21st Century Museum Professionals

Sample Application 21MP-257631-0MS-25

High Desert Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	$482,943
Amount of cost share:	$483,060

The High Desert Museum will create a community of practice to support museum professionals and their community partners in the Intermountain West. Participants will include rural museum practitioners and their community partners in the Intermountain West who create and deliver public programs. Each community will send two people from the museum and one from a partner organization, and most of the 60 participants will come from small to medium-sized institutions. Participants will choose to learn about one of two field-tested programming models focused on families, youth, or adults. High Desert Museum staff and collaborators will help the participants gain knowledge and skills related to the chosen model, implement an original community program, deepen collaborative relationships, and contribute to a place-based programming toolkit for the field.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

Desert Dialogues: A Community of Practice for Sustained, Place-Based Learning in Rural Communities

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

21MP program goal and associated objective: The High Desert Museum's *Desert Dialogues* project will address the 21MP *Goal 1: support the professional development of the current museum workforce* and *Objective 1.1: Develop new or enhanced professional development (PD) and training programs for the museum workforce.*

Need we address: Rural museums can act as vital community builders but need support to create the professional networks, skills, and programs that can affect change. *Desert Dialogues* addresses the needs of rural museum professionals and their community partners from historically excluded communities[1] to do this work. *Desert Dialogues* will create a Community of Practice (CoP) based on the strengths and needs of rural communities to share programming models that allow museums to cultivate community connectedness and a deeper sense of place.[2] Through the process, practitioners will build skills, strengthen networks, and create a Place-Based Programming Toolkit for the field.

We define *rural areas* as places with low population density. Often, the term *rural* conjures misconceptions that all rural communities are white, low income, and politically homogeneous. In reality, rural areas are racially, economically, and politically diverse. There are also vast differences between communities based on their environments, histories, and economic activities. That said, many rural communities share attributes including community members who play multiple roles (e.g., business owner and fire chief), have a strong connection to place, and a long community memory. Rural areas also have limited organized after-school activities and access to technology infrastructure (Kastelein, 2018).

Importantly, *Desert Dialogues* aims to meet the needs of rural museum professionals in the **High Desert**. The High Desert spans portions of eight states in the Intermountain West: Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, Nevada and California. The area has a rapidly changing population of over 10 million, including growing communities of color (Pohl, 2017). Although it is one of the most rural regions in the country, it is also one of the most significant, providing essential food, water, energy, and economic benefits for the rest of the nation (Mehl, 2017). In recent years, new industries, such as renewable energy, technology, and recreation as well as the rise of remote work are shifting demographics in rural areas that were previously logging, ranching, and farming communities. This change provides new opportunities but also intensifies tensions over the area's natural and cultural resources (Parker et al., 2018).

The *Desert Dialogues* team identified the needs of High Desert museum practitioners through conversations with leaders at the National Association for Interpretation (NAI), Western Museums Association (WMA), and Oregon Museums Association (OMA), recent data collected for the Oregon Heritage Vitality Study (UOIPRE, 2024), and additional research in the field. In particular, these sources highlight that museum practitioners in the West often work in small organizations with few local mentors to learn from and live far away from museum peers and PD opportunities (UOIPRE, 2024; OMA, 2024; Doctors, 2020). Rural museum practitioners are also required to fill several roles, therefore needing a diverse skill set. Staff and volunteers filling these positions often enter the field through informal pathways, motivated by their passion for the topic and/or a commitment to their communities but have little museum-specific experience or professional training. While their passion and life experiences are strengths, it means that they need support learning specific museum practices and building relationships in the field (UOIPRE, 2024). Finally, museums are specifically asking for help creating experiences that broaden community engagement for children, youth, and adults under 50 and demonstrate the museum's relevance in the community (UOIPRE, 2024). For all of these reasons, rural High Desert museums want more opportunities to build professional networks, skills, and community partnerships.

To do this effectively, the region needs a community-based anchor that can catalyze the many small institutions to learn from one another and create inspiring experiences that build connections within and between High Desert communities (UOIPRE, 2024). As outlined in our Strategic Plan, the High Desert Museum (HDM) is committed to serving as this "convener and thought leader for the High Desert community through bold programs and interpretation that encourage dialogue and engagement" [SupportingDoc2]. Creating a *Desert Dialogues* CoP will build on the work we have been doing for the last several years with rural, place-based programming and collaborations. The ***STEMeX*** project (IMLS

[1] Historically excluded communities are groups that have been denied access or opportunities based on institutional discrimination including Black people, Indigenous peoples, individuals with disabilities, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, etc.

