



## Museums for America

Sample Application MA-30-19-0681-19  
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Public Access

### George Eastman Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$116,975
Amount of cost share:	\$128,302

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Please note that the instructions for preparing applications for the FY2020 Museums for America grant program differ from those that guided the preparation of FY2019 applications. Be sure to use the instructions in the [FY2020 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

## Abstract

**The Project:** The George Eastman Museum requests a Museums for America grant of \$118,428 to support *Silver Voices: A Photography and Cinema Oral Histories Digitization Project*, (“The Project”). The goal of the 15-month project is to digitize and provide free online access to four of the museum’s most important audio and audiovisual collections. Three of the collections consist of audio and videotape recordings of artists, curators, and scholars who have made significant contributions to the history of photography, photograph conservation, and cinema. Included are interviews with the museum’s first curator Beaumont Newhall, photographers Ansel Adams, André Kertész, Lisette Model and others, and cinema stars such as Gloria Swanson, Buster Keaton, Lillian Gish and more. The fourth collection is comprised of audiotapes of landmark museum symposia, workshops, and conferences recorded over nearly 40 years. Aligned with the Museum’s mission and strategic plan, the Project preserves and makes accessible resources related to photography and cinema.

**The Opportunity:** The four audiovisual collections comprise nearly 300 hours of recordings relevant to the activities of the museum’s departments of Photography, Moving Image, and Conservation. The collections are under the stewardship of the museum’s Richard and Ronay Menschel Library. These recordings currently exist in formats that require playback on obsolete equipment and access requires an appointment at the museum. To provide online access to these oral histories—anytime, anywhere—the museum will professionally reformat these recordings from analog tapes to open-source digital formats accessible through the museum’s website and playable on any computer or mobile device. The creation of lossless digital production master files will significantly reduce handling, thereby supporting preservation of the original archival masters.

**Public Benefits:** Completion of this project will allow researchers, students, and the general public the ability to hear curators, artists, actors and others discuss—in their own voices—topics related to photography, cinema, and their professional and personal experiences. The addition of an interactive community transcription tool will allow end-users to participate in transcribing these recordings into textual representations that can then be downloaded and referred to offline.

**Outcomes:** The anticipated project outcomes are:

- **Cataloging:** Four of the museum’s oral history collections will be fully cataloged. One hundred fifty-six (156) item-level records will be created in the library’s online public access catalog and four finding aids that use DACS (*Describing Archives: A Content Standard*) will be created in ArchiveSpace.
- **Digitization:** All 599 tapes in these four collections will be digitized in accordance with FADGI (Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative) recommendations and will result in the production of 156 master and derivative digital files. Each digitized recording will contain embedded technical, administrative, descriptive, and preservation metadata implemented in accordance with PREMIS (Preservation Metadata: Implementation Strategies) recommendations.
- **Access:** The *Silver Voices Project* will be fully accessible through the museum’s website: Eastman.org, where contextual information about the recordings and optimized links to derivative files will be provided. Site visitors will be encouraged to create transcriptions of the recordings using a free, open source interactive community transcription tool such as Scripto.

## **1. Project Justification**

Founded in 1947, the George Eastman Museum is the world's oldest photography museum and one of the oldest film archives. Our institution's mission has always included leadership in the fields of photography and cinema. For many years, the museum was one of the few centers for the study of photography and film, and attracted many leaders in these fields to participate in its programs. Key activities have included not just the collection and preservation of photographs and films, but also the documentation and study of their creators, curators, scholars, and conservators. Beginning in the mid-1950s, museum staff have recorded the commentaries, recollections, and histories of many leading figures in these fields, as well as the significant conferences, seminars, and workshops hosted by the museum.

Unfortunately, this rich cache of audio and video recordings currently exists only on magnetic media, which are vulnerable to degradation. Playback depends on increasingly obsolete equipment that further degrades these aging tapes with each use, and researchers can only access the content by visiting the museum in Rochester, New York, during library hours. Through implementation of the *Silver Voices* project, the museum will remedy these problems and limitations by digitizing these highly significant recordings and enabling web-based global access to them, many of which were originally recorded during the museum's early years when the study of photography and cinema were nascent fields at museums and in academia. As these recordings become more accessible, photography and cinema scholars around the world will have the rare opportunity of hearing firsthand accounts of the evolution of these art forms from some of their most important and innovative figures. Photograph conservators will also benefit significantly from the project.

