



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-30-16-0317-16
Project Category: Collections Stewardship
Funding Level: \$25,001-\$150,000

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$149,808
Amount of cost share:	\$155,322

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Please note that the instructions for preparing narratives for FY2017 applications differ from those that guided the preparation of previous applications. Be sure to use the narrative instructions in the FY2017 Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
IMLS Museums for America Proposal - Abstract

December 1, 2015

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum respectfully requests a \$150,000 Collections Stewardship grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services Museums for America program. We seek support for a three-year project to catalog, photograph, and make discoverable online approximately 6,000 artifacts exhibited by Isabella Stewart Gardner in fifteen glass-topped cases placed throughout the museum. These artifacts have not been adequately catalogued or digitally documented and, due to the nature of their installation and preservation requirements, are currently inaccessible to museum visitors. Gardner arranged the 6,000 artifacts in the cases thematically and in direct relationship to the installations of fine and decorative art within the galleries. Making this “hidden collection” accessible will allow the museum to more fully illuminate and understand her curatorial intentions for these materials for the first time in its history.

Although all cataloguing work represents an important collections stewardship need, the 6,000 artifacts addressed by this project are in particularly critical need of attention. Currently, there is no single centralized repository for information for these items. Existing catalog and provenance information is incomplete, inadequate, and organized in antiquated systems (catalog cards, handwritten inventories, photographs of the cases from the 1940s and 1970’s, a limited, sometimes inaccurate guide, *Correspondence of Isabella Stewart Gardner at the Gardner Museum, Boston Massachusetts*, published in 1973, a microfilm inventory; and “maps” of the cases that document the strata of the contents), none of which leverage the power of new digital tools and technologies for collections management.

Cataloguing, photographing, and making discoverable this collection of 6,000 artifacts meets our mission-driven institutional needs for collection stewardship by: 1) upholding and honoring the curatorial intentions and achievements of our founder; 2) preserving, documenting, and disseminating vital collection information for a significant “hidden” aspect of our collection; and 3) fostering a comprehensive understanding of our institution’s purpose, relevance, and artistic significance, for museum staff as well as scholars, writers, and the general public, by producing collection catalogue records and metadata that are accurate, searchable, and discoverable online.

With the support of a grant from the IMLS we propose to meet the collections stewardship challenge outlined in our statement of need by 1) digitally photographing and cataloging all 6,000 artifacts in the gallery cases and conducting a condition survey and creating a conservation treatment plan for artifacts determined to need of intervention 2) tagging the resulting digital items with metadata and ingesting all digital products into the EmbARK collections management system and 3) in the context of a planned re-design for the Gardner Museum’s website, making these items discoverable online via a “WebKiosk,” a web-based access portal that will provide access to the Gardner’s EmbARK collections management system.

The immediate benefit of completing this foundation work over the next three years is twofold: 1) these 6,000 items will be digitally catalogued and preserved for the future and 2) the museum will be fully prepared to use digital technology to organize and disseminate this significant collection metadata and material via digital initiatives such as the museum’s new website, which is scheduled to launch in 2017.

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Institutional Background and Mission

Opened to the public in 1903, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum houses a renowned collection spanning thirty centuries and a world of cultures. Distinguished among American museums in that the architecture, installations, and garden courtyard may be regarded as a singular work of art, the museum contains more than 10,200 objects. Masterworks by Botticelli, Titian, Raphael, Rembrandt, and Sargent were installed in a complex, multi-disciplinary curatorial scheme that also encompasses carefully selected decorative art objects, furniture, architectural elements, textiles, books, and manuscripts from many corners of the globe and thousands of years of human history. The historic Palace building, an intimate, Venetian-inspired palazzo in the heart of Boston, was complemented in 2012 by the opening of a new wing designed by Renzo Piano. True to the ambitious vision of its founder and her spirit of creative risk-taking, the mission of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is: to bring to life and preserve the rich historic collection; to cultivate talent in the pursuit of knowledge and acts of creation in the arts and humanities; to support artists, landscape architects, musicians, scholars and students; and, to engage local and global audiences in a sanctuary of beauty and the arts where deeply personal and communal adventures unfold. The museum draws more than 200,000 visitors each year.