[2] A sense of place is the "meanings, both personal and shared, that are associated with a particular locale" (Creswell, 2014).

MG-77-16-0120-16) conducted place-based professional development with community partners including the library and rural STEM professionals. The project focused on the assets of rural communities highlighting lived experience and diverse pathways to expertise. ***Culturally Sustaining STEAM*** (NSF 2115488) created a Community of Practice for four rural museums around the country to create programming for families using Culturally Sustaining Approaches to Teaching (CSAT). The project adapted Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies to informal spaces and embedded CSAT into professional development (PD) with participating practitioners. The project focused on building relationships and trust via multiple site visits and shared experiences. The team is currently co-creating a Place-Based Programming Toolkit centered on the needs and insights of practitioners. The ***High Desert Project*** (IMLS MA-245690-OMS-20) is a program series that engages small, diverse groups of community members in shared learning experiences that includes field trips, shared meals, and meaningful dialogue focused on important local issues. Over the course of four events in the series, the *High Desert Project* uses the power of shared experiences to bring people together who would not normally interact with each other to build connection and dialogue, provoke greater understanding of and respect for different perspectives, and empower participants to take responsibility together for issues impacting the region.

The *Desert Dialogues* CoP responds to rural practitioners in past projects (described above) who specifically requested support to build relationships with colleagues at other museums and community-based organizations[3] (CBOs) to strengthen local and professional networks. Practitioners were particularly interested in building reciprocal relationships with historically excluded communities and learning interpretive approaches that foster dialogue, community building, and cultural learning. Participants were excited to develop professional skills but preferred PD that is uplifting, grounded in practice, and relevant to rural realities and small institutions. Coming out of the experience, practitioners wanted a set of adaptable, field-tested programs that they could easily modify and implement in their communities.

The *Desert Dialogues* CoP is not just about addressing the challenges of rural communities—it purposefully leverages and amplifies the **assets** of rural communities and their cultural institutions. Rural communities often have deep, long-term relationships with their place's history, cultures, and environments and care for important interpretive sites that share these stories. This place-based knowledge can come through a variety of personal and professional experiences such as family history or involvement in farming, logging, hunting, fishing, gardening, maintaining old buildings, hiking, camping, community traditions, etc. Similarly, people in small communities and museums know that if something is going to happen, they will have to be the ones to do it. Activating this resourcefulness and the strong, connected relationships in the community often allows rural communities to move more quickly and creatively than larger communities.

Our previous projects highlighted the assets and addressed the needs of rural communities by creating two highly impactful program types: Culturally Sustaining Approaches to Teaching (CSAT) for families with children in *STEMeX* and *Culturally Sustaining STEAM* and Dialogue-Based Approaches (DBA) for youth and adults in the *High Desert Project*. HDM and its partners created *Culturally Sustaining Approaches to Teaching* for museums building off of the work of Django Paris and H. Samy Alim to identify Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (2021). Paris and Alim take previous asset-based models such as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Hammond, 2015) a step further. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy views learning spaces as places where the cultural ways of being are not just understood and valued, but actively sustained through the educational process (CDE, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2021). HDM uses this asset-driven model to focus on how museums and their partners can support diverse rural participants by leveraging the unique physical and cultural assets of each rural community (Brandt et al., 2010).

Research and evaluation from these projects highlight the value of CSAT learning experiences for participants and communities. Long-term, place-based programs that cultivate shared experiences are particularly valuable in rural areas because they celebrate local expertise and strengthen relationships in the community. [See SupportingDoc3 for more information on CSAT and the emerging research findings from these projects.] The *Culturally Sustaining STEAM* project also highlights the value of creating a CoP for rural museums to support practitioners and co-create CSAT programs with CBOs. *Culturally Sustaining STEAM* CoP practitioners appreciated being able to learn from one another, see examples of turning theory into practice, and become part of something bigger than their own institutions. For example, one practitioner shared, "*I don't think I've ever worked on a project where everyone was so invested. I think about even the*

[3] CBOs are driven by and represent a community. They work to meet community needs and amplify strengths. They can include culturally specific organizations, youth programs, community centers, etc.

facilitation of the professional development and the activities that we do, how intentional every minute of those hour-and-a-half meetings are, and I leave feeling so excited to have this large-scale project that is being done across the country, and it's just a nod to all of you guys for being able to create something that has made all of us so excited and wanting to continue to do it." [See SupportingDoc4 for CoP reflections.]

