



Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

Sample Application MH-260761-OMS-26
Project Type: Small Project (\$5,000-\$100,000)

Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center

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

The Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center will preserve an oral history collection documenting African American life in Bulloch County and surrounding communities in southeast Georgia. Project activities involve hiring an archivist and digital collections assistant to conduct an inventory of the recordings, digitize the reel-to-reel and cassette recordings, generate transcripts and metadata of the recordings, and produce a comprehensive archival finding aid. Creating transcripts and descriptive metadata will enhance the collection's usability for researchers, educators, and students, allowing the recordings to be used in historical research, genealogy projects, and educational programs centered on African American history. The project will result in the preservation of 60 reel-to-reel tapes and 500 cassette tapes, representing an estimated 810 hours of recorded content, while ensuring the long-term preservation and access to these historically significant oral history recordings.

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.

Project Narrative

Preserving Voices: Digitizing Oral Histories at the Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center

Preserving and providing access to oral history recordings documenting the history and cultural heritage of the Willow Hill community

Project Justification

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

The Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center respectfully requests **\$100,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services through the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AMY-26) program** to preserve and provide access to a significant oral history collection documenting African American life in Bulloch County and surrounding communities in southeast Georgia.

This project supports the AAHC program goal 1: Build the capacity of African American museums and HBCUs to serve their communities, specifically Objective 1.3: Improve care and conservation of museum collections and archives and expand access to collections. Through digitization and archival processing, the museum will preserve fragile audiovisual recordings while improving responsible access to historically significant materials documenting African American community life in rural Georgia.

As a community-based museum founded to preserve the history of the Willow Hill School and the surrounding African American community, the Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center serves as a trusted steward of these oral histories and the cultural knowledge they contain.

Through professional digitization and archival processing, the project will transform a vulnerable analog audio collection into a preserved and organized research resource documenting African American community life in rural Georgia.

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

The Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center holds an extensive oral history collection documenting African American life in Bulloch County and surrounding communities. This collection was assembled over more than forty years by historian and

Willow Hill native Dr. Alvin Jackson, who conducted interviews with elders, educators, church leaders, and community members throughout the region.

The collection contains approximately 60 reel-to-reel tapes and 500 cassette tapes, representing an estimated 810 hours of recorded content. These recordings document the voices and lived experiences of African Americans whose lives span from the late nineteenth century through the twenty-first century, capturing community memory across major historical periods, including Reconstruction, the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights Movement, and the modern era.

Oral histories are particularly important for documenting African American history because many experiences, traditions, and community narratives were never formally recorded in written archives. In communities where segregation and limited access to institutional recordkeeping shaped historical documentation, oral testimony preserves knowledge that might otherwise disappear.

The interviews include descendants of formerly enslaved people, former students and teachers of the historic Willow Hill School and other one-room schools in Bulloch County, sharecroppers and landowners, church leaders, and community members whose stories illuminate the social, cultural, and political history of African Americans in rural Georgia.

The Willow Hill community itself holds particular historical significance. Founded by formerly enslaved people following the Civil War, Willow Hill remains one of the few intact African American rural communities in the United States established by freed people during Reconstruction. The community's central institution, Willow Hill School, founded in 1874, served as an educational and cultural anchor for generations of African Americans in Bulloch County.

Despite the importance of the collection, the recordings remain stored on aging magnetic media. Reel-to-reel tapes and cassette tapes degrade over time due to chemical and environmental factors. Playback equipment for these formats is also becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.

A professional assessment conducted by the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) determined that while the recordings remain playable, they show typical age-related wear and should be digitized before irreversible deterioration occurs.

Without digitization, the museum risks losing hundreds of hours of recorded testimony documenting the history and cultural heritage of the Willow Hill community.

Who is the primary audience for your project and how have they been involved in planning?

The primary audiences for this project include:

- Scholars and researchers studying African American history and culture
- Students and educators from regional schools and universities
- Members of the Willow Hill community and descendants of individuals represented in the oral histories

Members of the Willow Hill community played a central role in the creation of the collection. Over the course of four decades, elders and community members shared their stories with Dr. Jackson in order to preserve the history of their families and community.

