



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-255760-OMS-24
Project Category: Lifelong Learning
Project Type: Large Project (\$25,001-\$75,000)

Harvard University, Fisher Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$63,945
Amount of cost share:	\$74,560

The Fisher Museum at Harvard University's School of Forestry will create a multimedia exhibition centering the voices of the Nipmuc people whose ancestral land is occupied by the museum. The exhibit will acknowledge Indigenous stewardship legacies and its potential for future land resilience. The project team will conduct archival research and interview Nipmuc Tribal individuals, produce a series of short films, and design and install a digital installation. The museum will partner with a Nipmuc artist and community organizer to co-curate the exhibit. Museum staff will purchase digital equipment, provide two paid internships and a graduate student assistantship, and offer paid honorariums for Nipmuc participants. The museum will contract with a video editor and evaluation specialist. The project will result in an Indigenous-led, traveling, multimedia exhibition that will benefit the Nipmuc Tribe and public, student, and professional visitors.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Digital Product Plan
- 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.

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

This 2-year grant will support the development, design, installation, and evaluation of a new multimedia exhibit to advance the *Inspire! Grants for Small Museums* program goal. The exhibit will center the voices and values of the Nipmuc people, the tribe indigenous to the land occupied by the Fisher Museum. The new content will seek to disrupt systemic, race-based harm and erasure, create valuable oral history and research products for the tribe, redefine/build engagement by all Museum audiences, and help the Museum more fully achieve its mission. These outcomes will support *Objective 1 (development of cross-disciplinary learning experiences in small museums)* and help IMLS pursue agency-level *Goal 2: Strengthen Community Engagement*.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Since 1941, the Fisher Museum’s primary exhibit has been a series of 23, large-scale (5’x3’) dioramas depicting 230 years of colonial land history. The Museum’s mission is to engage visitors in understanding the history of the land and humans’ collective role in shaping its future. However, an incomplete interpretation strategy prevents us from fully implementing our mission. Absent from the dioramas are the visual representations and perspectives of Indigenous people, people of color, women, and other groups central to the history of the land. Addressing the harm of this erasure is the focus of this proposal and a key part of the Museum’s 2020-2025 strategic plan, which calls for us to “improve the Fisher Museum as an inclusive community anchor through stakeholder-informed changes to the visual culture and interpretive content.”

The Challenge: The first seven dioramas encountered by Fisher Museum visitors – a time series of landscape change from European colonial settlement in 1700 until 1930 – are the Harvard Forest learning tools most frequently referenced by scholars, students, and the public today. These dioramas are the focus of this proposal. The historical series (Figure 1, below) follows a seemingly unpeopled old-growth forest, through widespread exploitative land practices by colonists, to a sudden release of colonial exploitation during the Industrial Revolution. According to the existing narrative, this trajectory results in the forest’s remarkable natural recovery, once it is free of humans – a recovery which continues to shape our abundant forests today.

The Fisher Museum’s narrative – implying that colonial people are the only humans to meaningfully shape our region’s ecosystems – is now understood as authoritative by ecologists and educators. More than a century of long-term studies at Harvard Forest have augmented this sense by documenting the lasting legacy of colonial-era land clearing. Photos of the historical series of dioramas appear as foundational learning in K12 curricula, university textbooks, and nature centers in the Northeast US and beyond.



Figure 1. Landscape change diorama sequence in the Fisher Museum.

Our project seeks to disrupt and expand this narrative with a broader perspective that de-centers the colonial period as the primary pivot point for modern ecosystem function. In fact, thousands of years of Indigenous community land stewardship laid the foundation for the ecosystems of this region and provide a more scientifically, ethically, and culturally productive starting point for learning about human-land relationships and ecosystem trajectories.

- **Our proposed interpretive message: Indigenous stewardship legacies define the land today and can bring resilience to the land of tomorrow.**

This proposed message represents an intentional shift away from the pervasive educational paradigm in New England that Ojibwe scholar Jean O’Brien calls “firsting and lasting” (2010 – see SupportingDocBinder3 -

President & Fellows of Harvard College (Harvard Forest) – Re-Centering Indigenous *Perspectives* in the Fisher Museum References): that is, dominant histories asserting that only colonial milestones are meaningful and Native peoples/perspectives are a relic of the past, without a role in modernity and progress.

