



Museums Empowered

Sample Application ME-245361-OMS-20
Project Category: Organizational Management

Seattle Art Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$215,060
Amount of cost share:	\$302,643

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:
<https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/me-245361-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 Empowered 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.

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Narrative

1. Project Justification

What do you propose to do?

The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) requests \$215,060 in funding over three years to facilitate a new interpretation planning approach that aligns the in-gallery visitor experience with the museum's core values of equity and engagement. The *Connected Content Plan* (CCP) will be guided by a cross-divisional team representing leadership and frontline staff including: Curatorial, Education & Public Engagement, Museum Services, Communications, Admissions, Development, and Technology. Past and current exhibition community advisors will be important partners throughout the plan's implementation.

The *Connected Content Plan* will primarily address the exhibition planning process that currently drives the majority of budget allocation, cross-divisional planning, and audience engagement at the museum. The *Connected Content Plan* will 1) audit current planning processes and review field-wide best practices and planning models through site visits and interviews; and 2) build staff capacity in facilitating evaluation and audience research methods, collaborating with community advisory groups, and applying experience design strategies for exhibition planning. The plan will result in creating museum experiences that are cohesive across the institution and reciprocally responsive to our communities.

What need is addressed?

SAM's most recent strategic planning process identified the need to emphasize the museum's core values of equity and engagement across all aspects of the museum. The *Connected Content Plan* will address the need to holistically integrate SAM's core values of equity and engagement within the planning process of in-gallery visitor experience and interpretation. Currently, SAM's exhibition interpretive planning process occurs in silos, and is based on anecdotal audience feedback and internal narratives, rather than collaboration, data-gathering, and best practices from the field.

SAM is well positioned to address this challenge: 1) SAM has prioritized racial equity within its strategic plan; 2) SAM created a cross-departmental Equity Team to actively make museum practices more inclusive; and 3) SAM has engaged in deep community engagement work to bring community voices into special exhibitions to make them more inclusive in approach and presentation.

In the 2017 strategic plan, SAM prioritized building racial equity across all museum functions and fostering a more collaborative work culture. Concurrently, SAM formed a staff Equity Team to take a deeper look at how museum practices can better align with a racial equity-based lens. The Equity Team consists of over 20 cross-divisional staff whose work has included:

- Advancing racial equity training for all staff and new hires.
- Drafting core value and strategic plan language focused on diversity, equity, access, and inclusion.
- Creating learning opportunities and team-building for SAM staff including facilitated conversations, field visits, and gallery tours.
- Making recommendations to SAM leadership and board that enhance an equitable experience for visitors and staff alike, including creating micro-aggression training.
- Representing SAM's equity work—including best practices and challenges—at conferences in advisory roles for other organizations.

SAM prioritizes programs, exhibitions, interpretive technology projects, and educational opportunities that emphasize community partnership and equity. Presenting over 1,200 programs annually, this

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collaborative approach creates opportunities for new and/or underrepresented perspectives that respond to our exhibitions and collection, makes the museum experience more accessible to a broader cross-section of visitors, and embeds the museum in the communities of our region. This intentional focus has led to impactful and sustained community-driven partnerships such as *Legendary Children* with Seattle Public Library, a semiannual event that empowers *Queer & Trans People of Color (QTPOC)*.

Additionally, to address our core values of equity and engagement within special exhibitions and programs, SAM has advanced several new processes and initiatives including:

- Hosting paid community advisory groups for every special exhibition to help frame major themes and strategies; advisory members are reflective of local communities and/or are connected to the cultures or identities in the featured exhibition content.
- Prototyping post-program surveys with co-producing community partners.
- Reviewing all exhibition labels by members of the Equity Team.
- Integrated perspectives and expertise from Education & Public Engagement in initial stages of exhibition planning.
- Iterating visitor response spaces that gather feedback on interpretive content.
- Conducting audience research on how people experience specific galleries to create new interpretive technology projects.
- Developing community response spaces in exhibitions that allow for visitors to participate and respond to significant themes and questions.

