Because the site is beloved by the community, it was important to us to get input from as many stakeholders as possible. This input was shared with an exhibit design firm (Frina Design) who developed the exhibition design. The project for which we are now requesting implementation support is the product of that planning and design process.

Exhibits in the Griscom Bird Observatory will benefit a diverse range of visitors in a variety of ways. The exhibits are designed for those who may just be getting interested in birds and to peak interest in casual visitors. To this end, exhibits will be fun and interactive, and accessible through a variety of interpretive methods. In recent years, Briar Bush has increased our programming for special audiences, such as senior adults, low income households, and children on the autism spectrum. Ensuring that the bird observatory exhibits are accessible to many audiences is at the forefront of the planning process.

Briar Bush is valued in the community as a “Nature 101” resource. We begin teaching natural science to children as young as two years old. It is our belief that instilling an appreciation of the natural world must begin at a very young age. The Griscom Bird Observatory is a place where parents bring their toddlers to learn and explore, and all involved in the planning process insisted that a toddler area was vital. This has been incorporated into the design.

One of the main tenets of the STEM philosophy is that people must first understand the world around them in a logical, scientific way before they can hope to make an impact. The exhibits have been designed with this in mind—with interest and understanding leading to action. The exhibits teach visitors how to identify birds and how important birds are to ecosystems and biodiversity. They encourage visitors to participate in citizen science and make a difference, by asking them to count and report the birds they see, and they promote sustained action by providing examples of how people can create backyard habitats to help birds and other wildlife.

New exhibits in the bird observatory will result in more substantive tools that teaching staff and volunteers can use to facilitate programs. The bird observatory is a featured stop during all on-site programs at Briar Bush, including hikes run by volunteers. Staff and volunteer educators will better be able to engage people in the basics of bird identification, help them to understand bird habits and the roles that birds play in nature, explain how they can collect data on their observations, and demonstrate how they can improve life for birds in their own back yards.

The greater scientific community will benefit from this project by being able to access data, based on visitors’ bird sighting reports, which will be submitted by Briar Bush staff through eBird.

The Abington community, where Briar Bush Nature Center is located, will also benefit from this project. Briar Bush is often cited as a reason why the Abington Township is a great place to live, and a factor in Abington’s being included in Money Magazine’s 100 best places to live for several years. This value can only increase as Briar Bush’s value as an educational resource increases.

Finally, we expect that the local bird and wildlife community will benefit from the increased understanding, interest and action on their behalf that will result from the successful completion of this project, as people create more wildlife-friendly outdoor areas and aid in scientific inquiry.

What are the intended results of the project?

The result of this project is the completion of accessible, engaging, interesting exhibit installations that stay true to the educational goals identified during planning. Those goals are:

1. To excite and educate people about birds and provide the basics of bird identification;
2. To enable people to participate in citizen science by encouraging them to log their bird sightings;
3. To illustrate the history of Briar Bush and its relation to birding and natural history conservation, and
4. To model methods, plantings and landscaping that encourage visitors to create their own backyard bird habitats that promote sustainability and a wide range of visiting wildlife.

How does the project advance our strategic plan?

This project ties to several goals of Briar Bush Nature Center's strategic plan. The first goal in our plan is to, "Assess Briar Bush Nature Center resources and long term goals to create an overarching land management plan, an exhibits plan and plant and animal collections plans that focus on our vision of celebrating *native and local species*." As this goal states, our vision for the nature center is to celebrate local, native plants and animals and to explain the importance of native species. The floristic plan, just outside the bird observatory window, is especially aligned with this plan goal, as are the enhanced exhibits about local birds. In 2014, Briar Bush was awarded a grant by the Department of Conservation of Natural Resources (DCNR) to assess the site and plan for enhancements of the outdoor areas at Briar Bush. This Master Site Plan is 95% complete, and planned bird observatory garden improvements and outdoor elements dovetail well with plans for new exhibits in the interior of the Griscom Bird Observatory.

Another goal in our strategic plan is to, "create more value by instituting meaningful, relevant programming." Offering exhibits that focus on serious science and how to be an active part of improving the world for birds and other native species increases the nature center's value to everyone. Once the new exhibits are installed, we will be creating programming for a variety of audiences that will enhance the value of the exhibits.

A third relevant strategic goal is to, "build and strengthen alliances with relevant partners (i.e. the Wyncote Audubon Society, the three local watershed associations, special needs services, senior providers)." We have engaged a few of these groups in our earliest assessments of the Griscom Bird Observatory and will continue to engage them further throughout the implementation process. We have positioned ourselves as a special needs resource in our community (especially among people with autism spectrum disorder and for those with intellectual disabilities) and will continue to rely on the expertise of our partners to make the project as valuable as possible for those with special needs.

