



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-30-17-0260-17
Project Category: Collections Stewardship
Funding Level: \$25,001-\$500,000

American Museum of Natural History

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$499,525
Amount of cost share:	\$920,316

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.

The American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) requests a \$499,525, 18-month IMLS Museums for America Collections Stewardship grant to conserve a unique and historic group of six monumental totem poles and carvings on display in its iconic Hall of Northwest Coast Indians as part of a planned renovation of the Hall. These important objects are a key conservation priority because of their remarkable artistic value, their inappropriate surface appearance, and structural issues. The project will be headed by Principal Investigator Judith Levinson, Director of Conservation in the Division of Anthropology, who has extensive experience leading grant-funded conservation initiatives, including successful IMLS projects. Funding will support two of four conservators working full-time for up to 18 months under staff supervision, necessary consultation fees, equipment and supplies, as well as conservation training for Native interns. We anticipate that this work will be the first phase of a conservation and renovation project over several years, which will feature extensive consultation with First Nations communities. Subsequent phases of the conservation effort will include treatment of small artifacts in cases and limited triage to a number of the large totem poles without remaining paint.

Installed by Franz Boas in 1899, the Hall of Northwest Coast Indians highlights the traditional cultures of the native peoples of the Pacific Northwest, from Washington State to southern Alaska. In addition to being the first cultural hall at the Museum and an icon in the history of anthropology, the Hall offers the largest and most important collection and display of 19th and early 20th century Northwest Coast cultures and art in the world. Preservation and public access to these treasures is a strategic priority for the Museum. Among the many totem poles on display, the six elaborately carved and painted poles selected for this project were among the first to be installed and have been identified by the Curator of North American Ethnology and PI Levinson as the highest current conservation priority: a set of four 15-foot tall Tsimshian heraldic house posts acquired in 1883; a large Haida carving of a man in squatting posture with upraised hands, accessioned in 1881; and a Nuxalt (“Bella Coola”) monumental house entry pole, accessioned in 1909.

The four Tsimshian house posts will be treated in their vertical installation positions, as they are attached to built-in elements of the Hall construction. Two posts will be treated simultaneously by two project conservators each, with assistance from Native and other interns. The Haida carving and Nuxalt frontal entry pole will be rigged down from their current vertical installation for treatment in a horizontal position. As they are too large to be brought to the conservation lab, treatment will take place in a temporary lab on the main floor of the museum. A viewing window into the lab will engage visitors in the conservation process. Treatment steps for all six objects will include dry surface cleaning and photo-documentation, coating removal, removal of old fills and structural repairs, fill replacement and inpainting, and final documentation of treatment. Conservators will keep a daily treatment log to evaluate ongoing progress and address challenges, adjusting course if necessary.

Success will be visibly measured by the objects’ completed treatments, benefiting all who seek to examine, understand, and work with the collections. Ultimately, the project will ensure that these Northwest Coast treasures are preserved and accessible for scholars, First Nations communities, and visitors. Results from this effort will be particularly important for other museums that hold painted wooden sculptures, including totem poles, with non-original surface coating applications on porous surfaces, and intern training will build the pipeline of conservation professionals with a focus on diversity.

Lessons learned will be broadly disseminated during and after the project through professional conservation and museum journals and networks, as well as prominent conferences. We will also leverage the Museum’s significant web presence and numerous social media outlets to disseminate resources for public and the field. A blog reporting progress will be posted online, along with a special video in the Museum’s acclaimed “Shelf Life” series, a behind the scenes look at the history and uses of its collections. The website will also provide detailed information about the Hall and the conservation project, the historic and living Native cultures of the Northwest Coast, and links to items in Museum collections that are not currently on display.