High Desert Project uses DBA to create innovative, thought-provoking experiences that bring people together from diverse backgrounds in order to transform conversations about our region, deepen community engagement, and catalyze collaborative, creative solutions (Monitor Institute). Each cohort focuses on a central theme that reflects a relevant, complex issue in the High Desert, such as water, wolves, food, and the democratic process. Participants meet 4-6 times for a shared learning experience (often a field trip or in-depth content experience), meal, and conversation. Local artists, leaders, scientists, and thought leaders join the outings to share their expertise with the group, then join the discussion.

The *High Desert Project* program has been incredibly successful [see SupportingDoc5 for evaluation]. Participants report that the following are particularly important for positive outcomes: (1) Doing an activity together provides a foundational sense of connection that later events can build from; (2) Facilitated workshops provide a structure that builds confidence and comfort to engage in deeper dialogue; (3) Vulnerability of the presenter and questions that provoke deeper reflection can support more meaningful engagement with different perspectives and help individuals see something differently; (4) Sharing meals together provides the space to get to know each other and feel a sense of connection; (5) Diversity and vulnerability of participants is important in supporting sustained engagement with experiences that help to cultivate a deeper respect for perspectives; (6) Activities highlight what shapes our perceptions of the issue. During the event series, facilitated discussions increase understanding of different perspectives and build respect for these differences. Strategies for these discussions are based on the Aspen Institute's Better Arguments Project (https://betterarguments.org/our-approach/) and the Oregon State University-Cascades Laboratory for the American Conversation, which is using research to develop practical strategies for dialogue focused on deeper values and advancing solutions (https://osucascades.edu/lac).

The team will also build on our experience creating the *Culturally Sustaining STEAM* CoP and research in the field on how to cultivate meaningful Communities of Practice. We use Lave & Wegner's definition of Communities of Practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (1998). Based on this model, each CoP requires three elements. • The DOMAIN—Our *domain* is learning about sustained, place-based programming using CSAT and DBA in rural communities. • The COMMUNITY—Our *community* is formed through the museums and CBOs participating in PD together and co-creating programs. CoP members engage in in-person workshops, virtual meetings, online forums, and informal meet-ups at conferences. Iterative evaluation allows us to continually assess and adapt to community needs. • The PRACTICE—The people in our CoP are all practitioners practicing how to create, deliver, and evaluate place-based programs. They also work together to co-create additions to the Place-Based Programming Toolkit for the field. Successful CoPs are guided by skilled facilitators who cultivate connection, participant ownership, psychological safety, deep thinking about complex issues, and playfulness (Whyte, 2022; CPO, 2020). If these elements are in place, the CoP can support the professional growth of the practitioners as well as increase the efficacy of their community work.

Primary audience for our project and their involvement in planning: Our primary audience is rural museum practitioners and their community partners who create and deliver public programs (e.g., educators, interpreters, public program managers, etc.). Most of our participants will come from small to medium-sized institutions. *Museums* can include a variety of interpretive sites including history museums, science centers, children's museums, nature centers, cultural centers, zoos/aquaria, historic sites, parks, wildlife refuges, etc. We are including partners from community-based organizations (CBOs) for several reasons. First, participating together builds stronger relationships and shared goals within the museum's community. Second, the shared experience in the CoP provides opportunities for historically excluded communities to have a voice and role in the creation of the programming. Third, partnerships can leverage their combined resources and relationships to create more successful programs.

Each community that participates in the CoP will send 3 practitioners including 2 people from the museum and 1 from the partner CBO. We will host 30 practitioners per cohort and run two cohorts during the grant. Each cohort will have

two strands with approximately 15 participants: one strand for CSAT and one strand for DBA. Each museum/CBO partnership can choose which strand to participate in. Therefore, a total of 60 practitioners will participate representing approximately 20 museum/CBO partnerships.