2. Project Work Plan

What specific activities will you carry out?

To date we have used the input of volunteers, staff and our community partners to develop solid content goals and craft a plan for exhibits in the Griscom Bird Observatory; hired an exhibit developer/designer (With the help of IMLS funding) who worked with us to develop and design the exhibit. This phase of the project is implementation. We will:

- demo existing exhibitions, remove and update lighting and wall paneling in the exhibit area of the 700sq.ft. cabin;
- Contract to have exhibit components fabricated;
- Install exhibits;
- Evaluate and modify components as needed for effectiveness.

Exhibits will feature:

For Bird Identification: This section of the exhibit space is intended to teach visitors who know little or nothing about bird identification and uses the key principles of size and shape, color and markings, behavior and location. Interactive activities and imagery, such as matching games, bird puzzles, and zoetropes illustrating behaviors are included.

For Citizen Science: A “science desk” with information about why scientists count birds and how to get involved. This section will include a physical interactive for recording bird sightings out of the large observation window. This area enhances our programming around citizen science programs we already participate in, such as the national “project feederwatch” and the 100+ year old “Christmas Bird” count.

For Backyard Bird Habitat: This section will feature an interactive panel to help visitors and people identify which kinds of birds can be found in particular habitats; a low tech interactive helps visitors understand the three things birds need-water, food and shelter; an electronic “Bird Field of Dreams,” on which visitors will need to get their bird “home;” and a graphic panel explaining some of the intricacies of bird migration.

Exhibits will also include graphics describing the history of the site, the former home of the original occupants of Briar Bush, the Griscoms, who were bird lovers and influenced generations of children; a toddler play space, featuring a large nest that children can climb into and model bird parenting; and bird-related toys.

We have attached schematic drawings and the bid document with this proposal.

What are the risks to the project, and are they accounted for in the plan?

We expect that the greatest risks to this project are finding the time to properly devote to it, and coordinating the site preparation with Abington Township. This will take significant coordination and time management—our timeline reflects seasonal time constraints and working within schedules of Briar Bush and other Parks & Recreation staff--but we believe so

strongly in the project that we are ready to devote significant organizational resources to accomplish the project.

Who will plan, implement and manage your project?

The project will be managed by Executive Director Greta Brunschwyler, who has a strong background in exhibition development (Greta's resume is attached). Working with Frina Design and exhibit fabricators, Greta will oversee project implementation. Greta will be aided by Briar Bush staff in physical labor and content refinement and image acquisition.

When and in what sequence will your activities occur?

Activities prior to IMLS grant period: We will begin the silent phase of a capital campaign to raise funds for this project prior to the beginning of the IMLS grant period.

Activities during IMLS grant period

September 2017: Notification of IMLS grant

October 2017-January 2018: Dismantling of current exhibits, removal of old paneling, removal of some current framework to enlarge the space.

January 2018-April 2018: Renovation of the existing space, including building out the space to accommodate the new exhibits, replacing old paneling and flooring and updating lighting.

February 2018-August 2018- Fabrication of new exhibit components by outside contractor.

September 2018-October 2018: Installation of new exhibits in the prepared space of the Griscom Bird Observatory.

November, 2018 through September 2019: Evaluation and refinement of exhibit components. We want to capture seasonal audiences such as school students and summer camp participants, which is why we have allocated nearly a year for evaluation and modification.

What financial, personnel and other resources will you need to carry out the project?

The primary personnel commitment will be the time of Executive Director Greta Brunschwyler. Greta has lead staff and other stakeholders through the planning process, and has worked closely with exhibit designer Frina Design on the project thus far. This project leadership will continue through the implementation process.

This implementation phase of the project will also require resource commitment from both Abington Township and the Friends of Briar Bush. Existing dioramas, exhibits, and paneling must be removed (by Briar Bush maintenance staff and volunteers), paneling will be replaced (Parks staff), a wall will be taken out to make more room for exhibits and the area will need carpentry to properly finish it off (Parks maintenance staff and Mark Fallon) Exhibit components will be fabricated by a vendor, requiring monetary resources. Frina Design will stay on as the owner representative, working with Greta Brunschwyler. Evaluation tools will be developed by staff and administered by volunteers and staff.

What resources will your institution contribute to the project?

