



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-30-14-0276-14
Project Category: Collections Stewardship
Funding Level: \$25,001-\$150,000

Gilcrease Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$150,000
Amount of cost share:	\$187,262

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Native Artists and Scholars Bring Past to Present: Multi-disciplinary Perspectives for Mississippian Culture Pottery

Project Abstract

The Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, through the Gilcrease Museum Management Trust, seeks a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to create the largest, multi-disciplinary, searchable online catalogue of Mississippian period (700 C.E. – 16560 C.E.) ceramic vessels in the United States. This catalogue will be easy to navigate and comprehensively searchable using terminology appropriate to Native Americans, scholars, artists, and the general public.

The Gilcrease Museum has one of the finest collections of artifacts in the entire United States detailing the history of humanity in the Americas with objects from Alaska to South America and dating as far back as 12,000 years, continuing to the present. Unfortunately, the bulk of this remarkable collection is relatively unknown and unstudied outside of a small group of specialists. The Gilcrease Museum is rectifying this situation by launching a major digitization initiative which includes reviewing and enhancing the catalog information of all collections. Within the broad archaeology collection, the first priority is the digitization of approximately 3,500 Mississippian ceramic vessels from the Museum's Harry J. Lemley Collection. This collection was assembled by Harry J. Lemley, a federal judge in Arkansas, during the first half of the twentieth century and is comprised principally of objects from Arkansas and Missouri. Upon his death, the collection came to the Gilcrease Museum where these items have quietly lived in storage since 1955. Currently this material has limited, if any, provenance information, has rarely been photographed, and in its current state, provides little interpretive information. However, the revised database and searchable terms will be developed in collaboration with tribes who trace their ancestry to the sites and region, from which these collections come, as well as archaeologists, ethnologists, and tribal artists who are continuing the ceramic traditions of their people. This digital initiative revolutionizes how this material can be used internally to improve access to deeper and broader data and externally to allow Native American community members who are unable to come to the museum to access their ancestral heritage, provide scholars instant access to material that promotes scholarly research, and artists to delve into the details of traditional manufacturing techniques and designs as bases for their own work. Additionally, the Gilcrease Museum sees this project as an extension of consultations for compliance with Native American Tribal Historic Preservation Offices through the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 guidelines.

To accomplish this goal the Gilcrease Museum will photograph and record all basic information for each item in the Harry J. Lemley ceramic collection with guidance about the structuring of data from an advisory committee comprised of invited subject-matter experts, information specialists and native artists. This information will be posted to a password-protected site where consultants comprised of archaeologists, artists and tribal representatives will add substantial information in the form of subject search terms or comments that describe every vessel including any use-ware marks and all incised, painted, or iconographical motifs. Following the completion of this project, the Gilcrease Museum, in consultation with the relevant Tribal Nations, will transfer the data and images to a new collections site for use by researchers, artists and the general public. When it comes to the public, this will be the biggest, most definitive and accessible dataset of its kind. Furthermore, this undertaking will advance one of the institution's strategic goals, which is to create a searchable online collections database with a digital record for every item in the collection. This particular collection is a high priority in our digitization plan because of its relationship to the regional Tribal communities and its importance to the body of knowledge about the Mississippian Culture; moreover, this

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Narrative

1. Project Justification

- **What do we propose to do?**

The Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, also known as the Gilcrease Museum, in conjunction with the University of Tulsa, will create the largest and most definitive online catalogue of Mississippian ceramic vessels in the United States. The process to achieve this objective will include inventorying, correcting, updating, and expanding vessel metadata, cataloguing, digitally imaging and expert tagging (non-hierarchical, descriptive metadata to describe an item or image) of 3,500 Mississippian era (700 C.E. – 1650 C.E.) ceramic vessels from the Gilcrease Museum’s Harry J. Lemley collection. By adding diverse perspectives from information experts, subject-matter experts and cultural experts to guide the cataloguing this project will result in a robust public catalogue with records and images that are easily and comprehensively searchable using scholarly terms and design motifs.

