



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-255676-OMS-24
Project Category: Lifelong Learning
Project Type: Large Project (\$25,001-\$75,000)

Tomaquag Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$34,200
Amount of cost share:	\$42,172

The Tomaquag Museum will undertake a project to create an interactive outdoor exhibition of a mishoon, a dugout canoe traditionally used by Southeastern New England's Indigenous Tribes. As part of the project, museum staff will select up to ten Native youth artists to learn traditional mishoon-making skills. The museum will contract with a specialized exhibition design firm and Wampanoag Tribal artisan who will build the mishoon, provide educational training for staff, and mentor youth artists. The project will result in hands-on training for Indigenous youth, training for museum staff, and the creation of a weatherized, outdoor mishoon exhibit, benefiting staff, the tribes of southern New England, and visitors.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Performance Measurement Plan

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

NARRATIVE

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Alignment with Inspire! Grants Project Category & Objectives

As a small, specialized museum, the Tomaquag Museum's Mish8n (pronounced 'Mishoon') Outdoor Exhibit Project creates an authentic dugout canoe outdoor exhibit produced by expert Native culture keepers while they transfer traditional knowledge to Native Youth/Young Adult Artisans. Finally, training provided for Tomaquag Museum staff will result in new education & exhibit unveiling events that benefit the Museum's audiences that include K-12 students, families, college students, researchers and tourist visitors to Rhode Island.

Our project creates an outdoor exhibit of a Mish8n, an Indigenous dugout canoe, that will be specially weatherized to assure an estimated 30 years of useful life engagement, meeting Tomaquag's strategic mission *"to educate all our relations on the Indigenous cultures of the Dawnland (Southeastern New England through engagement and dialogue to reconcile the past and empower present and future generations."*

The planned long-term nature of this outdoor exhibit provides new engagement and education opportunities for the museum's visitors that are expected to increase from 15,000 (onsite & virtually) this year to over 150,000 per year as the Tomaquag Museum's new campus build is completed on lands provided by the University of Rhode Island. The new museum campus will be located on lands provided to the Tomaquag Museum for use in perpetuity and is the home of our proposed Mish8n (Mishoon) Outdoor Exhibit Project.

The project accomplishes Tomaquag's strategic goals of:

- increasing training for museum staff,
- preparing exhibits to serve the estimated 10x visitor increase to occur at the new Tomaquag Museum campus facilities and
- more fully develop and implement surveys on user experience.

All of these activities accomplish IMLS' Goals of Championing Lifelong Learning by advancing shared knowledge and learning opportunities for all.

With IMLS Inspire! Grant support, and based on the anticipated visitor increase to 150,000/year, we see the potential for up to 4.5 million people to benefit from the Mish8n (Mishoon) Outdoor Exhibit Project over the next 30 years, in addition to the scores of partnerships that Tomaquag Museum maintains (see the attachments for Letters of Support from our partners and beneficiaries).

Specific & Measurable Advances to Tomaquag Museum's Strategic Plan

Tomaquag Museum's Strategic Goal #1 supports increasing training/educational opportunities for staff.

Three (3) training workshops will enhance staff capacities to educate upon the resilient cultural values and practical strengths embodied in Indigenous Mish8n making and use. Levels of knowledge will be measured at the beginning of the workshop schedule, and a survey of staff satisfaction will be accomplished at the end of the training cycle.

Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums research finds: "Tribal Archive, Library and Museum (TALM) staff members prefer targeted, hands-on, how-to, short-course training programs that are culturally relevant and affordable. Our project's training exactly match best practices for Indigenous-led institutions.

Tomaquag Museum's Strategic Goal #3 supports growing community-based offerings while it realizes a 10x increase in Museum visitors to the new campus in South Kingstown. The completion and installation of the outdoor Mish8n (Mishoon) dugout exhibit precisely meets this goal and will be a tangible accomplishment anchoring expanded educational programming at the museum and increasing visitor engagement opportunities for decades to come.

The need for training of Tomaquag Museum staff has been identified by an intensive strategic assessment and planning process completed by the Tomaquag Museum's Board of Directors in May 2023. The Capital Campaign to raise funds for the new campus has already succeeded in raising \$5 million of the \$6 million needed to construct the first of four envisioned buildings: a new Museum with a Museum Store, an Education Center, an Indigenous Empowerment Center with an Indigenous Café, and a stand-alone Archive Collections Research Center.

