



Museum Grants for American Latino History and Culture

Sample Application ALHC-260698-OMS-26

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.

Project Justification

Which program goal and associated objective of ALHC will your project address?

For the proposed project, *Increasing Staff Capacity*, the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture (NMPRAC) is requesting \$500,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services American Latino Heritage Collections (ALHC) initiative to strengthen institutional capacity and support the growth and development of a professional workforce within American Latino museums. Through this project, NMPRAC seeks to hire a full-time Museum Curator and support the professional certification of two current staff members transitioning into the roles of Registrar and Archivist.

The project will primarily focus on **Goal 2, Objective 2.2** of the ALHC initiative:

Program Goal 2: Support the growth and development of a professional workforce in American Latino museums.

- **2.2: Create learning and growth opportunities designed to build the knowledge, skills and abilities of museum staff and/or volunteers.**

By funding the recruitment of a Curator and supporting workshop training and certification for staff transitioning into Registrar and Archivist roles, the project will create meaningful professional development opportunities while strengthening NMPRAC's long-term institutional capacity. The certifications will provide training in collections management, archival practices, and digital records, ensuring responsibilities are carried out to professional standards.

As the only Puerto Rican museum in the United States outside of Puerto Rico, NMPRAC plays a vital role in preserving, interpreting, and sharing Puerto Rican history and culture with national audiences. The museum highlights the contributions of Puerto Ricans to the economic, artistic, cultural, educational, and social development of Chicago and communities across the United States. In recent years, increased recognition of the museum's exhibitions, educational programs, and cultural leadership has expanded its reach and audience. However, this growth has also revealed significant gaps in staff capacity. Currently, key curatorial, registrarial, and archival responsibilities are shared among staff whose primary roles lie in other areas of museum operations, creating role overlap, inconsistent workflows, and staff burnout.

Through the ALHC initiative, NMPRAC will establish a stronger workforce structure with clearly defined professional roles. A dedicated 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. Together, these roles will enhance the museum's ability to care for its collections, interpret Puerto Rican history and culture, and enhance and expand public access to NMPRAC's exhibitions and archival resources.

By investing in professional development and expanding staff capacity, this project will not only strengthen NMPRAC's institutional workforce but also ensure the sustainable preservation,

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interpretation, and public accessibility of Puerto Rican cultural heritage, reinforcing the museum's unique role as a national resource for Latino arts and history.

What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?

NMPRAC currently faces critical staff capacity challenges that limit its ability to steward collections, plan exhibitions, and meet growing public demand. The museum operates without a dedicated Curator, Registrar, or Archivist, resulting in overlapping responsibilities: the Director of Education & Programming has taken on curatorial duties, the Director of Operations manages registrar functions, including condition reports, and the Director of Research and Development also assumes archival responsibilities when necessary.

With a team of 10 employees, 9 full-time and 1 part-time, the museum is already operating at full capacity. In 2025, NMPRAC welcomed over 77,000 visitors, and early projections for 2026 indicate even higher attendance. Rising demand from schools, community organizations, potential partners, and other visitors has increased the need for exhibition planning, field trips, public programs, and access to collections. While this growth reflects the museum's expanding impact, it underscores the urgent need to strengthen professional staffing to sustain operations and maintain high-quality public engagement.

Without a trained Archivist, the museum cannot fully implement a digitization plan or provide consistent access to archival materials. Similarly, without a full-time Curator, long-term exhibition planning and rotational gallery programming, three to four exhibitions per year, cannot be effectively executed. A professional Registrar is also essential to support operations, managing documentation, collection logs, inventory, and condition reports. With the Curator focused on exhibition planning and the Archivist managing archival collections and digitization initiatives, a dedicated Registrar will ensure the museum's collections and archival materials are properly tracked, documented, and maintained according to professional standards, safeguarding the collections and enabling staff to work efficiently.

