



National Leadership Grants - Museums

Sample Application MG-259722-OMS-26
Project Category: Community Engagement
Project Type: Non-Research

Colonial Williamsburg

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$749,971
Amount of cost share:	\$824,565

To commemorate the 250th anniversary of American independence, Colonial Williamsburg will partner with 49 museums and the Organization of American Historians to develop history.org, a free digital learning platform for K-12 U.S. history and civics education. The project partners will create online curated collections of objects and write object-based lessons that share uplifting narratives of American history. By shifting classroom pedagogy towards object-based inquiry, the project will enable teachers to engage students in respectful dialogue centered around vetted and contextualized digital primary source material. Deliverables feature a scalable website hosting over 1,500 animated videos, 4,500 primary sources, and a Customizer tool to adapt content to meet student learning needs. Project outcomes include reduced teacher stress, improved student engagement, and classrooms driven by object-based inquiry.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Digital Products Plan

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

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) is seeking \$749,971 in matching funds from IMLS's National Leadership Grants for Museums (NLG-M) to support the continued development of history.org—the most ambitious U.S. history and civics initiative in a generation. In 2023, CWF convened leading museums and civic organizations from across the country to meet a long-expressed demand from teachers—comprehensive, primary source-based teaching resources that are easy to deploy in the classroom. To meet this need, the finished Phase I site (scheduled for completion in summer 2028) will include a library of 1,500+ short, educational animated videos, more than 4,500 assets from museums' collections, multimedia learning tools and interactives, WCAG 2.2 compliant accessibility features, and customizable instructional materials including presentation decks, analysis questions, vocabulary terms, and learning activities. Designed based on extensive research and developed with our museum partners, K-12 classroom teachers, historians from the Organization of American Historians (OAH), and experts across the fields of learning design and user experience, history.org equips educators to teach the positive and uplifting narratives of our shared American experience, fostering the respectful civil dialogue vital to preparing the next generation of engaged citizens.

history.org is CWF's legacy gift to the nation to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence—and is a resource we plan to continue to grow over time. Following a highly successful classroom pilot in Spring 2025, history.org has evolved into a powerful, teacher-first platform built collaboratively by 49 world-class institutions. We are now driving toward our first public release in Summer 2026. This launch will arm educators with a comprehensive, classroom-ready library featuring enough content for teachers across grades K-12 to use a unique asset each day of the school year. To ensure long-term sustainability and scale, we will continue to build content and expand our partner network, enabling us to meet our goal of reaching 75,000 teachers in the 2026-2027 school year while still reaching for market penetration of serving the 2 million history, civics, and social studies educators who teach America's 54.1 million students each year.

I. Project Justification

Addressing the National Leadership Grants for Museums Program Goals and Objectives

history.org aligns to IMLS's NLG-M **Program Goal 2**, to “advance the museum field's ability to respond to community needs,” specifically meeting **Objective 2.1**, to “support the development of new and innovative methods for addressing community challenges through partnerships, services, processes, or practices for use across the museum field.” history.org's collaborative consortium model allows us to build a responsive learning platform that hosts assets from museums' collections across the country while responding to the expressed needs of teachers. It solves a multi-faceted problem the field has long faced—how to share resources, across collections, with teachers across the country using an intuitive, sustainable interface.

history.org also aligns to **Objective 2.3** by supporting “forums that convene experts and stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields..., to explore current and emerging issues and inform the field.” To ensure the usability and long-term viability of the project, CWF has convened over 120 multidisciplinary experts—including educators, historians, researchers, UX designers, video producers, and tech and instructional designers—alongside expert museum educators and curators from our 49 partner museums. Together, these stakeholders are navigating complex K-12 challenges and exploring novel site design and emerging tools like artificial intelligence (AI). The resulting technological and pedagogical insights are currently shared within our consortium but will ultimately inform the broader museum field through white papers, conference presentations, and collaborative convenings.

Although history.org best aligns with NLG-M Program Goal 2, it also addresses **Program Goal 1** and **Objective 1.1** by “developing, implementing, and disseminating” a collaborative consortium model that allows museums across the country to contribute digital assets and adopt the platform as a

supplemental programming tool. By centralizing thousands of museum assets alongside pedagogical supports grounded in object-based inquiry, the project provides a scalable blueprint for the field. In the hands of museum educators, history.org allows a small museum in a rural Southwest community interpreting the Civil War to quickly access the collections of New York Historical, Atlanta History Center, Washington State Historic Society, and the Massachusetts Historical Society to supplement their own collection and interpretive scope, thereby increasing the depth of learning, discovery, and connection-building experienced by users. When we partner to virtually share our collections, we increase our interpretive capabilities and share more complete stories with our visitors. Further, via the data we collect and disseminate, the project deeply addresses **Objective 1.2** by conducting robust, ongoing research into how museum resources can most effectively engage K-12 students with diverse learning needs. Built upon a foundational quantitative study of 995 teachers, the project team continues to execute iterative pilot studies, continuous user testing, and longitudinal evaluations. This ongoing research specifically focuses on understanding how the integration of museum collections, object-based inquiry, and tailored literacy supports can engage struggling readers, overcome background knowledge gaps, and support students of all learning abilities.

