



National Leadership Grants for Museums

Sample Application MG-251888-OMS-22

Ohio History Connection

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$49,340
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The Ohio History Connection will test and evaluate a community of support program model to encourage museum visits through Museums for All, an initiative through which museums offer free or reduced admission to people receiving food assistance. Based on an established model from the health care field, the museum will work with multiple community partners and a coalition of five additional museums in Columbus, Ohio, to recruit 10 “community navigators”—trusted members of the community—who will help create a process to engage visitors from the target community. The testing process will leverage activities such as community events to create bridges between the target community and the participating museums. If successful, the community of support program model can be used by other museums to strengthen relationships with this target audience and encourage more visitors to participate in Museums for All.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category (if applicable) to which you are applying.

Project Justification

The Ohio History Connection¹, in partnership with our community partners, the YMCA of Central Ohio and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective, along with five major Columbus, Ohio, museums: Columbus Museum of Art; COSI; Franklin Park Conservatory; National Veterans Museum and Memorial; and Wexner Center for the Arts² seek support in the amount of \$49,748.42 for a one-year National Leadership Rapid Prototyping grant entitled *Community Navigators*. The goal of the project is to **evaluate a community of support program model** that creates bridges between the Museum for All target community and multiple Columbus, Ohio, museums participating in the Museums for All program. This project supports IMLS Agency Goal 2, Objective 2.1 “*Promote inclusive engagement across diverse audiences.*” Please see Supporting Document 1 for the project’s logic model.

Columbus, Ohio, is the state capital and the largest city in Ohio. The 2020 census places Columbus’s population at 905,748 residents, an increase of approximately 13% over the 2010 Census. As part of this population increase, the Census Bureau’s most recent 2019 American Community Survey estimates that 19.5% of those residing in Columbus are persons living in poverty.³

A variety of thought pieces suggest museums have the opportunity to support wellness initiatives physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The American Alliance of Museums released “Museums, Health, and Wellness Compendium” detailing a variety of such initiatives in museums throughout the country.⁴ As cultural institutions continue to define their role as a community resource that supports a whole person, there are concerns of access inequity to these high-quality museum experiences - specifically with an emphasis on removing barriers to participation. As a Museums for All (M4A) Hub City, Columbus museums have been considering **how we can best leverage M4A to remove barriers to access**. We originally came together to discuss how to best highlight M4A in our community from an access perspective and quickly realized that more limited financial resources were not the only issue. We knew that the problem was not simply a marketing problem but a perception problem for our organizations.

While all our organizations do some form of outreach and community engagement, we do them as individual museums as opposed to a coalition of museums. **Becoming a M4A Hub City has helped us better realize the collective impact we can have as a coalition**. A letter dated January 1, 2021, to Columbus Foundation President and CEO Doug Kridler, stated the six museums in the coalition “... sit at different points on a spectrum to providing systemic-change

¹ As the state history organization, the Ohio History Connection is the organizational name. The Columbus site that is the Museums for All site is known as the Ohio History Center and Ohio Village.

² These six museums will be referred to as “museum coalition” or “coalition” for the remainder of this proposal.

³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/columbuscityohio>

⁴ <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/museums-health-and-wellness-compendium/>

through our service to the community. However, unequivocally, on December 17, we agreed to the following commitments:

1. Engage in a practice of listening with underserved and underrepresented people;
2. Examine and align operations and resources to support the work;
3. Re-evaluate and re-design programming;
4. Re-evaluate and redesign communication practices” (See Supporting Document 2 for complete letter).

Through this statement of commitment, the museum coalition engaged with the Columbus Foundation on an intensive human centered design sprint March 29 through April 2, 2021, where we interrogated the idea of “belonging,” how we as museums subtly and not so subtly signal who does and does not belong, and how we can do better for our community. As a M4A Hub City, it was important for us to have a better understanding of the barriers beyond just monetary for our community to utilize the M4A program. Please see Supporting Document 3 for more information on the design sprint process and findings.

