

Museums for America

Sample Application MA-20-17-0019-17 Project Category: Community Anchors Funding Level: \$5,000 – \$500,000

Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History at the McPherson Center

Amount awarded by IMLS: Amount of cost share: \$70,000 \$96,036

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.

Lead Applicant: The Museum of Art & History (MAH) is a dynamic community anchor in downtown Santa Cruz that builds a stronger, more connected community through shared exploration of contemporary art and local history. In 1992, the MAH was the first civic institution built in the downtown revitalization after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, and it is now a vibrant creative hub for our county. MAH is a community-rooted organization, working with 2,000 regional collaborators annually to present exhibitions and programs for an audience of 55,000 that is 92% local. Our partners include social service agencies, artists, and community groups, with a particular focus on organizations that serve and support Latino residents.

Need, Problem or Challenge Addressed: Our project addresses the need for a creative town square for community-driven public events. Santa Cruz County is the fifth most artistic community in the nation in terms of artists per capita, but our facilities for those artists to share their work in the public sphere are inadequate. Community groups, artists, and cultural festivals lack downtown locations for public events. Existing public spaces are highly regulated, expensive to use, and require complicated permits. This impacts event producers, especially those from volunteer or low-income communities, who are often unable to host their events in the downtown. It also impacts local residents, who lack a public outdoor venue to gather, connect, and build social capital at events, workshops, and activities. In 2017, the MAH will begin actively managing Abbott Square, a new creative town plaza in the middle of downtown Santa Cruz. In addition to MAH-driven programming, we want to create a structure for community-driven events, so creative leaders from across our county can bring their talents downtown on their own terms.

Project Activities and Time Frame: During the two years from October 2017-September 2019, MAH will work with 5-10 existing collaborators and 20-30 new collaborators to support the development, production, promotion, and evaluation of 100+ community-driven events in Abbott Square. MAH staff will create a handbook about this community-driven program model, both for local use with prospective collaborators and national use for colleagues managing comparable public outdoor sites.

Project's Public Benefit: Project beneficiaries include local collaborating artists, cultural groups, creative groups, and civic groups, who will feel empowered to execute successful public events in the downtown; downtown visitors of all backgrounds, who will feel increased community pride, safety, and enjoyment downtown via community-driven programs; and county residents, who will have a new, active creative heart for community activities.

Intended Outcomes:

- The County will have a new free public venue for art and cultural experiences in downtown, hosting 100+ community-driven events public festivals, events, and activities in Abbott Square for 125,000-200,000 downtown visitors.
- 25-40 creative and cultural collaborators will feel empowered to share their creative and civic voices in Abbott Square. Collaborators will gain skills, audiences, and allies in partnership with the MAH, and visitors will be ignited by the events and activities they create.
- The cultural field will have a new digital resource on how to structure, manage, market, and evaluate community-driven events.
- The MAH will be a more responsive institution, increasing value as a platform for community events.

Measurement of Success: We will measure our success through participant and collaborator surveys, focusing on attendance, demographic diversity, and incidences of social bridging and community pride for visitors and collaborators (with different measures of success for each). We will also track data related to the performance measure statements related to the IMLS "community" performance goal.

1. STATEMENT OF NEED

The Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH) requests a grant of \$70,000, payable over two years, to develop a **community-driven program model** for Abbott Square, a new creative town square for downtown Santa Cruz managed by the MAH.

For more than 50 years, Santa Cruzans have sought a town square. Our 1965 and 1992 City master plans each called for plazas that were never built. A lack of political will, available real estate, and capable management kept these dreams from becoming reality. By 2012, the need for a creative public space hit a crisis point. Downtown sidewalks were overcrowded with activists, artists, and street vendors. Retailers struggled as performers and panhandlers blocked their doors. Safety concerns kept families away. A 2011 retail leakage study put hard numbers to these challenges: 86% of County residents had opted out of downtown.

In response to these concerns, the City passed several ordinances that limit creative and social activity on downtown sidewalks. At the same time, the City joined an effort led by the MAH to develop a town square that could create a permanent, well-managed home for culture, creativity, and community in the downtown.