By late 2025 to early 2026, the new Museum facilities will be open to the public, and the proposed outdoor Mish8n (Mishoon) exhibit will be the first of a series of outdoor exhibits to be created, including a Longhouse, Wetu and Three Sisters Garden. Planning for the functionalities of the new campus has underscored the need for increased, and increasingly trained, staff ready and able to share knowledge with a deeply broadening audience.

Meeting the need for accurate and authentic Indigenous-led exhibitions to educate the public protects tribal peoples and communities from being relegated to invisibility or 'myth-informed' understandings of our history, contemporary and future barriers, opportunities and strengths. Clear and accurate information sharing benefits the whole of society.

Indigenous Focused Relevant Data & Best Practices

In March 2015, an article entitled "*Collaborations between Tribal and Nontribal Organizations: Best Practices for Sharing Expertise, Cultural Resources and Knowledge*" was published in The American Archivist's Special Section: Archives and Community Engagement. The article notes:

"Collaborations between tribal and nontribal organizations bring diverse communities together, often for the first time, to educate and learn, to address mis-interpretations of the past, and to share cultural resources and knowledge."

The Tomaquag Museum, a member of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums, has been at the forefront of creating, often first-of-their-kind, collaborations in Rhode Island and Southeastern New England.

The collaborative creation of first voice centered educational exhibits and events act to overcome knowledge gaps and mis-interpretations. In the case of the Mish8n Project we assure the exhibit, its processes and engagement meanings, are authentically accurate from inception.

Tomaquag Museum's Mish8n (Mishoon) Project is an anchor for further developing Indigenous Curriculum into the future.

Highlighting the importance of first voice Indigenous informed educational content, a 2022 Columbia University Teachers College K-12 teaching focused article entitled "*Here's How Indigenous Curriculum Can Help Students Thrive*" notes:

"American K-12 history lessons often omit key details that are critical to understanding the magnitude of not only the country's violent past, but also the policy that continues to impact Indigenous people today.

Take, for example, the 1835 Treaty of New Echota, which granted the Cherokee Nation the right to send a delegate to the U.S. Congress. Despite this agreement, Congress has yet to seat the Cherokee's delegate, Kim Teehee, selected in 2019.

"If you didn't know that, someone didn't teach you that," explains [Rachel Talbert](#), the Minority Postdoctoral Fellow at TC's [Edmund W. Gordon Institute for Urban and Minority Education](#), who discussed the issue during her colloquium at TC earlier this fall. "And if you don't even know that there is a treaty, then how can you as an

American citizen actively participate in voting for elected officials who are making decisions about current issues impacting Indigenous people?”

The hosting of the new exhibit on lands made available via collaboration with the University of Rhode Island signals a growing support and inclusivity of Indigenous perspectives, visions, goals, and knowledge in the State. Thorough planning for a new museum facility began in 2013. Planning accelerated in 2019, resulting in the completion of a Real Estate License Agreement between the University of Rhode Island and the Tomaquag Museum in 2020. Scoping the overall new campus project has included detailed architectural, environmental, and exhibition planning, examples of which are in the attachments. The Mish8n Project is a direct result of all these planning efforts.

Benefits to Target Groups & Beneficiaries in Rhode Island, Southeastern New England & Beyond

Has the applicant appropriately defined the target group(s) and beneficiaries, as applicable, for this work?

