Museum Grants for American Latino History and Culture

Sample Application ALHC-258462-OMS-25

National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture

Amount awarded by IMLS: $472,232
Amount of cost share: $0

The National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture will build capacity to fulfill its mission by hiring a full-time curator and supporting the training of two current staff members as archivist and registrar for the museum collections. Establishing these positions will increase staff capacity, creating dedicated leadership for exhibitions, collections management, and archival stewardship while improving the museum's ability to plan exhibitions, manage collections, and provide access to archival materials. The curator will lead long-term exhibition planning across the museum's five galleries, while the newly trained registrar and archivist will improve collections documentation, accessioning, digitization, and overall archival stewardship. As a result of this project, staff will develop greater confidence and capacity to manage exhibitions, steward collections, and provide access to archival materials. These improvements will foster a stronger culture of professional stewardship within the organization, ultimately enhancing the museum's ability to serve the public and preserve Puerto Rican cultural heritage.

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 most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Narrative

Project Justification

Which program goal and associated objective of ALHC will your project address?
For the proposed project, ***Where Preservation Meets Inspiration***, the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture (NMPRAC) is requesting $400,000 from the IMLS ALHC initiative to improve the Museum's collections management and increase accessibility of Puerto Rican archives for our Humboldt Park community and beyond.

The project will primarily focus on ***Goal 1 Objective 1.4*** of the ALHC initiative:

Goal 1: Build the capacity of American Latino museums to serve their communities.

- **1.4: Support the management and care of collections in American Latino museums.**

As the only Puerto Rican Museum in the country outside of Puerto Rico, NMPRAC preserves and expresses the vibrancy of Puerto Rican culture and celebrates the contributions of Puerto Ricans in the economic, artistic, cultural, educational, and social development of the City of Chicago and the nation. Recently, with increased recognition, the Museum has outgrown its storage capacity in the historic Humboldt Park Stables building it calls home. In efforts to meet museum standards, become an AAM accredited museum, and better serve our communities, the Museum has embarked on the creation of an off-site Archives and Collections Research Center. Set to open in 2026, this center will be a state-of-the-art collections and research facility for the care, management, and research of Puerto Rican history, art, and culture.

In the meantime, NMPRAC has secured a 2800 sq. foot off-site rental space a few blocks away to serve as a permanent extension of the Museum. Located at 2709 W. Division St on the first floor of the Nancy Franco-Maldonado Paseo Boricua Arts Building, a new mixed-space initiative offering affordable housing to artists in Chicago's Puerto Rican community, the facility will be used to properly house the museum's archive and collections until the new Archives and Collections Research Center is completed. This setup allows NMPRAC to enhance archival management immediately, meeting the Museum's needs and growing community interest, while the new Archives and Collections Research Center is underway.

NMPRAC is in the early planning stages to create a collaborative searchable database to combine Puerto Rican archives throughout the nation with New York's El Centro (Center for Puerto Rican Studies) and Puerto Rico's National Archive. In addition, this initiative will involve a collaborative partnership with Chicago's Puerto Rican Culture Center's "Digitizing El Barrio" project, ultimately contributing to the expansion and enrichment of the NMPRAC's archives. Through the joint effort, the materials digitized as part of the "Digitizing El Barrio" initiative will seamlessly integrate into and enhance the archival resources of NMPRAC and be available to the community at large. This collaboration represents a concerted effort to preserve and promote Puerto Rican cultural heritage through comprehensive archiving and digitization endeavors.

For the project, NMPRAC will use the ALHC grant to cover essential costs for improving the Museum's collection management, including equipment and software, the temporary hiring of a Collections Manager Consultant and Conservator Consultant, and professional development training and education to transition a current staff member into the Museum's permanent Archives and Collections Manager.

In accordance with its mission statement, NMPRAC maintains permanent collections in the fields of art and history, as well as archival materials related to both. Collections are developed, managed, and conserved for use in varied and informative exhibitions, educational programming for public audiences, and research. The collections capture the evolution and contributions of Puerto Ricans across diverse genres and social domains ranging from the arts, oral traditions, written works, film, politics, education to community organizing, providing a comprehensive understanding of Puerto Rican history, art and culture. Collections fall within the following geographical parameters: items created by Puerto Ricans born and raised on the island of Puerto Rico; and items created by Puerto Ricans living in the diaspora of the United States and other countries. However, without the proper capacity, NMPRAC is not able to grow its collections or make them accessible to the public.