CONSERVATION OF PAINTED TOTEM POLES AT THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Overview: The American Museum of Natural History (Museum) is planning a renovation and reinstallation of its iconic Hall of Northwest Coast Indians, and in this context seeks \$499,525 from the IMLS Museums for America program to conserve an exceptional and historic group of six totem poles and carvings on display in the Hall. These monumental objects have been identified as a key conservation priority because of their remarkable artistic value, their inappropriate surface appearance, and structural issues. Requested funding would support two of the four conservators working full-time on the project for up to 18 months, necessary consultation fees, equipment and supplies, as well as conservation training for Native interns. We anticipate that this work will be the first phase of a conservation and renovation project over several years, which will feature extensive consultation with Northwest Coast First Nations communities.¹ Subsequent phases will include treatment of the small artifacts in cases and limited triage to a number of the large totem poles without surviving paint.

Statement of Need:

Hall of Northwest Coast Indians: Originally installed by Franz Boas in 1899 and opened to the public in 1900, the American Museum of Natural History's Hall of Northwest Coast Indians highlights the traditional cultures of the native peoples of North America's northwest shores, from Washington State to southern Alaska, including Kwakwaka'wakw (formerly "Kwakiutl"), Haida, Tlinglit, and others. In addition to being the first cultural Hall at the Museum—and therefore a cultural icon in its own right—the Hall of Northwest Coast Indians offers the largest and most important collection and display of 19th and early 20th century Northwest Coast cultures and art in the world. It is also the first and still-grandest monument to the birth of American anthropology under Franz Boas (who led the Museum's Jesup North Pacific Expedition, the collections and research from which are on display in the Hall), and to Boas' signature doctrine of cultural relativism, which held that individual cultures must be understood and valued on their own terms, rather than in comparison to Western civilization. As the Museum's legacy hall of ethnology, the Hall of Northwest Coast Indians is widely considered to be the most important exhibition hall in the history of anthropology and one of the most beautiful anywhere.²

In recent years, the Hall has also become a platform and venue for deepening relationships with First Nations partners, who have collaborated with the Museum's Education and Exhibition

¹ To create a foundation for these conservation projects and critical curatorial work, the Museum is anticipating receipt of a planning grant from a private foundation. Commencing in January 2017, planning would culminate in a workshop at the Museum in Fall 2017 to refine a vision for the Hall renovation that integrates conservation, curatorial, scientific, and artistic perspectives from indigenous partners with that of other outside experts and Museum staff. The planning process would involve extensive outreach to First Nations partners on both the curatorial and conservation sides.

² The Hall has directly influenced main strands in 20th century art, including surrealism, the "modern art" movement, and abstract expressionism. In literature, the Hall is famously memorialized by J.D. Salinger and John Cheever. In art history, Boas' landmark *Primitive Art* and Claude Levi-Strauss' attribution of the Hall as a "magic place" are among the most widely known celebrations of the Hall's iconic value.

Departments and Dr. Peter Whiteley, the Museum's Curator of North American Ethnology, to bring important contextual information and the voices and perspectives of contemporary indigenous communities into the space through public programming and digital enhancements to the displays, including an innovative video link to the Haida Gwaii Museum in British Columbia. But other than these enhancements, there has been little change in more than a century, and the Hall is badly in need of renovation, reinterpretation, and conservation of the collections on display.

Objects Selected for Treatment: Overall, the collection of totem poles and other large carvings from the Pacific Northwest displayed in the Hall is significant for its size, early acquisition, and diversity of cultures represented. These monumental carvings, most commonly described as totem poles, include house frontal and entry poles, interior house posts, welcome figures, memorial poles, and mortuary posts. The Hall display includes poles from all major Northwest Coast societies, notably the Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw, Coast Salish, Tlingit, and Tsimshian. They are usually carved from red cedar, often hollowed out on the reverse, and many were painted. Totem poles were carved to memorialize chiefs, to publicly display family crests, to establish and maintain a person's lineage and importance, and their hereditary rights and privileges.