This need was identified through an internal assessment of staffing and collections management practices. The proposed project addresses these challenges by hiring a Curator and supporting two current staff members in professional workshops and certification programs to transition into Registrar and Archivist roles. This approach will clarify roles, prevent staff burnout, strengthen institutional capacity, improve stewardship of collections, and expand public access to Puerto Rican cultural heritage.

Strengthening staff capacity through this project will ensure the museum can meet growing demand while fulfilling its mission as a national resource for Puerto Rican arts, history, and culture.

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

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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 of this project?

Ultimate beneficiaries of the project include NMPRAC, as well as partner institutions such as Chicago's Puerto Rican Cultural Center, New York's El Centro at Hunter College, and Puerto Rico's National Archive. Through *Increasing Staff Capacity*, NMPRAC will establish a professionally managed archive following American Alliance of Museums standards. While the goal of a shared, searchable database of collections across partner organizations was identified in prior planning, this project provides the professional staff, Curator, Registrar, and Archivist, needed to implement and sustain it, expanding long-term access to Puerto Rican cultural heritage.

Community members and researchers, including students, educators, and artists, will benefit from improved collections management, archival documentation, and digitization, enhancing access to Puerto Rican history and culture.

Aligned with ALHC Program Goal 2, the project also strengthens the professional workforce. Certification and training for the Registrar and Archivist will build staff knowledge and skills, ensuring collections are managed according to professional standards. This professional development supports sustainable preservation and increases public accessibility, benefiting both the museum and the wider community now and in the future.

Project Work Plan

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

3-Year Project Timeline: September 1, 2026 - September 1, 2029

1. Develop Recruitment Plan for Curator

- Define qualifications, responsibilities, and desired expertise.
Establish outreach strategies, application timeline, and selection criteria.

2. Hire Curator

- Conduct recruitment, interviews, and select candidates.
- Formalize role responsibilities and reporting structure.

3. Onboard Curator & Develop Plan for Cultural Heritage Museums

- Orient Curator to NMPRAC operations, collections, archives, galleries, and partners.
- Begin developing a two-year exhibition plan, including rotating and permanent galleries.

4. Begin Training & Transitioning Identified Internal Staff to Registrar & Archivist

- Enroll staff in professional certification programs and track progress.
- Transition responsibilities from other staff to clarify roles and build expertise.

5. Curator Develops 2 Year Exhibition Plan

- Finalize exhibition schedule, themes, and interpretive materials for all galleries.
- Coordinate with Registrar and Archivist and support education staff in developing exhibition curriculum.

6. Continue Registrar & Archivist Training

- Continue coursework and professional development.
- Implement improved collections management practices; Archivist begins digitization planning.

7. Fully Integrate Curator, Registrar, & Archivist to Lead Respective Departments

- Assign departmental leadership and establish workflows.
- Maintain professional standards and operational efficiency.

8. Increase Public Access (Exhibitions & Collections)

- Launch exhibitions according to the Curator's plan.
- Expand access to collections through digitization, research, and educational programming.

What are the risks to the project, and how will you mitigate them?

A possible challenge is the timeline for hiring the Curator. A longer than expected recruitment process could delay the start of some program components. To reduce this risk, the museum will begin recruitment upon receiving NOA and will begin to advertise the position through professional museum networks. The museum has experienced leadership staff who can temporarily oversee the early stages of program planning if additional time is needed to complete the hiring process.

Another risk involves the transition of existing staff into the Archivist and Registrar roles. Since these positions will be filled internally, some operational responsibilities may need to shift as

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staff members move into their new positions. The museum will address this by documenting workflows and maintaining shared knowledge among staff members so that daily operations continue smoothly during the transition period.

There is also the possibility that the scope of archival or collections work could grow as materials are reviewed and organized. To address this, the project has been designed so that the Curator, Archivist, and Registrar work collaboratively allowing responsibilities to be shared across the team. Clear procedures and training will ensure the work progresses steadily while maintaining professional standards.