Over the past several months, the Project Director has met with the museum's curators and conservators to identify recordings that are considered to be of most value to the academic and museum communities and to their own work as scholars and educators. The information gathered during these meetings informed the selection of the oral histories that are the focus of this project: four collections comprising 156 recordings on 599 separate magnetic tapes, representing a total of 283 hours of invaluable content (for a detailed inventory of these recordings, see Appendix A). As further testament to the research value of these materials, three of the four collections have previously been selected for major preservation projects.

### **1. "The Photography Oral History Project"**

NUMBER OF AUDIO TAPES: 168

NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS: 37

TOTAL RUNNING TIME (HOURS:MINUTES:SECONDS): 143:23:00

ORIGIN AND SCOPE: The audio recordings comprising this collection were originally made during a National Endowment for the Humanities-funded oral history project conducted from 1975 to 1979. The project includes extensive interviews with key figures in photography, including André Kertész, the pioneering photojournalist; Jacob Deschin, the photography editor for the *New York Times*; Lisette Model, recognized for her striking photographs of individuals as well as her productive career on the staff of *Harper's Bazaar*; Henry Holmes Smith, renowned as a teacher and creative photographer; Brett Weston, famed for his elemental landscape and nature photographs; Arthur Siegel, the influential experimental and documentary photographer; and Carl Siembab, owner of a Boston art gallery. For Arthur Siegel, Henry Holmes Smith, and Brett Weston, background interviews with other photographers, friends, and family members were also conducted.

PRESERVATION STATUS: In 1997–1998, this collection was preserved to ¼" reel-to-reel magnetic tape in a project funded by a grant from the New York State Library Conservation Program.

## 2. “The George Pratt Oral Histories”

NUMBER OF AUDIO TAPES: 108

TOTAL NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS: 34

TOTAL RUNNING TIME: 42:42:30

ORIGIN AND SCOPE: In 1958, George Pratt (1914–1988), a film historian and Assistant Curator of Film at the George Eastman Museum, began interviewing many of the celebrated Hollywood stars and directors whom he met at the museum’s biannual Festival of Film Artists ceremonies. These contacts led to further interviews with some of the biggest names in early Hollywood. Among his subjects were the famous silent-era comedians Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton; legendary silent stars including Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson, and Lillian Gish; and the groundbreaking directors Cecil B. DeMille, Rex Ingram, and Frank Borzage. These oral histories offer intimate details of filmmaking during cinema’s earliest decades, as well as a rare opportunity to hear the voices of many silent-era stars whose careers peaked before the sound era.

PRESERVATION STATUS: In 1997, these oral histories were the subject of a project that produced ¼-inch reel-to-reel preservation masters by the National Film and Sound Archives of Australia.

## 3. “The Symposiums, Conferences, and Workshops Collection”

NUMBER OF AUDIO TAPES: 193

NUMBER OF EVENTS: 19

TOTAL RUNNING TIME: 194:14:49

ORIGIN AND SCOPE: Capturing nearly 35 years of significant events held at the Eastman Museum and related venues, this collection is by far the largest and widest in scope. Included are recordings of symposia on topics such as the preservation of color prints; the art history of photography; photographic collecting in North America and Europe; and such landmark museum exhibitions as *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* and *Electroworks*. The collection also contains numerous conferences held by the Society for Photographic Education, the Photographic Historical Society, and the Photographic Historical Society of Canada. The roster of participating photographers is a virtual who’s who of photography: Ansel Adams; Gordon Parks, whose photographs reflected the anguish of Jim Crow America; Robert Frank, whose controversial photographs of life in the United States revealed difficult truths; and street photographer Garry Winogrand. Other speakers include former museum directors and curators, including Beaumont Newhall, Van Deren Coke, and Nathan Lyons.

PRESERVATION STATUS: These tapes were preserved to ¼” reel-to-reel tapes in 1984 with grant funding.