PARTICIPANTS	**CSAT STRAND**	**DBA STRAND**
Cohort 1	15 people (~5 museum/CBO partners)	15 people (~5 museum/CBO partners)
Cohort 2	15 people (~5 museum/CBO partners)	15 people (~5 museum/CBO partners)
TOTAL = 60 people (~20 partners)	**30 people (~10 partners)**	**15 people (~5 museum/CBO partners)**

The design of this project emerged directly from the requests of museum practitioners and their CBO partners, and it will continually adapt based on participant feedback. The original inspiration came from the evaluation and research findings from HDM's NSF- and IMLS-funded projects listed above. HDM staff also reached out to colleagues at rural museums in the West and leaders at NAI, WMA, and OMA for input on what types of PD and CoPs would benefit rural museums. NAI's ED Paul Caputo emphasized: "Member sites are clamoring for this! They want to be collaborating with [historically excluded communities], but don't necessarily know how. It would be a huge asset for sites to get PD and support to build these relationships and programs." OMA Board Chair Peter Kukla reinforced that many of OMA's members are small museums with no or few paid staff. They are always looking for accessible PD opportunities and ways to connect with other museums since members outside urban areas can feel isolated from their peers. [See letters of support in SupportingDoc6.] To ensure that the CoP builds on the values, needs, knowledge, and interests of participants, we will include questions in the application and embed reflective evaluation activities throughout the experience to inform the development and refinement of the PD and other cohort activities.

Ultimate beneficiaries of the project: The ultimate beneficiaries of *Desert Dialogues* are rural High Desert community members of all ages and backgrounds. The CoP will support rural museums and CBOs to create shared experiences for community members that build stronger connections to place, community, cultures, and self (Cid et al, 2024). These connections in turn support emotional, social, economic, and environmental well-being (Falk, 2021) .

Museum workforce and professional network benefits: Participating museum and CBO practitioners will (1) learn new skills in community-centered program and partnership development; (2) build/deepen relationships with peers in their local communities and regional professional networks; and (3) get support to co-create programs with community-based organizations. These skills and relationships will support their institutions and communities now and as well as future organizations they may work with throughout their careers.

Desert Dialogues will also cultivate a network of mutual support among rural High Desert institutions that will lead to future collaborations. Resource sharing will allow small-to-mid-sized museums to increase their reach and impact. The museum field as a whole in the High Desert benefits by having a more connected, knowledgeable workforce that feels that their cultural knowledge and identity is reflected in local institutions and the regional museum community. These networks will foster a feeling of support, confidence, and belonging that will hopefully keep qualified, passionate people in the museum workforce. The project will also allow museums and CBOs to create meaningful public programs that cultivate a deeper appreciation of local museums and more public support for cultural organizations in their community. In this process, *Desert Dialogues* will connect museums with historically excluded communities to expand who is reflected and feels a sense of belonging in museums, which will diversify audiences and the potential workforce.

The project will also add to HDM's Place-Based Programming Toolkit. The Toolkit will include (1) a Theory of Change explaining how sustained, place-based experiences impact rural communities, (2) a set of field-tested, adaptable, place-based programs; and (3) correlated evaluation tools that any rural museum can implement at their site. We will expand the reach of these benefits through our partnerships with NAI, OMA, and WMA. These professional organizations are excited to share *Desert Dialogues* opportunities with their members, including sharing invitations to the CoP, distributing the Toolkit, hosting webinars, and accepting conference presentations that emerge from the project.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

Specific activities: HDM will create a *Desert Dialogues* Community of Practice using a cohort-based model. The goal of the CoP is to provide free, accessible professional development and networking for rural museums and their

community-based partners. The CoP will focus on how to co-develop public programs (CSAT and DBA) that (1) Foster multigenerational engagement and learning; (2) Build and/or deepen organizational partnerships within the community; (3) Center rural experiences and adapt to the context, lived experiences, and collective wisdom of the community members who participate, including honoring the cultures and worldviews of historically excluded groups; (4) Focus on deep connections to place including history, culture, land, water, sky, and the arts; (5) Encourage sustained (multi-visit), holistic participation through a variety of shared experiences that integrate many ways of knowing and engagement (e.g., meals, field trips, service projects, creative work, experiencing the arts, etc.); (6) Center practitioners in planning and decision-making by starting from community needs, interests, and assets; and (7) Embed evaluation throughout, leading to adapting the CoP activities based on feedback.