From 2012-2016, the MAH led a community project to build a town plaza in Abbott Square, an underutilized area adjacent to the museum in downtown Santa Cruz. In 2012, our staff began working with artists, business owners, social service providers, and City officials to develop a vision for the plaza. From 2013-2016, we led a successful planning, design, fundraising, and construction effort. Abbott Square will be a vibrant, inclusive town square that incorporates public art, local history, a public market featuring emerging chefs, and a family-oriented secret garden. Abbott Square is a fully-funded \$5,000,000 capital project, with all phases opening in 2017.

Now, in the final stages of construction, the MAH is working with community partners to develop programming for Abbott Square. MAH will offer free art, history, family, and wellness programs in Abbott Square 3-4 times per week. But Abbott Square will not be successful if it is exclusively programmed by museum staff. For it to truly be a town square, it needs to be more open, flexible, and community-driven than the museum itself.

In 2015 and 2016, we worked with local artists and community organizations to prototype different kinds of cultural activities in Abbott Square. This prototyping helped MAH develop our program model for Abbott Square, but more importantly, it exposed a key community need that we had not anticipated: the desire for local groups and artists to host their own public events in Abbott Square. Some entities, like the Santa Cruz Public Libraries and Sutter Health Maternity Center, want to offer regular weekly programming in the plaza. Others, like Ecology Action and the Diversity Center, want to host huge annual festivals. Still others, including art collectives and university groups, want to host one-off art fairs, workshops, or performances.

We envision a community-driven program model that enables community groups and artists to offer their own free, public programming in the plaza. We know from experience that providing a platform for others' events requires different staffing and workflow than providing museum-led programming. We are seeking funding to develop and implement a structure for community-driven events in Abbott Square, so the plaza truly feels like a community town square and not just a museum space. We are projecting 250,000-400,000 local visits annually to Abbott Square, of which we hope 25% will experience a community-driven event.

We see the programming in Abbott Square as a community patchwork quilt. Our goal as the lead programmer of the plaza is not to control all the offerings in the Square, but to invite community partners to contribute programs that reflect and represent the diversity of creative cultural practice in our county. The MAH provides the support and coordination to stitch all of these patches together into a beautiful, cohesive fabric. Urban theorist Jane Jacobs wrote: "The more successfully a city mingles everyday diversity of uses and users in its

everyday streets, the more successfully, casually (and economically) its people thereby enliven and support welllocated parks that can thus give back grace and delight to their neighborhoods instead of vacuity." Supporting community-driven events will contribute to the diversity of uses and users that will bring Abbott Square to life.

Connection to Strategic Plan

The Abbott Square project and community-driven program model are essential extensions of the MAH's community-based mission, strategic plan, and theory of change.

- This project helps fulfill MAH's desired community impact to build a stronger, more connected community. This impact statement has encouraged us to frequently program beyond the building, connecting diverse community members to art and history through unorthodox partnerships and programs in neighborhoods across the county. Leading the effort to build and manage a creative town square on the MAH's front porch is a powerful way to take our mission beyond our walls, strengthening our ability to build a stronger, more connected community downtown. After five years of audience growth inside the building, our board has increasingly focused on how we can strengthen our impact beyond the building, especially in well-used places that attract diverse participants like Abbott Square.
- This project builds on the MAH's strong history of community-based and collaborative work. We currently work with 2,000 local partners annually—1% of our county's overall population—on MAH programs and events. We recruit nontraditional partners and empower them to share their art and history, and to build bridges across social and cultural differences. We work with formal artists and informal arts groups, university historians and indigenous culture-bearers, civic leaders and activists. We know how to partner with diverse groups within our walls, and we are excited to take those partnerships outside in Abbott Square. In Abbott Square, we can shift the balance of power even further towards community ownership of programming, truly making the plaza public.
- This project empowers individual collaborators as creative and civic agents (a primary outcome in our theory of change). When we invite people not just to visit but to collaborate, we honor their skills and empower them as cultural producers. Critically, community partners are often the drivers of new programs and program formats rooted in needs and assets they identify. They shape the direction of the museum. We have been empowering partners for years inside the museum. This project will enable us to empower partners to showcase their talents and address community needs in Abbott Square.
- This project bridges people across differences in race, age, culture, and class (a primary outcome in our theory of change). Offering Abbott Square for community uses will strengthen the MAH's ability to engage more people, and more diverse people, in our county. The range of amenities planned for Abbott Square—food, beverage, garden, performances and activities—have been designed specifically to reach a bigger and broader audience than currently participates at the MAH. The very nature of Abbott Square as a free, outdoor, 24/7 space in the middle of downtown will invite many people who may not visit the museum to enjoy the plaza. Several design elements of Abbott Square were derived from an ethnographic study conducted in 2014 with Latina moms from surrounding low-income neighborhoods, in an effort to invite their participation in a downtown that can sometimes be perceived as upscale. Based on prototyping, we know that when we invite community partners to use Abbott Square for their own uses—from the Gay Pride Parade to Bike Night to Dia de los Muertos—it brings people together across differences, helping build bridges that lead to a more connected community.