During this design sprint we asked, **“how might we ensure ALL people in Columbus feel belonging in museums?”** We had design experts, content experts and lived experience experts participate. During the sprint week we conducted empathy interviews, defined the problem by synthesizing what we heard in the interviews, ideated solutions, prototyped ideas, and compiled learnings from the week. The museum coalition members listed for this project also participated in this design sprint.

Our design insights from this experience are:

1. People perceive clear indicators of what’s for them and what’s not, even if you *tell* them differently;
2. People want to be helpers too, not always the *helped*;
3. Whatever happens in the museum has to be relevant to me, opening the door isn’t enough;
4. What museums exhibit indicate who/what is important

The completion of the design sprint was a critical step in defining a local and collective museum community resource approach within Columbus’ cultural institution network, and the coalition has continued to work together on several projects. The Columbus Museum of Art (CMA) established a partnership with the Mid-Ohio Food Collective. Feedback from Mid-Ohio suggested a “membership” card for M4A would be an effective way to promote the program and offer an easier way for participants to access the benefit when they visited the museums. In mid-October, CMA hosted a Mid-Ohio Food Collective Resource fair at the museum where a variety of coalition members staffed a M4A booth and distributed these “membership” cards to participants.

The coalition has seen the benefit of collective action just within our museums and a few community partners. The “membership” card distribution outreach has received positive feedback from families and fellow service agencies eager to participate in or further share the program. Our network of diverse cultural institutions working together has also expanded our capacity to connect with the fuller set of lived experiences and identities that live within a whole person as we continue to promote our M4A initiative.

Project Work Plan

Incorporating the lessons learned from the initial M4A efforts, we will utilize two well-known models for *Community Navigators*: M4A and community of support. M4A is a national branding initiative of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Association of Children’s Museums that seeks “to promote access to high quality museums experiences to those who might not otherwise be able to afford them”⁵ by providing reduced admission to individuals and families receiving food assistance. As an M4A Hub City, Columbus, Ohio, has six major museums participating in M4A⁶. We have established a working relationship across this group of museums, relying heavily on the “Action Plan for M4A Implementation” detailed in the Museums for All Hub Convening Summary from 2019 to guide our work.

We will utilize a community of support program model to form the basis of *Community Navigators*. This model has been leveraged successfully in the healthcare field as “community health workers” and is currently being used in Columbus (Ohio) City Schools as “family ambassadors.” Community health workers and family ambassadors share a variety of traits: they are both trusted members of the community, they serve as a liaison between community and service providers, apply a diverse set of service trainings including trauma-informed care, and improve the cultural competency of service providers. This model has the potential to work within the cultural sector as well. Through this grant we will prototype a community of support program model among our six coalition museums working with ten Community Navigators.

As this is a rapid prototyping grant, we anticipate there will be some level of iteration and will remain flexible. Ohio History Center staff receive rapid prototyping training and therefore project staff can lead this phase of the project. We see three phases: development; prototype; review results. Please refer to the Schedule of Completion for additional information.

Development (September through December):

There are already established relationships between the museum coalition and with the community partners, the YMCA of Central Ohio and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective, which will allow us to start from a place of trust. During this development phase, we plan to recruit ten Community Navigators (with the help of our community partners), conduct empathy interviews

⁵ Museums for all Hub City Draft Deck for Stakeholder Meeting (PPT) <https://museums4all.org/becoming-a-hub-city/>

⁶ Columbus Museum of Art; COSI; Franklin Park Conservatory; Ohio History Center and Ohio Village, National Veterans Museum and Memorial; and Wexner Center for the Arts

with the Community Navigators to co-create the program and hold meetings with the Community Navigators and museum coalition to co-create the relationship. The Community Navigators will be recommended by our community partners and qualify for the Museums for All program.