The first 6 months of the grant period are dedicated to detailing the structure of the CoP and building relationships with potential participants. During this time project leaders will collaborate to finalize the CoP application and rubric [SupportingDoc7]. Then, we will host CoP information sessions for OMA, WMA, and NAI members via webinars and in-person conference sessions. These events will share the goals of the project and encourage High Desert practitioners to apply for Cohort 1. The team will also meet with interested practitioners individually to determine if the CoP is a good fit for their organization and help them complete their applications. The goal is for applicants to feel supported throughout the process while also helping them assess if their team is ready to participate in the CoP. Once the application period closes, the team will review the applications and select participants using the developed criteria and rubric. The leadership team will facilitate focus groups with the selected applicants to design PD that will meet their needs and interests. We will repeat this process for Cohort 2 starting at the beginning of Grant Year 2 (GY2).

Each **18-month cohort** will include two strands. One strand will focus on creating multi-visit CSAT programs for families with children. The other strand will focus on how to create a DBA event series for youth and adults similar to the *High Desert Project*. [See SupportingDoc8 for draft PD plans.] Each museum/CBO partnership will receive a $2,500 stipend to support developing and running their CSAT or DBA program. The 18-month cohort experience will follow these steps:

Months 1-3: HDM will kick-off the cohort with a virtual meeting for participants to meet each other and learn more about the project. Each month, participants will (1) attend a 90-minute online workshop, (2) complete 30-60 minutes of asynchronous activities with their museums/CBO partners that build on what they have learned in the virtual workshop, and (3) work on developing their own place-based activities for their communities. A project website and chat forum will allow participants to communicate with HDM and other CoP members to get support or share ideas.

Month 4: In April (after winter travel dangers have passed), all participants will travel to HDM for a 2-day workshop. During the visit, participants build relationships and participate in model place-making activities with their strand.

Months 5-16: Each strand will continue monthly online workshops to provide further PD and discuss the programs each museum/CBO partnership is creating for their community. Practitioners will pilot their programs in Months 13-16.

Month 16: The cohort will return to HDM for a second in-person workshop to share their experiences developing, delivering, and evaluating their programs. They will also reflect together on the successes, challenges, and impacts of these models for their communities. This work will set the stage for capturing their insights and program ideas in the Place-Based Programming Toolkit to share with the field. In GY2, the in-person workshops for both cohorts will overlap for one day to allow new participants to meet and learn from the previous group.

Months 17-18: In the final months of the cohort, participants continue monthly online meetings and asynchronous activities to document the programs they created for the Place-Based Programming Toolkit.

Beyond: After the cohort is over, participants will continue to have access to the project website and forum to communicate with other CoP members for at least 3 years. The team will also coordinate regular in-person meet-ups for past, present, and potential participants at regional conferences and online. The project leadership team will share the Toolkit with the field via webinars, conference sessions, and publications through OMA, WMA, and NAI.

Throughout the program, the cohort will cultivate participant ownership and reciprocal learning by inviting participants to take turns sharing their expertise with the group. The PD and evaluation teams will work collaboratively to embed evaluation throughout the CoP activities in order to continually adapt to the needs of the cohort. Evaluation activities during the application and early phases of each cohort will identify the goals, needs, and assets of the participating practitioners and organizations. In particular, the application and evaluation will help the team assess the readiness of applicants to participate in sustained, place-based models and collaborate closely with CBOs. Throughout the program,

the evaluation team will help CoP members develop community-based evaluation methods and instruments that museum/CBO partners can integrate into their programs. Then, the evaluation team will lead facilitated meaning-making sessions with practitioners to interpret their evaluation data. The Toolkit will include the field-tested program descriptions and evaluation tools so future practitioners can adapt materials for their sites. Throughout the project, the leadership team will work with participants to evaluate the development and impact of the CoP for members and ensure that the experience supports their professional growth and goals. [See Schedule, Supportingdoc9, & Perfmeasurement.]