Community Needs

We identified community need for this project through an iterative formal and informal process:

- First, we learned about the pent-up need for a creative town square downtown. We were aware of the historic struggle for a downtown plaza. In 2012-13, the MAH hired the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) to get a more nuanced understanding of this community need. PPS facilitated design workshops with 200 diverse participants to envision desired components of a creative town plaza. These workshops led to the plan for Abbott Square, which was further vetted at public events with 8,000 MAH visitors.
- We explored specific needs of low-income and Latino families living close to downtown. In 2014, the MAH hired Contemporanea to conduct an ethnographic study of Latina moms in three low-income neighborhoods proximate to downtown Santa Cruz, with a focus on how they make decisions about their recreational time with their families. This study emphasized Latino families' interests in outdoor, free events that feature food and music and do not have fixed entry points or starting times. This study led the MAH programming team to focus more intensely on the potential for Abbott Square to be an essential and valuable future component of the MAH's existing Latino Engagement Plan.
- We learned about the specific need for community-driven events through other event programming at the MAH. Since 2011, the MAH has provided a platform for community-driven events in the museum, and to a lesser extent, in Abbott Square. The MAH hosts ~100 community-driven events per year. Through these partnerships, MAH staff have learned about partners' interests and what they are seeking from event spaces. Many partners emphasized the need for outdoor space, especially for art sales, political rallies, performances, cultural festivals, walking tours, and health/wellness activities. Partners and City staff identified challenges of offering these activities in other downtown locations, including low availability of City permits, complex and expensive street closure processes, lack of large continuous spaces, and City regulation of activities that involve amplified sound.
- We experimented with different types of public events to understand the specific demand for cultural and creative activities downtown. In summer 2015, the MAH hosted 50 prototype events on Abbott Square to start learning more about community response to different program formats and content. A UC Santa Cruz graduate student in social sciences evaluated these programs from the participant perspective. Her research demonstrated that these programs increased social bridging and a sense of community inclusion and pride. At the same time, internal analysis of staff time on the prototype events revealed a big difference in the time required to support community-driven events vs. museum-managed events. We were surprised and overwhelmed by the demand for community-driven events during this prototyping phase and were not able to accommodate all of the requests.
- We interviewed existing MAH collaborators to inform the plaza's design and program format. In summer 2016, we started developing a comprehensive plan for museum programming in Abbott Square. We interviewed existing MAH programmatic collaborators to develop amenities for the plaza that support the kinds of performances, art activities, and cultural events they want to offer. Even as we used the lessons learned from the 2015 prototyping (and a new wave of tests in 2016) to develop program formats with confidence for the Abbott Square launch in 2017, we also identified a gap in our ability to host community-driven events in a brand new plaza without additional staffing or support.

2. IMPACT

Community Anchor Performance Measures

Our IMLS performance goal is to "strengthen museums and libraries as essential partners in addressing the needs of their communities." Internally, we will focus on measuring the extent to which our organization "better prepared to provide a program or service that addresses community needs." Externally, we'll focus on measuring the extent to which the museum "offers programs, services, or resources that address community needs."

We will add the internal performance measures to our annual board/staff self-assessment. The external question will be integrated into ongoing surveys of community partners. We conduct post-engagement surveys with all community partners with whom we co-create events, exhibitions, and programs. We share survey results in an annual public report card to ensure ongoing open community dialogue about the effectiveness of the museum. We will also share key findings with IMLS and participating community partners.