This IMLS request focuses on the processes needed to prepare and fully catalogue the records and images for eventual placement on the public collections website. Data will be entered into the Gilcrease Museum’s collection management database, TMS (The Museum System). TMS records will include measurements, archaeological identifications, iconographic labels, provenience, culture, classification, object type and medium, which is ported onto a password-protected editing and review site created in a Piction Digital Asset Management System/Orchestrator customized interface. Images of all sides (typically six images per vessel) will be shot along with an image of the catalogue card and will be stored and managed by the Piction DAMS, linked to the TMS records, and then both data and images will be pulled together for display in the private Piction-based review interface. Once this data is in the review site, contracted artists and scholars from remote locations will be able to organize records to keep track of objects as they add search terms (tags) to describe the iconography and vessel type. The tags will then become part of the catalogue records associated with an object and used for searching. All tags will be reviewed by the appropriate Gilcrease Museum curator. Once tags are accepted they will be moved onto the public collections website.

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

Even before the founding of the United States, Native American communities were systematically pushed aside and forgotten as an ever growing population of Europeans moved across North America. This attitude led to an unfortunate disconnect between pre-Columbian cultures and their modern-day descendants with the most glaring loss coming from cultures located in the American southeast and woodlands. So apparent was this disconnect that it was not until 1890 that Cyrus Thomas, working for the Bureau of Ethnology, formally acknowledged a connection between Native American mound building communities and modern Native American communities such as the Osage, Caddo, Tunica-Biloxi, Quapaw, Muscogee, Choctaw, as well as many others. Prior to this, Americans believed that a “lost race” of people were responsible for building and creating the Mississippian mounds as well as the many objects of unprecedented design, beauty, and skill, frequently found with these structures and in other ancient sites. Today, museums, scholars, and Native Americans strive to rebuild and reclaim this lost past. This project will be one of the best and most pertinent ways to achieve this goal.

Access to a great many archaeological objects, relating to the Mississippian people, has been limited because the depth of this material is often unknown to the general public and academic community. In an

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effort to re-contextualize the collections within their cultural sphere, the Gilcrease Museum aims to create a formal database and online presence, with the assistance of members of the major stakeholder communities including tribes, artists, and archaeological and ethnographic scholars. With the growth of technology and the digital distribution of information, the discovery of artifacts being made by tribal descendants and academics has illuminated the once forgotten past and brought new energy to native artists and community members hoping to reconnect with their heritage. For example, after encountering pottery made by their ancestors, native artists, such as Jeri Redcorn and Kaw Win Hut (Chase Earles) of the Caddo tribe, set about the task of reverse engineering the techniques and have learned to make this pottery, from digging the clay, forming the vessel, inscribing the designs, to firing the finished pots. The effect on native artists in the region has been dramatic and is growing. Their work is now represented in numerous museum and private collections. In fact, one of Jeri Redcorn's pieces now sits in the Oval Office of the White House.

The profound interest in making pottery according to old, rediscovered traditions can be seen in the activities of tribes in Oklahoma. Learning this skill is not only a creative outlet, but an economic opportunity. There are websites and newspaper articles devoted to the details of making traditional pottery. Classes are being organized around Oklahoma and submissions into tribal art shows include traditional ceramic vessels along with paintings of the intricate patterns found in ancient, Mississippian objects. The Caddo artists have lead the way, with evidence of similar activities showing up in the newsletters, classes and art shows of the Oklahoma Choctaw and Cherokee tribes. During the Red Earth Festival in Oklahoma City in 2009, Jeri Redcorn was chosen as a "Red Earth Honored One" for her efforts to resurrect these traditional ways.