Educated by O'Brien's examples, and seeking to avoid the oversimplified, dehumanizing tropes of the "Ecological Indian" (Krech, 2000), we will invoke a new interpretive paradigm with this project, to reveal:

- Millennia of mutual, resilient kinship between local Indigenous people, the land, and other beings
- The role of colonial land invasion in the systemic genocide and attempted erasure of local Indigenous people
- Modern Indigenous knowledge, leadership, and values and their centrality to our collective understanding of the land and our future in it

The Museum's current interpretation paradigm not only obscures critical lessons for visitors, but it also reduces the broader efficacy of the Museum classroom as a safe and productive meeting-learning space for thousands of students each year. We frequently receive feedback from tribal members and from students of many other ethnicities that the current physical context of the dioramas – which entirely surround the Museum's primary indoor learning and event space – is oppressive. Their interpretive erasure hinders the Museum's ability to fully welcome the participation of a range of BIPOC colleagues and allies, and, thus, reduces our ability to achieve our mission to educate and inspire a diverse and informed next generation of scientists and land stewards.

Local Context for the Challenge: In the *History of Petersham, Massachusetts* by Mabel Cook Coolidge (1948), a volume still promoted by the local Historical Society as a definitive history for the town where the Fisher Museum sits, Nipmuc people are rarely mentioned, except in a description that weighs whether they are "inferior mentally and physically" or in fact "congenial." The book details the bounty value of "the scalp of a male Indian at one hundred pounds, and that of a woman or child, dead or alive, at half."

Indigenous human scalp bounties were widespread during the colonies' 17th-century genocidal war against Indigenous Peoples, and in fact were the central currency in 6 military commanders "earning" as a reward the Nipmuc ancestral land that is now called Petersham. After the war, in 1676, Coolidge's book notes that "the Nipmucks drifted west and joined the river Indians." This widely accepted narrative erases the truth of public executions of Nipmuc people on the Boston Common in 1676, the widespread murder, enslavement, and forced Christian assimilation of thousands of Nipmuc people in the decades prior, and, in 1675, winter interment of the Nipmuc on a Boston Harbor island without food or fire, where an estimated 1000 people died. The new exhibit will not shy away from these truths that are a central part of the land's story.

Today, the Nipmuc tribe, a mostly urbanized community of ~600 members who comprise two state-recognized Bands in Mass. and Connecticut, survives and manages many thriving organizations (Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation, Eastern Woodlands Rematriation Collective, Hassanamisco Indian Museum, and more). Although their ancestral territory covers much of the state of Massachusetts, well into Connecticut, their reservation is a single house parcel of 3.5 acres. The Hassanamisco Band is currently pursuing several land-back projects in Massachusetts, but their government regularly encounters roadblocks rooted in racial bias and a lack of education around Native survivance and reserved rights in Massachusetts. Unlike tribes with federal recognition, Nipmuc community organizing work is often volunteer-based. Stipends for community members to convene around land issues is one way that Harvard Forest has supported capacity-building for the tribe this year; the *Perspectives* project will follow a similar mechanism – paying tribal members and community organizers for their time to produce content that will contribute to the exhibit and also to help build the permanent collection of tribal knowledge in the Hassanamisco Indian Museum and other archives.

Relational Work is Already Underway: Since winter 2020-2021, working side by side with Indigenous colleagues – especially from the Hassanamisco Band of Nipmuc – has been a regular part of work in the Fisher Museum and at Harvard Forest more broadly. Since 2020, co-I Holley and PI Hart, with support from grant collaborators White and Johnson, have co-mentored 9 student internships; co-facilitated Museum events for the Nipmuc community, students, and conservation decision-makers; and developed a 20-foot Museum wall panorama celebrating Nipmuc land and identity as the People of the Fresh Water (see SupportingDocBinder3 -- Nichewaugh).

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Holley and White also have co-created a new (in fall 2023) interpretive trail focusing on Nipmuc values for the Fisher Museum (see SupportingDocBinder3 -- Manchage Manexit), on a leveraged external grant written by Hart and colleagues. During the Manchage Manexit Trail’s soft opening phase in summer and fall 2023, co-PIs Holley, White, and Hart led guided tours of the draft trail for 400+ invited Fisher Museum visitors, ranging from Nipmuc tribal members to a wide diversity of university students, local family visitors, and land professionals and policymakers. Feedback has revealed **a need for more Indigenous-led narratives, and a decolonized pathway for learners to explore land history and the modern conservation imperative.**

