



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-260173-OMS-26
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access
Project Type: Large Project (\$25,001-\$75,000)

Center for Book Arts

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$30,000
Amount of cost share:	\$31,590

The Center for Book Arts (CBA) will undertake a comprehensive remediation of its online research catalog, which provides public access to over 8,000 artists' books, reference works, and archival materials. This project will standardize and clarify the catalog's descriptive fields, introduce a new dedicated field for bookmaking techniques and materials, and enhance its search and browsing features. A metadata manual will be produced to ensure consistent cataloging practice moving forward. The primary beneficiaries will be the users of CBA's catalog, including researchers, scholars, graduate students, artists, and educators in the United States and internationally. Additional beneficiaries include the broader humanities research community and peer institutions facing comparable cataloging challenges with artists' books, who may adopt CBA's methodology and documentation as a model.

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.

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PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Inspire! Objective: Collections Stewardship and Access

This project directly addresses the Collections Stewardship and Access objective by undertaking a comprehensive remediation of the Center for Book Arts (CBA) research catalog, which is the primary discovery tool for one of the nation's most significant collections of artists' books, fine press works, and book arts archival materials. By standardizing metadata, establishing coherent taxonomies, and enhancing the online catalog interface, CBA will substantially improve the management, accessibility, and use of its holdings for researchers, artists, educators, and the general public worldwide.

Alignment with Strategic Plan

This project is a direct implementation of CBA's Strategic Plan 2026–2030, specifically *Goal 1: Establish and expand the historical, scholarly, and cultural recognition of book arts within the visual and literary arts fields, Sub-goal B*, which calls for a phased plan to digitize and make collections accessible online and identifies digital collections access, measured by the number of records accessible online and usage data, as a key success metric beginning in 2026. The project also advances *Sub-goal C* which includes “Generate scholarship and document artists' books”, by creating the metadata infrastructure necessary for CBA's collections to function as a serious scholarly resource capable of supporting the research fellowship and artists' book documentation initiatives also described in the plan.

Need, Problem, or Challenge

Over several decades of catalog development, CBA's metadata environment has accumulated inconsistencies that significantly limit its usefulness as a research tool. Terms related to intellectual content or themes — such as heritage, built environment, family, migration, or society — are interspersed with, and often indistinguishable from, terms describing physical structures, production methods, and book forms such as photobooks or pamphlet bindings. The Object Type field, intended to provide reliable access to book forms, has been applied inconsistently, fragmenting key categories and obscuring meaningful relationships across the collection. These structural problems inhibit researchers from performing comparative study, tracing artistic or material lineages, or engaging in thematic or methodological analysis.

CBA already maintains a publicly accessible online catalog, built on the CollectiveAccess open-source collections platform, through which users worldwide can search and browse all three collections. The catalog is a functioning and actively used research tool. Because of this existing access infrastructure and its frequent use, CBA has developed an understanding of where the metadata falls short. This project is not a catalog-building project but rather a catalog-improvement initiative: it addresses the accumulated inconsistencies within an operational system to substantially raise the quality and utility of a resource that researchers and artists are already relying on.

The need for this project was identified through staff observation and feedback from researchers, which is regularly collected both during visits and via online survey. CBA's Librarian and Collections Manager, Nicole Rosengurt, has observed recurring difficulties among catalog users attempting to conduct more extensive research, confirming that the metadata problems have a direct and measurable impact on research outcomes.

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One example of this limitation can be seen in the catalog record for “Domestic Intimacy” by Maryann J. Riker (see additional examples in supporting docs). The record only has the subject “aprons” and the object type “books.” There are no broader subject terms that would connect it to relevant research themes such as wearable books, textiles, or domestic labor.

During a recent research visit, a scholar searching for “wearable books” was unable to locate this work through the existing metadata. The librarian was able to provide the item only because its presence in the collection was recalled through prior reference interactions. The work ultimately became an integral component of the researcher’s project.

This example illustrates a broader structural issue: without more comprehensive descriptive metadata, discovery of relevant materials can become dependent on informal staff knowledge rather than the catalog itself. Reliance on individual institutional memory is not a sustainable access strategy, particularly in small cultural heritage organizations where staffing is limited and evolves over time.

