



NATIVE AMERICAN LIBRARY SERVICES ENHANCEMENT GRANTS

Sample Application NAE-260929-OLS-26

Stockbridge-Munsee Community

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$150,000

The Stockbridge-Munsee Community Arvid E. Miller Memorial Library & Museum will improve collections care, increase accessibility, and boost community engagement through improved exhibit infrastructure, accessible interpretation, and the creation of an elder-led oral history initiative. Funds will support the purchase and installation of museum-quality exhibit cases, updated lighting to better preserve and present collections, and the redesign of exhibit panels for clarity, accessibility, and visitor engagement. The project will establish a dedicated recording space where elders can share stories and cultural knowledge, addressing a crucial need for cultural preservation. The project will provide direct benefit to the Tribal citizens within its project service area.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Tribal profile
- Proposal 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.

Tribal Profile

The Stockbridge-Munsee Community (SMC) is a federally recognized Tribal Nation of Mohican and Munsee Lenape peoples, with an enrolled membership of approximately 1,800. Originally from the eastern United States, the Tribe was relocated to Wisconsin, where the present-day reservation was established through the Treaty of 1854. Nearly 200 years of life in northeastern Wisconsin, on the traditional lands of the Menominee, has allowed the Community to maintain cultural lifeways connected to land, as the region shares many of the same ecological characteristics as the Tribe's ancestral homelands. Today, approximately 650 enrolled members reside locally, along with non-tribal family members and surrounding residents, for an estimated service population of 3,500 people. The reservation includes the Townships of Bartelme and Red Springs in Shawano County, as well as the villages of Bowler and Gresham. The Tribe holds approximately 24,734 acres of land in Wisconsin, with additional land reacquisition efforts ongoing in New York and other eastern states.

The governing body of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community is the Tribal Council, composed of a President, Vice President, Treasurer, and four Councilmembers, all elected by popular referendum. The Tribal Council holds authority to enact ordinances and guide governance in accordance with the Tribe's Constitution and Bylaws, as well as applicable federal law.

The Arvid E. Miller Library & Museum serves as the official repository for the Tribe's historical and cultural materials, including books, archival collections, and objects. The Library/Museum develops exhibits and public programming with Tribal Members at the center, providing a space for community members and visitors to learn about the history, culture, and contemporary life of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community.

This project will be led by the Cultural Affairs Department, under the direction of the Cultural Affairs Director, who oversees the Library & Museum, Language Program, and Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO). The Department is responsible for collections stewardship, exhibit development, public programming, and cultural resource management, and will guide all aspects of project planning, implementation, and reporting.

As a central community space, the Library & Museum works closely with Tribal Members, including elders, families, and community partners, to guide its work. A community committee of elders and knowledge holders will play a key role in shaping project content through participation in oral history recording and input on interpretation. Additional collaboration will include Library & Museum staff, Tribal departments, and families connected to the institution's namesake, Arvid E. Miller.

This project builds on the Library & Museum's role as both a cultural repository and a living community space, supporting the preservation of collections while expanding access to community knowledge and strengthening opportunities for engagement across generations.

Narrative

Project Justification

The Arvid E. Miller Library & Museum serves as a central space for cultural knowledge, history, and community connection for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. However, the current museum environment limits how effectively that knowledge can be accessed, experienced, and carried forward.

This moment presents both urgency and opportunity: elders and other community knowledge holders carry invaluable cultural knowledge, stories, and lived experiences that are at risk of being lost without intentional systems for preservation and sharing. At the same time, younger generations are seeking more meaningful and engaging ways to connect with that knowledge.

Currently, exhibit infrastructure and interpretive materials present barriers to access. Existing exhibit panels are text-heavy, difficult to read, and not designed with a broad range of community needs in mind, including elders, youth, and individuals with varying literacy or visual ability. The museum lacks interactive or audio-based components that reflect Indigenous knowledge systems rooted in oral tradition. Additionally, limited exhibit lighting, outdated cases, and a lack of seating reduce accessibility and overall visitor experience.