## 4. “The Oral History of Photographic Conservation”

NUMBER OF VIDEO TAPES: 130

NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS: 66

TOTAL RUNNING TIME (APPROXIMATE): 90:44:00

ORIGIN AND SCOPE: This important video collection is the cumulative result of a series of separate oral history projects begun in 2000 by fellows of the museum’s Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded Advanced Residency Program in Photograph Conservation (ARPPC). Each project successfully captured the professional knowledge and techniques of some of the world’s leading conservators and photochemical engineers, and together they form one of a small number of known oral histories dedicated to the theory and practice of photo conservation. The conservation communities have long expressed interest in this particular collection; the museum’s Conservator in Charge Taina Meller regularly receives email and phone inquiries regarding access, and discussions of particular interviews are often found on professional listservs.

PRESERVATION STATUS: All interviews were recorded on MiniDV cassettes and have never been preserved. In 2017, a short-lived effort led by staff of the University of Delaware Art Conservation Program sought to transcribe these recordings and make them available through the larger Oral History Project established in 1975 by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation. Coordination proved a challenge, and the project soon came to an end, but such collaborative efforts would be greatly facilitated by digitization.

Three of the four collections that will be digitized—the “The Photography Oral History Project,” “The George Pratt Oral Histories,” and “The Symposiums, Conferences, and Workshops Collection”—have been preserved through prior grant-funded projects that produced preservation master tapes from the original recordings. Still, the most recent of these duplicate copies are already more than twenty years old, and many were recorded onto Ampex 406 ¼-inch open-reel tape, a brand of tape known for its susceptibility to “sticky shed” syndrome—a condition in which the binders holding the top layer of electromagnetic coating to the tapes plastic carrier deteriorate and the information, or “signal,” is lost.

Each of these collections has been fully inventoried and described in a master spreadsheet prepared in preparation for this proposal (Appendix A). This project proposes to reformat these recordings as uncompressed, lossless digital preservation master files according to standards set forth by the Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative (FADGI), and to ensure their long-term usability using the digital preservation framework recommended by Preservation Metadata Maintenance Activity (PREMIS). The creation of smaller, web-friendly derivative files that will be linked to the museum’s website will ensure broad access to these recordings. A key component of this project will be to promote the use of these newly available materials on the museum’s website, social media platforms, press releases, and public and professional speaking opportunities.

Though effectively hidden from the public because of insufficient cataloging and promotion, these collections have not gone unnoticed. Thanks to word-of-mouth among scholars and conservators of photography and cinema, access requests are a regular occurrence. Unfortunately, few can be fulfilled because of a lack of easily deliverable formats and the inconvenience of the museum’s location. Other than these “insiders,” too few potential beneficiaries are aware of these collections, their significance, and their research value. Digitization and full cataloging of these resources will greatly increase their visibility and accessibility—enabling them to reach and benefit far more of their potential audience.

The project will provide public benefits to researchers, historians, students, the general public, and the museum’s staff. Specific audiences that will use and benefit from access to the recordings include:

- Media scholars interested in the effects of technology and the revolution in film style ignited by the advent of sound.
- Students of visual culture interested in the changing attitudes towards photography reflected in the symposia and conferences.
- Social historians seeking to gain insight into realities that only a camera in the hands of “street photographers” like Garry Winogrand or Robert Frank can capture.
- Journalists interested in the evolution of interviewing styles and past practices.
- George Eastman Museum staff in search of knowledge to inform future exhibitions, publications, research, and teaching.

The advent of new digital-imaging technologies has meant the estrangement of many students of photography from the photochemical processes of the past and a concomitant loss of associated conservation techniques. One of the great and unique aspects of “The Oral History of Photograph Conservation” is that, in addition to professional conservators, the interviewees include photochemical engineers—many of them employees of Eastman Kodak Company—who share a deep knowledge of how these images were made and how they may be best preserved.

Future generations of researchers will also benefit from the *Silver Voices* project, which will assure long-term preservation and accessibility of the digitized recordings, long after their analog counterparts on magnetic media have deteriorated.