With support from the IMLS ALHC grant, NMPRAC will be able to successfully complete the proposed project, which will empower NMPRAC as a Latino museum to obtain national accreditation, partner with other accredited museums, expand our educational programming, and increase community engagement.

NMPRAC's commitment to archives and collections reflects an active pursuit of resilience, manifested in our efforts to transform historical narratives that have frequently been presented through colonial perspectives. In taking on this initiative, we acknowledge the importance of challenging and reshaping historical memory, ensuring a more comprehensive and authentic representation of our Puerto Rican cultural heritage. By actively engaging in the preservation of our history, documents, oral stories, books, journals, art, etc., we contribute to the ongoing narrative that transcends colonial lenses and fosters a more inclusive and accurate understanding of our collective past informed by the Puerto Rican experience. This work serves as a testament to our dedication to resilience and the empowerment of marginalized voices in shaping the narrative of our heritage.

What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?
Currently, there is no dedicated museum archive for Puerto Rican arts and culture in the continental United States. New York's El Centro at Hunter College is the largest archive focused on the Puerto Rican experience, but its limited digital access and in-person restrictions make it difficult for out-of-state users.

As the only Puerto Rican museum outside of Puerto Rico, NMPRAC has a unique role in preserving cultural heritage. We have been working to obtain national accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums, which requires having an archive that meets professional

standards[1]. However, it is nearly impossible to improve our collections management and finish accessioning without expertise and adequate space, as we are restricted by our facility's landmark status (built in 1895 as the Humboldt Park Stables). Since 2015, we have cataloged 596 pieces, with 420 in the CMS Artwork Archive. The collection, mainly art and ephemera, is stored in a crowded 500 sq. ft. room, with additional items displayed in staff spaces due to limited secure storage.

In 2017, NMPRAC completed the American Alliance of Museum's Museum Assessment Program in order to analyze operations and create a plan for obtaining national accreditation, with improving archival management being among the top recommendations. At the time, the Museum had a staff of four employees and no urgent need for an accessible archive. With limited funding, staff capacity, and an unexpected global pandemic, NMPRAC was forced to halt all plans to grow the archive. Since then, NMPRAC has grown significantly and has rekindled efforts to improve archival management of the Museum's collections.

In 2024, NMPRAC temporarily hired Bethany Fleming of Fleming Museum Consulting, Inc. to complete an assessment of the Museum's Collections with recommendations for next steps to be taken, which resulted in a Collections Assessment Report and a revised draft of our existing Collection Policy, both of which can be found as an attachment to this grant application.]

Until the new Archives and Collections Research Center (mentioned above) is established, which we anticipate will be completed in 2027, an off-site facility has been acquired to immediately support the expanding collections. However, with limited staff and supplies, NMPRAC will need funding to begin the process of improving collection management in the off-site storage space. In addition to purchasing archival equipment and materials, NMPRAC will need to hire a Collections Management consultant to help finish all art registration, including accessioning, cataloging, digitization, and necessary re-housing. The Consultant will also be tasked with mentoring a current Museum Staff member, who is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Library and Information Science at Dominican University. With a deep passion to become a Cultural Heritage Archivist for Chicago's Puerto Rican community, this staffer will take over the management of the collections becoming NMPRAC's full-time Archive and Collections Manager in Year 2. During the grant period, NMPRAC will also need to hire a Conservator Consultant to analyze our collections and conduct any necessary preservation procedures.

With support from the IMLS ALHC grant, NMPRAC can improve collections management enabling the Museum to obtain national accreditation and better serve our communities. Establishing an accessible museum archive will play a pivotal role in documenting the historical narrative of Puerto Rican arts, history, and culture. By methodically archiving, cataloging, and digitizing, the archives will capture the evolution and contributions of Puerto Ricans across diverse genres and social domains - ranging from the arts, art traditions, written works, film, politics, education to community organizing. This approach ensures a comprehensive

[1] https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/collections-stewardship-standards/

understanding of Puerto Rican history. These stories are invaluable, as they carry the collective memory of the Puerto Rican community, and without preservation efforts, they risk being lost to time.