1. Statement of Need

As noted above, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’s unparalleled collection includes thousands of art objects, architectural elements, rare books and manuscripts, letters, photographs, and other memorabilia. The Gardner’s policy for collections care and stewardship, essential to the continued realization of the museum’s current long-range plan, dictates that the collections are accounted for and documented; that the collections are protected, secure, cared for, and preserved; that access to the collection and related information is facilitated and appropriately regulated; and that all activities concerning the collection support the mission of the museum. Although all cataloguing work represents an important collections stewardship need, the 6,000 artifacts addressed by this project are in particularly critical need of attention. Currently, there is no single centralized repository for information for these items. Existing catalog and provenance information is incomplete, inadequate, and organized in antiquated systems (catalog cards, handwritten inventories, photographs of the cases from the 1940s and 1970’s, a limited, sometimes inaccurate guide, *Correspondence of Isabella Stewart Gardner at the Gardner Museum, Boston Massachusetts*, published in 1973, a microfilm inventory; and “maps” of the cases that document the strata of the contents), none of which leverage the power of new digital tools and technologies for collections management.

The 6,000 artifacts discussed in this proposal reside within fifteen glass-topped cases placed by Gardner throughout the galleries. Artifacts in the cases include Isabella Stewart Gardner’s personal correspondence as well as literary manuscripts, photographs, autographed letters, plaster casts, numismatics, news clippings, and other turn-of-the-century ephemera collected over the course of Gardner’s lifetime. These thematic installations range in depth from one to five inches, allowing only the top layer of materials to be viewed.

Challenges to accessing these cases include legibility and size of handwritten materials, overlapping of materials, and lack of space for additional labels or descriptions within the cases to complement sparse handwritten labels placed by Gardner during installation. Digitizing and cataloguing these artifacts provides an access point not currently available, making newly discoverable a “hidden” collection. (Please see “Supporting Doc 2” for images of existing catalog materials and the cases).

Cataloguing, photographing, and making discoverable this collection of 6,000 artifacts meets our mission-driven institutional needs for collection stewardship by: 1) upholding and honoring the curatorial intentions and achievements of our founder; 2) preserving, documenting, and disseminating vital collection information for a significant “hidden” aspect of our collection; and 3) fostering a comprehensive understanding of our institution’s purpose, relevance, and artistic significance, for museum staff as well as scholars, writers, and the general public, by producing collection catalogue records and metadata that are accurate, searchable, and discoverable online.

This work also forms a key part of a comprehensive three-year collections stewardship initiative currently planned by curatorial, archives, registration, and conservation staff that will catalogue, photograph, and digitize the most significant objects in our collection by spring 2019. ¹

2. Impact

A. Intended Project Results

With the support of a grant from the IMLS we propose to meet the collections stewardship challenge outlined in our statement of need by 1) digitally photographing and cataloging all 6,000 artifacts in the gallery cases and conducting a condition survey and creating a conservation treatment plan for artifacts determined to need of intervention 2) tagging the resulting digital items with metadata and ingesting all digital products into the EmbARK collections management system and 3) in the context of a planned re-design for the Gardner museum’s website, making these items discoverable online via a “WebKiosk,”² a web-based access portal that will provide access to the Gardner’s EmbARK collections management system via www.gardnermuseum.org. Gallery Systems’ EmbARK collection management system consolidates descriptive, administrative, and technical metadata in one robust system that can easily export data as required. Selected data and photographs from each catalogue record can then be shared with the public through the Gardner Museum’s website.

The immediate benefit of completing this foundational work over the next three years is twofold: 1) these 6,000 items will be digitally catalogued and preserved for the future and 2) the museum will be fully prepared to use digital technology to organize and disseminate this significant collection metadata and material via digital initiatives such as the museum’s new website, which is scheduled to launch in 2017. We will also create high quality replicas (on acid free paper using archival inks) that will serve as surrogates for 600 “top layer” artifacts, which, with some exceptions, are primarily light-sensitive, paper objects. The Gardner’s archives staff will then store all original artifacts in appropriate acid-free housing in the museum’s secure, climate-controlled archival storage.

In order to sustain the project impact into the future, we will

¹ The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum has applied for a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support a three-year project to create comprehensive digital documentation of the most significant objects of the museum’s collection. If funded, this project will begin May, 2016.