SAM's next step is to broaden the exhibition planning process to be more collaborative, evidence-based, and inclusive. IMLS support for SAM's *Connected Content Plan* will enable a more comprehensive and evaluative approach that will affect wider institutional change, deepen impact within our communities, and deliver a more dynamic range of experiences for our audiences. Through a collaborative consultation with JLuke Consulting, SAM will be able to take a deeper look at how to integrate SAM's core values of equity and engagement within the exhibition planning process and better measure the museum's impact within the region.

SAM has already taken several important steps to address our exhibition planning process [see Supporting Document 8: Exhibition Planning Process and Supporting Document 9: Exhibition Advisory Process]. In recent cross-divisional assessment, staff provided supportive and critical feedback specific to working with community advisory groups [see Supporting Document 10: Exhibition Advisory Feedback]. This feedback identifies areas of growth that the *Connected Content Plan* will address including more embedded institutional support and actionable research and evaluation.

Who will benefit?

The most immediate beneficiaries will be relevant SAM staff from across the museum's working groups associated with exhibition and interpretation planning including Curatorial, Education & Public Engagement, Exhibitions, Communications, Development and Technology, and frontline staff including Admissions and Visitor Services. A project team of ten staff (CCP Team) will guide the work both collaboratively and within their respective working areas. The CCP Team will benefit from a deeper understanding of how their work can support a visitor experience built on the values of equity and engagement, and how audience research and more collaborative planning methods can make their work more efficient, meaningful, and aligned with the museum's mission.

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SAM's audiences are the longer-term beneficiaries as they experience exhibitions that are more accessible and representative of the communities in which they live. Our region continues to experience a population surge and shifts in demographics leading to issues of rapid gentrification and housing affordability that are radically changing historic communities of color in Seattle. This rapid shift underlines SAM's focus on advancing equity and representing a diversity of perspectives.

How does the *Connected Content Plan* advance SAM's strategic plan?

SAM's current strategic plan embeds racial equity across all working areas of the museum, including the inclusion of equity and engagement among our core values. The strategic plan also emphasizes sustaining SAM's existing programs and policies that exemplify equity-based practice, while identifying areas for growth. The *Connected Content Plan* also advances strategic directions detailed in the plan including to:

- Strengthen and enhance collections and exhibitions, consolidating SAM's position as a leading comprehensive collecting institution.
- Engage all audiences more deeply, with special attention to our focus audience [of young adult audiences], and to our commitment to equity and inclusion.
- Develop better understanding of current audience engagement via increased data and technology.
- Foster community with other museums and arts organizations doing racial equity work.

The *Connected Content Plan* will build on advancements made by the Equity Team, education and public engagement programmers, and exhibition content creators towards a common practice and direction in support of SAM's strategic plan.

How does the *Connected Content Plan* align with the Museums Empowered project categories?

While the plan intersects with many of the project categories, it fundamentally focuses on Organizational Management and the creation of better practices and procedures that deliver more innovative experiences for our visitors. Through best practice research, SAM will benefit from an understanding of how our advancements in equity-based museum practice are situated within the field. Through careful planning and change management, SAM will empower staff to carry out the museum's core values more robustly in their work.

2. Project Work Plan

Activities, evaluation, and performance measurements

SAM will partner with JLuke Consulting, Cultures Connecting, Creative Reaction Lab, and Pomegranate Consulting to implement evaluative assessment and capacity-building opportunities for the museum and relevant community partners. The *Connected Content Plan* scales significant advances made at SAM towards the core values of equity and engagement. The work plan is iterative in nature, placing an initial emphasis on internal assessment and research.

Stage one will assess our current exhibition content and interpretation planning process, and survey best practices in the field (September 2020 – February 2021). This initial stage prioritizes a period of deep internal assessment and external research. Four components will run parallel: Best Practice Research, Internal Review, Audience/User Research, and Community Feedback.