- *Who or what will benefit from your project?*

This project will directly benefit the descendants of the original creators of this collection of Mississippian Period ceramics collected by Harry Lemley—namely the Caddo, Osage, Tunica-Biloxi, and Quapaw nations. Furthermore, the body of knowledge for Mississippian cultures in general will be expanded and enhanced through the sharing of this data online as archaeologists, art historians, ethnologists, and Native American community members explore the iconographic continuity, and research the trade and migration patterns across North America and possibly into Mesoamerica. Other tribes in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Texas, Illinois, and multiple other states are also connected to this material via the Southeast Ceremonial Complex (a term that describes multiple Mississippian groups connected stylistically, architecturally, and economically during the period) and will benefit from the cataloguing and sharing of images of Mississippian Period ceramics because iconographic and oral traditions passed down through the years show the cultural connections between all of these people to related ancient sites. Educators will also benefit from expanding their knowledge of the Americas in this visual way. The primary focus of this project, however, is on the needs of native artists, archaeologist, and Tribal Historic Preservation offices; however, as this information is dispersed publically, we anticipate a wealth of new interest from schools and the general public.

- *What are the intended results of your project?*

The end result of this project will be online access to 3,500 Mississippian ceramic vessels complete with six images and a fully catalogued record for each item—although due to concerns with looting, specific site and provenience information will not be shared with the general public. Additional search terms will be added as tags in a way that builds upon lessons learned from the two IMLS-funded **steve** social tagging projects. Native artists and scholars will be able to look for vessel types, shapes and symbols found in decoration using simple, artistic terms such as interlocking spirals, sun, inscribed meandering lines with dots or red-painted circles with dots (eye-forms), hand shapes, etc. Since archaeologists have often catalogued by site name and the person who discovered and excavated the site to create their initial finding aids, they use names such as Hampson ID, Robert Johnson site, Leland incised, variety LeFlore, and other terms to label objects. Such labels have little or no meaning to artists and the general public without additional study. Archaeologists may have also assigned

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names to patterns and design motifs using words such as whorls, gant, blunderbug, buff triune and ogee, which again are confusing terms for the newly acquainted. Therefore, if a variety of descriptive terms exist, these objects will be better defined and simplified from the artist and general public's perspective and support easier searching.

- How will your project advance your institution's strategic plan?

Mission statement approved by the board in 2008 with educational goals added in 2013:

Gilcrease Museum, through its collections, is dedicated to bringing art, history and people together to discover, enjoy and understand the diverse heritage of the Americas.

The Gilcrease Museum collections uniquely demonstrate the entire breadth of the history of the Americas through 12,000 works of art, 300,000 archaeological and anthropological artifacts, 35,000 rare books, 40,000 manuscripts, 100,000 pages of New World documents and 300 early maps in the archival collection. This wide range of materials tells a comprehensive story about the heritage of the Americas but the wealth of the collection is not widely known.

The strategic plan, currently being revised by the National Board, focuses on increasing scholarship and academic excellence built on a foundation of study of the permanent collection. Two important initiatives outlined in the strategic plan to increase scholarship and academic excellence are underway: 1. The construction of The Helmerich Center for American Research (HCAR) to house the library and archival collection on the Gilcrease Museum campus (opening in Fall, 2014), 2. The implementation of the "Gilcrease Digitization Initiative" which aims to build a collection digital catalogue that allows online access to support research from any location, world-wide.

The "Gilcrease Digitization Initiative" is moving forward with funding from several sources; the Chapman Foundation, the Windgate Foundation, and the Charles and Marion Weber Foundation. These donations supported the recruitment and hiring of the new Head of Collections Digitization, Diana Folsom, who recently moved from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) to direct this initiative. A digitization team is in place with priorities set by the Gilcrease Museum's curatorial council. Work is currently progressing in two areas, the Charles M. Russell Research Collection (previously known as the Britzman-Russell Collection) and the anthropology department's ethnographic collection. Digitization of the 13,500 item Russell Research Collection is 75% complete and we are in early stages of digitizing the nearly 10,000 objects held in the ethnographic collection as part of the process to move into an expanded collection storage facility.

The curatorial council holds regular meetings to discuss the digitization process and to set content priorities. The Lemley collection was identified as the highest priority within the archaeology collection because of its comprehensive nature, the presence of some provenience data and due to the interest of the Caddo, Osage, Quapaw, and other Native American communities for possible repatriation and also because of the rise of Native American ceramic artistry.