Members of the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities will meaningfully benefit from the inclusion of the community-transcription feature that will make available recorded information that might otherwise be inaccessible to them. This feature encourages hearing users to transcribe the recordings as they listen. According to a report from the IMLS-funded project *Transforming Libraries and Archives through Crowdsourcing*, such volunteer-crowdsourcing features offer a feasible means of transforming image and voice materials into usable information. We believe that these interactive features will encourage return visits by a more fully-engaged public, while providing the museum with useful text transcriptions that can be easily indexed, searched, and downloaded for off-line reference and future research in ways the source recordings cannot. Transcriptions of video recordings will be added to the files in the form of subtitles that may be toggled on and off during playback.

The *Silver Voices* project directly advances the museum’s highest priority strategic objective: preservation of our collections. Reformatting these collections from aging ¼-inch magnetic tape to uncompressed, lossless digital files will ensure the preservation of these recordings for decades to come. *Silver Voices* also addresses our strategic objective to improve access, engagement, and collaborative capabilities. The creation of compressed service files will dramatically improve access to these recordings. Embedded with standardized descriptive metadata, these files can also be shared among collaborating institutions with similar collections. Lastly, the inclusion of a community transcription feature will enable end-users to engage with the material in a fully interactive manner. While listening to the recordings, they will be able to transcribe the recordings as text files that can later be indexed for content and downloaded for reference and dissemination, thus further improving access to the information included on these recordings.

## **2. Project Work Plan**

The project is considered to be at the mainstreaming level. The four oral history collections that are the subject of this project are in an obsolete format dependent on antiquated playback equipment that actually damages these rare and fragile tapes. The integration of an innovative community transcription feature into the museum’s website (Eastman.org) further mainstreams access to the recordings with special emphasis on the large community of deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

The greatest risk to any audio and audiovisual digitization work plan is that the recordings to be reformatted have degraded beyond the point where the original signal can be recovered. To manage this risk we will ship to the vendor both the original archival recordings, and where available, the preservation masters. Considering that no reformatting process is truly “lossless,” the original recordings are the preferred source material. Should any original recording have degraded in spite of the museum’s best conservation efforts, the preservation master recordings will serve as a replacement. Since there are no preservation masters for “The Oral History of Photograph

Conservation,” we must rely on the less desirable, lossy derivative DV-R and VHS access copies if the information on the MiniDV is irrecoverable.

Upon project commencement, the **Head of the Library and Archives Ken Fox (Project Director)** will collaborate with the Vice President of Finance and Operations to draft a Request for Proposals (RFP) through which professional digitization services for both audio and video will be competitively sought. For purposes of project and budget planning, cost estimates for these services are provided as a budget attachment. The time frame for completion of the digitization process will be approximately four months. The museum will seek out contractors that specialize in digitization of archival recordings in compliance with the Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative (FADGI), specifically those guidelines set forth by FADGI’s Audio Visual Work Group. Given the age and fragility of some of the tapes, preference will be given to contractors that offer “high-touch” or “attended” services with maximum human oversight to ensure proper handling and transfer with minimal damage to either the original archival or duplicate preservation master recordings. Preferred proposers will also need to assure the quality of both sound and image recordings. Upon contract execution the museum’s **Object Preparator Emily Phoenix** will package the archival master recordings and the preservation master tapes for collections that have been preserved, for secure shipping to the contractor(s). A fine arts transporter will be used for shipping.