The Hall of Northwest Coast Indians houses more than 1800 artifacts. Condition surveys of its 77 totem poles and other large scale carvings, undertaken in 2002–2003 and again in 2009, indicated that these are the most endangered artifacts in the Hall, as they are not enclosed by cases and are subject to high levels of dust accumulation and damage by visitors; in addition, many have old, unsightly, deteriorating fills. They require frequent vacuuming, which can cause ongoing damage to their highly degraded surfaces and loss of paint. Among the many totem poles on display in the Hall, a group of six elaborately carved and painted totem poles have been identified by Principal Investigator Judith Levinson, Director of Conservation, and Dr. Whiteley as the highest current conservation priority. The poles selected for treatment in this project, listed below, were among the very first to be installed in the Hall:

- A set of four 15-foot tall Tsimshian heraldic house posts collected by British Columbia Indian Agent Israel Powell for Museum Trustee Heber Bishop during the Bishop Powell collecting expedition (1880–1885)—the earliest Museum collection of Northwest Coast artifacts. The house posts were acquired in 1883. Catalog numbers 16/565–568.
- A large Haida carving of a man in squatting posture with upraised hands, also collected by Israel Powell for Heber Bishop and accessioned in 1881. Catalog number 16/570.
- A Nuxalt (“Bella Coola”) monumental house entry pole from a known location, Pootlas' house in Komkotes, collected by Harlan Smith and accessioned in 1909. Catalog number 16.1/438.

These six pieces are of the highest curatorial and conservation priority because of their extraordinary artistry, beautifully illustrating typical carving traits and painting characteristics of each of the represented cultures. They are in comparatively stable condition and with much more remaining paint than most of the other poles in the collection, as five of the six were installed indoors. However, they all have structural issues, old unsightly repairs, and are covered with

darkened museum-applied coatings, greatly compromising their visual integrity. Furthermore, two of the Tsimshian house posts were significantly affected by a fire event on December 12, 2014. As a result, their darkened coatings are extensively and unevenly blanched from contact with water from the sprinklers. Treatment experience on equally large pieces during the 2010–12 treatment project, described below, and recent testing have revealed the challenge of coating removal from the surfaces of all of these carvings.

Prior surveys, treatment and research projects: The proposed treatment project is firmly based on a succession of prior and current survey, treatment, and research projects undertaken over the past 13 years and outlined below.

A 2002–2003 condition survey examined all 77 totem poles to determine future needs for treatment. Each pole was examined *in situ* under normal lighting conditions and ultraviolet illumination. A follow-up survey was undertaken in 2009, prior to applying for funds to address structural instabilities to allow for routine housekeeping without incurring ongoing damage.

As a result of the documentation provided by these surveys, approximately 30 smaller poles—those up to eight feet in height, which were of a size to be transported to the conservation lab—were treated from 2009–2012, with partial support from IMLS. Surface coatings, though a problem, were beyond the scope of that project and most of these poles did not have significant remaining paint. However, four extensively painted 18-foot poles, carved as a commission by George Hunt to the Museum in 1923 by Kingcome Inlet Kwakwaka'wakw carver Arthur Shaughnessy (the “Shaughnessy poles”), were also treated during this period. These poles were rigged down during installation of the Hall’s fire suppression system.

Treatment of the Shaughnessy poles provided Museum conservators the first direct experience with coating reduction/removal from the surfaces of these pieces, underscoring its complexity. The lowest coating layer was most often found to be a nitrocellulose resin, often overlaid with several other coating layers, including a natural resin, shellac, and/or polyvinyl acetate emulsion, as well as surface dirt held in and between the coatings. The coatings were undoubtedly applied in early undocumented attempts (probably in the 1920s and 1960s, as inferred from archival photographs of the Hall), to either harden the deteriorated wood or re-saturate the painted colors. The major issues encountered in coating reduction/removal were:

- Lack of a ground layer, allowing the paint medium to migrate into the wood to varying degrees, coupled with seeping of the coatings into the now-lean paints;
- The influence of wood grain and orientation on the condition of the paint; and
- Varying sensitivity of each of the paint colors to the solvents for coating removal.

Given these three major issues and considering the very large size of the objects, the conservation work must proceed extremely carefully and deliberately; what is successful in one area may not be effective an inch or two away.