Who is the primary audience for your project and how have they been involved in the planning?

The target audience for this project includes both local and national stakeholders. In Humboldt Park, with a population of nearly 65,000, over 52.9% are Hispanic/Latino, while Chicago's overall Hispanic/Latino population is 28.7%. The community features Puerto Rican-focused schools, businesses, service centers, scholars, and a growing number of artists.

Nationally, NMPRAC has built a network of Puerto Rican organizations and artists through its Engage conference series. Key partners include major institutions in Puerto Rico like the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, the LGBTQ+ Community Archive, and the National Library of Puerto Rico, as well as diaspora groups such as Taller Puertorriqueño in Philadelphia and San Diego's House of Puerto Rico.

In April 2024, NMPRAC hosted its first Puerto Rican Archives Symposium, collaborating with the *Digitizing El Barrio* project. The event gathered experts, educators, and community members to discuss archiving practices. A survey showed strong interest in NMPRAC's initiatives to enhance collection management and public access. Based on this positive response, NMPRAC plans to make the symposium an annual event, using feedback to refine future archive activities.

Who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project?

Ultimate beneficiaries of the proposed project include NMPRAC, Chicago's Puerto Rican Cultural Center, New York's El Centro of Hunter College, and Puerto Rico's National Archive. With the completion of **Where Preservation Meets Inspiration**, NMPRAC will have a Museum archive that is properly managed according to the museum standards established by the American Alliance of Museum, which will allow us to move forward with efforts to combine the archives and collections of the mentioned organizations into one collective searchable database.

In addition, our vision is that our accessible archives will be used as a research center by community members and people traveling from outside Chicago, like students, teachers, academics, family history enthusiasts, and artists of all mediums. At the Museum we welcome thousands of students a year that visit as part of school field trips or for college assignments, many of whom request sources for project research. These visitors are also beneficiaries.

Project Work Plan

What specific activities will you carry out and in what sequence?

18-month Project Timeline: July 1, 2025 - July 1, 2027

1. **Purchase Equipment & Software (July 2025 - September 2025)**
    - Equipment & Software: a large format scanner, digitization lab equipment, rolling storage rack, and moving carts; two year subscriptions for Lucidea ArchivEra and CatalogIt.
    - These tools will enhance the museum's ability to safeguard and manage both physical and digital objects but will also improve research, collaboration, and public engagement. By investing in these technologies, the museum will be better equipped to care for its collection in a sustainable manner, ensuring that it continues to fulfill its educational and cultural mission for generations to come.

2. **Hire Collections Manager Consultant & Mentorship (July 2025 - June 2026)**
    - Collections Manager Consultant works with NMPRAC staff and interns to improve collections management, including proper accessioning, housing and re-housing,

3. **Professional Development Training (July 2025 - May 2026)**
    - NMPRAC Staff member (Corrigan) will complete her last year of classes in the MLIS program at Dominican University, with expected graduation in May 2026.

4. **Collections Management Improvement & Digitization (July 2025 - July 2027)**
    - This time will be allocated for the Collections Manager Consultant to work with NMPRAC staff, interns, and volunteers to teach them proper collection management procedures and digitization efforts through hands-on experience.

5. **Hire Conservator Consultant (October 2025 - June 2026)**
    - A Conservator will be hired to conduct a conservation assessment of the collections and Conservation Treatment Plan. They will also perform feasible preservation tasks during the grant period.

6. **Transition Staff to Collections Manager (May 2026 - July 2027)**
    - NMPRAC Staff member Alyssa Corrigan will have completed a year of training with the hired Collections Manager Consultant and is expected to graduate May 2026 with her Master's in Library and Information Science degree from Dominican University. NMPRAC will begin the process of transitioning Corrigan from her position as the Museum's full-time Director of Research and Development to full-time Archives & Collections Manager.

What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?
Project risks include material delays, contractor issues, buildout setbacks, and staff turnover. To address these, NMPRAC has appointed an experienced Project Manager to maintain the schedule and ensure clear communication. Staff turnover risk is mitigated by NMPRAC's focus on internal development and promotion, encouraging retention. The project aligns with the career goals of the current Director of Research and Development, who will be promoted to

Archive and Collections Manager in Year 2. This staff member is pursuing a Master's in Library Information Science with a Certificate in Archives and Cultural Heritage. Additionally, NMPRAC collaborates with Northern Illinois University students for grant writing support.

