



Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

Sample Application MH-259658-OMS-26
Project Type: Small Project (\$5,000-\$100,000)

Florida A&M University Meek-Eaton Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$100,000
Amount of cost share: \$ 0

The Meek-Eaton Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum at Florida A&M University will bring the museum's stewardship practices into alignment with contemporary archival standards by conducting a thorough assessment of their audio and video materials. Project activities include hiring a full-time project archivist with expertise in archival processing and audio-visual preservation, conducting a survey of the audiovisual holdings and creating a master inventory, developing finding aids to support research and public access, conducting a comprehensive preservation assessment, and creating a roadmap for future digitization efforts. As a result of this project, the university will increase the stewardship, accessibility, and interpretation of their audio-visual collection with strengthened conservation practices and increased opportunities for public engagement.

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 current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

Narrative

In recent years, the Meek-Eaton Research Center and Museum at Florida A&M University has undertaken a comprehensive and intentional strategy to strengthen access to its holdings and build sustainable institutional capacity for collections stewardship. Since 2022, the Center has implemented a series of strategic initiatives designed to improve intellectual control, expand public engagement, and position the organization to meet the evolving expectations of twenty-first-century museum and archival practice.

A foundational step in this effort was the hiring of a dedicated Director of Museum Operations to provide focused leadership in collections management, preservation planning, and programmatic development. Under this leadership, the institution has strengthened its participation in national professional networks, most notably through active engagement with the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture's History and Cultural Access Consortium (HCAC) program. This partnership has supported professional development, collaborative learning, and the adoption of best practices in archival description, digitization planning, and community-centered access.

The Center has also made significant progress in expanding its digital presence and improving discoverability of its collections. Through the implementation of web-based collections management platforms, the institution has begun establishing a digital footprint that enables researchers, students, and community members to explore selected holdings remotely. These efforts represent an important step toward democratizing access to materials that document African American educational and cultural history.

In parallel with technological improvements, the institution has invested in strengthening its professional staffing structure. The addition of key positions—including a museum registrar, digital humanities manager, digital publishing archivist, and processing archivist—has significantly increased the Center's capacity to manage and describe its collections. These critical roles have enabled substantial progress in gaining intellectual control over manuscript holdings and artifact collections, resulting in improved cataloging, storage practices, and research accessibility.

As a result of these sustained institutional investments, the Center is now positioned to address one of the most complex and vulnerable components of its holdings: the audiovisual collection. Building upon recent successes in manuscript and artifact processing, this proposed project represents the next logical phase in the organization's strategic development. By focusing on assessment, documentation, and preservation planning for audio and video materials, the initiative will help bring the museum's stewardship practices fully into alignment with contemporary archival standards. In doing so, it will move the institution "full circle" into the twenty-first century, ensuring that historically significant recordings documenting African American intellectual, cultural, and institutional life are preserved and made accessible for future generations.

The Meek-Eaton Research Center and Museum at Florida A&M University proposes a comprehensive audiovisual collections assessment initiative designed to strengthen

institutional capacity for stewardship, improve conservation practices, and expand access to historically significant recordings documenting African American educational, cultural, and civic life. This project directly advances the goals of the African American History and Culture (AAHC) Program, particularly Program Goal 1: Building Capacity and Sustainability of African American Museums, and Objective 1.3: Improve care and conservation of museum collections and archives and expand access to collections.

The Center serves as one of the leading repositories preserving the legacy of historically Black institutions and their surrounding communities. Its audiovisual holdings represent an expansive and under-documented body of primary source material spanning the late nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries. These materials include reel-to-reel tapes dating to the 1940s, cassette recordings of university commencements and convocations from the 1960s forward, LP records, VHS and Betamax formats, and additional legacy media documenting institutional milestones, cultural performance traditions, and public discourse.

The historical significance of this collection cannot be overstated. During much of the twentieth century, African American intellectual production, cultural expression, and institutional leadership were systematically marginalized within mainstream archival practice. Historically Black colleges and universities often served as primary custodians of their own narratives. The audiovisual materials preserved at Meek-Eaton therefore represent rare documentation of educational achievement, artistic innovation, athletic leadership, civic engagement, and community resilience. They provide essential insight into how Black institutions navigated segregation, desegregation, and the broader struggle for civil rights while simultaneously fostering cultural excellence and academic distinction.