The four Tsimshian heraldic house-posts in this proposal have been the subject of ongoing investigation since 2013. During a joint Museum/Bard summer research project in 2013, the colors underneath the coatings of two of the poles (16/565 and 16/567) were mapped; some

pigments were identified and initial coating removal tests were undertaken. The Bard student researched curatorial aspects of the poles, searching through databases of museums world-wide to locate related pieces, though no definitively comparable poles were identified, suggesting that these poles are a unique artist's production.

Having been identified as a priority as part of a Hall renovation, the heraldic posts and the two other carvings in this proposal are now once again the subject of intense study. They are the most fully painted totems in the Hall, most closely representing the original intent of the artists. Preliminary close examination, further research, and systematic testing by museum conservators are underway to identify the most successful means to remove the museum-applied coatings through the use of solvents, solvent mixtures, gels, and aqueous solutions. A paintings conservator familiar with unusual paint and solubility issues has indicated willingness to consult periodically throughout the project, and the scientific research department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art will lend analytical support to this work as necessary.

Alignment with AMNH Strategic Plan and MFA Goals: Updating its cultural halls and continuing improvements in collections stewardship and access are key priorities of the Museum's current Strategic Plan, and the Northwest Coast Hall is a prime target for conservation and transformation. The Strategic Plan underscores the Museum's intention to "build on its stature as the birthplace of modern anthropology to illuminate and better understand the diversity of human culture," and emphasizes its vital role in undertaking education and exhibition initiatives concerning issues related to the sustainability of cultural diversity. The Plan also focuses on stewardship improvements in key collections areas to ensure preservation of the "irreplaceable legacy these collections embody, now and for generations to come," and to make the collections accessible for researchers and the public.

The Museum's strategic commitments to exemplary stewardship and public access are also aligned with the goals of the Museums for America Collections Stewardship project category. In addition, the project addresses the IMLS special FY17 goals of supporting and diversifying the next generation of conservators through investing in the professional development of Museum staff and Native interns as well as the graduate conservation students and pre-program volunteer trainees from the existing anthropology conservation training program who will be involved in the effort.

Project Beneficiaries: In addition to the Museum itself, beneficiaries of the project include the Museum's more than five million onsite visitors and the still-vibrant First Nations communities of the Pacific Northwest, as well as participating conservation interns. The recent exhibition and programming collaborations with First Nations partners have revealed strong public interest in the Hall, the objects and cultures on display—both historic and extant. Finally, historic ethnographic collections are deeply meaningful to the communities of origin. The process of using them to study and reclaim cultural knowledge—of aesthetic styles, and the use and processing of materials—is critical to that effort. As part of their involvement in these recent initiatives and interest in sharing their heritage, First Nations partners have strongly encouraged a full renovation and conservation effort and have expressed their willingness to work with us. With its strong training component, graduate conservation students paired with indigenous partners training in conservation would form mutually beneficial learning experiences.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

Project Management and Resources: The project has been planned and will be overseen by Director of Conservation, Judith Levinson, in close concert with Dr. Whitely and Anthropology Department conservators Samantha Alderson and Gabrielle Tieu. All three conservators have had extensive treatment experience of Northwest Coast materials over many years and will guide the treatment process. Ms. Levinson will devote 50 percent time to the project; Ms. Alderson and Ms. Tieu will each devote 60 percent time to the project. Dr. Whitely has conducted significant research on the Hall, its history, and the cultures of the Pacific Northwest; developed partnerships in First Nations communities; and curated recent relevant exhibition projects.

Four graduate-trained conservators will be hired for the project to work with the three staff conservators. Two Native interns as well as graduate conservation interns and pre-program trainees in the established anthropology conservation training program will assist them over the course of the project. The lead project conservator will work the full length of the project beginning in October 2017, one month prior to the start of the three other project conservators, in order to take part in project set-up and become familiar with Museum and conservation lab procedures, particularly documentation and database usage. His/her final month will be devoted to project close-out and reporting. The other three project conservators will work 16 months of active treatment time. We anticipate employing one Native intern for eight months in Year 1 and a second intern for six months in Year 2.