Our project’s work is rooted in a methodologic paradigm that scholar Gerald Vizenor describes as “survivance”: that is, building an “active sense of presence” of Native people and narratives (2008). Our project will build education around the **continued and active presence of Native people and perspectives.**

“Re-Centering Indigenous *Perspectives* in the Fisher Museum” (“*Perspectives*”) continues the work of the Manchage Manexit trail to build Native survivance in a healing and affirming way, seeking to address a deep colonial history of violently erasing Nipmuc people and perspectives from this land. It specifically addresses an objective from the Fisher Museum’s 2020-2025 strategic plan: *Create a plan to update Fisher Museum diorama interpretation and other public displays to increase visibility of Native Americans and other groups underrepresented in the sciences.*

The *Perspectives* exhibit’s interpretation will not follow a typical colonial approach, with Indigenous perspectives presented as primitive or “other.” As with the Manchage Manexit trail, in *Perspectives*, Indigenous people are inviting themselves to tell their own stories – to share their lived, modern reality of a multifaceted, equitable relationship with land and non-human beings. The project will disrupt the static and archival nature of the dioramas and center the living autonomy of the land and its people.

This project’s process and deliverables are designed with tribal self-determination and sovereignty at their center. Since 2020, co-I Nia Holley, Nipmuc artist and community organizer, has been the community member assigned by the Hassanamisco Band Tribal Council to liaise with Harvard Forest and the Fisher Museum. Continuing her work with us as a leader on this project, Holley will ensure that the Nipmuc interview content gathered by this grant is fully owned and archived by the Hassanamisco Band.

Co-applicants Holley and White will be the lead artists/researchers/curators on the *Perspectives* exhibit (Artist-Curator team). *Perspectives* will be considered a traveling exhibit. In the years beyond this grant, Harvard Forest and the Artist-Curator team will pursue a mutual at-will agreement around the use of the exhibit content in the Fisher Museum, for which the Museum will pay an annual licensing fee.

In the *Perspectives* exhibit, 6-8 Nipmuc community members will reflect on their history and future, and in particular, on the concept of land community – humans, land, plants, animals – as kin.

Interviewees will be asked to reflect on these beings as change-agents over the millennia, into the modern day. They will be asked not only to remember the past but to look ahead to the future in our time of changing climate, species migrations, and more. In a framework echoed by the Manchage Manexit trail, *Perspectives* will ask viewers to actively reflect on their own relationship to the land, and offer them tools to bring a more expansive, decolonized mindset into their daily lives.

Holley will be applying for a 2025-2026 Bullard Fellowship at Harvard Forest (with a \$75,000 stipend) to support a more developed artistic effort on this exhibit during year 2 of the grant. While her fellowship acceptance by a committee of Harvard faculty is not a foregone conclusion, our unit is certainly behind the work, and her proposal would be greatly strengthened by leveraged federal investment in the project.

Target Audience & Beneficiaries: The *Perspectives* project will serve three target audiences:

1. the 600-strong membership of the Nipmuc tribe (and generations to come), who will be given capacity by this grant (via external hard drives and future licensing fees) to archive and steward content gathered/created by the project
2. 8000+ public, student, and professional visitors to the Fisher Museum annually, which includes a growing number of Indigenous people from around the world

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3. 40 Fisher Museum docents, 2 Fisher Museum staff, and 35 additional Harvard Forest staff, who will receive professional development in the content, plus 70+ K12 teachers who annually attend professional development workshops based in part around Museum content and engage 3500 K12 students annually as part of the Harvard Forest Schoolyard Ecology Program

PROJECT WORKPLAN

The *Perspectives* project will take a 4-step approach to exhibit development:

- YEAR 1 - a rigorous **archival research process** led by Holley and White (“Artist-Curator Team”), and supported by Hart and Johnson, with 2 winter interns (Harvard students) supported by leveraged funds
 - Utilizing archives, herbaria, and Nipmuc knowledge networks and oral histories, document the diverse networks of life present in this region over the last millennium
 - Identify key ecosystems, flora and fauna significant to Nipmuc cultural lifeways, to serve as foci for interviews (below)
 - Work sensitively and transparently with tribal leadership to differentiate between information that will be shared publicly as part of the exhibit, and information that will remain privately stored by the Artist-Curator Team in the tribal archive, and/or the Hassanamisco Museum
- YEARS 1 & 2 – production of a **series of short films**, led by the Artist-Curator team and supported by consultant video editor (R. Mighty):
 - Discovery process with Nipmuc tribal leaders (see Performance Management Plan)
 - Interviews with 6-8 Nipmuc tribal individuals sharing perspectives on plant-animal-land-human ecologies and the history and future of the land, filmed/produced by the Artist-Curator Team
 - Artistic renderings (digitally collaged scenes) with the diorama scenes as background
 - Recorded footage of specific areas of the modern woods at Harvard Forest, focusing on the plants and ecosystems referred to by Nipmuc interviewees
- YEAR 2 - **installation, professional development, and archiving**, led by the Artist-Curator team, supported by Hart and Johnson, with 2 winter interns (Harvard students) supported by Harvard Forest
 - Exhibit installation: 4 projects digitally projected and/or playing on screens (with audio) adjacent to and foregrounding the dioramas in the Fisher Museum
 - Online public web presence, with special attention paid to universal digital accessibility (See SupportingDocBinder3 – Harvard’s Digital Accessibility Policy)
 - Professional development workshops for volunteer docents, staff, and teachers (leveraged Harvard Forest funds)
 - Digital archive of all content for ownership by the Artist-Curator Team
- YEARS 1 and 2 - **assessment of the experiences** of exhibit contributors and visitors to the final installation (see Performance Management Plan), led by PI and all co-Is – with item 1 supported by consultant (N. Estrella-Luna) and items 2-3 led by PI Hart:
 1. a facilitated “request for qualifications model” to ensure autonomy and comfort of Nipmuc community members participating in the project
 2. a soft launch of the exhibit, with a 2-month targeted review phase
 3. post-launch visitor experience surveys

Project Resources:

Resources required for this project include staff time (cost-shared salary and internship funds; grant supported salary, honoraria, and consulting fees), technical equipment (projectors, screens, external hard drives), and website hosting. Costs for cameras and filming equipment will be entirely supported by the Harvard Lamont Multimedia Lab (see SupportingDocBinder1).

Risks:

The biggest risk in this project is a failure to follow the 6 R’s of Indigenous relational work (Tsosie et al. 2022): respect, relationship, representation, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity - instead bringing colonial constructs into the work. Thankfully, our collaboration will unfold within an envelope of existing relationship, which includes grace and courageous communication on all sides. However, intersections of different systems of reciprocity, power dynamics, and knowledge inevitably carry moments of misalignment. We will come with practiced awareness of potential pitfalls. We have safeguards (including a consultant experienced working

President & Fellows of Harvard College (Harvard Forest) – Re-Centering Indigenous *Perspectives* in the Fisher Museum within tribal and BIPOC communities) built in to regularly elicit feedback from Nipmuc participants, including any feelings about apprehension, trauma, discomfort, or misalignment of goals, and we will be nimble in pivoting our work to maintain the integrity of Nipmuc community members' self-determination above all else.

Another risk is working with potential conflict or trauma responses that arise in visitors who might feel vulnerable or unprepared to receive this content, especially its truths about pain and violence. During our two-month exhibit testing period with invited groups (see Evaluation of progress, below), we will solicit feedback and engage in dialogue in real time with representatives from our full range of target audiences, and develop any necessary content scaffolding or cautions. During this feedback period, we will pivot as necessary to preserve community well-being, especially of marginalized groups whose pain is often gaslit or overlooked.

Evaluation of progress:

Evaluation will be continuous throughout the grant period.

- **Check-ins after each engagement with participating tribal members** (facilitated by consultant Estrella-Luna) will invite feedback on their experience and document their intentions/goals for all information shared (see Performance Measurement Plan).
- The *Perspectives* exhibit launch will begin with a **2-month *in situ* “soft launch”**, during which the screen and projector content will remain offline for most public visitors, and behind a password wall for online visitors, with targeted groups invited to view the full content and offer feedback in facilitated dialogue: Nipmuc community members, Harvard Forest/Fisher Museum staff, partner educators (K12, university, and informal), and university students in relevant courses.

Once the exhibit is made public, there will be 3 ways for visitors to offer **post-visit feedback**:

- For in-person attendees: an anonymous paper (qualitative and quantitative) survey available in the Museum, or a QR code linking to a digital version of that survey (via Harvard Qualtrix – data will remain accessible beyond the grant by Artist-Curator team)
- A separate online qual-quant survey (via Harvard Qualtrix) for visitors only experiencing the content via the project website
- A contact email to submit direct (non-anonymized/aggregated) feedback to the Artist-Curator team, without the Harvard Qualtrix survey as an intermediary

PI Hart has extensive graduate training and professional experience in qualitative and quantitative survey design, ethics, and analysis, including working with tribal leaders to ensure a dialogic process to co-development of questions and performance metrics. The survey results will be used only by the PI, Co-I, Artist-Curators, and tribal leaders for program evaluation, exhibit content reflection, and improvement.

