

Sampling of Data and Evaluation Projects Funded by IMLS

FY2017-2020

Museums Empowered

Institution: Discovery Center at Murfree Spring

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Building Evaluation To Advance Learning

Project Description: Discovery Center at Murfree Spring will undertake a multipronged approach to create a culture of evaluation through staff professional development. The museum will work with an expert consultant to develop a set of strategies that positions staff to better understand the value, complexity, and importance of conducting and integrating evaluation more strategically across the institution. Professional development activities will include three in-person workshops, application to museum contexts, one-on-one mentoring, and documented reflections. Public cafes facilitated by field experts will cultivate community awareness of the critical importance and value of evaluative thinking, and emphasize the need for opportunities that build evaluation capacity across organizations and institutions. The project will gather data about current exhibitions that will help inform decisions relating to traveling exhibitions, and data about institutional influence that informs and becomes integral to ongoing operations.

Institution: Michigan History Center

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Building a Culture of Evaluation

Project Description: The Michigan History Center will undertake a comprehensive, three-year project to integrate evaluation into the daily work of exhibit and engagement staff. The museum is expanding the way it tells Michigan history to include the stories of the state's diverse communities, but currently lacks the data and skills to assess this transformation. Project activities will include gathering data about the museum's audiences and their needs, hiring an evaluator to train staff in evaluation skills, holding workshops with experts, and building a prototyping space in the permanent galleries. Museum staff will learn how to measure success based on the feedback of its visitors.

Institution: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Deepening Staff Capacity to Serve the Public through Comprehensive Audience Research

Project Description: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art will partner with expert consultants to develop and implement a three-year, mixed-methods research plan that will help staff better understand and serve the museum's current and potential audiences while advancing evaluation practices. The project includes a community partner workshop; qualitative exploration using in-community and in-museum ethnographic methods and experience sampling; a community survey and attitudinal segmentation; and co-creative experience design panels. Key staff from multiple museum departments will participate as partners and learners throughout the project, developing the skills, experience, and confidence to interpret and act on research findings.

Institution: Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Sustainability Through Evaluation: Building the Visitor Advocate Team

Project Description: The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History will team with an expert consultant to create a customized, dynamic exploration into evaluation capacity building. The consultant will be positioned as the museum's dedicated evaluation coach, defining the strategy, demonstrating key evaluation tenants and methods, training and motivating staff members, and transitioning project evaluation to the museum's internal team. The project design will provide multiple layers of professional development and skill building over the three-year project period, and will lead to sustainable capacity building for in-house evaluation beyond the grant period.

Institution: Regents of the University of California, Lawrence Hall of Science

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Evaluation Capacity for Strategic Collective Impact (ECSCI)

Project Description: The Lawrence Hall of Science will build the capacity of staff from different programmatic departments to systematically evaluate their programs in strategic alignment with the museum's newly revised Theory of Action. Based on best practices in evaluation capacity building, the museum will create a strategic plan for evaluation that provides ongoing opportunities for staff to engage in evaluation practice. To build capacity and foster a culture of continuous improvement, program teams will participate in a variety of activities such as trainings to build knowledge about evaluation; meetings to discuss purpose and methods of evaluation; group inquiry about evaluation measures, outcomes, and data; and conducting evaluation with support from evaluators. Project outcomes for museum staff will include increased knowledge of evaluation design; increased skill in designing and conducting evaluation; ongoing and continuous use of evaluation data to improve decision making and programs; and enthusiasm for evaluation as part of the process of strategic learning.

Institution: Lincoln Park Zoo

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Evaluation Capacity Building and Participatory Evaluation at Lincoln Park Zoo

Project Description: Lincoln Park Zoo will create tools and support for an organization-wide evaluation capacity-building program. Project activities will include two workshops with invited evaluation experts; training courses conducted by members of the project team; the creation of a Lincoln Park Zoo resource library and online support portal dedicated to evaluation; coaching and peer discussion; and ongoing opportunities for reflection through the team's formative and summative evaluation activities. Progress will be tracked through formative and summative assessment; measuring individual changes in attitude, knowledge, and skills; and assessing organizational evaluation capacity. These efforts will benefit Lincoln Park Zoo staff, volunteers, community partners, and visitors by increasing the quality of evaluation at the zoo, and enhancing the effectiveness of zoo programs.

