



## Museums for America Grants

Sample Application MA-245680-OMS-20  
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

### Chicago Historical Society

Amount awarded by IMLS:       \$249,810  
Amount of cost share:         \$1,475,441

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:  
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/ma-245680-oms-20>

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Please note that the instructions for preparing applications for the FY2021 Museums for America grant program differ from those that guided the preparation of FY2020 applications. Be sure to use the instructions in the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

## Project Justification

In October of 1871, a young Chicago was just finding its swagger when disaster struck. Dry winds, a rambling array of wooden structures and roads, and an exhausted fire brigade combined to turn a small barn fire into a three-day conflagration that engulfed three-fourths of the city and claimed more than 300 lives. Still considered one of the most defining events in Chicago's history, the Great Chicago Fire has long been fertile ground for both legend and scholarship; a compelling moment of destruction and rebirth that resonates anew for every generation. Perhaps no other American city has been so profoundly shaped by fire, and the legacy of this disaster is alive today in everything from the built environment to safety laws to our public library system. Most significant, the fire led to Chicago's enduring identity as a city of resilience and limitless potential. On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire in 2021, the Chicago History Museum will revive this story in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context, examining new questions and deriving new lessons to inform contemporary challenges we face as individuals and communities.

The Chicago History Museum (CHM) is requesting \$249,810 from the IMLS Museums for America program to develop and implement a landmark exhibition, *Fire 150* (working title), and related programs to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire's sesquicentennial. The goals of the project are to:

- 1) Connect visitors and program participants to the history and relevance of the Great Chicago Fire
- 2) Use historical inquiry as a tool to inspire civic and social-emotional learning among youth
- 3) Build CHM's capacity to serve family audiences and foster intergenerational engagement around historical content that is intellectually and emotionally resonant.

Designed for family audiences and lifelong learners, the exhibition will draw from CHM's significant collection of artifacts from the Great Chicago Fire, including a never-before-seen mural from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that depicts the disaster in vivid detail and stunning scale. During the anniversary year, we will further explore the contemporary significance of the Great Fire through collaborative public programs and education initiatives that promote civic and social-emotional literacy. A microsite will serve as a digital hub for *Fire 150*, with interpretive content and a calendar of fire-related events produced by CHM and other institutions.

The fire was a city-wide disaster, and the choices that were made in its aftermath still permeate Chicago today. CHM therefore seeks to bring this history to neighborhoods all over the city. We will partner with the Chicago Public Library to co-produce community programs and to host pop-up exhibitions in neighborhood branches throughout 2021. At least 20 Chicago Public Schools will participate in our Student Problem Solvers civic engagement component. We also seek to bring the city together in October 2021 by activating one of the only surviving structures of the fire: the Chicago Avenue Pumping Station. Lookingglass Theatre, which is now housed in the building, will reimagine material from its acclaimed play *The Great Fire* in public performances that weave in first-person narratives and other archival material from CHM's collection.

*Challenge addressed:* CHM's own story is closely intertwined with that of the Great Chicago Fire. In 1871, the then Chicago Historical Society had been active for 15 years when its building and nearly all its collection was destroyed in the blaze. After rebuilding from a second fire in 1874, the Society amassed an extensive collection of objects and archives from the Great Fire that, many generations later, continues to offer visceral evidence of the tragedy and recovery. From burnt clusters of buttons and a rescued doll to written first-person accounts and a shard of wood said to have come from the barn where it all started, these items have an interpretive value that has enriched countless exhibitions, commemorations, works of art, publications, and school curricula. This story continues to fascinate audiences of all ages, and it takes on new meaning with each era. Writing for CHM's interpretive website on the Great Fire, historian Carl Smith notes, "Like all the other fire commemorations, the fire exhibits that the Chicago History Museum mounted have often revealed as much about the current day as they have about 1871."<sup>1</sup> Fresh audiences, new curatorial perspectives, changing societal contexts, and evolving presentation methods sustain the fire history as a seminal learning opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Carl. "Commemorating the Catastrophe." *The Great Chicago Fire and the Web of Memory*, Chicago Historical Society and Northwestern University, 5 November 2019, [greatchicagofire.org/commemorating-catastrophe/](http://greatchicagofire.org/commemorating-catastrophe/)

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire invites us to re-examine this topic, informed by the current challenges and opportunities our city and the Museum face. The features of this landscape are fruitful and include:

**New content and methods of exhibition.** *Fire 150* will prominently feature a mural from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that vividly depicts the events of the fire (See image in Supporting Document 5). This 4 x 40-foot, oil-on-canvas piece was created as a study for the Chicago Fire Cyclorama unveiled in 1892 in anticipation of the World's Columbian Exposition. Rediscovered in CHM's collection in 2015, the piece has never been exhibited and has rich interpretive potential that will be enhanced with augmented reality activation. Other areas of the galleries will employ multi-sensory approaches that place visitors in the experience of the fire and compel them to make choices, emphasizing that decisions were central to response and recovery. While many Chicagoans have a superficial awareness of the fire, this exhibition will invite them to delve deeper into the story and make personal connections.

In addition to the exhibition, we will create an online home for the project. In 1996, CHM worked with Northwestern University and scholar Carl Smith to create the website [The Great Chicago Fire and the Web of Memory](#) to commemorate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Fire. We will select content from this comprehensive site to redesign for a new *Fire 150* microsite on the Museum's domain. The site will also promote city-wide events related to the fire, offer curricular tools, and share family resources.

**A deeper understanding of effective ways for history museums to serve family audiences.** In the last decade, CHM has made concerted efforts to study children and family audiences and share and apply what we have learned. In 2010, Garibay Group conducted a family audience study at the Museum and arrived at a set of recommendations to enhance the quality of the family visit (See Supporting Doc 3). That same year, CHM's then-senior curator and current senior vice president, John Russick, and director of education, D. Lynn McRainey, edited the book *Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibitions*, a compilation of essays by leading scholars and museum professionals presenting research and practice. Garibay Group returned in 2011 to analyze the ways families connect to objects in exhibitions. Since that time, CHM has explored various ways to apply our knowledge of family audiences to our special exhibitions, but this remains a growth area for us. *Fire 150* is an ideal opportunity to bring our extensive front-end learning to an exhibition full-scale. The subject matter and wealth of collection items support the various attributes of an engaging intergenerational exhibition: multi-sensory and multi-modal experiences, immersive settings, compelling narratives with personal stories, and representation of children.<sup>2</sup>

**A growing urgency to foster civic-mindedness and resilience in the face of crisis.** The Great Fire affected people of all ethnicities, income levels, and social status. The response to the crisis and the recovery efforts raise questions about equity, collective action, and the role of government. This line of inquiry resonates more than ever today, when accelerating climate change, gun violence, and other systemic threats test the bounds of our physical, social and political systems for disaster preparedness and response. Our educational programming, both in the galleries and in classrooms, will guide children and teens on an inquiry journey that examines the impact of the Great Fire from multiple perspectives and identifies lessons to apply to disasters we face today. The exhibition will also demonstrate powerful examples of personal and collective resilience that children and families may connect to their own experiences with struggle and loss.

*Populations that will benefit:* **Family audiences:** The exhibition will draw on CHM's front-end studies and research from the field to engage children ages 7-13 and their adults. The team will seek to meet children where they are in their cognitive development, embracing John Dewey's thinking that children create meaning through inquiry, experience, and action.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing that a family is more than the sum of its parts, our approach will respond to what we know about how families behave in museums: they explore and gather information together, they play, and they have conversations about things that spark their interest.<sup>4</sup> From our own audience studies, we have learned that families are drawn to the fire objects in our collection. The section "City in Crisis" in our signature exhibition *Chicago: Crossroads of America*, as well as the three-dimensional depictions of the city before, during, and after the fire in Diorama Hall are some of the most visited areas of the Museum by families.

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<sup>2</sup> Garibay, Cecilia (2010). *Family Audience Study, Chicago History Museum*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Shaffer, S. (2010). "Never Too Young to Connect to History: Cognitive Development and Learning." In D.L. McRainey & J. Russick (Eds.) *Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibitions* (p 35). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Rand, J. (2010). "Write and Design with the Family in Mind." In D.L. McRainey & J. Russick (Eds.) *Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibitions* (p 260). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.

