



Museum Grants for American Latino History and Culture

Sample Application ALHC-259980-OMS-26

Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$500,000

Amount of cost share: \$108,305

The Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation will develop a digital platform for the exhibition, study, and public education of historic materials of high cultural value from the Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection. Project activities include historical research, digitization of selected objects, digital platform design, development of educational resources for teachers, and the production of four short educational videos. This project will focus on digitizing up to 4,000 items from the collection assembled by historian and collector Teodoro Vidal-Santoni, who dedicated decades to preserving objects representative of Puerto Rican popular culture to document their historical and cultural significance. The project will result in the public launch of a free digital platform that preserves memory, strengthens cultural identity, and expands access to Latino heritage in the contemporary digital environment.

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.

Proposal: A Window to Puerto Rico's Past: Exploring the Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection in a Virtual Format

I. Project Justification

The Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation (FLMM) is requesting \$500,000 from the Museum Grants for American Latino History and Culture (ALHC) program of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to develop a public digital platform entitled A Window to Puerto Rico's Past: Exploring the Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection in a Virtual Format.

This proposal, entitled A Window to Puerto Rico's Past: Exploring the Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection in a Virtual Format, aims to develop a digital platform for the exhibition, study, and education of pieces of high historical and cultural value from the Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection, which is housed at the FLMM. Comprising more than 5,000 pieces, this project will initially focus on approximately 4,000 items, making them available for analysis or viewing, depending on the audience's interest, on a bilingual virtual platform. The project also includes the development of alternative educational modules for various educational levels using the cultural materials on the platform. Additionally, four short educational videos will be produced on a variety of topics related to the collection, including social practices, popular religiosity, artisanal expressions, publishing, musical traditions, household objects, and everyday symbols that contribute to understanding the historical formation of Puerto Rican identity within the broader context of the Latino experience in the United States.

The collection was assembled by historian and collector Teodoro Vidal-Santoni, who dedicated decades to preserving objects representative of Puerto Rican popular culture to document their historical and cultural significance. Part of this collection was donated to the Smithsonian Institution in the 1990s, while another part was deposited with the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation.

The integration of the collection into the FLMM expanded the institution's mission to include the preservation and study of Puerto Rico's cultural history, complementing its traditional work in political and documentary history. Currently, the collection is housed in a specialized storage facility within the institution's Visitor Center, designed to ensure optimal conservation conditions.

However, due to preservation requirements, physical access to the collection is limited primarily to researchers coordinating specialized consultations. This situation creates a gap between the heritage value of the collection and its public accessibility.

The proposed project directly addresses Objective 1 of the ALHC program, which aims to strengthen the capacity of museums and cultural organizations that preserve Latino history to serve their communities. In particular, the project will contribute to:

- expanding public access to Latino heritage collections
- strengthening educational programs based on primary sources
- improving the digital preservation of cultural collections.

The proposed digital platform will transform access to the collection by creating a curated, bilingual, and pedagogically structured virtual exhibition. This initiative will allow students, researchers, and communities of the Puerto Rican diaspora to explore the collection without the physical limitations of the archive.

Beyond digitization, the project will develop an interpretive narrative that examines three fundamental historical dimensions:

- the formation of Puerto Rican cultural identity through material culture

- the relationship between popular tradition and modernization processes
- the historical links between Puerto Rico and the Latino experience in the United States.

In this way, the platform will function as a digital space for learning, research, and cultural connection for local, national, and international audiences.

Need and Challenge

Limited Access to Heritage Collections

The Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection is preserved under controlled conditions to ensure its long-term preservation. Although the FLMM has organized temporary exhibitions and scholarly publications, there is currently no comprehensive digital platform that allows for the systematic exploration of this collection. Digitization will expand public access while reducing the direct handling of fragile objects, including religious carvings, antique prints, and paper materials.

The Gap in Latino Digital Representation

Despite the growing Latino population in the United States, digital collections dedicated to Puerto Rican material culture remain limited within the national digital museum landscape. The development of this platform will strengthen the digital presence of Puerto Rican heritage within Latino history in the United States, expanding its visibility in educational and academic settings.

Demographic and Educational Context

The Latino population represents more than 19% of the U.S. population, and the Puerto Rican community is one of the largest historical groups within that population. More than 5.8 million Puerto Ricans reside in the continental United States, creating a culturally active diaspora.

In Puerto Rico, more than 20% of the population is under 18 years old, highlighting the importance of developing educational resources that connect new generations with their historical heritage.

Educators participating in FLMM programs have identified the need for accessible, contextualized digital materials aligned with curriculum standards that allow for the integration of primary sources into history teaching.