Institution: Feiro Marine Life Center

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Rural Evaluation Capacity Building

Project Description: Feiro Marine Life Center will lead a community effort to improve capacity to conduct evaluation of programs, products, and practices across a rural region on the Washington State's Olympic Peninsula. By collaborating with six local partners, the center will engage an external consultant to implement a model of evidence-based practices for evaluation capacity building, through a face-to-face workshop, monthly web conference-based technical support, and the development and implementation of an evaluation during the project period. The six organizations will work collaboratively to form a learning circle focused on both increasing the capacity of individual

organizations and organizations working collectively to conduct evaluations. Participating individuals will build their skills in evaluation planning, data collection, and results analysis, and organizations will build skills in using results to communicate their effectiveness in the community.

Institution: Massachusetts Audubon Society

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Strengthening Mass Audubon: Upgrading School-Program Evaluation to Maximize Impact

Project Description: The Massachusetts Audubon Society will develop, pilot, and implement an evaluation framework for nature-based STEM programming that serves K-12 students visiting its network of nature centers and museums. Working with an external consultant, the society will develop the framework comprised of a logic model and theory of change for fieldtrips, and develop a toolkit of evaluation data collection methodology suitable to various child development stages. The project team will design and conduct three professional development training seminars to help Massachusetts Audubon school educators develop a working understanding of the new evaluation framework for school programs and gain the skills necessary to support protocol implementation. This project will result in the development and adoption of a universal protocol to guide the collection, management, and reporting of education program evaluation data across the 19 nature centers and museums in the Massachusetts Audubon system.

Institution: High Desert Museum

Fiscal Year: 2018

Title: Evaluation Capacity Building at HDM

Project Description: The High Desert Museum will embed evaluative thinking into organizational practices by building staff competencies in evaluation. The project will include a mixture of skill building workshops and guided studies designed to build staff skills and confidence in evaluation processes. A baseline visitor study and logic model will help the museum identify its evaluation priorities. An external consultant will act as an evaluation mentor, offering expert advice and working with a cross-departmental project team to guide the development of staff skills. In addition, an advisory group of evaluation experts will help staff develop a toolkit of evaluation methods that can be adapted to fit their needs. The project will culminate in the development of an institutional evaluation plan that will provide a framework for continuing a culture of evaluation within the institution. Through these activities, the museum intends to establish a culture of learning that will advance its capacity to serve its visitors and the Central Oregon community.

Institution: Philbrook Museum

Fiscal Year: 2018

Title: Philbrook Integrated Evaluation Program

Project Description: The Philbrook Museum will research, develop, and implement a three-year initiative to build institutional capacity around evaluation and integrate evaluation into sustained institutional planning and processes in order to better serve audiences. Working with a consulting team of evaluation experts, the museum will engage an interdepartmental and multilevel team of 16 staff members to receive training in evaluation through workshops, coaching, and individualized assistance; practice evaluation on exhibitions, interpretive projects and programs taking place in real time; and build sustaining processes and practices around evaluation. Team members will develop a shared knowledge of and skills in evaluation; conduct evaluation iteratively within existing institutional processes; and build a strategic evaluation plan, and develop pathways to share learning internally across the institution and externally with the field.

Institution: Science Museum of Minnesota

Fiscal Year: 2018

Title: A Museum-wide Evaluation/Data Gathering Plan

Project Description: The Science Museum of Minnesota will re-examine and recreate the ways in which it gathers, analyzes, and uses data to guide its strategic planning and daily work. The Department of Evaluation and Research in Learning, in collaboration with the senior leadership team, will expand and accelerate an ongoing process to document, study, and improve data-gathering systems throughout the institution; develop and test new strategies and practices; refine and expand on the tools and practices used to elicit feedback from visitors; better document the visitors' learning experiences; and be more proactive in engaging visitors. The project team will communicate findings and solicit feedback from the entire staff, and smaller cross-departmental teams will develop and refine data collection tools and management systems to strengthen institutional evaluation capacity. The museum will form an advisory board of external museum and evaluation experts, as well as a Twin Cities, industry-based advisory board to offer perspectives from other fields.

