



## Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-255934-OMS-24  
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access  
Project Type: Large Project (\$25,001-\$75,000)

### University of Hartford, Hartford Art School Galleries

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$40,983
Amount of cost share:	\$50,000

The Hartford Art School Galleries located at the University of Hartford will conduct a full inventory of the approximately 2,100 art objects in its collection to improve stewardship and accessibility. Informed by a Museum Assessment Program (MAP) report, the galleries will contract with a collections management expert to conduct a full inventory of two storage spaces, update physical and digital collection records, and photograph and label objects. The university will also offer a paid internship for the yearlong project. The results of this award will be improved intellectual control and online accessibility of the collection, benefiting students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

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.

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### Proposal Narrative—Hartford Art School Collections Professional Inventory

#### Project Justification

Our project will address Objective 4 of Inspire! Grants for Small Museums, which is to support the management and care of collections in small museums. The aim of this project is to contract a collections management expert to conduct a professional inventory of approximately 2,100 art objects in the collection of the Hartford Art School at the University of Hartford. This will include a full inventory (object to record and record to object) of two storage spaces, an update of physical and digital collection records, object imaging, and object labeling. A complete and accurate inventory will enable the Hartford Art School to make the collections searchable and accessible to the public, enhancing opportunities for learning through study visits, student internships, and collections-based exhibitions. In this way, the project also addresses Objective 3, which is to support the development of policies and institutional plans for small museums.

The Hartford Art School (HAS) galleries and art collection are in a moment of transition. We are in the process of writing a new mission statement and a strategy that consolidates the collection and exhibition spaces under the structural umbrella of the HAS Galleries (the “museum”), centering both as object-based, educational resources for students and artists. In conjunction, we are building out a five-year exhibition calendar for the two campus galleries and developing a plan to assess and address the state of the care and accessibility of the collections as we approach the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hartford Art School in 2027. To that end, we participated in the 2023 Museum Assessment Program run jointly by the American Alliance of Museums and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. We undertook the Collections Stewardship Assessment with three goals in mind: 1) to write a strategic and sustainable collections management policy and collecting plan; 2) to develop a plan for updating and optimizing our art storage facilities; and 3) to make the art collection more accessible to our students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. Over the course of the site visit with Peer Reviewer Ann Woolsey, held September 26-27, 2023, it became clear that to accomplish these goals we first need to prioritize a full inventory of the collection. As Woolsey describes in her letter of support for this project (see Supporting Documents), we need to know *what* we have in order to know *how* to store, access, and exhibit the objects in our care safely and effectively.

Conducting a self-assessment through the Museum Assessment Program helped our team of faculty, staff, and students define the major needs, challenges, and goals for this inventory project. By gathering data on-site in our two storage facilities, as well as through records in our online database, Collector Systems, we have clarified the scope of the collection

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in terms of numbers, materials, and strengths, and we have identified key challenges, from a notable lack of object labels to inconsistencies and omissions in the online records. We shared this information with a local collections management expert, Deborah Diemente, who comes highly recommended by our MAP Peer Reviewer. Per her letter of commitment (see Supporting Documents), Diemente has estimated the time, materials, and labor required for a full, successful inventory project.

The target group for our project is University of Hartford students, with a particular focus on teaching within the Hartford Art School, which consists of 309 undergraduate students, 49 graduate students, 21 full-time faculty, 24-part-time faculty, and 18 staff members. Two students and one full-time faculty member sat on our MAP Team, and two full-time faculty members were interviewed by our MAP Peer Reviewer about how the collection could be better utilized for teaching and researching. These perspectives were critical to the decision to prioritize a full collections inventory. Cleaning up and updating the online database with accurate records and images will allow us to make the collection publicly searchable so that students, faculty, and staff can request works for in-person study, class visits, and exhibition projects. Thus, the beneficiaries include these same students, faculty, and staff, in addition to the students and faculty of the University as a whole and the greater public from the New England region who frequent the HAS Galleries. In the 2022-23 academic year, we received 2,723 visitors to the galleries. So far in this 2023-24 academic year, we are on track to double those numbers. We have also begun a new Faculty Liaison program to expand opportunities for teaching with our exhibitions across the University campus. Since the implementation of the program, we have averaged three class visits per week to the galleries, including courses in religious studies, sociology, public policy, and studio art classes, among others. The major benefit of a collections inventory will be increased opportunities for object-based learning through in-person class visits and collections-based exhibitions.

### Project Work Plan

This project has been designed to take place over the course of the 2024-25 academic year. The contracted collections management specialist will spend the fall 2024 semester conducting an object-to-record and record-to-object inventory of the estimated 1,700 artworks stored in the Helen S. Kaman Print Study Center, which primarily houses works on paper in flat files, archival boxes, and frames. Over the course of this inventory, the artworks need to be labeled, their digital and physical records cross-referenced and (where necessary) corrected, and images added to the database. The spring 2025 semester will be spent applying the same method of inventory to the Joseloff Storage space, which houses approximately 200 paintings, plus larger framed pieces, and three-dimensional work. Due to the large scale of many of these pieces, as well as the poor state of the storage conditions, we anticipate that this second

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portion of the workplan will take nearly as much time as the first (despite the smaller number of works). Should there be time remaining once these two major tasks are complete, the collections manager will then inventory the remaining 200 artworks sited around the University of Hartford campus and make recommendations for rotations based on their recent inventory of the collection. A full inventory and labeling of artwork, including the verification, correction, and expansion of object data with attention to standard collection vocabulary terms, is the first step required toward making this data available and searchable to the public. Once this is complete, we will be able to update the publicly viewable “gallery” setting of the online database, Collector Systems (a current version of this exists at the following web address, but it needs improvement before making it more widely available:

<https://gallery.collectorsystems.com/public/HAS>). We will then make the updated “gallery” accessible to the public through a link on the HAS Galleries’ website.