Another opportunity with this exhibition is to provide a safe, scaffolded environment for visitors to engage with challenging content. The fire story touches on disaster, death, and homelessness and is likely to provoke strong emotions and probe difficult questions. In her article “*Dad, look—she’s sleeping*”: *Parent-Child Conversations about Human Remains*, Andrea R. Patterson summarizes research on how parents tackle challenging subjects in museums. Noting that parents play a significant role in guiding their children’s museum visit, she concludes “Children have demonstrated that they are curious about challenging content and interested in hearing more... talking with their parents may help to reduce their anxieties and fears about the topic.”<sup>5</sup> The exhibition will provide tools for families to have these conversations and present the fire as a source of inspiration for personal and collective resilience.

Elementary school groups and teachers: The project will benefit the more than 50,000 K—8 students who visit the Museum annually, particularly children in grades 3—4 who study the Great Fire as part of their social studies curriculum. We will also launch an in-school initiative called *Student Problem Solvers: Design Thinking for Community Change* in fifth to eighth grade classrooms at 20 Chicago Public Schools. Approximately 500 students and their teachers will benefit from inquiry-based learning that draws on lessons from the Great Fire and offers an opportunity to engage in informed action. This cross-disciplinary program weaves together history, STEM, civic engagement, and social-emotional learning. We will select among schools on Chicago’s south and west sides in communities of color, where the need for civic empowerment programming is high.

Lifelong learners: Our partnership with the Chicago Public Library (CPL) will allow us to reach new audiences of all ages in neighborhoods throughout Chicago. The story of the fire and the city’s remarkable recovery figures prominently in Chicagoans’ collective imagination and civic pride. Pop-up exhibitions at as many as 81 local library branches will bring some of the content of *Fire 150* to all ends of the city while promoting the exhibition at CHM. Still in the early planning stage, other public events with the library may include dramatic readings, themed activities in the [YOUmedia](#) teen maker-spaces, and panel discussions. On the weekend of the anniversary in October 2021, CHM hopes to bring Chicagoans of all ages together at Lookingglass Theatre for a powerful site-specific commemorative performance and program. At least one additional performance will occur on-site at CHM in 2021.

*How will your project advance your institution’s strategic plan and align with the Lifelong Learners category?* CHM’s mission is to share Chicago’s stories, serving as a hub of scholarship and learning, inspiration and civic engagement. *Fire 150* perfectly reflects each component: the Great Fire is perhaps the most “Chicago” story of all, the Museum will serve as the central institution for commemoration of the sesquicentennial, and civic engagement is at the heart of our planned education programming. Our “Stepping Up to Serve Chicago” strategic plan identifies expanding civic education as its first pillar. The proposed project’s classroom-based strategies build civic engagement among 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> graders, using the fire story as an anchor to examine disaster response and recovery and to design solutions to today’s threats, like climate change and gun violence. Families and visitors on field trips will consider questions and make choices related to civic concepts, like city planning and equitable distribution of resources. *Fire 150* supports many of IMLS’s stated objectives, primarily the integration of inquiry-based learning methods and continuous learning for families with diverse backgrounds and needs. Our partnerships with CPL and Chicago Public Schools promote equitable access to our resources, diversify our audience, and extend community engagement.

Project Work Plan Activities include:

**1. An exhibition that uses objects and interactives to immerse visitors in the story of the Great Fire and compels contemporary and personal connections.** The experience will place visitors in Chicago just before, during, and in the years following the Great Fire, a period of dramatic transformation that will be brought to life in the galleries through fascinating artifacts, personal narratives, and theatrical components. We will work with [Manual Cinema](#), a renowned local theater and film company that creates original animated interpretive material. They will produce short videos that use shadow puppetry, paper cut-outs, and immersive music and sound design to imaginatively present moments, memories, and spaces from the fire (see Supporting Doc 2). Visitors will make emotional and historical connections with the stories and decisions that came out of this iconic event.

The interpretive approach is both thematic and chronological, with an experience that unfolds in five sections:

- The Wooden City is an introductory section on Chicago before the fire. Visitors will encounter a crowded, mostly wooden sprawl of buildings and roads that turned the town into a tinderbox in the dry fall of 1871.

