



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-249518-OMS-21
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

Discovery Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$110,224
Amount of cost share:	\$111,590

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/ma-249518-oms-21>

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 Justification

Discovery Museum respectfully requests a Museums for America grant in the amount of \$110,224 for *Enriching Relationships: Strengthening Connections Between Young Incarcerated Fathers and their Children*. In partnership with Massachusetts Correctional Institution (MCI)-Concord and Concord Prison Outreach (CPO), the Museum will develop a series of *Engagement Kits* to support incarcerated men who are fathers, ages 18-24, in building parenting skills and fostering meaningful connections with their children. Through playful interactions and shared activities, incarcerated “emerging adult” fathers will increase their understanding of their children’s developmental milestones and become more comfortable and confident engaging with them in richer, more positive ways.

Over two years, the Museum will prototype and refine a set of nine *Engagement Kits* containing materials, activities, and parenting resources for the thirty emerging-adult fathers housed in the newly opened BRAVE¹ Unit at MCI-Concord, located just four miles from the Museum. The specialized unit offers a range of supports and educational opportunities for young adult fathers, who were selected to participate in this program because of the established positive relationships they have with their children. As regular contact is essential for incarcerated parents to maintain their relationships, the BRAVE Unit will facilitate frequent family visits, affording fathers many opportunities to work on their parenting skills and connect with their children.

The Need

Nationally, more than 5 million children, including nearly 70,000 in Massachusetts, have had a parent incarcerated at some point during their childhoods (Kids, 2016). For many, the trauma of separation from a parent and the stigma associated with having a parent in prison add yet more layers of hardship on top of poverty, inequitable access to education and healthcare, and systemic racism—the cumulative effects of which place these children at higher risk for emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges (Peterson, Fontaine, Kurs, & Cramer, 2015; Murpy & Cooper, 2015). Children of incarcerated parents are also at greater risk for entering the criminal justice system themselves, although the relationship is not straightforward as these children almost always face additional adverse circumstances (Conway & Jones, 2015).

The pain of separation can also have a profound impact on the parent. In some studies, parents have cited separation from their children as the single most stressful aspect of incarceration (Dallaire & Kaufman, 2018). Incarcerated people are more likely than the general population to have mental health and substance abuse issues and are more likely to have grown up in unstable family situations where parenting was either lacking or overly harsh. Research has shown that parental mental health often deteriorates further when parents are separated from their children due to incarceration. However, regular contact, supplemented with parenting education, can improve self-esteem, reduce stress, and build self-efficacy (Troy, McPherson, Emslie, & Gilchrist, 2018). Incarcerated parents who are able to maintain relationships with their children also adjust better to their environment and are less likely to face disciplinary issues while in prison (Peterson, et al., 2019). Additionally, when incarcerated fathers are able to maintain a connection to their children, it signals to them that their parental role is valuable, which can be a motivator for fathers seeking to improve their parental knowledge and skills (Steward, 2014). Above all, positive contact between parents and children during incarceration provides stability and builds resilience in both adult and child, helping to mitigate some of the stress of separation (Martin, 2017). And because family support is essential when incarcerated people transition back to their communities, programs that strengthen relationships during incarceration have been shown to measurably reduce recidivism (La Vigne, Davies, & Brazzell, 2008).

¹ Building Responsible Adults through Validation and Education

The BRAVE Unit for young incarcerated fathers

In 2019, the Massachusetts Department of Corrections was awarded a \$675,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to open a unit for young fathers at MCI-Concord, a medium security facility housing 600 criminally sentenced males. While several states, including the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, have prison units specifically targeting incarcerated emerging adults, this program is one of the first in the nation to focus explicitly on incarcerated, emerging adult *fathers*. Because their brains aren't fully developed until their mid-20s, men in this age range are more impulsive, more susceptible to peer pressure, and more prone to recidivism than older men. While the average recidivism rate in Massachusetts is 33%, as many as 76% of emerging adults will reoffend within three years of returning to their communities (Creem & Tucker, 2020). However, the fact that their brains are still developing also makes emerging adults uniquely receptive to rehabilitation and enrichment programs (McDonald, 2018).