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

Veronica Ocasio, Director of Education - Project Manager

- As the Museum's Chief of Staff and Director of Education, Ocasio will serve as the Project Manager responsible for facilitating the special project, including managing correspondence with consultants, delegating tasks to NMPRAC staff, interns and volunteers, and any additional project participants.

Fleming Museum Consulting - Collections Management Consultant

- Bethany Fleming, of Fleming Museum Consulting will be hired as a Consultant at the start of the project to manage collections management needs and training of staff.

Alyssa Corrigan - Staff Support/Collections Manager (Year 2)

- Corrigan is the Museum's current Director of Research & Development, however, with career interest in becoming a Cultural Heritage Archivist, in addition to interns, she will be the NMPRAC staff member who will work with Fleming to gain hands-on collection management in Year 1, transitioning to become the Museum's full-time Archive and Collections Manager in Year 2 of the project.

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

To ensure successful collections management improvements, NMPRAC has planned a two-year project timeline and seeks financial support for necessary expenses. This includes purchasing equipment like a flatbed scanner, rolling storage racks, moving carts, and technology for a Digitization lab—featuring a DSLR camera, macro lens, lighting system, scanners, and computers with imaging software. Subscriptions to CatalogIt and Lucidea ArchivEra will also be needed for comprehensive collection management. Additionally, funds will cover the temporary hiring of a Collections Manager Consultant, a Conservator Consultant, and professional development to train a current staff member as the permanent Archives and Collections Manager.

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

To evaluate the *Where Inspiration Meets Preservation* project, NMPRAC will use both qualitative and quantitative data, closely adhering to the project schedule while accounting for potential delays in equipment and materials.

Success will be measured by passing the American Alliance of Museums' final requirements for national accreditation. With all core documents already submitted and approved, completing the archival accessioning and proper housing remains the final step toward accreditation.

Project Results

Where Inspiration Meets Preservation aims to improve collections management for NMPRAC to create an accessible Puerto Rican archive that can be utilized by people internationally. Having a tangible archive facility and fully digitized collections will allow the Museum to provide access to Puerto Rican resources, which are extremely limited in this country.

As part of a new partnership, NMPRAC will be joined in this space by *Digitizing el Barrio*, an archival project of Chicago's Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC), which focuses on preserving the legacy of Puerto Ricans in Chicago. The PRCC, a 50+ year-old organization, played a key role in establishing Paseo Boricua, the cultural heart of the Puerto Rican community in the Midwest and continues to contribute to its development as the neighborhood faces threats of gentrification. Once the new Archives and Collections Research Center is complete, the *Digitizing el Barrio* collection will become a special collection in the Museum's archives. Our long-term goal is to partner with New York's El Centro (Center for Puerto Rican Studies) and Puerto Rico's National Archive to create a unified, searchable database of our combined collections.

How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the primary audience change because of your project?

NMPRAC's efforts to improve the Museum's collection management is expected to enhance the connection between the museum and the local Puerto Rican community. We will become an even more valuable resource for community members to explore their heritage, fostering a sense of pride, connection, and empowerment. With an accessible archive, NMPRAC can begin to offer community workshops, talks, and training sessions organized to educate individuals on archiving techniques, enabling them to preserve and understand their family treasures. We aim to inspire a new generation of community archivists, educators, curators, and museum professionals.

What products will result from your project and how will you make them accessible to the primary audience?

The completion of the project will result in an accessible Puerto Rican archive for NMPRAC and its communities., with both virtual and in-person access. Doing so, will enable the Museum to begin developing intentional digital programming, like virtual tours of exhibitions and other special offerings. Once completed, the archive will be accessible in-person on request or online via the Museum's website.