Discussions with community members and museum leadership helped shape the goals of this project, particularly the decision to create transcripts and a comprehensive finding aid that will support research access.

Who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the project?

Ultimate beneficiaries include:

- Future generations of the Willow Hill community
- Scholars researching African American history and culture
- Genealogists and community historians
- Students and educators studying African American heritage
- Cultural institutions documenting rural African American communities

By preserving and organizing the collection, the project will ensure that the knowledge shared by community elders remains available for generations to come.

Project Work Plan

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

The project will be implemented in four phases.

Phase 1 – Project Preparation

The museum will prepare an inventory of recordings and coordinate logistics with the Northeast Document Conservation Center for shipment and digitization.

Phase 2 – Digitization

NEDCC will digitize the reel-to-reel and cassette recordings following International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA) and Federal Agencies Digital

Guidelines Initiative (FADGI) standards. Preservation master files and access copies will be created.

Phase 3 – Archival Processing and Ethical Review

Following digitization, the project staff member will conduct a systematic review and processing of the recordings. Because the oral histories include discussions of sensitive topics such as racial violence, discrimination, and personal family histories, the museum will review the recordings before determining which materials may be made broadly accessible.

Because some narrators or their descendants may still be living, the museum will conduct this review in accordance with ethical standards for oral history collections to ensure that privacy, community context, and cultural sensitivity are respected when determining access to the recordings.

Approved recordings will be made available for on-site research access at the Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center.

Phase 4 – Transcription and Finding Aid Development

The project staff member will prepare transcripts and descriptive metadata for recordings and develop a comprehensive archival finding aid describing the collection.

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

The primary risks involve the condition of aging magnetic tape and the potential difficulty of identifying speakers or contextual details within recordings.

These risks will be mitigated through collaboration with the Northeast Document Conservation Center, which has extensive expertise in digitizing fragile audiovisual materials.

Identification of interviewees and contextual information will be supported through consultation with Dr. Alvin Jackson and members of the Willow Hill community.

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

The project will be led by Project Director Dr. Alvin Jackson, who assembled the oral history collection over more than four decades. His knowledge of the Willow Hill community and the individuals interviewed will provide essential historical context during the processing of the recordings.

Nkenge Jackson, Board Secretary and Grants Administrator for the Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center, will oversee grant administration and compliance. She will coordinate communication with project partners, monitor project timelines, and assist with financial and program reporting.

Digitization services will be provided by the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC).

A project staff member will be hired to process the digitized recordings, create descriptive metadata, prepare transcripts, and develop the collection finding aid.

What resources will you need to carry out the activities?

The project will be completed over a twenty-four-month period.

Resources required include professional audiovisual digitization services, staff support for archival processing and transcription, digital storage for preservation files, and administrative oversight of the project.

The project budget also includes funds to support travel to attend IMLS-designated meetings, as required by the program.

How will you track progress toward achieving your intended results?

Progress will be tracked through project milestones including completion of digitization, creation of preservation and access files, preparation of transcripts, and development of the collection finding aid.

In addition to tracking project milestones, the museum will document project outcomes including:

- number of recordings successfully digitized
- number of recordings reviewed and processed
- number of transcripts produced
- completion of a comprehensive finding aid

These measures will allow the project team to assess progress toward preservation and access goals and ensure that the project achieves its intended results.

Project Results

What are your project's intended results and how will they address the need?

The project will result in the preservation of approximately 810 hours of oral history recordings documenting African American community life in Bulloch County.

Digitization will stabilize fragile analog media and ensure that these historically significant recordings remain accessible despite the deterioration of original tapes.

How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, or attitudes of the primary audience change?

Researchers, students, and community members will gain access to primary source materials documenting African American history in rural Georgia. Students and educators will be able to engage directly with firsthand accounts of historical events, while community members will have opportunities to reconnect with their heritage and history.

What tools, resources, or services will result from your project?

