



## Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-245551-OMS-20  
Project Category: Community Anchors and Catalysts

### Star-Spangled Banner Flag House

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$27,628
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:  
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/igsm-245551-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 Inspire! Grants for Small Museums 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.

**Star-Spangled Banner Flag House**  
**IMLS INSPIRE! Grants for Small Museums PROJECT NARRATIVE**

**Project Justification**

The Star-Spangled Banner Flag House (Flag House) seeks funding to support the updating of its core interpretive plan narrative to include the diverse stories of the women, enslaved persons, free persons of color, and immigrants who lived and worked in the historic Flag House beginning in 1807 until 1927. Interpretation, in this instance, is defined as "a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource." – National Association for Interpretation.

The Flag House sees an urgency to dedicate itself to evolving the Interpretive Plan to meet the needs of the museum-going public. Museum-goers of the twenty-first century wish to connect to historical interpretation in more profound ways and value visitor experiences that address challenging and underrepresented themes in history. After the opening of the Flag House's permanent exhibit *Family of Flagmakers* in 2014, there has been a considerable change in how our visitors interact with the museum and historic house. The content of *Family of Flagmakers* confronts visitors with the struggles in Mary Pickersgill's life as a widow, business owner, and woman who took on social roles traditionally reserved for males in the early nineteenth century. During tours of the historic house, visitors are presented with the dichotomy of Mary as an owner of female slaves while in the same period, dedicating her time to the Impartial Female Humane Society as a champion for working, impoverished, and widowed women in Baltimore. However, the current Flag House Interpretive Plan document and supporting research do not provide avenues or methods for discussion of topics or historical themes surrounding the different experiences of the diverse women or immigrants who lived in the home. The new Interpretive Plan would bridge the current interpretive gap between the exhibit and historic house and would disrupt the traditional format of the historic house tour. The Flag House's traditional tour and current interpretation do not effectively promote diverse learning methods, dialogue, or in-depth discovery of larger social and political themes that were the driving force behind the War of 1812 and the crafting of the Star-Spangled Banner. Presenting visitors with these themes and topics will bring underrepresented persons to the forefront of the story of the Star-Spangled Banner, connect the story of Mary Pickersgill and the history of the Flag House with more diverse audiences, and promote a safe atmosphere for open dialogue between visitors and museum staff.

The Flag House feels that it has a responsibility to its visitors to provide trusted research and information that challenges their perceptions of American history, delves deeper into difficult topics, and is more inclusive in its storytelling. The museum is poised to meet the desires of modern audiences to connect with historical interpretation in meaningful and lasting ways that meet the standards of equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion in museum stewardship. Interpretive planning is a critical objective in promoting lifelong learning that connects persons from diverse backgrounds and age groups with information that fosters inquiry-based learning and critical thinking. The Flag House has had success in developing this learning method apart from the current formalized interpretive themes, through hands-on activities that enrich the

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experience for groups of all ages. Integrating new interpretive themes into the historic house tour and field trip guides will increase the museum's capacity to serve as a space for engagement and tie the story of the Star-Spangled Banner to curriculum themes for Maryland educators.

The work plan, submitted with this grant (Supporting Document 1), will establish a Task Force that will conduct a self-assessment and analyze visitor data. Stakeholder and community listening sessions and survey feedback will assist the interpretive consultant in drafting the Interpretive Plan and Implementation Plan to directly impact and enhance the visitor experience of the Flag House. The Interpretive Plan will advance the defining principles of the Flag House's Strategic Plan and support three key areas of focus for the long-range goals of the museum:

- **Community Outreach and Impact**  
Education and Public Outreach Committee of the board of directors will identify areas of need for public programs and off-site outreach to strengthen the Flag House's engagement within the community. Current initiatives address three key areas: on-site public programs, off-site programs, and partnerships that promote diverse and engaging educational opportunities and make historical narrative connections to Baltimore and Maryland history.
- **Accessibility**  
Increase accessibility to the museum's programs and facilities for persons with disabilities. Participate in programs and partner with organizations working to bridge socioeconomic barriers and provide the public with access to museum resources. Bring awareness to the Flag House's diverse collection and make the collection more accessible to the public through a large-scale digitization project in partnership with Digital Maryland.
- **Financial Health Planning**  
Implement changes in the Flag House operations and development strategy for financial health. The Flag House's dedicated working board has invested itself in the success and sustainability of the Flag House. The Financial Health Plan will capitalize on support from current donors and will establish goals to increase the museum's donor base. Part of this initiative is updating the Flag House's strategy around interpretation. A new interpretive plan will broaden the Flag House's scope of interpretation to include more diverse and inclusive stories about the residents of the Flag House from enslaved persons to Mary Pickersgill herself.