The proposed platform will address this need through the development of:

- downloadable educational modules
- teacher guides
- audiovisual capsules
- interactive timelines
- access to digitized objects.

Primary Audiences

The project is designed to serve three primary audiences:

- **Students and educators:** Projected to impact approximately 4,000 educational users in Puerto Rico and the United States through resources designed for history, social science, and cultural studies courses.
- **Researchers and academics:** The platform will facilitate remote access to primary sources for historians, anthropologists, and specialists in Latin American studies, with a projected reach of 500 specialized users annually.
- **Puerto Rican Diaspora:** An initial audience of 6,000 digital visitors is projected, particularly within Puerto Rican communities in the United States interested in exploring their cultural heritage.

Conceptual Framework

The project is based on three interdisciplinary approaches:

a. Critical Museology

The virtual exhibition adopts principles of contemporary museology that interpret heritage objects as bearers of historical and social narratives. Each piece will be contextualized within broader cultural processes that allow for an understanding of its historical significance.

b. Digital Humanities

The platform will integrate digital tools that facilitate new forms of interaction with cultural heritage, including:

- interactive timelines
- historical maps
- multimedia educational resources
- interdisciplinary connections between history, art, and culture.

Standardized Digital Preservation

The project will adopt international standards for digital documentation and preservation, including Dublin Core, Cataloging Cultural Objects (CCO), FADGI, and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), ensuring interoperability, accessibility, and long-term sustainability.

The Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection has a relevance that transcends the island of Puerto Rico and is embedded within the broader narrative of Latino history in the United States. The Puerto Rican historical experience constitutes one of the oldest and most significant components of the Latino presence in the country, particularly due to the political, cultural, and migratory relationship that has linked Puerto Rico to the United States since the late 19th century. By documenting Puerto Rican material culture, its daily practices, religious traditions, artisanal expressions, and domestic symbols, this collection offers a unique perspective on the formation of Latino cultural identities within contexts of mobility, migration, and social transformation. By making this collection accessible through a public, bilingual digital platform, the project contributes to expanding the representation of the Puerto Rican experience within the Latino cultural heritage of the United States and strengthens national access to primary sources that enrich research, education, and intercultural dialogue.

II. Work Plan and Methodology (32 months)

The project will be developed over 32 months using an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates historical research, digitization of collections, technological development, and educational design.

Phase 1: Curatorial Selection (Months 1–4)

A representative set of 4,000 objects will be identified to construct a coherent historical narrative.

Main activities:

- Curatorial selection of pieces
- Historical research
- Initial drafting of bilingual interpretive content.

Phase 2: Digitization (Months 5–24)

The selected objects will be digitized following professional preservation standards.

Main activities:

- High-resolution photography

- Creation of TIFF master files
- Generation of JPEG derivatives
- Development of structured metadata.

Phase 3: Development of a Digital Platform (Months 1–32)

An adaptable and accessible digital platform will be designed to allow exploration of the collection.

Main components:

- Responsive design compatible with mobile devices
- Advanced search engines
- Interactive visualization tools
- Compliance with web accessibility standards.

Phase 4: Educational Development (Months 20–32)

Digital content will be transformed into educational resources.

Educational products:

- Downloadable educational modules
- Teacher guides
- Audiovisual capsules
- Interdisciplinary materials.

Phase 5: Launch and Dissemination (Months 24–32)

The platform will be publicly launched through a dissemination strategy targeting educational and academic communities.

Activities:

- Academic presentations
- Teacher workshops
- Digital outreach campaigns.

Institutional Capacity

The Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation has over 40 years of experience in the preservation of heritage collections, historical research, and the development of educational programs.

The project team will include specialists in:

- historical curation
- digital preservation
- cataloging of collections
- cultural heritage photography
- web development and accessibility
- heritage education
- audiovisual production
- external evaluation.

The institution will contribute technological infrastructure, servers, and administrative support as its institutional contribution.

III. Digital Products Plan

The project will generate a series of digital resources designed for research, education, and cultural dissemination.

The main products include:

- 4,000 high-resolution digital images

- interoperable metadata
- bilingual curatorial essays
- educational videos
- downloadable educational modules
- interactive historical maps
- digital timelines.

All files will be stored using redundant preservation systems and backups, ensuring their long-term availability.

Overview of the Digital Project Portal Application

The objective of the digital portal project is to manage the images and metadata of the Teodoro Vidal collection on a single platform. Once processed, these are published on the website archivo.flmm.org, developed on Omeka S, an open-source platform specializing in the dissemination and exhibition of digital collections.

The technologies used in the application are:

- **Main language and framework:** The web application is developed in PHP with Twig for the HTML templates.

- **Database:** We use MariaDB, a fork of MySQL, which offers all the advantages of a relational database management system while remaining open-source software.