Despite their importance, the audiovisual collections remain largely uncatalogued and insufficiently described. Many recordings are stored in aging containers with minimal labeling, and their content has not been systematically identified. Magnetic tape deterioration, technological obsolescence, and environmental risk pose significant threats to their long-term survival. As playback equipment becomes increasingly scarce and technical expertise declines, the possibility of permanent information loss grows more immediate. This project responds to an urgent need to assess and document these materials before their content becomes inaccessible.

One particularly compelling example illustrates both the national significance of the collection and the urgency of preservation planning. The archives hold reel-to-reel footage documenting the 1969 football game between Florida A&M College and the University of Tampa, recognized as the first interracial college football game played in the Deep South. Coached by the legendary Jake Gaither, the event represented a transformative moment in both athletic and social history, symbolizing the gradual dismantling of racial barriers within collegiate sports. The recording has been sought by national media organizations, including ESPN, yet the institution has exercised caution in providing access due to concerns regarding preservation risk, intellectual control, and ethical stewardship. Through this project, the Center seeks to develop a responsible roadmap that will allow

historically significant recordings such as this to be preserved and ultimately shared digitally with scholars, media producers, and the public.

The primary audience for this project includes archival staff, faculty researchers, graduate and undergraduate students, and visiting scholars who depend on the Center's collections for academic research, classroom instruction, exhibitions, and public programming. Each year, approximately 150 to 200 individuals engage directly with the archives. Their research inquiries and instructional collaborations have highlighted the need for improved documentation and access to audiovisual materials. By establishing intellectual control and developing descriptive tools, the project will significantly enhance their ability to discover and utilize previously inaccessible recordings.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the project extend far beyond the institution. Scholars of African American history, documentary filmmakers, alumni communities, cultural heritage organizations, and the general public will benefit from improved preservation and access. The project will contribute to a broader national effort to document the cultural and intellectual history of Black America and ensure that historically marginalized voices remain visible within the archival record.

Project Work Plan

This initiative represents the first stage in a long-term institutional strategy to develop a comprehensive audiovisual digitization program. Before digitization can occur responsibly, the institution must identify what recordings exist, understand their condition and significance, and establish a prioritized preservation framework.

The project will begin with the hiring of a full-time Project Archivist with expertise in archival processing and audiovisual preservation. A student intern will assist with inventories, documentation, and stabilization tasks, gaining practical experience in professional archival workflows.

The first phase will involve a systematic survey of audiovisual holdings across multiple storage environments. The Project Archivist will create a master inventory documenting format type, physical condition, labeling information, estimated duration, and preservation risk. This process will establish baseline intellectual control over the collection and enable staff to identify high-priority materials.

The second phase will focus on processing and intellectual arrangement. Materials will be organized into coherent groupings reflecting institutional functions, including administrative recordings, athletic programs, marching band performances, public lectures, and cultural events. Establishing descriptive structure will enhance both preservation planning and research accessibility.

The third phase will involve the development of standardized descriptive tools, including inventories and preliminary finding aids. These resources will allow researchers to better understand the scope of the collection and request materials for study. Intellectual control at this level is essential to expanding access and supporting future digitization initiatives.

The fourth phase will include a comprehensive preservation assessment. The Project Archivist will evaluate risks associated with each media format and recommend stabilization measures, improved storage practices, and digitization priorities. Special attention will be given to reel-to-reel recordings and early magnetic tape formats.

The final phase will produce a preservation and digitization roadmap. The archivist will research professional vendors, assess technical standards, and develop cost projections and phased implementation strategies. This planning framework will guide future funding efforts and ensure that digitization activities are conducted responsibly.

Risks to the project include material fragility, incomplete identification of recordings, and evolving vendor costs. These risks will be mitigated through careful handling procedures, consultation with technical experts, and adaptive project planning.

Project implementation will be overseen by the Director of Museum Operations, who will provide strategic leadership and ensure alignment with institutional priorities. Progress will be monitored through milestone reporting, inventory completion targets, and preservation planning deliverables.