Throughout the full inventory, the specialist will also be tasked with clarifying and documenting a full checklist of those works that are on permanent loan to the University by the Hartford Art School Endowment, Inc. Currently, no mandate or formal loan agreement exists between the two organizations, and a complete checklist is required to move forward with recommendations for the future relationship between the two collections. The specialist will also create a checklist of works recommended for conservation assessment and/or treatment.

The major risk to the project is a scarcity of resources, particularly in terms of workspace and additional labor to assist the collections manager in navigating and handling the artwork in the Joseloff Storage space. To mitigate this risk, we will spend the summer of 2024 cleaning out, organizing, and preparing Joseloff Storage by removing all non-art objects, such as old pedestals, catalogue inventory, and shelving units. This will create a workable space for the specialist to examine and arrange larger works of art for the inventory. Additionally, we will plan to contract additional art handlers, as needed and based on the specialist’s recommendation, to assist with moving and rehousing artwork.

The Gallery Director will oversee the project, which is to be implemented and managed by the contracted collections manager. In addition to compensation for this expertise, we will need additional part-time personnel to work alongside the specialist and provide assistance in handling, measuring, noting condition concerns, and photographing artworks. To this end, we plan to hire a student intern to assist with the project, which has the added benefits of providing students with a paying job as well as a hands-on learning experience in which they will gain concrete skills and become immersed in the art collection. We will also need financial resources to purchase materials for the project, such as an iPad for doing digital data entry while in storage and climate data loggers.

In order to track progress and results, the contracted collections manager will have monthly meetings with the Gallery Director to address challenges, discoveries, and progress.

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The contractor will inform the Gallery Director of any resources (material, personnel, or otherwise) that are required to keep the project on track. In addition to maintaining accountability, these conversations will be critical opportunities for the Gallery Director to learn more about the scope, strengths, and gaps in the collection so that a plan for new storage systems (in the case of Joseloff Storage) can be developed and so that a collection management policy and collecting plan can be written and approved by a governing authority. The Gallery Director will then make quarterly presentations on the progress of the project to the Spending Oversight Committee of Hartford Art School Endowment, Inc., who has agreed to fund a significant portion of the project.

### Project Results

This inventory project will have two primary results: 1) a complete and accurate online database that we are confident in making accessible to the public through the Collector Systems “gallery” page; and 2) a fully labeled collection that is physically accessible to HAS Galleries staff. These two results will facilitate greater accessibility to the collection from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, the public will be able to search the online database and submit requests to view and study objects in our Kaman Print Study Center for the purposes of individual research or class visits. On the other hand, the HAS Galleries staff who receives those requests will then be able to confidently pull the requested artworks for study, loan, or exhibition. Making the collection more legible to all parties creates more opportunities for use, from entire university courses designed around artwork in the collection to exhibitions that draw on the collection. In this way, the project advances knowledge and generates benefits to society on a spectrum that spans the individual researcher, to the university community, to the larger public audiences who visit the HAS Galleries for exhibitions and programming.

The knowledge of our target group of the Hartford Art School community will be greatly expanded as a result of this project. As it is, two seasoned faculty members use a limited number of collection objects in their teaching, while many other full-time faculty members do not even know that it exists. Opening up knowledge of the collection and making it searchable on Collector Systems to both full- and part-time faculty will create more opportunities for class and student engagement and opportunities for hands-on learning with art objects. In this way the knowledge and types of learning experiences offered to our students will also grow. This will also expand the knowledge and behavior of the HAS Galleries staff. We currently have a limited understanding of the strengths of the collection due to record inaccuracies and storage difficulties. A full inventory would enhance our understanding of the scope of the collection and thus the possibilities of using the collection as a foundation for creating programming and

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learning opportunities that benefit the target group into the future, such as student internships in collections work or collections-based exhibitions.

The primary improvements or products for this Collections Stewardship and Access project will be a clean and accurate digital record of the collection, full imaging of the collection, and full object labeling. Once the inventory is complete, we will sustain the benefits of the project by highlighting the collection on the HAS Galleries' website (through a short history narrative and a link to the Collector Systems "gallery" page), by inviting faculty for a tour of the Kaman Print Study Center with a focus on how they can request objects for study or class visits, by pursuing conservation assessments as recommended by the collections care specialist, and by developing a plan for addressing the storage and facilities issues in the Joseloff storage area. To that end, we are already anticipating applying for another IMLS grant that would fund a new design and physical improvements to these facilities.

The timing of this project is critical. As we approach the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hartford Art School in 2027, we are planning a major exhibition and book project that will rely on ready access and thorough knowledge of the art collection. Built through important visiting artist programs, such as the Hartford Print Workshop, the art collection reflects the Hartford Art School's rich and unique history and a legacy of contributions to art education in the United States. A firmer handle on our holdings is essential to ensuring the sustainability of that legacy for future generations of students, faculty, staff, and community members.

**Applicant Name:** University of Hartford

**Project Title:** Hartford Art School Collections Professional Inventory

**Project Period:** September 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

**Schedule of Completion**

	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May
Kaman Inventory	████████████████████								
Joseloff Storage Inventory					████████████████████				
Art on Campus Inventory							████████████████████		