The newly opened BRAVE Unit houses 30 incarcerated fathers ages 18 to 24, each serving sentences of between 6 and 10 years—thus they'll still be relatively young when they return to their communities. Admission to the program is competitive and draws from prisons throughout the state. To be accepted, fathers must demonstrate existing positive relationships with their children—an important consideration as prison parenting programs are not known to be effective for initiating relationships, but have been shown to help sustain and strengthen parent-child bonds (Martin, 2017). The fathers selected for this program each have one to four children between the ages of 0 and 12.

It's important to note that cultural awareness will be particularly important for this project, as many BRAVE Unit fathers are native speakers of Spanish, Portuguese, or Haitian Creole.² It's also important to recognize the striking racial disparities in incarceration rates. Latino/a and Black children are two and seven times more likely, respectively, than their white peers to have had a parent incarcerated (Kids, 2016).

Fathers in the Unit are required to advance their educations, acquire job skills, and participate in restorative justice and mindfulness programs. MCI-Concord is also working with ROCA and UTEC, two evidence-based programs headquartered in Massachusetts that offer intensive support for at-risk youth and individuals returning to their communities (Perker & Chester, 2017). In addition, up to 15 older incarcerated fathers, selected through an application process, live in the Unit and serve as mentors. Both BRAVE mentors and corrections officers receive training to increase their understanding of brain development and trauma-informed care. The program also provides enhanced opportunities for incarcerated fathers to communicate with their children through video conferencing, email, and frequent in-person visits. The state subsidizes the cost of transportation for custodial caregivers, eliminating one of the major barriers preventing families from maintaining relationships through the period of incarceration (La Vigne, Davies, & Brazzell, 2008).

The Unit also includes a child-friendly visitation area. Making family visits less intimidating for children reduces pre-visit anxiety and creates an environment where fathers and children are more at ease interacting with each other (Peterson, Cramer, Kurs, & Fontaine, 2015). This allows fathers to practice their parenting skills in a more natural and playful manner (Cramer, Goff, Peterson, & Sandstrom, 2017). Research has also shown that promoting playful interactions between incarcerated parent and child helps fathers develop empathy, convey acceptance, and form deeper emotional attachments to their children (Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008).

² The current MCI-Concord population is 35% Black, 30% Hispanic, and 32% White (statewide the population is 9% Black, 12% Hispanic, and 81% White).

As MCI-Concord's first parent-child-focused collaborator, the Museum will support fathers in strengthening relationships with their children through playful exploration and communication—well known to promote bonding between adults and children, as well as support children's development (Yogman & Garner, 2018).

For this project, the Museum is also partnering with Concord Prison Outreach (CPO), a nonprofit organization that provides volunteer support for prison enrichment programs. CPO will provide guidance and possibly, depending on prison regulations as they evolve in the newly opened Unit, assistance in overseeing use of *Engagement Kit* activities and the gathering of evaluation data from the BRAVE Unit fathers.

Enriching Relationships will most directly benefit the young incarcerated fathers by providing knowledge and skills that will enable them to connect in positive ways with their young children. Museum staff will also increase their awareness of the impact of trauma on families and develop new skills for supporting them, which will strengthen the Museum's ability to serve all members of our public.

Other Children's Museum-Prison Partnerships

Over the last several years, a handful of children's museums have formed partnerships with correctional institutions to bring playful learning opportunities to incarcerated parents and their children. Since 2018, the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) has hosted mothers incarcerated at Rikers Island and their children for monthly arts programs (Valencia, 2018). The Kansas Children's Discovery Center has partnered with the Topeka Correctional facility for *Play Free*, which brings incarcerated women to the museum for playdates with their children. The Tulsa Children's Museum Discovery Lab leads monthly hands-on STEM programs for incarcerated mothers and their children (Mannell, 2020). In 2019, the Chicago Children's Museum became the first to launch a program focused specifically on incarcerated fathers. Providence Children's Museum has worked for several years with the Rhode Island Department of Corrections to bring exhibit components into correctional facilities for children to play with during family visits. *Enriching Relationships* will be the first of its kind in Massachusetts. Staff members from CMOM and the Chicago Children's Museum have generously agreed to join our project advisory committee (see Supportingdoc2 for letters of support).