² WebKiosk features tools for searching, browsing, fathering, and saving data sets, as well as collaborative project portals for education purposes. The WebKiosk layout is run by HTML templates that can easily be customized to grow and tailor the user experience. The Gardner began a beta testing version of the WebKiosk in summer 2015 to enable the museum’s staff to test the system and provide feedback. This feedback will be integrated into future versions and help inform project development. The collection data presented on the museum website will be fed from the EmbARK collection database through customized APIs pulling from the datafile.

- conduct a condition survey on select materials, develop and prioritize a conservation treatment plan
- ingest all digital items and metadata into EmbARK, which supports discoverability
- upload all digital items and metadata to MetaArchive’s Trusted Digital Repository. As outlined in the Digital Stewardship attachment for this proposal, we will leverage resources such as Amazon S3 storage and the MetaArchive Trusted Digital Repository to carefully ensure access and data persistence for all digital items created, including images, catalogue records, and metadata, in accordance with the museum’s digital stewardship policy.

The modest increase in digital storage costs required to host 52,800 additional digital artifacts (approximately \$2,000 per year) will be absorbed by the museum’s operating budget.

B. Tangible Products

The tangible products of this project will be:

- 52,800 digital photographs/artifacts capturing all 6,000 artifacts (multiple photographic captures will be necessary to fully document certain items, such as multi-page letters, that cannot be captured via a single image),
- Digital catalogue records for all 6,000 artifacts that fully describe their case and gallery location, date of creation or manufacture, and provenance,
- Metadata for all 52,800 captures,
- Conservation assessment and a conservation treatment plan as needed for all 6,000 artifacts,
- EmbARK records and TDR data persistence for all 52,800 captures representing the 6,000 artifacts,
- Paper replicas for light-sensitive top layer paper artifacts.

Cataloguing is based upon best practices and the content standard AACR2, Anglo American Cataloging Rules, Cultural Objects (CCO) and value standards such as the Getty Vocabularies [Union List of Artist Names, Art and Architecture Thesaurus, Thesaurus for Geographic Names, Cultural Objects Name Authority], Library of Congress Name Authority Files, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Thesaurus for Graphic Materials, *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*

C. Institutional and Public Impact

The Collections Stewardship impact of this project is extremely significant. As noted in our statement of need, the existing catalogue records for these materials do not support the current needs of our museum staff or those outside the museum who benefit from experiencing or using our collection. Cataloguing and digitizing these items 1) creates a comprehensive, accurate record for these materials; 2) creates digital artifacts of these items to support ongoing preservation and digital dissemination work that provides easily accessible points of entry for multiple audiences, near and far 3) provides an access point not currently available within the galleries and 4) puts this material back in conversation with the fine art collection, restoring the full character of the original institutional vision as imagined by Gardner and re-emphasizing the multidisciplinary nature of the museum’s holdings.

Gardner arranged the 6,000 artifacts in the cases thematically and in direct relationship to the installations of fine and decorative art within the galleries. As such, the fine art and these items were meant to complement, converse with, and even challenge each other. In a particularly trenchant example of this dynamic, Gardner placed Zorn’s *The Omnibus*—a painting preoccupied with a startlingly new vision of working women on urban public transportation—above a case holding a photographic portrait and letters from Gardner’s close friend and women’s rights activist Julia Ward Howe.

When taken together, the cases illustrate the liveliness of Gardner’s intellectual life and her desire to communicate the fullest reach of her interests to visitors at the museum. This in turn supports recent

scholarship that has begun to explore the manifold nature of the collection and the cultural history of its installations. On one hand, it is a collection of artifacts that can be examined separately; on the other, it is a historically specific ensemble that speaks to the breadth of its founder's interdisciplinary interests and the depth of her legacy. As an institution born of Gardner's own considerable pursuit of knowledge and experience, and as a record of her civic accomplishments, the museum represents a singular vision for the future of the American museum at the turn of the twentieth century. It is the culmination of a decades-long process of aesthetic, intellectual, and social engagement, and Gardner's collection demonstrates the depth of her involvement in the arts and humanities as well as her abiding interest in global history, literature, politics and governance, scientific exploration and research, and social reform.