The four Tsimshian house posts are estimated to require a total of 10 months treatment time, five months for each pair. Two posts will be treated simultaneously by two project conservators each, with assistance from interns. The Nuxalt doorway entrance pole and the Haida carving together are expected to require six months treatment time. The structural issues of the Haida carving were largely addressed in the 2010–12 treatment project, but not its surface coatings; the Nuxalt pole has considerably more structural issues and old repairs than the other five poles, as it was originally installed outdoors.

The number of conservators required, the treatment plan, schedule, and budget are based on previous successful work, particularly work on the Shaughnessy poles in 2011, which were in comparable structural condition to most of the poles in this project, but were far more simply painted with few colors, and involved only limited coating removal. A varying number of conservators worked to treat the Shaughnessy poles over a ten month period. This project will require a full-time dedicated team for the entire duration of the treatment.

Given the importance of and broad interest in this project, the Museum is committing significant resources to the effort and is in the process of securing private support.

Activities: The four Tsimshian house posts will be treated while in their vertical installation positions in the Hall, as they are attached to built-in elements of the Hall construction. The Haida carving and Nuxalt frontal entry pole will be rigged down from their current vertical installation for treatment in a horizontal position.³ As they are too large to be brought to the conservation

³ Rigging, scaffold, lift rental, and temporary lab costs will be supported by the Museum from other funds.

lab, treatment will take place in a temporary lab location on the main floor of the museum. Results from the current research to test the full array of coating removal options will have obvious influence on the final treatment plan.

Current testing indicates that the successful solution will consist of several steps utilizing solvents, solvent mixtures, and modular cleaning solutions for coating removal from the surfaces of these pieces.

The following treatment steps and estimated time requirements are planned for each set of poles:

- Dry surface cleaning and photo-documentation – two weeks
- Coating removal – eight weeks
- Removal of old fills and structural repair – four weeks
- Fill replacement and inpainting – four weeks
- Final documentation and treatment report – two weeks

The conservators will be required to keep a daily treatment log, to be reviewed by supervisory staff during weekly meetings in order to evaluate ongoing progress and address challenges, adjusting course as necessary.

Risks to the Project: These pieces have been carefully surveyed while installed vertically in the Hall, without access to the reverse sides. However, regardless of the extent of preparation for treatment of extremely large pieces with undocumented histories such as these, unforeseen conditions—for example, changes in Hall construction schedules or condition issues that could not be anticipated beneath the surface coatings—can affect work plans. In the past, the conservation team has successfully navigated such challenges, and is confident in its ability to successfully complete this project as planned.

Dissemination of Project Results: The Museum’s conservation staff has a solid track record of disseminating project results within the conservation community through publications and conference presentations and posters, as well as to general Museum audiences. Results from this effort will be particularly important for other museums that hold painted wooden sculptures, including totem poles, with non-original surface coating applications on porous surfaces, and colleagues have already expressed interest in the planned work. Presentations addressing large historic hall renovation issues and work with indigenous stakeholders will also contribute to ongoing discussion in the field on these issues. We will leverage the Museum’s significant web presence and social media outlets to disseminate resources for the field and the public including detailed information about the Hall, the historic and descendant cultures of the Northwest Coast, and links to items in Museum collections that are not currently on display. In addition, an ongoing blog reporting progress of the project will be posted periodically online, along with a special video in the Museum’s acclaimed “Shelf Life” series, a behind-the-scenes exploration of the history and uses of its collections ([http://www.amnh.org/explore/amnh.tv/\(watch\)/shelf-life](http://www.amnh.org/explore/amnh.tv/(watch)/shelf-life)).

PROJECT RESULTS

The results of the project address the goals of the Museums for America program as well as the Museum’s long-range plan to renovate this important exhibit hall. Strengthening the Museum’s

unique role in preserving, providing public access to, and deepening understanding of the cultural heritage of the peoples of the Northwest Coast; engaging the public in appreciation of collections and the conservation process; helping to build a diverse museum workforce; and collaborating with First Nations communities as part of a multi-faceted renovation project are all intended results.