Beyond NLG-M's program goals, history.org deeply aligns to IMLS's Agency-Level Goals as it "advances shared knowledge and learning opportunities for all" (**Objective 1.1**) through the creation of a U.S. history and civics learning platform built for teachers for the benefit of K-12 students, regardless of their location, learning ability, or reading level. By uniting cultural institutions to document the narratives of our shared American experience, the site aims to support teachers as they "support...collaboration and foster civic discourse" (**Objective 2.2**) among the next generation of engaged citizens. Finally, through our partnership model, history.org seeks to "promote access to museum and library collections" (**Objective 3.2**) across the country, ensuring educators interested in using assets from a wide array of museums can access sources and learning supports in one, easy-to-use location.

Teachers Face Significant Challenges; history.org Enables Museums to Respond

The National Assessment Governing Board intermittently administers the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in U.S. History and Civics to a representative sampling of 4th, 8th, and 12th graders across the United States. In the most recent exams for U.S. History, only 19% of 4th graders (2010), 13% of 8th graders (2022), and 11% of 12th graders (2010) in public schools scored at or above the NAEP Proficient. Civics scores are only slightly better, with 26% of 4th graders (2010), 21% of 8th graders (2022), and 23% of 12th graders (2010) scoring at or above NAEP Proficient ([NAEP](#)). Forty-eight states require or recommend that students take U.S. History at the high school level, with comparable numbers at middle school (46) and elementary school (43) ([AHA](#)), while forty states require at least one course across K-12 education in American government or civics ([CIRCLE](#)).

While these numbers seem positive, they can be deceiving. Requiring or recommending a course does not ensure sufficient or quality instruction—a 2023 study by [EdWeek Research Center](#) indicated that: (1) districts place the lowest emphasis on social studies and related subjects at the middle and high school levels when compared to other core subjects, (2) only 27% of respondents rated the support and materials they received to teach civics as "Excellent" or "Very Sufficient;" and (3) only 40% of teachers use inquiry-based instruction daily or weekly, with 21% reporting they use it a few times a year or never. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics supports these findings as they found only 10.6% of time in the elementary classroom is dedicated to Social Studies instruction ([CCCCSO](#)). Finally, while states may require a history course, only fourteen currently mandate assessment in U.S. History for graduation or accountability purposes ([AHA](#)). Together, the data indicate that students are struggling to master U.S. History and Civics content, and their teachers seemingly lack the necessary time and supports required to do justice to their instruction.

Museums, as trusted sources of information ([AASLH](#)) and caretakers of historical artifacts, are extremely well positioned to assist teachers in addressing the knowledge gaps experienced by students. However, our efforts, while valiant, often fail to reach teachers and, when they do, may fall short of meeting the demands of the modern classroom. To create a museum-driven solution to these problems, we needed better data. In late 2023, CWF completed comprehensive, novel quantitative research with a representative sample of 995 teachers across the U.S. to understand the unique challenges and needs they experience in the classroom today (Supporting Document #4 (SD #4)). We used what we learned in the survey to develop probing questions and early design concepts for history.org to gather data in qualitative interviews and focus groups with 49 teachers. Our research surfaced three explicit challenges teachers face: (1) they struggle to serve an ever-widening range of learner needs in their classrooms; (2) low student engagement results in less “sticky” learning; and (3) high levels of teacher stress and job difficulty sap energy and erode teacher tenure (CWF, 2024). Our research further indicated that teachers want short, contextual videos to share with students, they often fail to surface museum materials for classroom use, and they want teachers involved in the creation process.

Our findings were supported by [American Lesson Plan](#), a recent study conducted by the American Historical Association. The report outlines the “eclipse of textbooks,” indicating that while 52% of teachers continue to rely on textbooks, 38% of teachers do not have or never use their textbooks. Digital connectivity has encouraged teachers to look beyond traditional print materials with 76% of teachers surveyed reporting they use “free online resources from history education providers and institutions” while 86% indicate they use online resources created by other teachers, both paid (30%) and free (56%). Key to our work, however, is that teachers want vetted, non-biased, and non-ideological content—as AHA noted, “curricular products that come precoated with politicized associations can expect a cool reception from teachers.”

