



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-256086-OMS-24
Project Category: Institutional Capacity
Project Type: Large Project (\$25,001-\$75,000)

Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries, Discovery Wharf

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$48,207
Amount of cost share:	\$49,361

The Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries will undertake planning to prepare for an expansion of its Discovery Wharf interpretive center. Located in Maine's top lobster landing port, the center engages and informs the public about coastal communities, local fisheries, and the marine ecosystem. Center staff will partner with local stakeholders to form an advisory committee, develop exhibition themes, create a business and staffing needs plan, and complete interpretive training. The center will contract with a museum consultant to assist with exhibition design and planning. The project will result in a comprehensive plan for the expansion of Discovery Wharf to meet the demands of visitation and support community educational needs. Beneficiaries of the project include center staff, local education groups, the coastal Maine community, and visiting tourists.

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.

Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries- Discovery Wharf Expansion Proposal Narrative

Project Justification

With which Inspire goal will Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries' project align?

This project aligns with Inspire!'s Program Goal: Build the capacity of small museums to provide museum services to their community. Our exhibit expansion plan fits squarely within Objective 3: support the development of policies and institutional plans for small museums while also aligning with Objective 1: support the development of cross-disciplinary learning experiences in small museums and Objective 2: support the professional development of the small museum workforce.

How will your project advance your organization's strategic plan?

Discovery Wharf, the public education center at Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries (MCCF), is an attraction where visitors come to learn about the historical context and heritage as well as the science underpinning Maine fisheries. We are a forum where people can raise discussion of observed change and an inspiring source of personal reflection for adaptation. Using the basis of the scientific method of inquiry, we create videos and exhibits which allow visitors to examine the drivers and levers associated with large-scale ecosystem and community changes ahead.

MCCF is a trusted source of stories, ideas, information, and a collective brain trust of critical natural and cultural heritage. As a thought-leader in marine science, we work in three strategic focus areas: Collaborative Research, Collaborative Management, and Collaborative Education. Our 2021-2024 Strategic Plan outlines a synergistic approach to these three interlocking focus areas (see illustration in SupportingDoc5) with the ultimate mission of securing a sustainable future for fisheries and fishing communities in Eastern Maine and beyond.

The proposed project will allow us to design a thoughtful and professional expansion of our small museum. Our vision is to focus on science and local history, highlighting the urgency and realities of climate adaptation and resilience within coastal communities and eastern Maine watersheds through place-based interactive and interpretive exhibits and workshops, as well as our own actions to adapt our ocean pier-supported building in Stonington to sea-level rise. We will continue to incorporate fishermen's and fishing communities' voices and knowledge when developing Discovery Wharf museum content. The scope of work in this proposal allows us to lay that solid foundation for long term growth of our small museum in the iconic town of Stonington, Maine.

What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?

Multiple challenges threaten the traditional way of life of Maine's coastal fishing communities. We believe fishermen's engagement, knowledge, and leadership is central to sharing

responsibility, incorporating diverse viewpoints, and adapting to dynamic ecosystem, climate, market and social change. Through engagement with our visitors and community, we've identified a need to expand our capacity to interpret these issues and allow for individual reflection, appreciation, and conversation within the construct of our public education center and museum, Discovery Wharf.

Discovery Wharf has grown in popularity over the past 6 years, and in summer 2023 we outgrew our space, attested by our inability to accommodate everyone who wished to visit us the past two summers. We currently offer one hour guided tours for visitors to experience the marine touch tank, gear exhibits, and one or two of the videos. The space is small though, and we struggle to allow guests to continue to explore the self-guided elements such as the touch wall, and the virtual reality station, beyond the one hour time slot. We propose to explore existing space that is immediately adjacent to the current education center, an additional 1800 square feet of multi-use space, available for potential expansion (See SupportingDoc1-ExpansionArea).

In its current 587 square feet, Discovery Wharf offers a live touch tank, a virtual reality exhibit with a library of 360 degree experiences, a large projection wall, a workshop corner with trap building tools, and static fishing gear displays (See SD2-DiscoveryWharf). We draw ~5,000 visitors over the tourist season, primarily through our reservation system with additional walk-in visitors from the village main street. We draw people from 45 countries and 15 States, seeking insights into the workings of the fishing community and information about what is happening in our ocean ecosystem.

Next summer, we intend to expand Discovery Wharf to add space, exhibits, and capacity. We will add points of interest for younger children, between ages 2 and 5, such as a captain's wheel and pulley system for role play learning and mechanics. Our facility lends itself to a second water display¹, and we have local capacity to construct a similar feature. We will expand our gift shop footprint and merchandise offerings to provide mementos of the experience, and contribute to revenue generation. In 2023, we piloted a new fee structure, to recover costs, and elevate the uniqueness of the touch tank and Leroy experience. Our Comprehensive Plan will address this aspect of the revenue generation activity, balancing the income with visitation numbers, while also encouraging donations and gift shop purchases. We are committed to accessibility and affordability of our museum, where visitors of all ages can explore the exhibits at their own pace, and fully experience the thematic elements throughout the expanded footprint

Who is the target group for the project and how have they been involved in the planning?

The target group for this planning project is the staff at Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries. MCCF employs seven full-time staff, two part-time seasonal docents, and up to two summer interns each year. Staff play a role in our educational programming and will participate in the planning project and/or benefit from the resulting plan. Local partners, including the Downeast Fisheries Trail, Deer Isle Historical Society, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, the Town of Stonington, Penobscot Marine Museum, the Maine Discovery Museum, and local educators will

¹ Such as the Children's Museum of Hawaii and the Children's Museum of Oswego

be involved in our planning process to ensure that Discovery Wharf is an asset to the community year round. The ultimate beneficiaries of this project are our multi-age visitors and tourists, our coastal Maine community, as well as local education groups.