Clarification of the provenance and deliberate order of the placement of these artifacts in the cases, which will be addressed through careful cataloguing, is key to the continuation of this work. Many artifacts, letters in particular, have been examined only by the context of author/correspondent and not by the context Gardner created through their curatorial placement. Many connections remain as yet undiscovered regarding the location of the items in each case (Gardner, for example, choose to display papers from Bernard Berenson, Julia Ward Howe, Henry Higginson and T.S. Eliot in the same case, an arrangement that has not yet been considered). Additionally, and in comparison to letters between Gardner and her personal correspondents, many of the collected letters, manuscripts, and items of ephemera in the cases have received very little attention to date. Outstanding examples of these materials include manuscript items such as a handwritten copy of John Keats' *Robin Hood*, handwritten copy of Percy Bysshe Shelley's "To the Nile," a handwritten copy of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Paul Revere's Ride," a manuscript of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Oration on Nature*, and a manuscript page from an early version of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's string sextet in D minor, "Souvenir de Florence" Op.70 (first version, 1887-90). Especially fascinating in the age of social media, this trove of information illuminates the "communication technologies" and social media of Gardner's era, bringing together letters, carte de visite, and photography that Gardner used to put herself and her contemporaries in relationship to the luminaries of art, music and culture of the past.

Ultimately, these collection materials illuminate Gardner's role and intentions as a collector, a traveler, and a civic leader. By providing museum-goers with a window into Gardner's inspirational story and the ideas, people, and art of her era, we broaden our understanding of her work, her museum, and her story and allow for a more complete understanding of its importance to civic and cultural life, both past and present. Recent scholarship regarding these artifacts has already begun to inform our internal planning. Work with these collection materials supported by Casey Riley, our 2015-2016 Richard C. Von Hess Foundation Curatorial Research Fellow, for example, has been essential to the planning for *Off the Wall: Gardner and Her Masterpieces*, as well as a new guidebook to the museum forthcoming in 2017. Both of these curatorial projects will feature these materials more prominently and in direct relationship to the fine arts collection. As we prepare for essential digital dissemination work and other web-based projects, the work outlined in this proposal will allow us to use digitization and collection management technology to facilitate the broader discovery of this knowledge and cultural heritage. This project will have a huge impact both within the institution and without – informing curatorial work, exhibition planning, and even marketing and community engagement efforts while also transforming work by scholars, especially those whose work focuses on artists, authors, performers, and other intellectuals represented in materials that have been less closely examined.

General Description of the Artifacts in the Cases

The fifteen cases are installed on all three floors of the museum, with the preponderance of the archival displays appearing in the first and third stories of the Palace building. On the first floor, Gardner devoted all of the cases in the Yellow Room to her professional collaborations with a dazzling array of composers and musical performers as well as objects associated with musicians or musical traditions she admired; among those featured were the soprano Nellie Melba, the composer Franz Liszt, and the conductor Karl Muck. In the Blue Room on the same floor, she dedicated the cases to her relationships with a number of important scholars, historians, novelists, poets, essayists, philosophers, curators, and critics of her time – including

Francis Parkman, Sarah Orne Jewett, Julia Ward Howe, Bernard Berenson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., and Henry James – in addition to authors whom she admired, such as Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. On the second floor room known as the Short Gallery, Gardner devoted a single case to the life of Napoleon Bonaparte. On the top floor of the museum in the Long Gallery, she placed several cases encompassing the broadest thematic range found among these installations. In the “Presidents and Statesmen” case, autographed photographs of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft appear next to a medal denoting Gardner’s membership in the Hispanic Society of America and letters of thanks from Louis Agassiz. Other cases in the Long Gallery display her lifelong passion for the written word through mementos associated with literary luminaries such as Paul Verlaine, Georges Sand, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Samuel Pepys, Robert Browning, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, while others depict her friendships with modern artists such as Cecilia Beaux, John Singer Sargent and James McNeill Whistler through sketches, photographic portraits, and even the latter’s walking stick. Still others show her admiration for theatrical performers such as Sarah Bernhardt and Ellen Terry, and for European royalty, particularly Mary Queen of Scots. (Please see “Supporting Doc 2” for more information regarding the contents and location of the cases).

3. Project Design

The specific activities we will carry out through this project, and the evaluation and performance measurements, staffing, and sequence for each are outlined in the chart below. The project will take place under the primary direction of Curator of the Collection Christina Nielsen, who will serve as Project Director and determine the sequence of deinstallation and reinstallation for the fifteen cases taking into account the overall curatorial priorities of the museum. Archivist Shana McKenna and Collections Photographer David Mathews will liaison with The Digital Ark, a digital preservation and access company that will be contracted to provide cost-effective digitization services in-house at the museum during the project. McKenna will also hire the project archivist and supervise this individual’s day to day work, ensuring that the intended results are achieved and tangible outputs created within the proposed time frame. We will also contract paper conservation firm Studio TKM to assess any at-risk artifacts. This will allow us to create a conservation treatment plan for any artifacts in need of attention.