Target Group

- 1) **Native Artist Youth/Young Adults (Ages 18-32)** up to ten (10) participants will be identified and confirmed for participation to learn traditional Mish8n (Mishoon) making skills from SmokeSygnals' Darius Coombs (Mashpee Wampanaog) who has led outdoor exhibition creation and interpretation focusing on the region's Indigenous practices for over 30 years. Participants will be identified and confirmed via the work of Tomaquag Museum's Indigenous Empowerment Center's Samantha Cullen-Fry, leveraging deep relationships with the Narragansett Tribe's Language, Youth Ambassadors, Natural Resources departments and the Narragansett Silver Clouds, along with outreach to Brown University's Native Americans at Brown, URI's Native American Student Organization, the Northeast Indigenous Arts Alliance, Rhode Island Indian Council, Connecticut Indian Council, and other Tribes in nearby Massachusetts and Connecticut. It is expected that many of the participants will be Youth/Young Adults who have already benefitted from IEC programs and activities, and those who have already begun to work as Native artists individually or in collaboration with the Tomaquag Museum. Their inputs are a regular occurrence that have helped to shape the activities design of our project.
- 2) **Tomaquag Staff** up to ten (10) staff will participate in three (3) different Mish8n (Mishoon) educational workshops to increase their capacities to educate upon the completed Mish8n (Mishoon) Outdoor Exhibit. Staff meetings are held at least monthly and staff provide insights to the direction of Tomaquag's programming regularly.

Beneficiaries

The ultimate beneficiaries are Tomaquag Museum visitors, who average 15,000 virtually and at our current converted residential building highly rural location. As the new Tomaquag Museum campus is built and the Mish8n (Mishoon) exhibit is completed, our business planning consultant Ascent Advisors has estimated that there will be a 10x increase in Museum visitors annually (up to 150,000 visitors a year, which is an estimated 600 visitors daily onsite & virtually (up from our current average visitor rate of 60 people/day). Our visitors most often include K-12 students, college students, researchers, families, and tourists.

Target Group & Other Project Stakeholders Collaborative Planning with the Tomaquag Museum

SmokeSygnals, the Native-owned business that will provide the Mish8n production and installation services (including an ADA-compliant ramp to access the exhibit), has worked with Tomaquag Museum for over 2 years to plan for this project. Their expertise is demonstrated in the quote and resumes included in the attachments.

The University of Rhode Island has approved our planning completed to date for the build-out of the new Tomaquag Museum campus, including the siting of outdoor exhibits that include a Longhouse, Wetu, and Three Sisters Garden, and the Mish8n for which we request funding in this proposal.

Our project addresses the IMLS Inspire! Program category of **Lifelong Learning**.

Our project will help IMLS accomplish the Inspire! Goal to **build the capacity of small museums to provide museum services to their communities**.

And help accomplish the IMLS Objective of **supporting the development of cross-disciplinary learning experiences in small museums.**

PROJECT WORKPLAN

Indigenous Museum Relevant Theory & Practice

Tomaquag Museum's leadership educates mainstream institutions, museums, nonprofits, and companies on the relevant theory & practice of operating an Indigenous-led museum. In addition, programming, functions, services, and activities rely first upon best practices handed down from prior generations of tribal people indigenous to what is now called Rhode Island & Southeastern New England. Best practices are strengthened by lessons learned from peer members at the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums and from other regional museum partners like the University of Rhode Island, Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, RI State Council on the Arts, RI Council for the Humanities, Brown University, Brown University – Center for Slavery & Justice, New England Museum Association, and many more.

Goals, Assumptions & Risks

Goals Create a cross-disciplinary outdoor Mish8n (Mishoon) exhibit that draws upon and intersects history, art, science, traditional ecological knowledge, and oral literacy.

Assumptions Upon completion, the project will accomplish knowledge transfer to up to ten (10) Native Youth/Young Adult artists who will be prepared to sustain Indigenous traditional knowledge far into the future. The project will strengthen the capacity of Tomaquag Staff to educate on Indigenous ways of knowing and practice, thereby adding value to the outdoor Mish8n exhibit itself, and benefitting future visitors to the Tomaquag Museum who engage with the exhibit made possible with IMLS Inspire! Funding.

Risks The greatest risk is not to move forward with the project, thereby leaving unfilled gaps of authentically accurate education for Rhode Islanders and students, researchers, and visitors to the State. Other risks may occur in the timing of the project and the construction schedule for the completion of the new Tomaquag Museum building on University of Rhode Island lands, while close collaborations with URI's planning department, Tomaquag's Architects and Engineers, and Environmental professionals have projected the first building to be complete by Summer 2025, we have accounted for any unforeseen scheduling hold-ups to allow the Mish8n (Mishoon) project to be successfully completed by April 2026, if needed.