The proposed project will address this issue by expanding and standardizing subject metadata, enabling researchers to reliably discover relevant works through the catalog without requiring staff mediation.

Primary Audience

The primary audience for this project is the community of researchers, scholars, artists, and educators who use the CBA catalog to access and study the collections. This includes 3,000+ annual catalog users (in person and online), comprising graduate students, academic faculty, independent artists, book arts practitioners, and librarians at peer institutions. These users are located across the United States and internationally, reflecting the global reach of CBA's collections and reputation.

Beneficiaries

The ultimate beneficiaries of this project extend beyond direct catalog users. They include the broader humanities research community, which will benefit from improved access to a unique body of material culture; book arts practitioners and students who rely on CBA's collections for creative and technical research; and peer institutions facing comparable cataloging challenges with artists' books and materially complex collections, who may adopt the methodologies and documentation produced through this project as a model for their own practice.

Collections Description and Current Conditions

CBA maintains three interconnected collections totaling over 6,000 items, all accessible through its CollectiveAccess online catalog. The Fine Arts Collection comprises more than 3,500 artists' books, book art objects, and prints by significant artists and publishers, representing both historic and contemporary practice. The Reference Collection includes over 2,400 books, periodicals, artist monographs, and exhibition catalogs documenting the history and practice of book art across disciplines including bookbinding, printmaking, typography, calligraphy, papermaking, and design. The Archives Collection holds over 800 items documenting CBA's own institutional history as the first nonprofit book arts organization in the United States, including postcards, invitations, newsletters, course catalogs, and exhibition records.

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The physical condition of the collections is good; the challenge this project addresses is the condition of the metadata. Records have been built over decades using inconsistent terminologies, resulting in a taxonomy that conflates intellectual subject matter with physical and technical descriptors and that no longer supports the research needs of contemporary users. There is currently no dedicated field for binding structures, materials, or production techniques, which creates a significant gap given that the materiality of the book is a central concern of book arts scholarship. The Object Type field has been applied incompletely and inconsistently, and subject terms vary widely in specificity and type across records, making reliable thematic or comparative searching difficult.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

Activities and Sequence

The project will proceed over nine months, from September 1, 2026 through May 31, 2027, in four sequential phases.

Phase 1: Audit and Preparatory Analysis (September - October 2026): Nicole Rosengurt will conduct a comprehensive audit of all existing catalog records, mapping current subject and object type usage, identifying inconsistencies, and establishing the scope of remediation required. This phase will also include the development of a new taxonomic framework that clearly separates intellectual subjects, book forms and object types, and a new dedicated field for binding structures, materials, and production techniques. Seth Kaufman of Whirl-i-Gig will be engaged at this stage to assess the current CollectiveAccess configuration and confirm technical requirements before remediation begins.

Phase 2: Metadata Remediation and Standardization (November 2026 - February 2027): Nicole will systematically remediate records in accordance with the new taxonomic framework. This work includes the removal or revision of outdated or misapplied terms, the consistent application of accurate descriptors, and the identification and application of intellectual themes that support humanities research. Concurrently, the metadata manual will be drafted, codifying all decisions and standards for future cataloging practice.

Phase 3: Catalog Implementation (January - March 2027): Seth Kaufman will implement the new metadata fields in CBA's CollectiveAccess catalog and build enhanced search and browse capabilities, including user-generated list functionality that will allow researchers, instructors, and artists to construct and save thematic or methodological sets of materials.

Phase 4: Documentation, Training, and Completion (April - May 2027): The metadata manual will be finalized and staff training conducted to ensure all relevant personnel can apply the new standards consistently. The project will conclude with a full review of remediated records and public launch of the improved catalog interface.