2. Project Work Plan

- What specific activities will you carry out?

To bring art, history and people together through the collections, this project will inventory, catalogue and image approximately 3,500 Mississippian ceramic vessels from Museum's Harry J. Lemley Collection. The images and records will be uploaded into a new password-protected review site where data and images will be posted for expert scholar and artist tagging, review and approval of terms and cultural assessment. The project will take three years to complete: the first two years will be spent re-inventorying, cataloguing and imaging, with the second and third year spent defining and building the password-protected tagging site, adding tags, securing curatorial approvals, uploading this new data into TMS fields and lastly, moving the new records with expert tags and images online.

- Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

The general planning, oversight and management of the project will be carried out by Project Director, Diana Folsom, Head of Collections Digitization with other elements managed by Co-Project Director, Eric Singleton. Ms. Folsom will oversee the development of cataloguing methodology, imaging, software customization and communication with native artists. Curator Eric Singleton will oversee content development and will communicate with tribal representatives. Dr. Robert Pickering, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Public Programming, will provide executive oversight.

A cataloguing advisory committee will review the field and outline methodology and taxonomic standards for this collection as it fits into the related items collected by the Gilcrease Museum and other similar archaeology collections in the region. The *advisory committee* will work toward establishing regional standards in archaeology collection cataloguing and examine the intricacies of a multi-disciplinary approach to give guidelines for best ways to integrate needs of both constituents for best online search results. The *advisory committee* will include: Mary C. Suter, Curator of Collections, from the University of Arkansas; Dr. Jonathan Furner, Associate Professor of Information Studies, part of the IMLS *steve-in-action* project, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); Jeri Redcorn, Caddo native ceramic artist; Elsbeth Linn Dowd, Museum Registrar, Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, University of Oklahoma; Marc Carlson, Head of Special Collections, The University of Tulsa; Diana Folsom, Head of Collections Digitization, Gilcrease Museum/The University of Tulsa; Eric Singleton, Curator of Anthropology, Gilcrease Museum/The University of Tulsa; Dr. Robert Pickering, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Public Programs, Gilcrease Museum/The University of Tulsa.

- When and in what sequence will your activities occur?

The first two years will be spent cataloguing and imaging the collection of ceramics. This portion of the project will be performed by a post-graduate fellow with the help of a part-time graduate assistant. The post-graduate fellow will have an academic specialty in Mississippian ceramics and work under the supervision of the Curator of Anthropology, Eric Singleton.

The first step will take two years to create a full inventory, move each vessel individually to the designated work area for analysis, which will include measuring, cataloguing according to University of Arkansas archaeological standards for ceramic vessels (See Supporting document: Ceramic Vessel Form), and inputting data into the TMS software. After a record is created in TMS, the vessel will be moved into the photography studio for imaging on four sides, top and bottom (a minimum of six images) along with any details specified by the curator. Based on the curator's experience with this level of detailed archaeological cataloguing, the rate of speed is approximately ten objects per day, with an average of 150 – 200 objects catalogued and imaged per month.

The second major step is to create the software for review and tagging, and to acquire meaningful subject terms for every object by a scholar and a native artist, and for data and images to be reviewed by cultural experts. Early in the second year, the tagging software will be created as a customized Piction Lightbox software function which is password-protected and will be easy to use remotely. Scholars and artists will add search terms about subject, type, and iconography, and the cultural experts will be able to more easily provide consultation through comments about the objects from their tribal perspective for compliance with NAGPRA guidelines. Terms will then be exported back into designated fields in TMS specially identified: a field for the scholar tags; a field for artist tags and a third field identified to hold cultural expert comments, so that the source of the search terms will be clear for internal and external use. The cultural comments provided by tribal representatives will not go online.