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Best Practice Research, led by CCP Team. The core team of staff will research and identify key institutions that are exemplifying the values of equity and engagement in their exhibition content and interpretation. Selected institutions may include Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, Detroit Institute of Art, Columbus Museum of Art, Rubens Museum, Queens Museum of Art, MCA Chicago, and Minneapolis Institute of Art. These museums have recognized and publicized processes that advance equitable interpretative practices that include community voice and participation. Working from a shared set of criteria and research questions around best practices developed in collaboration with consultant JLuke Consulting, staff will conduct field research visits and interview staff members at these institutions.

Internal Review, led by Consultant. Through observational studies and onsite interviews with relevant staff, the consultant will gather a complete overview of SAM's current planning processes for creating in-gallery experiences for visitors. JLuke Consulting will consolidate findings that will inform a facilitated group retreat to address and strategize new processes and future work plans. In collaboration with the CCP Team, the consultants will create a comprehensive report for internal use that documents the internal review and findings that will also be presented to all SAM staff.

Audience/User Research, co-led by Consultant and CCP Team. With values of equity and engagement as their focus, the core team will develop evaluation goals that assess visitor's experience of SAM's exhibition and interpretation planning. Methods will include pre- and post-surveys for visitors; in-gallery experience-focused interviews with multigenerational visitors; and focus group sessions to deepen SAM's understanding of what methods deliver dynamic experiences for visitors in SAM's galleries. Best practice research will help benchmark SAM's audience research to identify growth areas and successes in current planning processes.

Community Feedback, co-led by Consultant and CCP Team. Over the past three years, SAM has worked with teams of community advisors for each special exhibition. Structured feedback from these advisors will be essential in sustaining this process for the future. The Consultant and CCP Team will develop evaluation goals and questions for participating advisors that deepen SAM's understanding of the advisors' perspective on the process. The Consultant will attend current community advisory meetings to observe and evaluate the current process. The CCP Team will review evaluation data in parallel to reviewing best practice resources on facilitating community advisory groups, particularly through a race and social justice lens.

Stage two will build staff capacity for creating and developing sustainable evaluation tools, facilitating effective community partner meetings, and collaborating in new methods and timelines for exhibition planning (March 2021 – August 2023). This stage builds a common approach to assessing and creating visitor experiences at SAM. Three components will build on each other to result in new systems of working and evaluating our approaches. The steps outlined below are proposed, but will also be adapted to align with the findings from stage one.

Process Change, led by CCP Team. Based on findings from the report, the CCP Team will develop a new process for the museum to approach internal exhibition, program, and interpretation planning. This plan will include proposed timeline for implementation, budget needs, and incorporation of evaluation feedback on an ongoing basis.

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Professional Development, led by Consultant. Core team members will be introduced to new ideation and problem-solving approaches including design thinking and experience design through consultation sessions and condensed learning boot camps with organizations like Pomegranate Center, Cultures Connecting, and Creative Reaction Lab. Working with community partners and advisors in planning stages for exhibition content and interpretation is at the core of this plan, and SAM staff will strengthen their capacity and competency in group ideation, facilitation, and conflict resolution skills through structured workshops and consultant sessions. These trainings will build internal capacities and may include topics such as Equity Centered Design Thinking, Building Cultural Competence, or Creating Meaningful Community Partnerships.

Evaluation and Assessment, co-led by Consultant and CCP Team. With new lessons learned on the importance of audience research, SAM will create and begin delivering sustainable evaluation tools used to inform how visitors are engaging with our exhibitions, identify successes and challenges, and measure SAM's community impact. These tools will be designed to be managed by staff so they can continue to impact and inform work following the end of the grant cycle. Reconfigured institutional timelines will allow for deeper involvement by community advisors in planning processes. New formats for cross-divisional idea generation and engagement strategy will reflect best practices in the field. This iterative approach will empower SAM to live its values of equity and engagement.