**Project Work Plan**

The Flag House's interpretive planning is in the pilot phase, evaluating the strengths and pitfalls of the current interpretive narrative while considering enhancements that will directly impact the museum's current visitorship and increase access and capacity to welcome new audiences.

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Throughout early 2020, before the beginning of the grant period, the Flag House will pull together, analyze, and summarize recent and current audience research/evaluations. Conduct surveys with membership and stakeholders to assess knowledge of Flag House history, test ideas about future interpretation themes and identify what people value from a visit.

Before the start of the grant period, Amanda Davis, the Flag House's executive director, will assemble pertinent literature in history, interpretation, learning, museum education, and document current offerings of exhibits, programs, school tours, outreach, attendance metrics, and membership data. It will be essential that these documents are compiled and presented to the Task Force should the project be funded.

Key project individuals will each have roles that forward the progress of the project and provide meaningful feedback at the stakeholder level and use community feedback to identify the themes and historical narrative connections of the new Interpretive Plan.

Amanda Davis, the executive director, will act as the grant administrator and oversee the activities of the interpretive consultant and Task Force. Ms. Davis will be responsible for pre and post-grant activities, including assembling necessary visitor data and plans for future implementation of the Interpretive Plan after the close of the grant period.

Dean Krimmel of Creative Museum Services will act as the interpretive consultant and will facilitate or co-facilitate all meetings, and produce written meeting notes that capture ideas, findings, and decisions. Mr. Krimmel will be responsible for drafting the Interpretive Plan and presenting the final product to the Task Force, Flag House's board of directors, and community during a public presentation meeting.

Task Force members will be identified and recruited based on the following criteria: knowledge of the historical period or historian specifically of Baltimore and Maryland history, connection to or expertise in heritage tourism, work with or professional role as an educator, community leader, or stakeholder.

The Task Force will work directly with the community to facilitate a series of public listening and feedback sessions to learn what its audiences' value, including benefits they derive from engaging with Flag House, and what they need from the Flag House. A prototype of the Interpretive Plan will be presented during a second community meeting to share findings and gauge public interest, comprehension, and appeal.

The final Interpretive Plan will be presented to the board and shared with the public.

Key project activities:

**Phase I: Kickoff & Self-Assessment (September–December 2020):**

Task Force kickoff meeting, literature review, self-assessment meetings 1 & 2, audience outreach public meeting 1 of 2, Task Force field trip, outcomes meeting.

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**Phase II: Interpretive Planning (January–April 2021):**

Host an interpretive content meeting, interpretive themes meeting 1 & 2, audience outreach public meeting 2 of 2, interpretive menu meetings 1 & 2, audience research evaluation.

**Phase II: Crafting the Interpretive Plan (May-August 2021):**

Task Force meets to identify interpretive priorities, drafting of the interpretive plan, public feedback meeting, revisions, and presentation of the final Interpretive Plan to the board and public, goal setting for implementation.

This project requires the time and oversight commitment of the executive director to self-assessment and analysis of public feedback to inform and enrich the final Interpretive Plan product. This grant will allow for the hiring of an interpretive consultant who will lead the Task Force and draft all related project materials. The financial requirements of hiring outside personnel or consultants for this project would not be possible without grant funding. Nor could the objectives of this project be carried out solely by the Flag House's board or executive director with the same dedication to community involvement, research, and implementation. The Flag House will use formal data collection methods to track the progress of this project. Self-assessments, visitor data, and audience evaluation tools and feedback information outlined in the Plan of Work as the method of progress tracking. Data from these evaluation tools will be analyzed for trends and themes and will inform the final drafting of the Interpretive Plan.

The Task Force will track progress by achieving each of the goals outlined within the three project phases of the Project Workplan. In phase I, outcomes from self-assessment, Task Force field trip, and a public meeting will inform the desired results we hope to achieve and impact we hope to have on our audience based on what we know about the audiences' needs and what they value. Phase II will result in the development and refinement of a menu of interpretive offerings and interpretive content based on audience research findings. Phase III will culminate with the completion of the Interpretive Plan and timeline for implementation.

