



## Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-251752-OMS-22  
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

### Watkins Museum of History

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$49,980
Amount of cost share:	\$81,044

Led by the Watkins Museum of History, five heritage sites in Douglas County, Kansas, will collaborate to develop a series of online learning resources uniting the histories of the sites under the theme, "Seeking a More Perfect Union: The Enduring Struggle for Freedom and Civil Rights." Based on a newly developed field trip program and a needs assessment of K-12 teachers, this series of lesson plans, student workbooks, and classroom resources will connect stories that emphasize how issues of freedom, race, justice, equality, and economic opportunity affected people's lives from the mid-1800s to the present. The project will ensure that teachers and students continue to benefit from the advantages offered by learning in a museum setting, in addition to providing a more accessible option for those who cannot travel to the sites.

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 Narrative**

### Project Justification

Douglas County, Kansas has a rich civil rights heritage founded in the events of Bleeding Kansas and the nation's struggle over slavery in the 1850s. It was home to the headquarters of both pro-slavery (Lecompton) and free-state (Lawrence) factions in Kansas Territory. The Battle of Black Jack, fought by John Brown's anti-slavery and Henry Clay Pate's pro-slavery forces at a site along the Santa Fe Trail, was the nation's first armed conflict over slavery. Communities near Clinton Lake were home to abolitionist "conductors" on the Underground Railroad and African American farmers after the Civil War. The city of Eudora was founded by a German emigrant aid society in the 1850s. Haskell Institute, now Haskell Indian Nations University, was established in Lawrence by the federal government in the 1870s as a vocational training school for American Indian children. Lawrence in the 1950s-70s saw desegregation efforts and grassroots movements to advance civil rights that reflected events across the nation.

Supported by a 2021 NEH American Rescue Plan grant, a consortium of five independent, non-profit heritage sites—the Eudora Community Museum, Old Castle Museum (Baldwin City), Territorial Capital Museum (Lecompton), Wakarusa River Valley Museum (Clinton), and, managing the project, the Watkins Museum of History (Lawrence)—is developing a series of field trips that unite their stories of people's struggle for justice and a better life under the theme, *Seeking a More Perfect Union: The Enduring Struggle for Freedom and Civil Rights*.

Connecting the stories of these heritage sites will emphasize how issues of freedom, race, justice, equality, and economic opportunity impact different people in different places through time, from the mid-1800s to today, and will allow teachers and students to more fully explore how these issues affected people's lives. The field trips will be available in the fall 2022 semester. However, field trip programs at the sites, which were curtailed in 2020 due to the pandemic, have been slow to recover in 2021. As it may no longer be possible for some schools to participate in on-site educational experiences, field trips may no longer be enough to support the needs of local schools and educators.

Realizing that continuing to engage students with our heritage stories and provide robust support for local educators will require broader educational approaches and resources that help educators incorporate these stories into their classroom teaching, we seek an IMLS Inspire! grant to support development of a range of online learning resources and experiences. Based on techniques pioneered during the pandemic shutdowns and curriculum content developed for *Seeking a More Perfect Union* field trips, these new standards-based educational experiences will build a permanent alternative to field trips for schools that cannot travel to our sites. The online learning resource units for each site, developed under the guidance of the education staff of the Watkins Museum, will include a lesson plan, student workbook, and classroom resources—video presentations, activities, live-streamed tours, handling materials, or reproductions of primary source material—for use by students in the classroom and to aid teachers engaged in online instruction. The online learning resources developed by this project will ensure students can continue to benefit from the unique advantages provided by learning in the museum setting—encounters with collections materials as primary historical resources, interactive educational experiences that encourage creative thinking and accommodate multiple learning styles, and use of historical examples to reinforce learning in a variety of curriculum

areas—even when they cannot visit the museum in person. These experiences will ensure accessibility to heritage-based educational programming in Douglas County, being more affordable and available than onsite fieldtrips are for many students and school systems.

*Background: Education Beyond the Field Trip at the Watkins Museum of History*

The expansion of the Watkins Museum's education program beyond field trip tours began in 2013 when the museum tested its first multi-component learning program, *Maggie Herrington's Lawrence*. This program addresses 3<sup>rd</sup> grade social studies curriculum on community and uses examples from the past to teach concepts required by state academic content standards. The program, based on an 1867 journal written by 13-year-old Lawrence student Maggie Herrington, includes multiple components that explore life in the early Lawrence community through her journal entries, handling artifacts, and student activities and can be presented at the museum or in the classroom. In addition to addressing social studies standards, it also addresses standards in language arts, establishing our practice of developing educational programs that support standards in history and in at least one other discipline, including science, math, and technology.