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<sup>5</sup> Patterson, Andrea R. (2007) “Dad look, she’s sleeping”: Parent–Child Conversations about Human Remains, *Visitor Studies*, 10:1, 55-72, DOI:10.1080/10645570701263453

- In *The Divided City*, guests enter the home of Patrick and Catherine O’Leary, looking out to their barn where the fire began on the night of Sunday, October 8, 1871. The Irish O’Learys bore the blame for starting the blaze, easily scapegoated at a time when nativist sentiments led to the marginalization of immigrants. Seeing things from the O’Learys point of view will prime visitors for an empathetic response and spur connections to contemporary social divisions.
- *The Burning City* simulates the experience of fleeing the fire as it overtook the city. This immersive gallery will feature animation and artifacts to re-create the experience from multiple perspectives: prisoners viewing the fire from their basement jail, panicked Chicagoans crossing the Chicago River on a crowded bridge, and ill-equipped fire fighters rushing into the inferno. Here, the mural that was the study for the Chicago Fire cyclorama is displayed in the round and activated on tablet devices with augmented reality created with Balance Studios. (see Supporting Doc 2).
- *The Tent City* explores the aftermath of the fire and the decisions made in response. It sparks critical inquiry into what happens when recovery efforts are left to the wealthy and well-connected. Who was deemed worthy of charity, and how were resources distributed? Audiences will be prompted to make connections with how we respond to disasters today and how disaster politics have shaped inequities.
- *The Rebuilt City* takes visitors through the city’s rise from the literal ashes, culminating with the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition – Chicago’s proof to the world of its remarkable recovery.

Throughout the exhibition, visitors will confront tragedy and resilience as they experience the chaos of the fire, hear personal survival stories, and place themselves in the aftermath, when 100,000 people were left homeless. Lurie Center for Childhood Resilience will provide the experience team with training and tools to bring a trauma-informed approach to this challenging content in a way that empowers children and families.

## **2. Education initiatives that bring inquiry-based and social-emotional learning (SEL) to CHM’s galleries and to 20 Chicago Public Schools classrooms.**

CHM’s education team is designing multi-faceted programming that leverages the Great Fire as a story that has appeal and familiarity to young audiences. Activities will support three goals that reveal how history knowledge is an anchor for building crucial competencies among today’s youth:

- 1) Cultivate an understanding of the importance of disaster preparedness and resilience among children. According to the *Journal of Education and Health Promotion* article “The Importance of Education on Disasters and Emergencies,” awareness and adequate understanding of risk positively affect people’s disaster readiness, response, and recovery<sup>6</sup>.
- 2) Build students’ awareness of their own agency in analyzing and solving societal problems, particularly those related to nature and people-made disasters. We draw from Illinois Social Science Standards to develop learning approaches that are rooted in inquiry and culminate in informed action. This aligns with the Chicago Public Schools strategic plan, which encourages “students to be critical thinkers and communicators who know how to analyze the past and its impact on the present and take meaningful action for the greater good.”<sup>7</sup>
- 3) Promote social-emotional wellness and resilience, using the stories of the fire to evoke empathy and demonstrate our collective and personal capacity for recovery from difficult times. Guided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, our education approach for *Fire 150* will emphasize three core competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, and responsible decision-making.<sup>8</sup>

We will pursue the above goals through the following platforms:

School Partnerships. In the 2020-21 school year, *Student Problem Solvers: Design Thinking for Community Change* (SPS) will connect young people to the story and lessons of the Great Fire. Looking at the themes of resilience and disaster response, students in 5<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> grades will embark on a design thinking process that culminates in informed action. Teachers, with the support of Museum staff, will guide students to identify disasters of today, either nature or people-made, and explore solutions to addressing them. Students will be empowered to launch inquiries into

<sup>6</sup> Torani, Sogand et al. “The importance of education on disasters and emergencies: A review article.” *Journal of education and health promotion* vol. 8 85. 24 Apr. 2019, doi:10.4103/jehp.jehp\_262\_18

<sup>7</sup> “Success Starts Here: A New Five-Year Vision for Chicago Public Schools.” Chicago Public Schools. 5 November 2019, [https://cps.edu/About\\_CPS/vision/Documents/Vision19\\_Booklet\\_English\\_Spreads.pdf](https://cps.edu/About_CPS/vision/Documents/Vision19_Booklet_English_Spreads.pdf) p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> “What is SEL?” Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). 5 November 2019, <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>

issues that are relevant to their lives and to present their own solutions in the form of physical models, digital media, or graphic design. Projects will be shared at a culminating expo, staffed with skills-based volunteers who will offer students constructive feedback. SPS will take place over 8-10 weeks in 20 Chicago Public Schools classrooms and include a Museum visit. Each classroom will have the opportunity to extend the process by selecting one project to implement in the real world; they will receive a stipend and curricular resources to guide their efforts. Student work will be on display at the Museum and on the *Fire 150* microsite.