Strategic Plan and Museums for America Program Alignment

As stated in the Discovery Museum 2019-23 Strategic Plan, we want our entire community to experience a sense of belonging when they engage with us. Whether visiting the Museum in person, participating in our school outreach programs, or engaging with us offsite, we want everyone to feel included and that their unique experiences and values are reflected in our mission to promote family learning through play. We acknowledge and value, as stated in our Strategic Plan, that our community partners will play a pivotal role in our achieving this goal by connecting us with underserved communities. In the case of *Enriching Relationships*, we literally would not be able to reach the incarcerated fathers and their children without our collaborations with MCI-Concord and Concord Prison Outreach. Our partners will not only provide physical access, but also counsel and support in developing program content responsive to, and considerate of, these families' unique circumstances. This project aligns with the MFA goal to support projects that strengthen the ability for museums to serve their public. *Enriching Relationships*, in addition to directly supporting incarcerated fathers, will also provide valuable knowledge for our staff in working with families who have experienced or are presently navigating trauma. Thus the learning outcomes of this project for staff will support broader, more effective service to families facing adverse circumstances. *Enriching Relationships* also aligns with the Lifelong Learning project category in that we'll be reaching audiences of varied backgrounds and circumstances and directly empowering people—young incarcerated fathers—through playful learning.

Project Work Plan

Senior Director of the Museum Experience Brindha Muniappan, the *Enriching Relationships* Project Manager, has held monthly meetings since August 2020 with MCI-Concord and CPO leaders to develop preliminary plans and goals for this project. One lesson emphasized by both our partners and project advisors is that collaborating with a correctional facility requires an added layer of preparation and training due to stringent prison regulations and security protocols. Accordingly, we have developed a work plan that accounts for the time necessary to deliver programs in a prison setting. In addition to monthly partner meetings and quarterly advisory committee meetings, we will carry out the following project activities:

- 1) Research and development of cultural awareness (fall 2021 and ongoing): Discovery Museum staff will acquire background information and skills to inform the prototyping of the *Engagement Kits*. We will:
 - Tour the BRAVE Unit to understand the physical layout of the space.
 - Gather current demographic information about the fathers in the Unit and their children, including ages, primary language spoken, and family towns of residence.
 - Participate in training workshops led by project advisors (see Resumes and Supportingdoc2):
 - Raymond Levy, Development of a Fatherhood Identity (winter 2021)
 - Robbie Pollack, Incarceration and Cultural Sensitivity (spring 2022)
- 2) Building support: Project staff will disseminate information about the project and goals to corrections officers and custodial caregivers in order to build trust and foster cooperation.
 - We will hold a family night for corrections officers and BRAVE Unit staff at the Museum in fall 2021 and 2022 to introduce them to the Museum's ethos of playful learning and to encourage their support.
 - In fall 2021, we will draft and translate an information sheet for custodial caregivers visiting the BRAVE Unit that introduces them to the Museum, explains the goals of the project, and requests that they complete a short survey or interview about the *Engagement Kits* once they are in use.
 - Because the Museum is located just four miles from MCI-Concord, we will distribute free admission passes to families during each BRAVE Unit visit to encourage a trip to the Museum after visiting with the incarcerated fathers. In addition, we will provide free Discovery Museum memberships to the young fathers' families and/or memberships to other children's museums more conveniently located to their towns of residence.
 - In consultation with our partners, we will develop a library of children's books on topics that supplement the ideas and concepts put forth in the *Engagement Kits* (fall 2021, and updated in 2022).
- 3) *Engagement Kit* development: Our goal is to create opportunities for young incarcerated fathers to interact in rich and positive ways with their children, supported by parenting information and co-exploration ideas. We want fathers to encourage their children to ask questions, explore the materials in the kits, and make observations. Our approach will mirror the one we use in all Discovery Museum visitor and school outreach programs. Kits will include familiar, low-tech, hands-on materials; activities will be open-ended to encourage inquiry and experimentation; the focus will be on the process rather than the end result; and we will relate the activities to real-world phenomena that children experience in their daily lives (see Supportingdoc3 for examples of representative Discovery Museum program activities).