This project addresses these challenges through a comprehensive effort to improve collections care, enhance accessibility, and create new pathways for community-centered knowledge sharing.

The project will support the purchase and installation of museum-quality exhibit cases and updated lighting to better preserve and present collections. It will introduce seating and furnishings that make the space more welcoming and usable, particularly for elders.

To address the urgent need for cultural preservation, the project will establish a dedicated recording space where elders can share stories and cultural knowledge in their own voices. These recordings will form the foundation of a growing oral history archive. We currently maintain a backlog of hard drives containing hundreds of hours of recorded material, but lack the resources and staff capacity to properly process, preserve, and make these recordings accessible to the community.

In tandem, a curatorial consultant will redesign exhibit interpretation to prioritize accessibility, clarity, and community voice. This includes rewriting exhibit panels, incorporating community input, and developing audio-based elements such as button-activated recordings.

Together, these efforts will transform the museum into an accessible, interactive, and community-centered space. The primary audience for this project is the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, particularly elders as knowledge holders and youth as future carriers of that knowledge. The broader public will also benefit from improved access and interpretation.

The need for this project is reinforced by both direct observation and ongoing engagement with the community. Staff have observed limited engagement with existing exhibits due to readability and accessibility challenges, and community members have expressed a desire for more interactive and understandable ways to connect with cultural knowledge. This assessment is further supported by existing documentation and recorded materials held within the museum's collections, including a backlog of recordings that have not yet been processed or made accessible. Together, these factors have informed the scope and direction of this project.

Challenge and Opportunity

The challenges facing the Arvid E. Miller Library & Museum are not unique, but they are urgent. Like many small Tribal museums, the institution operates with limited staff capacity and infrastructure while carrying the responsibility of stewarding significant cultural knowledge and materials. Over time, this has resulted in a space that, while deeply meaningful, does not fully support how community members access, engage with, or contribute to cultural knowledge.

A primary challenge is the gap between how knowledge is currently presented and how it is traditionally shared within the community. Existing exhibits rely heavily on text-based interpretation, which can be difficult to engage with for a broad range of visitors, including elders, youth, and individuals with varying literacy or visual ability. This creates an unintentional barrier to access and limits the museum's ability to serve as an active, living space of knowledge exchange.

At the same time, the museum faces a critical moment of opportunity. There is an immediate need to create systems that support the preservation of knowledge held by elders and other community knowledge keepers. Without intentional infrastructure for recording and sharing these stories, important cultural knowledge risks being lost. However, this moment also presents an opportunity to build systems that not only preserve knowledge, but make it accessible in ways that reflect community values.

This project responds directly to both the challenge and the opportunity. By improving physical infrastructure, redesigning interpretation, and centering oral storytelling, the museum can better align with Indigenous ways of knowing and sharing knowledge. Rather than treating preservation and access as separate goals, the project integrates them, ensuring that what is preserved is also actively shared, experienced, and carried forward.

Project Significance

This project is significant because it moves beyond improving a physical space to fundamentally shifting how the museum functions within the community. Rather than serving primarily as a site of static display, the museum will become a space of active engagement, where knowledge is not only viewed, but heard, shared, and experienced.

The integration of oral history recording and audio-based interpretation is particularly important. Indigenous knowledge systems are rooted in oral tradition, relationship, and lived experience. By incorporating these elements into the museum environment, the project creates a more culturally aligned approach to interpretation that better reflects how knowledge is held and transmitted within the Stockbridge-Munsee Community.

The project also addresses accessibility in a meaningful way. By redesigning exhibit panels for clarity, incorporating audio elements, and improving the physical environment through seating and lighting, the museum becomes more inclusive for elders, youth, and individuals with varying abilities. This ensures that the space can be used more fully by the community it serves.

Finally, this work establishes a foundation for long-term growth. The systems developed through this project, particularly the recording booth and interpretive redesign, can be expanded over time, allowing the museum to continue evolving as new stories, perspectives, and materials are added. In this way, the project supports not only immediate improvements, but sustained cultural preservation and access.