Staff & Collaborators: Christina Cid, Ph.D., Director of Strategic Projects, will act as project director and lead the CSAT cohort. **Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D.,** Executive Director, will provide oversight and ensure project support. **Michelle Seiler, Ph.D.,** Assistant Director of Strategic Engagement, and **Isabel Engel**, High Desert Project Coordinator, will lead the DBA cohort. **Jill Stein** and **Victoria Bonebrake** from Reimagine Research Group will coordinate and conduct the evaluation. The following collaborators will share their expertise and provide direction for the *Desert Dialogues* CoP PD: **Cristina Trecha** (Oregon Science Project, co-lead CSAT strand), **Robert Brunoe** (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs), **Rachel Galan** (Caddo Mounds State Historic Site), **Kerri Ziemann** (Wild Center), **Zachary Stocks** (Oregon Black Pioneers), **Debbie Siegel, Ph.D.** (Institute for Learning Innovation), **Veronica Vega** (Camp Chica), **Gabriela Peden** (Better Together), and **Brian Forist, Ph.D.** (Indiana University, Bloomington). We have included funds for up to 4 additional collaborators to be determined later based on the needs of the cohorts. [See Projectstaff & Resumes.]

Time, financial, personnel, and resources needs: This three-year project will require $966,003 with $482,943 provided by this grant. Project funds will support (1) key HDM personnel; (2) stipends and travel expenses for cohort participants; (3) travel expenses for HDM staff and attend conferences to disseminate work; (4) virtual collaboration technology; (5) space rentals, food, and materials for workshops; (6) advisor honoraria; and (7) evaluation contracting services.

Recruiting and selecting participants: HDM will work closely with NAI, OMA, and WMA to recruit CoP participants including (1) hosting free webinars to introduce the concepts of *Desert Dialogues* and explain how to apply for the CoP; (2) announce the application period in partner newsletters, forums, and social media; (3) attend conferences to present sessions about *Desert Dialogues*, the impacts of the CoP, and the Toolkit; and (4) host meet ups at conferences with current and prospective participants to build relationships and answer questions.

During the application period, the leadership team will host live and recorded webinars to explain (1) the purpose of the CoP, (2) the activities involved and why they are important, (3) the community partner requirements and how to invite a partner to participate, and (4) how to determine if your museum is ready to participate. Museums and CBO partners apply together via an online application, including a needs assessment and questions designed to gauge readiness to participate. [Draft application included in SupportingDoc7.] Readiness includes a willingness to collaborate with historically excluded communities, try new approaches to programming, and fully participate in the CoP activities. As part of their readiness assessment, applicants must include explicit, written support from the leadership of both the museum and CBO partner as well as personal statements from each practitioner who will participate in the cohort.

Any type of museum can participate. Community partners from historically excluded communities can include culturally specific organizations led by a historically excluded group or an organization that serves a population that has been historically excluded (e.g., youth organization, school, library, or community center). If there are more qualified applicants than spots, we will use a lottery system to choose and invite others to participate in the next cohort.

Risks to the project and how we will mitigate them: All projects that rely on collaborations between diverse partners run the risk of participants or leaders dropping out of the project. To limit the impact of losing key staff, there will always be two people co-leading each cohort strand so if one has to step away, there is continuity in institutional knowledge and relationships. The project will request that two people from each museum participate in the CoP to provide a backup if one person cannot attend and to encourage internal dialogue and collaboration. HDM will also place overflow applicants on a waitlist in case a museum/CBO pair drops out during the early phase of the cohort.

The team must also be prepared for disruptions due to extreme weather, pandemics, wildfires, and other disasters that might disrupt events. To reduce this risk, we will schedule travel to align with safer travel times (e.g., spring, early summer, and fall). We will also have backup plans for how to adapt workshops and meetings to virtual experiences.

Finally, we have learned through previous projects that not all practitioners or institutions are ready to take on deep community collaborations, sustained programming models, and/or practices that center the knowledge, cultures, and experiences of participants. For this reason, we have included opportunities for project leaders to meet directly with applicants, informational webinars to learn more about the project models before applying, and the required statements from participants and leadership to ensure that participating organizations/practitioners are ready to fully participate and get the most out of the experience for themselves, their institutions, and their communities.

Tracking progress: The Program Director will ensure that the team maintains progress as outlined in the proposed timeline through quarterly project meetings. If conditions change, she will work with the team to adjust the process to successfully complete the project. Evaluators at Reimagine Research Group will work closely with the team to integrate evaluation activities into the CoP development and adapt the program in response to participant feedback. (See Perfmeasurement.pdf, Supportingdoc9, and Scheduleofcompletion.pdf.)