Institution: McWane Science Center

Fiscal Year: 2018

Title: Program and Exhibit Evaluation at McWane Science Center

Project Description: The McWane Science Center will strengthen organizational capacity to evaluate the impact of its museum exhibits and programs, as well as its success in delivering the institutional mission. Based on a recently completed needs assessment that defined a logic model identifying the outcomes that are important to determine organizational success, the museum will initiate a process to build its evaluation capacity and create a culture of impact evaluation. The museum will establish a staff evaluation team to work with an external consultant who will create a summative evaluation instrument to assess impact objectives; train staff and volunteers in data collection and documentation; and implement an evaluation process to understand the museum's impact performance, creating a baseline for future comparison. The project will include two evaluation cycles, ensuring that staff are trained and prepared to continue the process independently without external supervision.

Institution: Montana Natural History Center

Fiscal Year: 2018

Title: Using professional development to cultivate a evaluation mindset and build staff capacity at the Montana Natural History Center

Project Description: The Montana Natural History Center will implement a year-long professional development program for staff to build capacity for internal evaluation and cultivate an institutional commitment to evaluation. The museum will work with an evaluation consulting company, an online resource and marketing firm, and a community engagement expert to create and present a series of professional development workshops. The expert consultants will provide 31 hours of workshop sessions which will reach a broad cross section of the employees, including managers, research staff, program coordinators, development staff, administrators, and marketing and communications staff. The project is intended to train staff to evaluate their own programs, individually or as a team, using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Institution: Chicago Zoological Society

Fiscal Year: 2019

Title: Zoo Practitioners as Evaluation Partners

Project Description: The Brookfield Zoo will design and implement a professional development program in evaluation capacity building for the zoo's Conservation, Education, and Training department managers. The training will focus on building their understanding of the role of front-end,

formative, and summative evaluation; understanding how logic models support program development and frame evaluation; interest in being a partner in evaluation; interest in evaluation-based program improvement; confidence to apply evaluation findings; and confidence to construct and use logic models. The project is designed to build managers capacity to be partners with the organization's professional researchers and evaluators in order to bolster their ability to develop outcomes-focused programs and act on evaluation findings. The zoo's published framework for educator engagement in program evaluation will provide the groundwork for project activities.

Institution: Discovery Museums

Fiscal Year: 2019

Title: Data Empowered Museum

Project Description: The Discovery Museums will develop and implement a continuous improvement process to improve the impact of its STEM programming by strengthening staff skills in using evaluation data. The project will begin with a series of training sessions for learning programs staff based on feedback from youth regarding the quality of the museum's program delivery and an assessment of staff competencies in positive youth development. Participating staff will benefit from a deeper understanding of data and the ability to build ongoing evaluation and positive youth development practices into their program presentations in a way that supports Social-Emotional Learning outcomes. The project will potentially result in a process and set of tools to quantify the impact of STEM programming that can be shared with other informal learning organizations.

Institution: Museum of Science, Boston

Fiscal Year: 2019

Title: Building Inclusive and Culturally-responsive Evaluation capacities at the Museum of Science

Project Description: The Museum of Science, Boston will integrate inclusive and culturally-responsive practices into its ongoing evaluation work. The museum's Research & Evaluation department will lead the project, which will include professional development workshops conducted by external evaluators for museum staff followed by mini-experiments to allow participants to practice what they've learned. The project is prompted by recent literature suggesting that many of the currently employed methodological frameworks for research and evaluation are inherently biased in ways that do not support the goal of broadening participation of underrepresented audiences. The museum will produce a position paper that outlines how it will sustain the integration of inclusive and culturally responsive evaluation practices into its work as well as training materials that can be used by staff after the project ends.

Institution: Science History Institute

Fiscal Year: 2019

Title: Evaluate for Impact

Project Description: The Science History Institute will build an institutional culture of evaluation by providing a series of training, mentoring, and coaching opportunities for multi-departmental staff and members of the museum's board. An external evaluation firm will design and deliver a series of workshops addressing outcomes-based program design and evaluation and assessment practices as tools for broadening institutional impact, encouraging risk-taking, and supporting collaboration. The museum will record and edit the training sessions to create a training library, ensuring that new staff and board members have access to this work as part of their onboarding process. Project outcomes will include enhanced skills at all levels of the organization in defining, measuring, and reporting on programmatic impact, adoption of outcomes-based program design and evaluation, and new institutional structures for aligning resources with effective projects.

Institution: The Pretend City Children’s Museum

Fiscal Year: 2020

Title: Evaluation Capacity Building for Better Brains

Project Description: Pretend City proposes to implement a sustainable, evidence-based evaluation infrastructure to assess progress toward specified objectives and outcomes; that will strengthen our ability to assess the museum’s impact on young children and families who visit the museum and participate in programming.