Skilled Partners & Consultants

Tomaquag Staff possess the experience and skill to complete this project. As noted in one of our support letters, the Museum had previously completed an outdoor Mish8n exhibit that lasted through the elements of New England winters and summers for over five (5) years. Lessons learned from that successful first foray into Mish8n exhibiting led to the requirement for weatherization of this project's Mish8n to provide a useful life of up to 30 years. Tomaquag's Education and IEC Staff have deep experience engaging tribal member participants in programs that benefit them – and will continue to do so for this project. SmokeSygnals, the contractor making the Mish8n and providing educational workshops upon them is nationally recognized and has received many prior awards for their Indigenous-focused museum exhibitions production.

Realistic Timeframes, Costs, Personnel & Other Resources

Our budget, budget justification, schedule of completion, and performance evaluation documents are detailed and complete and confirm that we have identified a reasonable and realistic timeframe, costs, and personnel pattern to administer and complete this project.

Our schedule of completion provides detail on every activity and its timing that will be carried out including grant acceptance and quarterly reporting, contracting and confirming Mish8n crafting lead, confirming youth participants, tree location, tree harvesting, tree transportation to Exeter Museum location, log prepping, burn scheduling, youth/young adult training, youth/young adult public demonstration activities, Tomaquag Staff training, fabrication of ADA compliant ramping and cradle, Mish8n weatherization, Mish8n cradle and ramp installation, Exhibit unveiling event(s) and ongoing education provided after the end of the project performance period.

Loren Spears, Executive Director, will plan and manage the project with the assistance of Education and IEC staff. SmokeSignals staff will implement and install the project.

No other resources are needed to carry out the project's activities.

Performance Measurement Plan & Progress Tracking

Effectiveness We will measure the effectiveness of producing & installing an outdoor Mish8n (Mishoon) exhibit with cradle and ADA-compliant ramping, and the transference of traditional knowledge to a new generation of Indigenous artists and culture bearers, and the related training of Tomaquag Staff, and the impacts of the exhibit upon visitors during the unveiling event(s).

Efficient Quarterly assessment and reporting on project expenditures and milestones achieved will be documented along with the value provided to up to ten (10) Native Artists Youth/Adult participants, and up to ten (10) Tomaquag Staff receiving training, and to the number of people attending the unveiling event(s). At minimum, the efficient use of the \$34,200 in federal funding requested is likely to result in an individual benefit value of \$1,720/person (\$32,400/20 target group individuals), and if visitor beneficiaries are calculated over the course of a year an investment of \$2.28 per visitor (\$34200/15000) is certain in the first full year of exhibit operations.

Quality Surveys will measure the quality and usefulness of the training provided to enhance their capacities to educate Museum visitors; the impacts of training for Native Youth/Young Adult participants; and the impacts on visitor knowledge & attitudes who attend the exhibit unveiling(s).

Timeliness Quarterly reporting will assess the fit between the proposed Schedule of Completion and actual completion dates.

Detail is provided in the Performance Measures document provided in attachment. Quarterly reporting processes will ensure that all grant, project performance, and financial reporting is complete and will allow for a regular review of the project and opportunity to make adjustments as needed. Data collection will be included and updated in each Quarterly Project Progress Report.

PROJECT RESULTS

Tomaquag Museum's Mission is to "Educate all of our relations (everyone) on Indigenous cultures of the Dawnland (focus Southern New England) through engagement and shared dialogue to reconcile the past and empower present and future generations."

Advancing Knowledge & Understanding

The knowledge, skills, behaviors and attitudes of the Native Youth/Young Adult target group will strengthen and hone their capacities to maintain culturally important skills and to educate others about them.

Increased knowledge and communications skills will be obtained by Tomaquag Museum staff, thereby increasing their capacity to share meaningful education with Museum visitors.

IMLS Investment & Investment Returns Benefitting Society Long-Term \$32,400 in IMLS grant funding will produce an expertly crafting traditional Indigenous dugout canoe (Mish8n/Mishoon) outdoor exhibit with a useful life of 30 years and the capacity to serve up to an estimated 4.5 million visitors during that time period.