- **Python services:** The Python program is used for advanced OCR, which allows for the automatic extraction of text from digitized documents, facilitating their indexing and subsequent search.

- **S3 Synchronization:** A service that automates the transfer of digital files (images, documents, etc.) between the application and Amazon S3, ensuring that objects are kept up-to-date and backed up.

- **Cloud Storage (AWS):** Amazon S3 acts as the primary repository for all digital files, ensuring their long-term availability and durability. Metadata is stored in the database (MariaDB) running on an instance within AWS, enabling fast and reliable access to all digital objects (images, PDFs, documents, etc.). All services and the web application are deployed on Amazon Web Services (AWS) servers, providing flexibility and scalability. Resources can be adjusted according to traffic or processing demands based on project needs, and security is ensured by providing multiple layers of protection and automatic backups.

- **Information Security:** This platform provides access control through roles and encrypted passwords and offers monitoring and activity logs for reliable auditing.

- **Integration and Compatibility:** The interface architecture is designed to integrate with other document management systems or cultural dissemination platforms. Online publication of collections is planned through Omeka S, providing users with secure remote access to historical materials.

- **Local Digitization Hardware:** Scanners and digitization equipment for the project perform the initial capture of documents. These files are then uploaded to S3, and the FLMM application synchronizes them for processing (OCR, metadata assignment, etc.).

Project Evaluation

The evaluation will combine quantitative and qualitative methods:

- Web traffic analysis
- Educational resource usage metrics

- User satisfaction surveys
- Independent external evaluation.

The main indicators will include:

- User reach
- Documented curriculum integration
- Digital engagement
- Educational and cultural impact.

Expected Results

Immediate Results

- Expanded digital access to 4,000 historical objects
- Reduced physical handling of fragile pieces
- Educational integration of the collection
- Strengthening of the institutional digital infrastructure.

Area of Impact	Indicator	Target during the project
Access to collections	Digitized objects	4,000
Public access	Digital visitors to the platform	10,000+ usuarios
Education	Students and educators impacted	4,000
Research	Researchers and academic users	500 anuales
Cultural participation	Visitors from the Puerto Rican diaspora	6,000
Educational resources	Educational modules developed	8–10
Audiovisual production	Educational videos	4
Preservation	Objects with standardized metadata	4,000
Accessibility	WCAG-compliant platform	100%

Long-term impact

The project will contribute to:

- expanding public knowledge about Puerto Rican material culture
- strengthening cultural identity in Latino communities
- promoting the educational use of digital heritage resources
- improving institutional preservation and access processes.

Public Access and Sustainability

The platform will be:

- free
- bilingual (Spanish and English)
- compatible with mobile devices
- accessible under WCAG standards.

Once the grant period ends, platform maintenance will be integrated into the FLMM's operating budget, and the institution will continue to expand the project through future digitization phases.

The Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection constitutes an exceptional material archive of Puerto Rican cultural history. Each object preserves stories about beliefs, trades, traditions, and social practices that form a fundamental part of the country's collective memory.

The creation of this virtual exhibition will allow this heritage to transcend the physical limitations of the archive and reach broad audiences in Puerto Rico, the United States, and the

diaspora. More than digitizing objects, this project preserves memory, strengthens cultural identity, and expands access to Latino heritage in the contemporary digital environment.

In an era where Latino communities continue to expand their presence within the cultural fabric of the United States, preserving and making their historical heritage accessible is a fundamental responsibility of cultural institutions. By transforming the Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection into an open digital platform, the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation not only expands access to an exceptional collection of Puerto Rican material culture but also contributes to strengthening Latino cultural memory within the American historical landscape. This project demonstrates how digital preservation, public education, and academic research can converge to ensure that the stories, traditions, and experiences of Latino communities continue to inform and enrich our understanding of the United States' past and present.

A Window to Puerto Rico's Past: Exploring the Teodoro Vidal-Santoni Collection in Virtual Format

Project Completion Schedule (32 Months)

Activity	Months 1–4	5–8	9–12	13–16	17–20	21–24	25–28	29–32
Curatorial selection and historical research	■							
Writing bilingual interpretive content	■	■						
Object digitization (high - resolution photography)		■	■	■	■	■		
Metadata creation and cataloging		■	■	■	■	■		
Digital platform development	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Interactive tools (maps, timelines)			■	■	■	■	■	
Educational modules and teacher guides					■	■	■	■
Production of educational audiovisual capsules					■	■	■	■
Usability and accessibility testing (WCAG)						■	■	
Public launch of the platform							■	
Outreach and teacher workshops						■	■	■
Project evaluation and impact analysis							■	■