Project Work Plan

Year 1: Planning, Procurement, and Initial Implementation

- Purchase exhibit cases, lighting, and furniture
- Install lighting and reconfigure space for accessibility
- Design and install recording booth
- Develop oral history protocols
- Hire curatorial consultant
- Begin exhibit assessment and panel redesign
- Initiate oral history recording

The museum will work closely with internal staff and community knowledge holders throughout implementation to ensure that all improvements reflect cultural values and community priorities. Adjustments to project activities will be made as needed based on feedback and ongoing evaluation.

Year 2: Completion, Integration, and Community Activation

- Complete exhibit panel redesign and installation
- Develop and install audio-based exhibit components (button-activated recordings)
- Expand oral history recording and processing
- Integrate recordings into exhibits
- Host community engagement events and programming
- Develop long-term storage and access systems
- Evaluate project success

Project activities will be carried out by the Cultural Affairs Director, who will oversee implementation, coordination, and reporting. Additional support will come from museum staff and the contracted curatorial consultant, who will lead exhibit redesign and interpretation development. The project will draw on existing Tribal resources, including staff knowledge, community relationships, and existing collections and archival materials. Community members, particularly elders, will play an active role in shaping content through participation in oral history recording and input sessions. Results and lessons learned will be shared with the community through updated exhibits, audio installations, and informal engagement opportunities within the museum space.

This phased approach ensures that foundational infrastructure and planning in Year 1 directly support implementation, integration, and community activation in Year 2.

Project Results

This project will result in measurable improvements in collections care, accessibility, and community engagement.

Collections Care & Access – Measures

- 6–10 exhibit cases installed
- 50–150 objects rehoused or newly displayed

Accessible Interpretation – Measures

- 15–25 exhibit panels redesigned
- 5–10 audio-based interpretive elements installed

Oral History – Measures

- 15–30 oral histories recorded
- 10–20 elders and community knowledge holders participating

Community Engagement – Measures

25–50% increase in museum visitation

4–8 community engagement activities hosted

In addition to measurable outputs, the project will result in a qualitative shift in how the museum is experienced by the community. The space will better reflect Indigenous ways of sharing knowledge, through audio, relationship, and lived experience, rather than static text alone.

Success for this project will be defined by both measurable outcomes and community experience. In addition to achieving target outputs such as exhibit improvements and recorded oral histories, success will be reflected in increased use of the museum and positive feedback from community members. Results will be shared directly with the primary audience through updated exhibits, audio components, and ongoing access to recorded materials within the museum space.

The primary method of dissemination will be through the museum itself, where project outcomes will be made accessible to the community through exhibits, audio installations, and recorded materials. Additional sharing will occur through community gatherings, informal presentations, and integration into future programming.

Sustainability

The outcomes of this project are designed to extend beyond the grant period. The recording booth and oral history initiative will become part of ongoing museum operations, allowing for continued documentation of community knowledge. Updated exhibit materials and audio components will be maintained and refreshed over time as new stories and perspectives are added.

Staff will retain the knowledge and workflows developed during the project, ensuring that exhibit updates and community engagement remain active components of the museum's work. By embedding these practices into daily operations, the project creates a sustainable foundation for continued cultural preservation and access.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be conducted through both quantitative tracking and qualitative community feedback. Quantitative measures will include tracking the number of exhibit components installed, oral histories recorded, and participation rates in museum activities.

Qualitative evaluation will be grounded in community experience. Feedback will be gathered through informal conversations, comment cards, and direct engagement with elders, youth, and

visitors. The museum will assess whether visitors find exhibits easier to understand, more engaging, and more reflective of community knowledge.

Evaluation will be ongoing throughout the project period, allowing for adjustments to activities as needed. This iterative approach ensures that the project remains responsive to community needs and priorities.

Year 1: Planning, Procurement, and Initial Implementation

	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10	Month 11	Month 12
Project planning and procurement												
Purchase exhibit cases, lighting, and furniture												
Install lighting / reconfigure space												
Design and install recording booth												
Develop oral history protocols												
Hire curatorial consultant												
Exhibit assessment + panel redesign												
Initiate oral history recording												

Year 2: Completion, Integration, and Community Activation

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