Plan to Change Knowledge & Attitudes toward Indigenous Knowledge & Skills

The delivery and implementation of our project is learner-centered, especially regarding our primary target group (Native Artist Youth/Young Adults), and experiential, especially for our visitor beneficiaries. As our Museum Staff is trained, they will have the capacity to create new interactive programs using the Mish8n/Mishoon. For example, a Native Artist could use the Mish8n exhibit as a place to share a demonstration of making a wooden bowl by burning a wooden burl and speaking to the relationship of the ecosystem particular to this place, and these Indigenous peoples, and the materials used. These ongoing activities into the future of the Tomaquag Museum will be sustained by increased program income streams that will be developed around the operations of the new Tomaquag Museum Campus, including the new Indigenous Café, expanded Museum Store offerings, and other program income revenues.



Applicant Name: Tomaquag Museum

Project Title: Mish8n (Mishoon) Project

Performance Measures: Mish8n (Mishoon) Project Effectiveness, Efficiency, Quality, Timeliness

<p>Effectiveness:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mish8n (Mishoon) Exhibit Production & Installation 2. Mish8n (Mishoon) Youth/Young Adults Knowledge Transfer 3. Tomaquag Staff Training 4. Mish8n (Mishoon) Exhibit Public Unveiling 	<p>Mish8n (Mishoon) Exhibit Production Measures: At the end of each quarter, using the quarterly project performance report prepared by the Executive Director and Business Finance Manager, will record the percentage of completion of the Mish8n (Mishoon) Exhibit production and installation and document project progress with photos.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Types: Observations, Photos • Data Source: Executive Director & Business Finance Manager interactions with SmokeSygnals contractor • Method: Informal discussion, observation, and assessment of documents provided by SmokeSygnals • Schedule: Quarterly <p>Mish8n (Mishoon) Artist Youth/Young Adults Knowledge Transfer: The artist youth/young adult knowledge transfer occurring as a part of the project will share traditional techniques for harvesting, burning, and digging out the Mish8n (Mishoon) canoe in translating from a historical necessity to a contemporary artform. Via Survey at the beginning and end of the production phase of the project, the Indigenous Empowerment Manager will document the levels of participant knowledge and skill in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canoeing Experience, Woodworking Experience, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Botany Knowledge, Expression of each participant's own artistic, What participants hope to gain • Data Types: Opinions, Feelings • Data Source: Native Artist Youth/Young Adult Participants learning Mish8n (Mishoon) making • Method: Survey upon participation selection; Survey upon end of participation. • Schedule: Q2 (Feb 2024) Baseline Survey through Q4 (Sep 2024) End of Participation Survey of Year 1 <p>Mish8n (Mishoon) Staff Training Workshops: Three (3) Staff Training Workshops will be provided to up to 10 Tomaquag Staff during August – October 2024. The Education Manager will provide observations and a report on the topics provided during each workshop, including the number of staff attending, and an assessment of their capacity to educate on this topic (focusing upon traditional ecological knowledge, botany, canoe making, and how to present to the public in accessible ways, learning about notable Native canoe artisans past & present, and understanding the lifeways in which our ancestors experienced utilizing canoes), along with lessons learned to improve future staff trainings. Staff Training will focus on being able to express the history and culture of Mishoon making past to present, reflecting the lifeways of the uses of Mishoon as transportation, trade, hunting, fishing, gathering resources (bullrush/cattails, etc.) communication.</p> <p>Mish8n (Mishoon) Exhibit Public Unveiling: The dates and attendance of the two (2) initial public unveilings planned (Nov 2024 during Native American Heritage Month and/or Apr/May 2025 Spring Herring Moon) will be documented by the Education Manager, and an Experience Survey will be developed by the Education Manager and provided to attendees during each event. The results will be provided to the Executive Director and included in the quarterly project performance progress reporting provided to the IMLS.</p>
<p>Efficiency:</p>	<p>Each quarter, we will calculate the amount expended upon the project. In federal and match funding and assess these amounts as value provided to the number of Native Artists Youth/Adult participants, and to the number of people attending the unveiling event(s).</p>

Quality:	Focusing upon Staff Training, at the beginning, during each workshop provided, and at the end of the project we will administer a satisfaction survey to staff who have participated in the Mish8n (Mishoon) Project trainings.
Timeliness:	Each quarter, the Executive Director, Education Manager & Indigenous Empowerment Manager will assess the fit between our proposed Schedule of Completion and actual completion dates.