The three year timeframe allows the institution to build the program thoughtfully, evaluate how it is working, and refine it along the way. Regular internal check-ins will help the museum track progress, address challenges early, and make adjustments if needed.

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

Billy Ocasio, CEO & Executive Director - Project Manager

- Ocasio will oversee all aspects of the project, including recruitment and hiring of the Curator and the training and transition of staff into Registrar and Archivist roles. He will provide strategic oversight to ensure project milestones are met, drawing on his experience in growing NMPRAC's staff, budget, and audience, and his leadership as Regional Coordinator of the Diaspora for the Alliance of Puerto Rican Museums.

Yesica Ortiz, Director of Operations - Registrar (new role)

- Ortiz will transition into the Museum's first Registrar, applying her organizational skills and operational knowledge to manage collections, documentation, and condition reporting. She will complete professional workshops under the grant to fully assume Registrar responsibilities and ensure consistent collections management.

Alyssa Corrigan, Director of Development - Archivist (new role)

- Corrigan will transition into the Archivist role, working towards the completion of a Digital Archive Specialist Certificate to lead archival management and digitization initiatives. She will oversee accessioning, archival organization, and the development of a long-term digitization plan to expand access to NMPRAC's collections and archives.

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

To successfully carry out the proposed activities, NMPRAC will rely on a combination of financial support, personnel time, and institutional resources. Funding from the ALHC grant will support the recruitment and hiring of a full-time Curator and the professional training and transition of two current full-time staff members into Registrar and Archivist roles through workshops and certification programs. This financial support ensures NMPRAC can build the professional

capacity needed to manage exhibitions, collections, and archives effectively, while increasing public access to all three.

Additional resources are already in place to support collections documentation and access, including collections management software such as CatalogIt and Lucidea ArchivEra, as well as consultant training and equipment for digitization and archival documentation. NMPRAC's existing staff will contribute time to project coordination, training, and implementation to ensure the successful integration of these roles and systems. Together, these investments will strengthen the museum's institutional capacity, improve long-term stewardship of its collections, and expand public access to Puerto Rican cultural heritage.

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

NMPRAC will track progress toward the goals of the *Increasing Staff Capacity* project by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data throughout the three-year grant period and measuring outcomes against established milestones. Key indicators include the successful recruitment and hiring of a full-time Curator in Year One; enrollment and progress in professional workshops and certification programs for two staff members transitioning into Registrar and Archivist roles; development of a two-year exhibition plan for the museum's rotating galleries; and the initiation of a digitization process and long-term plan to expand public access to collections.

Progress will be documented through hiring records, workshop and certification documentation, exhibition planning materials, and collections management tracking. Project leadership will review these records quarterly to ensure milestones are met and to address any challenges. These regular reviews will allow NMPRAC to make adjustments as needed while remaining aligned with the project's goals of strengthening institutional capacity, improving stewardship of collections, and expanding public access to exhibitions and archival materials.

Project Results

What are your project's intended results, and how will they address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified?

The intended results of the *Increasing Staff Capacity* project are to hire a full-time Curator and support two current staff members in professional workshops and certification programs to transition into Registrar and Archivist roles. Establishing these positions will increase necessary staff capacity, creating dedicated leadership for exhibitions, collections management, and archival stewardship, addressing current staff capacity challenges and improving the museum's ability to plan exhibitions, manage collections, and provide access to archival materials. These outcomes will advance knowledge and understanding by strengthening the museum's ability to interpret and share Puerto Rican history, arts, and culture through exhibitions, research access, and improved collections documentation. By building a more sustainable professional workforce and initiating a digitization strategy, the project will expand public access to cultural resources for students, educators, researchers, and community members. In doing so, the

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federal investment will support long-term preservation of Puerto Rican cultural heritage and increase opportunities for public learning and engagement.

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

The project will strengthen the knowledge and professional skills of NMPRAC staff by providing targeted training and certification opportunities for employees transitioning into Registrar and Archivist roles, while also supporting the hiring of a full-time Curator. Through professional workshops and certification programs, staff will gain expertise in exhibition planning, collections management, archival standards, and documentation practices aligned with museum best practices.