The data clearly indicates that teachers are struggling to reach students with the resources provided by their schools and districts. They need vetted, contextualized, compelling digital content and primary sources to teach U.S. History and Civics. history.org, drawing on the collective power of our partner institutions, seeks to create a solution.

Target Audience

The primary audience for history.org is the approximately 2 million K-12 social studies, history, and civics teachers in the United States. While access is currently limited to the 1,000 educators invited to test our Closed Beta, we are actively preparing to scale. Over the next two years, we will drive user acquisition through targeted marketing, consortium partner networks, and strategic relationships with district- and state-level leaders. By employing this blended top-down and bottom-up approach, we aim to capture a significant portion of the market's estimated 320,000 early adopters, reaching at least 75,000 active teachers by the end of the 2026-2027 school year and 200,000 by the end of 2027-2028.

To ensure history.org solves the real-world instructional challenges experienced by our target audience, teachers have driven development at every stage:

- **Formative Research:** We surveyed 995 K-12 teachers and interviewed dozens more to understand the experience of the average classroom teacher in the United States. This novel research provided three clear pain points experienced by teachers and guided our understanding of student behaviors and needs. (See SD #4)
- **Co-Creation and Review:** Classroom teachers helped finalize our Phase 1 Scope and Sequence (SD #5) and drafted all content that launched on the Closed Beta MVP. When we transitioned to external writers (most former classroom teachers) to create the content, our Teacher Advisors moved to curatorial and review roles. They draft the guiding document for every collection, curate partner assets, and review all classroom materials prior to inclusion on the site.

- **Classroom Pilots:** In Spring 2025, 39 teachers piloted the closed beta site in their classrooms, providing continuous, direct feedback that drove immediate design enhancements, such as our new Customizer tool. (See SD #7)

Although it's still early in the project, teachers are excited about history.org. Data from the Spring 2025 pilot overwhelmingly shows that teachers feel supported, engaged, and empowered by history.org:

- 89% of pilot teachers rated history.org as better than other resources they had used in the last year, praising its usability, credibility, and convenience.
- Teachers explicitly noted that history.org saved significant planning time and is actively shifting their instruction. Survey data shows that 89% of participants agreed they are now more likely to teach using primary sources because of history.org.
- While satisfaction was high across all grade bands, the platform fills a persistent void for historically underserved early childhood educators. An impressive 90% of K-2 teachers reported being "extremely satisfied" with the resources.

Please see SD #3 to read letters from five teachers who are building and using history.org.

Project Beneficiaries

As CWF's legacy project for America's 250th, history.org will be a sustained and regularly updated part of the Foundation's digital outreach plan. While we anticipate seeing numbers comparable to our current outreach efforts (SD #10) in the first five years, as the site grows and scales over time, we believe it has the potential to reach the 2 million history, civics, and social studies teachers and 54.1 million students they serve in the K-12 education space in the United States.

Benefits to the Field

history.org allows museums across the country to nominate assets for inclusion in collections curated to address key U.S. history and civics topics, highlighting narratives of our shared past as we celebrate the 250th anniversary of American independence. Through our collaborative consortium model, assets from a single museum are placed in interpretive conversation with assets held by other institutions to ensure users receive the most complete story possible as they learn about the topic. As a single site powered by many museums, history.org stands to benefit the field in many ways, including:

1. increasing access to collaborative collections and helping museums engage new audiences, especially in rural and remote communities;
2. empowering smaller museums via the shared reach of larger institutions who will encourage their educator networks to use history.org;
3. sharing analytics, data metrics, and insights on leveraging new technologies like AI with partners and to the field broadly via conference presentations and white papers;
4. offering targeted small and under-represented museums stipends—alongside critical capacity-building support through onboarding and technical training—to digitize and share the best of their collections; and
5. creating a tool that museums can use to expand their programming and interpretation by supplementing their collections with assets included on the site, as described above.

Finally, we hope that research into history.org, over time, will help us to understand pedagogical changes and the potential museums and our collections have to positively affect daily classroom practice, which will benefit the whole field.

For additional information please see the letters provided by our partners and supporters, who see history.org as a dynamic, long-needed resource (SD #1 and SD #2).