Supported field trip experiences. Each year, more than 50,000 visitors come to CHM as part of a school group. Students in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades compose 42 percent of this number, as the visit supports the local history they are learning in the classroom. For *Fire 150*, we will enhance the field trip experience through a newly conceived Great Chicago Fire activity cart. Through physical manipulatives and digital media that draw from CHM's collection, students will analyze the choices of everyday people and government officials and see the effects those choices had on individuals and the built environment. CHM's education staff and volunteers will guide students at the cart to explore the inequitable impact of disasters and consider how lessons from the past can apply to disaster response today. Field trips will be further supported through a Learning Guide offered as a free downloadable PDF in Spanish and English. Geared to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades, the guide will offer pre-visit inquiry prompts and artifact analysis; an on-site discovery kit that engages students in visual thinking strategies, role-play, and team-building activities; and post-visit classroom activities that apply history learning to current civic issues.

Teacher development and tools. Chicago area teachers will be invited to a three-session professional development seminar. Two sessions will be onsite, exploring the exhibition, modeling learning strategies from the Learning Guide, and attending presentations by the curator and an SEL facilitator. The final session will be a city tour that explores the legacy of the fire in our built environment. Additionally, we will offer a Teacher Book Club centered on a fire-related work for young people. Teachers will attend an on-site session for historical context, discuss the book and share resources online via Basecamp, and gather again to engage in hands-on teaching strategies. SPS teachers will attend a session that introduces them to the design-thinking program and its resources.

**3. Public programming that commemorates the history of the Great Fire in neighborhoods throughout Chicago.** We will partner with the Chicago Public Library (CPL) to extend our audience for *Fire 150*, with public programs and a pop-up panel exhibition in as many as 81 neighborhood branches. CPL itself was born out of the Great Fire, established with the "English Book Donation" spearheaded by prominent Londoners to aid the ravaged Chicago. On the verge of their own sesquicentennial, they are eager to work with us on this commemoration. Planning is in its early stages, and programming possibilities include dramatic readings, panel discussions, teen digital media initiatives, and presentations surrounding CPL's *One Book, One Chicago* citywide book club. Our other identified partner, Lookingglass Theatre, also has connections to the Great Fire, as it is housed in one of the only surviving structures, the Chicago Avenue Pumping Station. We envision activating that site with Lookingglass company members reviving content from their acclaimed play *The Great Fire*, as well as readings of personal survival narratives and other archives from the event. Our partnerships will be mutually beneficial, with each entity sharing expertise and resources and engaging in cross-institutional marketing and audience development.

**4. A digital hub with interpretive content, curricular tools, and a calendar of fire-related events happening throughout the city.** CHM will develop an exhibition-specific microsite on [www.chicagohistory.org](http://www.chicagohistory.org) that will be rich with fire history and imagery, interactive content, and educator resources. We will invite all organizations that are planning fire-related events to populate a community programming calendar, resulting in a central digital hub for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Interactive content on the site will include: narrated personal accounts written by fire survivors; an interactive map of the fire through the location-based digital storytelling app, [Vamonde](#); and access to CHM's archival materials and images of the fire. Family resources might include book lists from CPL, social-emotional tools from the Lurie Center, and other partner contributions.

**5. Evaluation.** Prior to the start of the grant period, we will work with Lindsay Maldonado, Ph.D., a specialist in child development and family learning in museum environments. She will help build staff capacity for planning for family audiences through a guided training, then work with the team to develop a front-end evaluation instrument. The evaluation methods will draw from the body of child and family-centered techniques that accommodate diverse perspectives and developmental levels. These learnings, in concert with conversations and expertise of the Lurie Center, will help to shape both messaging and experiences in the very earliest phases of exhibition planning.

During the design development phase, we will re-enlist Cecilia Garibay of Garibay Group to conduct a formative assessment specific to the *Fire 150* exhibition. With the family study and object studies she previously led for CHM as a basis, she will work iteratively with the design team to evaluate specific concepts and approaches. Prototypes of media, object experiences, interactives, and label copy will be part of the scope of formative assessment, so that the team can finely tune each component for maximum family engagement. Investing heavily in formative evaluation will allow CHM to truly shape the exhibition experiences around the needs of the audience.