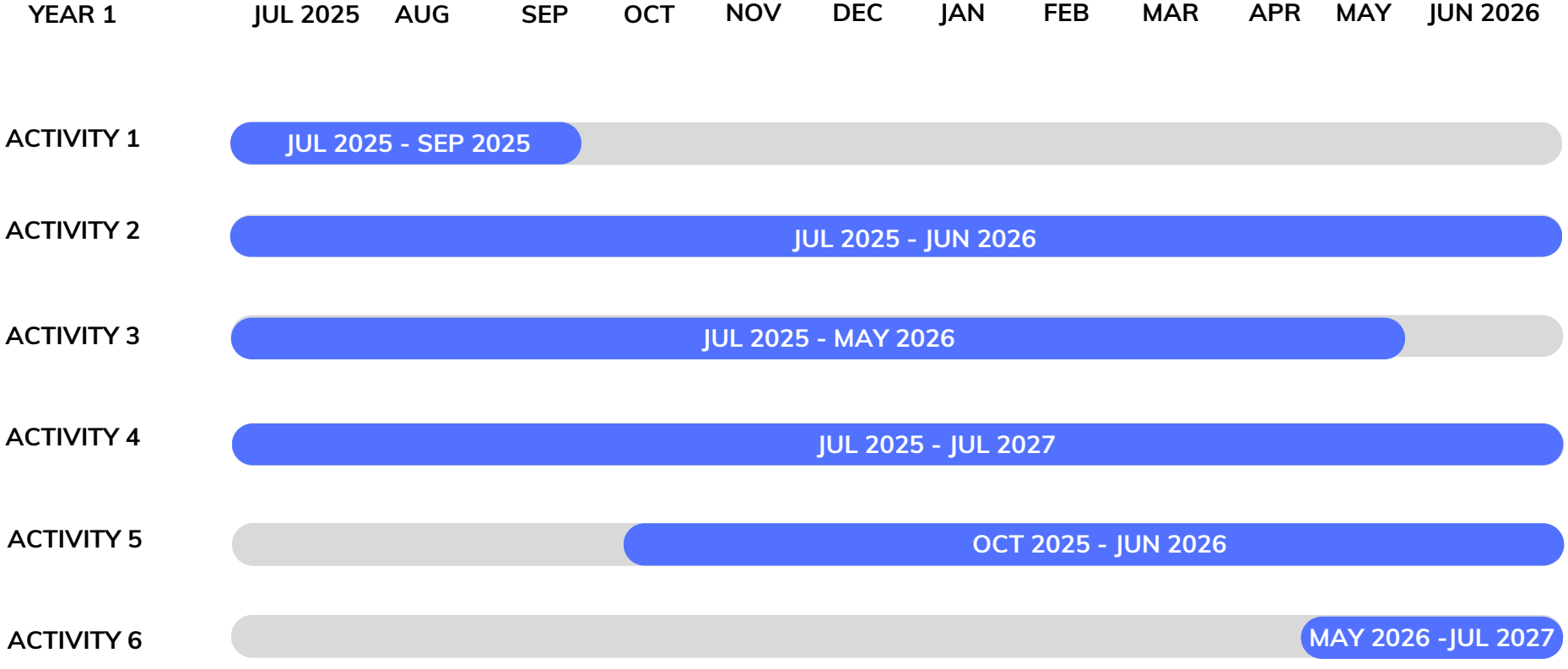
How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance?

With the improvement of our collections management, NMPRAC will be able to obtain national accreditation, which will open the doors to new funding and new partnerships. We plan to leverage this achievement to help secure more grant funding and big gift donations. In addition to general operating funds and grant opportunities, NMPRAC is confident in its capacity to maintain sustainability and cover educational programming costs.

NMPRAC SCHEDULE

18-MONTH PROJECT TIMELINE: JULY 1, 2025 - JULY 1, 2027

WHERE PRESERVATION MEETS INSPIRATION



ACTIVITY 1: PURCHASE EQUIPMENT & SOFTWARE

ACTIVITY 2: HIRE COLLECTIONS MANAGER CONSULANT & MENTORSHIP

ACTIVITY 3: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

ACTIVITY 4: COLLECTIONS MGMT IMPROVEMENT & DIGITIZATION

ACTIVITY 5: HIRE CONSERVATOR CONSULTANT

ACTIVITY 6: TRANSITION STAFFER TO COLLECTIONS MGMT

NMPRAC SCHEDULE

18-MONTH PROJECT TIMELINE: JULY 1, 2025 - JULY 1, 2027