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The tagging software design builds on experience from the IMLS-funded *steve* projects. Added features are needed to make the tagging easy to accomplish and track. Keeping up the motivation while tagging a large batch of objects can be difficult, so taggers will be selected for their expert interest or knowledge of the content and will be paid a defined consulting fee as an incentive to complete the tagging for the entire 3,500 vessel collection. Features for the password-protected tagging/review site will include:

1. The display of records and multiple images (pulled from TMS) for each vessel
2. A place for scholarly terms
3. A place for artists to add terms about iconography and shape
4. A method for taggers to keep track of records they've already tagged (show number of items in a group, show how many in group that were tagged and saved, show how many left to tag...) This will be a modification to the Piction Lightbox feature to display elements of status changes as "complete" or "in progress".
5. A search utility will handle searches with basic facets, such as type of pottery, geographical area, time period, color, shape and iconography.
6. The ability to save and name groups of records as mini-collections.
7. A place for cultural review after cataloguing has been completed by experts. Tribal representatives will review all items in certain geographical areas based on existing metadata; be able to make groups and save for continuing review and make annotations in a specially assigned field.
8. The ability to copy and export tags out of the review site into specified TMS fields so they become part of the full catalogue records for internal and/or external use in the public collections website.

The *formative* and *remedial-summative* evaluation will focus on the effectiveness of the eight features as they evolve. We will use a *formative evaluation* process with an early sampling of tags and search terms for some of the ceramic vessels in order to review the prototype being developed. This initial evaluation will happen towards the end of the first year and extend into the second year. *Remedial-summative* evaluation will be important for continually improving the site after the program is created and to focus on the effectiveness of the tagging and searching features as they evolve during the second and third year.

For evaluation, we will create a stakeholder group comprised of 3 native artists and 3 archaeologists (other than the taggers) who will respond to the search terms to see if they are useful and meaningful toward the end of the first year and start of the second year. During the third year this stakeholder group will be invited back to assess the password-protected review site and suggest ways to improve it. Evaluation tools will be online questionnaires and/or interviews via Skype calls.

- *What financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?*

We request funding for one full-time post-graduate fellow for two years, one half-time graduate assistant position for two academic years and one part-time summer graduate assistant for this project for two summers as well as funding to create the private tagging site based on the Piction digital asset management system Orchestrator and Lightbox feature Funding is requested to pay travel and honoraria for the cataloguing advisory committee (mentioned above) as well as consulting fees for formative and summative evaluation and for subject tagging by native artists and content experts. The specific experts who will be brought in for tagging are George Sabo III, Professor at the University of Arkansas and Director, Arkansas Archaeological Survey; Ann Early, Arkansas State Archaeologist; along with Caddo native artists, Jeri Redcorn and Chase Kahwinhut Earles.

- *What resources will your institution contribute to the project?*

Gilcrease staff time (see list) as well as the purchase of Piction DAMS software license and installation will provide the foundation to build the private review site. The initial Piction DAMS installation is expected to be complete in 2014.

- How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?

The project progress will be tracked using the Basecamp software to post milestones and deadlines, shared documents and other conversation threads. Regular project meetings will be held weekly with written reports submitted to Dr. Robert Pickering on a bi-monthly basis.

- How and with whom will you share your project's results?

Project results will be shared through conference papers for the Museum Computer Network, American Association of Museums, the Oklahoma Museum Association, Anthropology conferences, and Anthropology workshops. There will also be news releases created by the Gilcrease Museum/The University of Tulsa Communications Manager, Melani Hamilton. There will also be thorough presentations and participation through classes at The University of Tulsa Museums Science Management classes. Additional presentations will be made at the yearly Caddo Conferences and articles will be written for tribal newsletters. All presentations, articles and the Gilcrease Museum collections website will incorporate appropriate acknowledgments to IMLS.

3. Project Results

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

Native communities including Native artists connected to the Mississippian Interaction Sphere will have new, meaningful access to their heritage, and the ability to quickly and easily study the pottery techniques and iconography of their ancestors, thereby encouraging the growth of pottery-making as a past-time and as an income-producing endeavor. The community of regional archaeologists in Oklahoma and Arkansas with related collections will have established a cataloguing committee and begun to standardize fields and terms to be used across collections. Their work will benefit a wide range of archaeologists, ethnologists and historians who study the Mississippian Interaction Sphere and descendant cultures. The general public will gain access to this material in a significant quantity which will open a new chapter of understanding of American History.