Potential Risks

The *Connected Content Plan* addresses an institutional shift in how SAM plans and presents its exhibitions and collection, which will require significant consensus building among staff. The iterative nature of the project's work plan builds understanding and competencies in new methods and processes, supported by audience research and evaluation, over three years versus piloting a new project immediately. Data from audience research and evaluation will provide deeper insight into the public's current perception of SAM's alignment with the values of equity and engagement, which may in turn reveal negative findings in certain aspects of SAM's in-gallery experience. This requires adaptability to scope and scale of work necessary at stage two of the project, which will be addressed through quarterly debriefs and consultations with JLuke Consulting and by building deeper understanding of data analysis and interpretation among SAM staff. The project will also require a level of commitment and time from CCP Team members and additional stakeholders, therefore requiring institutional understanding that the plan will need to be prioritized in their work and responsibilities. In demonstration of the commitment to this plan, please review Supporting Document 7 with signed support from all key department leads.

Project Management

Regan Pro, Kayla Skinner Deputy Director of Education and Public Engagement, will serve as project lead. The core team of cross-divisional staff will include Chiyo Ishikawa, Deputy Director for Art and Curator of European Painting and Sculpture, Cindy McKinley, Acting Director of Communications; Tiffany Tessada, Director of Membership and Annual Giving; Tina Lee, Exhibitions and Publications Manager; Tasia Endo, Manager of Interpretive Technology; Philip Nadasdy, Associate Director of Public Engagement; Elisabeth Smith, Collections and Provenance Associate; Nate Peek, Director of Design and Installation; and Amy Domres, Director of Admissions.

To foster deeper institutional buy-in, cross divisional collaboration, and overall effectiveness, the plan will be facilitated and advanced through project management by Tasia Endo, Manager of Interpretive

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Technology. This position currently develops cross divisional projects and audience research related to interpretation and in-gallery experiences, which will effectively translate to supporting the CCP. A new coordinator position will help support the Manager of Interpretive Technology to support capacity and workload related to interpretive technology projects. SAM's goal is to sustain this new position after the IMLS grant's completion to deepen the museum's capacity and resources in interpretive technology. Additional staff will engage with the *Connected Content Plan* as new learning and tools are developed. Our partners at JLuke Consulting will provide additional coordination throughout the plan's lifetime.

Project Resources

The IMLS grant award will be directed towards consultancy fees, travel, staff time, and supplies for JLuke Consulting during all stages of the plan. During stage one, grant funding will support staff travel for field visits, supplies for compiling shared research, and honorarium for community participants and advisors. Stage two funding will continue support for community participants and advisors, provide stipends, supplies, and equipment for delivering evaluation tools; and cover fees associated with workshops and facilitated skill-building sessions for SAM staff.

Tracking Progress

The CCP Team will meet monthly to develop internal work plans, track budget, and assess the *Connected Content Plan's* status and goals. Quarterly status reports with JLuke Consulting will ensure project milestones are met and practical timelines are in place to ensure an iterative and responsive approach. The project lead will deliver regular updates to SAM's leadership, including the Board of Trustees, throughout the plan's lifetime.

Sharing Results

The CPP Team will share ongoing status updates with SAM staff during monthly all staff meetings. Building on current models of community engagement at SAM, the core team will host a community partner gathering with regional cultural institutions, partners, artists, and leaders to share summary results, learning, and next steps. Externally, the CCP Team will present summary findings, best practices learned, and challenges faced, to conferences and professional development gatherings of museum professionals. SAM will communicate with its audiences both onsite and digitally about how the values of equity and engagement are embedded within the experience of its exhibitions.

3. Project Results

IMLS Performance Goal

The *Connected Content Plan* addresses the IMLS goal of "Building Capacity." The summary report at the end of stage three will include measurement of the plan's efficacy in developing staff skills, understanding, and capacity for advancing the values of equity and engagement in the museum's in-gallery experience. Measuring this growth will be conducted through bookend interviews with the CPP Team and relevant staff at the beginning and end of the plan, and surveys that address the IMLS performance measure statements.