*Maggie Herrington* paved the way for a robust education program that, five years later, served over 6,000 school and home-school students. Over those five years, museum educators developed nearly 30 tour topics connecting history and other areas of study, custom programs on civil rights for high school students, a debate-based program on John Brown, and presentations on using history across the curriculum for educator events.

*Background: Pandemic Response*

In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 health crisis, the museum cancelled its spring and, ultimately, its fall school programs. By late April, the education team had adapted two of the museum's most in-demand programs, *Maggie Herrington's Lawrence*, for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and *Debating John Brown*, for middle and high school, as online alternatives for programs that would have been presented at the museum or in person in the classroom. Over the summer, education staff began revising school fieldtrip content and homeschool programs into online lessons delivered through Nearpod, a learning platform for educators to provide interactive lessons with engaging media and formative assessments.

Through continued conversations with teachers, curriculum coordinators, and the director of the Kansas City Social Studies Consortium in 2020 and 2021, education staff realized that, given the challenges presented by COVID-19 and the pace of recovery, providing useful resources for online instruction was necessary to sustain service to schools and students, ensure the continued vitality of the museum's educational programs, and successfully fulfill its mission. In spring 2021, *Maggie Herrington's Lawrence* was revised as a virtual tour experience. Response was positive, with 515 students from 12 schools and four other learning organizations participating. This revision of the program gave education staff an opportunity to experiment with methods and technologies for providing virtual tours, building a foundation of experience for future educational programs. Work on *Maggie Herrington* continued through the fall, with development of a lesson plan format that expands the program to support curriculum for middle and high school and scaffolds the activities to support students with a variety of learning needs.

This lesson plan will provide a model for the development of learning experiences for the *Seeking a More Perfect Union* theme at all five heritage sites.

Moving forward, the Watkins Museum, working with the other Douglas County heritage sites, intends to create a new array of educational offerings that build on our past success—multi-faceted experiences that accommodate various learning styles, include elements that are facilitated by a leader and self-directed by students, employ inquiry-based learning techniques, and include hands-on activities for students—but address the needs of educators and students who cannot participate onsite. This Inspire! grant project will develop the foundation for achieving that outcome at the Watkins Museum and four other primarily volunteer-run history museums in Douglas County, Kansas. Expanding the approaches used to present educational programming county-wide will require thoughtful planning, new skills, and an expanded investment of resources. Given the central role that education plays in the Douglas County heritage sites' community engagement, such investment is critical to sustaining that public engagement, providing robust service to schools and educators, and achieving strategic goals for education: connect our local history to national themes, address multiple curriculum areas, and promote material culture as a primary resource.

#### *Online Learning Resources: Who Benefits*

Since the development of the *Maggie Herrington* program, the Watkins Museum has significantly grown its partnership with area students and educators, who are now one of the museum's largest audiences. The education team started with a focus on 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students but quickly expanded to include lessons for students at every grade level from kindergarten through high school. The museum reaches students outside of Lawrence's USD-497 school district through a monthly program for homeschool students, a monthly program for Pre-K students, and partnerships with University of Kansas faculty that incorporate museum experiences into their coursework. This project will continue to build on the partnerships the museum has established with these students and educators.

In recent years, the Watkins has expanded its educational reach to schools in the surrounding metropolitan regions of Topeka and Kansas City. This growth is largely due to the museum's association with two regional groups, Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA) and the Kansas City Social Studies Consortium (KCSSC), both of which have access to established networks of educators. The KCSSC, established in 2015, fosters connections between schools and community resources to enhance learning opportunities for students. Museums are one of the community resources they prioritize, and the Watkins has benefitted from the large network of educators under the umbrella of the KCSSC. Through this partnership, the museum's educational programs benefit students in urban, suburban, and rural schools. This project will help strengthen our association with the KCSSC, increase opportunities to work with regional schools, and expand the socio-economic diversity of the students the museum serves.

#### Project Work Plan

The project will develop online resources for K-12 education and begin with an assessment of the needs of educators, the effectiveness of resource formats, and the skills museum staff need to develop to provide online resources and educational experiences. Amanda Burkhart, project manager and the museum's lead educator, will serve as the primary liaison to educators, working

to understand their needs, evaluate new resources, and build awareness of the museum's educational offerings. Curriculum specialist Jane Nuessen will develop new lesson plans based on *Seeking a More Perfect Union* tour content from partner museums. Assisted by staff at the Watkins and other sites, they will develop student workbooks and classroom resources including videos, activities, and primary source material reproductions. The lead educator and curriculum specialist will evaluate program effectiveness. William Haynes, PhD, director of engagement and learning, will oversee staff, assure progress milestones are met, and facilitate modification of the Watkins Museum website to provide access to and build awareness of new distance learning offerings. Natalie Vondrak, communications and outreach manager, will oversee development of videos and other digital resources. The museum contracts with a web technician and graphic designer; they will be called upon as needed for the project.