PROJECT RESULTS

Intended results: The *Desert Dialogues* CoP will address the needs of rural museum and CBO practitioners by providing (1) Opportunities to deepen relationships between museums and CBOs serving historically excluded communities to diversify the stories, worldviews, voices, visitors, and staff represented in High Desert museums; (2) Shared experiences that expand and deepen relationships in regional professional networks; (3) PD to strengthen skills in program development, partnership development, and evaluation practices; and (4) Time to create, share, and learn about successful program models with their peers and create a program Toolkit.

Changes in knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the primary audience: The intended outcomes of the *Desert Dialogues* project are that practitioners will…

- Knowledge: (1) Understand CSAT/DBA (depending on strand) and how they can be integrated into their programming. (2) Increase awareness of and connection to the community and place in which they work.
- Attitude: (1) Feel a sense of belonging and value in the professional learning community. (2) Feel that the CoP is a safe space to bring their whole selves. (3) Feel confident in their ability to work with partners to co-create CSAT or DBA programming.
- Behavior: (1) Expand their professional network of contacts and resources related to CSAT/DBA. (2) Shift their practice as a result of participating in the CoP.
- Skills: (1) Have more "tools in their toolkit" to create place-based programming. (2) Be able to lead a place-based program for and with their community using CSAT or DBA.

Products and how we will make them accessible: The *Desert Dialogues* project will result in two primary products: (1) a Community of Practice supporting rural museum practitioners and CBO partners in the High Desert who want to co-create sustained, place-based programming models; and (2) a Toolkit outlining the fundamental elements of creating sustained, place-based programming and a set of field-tested activities and evaluation tools that can be adapted to a variety of settings. HDM will make the CoP accessible through an open application process twice during the grant. The Toolkit will be publicly available on the HDM website and disseminated via webinars, conference presentations, and publications in collaboration with NAI, WMA, and OMA.

Sustaining the benefit(s) of the project: The *Desert Dialogues* CoP will impact participants and the region long after the grant is over. The practitioners who participate will be able to take the foundational learning, relationships, and activities that they have created to strengthen their careers, institutions, and communities. After the cohorts end, HDM will also continue to cultivate connections among CoP members for at least three years through (1) the CoP website and online forum and (2) informal meetups at OMA, NAI, and WMA conferences. Additionally, the Place-Based Programming Toolkit will provide a lasting resource for CoP members and others in the field who want to create sustained, place-based programming for rural communities. During the third year of the grant, project leaders will reflect on the program experience and evaluation to see if there are additional museums/CBOs that would like to participate in the CoP. If there is continued interest, HDM will work with regional funders to support a Phase 2 of the CoP based on these reflections.

Schedule of Completion

	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
	July 2025-June 2026				July 2026-June 2027				July 2027-June 2028			
	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	April-June	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	April-June	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	April-June
COORDINATION	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Coordination between key personnel												
Meetings with Professional Development Collaborators												
RECRUITMENT & RELATIONSHIP BUILDING												
Refine and distribute application												
Recruit at conferences, through online forums, newsletters, social media, LinkedIn, and other platforms.	WMA	NAI		OMA	WMA	NAI						
Host recruitment webinar												
Review applications												
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT												
Needs assessment conversations with accepted sites		Cohort 1				Cohort 2						
Cohort 1 Virtual Professional Development			Cohort 1									
Cohort 2 Virtual Professional Development							Cohort 2					
In-person Professional Development				PD #1				PD #2				PD #3
Sites implement and evaluate community-based programs							Cohort 1				Cohort 2	
Create & add to the toolkit							Cohort 1				Cohort 2	
EVALUATION												
Readiness assessment (application)	Cohort 1					Cohort 2						
Project kick-off evaluation activity			Cohort 1				Cohort 2					
Evaluation virtual check-in (mid)					Cohort 1				Cohort 2			
Social network analysis (pre and post)			Cohort 1				Cohort 2	Cohort 1				Cohort 2
End of cohort reflection activity								Cohort 1				Cohort 2
Culturally responsive eval training					Cohort 1				Cohort 2			
Facilitating meaning making								Cohort 1				Cohort 2
Contributions to toolkit												
DISSEMINATION												
Conferences					WMA	NAI		OMA	WMA	NAI		OMA
Manuscript preparation and submission (Legacy Magazine, regional newsletters, forums, and other publications)												