Prototype (January through June):

Once we have established the components of the program, we will implement and capture feedback from the Community Navigators. As part of the process, the Community Navigators will work alongside the coalition to plan and co-evaluate up to two public programs based on the Community Navigators' feedback. The public programs will be an opportunity for Community Navigators to engage their community with events they think will best serve their needs. A co-creation model is something that many museums use, and we are using this concept as a placeholder, because it is entirely possible the Community Navigators will not feel a programmatic approach will be best for their community. While the coalition believes this is a promising idea, the decision is with the Community Navigators, meaning the "programmatic" aspect of the community resource pilot approach may look different than what is outlined in this proposal. Because of this, we have not budgeted programmatic costs. Feedback will occur immediately following identify components to add, changes to make, questions they have, and ideas for future.

Review Results (July through August):

As this is rapid prototyping, there will be checking in and tweaking along the way, but we are reserving this time for a more thorough look at the results of this prototyping. This will include a final report and presentation to coalition members, as well as researching potential publication opportunities.

Museum Coalition Members and Key Personnel

The chart below shows the six coalition museums who have been working together on M4A, and will continue working together on the *Community Navigator* project. The chart details the founding dates, missions and pre-pandemic annual visitation of all six museums, providing insight to the range of disciplines, ages, and sizes represented.

Institution	Date Founded	Mission Statement	Annual Visitation
Columbus Museum of Art	1878	Great experiences with great art for everyone	250,000
COSI	1964	To engage, inspire, and transform lives and communities by being the best partner in science, technology, and industry learning.	719,189

Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens	1993	Inspired by horticulture, Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens elevates quality of life and connects the community through educational, cultural and social experiences.	193,269
National Veteran's Museum and Memorial	2018	Share the stories and journey of the American Veteran in order to lead a national conversation about the impact of the selfless acts of service and sacrifices of Veterans and their families.	45,000 (NVMM did not have a full visitation year prior to the pandemic)
Ohio History Connection	1885	Spark discovery of Ohio's stories. Embrace the present, share the past and transform the future	233,248
Wexner Center for the Arts	1989	We fuel creative expression, ignite cultural curiosity, and offer unique experiences across all art forms that enliven the local landscape while promoting global connections and understanding.	250,000

Alex Ingley will act as the Project Director for this grant. While we are charging only 15% of her time to this project, we plan on Ms. Ingley spending about 40% of her time managing this program. As Community Engagement Coordinator, her role is to engage with communities in Columbus, specifically our near neighbors, many of whom qualify for the M4A program. We see her work on this grant as a natural extension of her work responsibilities. Ms. Ingley has experience in community programming development and implementation, coalition facilitation and convening, and managing neighborhood relationship building.

Ben Anthony, Manager of Community Engagement at the Ohio History Connection, will serve in an advisory capacity to Ms. Ingley. Mr. Anthony's background in community organizing, and long terms engagement with Columbus neighborhoods, will help ensure the project is community focused.

Stacia Kuceyeski, Director of Outreach at the Ohio History Connection, will serve in an advisory capacity to Ms. Ingley. Ms. Kuceyeski's background in community engagement and outreach spans over fifteen years, and she has a proven history of making space for staff to find and implement non-traditional solutions to museum issues, particularly in the engagement and outreach space. She has also been involved in all aspects of the museum coalition and is the main OHC liaison to the coalition.

The group of staff from the six Columbus institutions will continue to serve in their current coalition capacities for this grant. The complete list of staff who are part of this coalition are in Supporting Document 4.

Heather Tsavaris, Principal Consultant leading the community well-being practice at The Columbus Foundation, will act as Evaluator, scoping and leading the co-design and analysis phase of the work with Community Navigators. Heather brings deep expertise in leading equitable community-centered design projects, having led more than 20 community-wide design projects since 2019. Heather led the original co-design sprint focused on museums and belonging in March 2021.