Project Results

Perspectives will leverage the wide reach of the Fisher Museum to build survivance and self-determination in the Nipmuc people, visibilize previously erased narratives, and foster discourse by thousands of annual visitors (students, scientists, decision-makers) toward a resilient landscape for tomorrow. Five project deliverables include: 1) an Indigenous-led digital, traveling multimedia exhibit for initial/ongoing display in the Fisher Museum, 2) an online presence that is accessible to more abilities and geographies of learners, 3) a private archive of unedited oral history and research content added to the Nipmuc tribal archive, 4) multiple professional development workshops to support community dialogue and educator training around this new content, and 5) ongoing survey results that evaluate the experiences and attitudes of visitors and provide information for exhibit modification / build-out in the future.

Deliverables #4 (ongoing workshops) and #5 will be funded with the Forest's regular operating budget. Harvard Forest educators annually lead 5-6 similar professional development workshops for staff and educators. A survey mechanism is already in place for Museum visitors, which can be easily expanded. After 2026, as part of our K12 Schoolyard Ecology Program, we will pay stipends to classroom teachers to develop, pilot, and share lesson plans based on the new content, linked to state and NGSS standards. And, with this work as a key part of a broadening foundation, our organizational relationship with the Nipmuc and the land will continue to grow.

SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION

Note:

“HF staff” is C. Hart and E. Johnson

“Artist-Curator Team” is N. Holley & T. White

Grant Year 1

	Fall 2024 (Sept. to Nov.)	Winter 2024-2025 (Dec. to Feb.)	Spring 2025 (March to May)	Summer 2025 (June to August)
Archival research on networks of life in the region past and present	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff, interns		
Discovery meeting to discuss project & develop shared goals & metrics	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff, N. Estrella-Luna, Nipmuc community			
Identify content foci & participants for interviews		Artist-Curator Team, HF staff		
Create plans for maintaining integrity of cultural info & knowledge w/tribal leadership			Artist-Curator Team, Nipmuc community	
Record & edit field-based footage of specific areas/species referred to by interviewees			Artist-Curator Team, Nipmuc interviewees, R. Mighty	
Record & edit interviews with tribal community members				Artist-Curator Team, Nipmuc interviewees, R. Mighty
Facilitated assessment of interviewees’ goals & experiences				Artist-Curator Team, HF staff, Nipmuc interviewees, N. Estrella-Luna
Artistic renderings for inclusion in films				Artist-Curator Team
Quarterly progress and budget check-in	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff

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Grant Year 2

	Fall 2025 (Sept. to Nov.)	Winter 2025-2026 (Dec. to Feb.)	Spring 2026 (March to May)	Summer 2026 (June to August)
Record & edit field-based footage of specific areas/species referred to by interviewees	Artist-Curator Team, Nipmuc interviewees, R. Mighty	Artist-Curator Team, Nipmuc interviewees, Interns, R. Mighty		
Record & edit interviews with tribal community members				
Artistic renderings for inclusion in films	Artist-Curator Team	Artist-Curator Team, interns		
Facilitated assessment of interviewees' goals & experiences	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff, Nipmuc interviewees, N. Estrella-Luna	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff, Nipmuc interviewees, N. Estrella-Luna		Artist-Curator Team, HF staff, Nipmuc interviewees, N. Estrella-Luna
Exhibit installation			Artist-Curator Team, HF staff, consulting electrician	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff
Develop & launch online web presence		HF staff, Artist-Curator Team, Interns	HF staff, Artist-Curator Team	
Professional development workshops				HF staff, Artist-Curator Team, museum docents, teachers
Soft launch of exhibit (May/June)			HF staff, Artist-Curator Team, target audience groups	
Develop & implement post-launch visitor surveys			HF staff, Artist-Curator Team	HF staff, Artist-Curator Team
Digitally archive raw interview footage & final video products		Artist-Curator Team, Interns		Artist-Curator Team
Quarterly progress and budget check-in	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff	Artist-Curator Team, HF staff
Final grant reporting				HF staff, Artist-Curator Team

REPORT



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Harvard University Digital Accessibility Policy

This Policy is established to promote equal access to information technology and digital content and to improve the user experience of IT and digital / online media for all users, including persons with disabilities.