Building a High-Impact Platform that Lasts

To ensure history.org remains a permanent piece of national civic infrastructure, CWF is collaborating with its Board of Trustees and external business experts to develop a comprehensive, phased sustainability plan. While the core K-12 educational content will always remain free to ensure equitable classroom access, the project is designed to transition from a philanthropy-dependent initiative into a fully self-sustaining ecosystem that targets break-even profitability by 2030. This strategic roadmap capitalizes on the organic demand generated by the nation's 250th anniversary to rapidly build a free user base, followed by the progressive rollout of diversified premium digital tools and scalable licensing. Because the initiative is non-profit, all revenue generated from these streams will be directly reinvested to cover ongoing operational, maintenance, and partner support costs, with the latter benefiting digitization efforts within the field. Further, the project will proactively integrate advancing AI technologies to significantly lower expenses associated with content and video production, maximizing the efficiency of upfront investments and ensuring long-term financial viability.

See SD #8 for a more detailed description of our business plan and sustainability model.

II. Project Work Plan

To ensure the success of history.org, the project team adopted the Stage-Gate Discovery-to-Launch Process, a project management tool that increases success and agile governance while improving team collaboration ([Stage Gate](#)). We defined eight stages for Phase 1 of history.org: (1) Ideation; (2) Feasibility & Scope; (3) Build & Launch a Minimum Viable Product (MVP); (4) Test MVP in Closed Beta, Continue Content Development; (5) Open history.org Beta, Scale Content Development; (6) Testing & Validation; (7) Launch; and (8) Research & Ideation for future phase. At each stage we established high-level activities, assessment metrics, and key performance indicators (SD #6). This grant proposal seeks funding assistance for Stages 5-8.

Project Background: Stages 1-4

CWF introduced the concept for history.org at a convening of inaugural partners in November 2022. With their support and the Board's approval to move forward in Fall 2023, we completed novel, national research to understand what needs teachers had and if we could build a product to meet them. The data proved promising and, since March 2024, the design team (see Project Staff) has:

1. leveraged AI to merge standards from nine states to identify a clear through-line and convened teachers and historians to review and finalize our final content Scope and Sequence (SD #5).
2. partnered with 49 museums, seeking asset nominations and content area expertise.
3. developed 500 animated films to introduce history and civics topics across each grade band.
4. launched our Closed Beta website, with industry-leading search and usability features, in November 2024 and invited 1,000+ teachers to join.
5. completed a pilot study in Spring 2025 in 39 classrooms to promising results (SD #7).
6. responded nimbly to pilot feedback by developing a Customizer tool that empowers teachers to seamlessly customize lessons by adding, removing, and modifying content for their classrooms; enhancing site literacy supports; and adding additional content prior to our Summer 2026 launch.

Today, visitors to history.org can only access the Home, About, and Partner pages and see six sample content pages linked to the Home page. Additional access requires a login on the Closed Beta site. Once we launch in Summer 2026, visitors will be able to see all assets without creating a login. Enhanced site features, such as the ability to customize a source, will require the user to create a free account. Please see SD #9 for a password and login to access history.org's Closed Beta version.

Project Activities: Stages 5-8

Assuming we meet the established performance metrics, we plan to complete Stages 5-8 during the grant performance period. In Summer 2026, we will launch the public Beta of history.org. Throughout this phase, we will: (1) engage new museum partners in asset sharing, (2) build an additional 155 curated collections, (3) develop website features that respond to user needs, and (4) expand our user base through targeted outreach to teachers and districts.

For the duration of Beta, we will continue to collect data, assess metrics, and engage in iterative design. All Phase 1 content will be developed and uploaded by Spring 2028. We will then conduct intensive testing to ensure the platform meets all quality standards before the final Phase 1 launch on July 4, 2028. Over the following year, CWF and its partners will heavily market the site to educators, school administrators, and state-level social studies coordinators to drive engagement. We will continue to monitor data to optimize the user experience. Finally, post-launch research will assess history.org's long-term impact on K-12 history and civics instruction and inform future iterations.

Please see the Stage Gates (SD #6), Schedule of Completion, and the Scope and Sequence (SD #5) for more detailed descriptions of the projected work plan for history.org.

Planning, Implementation, and Management

At present, the history.org project development team includes 120+ individuals across seven organizations and is supported by the expertise of our Steering Committee and 49 museum partners. Although CWF is leading the charge to develop history.org, our intent is to grow the consortium to more than one hundred partners across the country who will contribute institutional expertise and assets and disseminate this vital project to their educator networks. Please see Project Staff, Resumes, and Letters of Commitment/Partner Letters (SD #1) to review the expertise and assets each of the following teams contribute to history.org.