The museum has already adapted its *Maggie Herrington's Lawrence* program for use online. As we develop additional online resources, the museum will follow the model established for the development of this program:

- Review content standards requirements with teachers and/or curriculum specialists
- Assess and adapt existing fieldtrip/tour content
- Produce materials and videos
- Pilot the program with a teacher/class
- Adapt the program and/or materials as necessary
- Promote the program and make it available to teachers

As part of this grant project, the museum will undertake the following activities:

- Train education staff in video production/editing and facilitation of online meetings and webinars
- Interview teachers and curriculum specialists to gather information on needs and guidelines for effective online learning resources
- Review and further research existing field trip topics identified for the *Seeking a More Perfect Union* tours topics based on educator need
- Develop teaching outcomes for each program
- Write, design, and produce instruction materials and video tours and presentations
- Identify and develop experiences, such as video or live-stream examinations of historic artifacts or virtual exhibits, to support outcomes
- Test programs
- Modify programs or materials as needed
- Modify or expand education pages on museum website to promote and manage expanded online programming
- Schedule and distribute programs/materials for use as needed

In September and October 2022, museum educators will gather information on the needs of schools and teachers, review existing fieldtrip content, and work with partner sites to finalize resource focus. Three online resource units will be developed and tested in each year of the grant. From November 2022 to August 2023, three resource units will be developed, produced, and tested. They will be made available to educators for the fall 2023 semester. From September

2023 to August 2024 three more units will be produced and posted. Ongoing evaluation with teachers and students will occur as resources are made available and used.

The museum will adapt existing tools to evaluate programs and gather information from teachers. In addition to testing the program with a teacher/class prior to making it widely available, teachers who use the resources will be asked to fill out an evaluation. Students may also be asked to fill out a short evaluation with the teacher's permission. Museum educators will review evaluations to determine if adjustments need to be made to some resources or if certain topics should be expanded, modified, or abandoned. Ongoing evaluation will ensure that the programs offered meet the needs of teachers and students.

Results of the project, both the form/content of the programs and program evaluations, will be shared first with the partner sites. Results will be shared through the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA), which encompasses 41 counties on the Kansas-Missouri border and includes more than 250 museums and heritage sites as partners. FFNHA regularly hosts partners' meetings and posts a weekly e-newsletter, providing ways to share information. Program results will also be shared through the Kansas City Social Studies Consortium, the Kansas City Museum Educators Roundtable, and in sessions at the Kansas Museums Association's annual meetings.

#### Project Results

This project will develop online learning resource units associated with the key stories of five Douglas County heritage sites, applying local history to study in a variety of curriculum areas and drawing on the historic stories, collections, and primary resource materials at the Eudora Community Museum, Old Castle Museum, Territorial Capital Museum, Wakarusa River Valley Museum, and the Watkins Museum. The resulting resources, promoted and distributed through the Watkins Museum and made available through online educator resource sites like Nearpod, will expand the educational offerings at all five sites and provide a means to serve students and educators across the county and beyond. After the grant period, a partnership with FFNHA could permanently sustain the initiative to develop online learning resources and extend participation to include museums across the 41-county heritage area.

The project's success will be evidenced by the rate at which programs are scheduled or downloaded, teacher evaluations, and maintenance of relationships between these museums and local school systems. Equally important, the project will result in a reimagining of the heritage sites' service to educators, schools, and students, which will better position them to serve the educational needs of students locally, regionally, and beyond. Educational experiences and learning resources will continue to be of use whether students are learning online or in the classroom and can supplement or provide an alternative to onsite field trips.

Evaluative data collected from teachers and students who participate in the programs, along with assessments by curriculum specialists and other museum educators, will allow the museum to assess effectiveness for users and ensure programs meet educational standards. The programs produced by this project will permanently enhance educational offerings of five heritage sites and be a model for the development of future educational experiences. Ongoing expense, such as the printing of additional instructional materials, will be covered by the Watkins Museum's operating budget or through sponsorships by local businesses and individuals. Development of new programs could be supported by grants or private donations.