Intended Results

SAM staff will:

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- Gain a better understanding of innovative models and best practices in the museum field that address the values of equity of engagement in exhibition content and interpretation and apply those understandings to their work at SAM.
- Learn the importance and methods of evaluation and audience research in the development of exhibition content and interpretation.
- Build competency in facilitating community advisory groups and new strategies of ideation and design.
- Grow a greater sense of accountability to SAM's audiences in their work through the creation of benchmarks based on audience research.

Intended Audience Results

SAM community partners will:

- Report improved understanding of how feedback, perspectives, and expertise is addressed and considered during the creation of exhibition content and interpretation.
- Identify the benefits of collaborating with SAM staff and how their individual cultural experiences and identities are represented at SAM.

SAM visitors will:

- Experience richer and dynamic exhibitions and interpretation that represent the values of equity and engagement.
- Understand how SAM engages and collaborates with communities of the region.

Tangible Products

- Stage One Findings Report by JLuke Consulting.
- Documentation of new collaborative exhibition planning process.
- Evaluation and audience research tools to be adapted and implemented by SAM staff.
- Action plan detailing how and when new processes will be embedded into planning timelines.
- All tools shared publically both through museum conferences, webinars, and available publically on SAM's website.

Sustainability

The iterative approach to the *Connected Content Plan* builds on SAM's significant steps in creating equitable and community-driven programming—an existing foundation that will support the longevity of the project's goals. Through the implementation of new audience research and evaluation, the *Connected Content Plan* will create a foundation of baseline data from which to grow SAM's understanding of visitor engagement in the galleries and community involvement in planning processes. SAM leadership is committed to developing a cross-departmental exhibition planning process that aligns the in-gallery visitor experience with the museum's core values of equity and engagement. Cross-divisional staff participation ensures new learning and skills are distributed across the museum. After new processes and timelines have been put into action, core team and relevant staff will debrief after specific projects to assess areas of success and challenges to address moving forward.

SEATTLE ART MUSEUM												
Connected Content: Schedule of Completion												
Project	Fall 2020	Winter 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Winter 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Winter 2022	Spring 2023	Summer 2023
STAGE 1												
General Planning												
Form CCP team, brief full museum on project plans, hire part-time Interpretation coordinator, contract Jluke Consuling	█											
IMLS Year 1 Report Due					█							
IMLS Year 2 Report Due									█			
IMLS Final Report Due												█
Co-write final project report to share with full Project summary paper and public sharing of						█	█				█	█
Best Practice Research												
Establish goals for site visits		█	█	█	█	█	█					
Identify, contact and schedule site visits			█	█								
Develop field questions and observation tools			█	█	█							
Complete site visits feedback & findings				█	█							
Share and compile findings with CCP team and						█	█					
Internal Review												
Establish goals for internal review		█	█	█	█	█	█					
Review internal documents & existing meetings			█	█	█							
Create field questions for staff interviews			█	█								
Conduct internal staff interviews				█	█	█						
Share and compile findings with CCP team and						█	█					
Audience Research												
Establish goals for evaluation & identify audiences/objects/spaces to assess		█	█	█	█	█	█					
Create assessment tools			█	█	█							
Run observations and surveys in gallery			█	█	█	█						
Run focus groups with current SAM visitors			█	█	█	█						
Review research from other institutions			█	█	█	█						
Share and compile findings with CCP team and						█	█					
Community Feedback												
Establish goals for evaluation		█	█	█	█	█	█					
Draft questions and tools			█	█	█							
Conduct interviews			█	█	█	█	█					
Observe current advisory meetings				█	█	█	█					
Review research from the field				█	█	█	█					
Share and compile findings with CCP team and						█	█					