Institution: Tennessee Aquarium

Fiscal Year: 2020

Title: Developing an Evaluation Mindset for Enhanced Visitor Experiences

Project Description: In order to build capacity in evaluation and develop an evaluation mindset among staff, we will conduct a three-year, cross-departmental project that will build upon the development of a framework to help define educational outcomes, followed by evaluation capacity building professional learning, practice of methods, and application in the galleries of the Tennessee Aquarium. This effort will be led by experienced external consultants to ensure that we are developing best practices in evaluation. We will primarily work across departments at the Aquarium, but will invite other local informal education institutions to the workshops to help develop evaluation capacity across the Chattanooga region.

Institution: Cleveland Museum of Art

Fiscal Year: 2020

Title: Expanding Data Literacy at the Cleveland Museum of Art

Project Description: Expanding Data Literacy at the Cleveland Museum of Art is a museum-wide evaluation project focused on promoting data literacy, empowering museum staff at all levels to more fully and confidently integrate data-informed decision-making into their work and enable the internal evaluation team to develop new methodologies for sharing and integrating visitor studies. The museum’s strategic plan (2017) and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) plan (2018) call for audience data to be at the core of all decision-making, tasking CMA to “educate staff to use analytical thinking as individuals and in teams, empowering them to use data to inform planning and practice; make data easily available to staff at all levels.”

National Leadership Grants for Museums

Institution: Association of Children’s Museums

Fiscal Year: 2017

Title: Community Catalysts: Modeling the Economic Impact of Children’s Museums

Project Description: The Association of Children's Museums will partner with NewKnowledge, a nonprofit think tank and planning group, and IMPLAN Group, a provider of economic impact data, to prototype a model for assessing the economic impact of children's museums and the field at large. The project team will conduct economic impact analyses that quantify the operational economic influence of children's museums, as well as the impact of local and out-of-area visitors to children's museums. The project will produce a report that details the economic impact of the children's museum sector which will be evaluated by children's museums for its utility and perceived value for the field. The resulting model will be shared with other museum associations to guide and inform future efforts to understand the economic impact of museums at national, regional, state, and local levels.

Institution: Exploratorium

Fiscal Year: 2018

Title: Cultivating Confidence: Young Women's Self-efficacy in Science Museums

Project Description: The Exploratorium will increase the museum community's understanding of the impact of a single science museum visit on "emerging adult" learners-young adults aged 18-29, who are not yet married and have no children. In particular, the study will attempt to understand how museum visits help young women build crucially important science self-confidence. The project will build on prior IMLS-funded research that found that a science museum visit mitigated a pre-existing gender gap in science confidence, or self-efficacy (SSE). The research team will replicate and investigate this effect further by observing male and female young adults during their visits, and over the course of the following three months. The study will gather data before, during, and after the visit through interviews, surveys, experience-sampling, and analysis of participants' social media posts. Results of this research will provide valuable information to the science museum community, as they seek to address the challenges of achieving gender equity in STEM education and the workforce.

Institution: Knew Knowledge Organization

Fiscal Year: 2018

Title: Emerging Research on Identity, Representation and Inclusion in Museums

Project Description: The New Knowledge Organization will conduct a qualitative meta-analysis of Master's and Doctoral theses from museum studies programs that address issues of personal and group identity and representation in museums, followed by interviews with a sample of the authors. A team of experienced researchers will aggregate the findings to develop a set of publication briefs to inform an edited volume of chapters written by collaborative teams drawn from the pool of thesis authors. The project team will upload a publicly accessible bibliography of all the works, and publish a glossary of terms used in this emerging area of research. The intended outcome of the work is to increase museum professionals' access and use of research on identity and representation. This will benefit the museum field by helping museums engage with communities and provide inclusive services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Institution: Ashé Cultural Arts Center

Fiscal Year: 2019

Title: Architecting Sustainable Futures: Investigating Financial Sustainability in Small Museums and Community-Based Archives Using New Orleans as a Model

Project Description: The Ashé Cultural Arts Center will conduct research on the role small museums and community-based archives play in the welfare of their communities, the value they bring to the local cultural economy, and potential models for their financial sustainability. In partnership with external consultants and the Southern University at New Orleans, the project team will conduct data analysis of the local cultural heritage funding landscape, and facilitate a discovery and design workshop and interviews with practitioners to identify both successful strategies and barriers to financial sustainability. The project focuses on organizations preserving the histories and culture of marginalized people to identify the ways in which they contribute to community health and vitality, resulting in a model for research that observes national funding trends and defines a process for translating national data to useful local data.