CWF Team

Heather Nice, Executive Director of Strategic Education Projects and Partnerships, is the Project Director for history.org and assumes responsibility for ensuring completion of grant activities. She leads a team of four historians, a Project Manager (**Jordan Hammon**), and three interns. Nice has more than twenty years of experience in the education field, having served as a high school teacher in Texas, an instructional designer, a curriculum developer, and a museum educator. **Stacie James**, Federal Grant Officer, will serve as the Grant Administrator, guiding the fiscal management of the project and overseeing the use of grant funds through the procurement, contract negotiation, and payment processes. She will develop all required financial reports during the grant period. **Mia Nagawiecki**, Senior Vice President for Education, has extensive experience in the museum field and has successfully led large-scale, grant-funded projects, such as the New-York Historical Society's "Women & the American Story." She provides institutional oversight, interpretive direction, and strategic guidance for history.org and will serve as Authorized Representative for the grant. All **interns** who support history.org leave with relevant work experience, participating in content curation, development, and review; site uploads; partner engagement activities; and strategic collaboration. Finally, as part of our growth plan and reflected in the Budget, we plan to promote the Project Manager position to Strategic Projects and Partnerships Manager (lead for project management and partner engagement) and hire two additional

positions, a **Senior Content Strategist** (lead for content creation) and **Support Coordinator** (communications and site support).

Contractors

To support CWF in the creation of history.org, we have assembled a team of industry-leading organizations to complete the day-to-day work of building the site. Further, they will continue to support the development of history.org through the completion of our Phase 1 build. As site sustainability is reached, all will continue with us on retainer to ensure site support and readiness for future build phases.

Marley MacDonald ([Wondrus](#)) brings deep expertise in curriculum strategy and user-centered research to history.org. Her team leads ongoing teacher user research that informs product development and manages the **22 classroom teachers** responsible for curating collections and reviewing site content. The team at [Grow](#) (**Lindsey Parker, Nate Witte, Jax Jackson, and Aidan Molloy**) leads the industry in human-centered thinking and user experience design. Together, they architect scalable digital platforms, ensure history.org offers an intuitive, highly functional experience for users, and develop the high-impact digital marketing campaigns and integrated brand strategies necessary to reach our target audiences.

Sonny Regelman and **Elly Strzalkowski** ([Learning Mate](#)) lead a team of social studies content and instructional design experts. They expertly develop all wrap-around instructional materials (including analysis questions, suggested responses, and vocabulary terms) for each asset nominated to the site. Their team interfaces with the historians, museum partners, and teachers to ensure all content is approved before completing final copy edits. The team at [Clickview/Makematic](#) led by **Dr. Brenda Barr** and **Becky Jones**, produced the 500 animated films that serve as the contextual foundation for history.org. They will continue to support the development of animated films and are working with CWF to leverage our partner network to generate Professional Development content for teachers.

The [OAH](#), led by **Dr. Beth English**, oversees a team of **18 professional historians** who review all interpretive text and learning materials. This team provides vital external verification to ensure all content published on history.org maintains the highest standards of historical, factual, and interpretive accuracy. **Drs. Mark Hofer** and **Leslie Grant** ([W&M](#)) participated in early ideation of the project, creating the Scope and Sequence and overseeing the development of the teacher-created materials for the Closed Beta site. Over the next three years, they will lead the charge to build a consortium of research fellows to test the longitudinal effects of history.org on classroom practice and disciplinary pedagogies. Finally, **Sarah Jencks** (**Every Museum a Civic Museum**) brings over two decades of museum education and civic strategy experience to the project team. She helps surface and onboard new museum partners while providing vital guidance on best practices for object-based inquiry and civic learning.

Steering Committee, Inaugural Partners, and Contributing Partners

The design team of history.org is supported by a **Steering Committee** comprised of staff from Colonial Williamsburg, iCivics, George Washington's Mount Vernon, the National Constitution Center, and W&M's Office of Strategic Cultural Partnerships. The Steering Committee works in close collaboration with the project team to provide strategic guidance and institutional expertise. Our **Inaugural Partners** are the core group of 14 museums and organizations that contributed to the project's ideation, design, and initial Closed Beta content. We have an additional 35 **Contributing Partners**, who we began recruiting and onboarding, on a rolling basis, last June. They contribute assets from their collections to history.org and participate in collaborative ideation around the future of the site. See the Project Staff document for a complete list of our partners.

Resources

Work to develop history.org began in fall 2022 and will continue, at minimum, through 2028. All finances, including those originating from the grant, CWF's annual budget, and philanthropic gifts, will be

administered by CWF's finance team. Beyond the team described above, additional support for history.org will be provided by CWF's Board of Directors and the following teams: Leadership; Education; Historic Area; Human Resources; IT; Communications; Legal; and Development. Please see the Budget, Budget Justification, Project Staff, and Project Development Stage-Gates (SD #6) for additional information.