Abington Township will contribute to the project in the form of site preparation and supporting personnel needs for implementation of the project (Parks maintenance staff). Greta

Brunschwyler and Mark Fallon's salaries are provided by the Township. The Township will also provide dollars in the operating budget and through capital funding. The Friends of Briar Bush will provide outright dollars in support of the project.

The Friends of Briar Bush will conduct a capital campaign composed of several fundraising strategies, including a Fund the Need appeal at our annual fundraising gala and requesting major gifts from individual donors. We have several dedicated donors who are especially enamored of the Bird Observatory.

How will you track progress toward the intended result?

The project director will create a timeline with milestone markers and communicate any changes to the timeline to involved parties. We'll keep stakeholders informed of progress, as there are many interested parties. We will report progress in our public communications.

How and with whom will you share your project results?

We'll share the project results with all those who were involved in its conception: stakeholders, including volunteers, school groups and visitors; those who use the Observatory for their classes and research, including our many local universities; bird clubs and formal and informal education organizations; and with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, who jointly manage eBird, the electronic system for counting birds around the world, which features prominently in our exhibit plan. We'll accomplish this through events, including a grand opening, newsletters, email marketing, social media, the Briar Bush website, board meetings, and direct meetings with some of the organizations and stakeholders. We'll also share with local media, including the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and County media outlets.

3. Project Results

What knowledge, skills, behaviors or attitudes do you expect to change and among whom?

We hope to achieve the following changes in the knowledge, skills, behaviors and attitudes of visitors to Briar Bush Nature Center:

1. Bird Identification: We expect visitors who are new to birding to be able to identify birds that are common in their own neighborhoods and begin to understand the basics of migration. This knowledge can connect visitors to their greater environment, help them understand the importance of birds, and hopefully lead them to get involved in citizen science to help birds, and build backyard habitats to help birds.
2. Citizen Science: Visitors will see how easy it is to log bird sightings and understand why it is important to participate in this and other citizen science activities. We hope that this will lead to more participation in citizen science at Briar Bush and elsewhere.
3. Backyard Bird Habitat: Visitors will understand that no matter how large or small their backyard (or deck or balcony) is, they can make a big difference in the well-being of birds by making small enhancements, such as a few native plants, or a small water source. We expect that this will lead them to create backyard habitats around their own homes.

How will you measure success in achieving intended results?

Once the new exhibits are installed, we plan to implement pre and post-surveys to casual visitors, school groups, and program groups in a systematic, comprehensive way. Because we provide a good deal of programming on site for audiences from young families to senior adults, are confident in our ability to get tangible feedback. We will create surveys geared toward various audiences, and present the surveys as an adjunct to programming. For example, during regularly scheduled Family Nature Nights, which are evenings especially designed for children on the autism spectrum and their families, we can present activities in the Griscom Bird Observatory, and survey children and their parents about the effectiveness of the exhibits and the understanding, interest, and intended action that resulted in exposure to the exhibits. We will also do this for our families who participate in weekly Magic Mornings (for two-four year-olds and a caregiver) and Nature Pioneers (for four to seven years olds on their own); for senior adults who attend monthly programs, and for children and teachers who visit from area schools. We are invested in creating programming that meets program goals and mission and will adjust exhibits to achieve results based on survey information.

What project results will be of value to the field?

The scientific birding and bird conservation community, among other scientific communities, is well aware that citizen participation, or “citizen science” is an increasingly important tool for measuring things such as the biodiversity of species. Once the exhibit is installed, Briar Bush will increase the impact of citizen science on biodiversity studies by opening participation to visitors, and students, who may not have been avid birders when they walked through the door. While we had originally hoped to offer an electronic kiosk into which visitors could add their bird sighting directly into eBird, after much research and discussion it became clear that the quality of data could be severely compromised. Discussions with Cornell Lab of Ornithology guided us to a low tech solution that may be more accurate and effective in engaging visitors.

Briar Bush is a member of a close-knit regional nature center consortia ACE (Association for Conservation Executives, in PA, DE, and NJ) and members of ANCA (Association for Nature Center Administrators, a national organization.) Once we determine our success, we will share this project with our constituents so that they may replicate or use parts of the project.

How will you sustain the benefits of your project?

The exhibits that we will install in the Griscom Bird Observatory will be permanent exhibits. Staff and volunteers will monitor the exhibits physically and will refresh and reset items as needed. The exhibits will serve as a base for more robust programming around bird id, the history of conservation, migration, plant and animal ecology and much more. We expect that this project will have very positive programming impacts for Briar Bush Nature Center well into the future.

Friends of Briar Bush Griscom Bird Observatory Planning Project

Submitted December 2016

Attachment 5: Schedule of Completion

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