At the close of the grant period, Dr. Maldonado will work with the team to develop child and family appropriate summative evaluation instruments to assess the efficacy of the exhibition on meeting the intended outcomes. The tools will draw from techniques successfully used to measure engagement for this target audience, such as analysis of child drawings, family interviews, observations, and other interactive and participatory methods.

*Project maturity level:* This project rests on a deep foundation of institutional expertise about the Great Fire, a vast collection of artifacts and archives on the subject matter, and extensive front-end research on family and school audiences. The various *Fire 150* platforms are in the early stages of development. We have committed partners, an exhibition framework (See Supporting Doc 4), and research-based education strategies, but much planning remains. We intend to use the two-year grant period for both planning and implementation activities.

*Project team:* Kristen Nesbitt, chief strategic initiatives officer at CHM, will coordinate this project. Charles Bethea, director of collections and curatorial affairs and Julius Jones, assistant curator, will manage curatorial work. Tamara Biggs, director of exhibitions, and Dan Oliver, senior exhibition designer, will plan and implement the exhibition experience, working with CHM’s collections staff, preparators, mount-makers, and graphic designers. Exhibitions staff will work with Balance Studios on augmented reality and Manual Cinema on immersive animation. Nancy Villafranca, director of education, and Heidi Moisan, school programs manager, will plan and implement the Student Problem Solvers initiative and create the field trip experience for the exhibition. Ms. Villafranca will also oversee our public programs. She will work with Mary Ellen Messner, deputy commissioner at the Chicago Public Library and Andrew White, director of community engagement at Lookingglass Theatre for our two primary programming strategies. Marketing manager, Laura Cusick, and director of publications, Rosemary Adams, will manage the microsite’s design, development, and events calendar. External advisors include scholar Carl Smith, family learning expert Lindsay Maldonado, trauma experts from Lurie Center, and evaluator Garibay Group.

*Sequence of activities*

Dec 2019 – Aug 2020 <i>Pre-grant period</i>	Curatorial research; conceptual and schematic design for exhibition; front-end evaluation and staff enrichment; website planning; conservation of the cyclorama study painting
Sept 2020 – March 2021	Microsite goes live; Student Problem Solvers (SPS) program is implemented; activity cart under development; program planning with CPL and Lookingglass; formative evaluation; consulting with Lurie Center; ongoing exhibition development
April 2021 – Aug 2021	SPS culminating expo and action projects; activity cart testing; curricular resource development; production and launch of pop-up exhibition; public programs launch; professional development with Lurie Center; exhibition fabrication and installation
Sept 2021 – Aug 2022	Exhibition opens; field trip experiences launch, curricular resources go live; Lookingglass partner event/fire anniversary; pop-up exhibitions continue; summative evaluation

*Risks to the project:* *Fire 150* will be a landmark project at CHM, on a scale that is fitting for a major anniversary of a pivotal event in Chicago history. The risks lie mainly in the complexity of a multi-platform project that cuts across Museum departments and involves external partners. Project director Kristen Nesbitt is our chief strategic initiatives officer, a new position at CHM that was created to manage museum-wide efforts like this. She has extensive experience guiding museum projects from concept to completion. We have enthusiastic commitments from our carefully selected program partners and have built in enough flexibility in our early planning to allow all parties to adapt to shared ideas and resources. Including pre-grant activity, the work plan spans nearly three years and provides ample time to complete our objectives and assess impact. Another risk is integrating challenging content into the exhibition in a way that is sensitive to visitors who have experienced trauma and inspires fruitful conversations among families. We will build our capacity to produce such content through our partnership with the Lurie Center and through front-end and formative work.

*Resources:* The project requires support from all Museum departments. To fund the full budget of the project, CHM will apply for grants from diverse sources, focusing on Chicago companies that support hometown projects and foundations that prioritize civic and social-emotional initiatives. CHM has a proposal pending with the NEA to conserve the mural pre-grant period. We will rely on our extensive connections with other cultural institutions to share their events on our online calendar and promote the project.