- How will the care, condition, and/or management of the materials (e.g. objects, specimens, collections) that define the focus of your project be improved?

The Gilcrease Museum will have a precise inventory with images of 3,500 significant objects from the Mississippian Period and establish a basis upon which to build the online archaeology presence. Moreover, this will allow the Museum to greatly minimize the need to handle the objects; therefore, dramatically reducing potential damage to vessels that can occur through repeated handling and movement.

- What tangible products (e.g. reports, inventories, catalogues, treatment plans, publications, presentations, databases) will result from your project?

Tangible products are: an inventory of the Lemley Collection; a private database for review and tagging; an online database for the public and the training of graduate students. A complete inventory will improve access to deeper and broader data. An online, searchable database will allow community members who are unable to come to the museum to access their ancestral heritage. The online database will also provide scholars instant access to material that promotes scholarly research and artists will be able to delve into the details of traditional manufacturing techniques and designs to use in their own work. The private tagging and review site will be used regularly for other areas of the collection which might require offsite review and tagging by experts. The private site will also allow Native American cultural experts to review the objects without having

to travel to Tulsa. The resulting online database of Mississippian ceramic vessels will be the largest, most comprehensive collection to be posted online at this time.

- How will you measure success in achieving your intended results?

We have articulated anticipated outcomes for this project that will help to measure its success, included are the following:

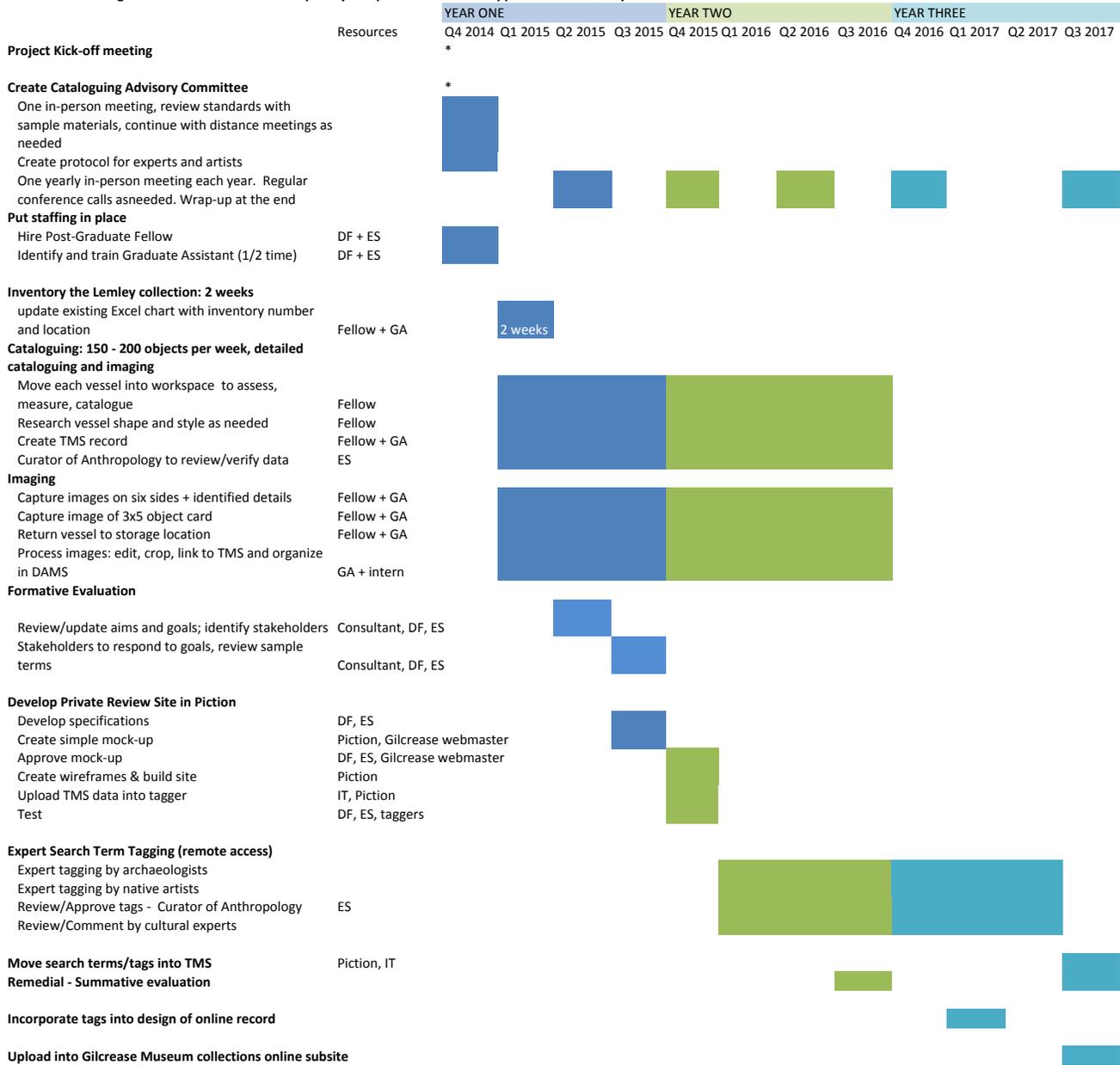
1. After accessing the easily searchable database of 3,500 ceramic vessels on a useful private site for organizing and tracking, review and tagging processes:
 - Native artists will have used their terminology for iconography, object type, and motifs.
 - Archaeologists will have used their terminology for iconography, object type, and motifs.
 - Tribal Cultural experts will have expanded their knowledge about items in the Gilcrease collection and added comments from their perspective.
 - Gilcrease Museum will have a record of the number of tagging and search terms each group has created for individual ceramic vessels.
2. After data and images are uploaded from the private site into the public collections site:
 - General public will have become more aware of these types of ceramic vessels using object type, iconography, and geographical region.
 - The public site will have enabled native artists to search the database for iconography, manufacturing details and pottery forms to stimulate pottery making ideas for their own work, and inspire and enrich the visual language in a way that is tied with the past. The site also will have generated knowledge about the Mississippian Period and make it relevant to today's native artists.
 - The public site will have generated knowledge for the field of archaeology and for access by the general public.
 - The Gilcrease Museum will publish catalogue records and images on the public site about a high-priority group of items to achieve institutional goals for digitizing the collection and will be able to track the number online visitors who use individual object records.

In addition, success will be measured by papers given, articles written in tribal newspapers and scholarly publications and at conferences.

- How will you sustain the project and/or its benefit(s)?

This project is an early step in the high-priority "Gilcrease Digitization Initiative" within the strategic plan to digitize the entire Gilcrease collection and make it available online. The Gilcrease Museum/The University of Tulsa have committed to this major **STEM-related** goal utilizing technology as a powerful way to communicate the stories behind the making of America through sharing the collection with multiple perspectives. Momentum created through the regional cataloguing advisory committee will encourage related archaeology collections to open their records and images through online collections. We anticipate this technological platform will expand programs and research based on the collection, enable enhancement of information presented in the galleries and also offer electronic access to online audiences for continuous education in the form of distance learning. Finally, this state-of-the-art project will engage the next generation through the MS degree program for museum management at TU and provide training for a graduate research assistant and undergraduate students involved directly with this specific project. **STEM related objectives** at IMLS addressing educational, scientific and technology challenges harmonize completely with long-term strategies at the Gilcrease Museum Management Trust for which this project provides an outstanding foundation.

Native Artists Bring Past Into Present - Multi-disciplinary Perspectives for Mississippian Culture Pottery



Note: DF = Diana Folsom, ES = Eric Singleton, Fellow = Post-Graduate Fellow, GA = Graduate Assistant, IT = Information Tecchnology department staff