Policy Statement

Harvard University is committed to making University Information Technology and University Digital Content accessible.

For the purposes of this Policy, “accessible” means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.

Digital Accessibility Standards

Toward meeting the University’s commitment to accessibility, Harvard expects University Information Technology and University Digital Content to conform to applicable Digital Accessibility Standards to the fullest extent possible.

For the purposes of this Policy, the Digital Accessibility Standards (or “the Standards”) are The World Wide Web Consortium’s Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.1, Level AA Conformance (WCAG 2.1 Level AA) for websites and web-based applications and services. Software and services that are not web-based should conform to WCAG 2.1 Level AA to the extent such guidelines may usefully be applied to improve the accessibility of these resources.

In the case of digital hardware interfaces, the Standards also include the federal Section 508 standards described in Chapter 4 (“Hardware”) of Appendix C to 36 C.F.R. Part 1194, whether or not such instances of hardware are covered by the regulation.

The Path Forward

New Instances of University IT

Instances of University Information Technology newly purchased, licensed, or internally developed after June 1, 2023 are expected to conform to the Standards to the fullest extent possible at the point of rollout or implementation. Where such conformance with the Standards is not technically feasible or may require extraordinary measures due to the nature or purpose of the Information Technology, a request for exception may be submitted for review by an appropriate University, School, or Unit Authority.

New University Content

Starting on June 1, 2023, Harvard users using University IT to post, distribute, or publish University Content should aim to make such content conform to the Standards, to the extent technically feasible and in accordance with the University Content framework specified in the Implementation Procedures. Where conformance with the Standards is not technically feasible, Harvard users should consider how to make University Content available in an alternative format accessible (as defined above) to persons with disabilities.

Existing University IT and Content

As further outlined in the Implementation Procedures, the Accessibility Steering Committee will establish and recommend to Senior Leadership a prioritization plan for improving the accessibility of existing University Information Technology, including websites and web-based applications, and the existing University Content hosted, published, or communicated on those platforms. Priority will be given to University IT platforms that provide the most essential functions to, and are most broadly and regularly used by, Harvard faculty, staff, and students. In the case of public-facing websites, priority will be given to sites that are among the most highly trafficked and to those that contain core institutional information.

Procurement Considerations

Harvard personnel purchasing or procuring University Information Technology are responsible for ensuring that suppliers seeking to develop or provide University IT are aware of this Policy and that contracts with such vendors hold them accountable to the Standards to the fullest extent possible. Harvard Strategic Procurement, the HUIT Vendor Management Office, and others charged with supporting IT procurement efforts should support these efforts when involved in IT purchases.

The Implementation Procedures published under this Policy will identify resources, strategies, and guidelines for securing the greatest possible level of conformance to the Standards from third-party vendors, and purchasers and providers of University IT are expected to adopt and practice them. The Policy expects that the University will apply such market power as it has to prioritize and promote digital accessibility. However, the Policy recognizes that the University is able to exert less control over some “off-the-shelf” Information Technology developed and marketed outside the University.

Definitions

“University Information Technology” or “University IT” is Information Technology purchased, developed, deployed, or used for University Business and, in the case of web-based applications and websites, is hosted on a Harvard-owned or -controlled domain.

“Information Technology” includes software; server-based, personal computer, mobile device, and web-based applications and websites; website hosting and design services; development, hosting, maintenance, and archiving services; cloud-based applications and information processing or storage services; digital hardware interfaces; and digital database configurations and interfaces.

“University Content” is Digital Content created, posted, distributed or published for University Business.

“Digital Content” consists of any information or communication accessed or displayed in a digital format or medium, as text, image, audio, or video.

“University Business” includes activities carried out by Harvard faculty and staff in furtherance of Harvard University’s mission of teaching and research but does not include activities organized or conducted by students or student organizations.

“Senior Leadership” includes the University’s President, Provost, Executive Vice President, and Vice Presidents; the Deans of the several Schools, their Department Chairs, and the Directors of University and School Centers or their designees.

Responsibility

The University expects that Senior Leadership will promote broad awareness of this Policy, assign responsibility to ensure the accessibility of University IT provided within their jurisdictions, and designate Digital Accessibility Liaisons. Improving digital accessibility requires the attention and commitment of the entire University community. Accordingly, all members of the Harvard community should be mindful of this Policy and aim to ensure that University Content they post to, publish on, or communicate through University IT is accessible.