*Tracking progress and sharing results:* We will engage Dr. Lindsay Maldonado to design assessment instruments that use child and family-appropriate techniques. Exhibition staff will collect data at various intervals during the exhibition's run. Education initiatives will be measured with a variety of staff-implemented tools, including teacher surveys, student project statements, student project review cards, and student surveys. Public programs will use audience surveys. We will also monitor analytics on the microsite. CHM believes in sharing what we learn with stakeholders and peer institutions. In addition to grant reports and internal meetings, we will bring our evaluative findings to our partner organizations and to professional conferences, if invited. We will specifically focus on learnings from serving family audiences, integrating challenging content, and collaborative programming.

### Project Results

*Fire 150* is slated to run from October 2021—September 2024 and will be visited by an estimated 600,000 people. The following are project goals and corresponding outcomes reflecting changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes:

1. *Connect visitors and program participants to the history and relevance of the Great Chicago Fire.*
  - Visitors and program participants will increase their knowledge of the fire and its key role in Chicago's history.
  - Audiences will improve their understanding of how communities respond to disasters and how knowledge of historical disasters can apply to contemporary preparedness and response.
2. *Use historical inquiry as a tool to inspire civic and social-emotional learning (SEL) among youth.*
  - Students and visitors will improve SEL competencies related to social-awareness and relationship skills as they engage in learning strategies that promote empathy, appreciation of diversity, communication, and teamwork.
  - Teachers will gain strategies for using historical inquiry to engage students in civic learning.
  - Students will improve their ability to apply design thinking, research, and inquiry as tools for solving civic problems that are important to them.
  - Students will gain confidence in their ability to ideate solutions and share their ideas with others.
3. *Build CHM's capacity to serve family audiences and foster intergenerational engagement around historical content that is intellectually and emotionally resonant.*
  - CHM's experience team for the project will learn and apply child and family-centered techniques that accommodate diverse perspectives and developmental levels in the exhibition.
  - CHM will learn trauma-informed approaches to presenting challenging content in exhibitions and programs.
  - Visiting families will glean lessons from the fire that they can apply to their own experiences.
  - Visiting families will see the exhibition as an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations about disasters, inequity, death, and other challenging topics.

Tangible products include: an immersive exhibition; an activity cart; pop-up exhibitions for display in neighborhood libraries; a microsite with interpretive, educational, archival, and events-related content; a Learning Guide for school groups; a design-thinking curriculum for classrooms; and front-end and summative evaluation instruments.

*Sustained benefits:* *Fire 150* will build CHM's capacity to address the needs of family visitors in designing exhibitions, preparing us for future family-oriented projects and building our audience. We will also apply new trauma-informed knowledge to other Museum work, particularly efforts that focus on Chicago communities that have been marginalized. The fire will endure as a high-interest story among our visitors, and aspects of the exhibition may be repurposed as permanent installations. We will continue to use the fire activity cart with school visitors, and the Learning Guide will remain as a rich toolkit for teachers. Finally, we look forward to a sustained partnership with the Chicago Public Library to bring our resources even further into communities.



Year One													
Category	Activities	20-Sept	20-Oct	20-Nov	21-Dec	21-Jan	21-Feb	21-Mar	21-Apr	21-May	21-Jun	21-Jul	21-Aug
Website	Development and implementation of Fire web microsite												
Website	Website live / events updated and content shared												
School/Teacher Programs	Student Problem Solvers Program – Prof Development session for educators												
School/Teacher Programs	Design Thinking projects and inquiries, CHM museum and classroom visits for Student Problem Solvers												
School/Teacher Programs	Student Problem Solvers Culminating Expo; Action Plan stipends requested and implemented												
School/Teacher Programs	Student Problem Solvers Work implemented into exhibition												
School/Teacher Programs	Activity Cart development and testing												
School/Teacher Programs	Chicago Fire learning guide and curricular resources developed												
Public programs	Public program planning with partners (CPL, Lookingglass)												
Public Programs	Pop-Up exhibitions for library branches developed and produced												
Public programs	Public programs launch and implementation												
Public Programs	Pop-Up exhibitions go live in library branches												
Evaluation and Training	Formative evaluation for exhibition; ongoing partnership and collaboration with Lurie Center for Childhood Resilience												
Evaluation and training	Staff PD/capacity building with Center for Childhood Resilience												
Exhibition Planning	Exhibition Design Development												
Exhibition Planning	Exhibition media production												
Exhibition Planning	Exhibition Construction Documents and Bidding												
Exhibition Planning	Exhibition Fabrication												
Exhibition Planning	Exhibition Installation												
Year Two													