Who are the ultimate beneficiaries?

We believe that education at all ages leads to an informed public and fishing community better prepared to take responsibility for the stewardship of their resources. Our educational content is centered around providing insight into the history and heritage of our fishing communities as well as the science underpinning their sustainability. This allows our visitors to better understand the complexities of fishery management, the effects of climate change, and how they can help coastal communities thrive, regardless of where they live.

Project Work Plan

What specific activities will you carry out and in what sequence?

1. Develop Advisory Committee: We will convene and solicit input from our stakeholders: staff, fishermen, local educators, local nonprofits, and local heritage experts. We aim to develop a shared vision for an expanded Discovery Wharf experience, identifying key audiences and goals. We will engage a museum planning consultant to work with the Advisory Committee.

2. Concepting for audiences: We will work to turn our advisory committee's vision into holistic story development: what are the themes we'll focus on and how do we share and interpret them for a variety of audiences. We will focus on planning for all ages and including local educators and curricula experts. This work will be iterative with facilities and business planning and guided by a museum planning consultant, including carrying capacity, technology needs, ADA compliance, and impacts of increased visitor traffic on surrounding businesses and parking facilities.

3. Exhibits Planning: We will engage a museum and exhibit design consultant to help us plan our exhibits, designs, and expansion based on our concepting for audiences. We will be attentive to accessibility and inclusivity. Key staff involved in this step of our project will complete basic interpretive training and climate change interpretation training similar to those offered by the National Association for Interpretation and the American Alliance of Museums, so they can transform MCCF's evolving scientific work into engaging exhibits and interpretive experiences.

4. Iterative Business and Staff Planning: We will work with consultants and partners to develop a funding plan, evaluate sustainability balanced with access, and consider ways to generate ongoing operational support from patrons and visitors. This step will include an assessment of staffing needs for an expanded Discovery Wharf and identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to implement the exhibit plan and operate our upgraded museum.

At the end of our project, we will have a Comprehensive Plan for a re-imagined Discovery Wharf with expanded and updated exhibits and displays. This will allow Discovery Wharf to meet the demands for expanded capacity during the busy summer months and support community educational needs year round. This plan will allow us to blend science and history while showcasing the long standing heritage of Maine's coastal communities, sharing the local knowledge and stories, and providing a better understanding of the stewardship of Maine's coastal and nature-based culture.

What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?

MCCF has a strong record of engaging with community partners and guiding complicated, multi-year and multi-jurisdictional projects. Our supporters and the community recognize the value of our education and awareness work. There is very little risk regarding our ability to convene stakeholders, listen to their input, and synthesize the information we are seeking in this project. We recognize that we need to engage with strong museum consultants to help us; it may take time to find the right combination of availability, skills, and cost. Our most significant risk may be the element of unpredictability of outside forces and events impacting the availability of our community partners and consultants to help us with critical steps, which might result in a longer than anticipated timeframe for our project.

Who will plan and implement the project?

Dr. Alexa Dayton, MCCF's executive director, will lead the project. She brings 25 years of organizational leadership and non-profit experience, spanning the science, education, and community engagement disciplines. Bobbi Billings, our administrative manager, will coordinate and facilitate external partnerships and scheduling. Dr. Carla Guenther, chief scientist for MCCF, will play a critical role in audience identification and content guidance. Catherine Moore, MCCF's finance director, has 15 years of experience in museum administration, assessment, and strategic planning and will lead the business planning. Capt. Leroy Weed, our Docent Storyteller, is a retired commercial fisherman born and raised in Stonington. He carries with him a lifetime of experiences from living and working in a small fishing community and has witnessed the changes that have occurred on our waterfront first hand. (See SupportingDoc 3- Leroy's handwritten resume). Leroy will offer his insights on audience planning, making sure our communications goals align with the curiosities of our visitors. Our community partners will join in the advisory panel to help guide all decisions.

What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?

We request \$48,207 from IMLS to fund MCCF staff time, meeting costs, and contract work. The project will take approximately 12 months, beginning in September 2024 and ending in August 2025, although we hope most work will be completed by May 2025. The project manager will spend about 15% of her time dedicated to the project. Our administrative manager will spend

about 19% of her time and the finance manager will dedicate 4% of her time to the project. Other staff members will spend 1-2% of their time assisting as needed.

How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended goals?

The ultimate goal is to have an exhibit design plan ready to implement. Progress will be measured by the degree of completion of each activity over the course of the project period. The project manager will track the level of product completion for each part of the expansion planning process: each part and its associated tasks are organized in a gantt chart with milestones and target completion dates (see Perfmeasurement.pdf).

Project Results

What are your project's intended results and how will they address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified? What products will result from your project?

The product of our project will be a comprehensive exhibit expansion plan that includes community educational needs, responds to concerns of stakeholders and community partners, and encompasses our vision of sustainability in action. Through facility planning, we will be able to dedicate more space to Discovery Wharf to meet visitor demand and allow for longer average visits. Through concept planning, we will be able to expand in ways that appeal to visitors of all ages and compliment local educational programs. And through business planning, we will ensure that our expansion is financially viable and sustainable.

How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the target group change as a result of your project?

The proposed planning project will allow our staff to greatly expand their knowledge and skills. We intend to have staff participate in training on narrative and exhibit concepting. This will allow our team to continue developing thoughtful and professional exhibits for Discovery Wharf.

How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance?

At the end of this project, we will have a comprehensive and feasible expansion plan ready to put into action. Once completed, the expanded Discovery Wharf will have the capacity to serve many more visitors, will have exhibits for all ages that model our vision of sustainability in action, and will serve community educational needs year round.