Project Results

The proposed project will produce significant and lasting improvements in the stewardship, accessibility, and interpretive potential of the audiovisual collections held by the Meek-Eaton Research Center and Museum. By establishing intellectual control over a large and historically important body of legacy media, the initiative will transform materials that are currently difficult to identify and access into documented, research-ready collections that can support scholarship, teaching, public programming, and digital engagement.

A primary result of the project will be the creation of a comprehensive intellectual framework for understanding the audiovisual holdings. Through systematic survey, inventory creation, and preliminary finding aid development, the institution will gain, for the first time, a clear and organized understanding of the scope, content, and condition of recordings that document African American educational, cultural, and civic life across multiple historical periods. This intellectual control will directly address longstanding barriers to access, enabling researchers to identify relevant materials more efficiently and encouraging increased scholarly use of the collections.

The project will also result in strengthened conservation practices and improved preservation readiness. By identifying at-risk formats—particularly early reel-to-reel recordings and magnetic tape media—the institution will be able to prioritize preservation actions and allocate resources strategically. The preservation assessment and digitization roadmap produced through the project will position the Center to pursue subsequent funding for analog-to-digital transfer, ensuring that historically significant recordings can be safeguarded and made accessible before deterioration renders them unusable.

In addition to enhancing preservation capacity, the project will expand the interpretive and educational use of audiovisual materials. Faculty across disciplines—including history, African American studies, journalism, music, education, and public history—will be able to incorporate newly documented recordings into coursework, research assignments, and experiential learning opportunities. Students will gain access to primary sources that illustrate the lived experiences and intellectual contributions of African Americans within a historically Black university context. These materials will support interdisciplinary teaching approaches that integrate archival evidence into discussions of social change, cultural production, and institutional leadership.

The project will also support increased public engagement and cultural visibility. By establishing descriptive tools and a strategic plan for digitization, the Center will be better positioned to share audiovisual content through exhibitions, public programs, digital platforms, and collaborative initiatives with media organizations. Recordings documenting landmark events—such as the 1969 interracial college football game between Florida A&M and the University of Tampa—have the potential to reach national audiences through documentary production, broadcast media, and online access. Responsible preparation for digital dissemination will enable the institution to share these stories in ways that honor their historical significance while ensuring long-term preservation.

Another important result will be the strengthening of institutional and professional capacity. The project will enhance staff knowledge and skills related to audiovisual collections management, including format identification, condition assessment, metadata development, and preservation planning. The inclusion of a student intern will contribute to workforce development by providing hands-on training in archival practice, thereby supporting the cultivation of future cultural heritage professionals. This capacity-building component aligns with the broader goals of the AAHC program by promoting sustainable stewardship within African American collecting institutions.

The knowledge generated through the project will also contribute to the field of cultural heritage preservation. Documentation methodologies, assessment findings, and preservation strategies developed during the initiative may inform future institutional planning and serve as models for peer organizations managing similar audiovisual collections. By improving the visibility and accessibility of historically underrepresented narratives, the project will contribute to broader scholarly understanding of African American cultural history and institutional life from the nineteenth century through the present.

Long-term benefits will extend beyond the immediate period of performance. The inventories, finding aids, and digitization roadmap produced through the project will serve as foundational tools guiding future preservation initiatives, grant applications, and digital access efforts. As the institution progresses toward implementing digitization, the project will ensure that audiovisual materials can be shared responsibly with researchers, educators, media producers, and the public. Ultimately, the initiative will safeguard historically significant recordings and expand their use in scholarship, education, and cultural interpretation, ensuring that the voices and experiences they document remain accessible for generations to come.

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University Meek-Eaton Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum

Schedule of Completion

ACTIVITIES	Sept 2026	Oct 2026	Nov 2026	Dec 2026	Jan 2027	Feb 2027	Mar 2027	Apr 2027	May 2027	June 2027	July 2027	Aug 2027
Advertise Project Archivist Position												
Advertise Student Intern Position												
Interview Project Archivist												
Interview Interns												
Onboarding of Project Archivist												
Onboarding of Intern												
Archival Collections Training												
Implementation of Program Activities Collection Processing												
Creation of Finding Aids												
Research AV Conversion Companies												
Training on Collection Directory and Locations												
Draft Preservation and Transfer Plan												
Review Plan												
Program Evaluations												
Final Assesment Plan												