Risk Mitigation

The primary risks to this project are timeline delays due to the volume of records requiring remediation and potential technical challenges in implementing new metadata fields. To mitigate the first risk, Nicole Rosengurt's hours have been scoped at full-time over nine months to allow for a realistic and sustainable pace of work, with clear phase-based milestones to track progress. Technical risk is substantially mitigated by the engagement of Seth Kaufman of Whirl-i-Gig, the organization that maintains CollectiveAccess — the open-source collections

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platform that already powers CBA's online catalog. As a core developer of the platform itself, Kaufman brings authoritative knowledge of CollectiveAccess's architecture, eliminating onboarding time and ensuring that new metadata fields and interface enhancements are implemented efficiently and correctly.

Personnel

The project will be led and managed by Corina Reynolds, CBA's Executive Director, who will provide overall project oversight, manage the timeline and budget, coordinate between key personnel, and ensure integration of all project outputs into CBA's institutional systems. The primary project role will be filled by Nicole Rosengurt, CBA's Librarian and Collections Manager, whose existing part-time position (24 hours/week) will be expanded to full-time (40 hours/week) for the nine-month project period. In addition to her role at CBA, Nicole works as a cataloger at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, bringing professional museum cataloging expertise and familiarity with the rigorous standards of one of the world's leading art institutions. Seth Kaufman of Whirl-i-Gig will be responsible for all technical implementation in the online catalog.

Resources

The total project budget is \$30,000, comprising \$18,500 for Nicole Rosengurt's expanded hours, \$5,500 for Seth Kaufman's web development work, \$3,500 for staff oversight and training, and \$2,500 for supplies and software configuration.

Tracking Progress

Progress will be tracked through phase-based milestones and regular check-ins between Corina Reynolds, Nicole Rosengurt, and Seth Kaufman. Quantitative benchmarks will include the number of records audited, the number of records remediated, and the completion of each phase deliverable: the taxonomic framework, new metadata fields, metadata manual, and staff training. Corina Reynolds will report progress to CBA's Board of Directors on a quarterly basis.

PROJECT RESULTS

Intended Results

At the conclusion of this project, CBA's catalog will be markedly more coherent, discoverable, and research-ready. Researchers will be able to trace connections across intellectual themes, production histories, and book forms with considerably greater ease. The catalog will feature clearly separated and consistently applied fields for subjects, object types, and binding/production techniques, eliminating the terminological conflation that currently hampers discovery.

Changes in Knowledge, Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes

For the primary audience of researchers, artists, and educators, the improved catalog will fundamentally change how they are able to engage with CBA's collections. Users who previously encountered dead ends or incomplete results will gain the ability to conduct precise, comparative, and thematic searches. Educators will be able to construct and save curated resource sets for teaching. Artists conducting material or technical research will have direct, reliable access to production and binding-related descriptors for the first time. These changes represent a fundamental shift from a catalog that users must work around to one that actively

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supports and extends their inquiry.

Project Products

This project will produce the following tangible outputs:

- A fully remediated catalog with standardized Subject, Object Type, and Binding/Production Technique fields across all records
- A new dedicated metadata field for binding structures, materials, and production techniques
- Enhanced online catalog search, browse, and user-generated list functionality
- A metadata manual codifying all cataloging standards and taxonomic decisions

The remediated catalog and enhanced interface will be publicly accessible online at no cost.

Sustainability

The benefits of this project are designed to be durable. The metadata manual will ensure that all future cataloging at CBA adheres to the standards established through this project, preventing the re-accumulation of inconsistencies. The enhanced catalog platform will require only routine maintenance, supported by CBA's existing technology budget.

Impact on Collections Care, Condition, Management, Access, and Use

This project will directly and substantially improve access to and use of CBA's collections. By resolving longstanding metadata inconsistencies, CBA will transform its catalog from a partially functional finding tool into a robust, research-grade resource. Scholars will gain meaningful access to over 6,000 items across three collections that are currently underserved by an inconsistent metadata environment. The introduction of a dedicated field for binding structures and production techniques will make visible the materiality of collections items that is central to book arts scholarship and has previously been difficult to isolate and study. These improvements will advance CBA's mission of preservation, access, and scholarly engagement, and will position the catalog as a model resource for the field.

Center for Book Arts: Rectifying Subjects and Object Types in the CBA Catalog
Schedule of Completion

Project Period: September 1, 2026 – May 31, 2027 (9 Months)

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