The project will produce several important research resources:

- a digitized oral history collection
- transcripts of recorded interviews
- descriptive metadata for recordings
- a comprehensive archival finding aid

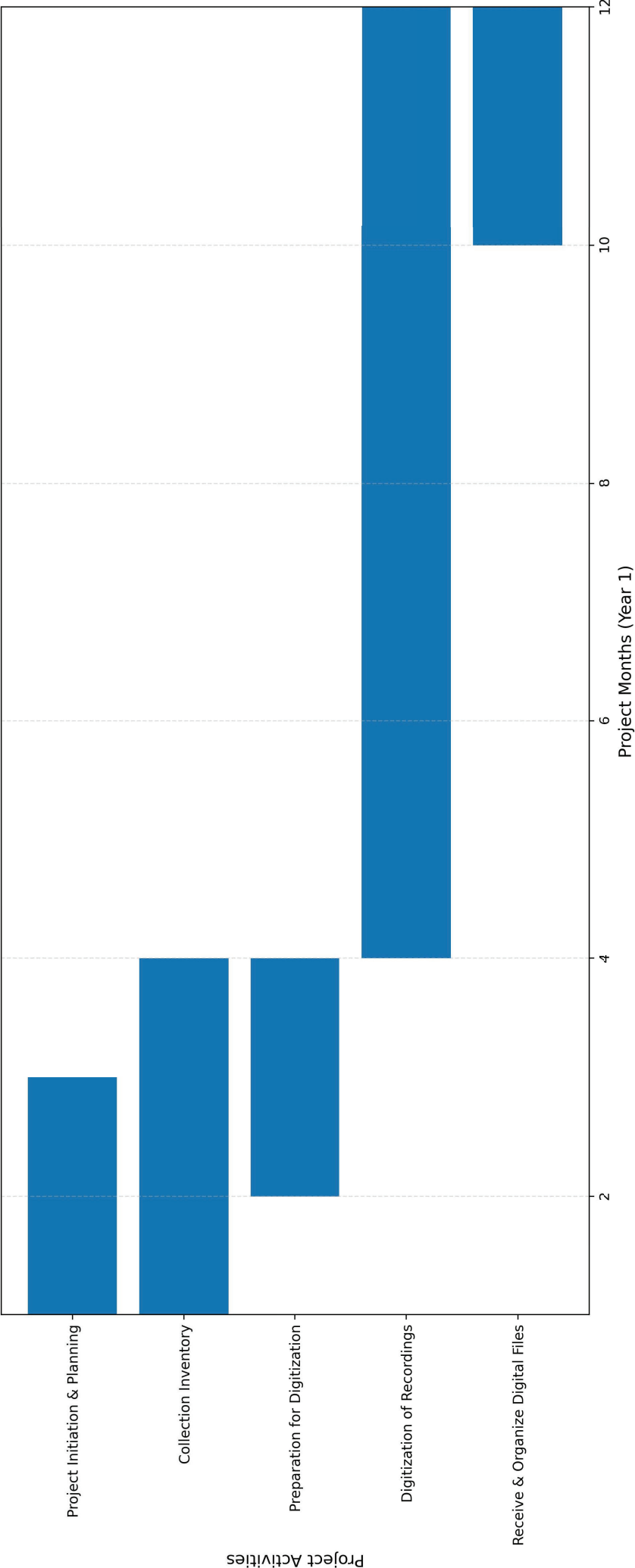
Creating transcripts and descriptive metadata will greatly enhance the collection's usability for researchers, educators, and students, allowing the recordings to be used in historical research, genealogy projects, and educational programs centered on African American history.

How will you sustain the benefits beyond the project period?

The digital preservation files created during the project will ensure long-term access to the recordings. The transcripts and finding aids will remain valuable research tools long after the grant period ends.

By preserving and organizing these recordings, the Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center will safeguard a rare body of oral testimony documenting the development of an African American community founded by formerly enslaved people and sustained across generations. Because relatively few rural African American communities possess such extensive recorded oral testimony documenting community life across multiple generations, this collection represents an important resource for understanding the historical experiences of African Americans in the rural South and contributes to broader national efforts to preserve community-based archives and oral histories.

Schedule of Completion – Year 1 (Months 1–12)



Schedule of Completion – Year 2 (Months 13-24)