Where possible, including on websites operated by the University, Harvard administrators should indicate commitment to accessibility by posting a link to this Policy.

Resources and Support

The University is committed to providing resources and support to the Harvard community in order to effectuate this Policy.

Accessibility Steering Committee

The Accessibility Steering Committee is convened by the President and/or Provost. In addition to preparing the prioritization plan described above (see “Existing University IT and Content”), the ASC is responsible for (1) providing periodic review and revision of this Policy and its Implementation Procedures, including making appropriate updates to the Policy’s Standards definition as industry standards and practices evolve, with recommendations going to the President and/or Provost; (2) working with Senior Leadership to promote general awareness of this Policy; (3) assessing and reporting to the President and/or Provost the University’s accessibility efforts as outlined in this Policy; and (4) establishing a process and designating appropriate authorities to review and decide on requests for Policy exceptions.

Digital Accessibility Services

The Office of Digital Accessibility Services (“DAS”) within Harvard University Information Technology is responsible for supporting Senior Leadership across the University in creating and sustaining a culture of commitment at Harvard. In addition to devising Implementation Procedures for the ASC to review, DAS provides training, guidance, and information on accessibility standards and best practices and works with University IT purchasers and providers, and their technical partners, to advise or augment their efforts toward adopting the Standards. Guided by ASC priorities, DAS tracks and supports remediation efforts throughout Harvard.

Digital Accessibility Liaisons

Digital Accessibility Liaisons (“DAL”) are appointed by Senior Leadership. DAL coordinate local accessibility efforts and report on progress to the ASC and DAS.

University Disability Resources

University Disability Resources (UDR) within Central Administration provides leadership to University efforts to ensure an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming learning and working environment for persons with disabilities while complying with federal and state regulations. UDR serves as a University-wide resource on disability-related information, procedures, and services for the Harvard community, digital and otherwise.

Exceptions and Remediation

As outlined in the Implementation Procedures, IT purchasers or providers requesting an exception to this Policy may be required to submit an accommodation plan detailing how the unit will make, as applicable, the services or information provided by the University IT in question available to persons with disabilities, by alternate accessible (as defined above) means. The additional cost and expense incurred to bring University IT into conformance will not be considered a valid basis for grant of an exception, except in extraordinary circumstances and as approved by the Accessibility Steering Committee (“ASC”). Further details on exceptions processes will be included in the Implementation Procedures document.

The ASC may require that some or all non-conforming portions of an instance of University Content (as provided in the University Content framework specified in the Implementing Procedures) or University IT be brought into conformance by designated staff or suppliers, and the expense of that work may be charged to the unit that is responsible for assuring the accessibility of that asset. If the ASC is unable to identify who is responsible for an instance of University Content that does not conform to the framework, then the ASC may ask that HUIT remove the non-conforming content from view until it can be brought into conformance. Upon a specific request by an individual who is unable to access specific University Content due to non-conformance to the Standards, either the requested content must be updated to conform to the Standards or the requested content otherwise must be made available in an alternative format in a timely manner. The unit responsible for the creation and maintenance of University Content is responsible for making it accessible or providing the accessible alternative.

Disclaimer

This Policy establishes internal guidelines and expectations for the purpose of promoting and advancing digital accessibility at Harvard University. Harvard reserves the right to modify the Policy unilaterally at any time. The Policy is not intended to create, nor does it create, any contractual or other legal obligation on Harvard’s part, or any contractual or other legal right for any member of the Harvard community or the general public.

Note: this updated Policy supersedes the previous Digital Accessibility Policy, which was made effective on April 30, 2019 and applied exclusively to “University Websites,” which was defined to include only certain public-facing websites within a Harvard-controlled domain. The updated Policy has a broader scope and applies to all websites within Harvard-controlled domains, as well as the other forms of Information Technology listed in the definition above.

Last updated: June 1, 2023

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DAS Office Hours

Not sure where to start with accessibility? We're here to help!

The Digital Accessibility Services (DAS) team is available to answer your questions and provide guidance and support to the Harvard community. Stop by our virtual DAS Office Hours on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month from 10am-12pm.