Progress

As the Project Director, Heather Nice will oversee the development of history.org, ensuring alignment to the Scope and Sequence (SD #5), Schedule of Completion, and Budget. She will work closely with Jordan Hammon, Digital Projects Manager, who created and manages shared Monday project management boards to clearly identify deliverables, timeline, and critical paths as we scale content development after the Summer 2026 launch. This information will continue to be shared with all teams, including staff, contractors, the Steering Committee, and museum and civics partners, to ensure schedule compliance and timely project completion.

At every stage of the development process, Mia Nagawiecki, CWF's Senior Leadership Team, and the CWF Board of Directors history.org Working Group will hold the history.org development team accountable to meet the high-level activities, assessment metrics, and key performance indicators outlined in the Project Development Stage-Gates (SD #6) and described in the work plan. Through this systematic, step-by-step review, the odds of achieving our goals for history.org increase significantly.

Mitigating Potential Risks

Large-scale digital projects inherently come with operational, interpretive, reputational, and technological risks; however, CWF will mitigate these through careful planning, clear guidance, and strategic oversight.

Operational Risks: Due to the size and scope of this project, we face the risk of budget and schedule non-compliance. To address this, CWF utilizes the Stage-Gate process to improve project outcomes, reduce risks, and ensure metrics-informed decisions (SD #6). Our Stage-Gates outline assessment metrics and key performance indicators at each of the eight stages of the project. To move from one stage to the next, history.org must meet the established metrics—ensuring our work aligns with project goals while mitigating operational ambiguities.

Content Breadth and Audience Uptake Risks: Data from our Spring 2025 pilot study indicated a significant risk: audience uptake and organic growth will be stymied if the amount and coverage of content does not quickly reach a critical mass. To mitigate this risk, we are investing in an aggressive development schedule throughout 2026, developing content across all eras and grade bands simultaneously rather than chronologically. We will also calibrate our go-to-market plan to avoid large-scale marketing and publicity efforts until the content library meets the minimum content counts identified by our user research.

Interpretive and Reputational Risks: history.org seeks to engage organizations nationwide to develop a platform used in K-12 classrooms. Any failure to uphold the highest standards of intellectual rigor could damage the reputations of CWF and our partners. To mitigate this, CWF has contracted with the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to review all interpretive text and learning materials and has instituted a rigorous review process that includes multiple steps with teachers, museum partners, content experts, and historians to maintain the highest standards of the field.

Technology and AI Risks: To ensure long-term sustainability, history.org plans to integrate AI into its workflows. However, our market research indicates that teachers harbor significant skepticism regarding AI's impact on content accuracy and quality. To build trust, history.org will pursue AI integration with high transparency. We will not use AI to independently generate final content; instead, it will

function as an operational tool utilized by our SMEs to streamline the drafting process before rigorous human review. Any AI-supported features on the site will be clearly labeled.

Long-term Obsolescence: Expansive digital projects risk aging quickly. To mitigate this, we have established a permanent sustainability strategy that continues to leverage the team we have assembled. CWF is committed to maintaining our current scale of internal staff, advisory groups, and contractor relationships as part of our permanent operating structure to support these refreshes and ensure the platform's ongoing relevance.

Project Results

history.org aims to mitigate three problems surfaced in our research with K-12 classroom teachers: (1) teachers struggle to serve an ever-widening range of learner needs in their classrooms, (2) low student engagement results in less “sticky” learning, and (3) high levels of teacher stress and job difficulty sap energy and erode teacher tenure (CWF, 2024). history.org will mitigate these problems by providing:

- Access to quality content and museum- and historian-vetted resources informed by state and national standards. This will include more than 4,000 assets from museums, a library of 1,000+ original animated videos, and the relevant learning supports (analysis questions, vocabulary, etc.) needed to effectively implement them into classroom instruction.
- Effective pedagogies for today’s learners. On history.org, teachers and students will find compelling learning opportunities grounded in object-based inquiry, disciplinary literacy, and historical thinking. The site will include simplified texts, vocabulary support, and WCAG 2.2 compliant accessibility features to meet a wide array of student learning needs.
- An easy-to-use site with innovative functionality that surfaces compelling, curated collections, grounded in inquiry. Teachers can create individual accounts to “collect” content and download and customize primary sources and activities for immediate classroom use.

Beyond our work to support teachers and students in the classroom, history.org also solves a problem that regularly troubles museums—ensuring increased access to our collections. By creating a single, delightful platform for museums across the country to share assets from their collections and ensuring users can easily surface information about our partners, history.org will raise awareness of these institutions and increase traffic to their sites, both digital and physical.