TASK	STAFFING	TIMEFRAME	CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS	EVALUATOR/SUPERVISOR
Hiring Project Archivist, contracting The Digital Ark, hiring paper conservator	Archivist Shana McKenna	October 2016-February 2017; Project Archivist and Paper conservator hire, October, 2017	Digital Ark in place by November 2016; project archivist and paper conservator hired by October 2017	Archivist Shana McKenna
Identify and track items for review by paper conservator	Shana McKenna/archives staff	October 2016-November 2016	Completed in time for Digital Ark start date	Shana McKenna
Project planning and preparation, development of metadata schema	Shana McKenna/archives staff	October 2016-October 2017	Completed in time for Project Archivist start date	Shana McKenna

for artifacts				
Customize EmbARK for cataloging, troubleshoot documentation	Shana McKenna/archives staff	October 2016-October 2017	Completed in time for Project Archivist start date	Shana McKenna
Condition survey, materials	Paper Conservator (outside vendor)	October 2017-September 2018	Work completed in a time frame that aligns with schedule as determined by curatorial and archives staff	Shana McKenna
Create deinstallation schedule for cases	Curator of the Collection Christina Nielsen/Shana McKenna	October-November 2017	Completed by December 1 2017 to accommodate deinstallation in December	Christina Nielsen/Shana McKenna
Digital photographing of artifacts and creation of basic metadata	Digital Ark (outside vendor)	November 2016-November 2017 (est. 8 weeks total on site)	Work completed by November, 2017	Shana McKenna
Deinstallation and archival storage, case by case	Project Archivist/Shana McKenna	December 2017-March 2019	Work completed in a time frame that aligns with schedule as determined by curatorial and archives staff	Shana McKenna
Producing of paper replicas for top layer items	David Mathews	June 2017-December 2017	Work completed by December 2017	Christina Nielsen/David Mathews
Train and oversee project archivist, track progress of cataloging	Shana McKenna	October 2017-March 2019	Work completed in a time frame that aligns with schedule as determined by curatorial and archives staff	Shana McKenna
Catalogue material from cases following museum	Project Archivist	October 2017-March 2019	Work completed in a time frame that aligns with	Shana McKenna

guidelines and best practices; create digital catalogue records			schedule as determined by curatorial and archives staff	
Upload 40,000 captures to EmbARK and TDR	Project archivist	October 2017-March 2019	Work completed in a time frame that aligns with schedule as determined by curatorial and archives staff	Shana McKenna
Dissemination via new website (not funded by IMLS grant)	Christina Nielsen/Shana McKenna/Director of Digital Media Carolyn Royston	Calendar year 2017	Website launch by December 2017	Christina Nielsen/Carolyn Royston/Shana McKenna
Reinstallation of case materials, dissemination of project outputs, final stage of cataloging and rehousing work, creation of conservation treatment plan	Shana McKenna and archives staff	April-September 2019	Work completed by end of project period	Christina Nielsen/Shana McKenna

Dissemination Activities

Although not a direct tangible product of this grant, this work prepares us for essential digital dissemination work in the long term. Dissemination work for our project results will begin during the project period with the launch of the new website for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in calendar year 2017. To ensure easy online public access to the digital catalog records and images of the Gardner's entire collection, including all material in the fifteen in-gallery cases, this responsive website will fully integrate the museum's collections database through Gallery Systems' EmbARK collections management system and WebKiosk portal. The museum is committed to a responsive designed site, to ensure access to the widest possible audience. The responsive website's layout and content will automatically adapt to the user's screen, whether it is on a mobile phone, tablet or desktop.

Additional plans to disseminate information to the general public and scholarly community include distributing updates to the Gardner constituent “family” – museum members, mailing list subscribers (print and email), social media channels such as Instagram and Flickr, and more. The Gardner may also host an activity involving local universities scholarly communities to highlight how digitization promotes connections between many disciplines, including science. Under the direction of Director of Digital Media Carolyn Royston, we will work to tie digitization project in with both the museum’s new website and the overall “Gardner experience,” including in-gallery digital tours and enhanced gallery guides.