[**Upcoming DAS Office Hours**](#)

UNIVERSITY DISABILITY RESOURCES

For access to all other disability-related resources and guidance for students, faculty, staff, visitors and guests, please visit [**University Disability Resources →**](#)

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT PLAN

Our PI/co-I team has several years of experience coordinating Nipmuc-led projects in the Fisher Museum and keeping those projects on time and on budget.

Performance Measure	Data We Will Collect	Source of Our Data	Method We Will Use	Schedule
<p>Effectiveness: The extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results</p>	<p>Our framework for measuring effectiveness can be found in Margaret Kovach’s Nehiyaw Kiskeyihtamowin research epistemology (2021 – SupportingDoc3Binder_Refs Past Museum Work Digital Accessibility) – which focuses strongly on preparing for the work with a “good mind,” decolonized assumptions, meaning-making that centers traditional values, and reciprocity in every phase of project.</p> <p>Quarterly, the Artist-Curators and Harvard Forest staff on this grant will meet for a Quarterly Progress and Budget Check-in (see Project Timeline) to review the budget (see Efficiency, below) and to discuss in community a set of questions established during the Discovery phase of the project (see Efficiency, below). Example questions might be: what have we received for this project, and what have we given? What have our preparations looked like, and what have we expected from others? Has our work honored people, place, and helped reveal participants’ individual gifts? Is there a wholeness to this picture?</p> <p>These questions build from the AIHEC Indigenous Framework for Evaluation (LaFrance and Nichols 2010) – which prioritizes process-based questions about effectiveness that reflect traditional values, such as: in our work together, what are we <i>becoming</i>, as individuals and as a community? Does what we are becoming match the goals we established for the project? If not, should our practices be revisited, or should we revisit the goals themselves?</p>			
<p>Efficiency: How well resources (e.g., funds, expertise, time) are used and costs are minimized while generating maximum value for the target group</p>	<p>In a Discovery meeting in September 2024, the co-Is will meet with Nipmuc community members to discuss the project and co-develop a shared set of exhibit goals, values, and process frameworks.</p> <p>The Nipmuc community values deep deliberation and consensus, which can take time. Efficiency in a colonial sense is not a goal for us, though as in our past projects together, we <i>will</i> create deliverables from the given budget that recognizably match the initial proposal!</p> <p>At the end of each project year, all co-Is will meet with Nipmuc community member participants (facilitated by N. Estrella-Luna) to discuss project progress in relationship to shared goals and values established in September 2024.</p>			

Quality: How well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group

To ensure Indigenous autonomy in the project, intentional support is built into every touchpoint with Nipmuc contributors:

1. At the Discovery meeting, tribal leadership will suggest Nipmuc community members living in Massachusetts who may be interested in participating in interviews.
2. Project co-Is Holley and White will connect with each potential Nipmuc participant – or if desired, convene a small group of participants – to discuss the project, learn of their individual motivations for participating, and narrow down the narrative topics of most interest to them. This framework follows the “request for qualifications” model to help align individual goals/strengths/needs with project goals.
3. Holley and White will work with each participant to co-develop relational goals, expectations, boundaries, and plans for sharing their perspective/knowledge/story in an interview, and archiving/publishing it thereafter.
4. Check-ins with each participant before, during, and after contribution to the project will ask a series of questions gauging members’ comfort levels, formally revisiting their original goals and checking for alignment and feedback.
5. At quarterly check-points after a contribution (following each Quarterly Progress and Budget Check-in), Holley and White will share each Nipmuc community member’s content back to them in its most updated/edited/contextualized form, again revisiting their original goals and checking for alignment and feedback.

During the 2-month soft launch of the exhibit in spring 2026, representatives from all target groups will be invited to view the content in a guided tour and give verbal or written (anonymous) feedback. This feedback will be gathered for a final presentation to Nipmuc participants and leadership in the final month of the project.

A voluntary survey (paper or Qualtrics) will solicit feedback from exhibit visitors. This feedback will be reviewed monthly by the Harvard Forest team as part of our regular post-visit survey review, which is quarterly checked to document alignment with strategic plan goals.

Timeliness: The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the proposed timeframe

Beginning in September 2024, following the initial Discovery meeting of all project staff and the Nipmuc community, Holley and White will meet bi-weekly to set near-term research, curatorial, and artistic tasks; review completed work; and review progress on the shared project timeline.

On a monthly basis, all co-Is will meet together to review progress on the shared project timeline.

On a quarterly basis, Hart and Johnson will meet with the Harvard Forest accounting/budget team lead (Lisa Richardson) to discuss grant expenditures and the project timeline.