Each themed kit will include materials for two to three activities, in addition to pictorial, written, and video guides, all translated into the three primary BRAVE Unit languages, provided for fathers to review in advance of their children's visits. These guides will also highlight child developmental milestones to help fathers understand how much their children are capable of understanding and doing. They will also provide prompts to help fathers interact with their children during each activity, such as suggesting a response to their infant's coos, asking "how can I help" questions or making "I notice" observations about how the child is using the materials. We will create nine kits in total, with three kits each for 0-3, 4-7, and 8-12 year olds. We will prototype the kits in three phases, gathering feedback from fathers, MCI-Concord staff, and families as we refine the activities. Throughout the *Engagement Kits* development phases, we will seek feedback and guidance from our project advisors and partners during our regular meetings.

During Phase One (fall 2021-spring 2022) Discovery Museum staff will:

- Identify developmental milestones to be highlighted for fathers.
- Work with an external evaluator to develop a Data Collection Tool (described below).
- Gather baseline data from BRAVE Unit fathers and mentors.
- Confer with MCI-Concord staff about permissible materials.
- Create text, pictorial, and video explanations of developmental milestones in multiple languages.
- Develop three prototype *Engagement Kits*, one for each age range, each containing 2-3 activities
- Create written, pictorial, and video activity guides in the four predominant BRAVE Unit languages.
- Make copies of kits and deliver them for testing by an initial group of 15 young fathers and mentors (who will also be invited to participate with their grandkids), selected by BRAVE Unit staff.
- Gather feedback from fathers, mentors, and families via survey to assess responses to activities, methods of delivery, materials, design, and appropriateness of kit content.

During Phase Two (summer-fall 2022) Discovery Museum staff will:

- Revise the initial activities, materials, and accompanying guides based on feedback.
- Create three new *Engagement Kits* and supporting materials.
- Deliver revised Phase One kits for use and evaluation by 15 fathers, mentors, and families.
- Deliver the set of new kits for use and evaluation by 15 fathers, mentors, and families.

During Phase Three (fall 2022-spring 2023) Discovery Museum staff will:

- Revise the Phase Two activities, materials, and accompanying guides based on feedback.
- Create three new *Engagement Kits* and supporting materials.
- Deliver revised Phase Two kits for use and evaluation by 15 fathers, mentors, and families.
- Deliver the third set of new kits for use and evaluation by 15 fathers, mentors, and families.
- Ask fathers to suggest ideas for new kit activities as a way to gauge their interest. Our target is for 50% of fathers to participate in this part of the project.
- Administer the Data Collection Tool to fathers and mentors who participated in three or more *Evaluation Kit* sessions.
- Deliver final kits and materials in sufficient quantity for each father and mentor to use at a rate of one kit a month for a year, as requested by MCI-Concord, for a total of 540 kits (summer 2023).