How this Project will Change Our Community

We expect this project to have significant impact on the creative life of downtown and the MAH in three ways:

- More creative and cultural groups will have the ability to host events downtown. Our partners are challenged by the cost and complexity of street closures and permits for public events. For example:
 - Some organizations, like Santa Cruz Public Libraries, Sutter Health Maternity Center, and Senderos, would like to offer regular outdoor family programming but lack a site. Abbott Square will provide a safe outdoor location that can supplement their indoor-only offerings downtown.
 - Some events, like the Japanese Cultural Fair, have ceased operation after decades because of the expense and complication of street closures. This project will provide community groups with an affordable place to host events, with a dedicated staff who are motivated to say yes.
 - Some events, like the Gay Pride Parade or the Oaxacan Calenda, are volunteer-led and need support beyond a permit. This project will provide community groups with dedicated staff partners who can support event planning, marketing, production, and evaluation.
 - Some events, like Dance Week or First Friday, are distributed events that would benefit from a centralized home base for event management and for a coherent visitor starting/meeting point. This project will provide these wide-ranging events with a well-managed hub.
- Community members will experience an increased sense of community pride, connection, and safety in the downtown. In our 2012 Abbott Square research, we found that a significant number of County residents felt unwelcome or unsafe in the downtown—especially families. We believe Abbott Square can change that perception for the better. Even in the 2015 prototyping (in an unchanged plaza), 82% of Abbott Square event visitors felt welcome. Furthermore, 60% of event participants had positive interactions with strangers in Abbott Square. These connections among strangers help increase social bridging, which is proven to increase perception of safety, inclusion, and cross-cultural appreciation.
- More county residents will see the museum as an important partner and participant in the things they value most in our community. By providing a new public, free venue for community participation, and providing a platform for community-driven programming (alongside MAH-driven events), the MAH will be seen as an essential hub of an ever-diversifying web of community resources.

Tangible Products

Over the grant period, this project will result in:

- At least 100 community-led public festivals, events, and activities in Abbott Square, including a mix of one-off events and regularly-scheduled activities
- An informational handbook for local collaborators about how to hold community-driven events in Abbott Square, with structures for event setup, production, marketing, and evaluation
- A Community-Driven Events Toolkit for national and international colleagues about how to host community-driven events in diverse public and civic spaces

Sustaining the Benefits of the Project

This project will help us build the capacity to integrate more diverse collaborators and community-driven programs into Abbott Square. We see this project as an intensive research and development phase to develop a manageable, repeatable process and structure for community-driven events in Abbott Square. We presume that some lessons learned about community-driven events in Abbott Square will impact the ways we work with collaborators on events within the museum and at other MAH-managed sites.

From a financial standpoint, we expect all programming in Abbott Square, including community-driven programs, to be self-sustaining by 2020. We are incorporating a retail food market into Abbott Square, whose revenue will fund programming. However, it will take time for the market to operate at full potential. We are seeking this grant and others to fuel these important launch years as the market and plaza get off the ground.

3. PROJECT DESIGN

This project is a component of Abbott Square programming overall and should be contextualized as such.

- **PHASE 0: PARTNER ENGAGEMENT.** In spring 2017, we will open Abbott Square to the public and offer MAH-led programs three times per week in Abbott Square. Throughout the summer and fall, we will begin identifying collaborators who have interest in community-driven programming and discussing specific needs, projects, and possibilities with them.
- PHASE 1: EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS WITH EXISTING PARTNERS. In the winter/spring of 2018, we will begin an experimental phase, working with long-time MAH collaborators on community-driven programs in Abbott Square at least twice per month. We will experiment with a mix of one-off events and repeat programming. We will evaluate these experiments by tracking staff time on different kinds of partnerships, partner perceptions about the process, and visitor response to different types of events. We will start fleshing out the specific process for proposing, developing, planning, producing, marketing, and evaluating community-driven events.
- **PHASE 2: EVALUATING AND FORMALIZING THE PROCESS.** In summer 2018, we will review the results of this experiment with our collaborators and formalize a rough draft version of the informational handbook. At the same time, we will increase frequency of community-driven programming (to coincide with the summer busy season) to once per week.
- PHASE 3: OPENING THE DOORS TO NEW PARTNERS. In fall 2018/winter 2019, we will start circulating the first draft of the informational handbook to local prospective collaborators. We will open the doors wider to new partners, supporting community-driven programs once per week. In spring/summer 2019, we will finalize the local version of the handbook and prepare for another busy summer, with community-driven programs twice per week.
- PHASE 4: FORMALIZING THE PROCESS LOCALLY, SHARING IT NATIONALLY. By fall 2019, we will have a fully-functional and repeatable structure for community-driven programs. At this point, we will write the Community-Driven Events Toolkit with community partners, featuring tools, tactics, and lessons learned, to be shared nationally and internationally with other museums, cultural institutions, and organizations considering community-driven programming in outdoor sites.