This project carries considerable risk because of its reliance on the public to give critical and productive feedback to the project team. However, the involvement of the community and individuals from diverse backgrounds and professional expertise is necessary to develop a well-informed interpretive plan that genuinely considers the needs and desires of the museum's audience base. To mitigate risk, the Task Force will give sufficient public notice for the times and dates of each feedback meeting. The team will provide the public with resources and information that allows them to generate productive feedback but does not seek to direct them toward specific outcomes.

**Project Results**

This project is the result of feedback received from the Flag House's American Alliance of Museums peer reviewers and accreditation site visit report. As a reaction to this feedback, the Flag House revised its mission statement in June of 2019, to align with the museum's long-range goals for interpretive planning. The intended results of this project are:

- To develop an interpretive plan that meets the needs of modern museum-goers;

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- To enhance the visitor experience through interpretive narratives that represent diverse viewpoints not currently expressed in the museum's interpretive offerings;
- To be conscious stewards of history and present trusted information to our audience that does not convey a diluted interpretation of historical events, but instead confronts difficult topics and fosters a culture of safe and open discussion within the museum space;
- To identify and develop interpretive priorities for the next 3 – 5 years and gives a road map for implementation.

The project Task Force will collect critical public feedback, visitor evaluations, and self-assessment data from the Task Force and institutional documents. The final Interpretive Plan will be presented to the board and public for comment. Feedback from public meeting sessions will be used to track the success of the project, and the impact of the Interpretive Plan outlined in the goals above.

The Flag House will sustain and capitalize on the successful completion of the Interpretive Plan by launching the first phase of implementation in late 2021 after the close of the grant period. The first phase of implementation will include the training of staff, development of hands-on activities, traveling programs, and fundraising for additional grant support. Grant support will fund an initial visitor experience project to improve and enhance tours of the historic Flag House. This initial project is likely to be the development of text panels for the historic house. Bringing text and images into the house and period rooms will augment the interpretive narrative and give agency to the experience of the other occupants of the home at the time of the crafting of the Star-Spangled Banner and into the twentieth century. The Flag House's Strategic Plan also outlines goals for promoting the Interpretive Plan through updates to the museum's marketing strategy. A refresh of the marketing strategy and tools will coincide with the launch of the Interpretive Plan to reach broader audiences, appeal to educators, and develop content for the Flag House website, newsletter, and social media accounts.

Self-assessment and stakeholder feedback are critical elements of the Flag House's recent success in growing its off-site outreach programming and in its achievement of American Alliance of Museums accreditation. The evaluation tools and methods for this project will only serve to make the Flag House a stronger institution and trusted community resource for information and dialogue. The project will result in an interpretive plan that reinforces the museum's dedication to stewardship and excellence, promotes accessibility to diverse audiences, and connects the story of the Star-Spangled Banner to themes in Baltimore, Maryland, and American history. Interpretive themes will challenge visitors to think critically, confront difficult topics, and consider interpretive narratives through lenses that differ significantly from their own.

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 IMLS INSPIRE! FY20 Schedule of Completion

Jan-20 Feb-20 Mar-20 Apr-20 May-20 Jun-20 Jul-20 Aug-20 Sep-20 Oct-20 Nov-20 Dec-20

**Preparation Tasks Pre-grant Notification (non-grant funded):** analyze and summarize audience research/evaluations, conduct stakeholder formative evaluations, assemble literature & history, document current offerings, assemble task force documents



**Phase I, Kickoff & Self-Assessment:** task force begins meetings, literature review, host first public meeting, task force field trip, outcomes meeting



Jan-21 Feb-21 Mar-21 Apr-21 May-21 Jun-21 Jul-21 Aug-21 Sep-21 Oct-21 Nov-21 Dec-21

**Phase II, Interpretive Planning:** content meetings, themes meetings, audience outreach meeting, interpretive menu meetings, audience research tool administered on site



**Phase III, Crafting the Interpretive Plan:** task force sets priorities for interpretation for 3-5 years, plan drafting, public feedback meeting, revisions, public presentation of final interpretive plan, implementation recommendations