Institution: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

Fiscal Year: 2019

Title: Building Capacity for Collective Evaluation across North Carolina Science Museums

Project Description: The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences will partner with North Carolina State University to improve the evaluation skills of informal science education providers. The project team will create a community of practice for 54 science museums across North Carolina by implementing a series of regional professional development workshops. The workshops will be

designed to create a shared sense of purpose for programming and evaluation, build capacity among science museum educators to evaluate their programs, and establish a set of common metrics and methodologies for the evaluation of informal science learning across the state. The project will produce a practitioner's guide that will describe the collaborative process, lessons learned, and ways other informal science organizations can use identified evaluation goals and metrics.

Institution: Children's Museum of Tacoma

Fiscal Year: 2019

Title: Evaluating Military Family Programming

Project Description: The Children's Museum of Tacoma will develop and disseminate an evaluation tool that enables museums to measure the impact their programming on military families. The museum will work with a variety of partner organizations, including FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention, the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research, and the Army Analytics Group, to adapt two existing frameworks for use by museums. The project partners will test iterations of the tool, which will be informed by focus groups with military families. The museum will disseminate project resources to support the evaluation of programming tailored for military families by launching a web page with explanatory information, downloadable content, and a recorded webinar. The museum and its project partners will share project results through presentations at national conferences.

Institution: Association of Children's Museums

Fiscal Year: 2019

Title: ACM Trends: Next Generation Data Literacy & Management Tools

Project Description: The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) will strengthen the capacity of children's museums to draw on shared data to more effectively analyze their operations by using forward-looking data to predict how they may need to manage for the future. ACM will overlay its previously gathered longitudinal data with other available datasets and research that will help illuminate and forecast new trends affecting the sector. Project activities will include developing online data analytics tools that allow children's museum users to generate standardized institution reports; the publication of 18-24 Trends Reports; and hosting three discussion forums with museum professionals to explore critical data and research impacting the field. The project can serve other museum sectors as a model that integrates attendance and fundraising data with visitor studies data and national public datasets to advance predictive modeling and performance measures.

Institution: Utah Arts Council

Fiscal Year: 2020

Title: Measurement of Museum Social Impact (MOMSI) Research Project

Project Description: In partnership with the Thanksgiving Point Institute, the Utah Division of Arts and Museums will conduct a collaborative Measurement of Museum Social Impact project to measure short-term indicators that have been found to lead to long-term outcomes of strengthened relationships, improved health and wellbeing, meaningful learning and engagement, and deeper intercultural competency. They will recruit a project manager and identify and train 30 partner museums to host the study. The host museums and the project manager will recruit study subjects, collect and analyze data, and conduct formative evaluation to understand their experiences. The team will publish and broadly share the data and a toolkit through regional museum association communication channels, presentations at symposia and conferences, and professional journal publications.

Institution: Morton Arboretum

Fiscal Year: 2020

Title: Coordinating Consortia to Conserve Living Plant Collections

Project Description: The Morton Arboretum—along with partners Atlanta Botanical Garden and Montgomery Botanical Center—will implement a project to improve the conservation quality of living collections of “exceptional species” (plants that cannot be seed banked). Three taxonomically focused conservation consortia—for oaks, magnolias, and cycads—will be established, involving dozens of organizations. The project team will gather and analyze collection data to evaluate conservation quality and conduct genetic analyses. They also will develop species management plans for priority species in each consortium. The shared collections data will position consortium members for future sustainable collections management.

Institution: Museum of Science, Boston

Fiscal Year: 2020

Title: Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies: Art Research Team (COVES:ART)

Project Description: The Museum of Science will work with the art museum community by adapting a successful collaboration among science museums to collect and analyze visitor experience data across disciplines. Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies: Art Research Team (COVES:ART) will bring art museum professionals from across the country together to discuss the value of and logistics involved in incorporating art museums into a collaborative system of collecting, analyzing, and reporting on visitor experience data. The Museum of Science will spearhead the project in conjunction with a wide range of art museums partners. Participants will focus on understanding and improving the visitor experience while supporting visitor data collection and streamlined analysis and reporting across a diverse range of museums. If successful, the resulting data will vastly increase field-wide understanding of museum visitors.