- 4) Evaluation (beginning fall 2021 and ongoing): We will work with independent evaluator Lana Hamilton to develop a Data Collection Tool to assess our central objectives for this project. Data will be collected by Discovery Museum staff, BRAVE Unit staff, and/or CPO volunteers, and managed and analyzed by Ms. Hamilton (see Supportingdoc4).
- The Data Collection Tool will be administered to fathers and mentors prior to using the *Engagement Kits* and then again in year two to fathers who have participated in three or more kit sessions.
 - We will administer a survey to all fathers and mentors following each kit session (75 in total).
 - Custodial caregivers will be invited to provide feedback about their child’s response to the *Engagement Kits* via a short survey or interview following each family visit.
 - After Phases One, Two, and Three we will collect qualitative data from BRAVE Unit staff and mentors about fathers’ responses to the activities.
 - In the spring of 2023, we will hold a focus group with our Museum Experience Team to gauge whether this project increased Museum staff confidence in supporting families who have experienced trauma.
 - Ms. Hamilton will analyze all data for this project and deliver a summary report at the end of year two.
- 5) Sharing of results: Staff will share the outcomes of this project locally and with the children’s museum field, including by:
- Holding an all-staff workshop for full-time and part-time Museum staff, volunteers, and board members in spring 2023 to share details of the project, including educational takeaways learned by working with incarcerated parents, custodial caregivers, and prison staff.
 - Presenting a panel discussion in spring 2023 as part of the regular *Discovery Museum Speaker Series*, moderated by Dr. Kaia Stern, Executive Director of Concord Prison Outreach, to share results of this project and discuss pertinent issues related to emerging adulthood, criminal justice, and fatherhood. The Museum holds 5-7 free and open-to-the-public *Speaker Series* events annually, in person or via Zoom webinar, attended by 100-200 people each.
 - Submitting a paper in summer 2023 for publication in the *Journal of Museum Education*.
 - Participating in Association of Children’s Museums (spring 2023) and New England Museum Association (fall 2022) annual conferences.

Time and Resources Needed

Enriching Relationships will require project management by the Museum’s Senior Director of the Museum Experience; time of the Museum’s Education staff to prototype and revise *Engagement Kit* activities; kit materials; free Discovery Museum memberships and admission passes; family memberships at other children’s museums in the region; the services of a graphic designer and videographer to assist in the creation of pictorial and video materials to supplement the activities; translation services; the services of our external evaluator and development and delivery of evaluation tools; the guidance of our project advisors and partners; the support of correctional officers and the families of the incarcerated fathers; the incarcerated fathers themselves; and time—two years gives us time to develop all of the project elements while working within MCI-Concord’s regulations, as well as time to respond to feedback from the fathers and their families.

Project risks

The *Enriching Relationships* project will be the first opportunity the Museum has had to work in a prison setting, subject to strict regulations. Because of our inexperience, we run the risk of setting unrealistic expectations and timelines for the project. To mitigate this risk, we have formed an advisory committee that includes experts on a range of relevant subjects, including a psychologist specializing in fatherhood who has

worked in MCI-Concord; staff members at two children’s museums that have partnered with correctional facilities; and a formerly incarcerated man who now works to support social justice initiatives and healing through the arts. MCI-Concord and CPO are enthusiastic partners who have expressed a willingness to support the Museum in creating and testing the *Engagement Kits*, including overseeing the activities with the fathers and their children and collecting feedback. An additional risk to the project is the likelihood that there will be some turnover in the BRAVE Unit participants. We have set our targets to account for this possibility by aiming to have repeat engagement with at least half the fathers.

Project Results

The overarching goal of the *Enriching Relationships* project is to support incarcerated emerging adult fathers in maintaining and strengthening their bonds with their children. With data collected at the start of the project and after three *Engagement Kit* sessions we will assess our three main objectives. At least 80% of fathers who use *Engagement Kits* three or more times with their children will:

- Report increased knowledge about developmental milestones and their own role in supporting their children’s development;
- Report a greater level of comfort engaging with their children;
- Indicate the value of the kits by participating in co-developing new kit ideas and/or activities that support playful learning with their children.

In addition, information will be gathered and analyzed by staff and evaluator in the following ways:

- Formal and informal assessments for continuous quality improvement conducted with BRAVE Unit fathers, mentors, corrections officers, and project staff.
- Intercept interviews or surveys with custodial caregivers to assess observed level of comfort of child(ren) visiting their incarcerated fathers.
- One focus group conducted with the Museum Experience Team to assess strength of applicable knowledge gained during the implementation of the project. Staff will report a greater understanding of the challenges facing parents, children, and families in underserved communities and consider new ways of supporting these children and adults.