Community Partners

This project is rooted in the partnerships—existing and prospective—that will fuel Abbott Square communitydriven programming. In 2018, we will focus on working with existing MAH partners. Because of our preexisting relationships, we can talk more directly about their needs and interests and our own questions and ambiguity

about a yet-to-be-formalized process for community-driven events. The following existing MAH partners have already expressed strong interest in running community-driven events in Abbott Square:

- Santa Cruz Public Libraries, which lack an outdoor area in their downtown branch, wants to offer regular "open air story hours" for families, as well as circulating materials and offering one-off performances.
- Ecology Action's Bike to Work Week, a distributed county event which lacks a centralized hub, wants to launch their week of events with a celebratory festival in Abbott Square.
- Sutter Health Maternity Center wants to offer a weekly meet-up for new moms and babies in the plaza.
- Senderos (an Oaxacan community music/dance group) wants to use Abbott Square for various Mexican and Latino-oriented festivals, performances, and celebrations.
- Two local art collectives want to use Abbott Square for art markets and printmaking events.
- The Santa Cruz Bonsai Kai wants to host a two-day bonsai festival in Abbott Square.

All of these partners understand that they would be working with MAH staff not only to execute their events but also to help develop a structure and process for other groups to host programs in Abbott Square. By late 2018, with a clear roadmap for community-driven programs in Abbott Square, we will extend our reach to partners who have not previously worked with the MAH. We expect these to include artists, art collectives, performance groups, cultural and family-oriented festivals, health/wellness groups, business meetups, and civic events.

We expect to work with 5-10 unique community partners in the first experimental phase of this project, and 20-30 more once we roll out the local handbook, for a total of 100+ events managed with 25-40 unique partners.

Project Staffing and Resources

We see this project as an intensive investment of resources that will lead to a more sustainable, repeatable, manageable system for supporting community-driven events. The project will be led by Emily Hope Dobkin, Public Playmaking Catalyst, in partnership with Diana Kapsner, Event Operations Catalyst.

Ms. Dobkin, a community programmer with a master's degree in community arts, will lead the partnership and program development. Ms. Dobkin has extensive experience at the MAH working with diverse community partners on cultural events, family festivals, and youth programming. She has designed toolkits on art & social justice that have been adopted by museums and organizations nationwide. Ms. Kapsner, an experienced event manager with over six years of event leadership at the MAH, will lead the event operations team and develop repeatable, successful processes for different events and formats. We will hire one full-time staff member to support this work in Phase 2 as part of Ms. Kapsner's event operations team.

Executive Director Nina Simon, an internationally-recognized expert in audience participation, will assume supervisory oversight and lead national distribution of the Toolkit. Director of Community Engagement Stacey Garcia, an accomplished community programmer with a master's degree in museum studies and community engagement, will oversee all programs, both in the MAH and in Abbott Square.

Project Resources

As detailed in the attached budget, project costs will total \$166,036 during the two years covered by the requested IMLS grant of \$70,000. Project activities will run October 2017 and through September 2019, and will be led by the key staff members described above.