Continuing to develop dynamic relationships with its First Nations partners is critical to the Museum's goals to diversify and deepen its cultural exhibitions to include indigenous perspectives. As discussed in Footnote 1 above, we anticipate expanding and strengthening these partnerships through a separate project expected to launch in January 2017, which will be the foundation for ongoing collaborations in person and via video links throughout the duration of the Hall renovation and beyond.

The Museum is also committed to supporting the next generation of museum professionals and, in particular, to creating a diverse pipeline for museum careers. Its conservation lab is recognized as a strong training site for emerging conservators. Conservation training will be a strong component of this project, with participation of pre-program interns, recent conservation graduates, and Native trainees identified and recruited with assistance from the Museum's First Nations partners. Trainees at all levels receive supervised preparation in hands-on application, as well as an array of additional museum activities, such as climate monitoring and other aspects of preventive conservation.

For Museum visitors, the visual impact and most tangible product will be stabilizing the carvings and revealing their original painted surfaces to both dramatic and informative effect. The totem poles currently read as large dark, brown carvings in a sea of other dark, brown carvings. With their coatings removed, they will enliven the entire central area of the hall, where all six are installed, and provide a more accurate representation of the original intent of the Native artists.

Finally, the project will have broad educational benefits. Information regarding the care and conservation of its collections holds considerable interest, but is absent from the onsite experience of Museum visitors. We plan a viewing window onto the conservation space, as well as printed explanatory information about conservation and digital/video initiatives around the project, as described above. In addition, a video link between conservators and indigenous consultants, similar to the video link deployed successfully to connect visitors with Native staff at the Haida Gwaii Museum, will provide a unique opportunity for ongoing exchange.

Tangible Products and Sustaining Benefits: The newly stabilized and cleaned poles will be the most tangible results of the project, making them available for appreciation to the public, scholars, and indigenous partners, particularly after planned relighting as a component of the Hall renovation. The benefits of these lengthy treatments will be sustained by twice-yearly routine housekeeping by exhibit and conservation staff. The deepened connections with stakeholder community members will have a beneficial and sustaining influence on the continuing phases of work for the Hall renovation project, enriching both the conservation and curatorial processes with their knowledge and perspectives and providing a template for best practices for future work in other Museum cultural halls.

AMNH PAINTED TOTEMS												
	Project Year					Year 1						
	Calendar Year	2017				2018						
Administration and Preparation	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Advertise, interview, and hire for project conservator positions and Native interns	█											
Order supplies, rent lifts	█											
Set up remote lab on first floor location	█											
Carry out final planning and attend anticipated workshop with Native and other advisors (1)	█	█										
PI writes interim report												█
Conservation Treatment												
Lead project conservator starts, reviews past treatment history, organizes documentation procedures		█										
Lead conservator and graduate conservation intern carry out photo/UV documentation		█										
Graduate conservation intern starts at AMNH (2)	█	█							█			
3 project assistant conservators start and active treatment of poles begins			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Native Intern 1 works			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█		
Treatment of first set of poles			█	█	█	█	█					
Treatment of second set of poles								█	█	█	█	█
Dissemination												
Initial AMNH website blog published		█										
Second AMNH website blog published							█					
Third AMNH website blog published												█

- (1) The Museum anticipates a grant from a private funder to support this workshop.
- (2) Graduate intern will be part of the Museum's current Anthropology training program.

AMNH PAINTED TOTEMS

	Project Year		Year 2						
	Calendar Year	2017	2018						
		Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Administration									
Send in interim report to IMLS									
Final Documentation and reports written/checked by lead project conservator									
Temporary lab dismantled									
PI sends in final report to IMLS									
Conservation Treatment									
Treatment of third set of poles									
Native Intern 2 works									
Poles rigged back into place									
Final reports written and paperwork finalized by project conservators									
Dissemination									
Fourth blog post published to AMNH website									
Shelf Life article published on AMNH website									
Articles written for submission to AIC/CAC and other conferences/publications									