Tangible Products

At the conclusion of this two-year project, the Museum will have created nine, unique *Engagement Kits* that promote positive, playful interactions between young incarcerated fathers and their visiting children. Each kit will include information about age-appropriate developmental milestones, activity ideas and supporting materials, and text, pictorial, and video instructions in the primary languages of the BRAVE Unit fathers.

Sustainability

As this project is highly consistent with the goals of the Museum’s Strategic Plan, leadership is committed to integrating this program into ongoing budgets. In addition, outreach to prospective future funders, who have expressed an interest in following the progression of this project, has already begun in order to build support for this initiative beyond the IMLS-funded initial phase. The success of *Enriching Relationships* will demonstrate the value in supporting continuation of the project and expansion to additional correctional facilities, as well as to other underserved communities with specific needs and challenges.

Discovery Museum: Enriching Relationships (IMLS MFA 2021): Schedule of Completion

Project Activities Year 1	2021				2022							
	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.
Monthly meetings with MCI-Concord and Concord Prison Outreach												
Quarterly Advisory Committee meetings												
DM staff visit to MCI-Concord												
Collate demographics of fathers and their children												
Draft/translate/distribute info sheet about program for families												
Purchase and distribute children's museum memberships to families												
Supply MCI-Concord with Museum passes for visiting families												
Purchase books for BRAVE Unit family library												
Family Night for Unit staff and correctional officers at Museum												
Identify developmental milestones to highlight in the kits												
Program staff develop activities for three prototype kits												
Evaluator and DM team create data collection tool												
Baseline data collected from fathers in BRAVE Unit												
DM staff develop follow-up survey about kit content for fathers												
Submit materials list to MCI-Concord for approval												
Work with graphic designer for pictorial guides												
Create and translate written Engagement Kit Guides												
Work with videographer and multilingual narrators on video guides												
Staff workshop on fatherhood identity with advisor Ray Levy												
Create post-visit survey for custodial caregivers												
Make 5 copies each of the 3 Engagement kits and deliver to 15 fathers												
Administer follow-up surveys to fathers and custodial caregivers												
Feedback from BRAVE Unit staff, mentors, corrections officers												
Cultural sensitivity training with Robert Pollack												
Revise first three kits and accompanying materials												
Create three new kits with accompanying materials												
Deliver 15 total copies of the three new Engagement Kits, #4-6												
Deliver 15 total copies of revised Phase 1 Engagement Kits												
Administer follow-up surveys to fathers and custodial caregivers												
Feedback from BRAVE Unit staff, mentors, corrections officers												

Discovery Museum: Enriching Relationships (IMLS MFA 2021): Schedule of Completion

Project Activities Year 2	2022				2023							
	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.
Monthly meetings with MCI-Concord and Concord Prison Outreach												
Quarterly Advisory Committee meetings												
Purchase and distribute children's museum memberships to families												
Supply MCI-Concord with Museum passes for visiting families												
Purchase books for BRAVE Unit family library												
Family Night for Unit staff and correctional officers at Museum												
Deliver 15 total copies of new Engagement Kits, #4-6												
Deliver 15 total copies of revised Phase 1 Engagement Kits												
Administer follow-up surveys to fathers and custodial caregivers												
Feedback from BRAVE Unit staff, mentors, corrections officers												
Revise second set of three kits and accompanying materials												
Create three new kits with accompanying materials, #7-9												
Deliver 15 total copies of final 3 Engagement Kits												
Deliver 15 total copies of revised Phase 2 Engagement Kits												
Administer follow-up surveys to fathers and custodial caregivers												
Solicit ideas from fathers for additional kit activities												
Feedback from BRAVE Unit staff, mentors, corrections officers												
Summative evaluation by external evaluator												
Revise third set of three kits and accompanying materials												
Make 540 copies of all nine Engagement Kits												
Focus Group with Museum Experience Team												
All-staff workshop												
Discovery Museum Speaker Series												
New England Museum Association Conference												
Association of Children's Museums Conference												
Paper submitted to Journal of Museum Education												