Community Navigators are Columbus residents who qualify for the M4A program. We recognize that this is a large group of people – results from the most recent 2019 Census Bureau American Community Survey estimate that 11.4% or 51,986 of Columbus’ population include food stamps/SNAP benefits as part of the supplemental income.⁷ Our community partners, like the YMCA of Central Ohio and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective, will help in recruiting Community Navigators. As part of their participation in this program, Community Navigators will receive an hourly wage that is in line with other community of support resource programs in the city. Additionally, Community Navigators will receive a travel stipend to offset additional costs of participation. Please see the Budget Justification for more information.

Project Results

This evaluation framework is the baseline that we will start with at the beginning of the project. Our coalition members and community navigators will act as co-evaluators with Heather Tsavaris, who will act as our lead evaluator. As this is a rapid prototyping grant, we anticipate some shifts in our methodology as we learn more about utilizing a community of support program model in the museum field.

Ensuring that we are providing a relevant, safe, and supportive experience for Community Navigators’ and coalition members is paramount. To ensure we are doing that throughout the project, we will do occasional, short “pulse-check” surveys via an electronic survey service (survey monkey, Google forms, etc.). They will be built and administered over the grant period by the Project Director and lead evaluator. These will be designed to adapt the grant live according to the feedback. The “pulse-checks” will also ensure that Community Navigators and coalition members feel supported, connected and the space created by the project is a culturally empathetic and trauma-informed environment. Both Community Navigators and coalition members will also receive an initial and closing survey to track if the learning and networking of the community has been valuable, relevant, and met our objectives.

In the **Development Phase**, coalition members will conduct empathy interviews with the Community Navigators. The lead evaluator will help coalition members make sense of the

⁷ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=-00%20-%20All%20available%20races%3ACash%20Assistance%20and%20Social%20Insurance%3AEmployment%3AHealth%3AHealth%20Insurance%3AIncome%20%28Households,%20Families,%20Individuals%29%3AIncome%20and%20Earnings%3AIncome%20and%20Poverty%3APopulations%20and%20People%3ASNAP%2FFood%20Stamps&g=0500000US39049&tid=ACSDP5YSPT2010.DP03&hidePreview=true>

information gathered during these interviews to initially shape the program. We utilized empathy interviews during our spring design sprint and found them to be critical in identifying unacknowledged needs of community members. These interviews were also invaluable in the continued development of coalition members in understanding more about the M4A community.

The **Implementation Phase** will potentially focus on evaluating the co-creation public program development. As mentioned, this phase is dependent on the Community Navigators. While we imagine co-creating up to two programs, we do not want to be prescriptive, as an objective of this program is to pilot a community resource approach, not to create programming.

For our final phase, **Results Review**, our lead evaluator will help us assess the viability of a community resource model for community engagement in museums. This will include reviewing data collected over the course of the project, including the pulse checks, initial survey and closing survey. The Project Director will work with the lead evaluator to complete a white paper detailing the successes and failures of the project, and deciding the viability of pursuing this model further. The white paper will be the main deliverable of the project.

The idea of “success” for a rapid prototyping model is not necessarily the typical way in which we measure programmatic success. The museum coalition is entering this experience with an understanding that in a community resource model “success” does not necessarily mean how many people come to a program or how much earned revenue is generated. Piloting this approach and being clear on the successes, as well as the failures, is paramount in our process.

As a National Leadership grant, it is of utmost importance that our project and evaluation process be transparent, replicable, and scalable. Community engagement, empathetic engagement, and cultural institutions as community anchors continues to be a popular topic in museum think pieces and conferences. The field will be particularly interested in the results from a case study such as the *Community Navigators* project. We feel this project will continue to add to the discourse.

At the conclusion of this project, we hope to have a better idea of what a community resource approach to museum community engagement might look like, and if it is a viable option to pursue further. If so, this project will allow us to create an even stronger case for support in finding additional community partners as well as additional funding to support further evaluation of the concept.