Our cost sharing funds will be allocated from the following sources:

• Packard Foundation, providing \$50,000 annually (confirmed for 2017, renewal anticipated for 2018-2019)

- Hewlett Foundation, providing \$35,000 annually (confirmed for 2016-2018)
- Museum members and donors, who provide \$317,000 annually

Tracking Progress and Measuring Results

As a small, nimble organization, we believe in coordinating formal evaluation, continuous community feedback, and informal reflections to achieve continuous program improvement. We will modify our plan as community needs evolve and as we learn new insights from our collaborators.

When it comes to project evaluation, we will apply both informal and formal methods. For all years of the grant, we will conduct ongoing evaluations of collaborative projects internally with staff and externally with collaborators and visitors. We worked with Stanford University social psychologists to develop an evaluation framework that maps to our theory of change, with separate surveys for visitors (surveyed at discrete sampling periods) and collaborators (surveyed after every project). We will continue employing this evaluative framework during the IMLS grant to track progress, strengthen programming, and measure results.

Internally, via program tracking by Ms. Dobkin and Ms. Kapsner, we will measure:

- The number and makeup of collaborators for community-driven events. We will track collaborators both by type (i.e. non-profit, artist, civic group) and demographics (age, ethnicity, zip code, income).
- The number and type of community-driven events (festival, repeat program, workshop, etc.).
- Staff time required for different types of community-driven events. Staff time on task is a quantitative measure of program sustainability and the extent to which the museum addresses community needs.
- The number of handbooks distributed locally to prospective collaborators and nationally to colleagues.

Externally, through visitor and collaborator surveys, we will measure:

- The demographic mix by race/ethnicity of visitors and collaborators.
- The extent to which visitors and collaborators for community-driven events in Abbott Square feel increased sense of welcome and community pride after their experiences.
- The extent to which visitors and collaborators build meaningful social bridges across cultural differences.
- The extent to which collaborators perceive the MAH as actively helping to solve community problems.

Sharing Results

The MAH has a strong policy of openness. MAH staff will share project outcomes on an annual basis with trustees, partners, and visitors via reports and annual "state of the MAH" community forum. MAH staff often present at national and international conferences and write for professional publications, and we will do so around this project. MAH's Executive Director, Nina Simon, runs an influential blog, Museum 2.0, which reaches ~30,000 people monthly, and will publish about notable successes, failures, and outcomes.

The Community-Driven Event Toolkit will be shared in two ways:

- Locally in Santa Cruz County, as an informational guide for prospective Abbott Square collaborators. We will distribute locally on the MAH website, via key partners (Arts Council Santa Cruz County, Downtown Association, City and County), and at twice-annual informational sessions for collaborators.
- Nationally and internationally online, as a toolkit for other organizations to reference and use as desired. We will partner with Springboard for the Arts to host the toolkit on Creative Exchange, a national compendium of artist-led toolkits for community change. MAH staff created a similar toolkit in 2013 for a previous project, the Pop Up Museum, hosted at popupmuseum.org and on Creative Exchange. That toolkit has been downloaded by over 12,000 cultural professionals in 128 countries around the world.

MAH / The Museum of Art & History at the McPherson Center Schedule of Completion

	Pre- Grant Period 2017		Grant Period							
			2018						2019	
	Apr - Jun	Jul - Sept	Oct - Dec	Jan - Mar	Apr - Jun	Jul- Sept	Oct - Dec	Jan - Mar	Apr - Jun	Jul - Sept
Phase o Partner Engagement	Abbott Square opens to the public		collaborators interested iven programming							
Phase I Experimental Programs with Existing Partners			Partner with long-time present community-dr Abbott Square at leas	iven programming in						
			Evaluate staff time on v partner perceptions, a							
				Fine-tune processes for community driven event model.						
Phase 2 Evaluating and Formalizing the Process					Review Phase I resul formalize a rough o handl	raft version of the				
					Partner with collab community-driven pr Square onc	ogramming in Abbott				
Phase 3 Opening the Doors to New Partners							Circulate first raft o prospective com			
							Partner with collab community-driven pr Square onc	ogramming in Abbott		
									Finalize local version of handbook	
									Partner with collaborato driven programming in A we	Abbott Square twice per
Phase 4 Formalizing the Model Locally, Sharing it Nationally										Fully-functional model for community-driven programs is finalized.
										Create and distribute Community-Driven Events Toolkit.