Changes in the Target Audience

Because we believe a thriving democracy starts in the classroom, history.org’s mission is to empower teachers with top-tier educational assets, spark curiosity in history and civics, and cultivate an engaged citizenry. While solving logistical challenges for K-12 educators is foundational to our work, at scale, we are dreaming bigger and actively seeking to move classroom pedagogy toward an object-based inquiry model. Data from our Spring 2025 pilot already demonstrates this shift, with 89% of participating teachers reporting they are more likely to teach with primary sources because of the platform.

Our goal is to invite teachers to embrace object-based inquiry as a routine tool, empowering them to effectively support all students—particularly struggling readers and those with persistent gaps in background knowledge. Finally, by equipping teachers to teach the narratives of our shared American experience, history.org will help focus classrooms on what unites us, fostering the respectful civil dialogue necessary to ensure students graduate ready for the responsibilities of citizenship.

Models, Tools, and Services

history.org brings together assets from partner museums across the country in a single, easy-to-access location for teachers seeking ready-to-use resources for their students. For teachers, it creates a

model for the implementation of and a tool to immerse their students in object-based inquiry, a cornerstone of museum pedagogy and practice. For students, the platform provides an accessible and dynamic learning experience that utilizes short, animated videos to build critical background knowledge, unique primary sources to spark curiosity, and analysis questions to encourage respectful civil dialogue and prepare them to become responsible, engaged citizens. For museums, history.org provides a model for digital outreach, a tool to collect, analyze, and share data, and a service to partners seeking novel ways to reach new and existing users.

CWF intends for history.org to deeply benefit the broader museum field as institutions collectively seek to engage new generations of digital users. To achieve this, we will share high-level data on user engagement, interaction, and preference patterns with our partners and disseminate these insights field-wide through conference presentations, white papers, and convenings.

history.org is pioneering the use of AI to streamline workflows, reduce redundancies, and maximize cost savings. As we responsibly test AI to assist in curation, search optimization, increased site accessibility supports, and content development, we anticipate leading national conversations on best practices for the safe and transparent implementation of AI in museum practice.

Sustained Benefits

Conceived as CWF's legacy gift to the nation to commemorate the 250th anniversary of American independence, history.org will serve as the go-to resource for K-12 educators seeking curated collections uniting assets from the nation's leading museums. By equipping educators to share the narratives of our collective American experience, the platform will help classrooms focus on what unites us. Leveraging the established reach of CWF (SD #10) and our expanding consortium of partners, we will capture approximately ~4% of the addressable K-12 teacher market in our initial launch phase, reaching at least 75,000 teachers and the 2.1 million students they teach. Our ultimate vision extends far beyond these initial metrics. Because teachers are the gatekeepers to student learning, empowering them creates a powerful multiplier effect: by transforming the instructional practice of a single educator today, we ensure that every student they teach over their career will continue to experience these same benefits.

Beyond the duration of the grant period, CWF is committed to ensuring history.org's long-term success by transitioning from a philanthropy-dependent initiative into a diversified, self-sustaining educational ecosystem. To achieve break-even profitability by 2030, we are working with CWF's Board of Trustees and external consultants to execute a 5-year business plan that establishes dedicated revenue streams, including district-wide site licensing and a premium instructional design suite (SD #8). While the core platform and educational assets will always remain permanently free to ensure equitable classroom access, these revenue streams will directly fund ongoing operations, content updates, and partner support, ensuring the platform remains a permanent piece of national civic infrastructure.

Finally, as we complete Phase 1 of the project, we will conduct additional research to assess future visions for the site. We plan to explore a dedicated student interface, the development of localized state history portals, and transparently integrate generative AI to streamline content creation and dynamically increase text accessibility for struggling readers. Regardless of where the future takes history.org, CWF is committed to leading this collaborative consortium, supporting our partner museums, and disseminating our pedagogical and technological insights to advance learning and engagement practices across the broader museum field.

The complete Phase I of history.org will launch on July 4, 2028. We will continue to research, iterate, and explore additional phases beginning in 2028 in collaboration with our consortium of partners. The graph below represents a high-level overview of the project timeline and concurrent work streams.