As a result, staff will develop greater confidence and capacity to manage exhibitions, steward collections, and provide access to archival materials. These improvements will foster more consistent workflows, clearer role responsibilities, and 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.

If applicable, how will your project improve the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum collections and/or records that are the focus of your project?

This project will significantly improve the care, management, and accessibility of NMPRAC's collections and archival records. By hiring a full-time Curator and training two staff members to transition into Registrar and Archivist roles, the museum will establish dedicated leadership for exhibitions, collections management, and archival stewardship. With the proper training and certification, the Archivist will oversee the archival management, and implement a digitization strategy, ultimately resulting in a long-term digitization plan, to increase public access. The Registrar will ensure proper documentation, inventory management, and condition reporting, while the Curator will coordinate exhibitions that integrate both collections and archival materials. Together, these roles will create consistent workflows, strengthen professional standards, and make NMPRAC's collections more accessible, well-maintained, and engaging for the public.

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

NMPRAC is in the final phase of achieving national accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums, with its last site visit scheduled for April 1–2, 2026. With accreditation and increased staff capacity, including a full-time Curator and trained Registrar and Archivist, the museum will have the professional infrastructure to sustain exhibitions, collections management, and archival stewardship. This strengthened capacity will position NMPRAC to secure additional funding, partnerships, and major gifts, while ongoing operating support and grant opportunities will ensure the continued maintenance of educational programming and public access, preserving the benefits of the project well beyond the grant period.

NMPRAC SCHEDULE

3 YEAR PROJECT TIMELINE: SEPT 1, 2026 - SEPT 1, 2029

INCREASING STAFF CAPACITY

YEAR 1
"RECRUITMENT"

SEPT 2026 OCT NOV DEC JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEPT 2027

ACTIVITY 1

SEPT - NOV

ACTIVITY 2

NOV - DEC

ACTIVITY 3

JAN 2027 - SEPT 2027

ACTIVITY 4

SEPT 2026 - SEPT 2027

ACTIVITY 1: DEVELOP RECRUITMENT PLAN FOR CURATOR

**ACTIVITY 3: ONBOARD CURATOR & DEVELOP TRAINING
PLAN FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE MUSEUMS**

ACTIVITY 2: HIRE CURATOR

**ACTIVITY 4: BEGIN TRAINING & TRANSITIONING IDENTIFIED
INTERNAL STAFF TO REGISTRAR & ARCHIVIST**

NMPRAC SCHEDULE

3 YEAR PROJECT TIMELINE: SEPT 1, 2026 - SEPT 1, 2029

INCREASING STAFF CAPACITY

YEAR 2
"TRAINING"

SEPT 2027

OCT

NOV

DEC

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEPT 2028

ACTIVITY 5

SEPT 2027 - SEPT 2028

ACTIVITY 6

SEPT 2027 - SEPT 2028

ACTIVITY 5: CURATOR DEVELOPS 2 YEAR EXHIBITION PLAN

ACTIVITY 6: CONTINUE REGISTRAR & ARCHIVIST CERTIFICATION TRAINING

NMPRAC SCHEDULE

3 YEAR PROJECT TIMELINE: SEPT 1, 2026 - SEPT 1, 2029

INCREASING STAFF CAPACITY

YEAR 3
"IMPLEMENTATION"

SEPT 2028

OCT

NOV

DEC

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEPT 2029

ACTIVITY 7

SEPT 2028 - SEPT 2029

ACTIVITY 8

SEPT 2028 - SEPT 2029

ACTIVITY 7: FULLY INTEGRATE CURATOR, REGISTRAR, & ARCHIVIST TO INDEPENDENTLY LEAD RESPECTIVE DEPARTMENTS

ACTIVITY 8: INCREASE PUBLIC ACCESS (EXHIBITIONS & COLLECTIONS)