[illegible]

Digital Products Plan

Type

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) will create the following types of digital content files during the proposed project period:

- Born-digital collections comprising an estimated 1,000+ short, animated videos, more than 4,000 digital assets from museum collections (documents, artifacts, artworks, etc.), and accompanying customizable instructional materials. These files will be formatted as .mp3, .docx, .pdf, .ppt, .jpg, .png, .mov, .mp4, .qt, .m4v, or .glb and will live on history.org. To ensure broad interoperability and preservation, digital assets will utilize a standardized metadata schema.
- These files can be downloaded by users, exported to the Microsoft or Google Suites or a learning management system, such as Google Classroom using application programming interface (API) protocols.
- Presentations and other digital marketing materials produced for conferences, donor events, and outreach to our target audience. These materials will likely be in one of the following formats: docx, .pdf, .ppt, .mp4, .jpg, or .png.
- Evaluation reports in .docx or .pdf format.
- Project work files, including meeting notes, documentation of working sessions, project management files, etc. created in Microsoft Office, Google Suite, PDF, or Monday.
- Partner museums that receive a subaward for digitization of their assets will share files in one of the following formats acceptable for upload on history.org: .mp3, .docx, .pdf, .jpg, .png, .mov, .mp4, .qt, .m4v, and .glb.

Availability

From November 2024 to summer 2026, history.org's Closed Beta version will be available to a limited number of teachers via invitation. This restricted access is a necessary limitation to conduct rigorous user testing/Pilot Studies, quality control, and iterative design before a full-scale public launch. During this period, they will have full use of history.org and support our work to test the site's functionality, efficacy, etc. Users who do not have an invitation to create an account that visit www.history.org during Closed Beta will see the home page and be able to access a few content pages to learn more about the site. They will also be prompted to join our mailing list to receive updates about the site's progress.

From summer 2026 to June 2028, history.org will be open for all users to access our content without cost and create an account. To maximize reach and facilitate a seamless delivery strategy, the site is hosted on a Wagtail Content Management System (CMS) utilizing Google Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) for direct classroom integration. Furthermore, to ensure the site and its resources are fully accessible to diverse learners and users with disabilities, the platform is being built to include WCAG 2.2 compliant accessibility features. It will remain in a Beta version to allow the project team to continue developing and testing features of the site to respond to user feedback and what we learn from site analytics.

On July 4, 2028, we will launch the complete Phase 1 version of history.org. While we will continue to collect data, add new collections, and make changes as necessary, history.org will contain the complete set of collections listed in the Scope and Sequence (SD #5). CWF also plans, with

demonstrated achievement of Phase 1 metrics, to conduct additional research to understand potential future iterations of the site.

Access

To maximize the reuse of educational resources, CWF holds the copyright for all original instructional materials but grants users a worldwide, non-exclusive license to download, display locally, and modify these materials strictly for personal, non-commercial educational purposes. Users may not republish or seek financial gain from the content.

Additional limitations exist for third-party assets: CWF, Makematic, Driving Force Institute, and Northern Ireland Screen funded the 500 videos that form the contextual foundation of history.org. Users may view these films and share them for educational purposes; however, they may not be downloaded or modified in any way due to contractual obligations.

All digitized museum assets (primary sources, artifacts, etc.) on history.org remain the property of their holding institutions and are provided to CFW for use on the site under a Content Hosting Agreement that allows users to access, view, and download them for educational purposes as outlined per the Terms of Use above. Because the site provides access to primary historical documents, all content undergoes a rigorous vetting process by the Organization of American Historians (OAH), Teacher Advisors, and the contributing museum partner prior to publication.

Sustainability

While this project proposal addresses Phase 1 of history.org, CWF hopes to continue iteration of the site over time, creating a long-lasting, continuously developing resource for museums to share their assets and interpretive expertise with teachers across the country. To ensure sustainability of the history.org website, and the assets and learning materials it contains, the site will be maintained by the history.org design team, CWF Digital Content team, IT, and Library teams and our external partners in the following manner:

- The history.org design team and CWF's Digital Content team will review and schedule any necessary content updates, with thorough reviews of site pages scheduled on a 5-year rotation as outlined in our Content Hosting Agreement. To support this ongoing review cycle and ensure the site does not age quickly, CWF is committed to maintaining our current project staff and contractors (on retainer) as part of our permanent operating structure.
- Our IT team and Grow will partner to ensure seamless user experience, addressing any site issues immediately and maintaining a clear update schedule for the site. They will also maintain comprehensive technical documentation and migration plans to ensure the site's underlying infrastructure remains functional as technologies evolve.
- Once history.org is uploaded to the Wagtail CMS, we will archive our working files and assets in CWF's Digital Asset Management (DAM) system to ensure records retention.

Financially, CWF is committed to sustaining history.org as a permanent piece of national educational infrastructure beyond the grant period. While the core platform and baseline educational content will remain permanently free to ensure equitable access for K-12 classrooms, CWF is actively developing a strategic 5-year business plan to transition the initiative from philanthropic funding to a self-sustaining ecosystem by 2030 (see Supporting Doc #8).