Processing of the Oral Histories collections will begin upon project commencement. The Project Director will work with **Chief Registrar Sarah Evans** to plan, create, and select metadata fields, and will create four collection-level folders to hold the assets and their associated information records to prepare the DAMS to receive each oral history collection. The Chief Registrar will also create four collection-level records in the The Museum System (TMS), the museum’s collection management software. **Research Facilitator Stephanie Hofner** will create descriptive metadata for each recording in accordance with current professional standards. Particular attention will be given to the creation of preservation metadata designed according to (PREMIS) international framework in order to enable long term access and usability of the digital master files. Hofner will also conduct research to prepare a biography for each oral history interviewee and interviewer and to locate a photo that will accompany the biographical information. Hofner will work with the Chief Registrar to assure that all required intellectual property rights are obtained. **Assistant Librarian Deb Mohr** will create recording-level MARC records in Voyager, the online public access catalog (OPAC) the museum shares with the University of Rochester and the Memorial Art Gallery. Following the guidelines provided by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, the Project Director will create four collection finding-aids through the ArchivesSpace platform that will be available through the ArchivesSpace website and archival materials aggregators such as ArchiveGrid. The Project Director will provide cataloging and metadata control. He will send monthly batches of descriptive metadata to **Editor and Publications Manager Molly Tarbell** who will review all descriptive metadata and edit as necessary for grammatical and punctuation accuracy. She will also edit text to comply with the museum’s style guide. Following Ms. Tarbell’s review, the metadata will be sent to the **Director of Publishing and Design Amy Schelemanow**, who will provide final review and approval before posting online.

Upon the return of the digitized files, **Manager of Information Technology Systems Ory Ballenger** will ingest the uncompressed audio files and the audio and video derivatives into the DAMS, along with any additional metadata. The much larger uncompressed video files will be stored on LTO-6, the museum’s magnetic tape data storage system. In the future, the museum plans to install a new Storage Area Network (SAN) that will accommodate the permanent storage of these files.

When all files and associated metadata have been ingested into the DAMS and LTO-6, **Manager of Digital Engagement Kate Meyers Emery** will work with the Chief Registrar to design an output system that will extract and save data from the DAMS to an external SQL-compatible database. The metadata for files on LTO-6 will be stored in the DAMS, awaiting their future ingestion. The Manager of Digital Engagement will use this data to build an auxiliary website, or “microsite,” that will be attached to the museum’s website, Eastman.org. The microsite will contain four collection-level areas, one for each collection. Each area will comprise content-rich pages containing links to web-friendly derivatives of the master recordings, mostly hosted on a streaming platform such as SoundCloud for audio and Vimeo for video. These pages will also contain contextual information and photographs gathered by the Research Facilitator designed to enrich the user experience.

At the outset of year two the Manager of Digital Engagement will implement a community transcription application that will encourage hearing users to transcribe recordings as they listen. Textual transcriptions of the oral histories will make them available to deaf and hard-of-hearing communities—users for whom recorded sound materials are often inaccessible. These text transcriptions will also be available in a searchable format for all users to either read or to download as PDF files for future reference. Completed transcriptions will appear on the pages of the microsite alongside links to the recordings; transcriptions of video recordings will also be added to the files themselves in the form of subtitles that may be toggled on and off during playback. The addition of this functionality will be accompanied by targeted outreach to organizations such as the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) and Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) and its Rochester affiliate. In addition, the Project Director will host a Focus 45 Talk about this functionality specific to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community; ASL interpretation will be provided.

**Dissemination:** A wide variety of promotional efforts will inform the public about this project and will publicize the digital preservation of the Oral History Collections and open access. A primary means of promotion will be through social networking and will draw upon the museum’s existing network of members, supporters, and followers through platforms such as the Eastman Museum’s blog, e-mail newsletter (32,811 subscribers), Facebook page (42,106 fans), Instagram (22,300 followers) and Twitter (69,200 followers). Curatorial staff will participate in Twitter’s #AskACurator and #AskAnArchivist days to connect with larger online audiences and promote use of the online collection data. Museum members and visitors will be informed about the project through Focus 45 Talks and through articles in the museum’s newsletter, *News/Films/Events Bulletin*. Presentations or panel discussions will be provided to colleagues at national and regional conferences of professional organizations including: the American Alliance of Museums, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, the New York Library Association, and the Rochester Regional Library Council. In addition, the Project Director and Manager of Digital Engagement will share results at the Society of American Archivists (SAA) Annual Meeting in Chicago in 2020.

The Project Team will provide regular information updates to internal constituents at monthly all-staff meetings and at senior staff meetings. The Project Director will also present a “Lunch and Learn” session at a quarterly meeting of the museum’s Board of Trustees to provide project information.

### **3. Project Results**

Successful completion of the Project will result in the following tangible products and outcomes which will be tracked and reported upon:



- Four of the museum's oral history collections will be fully cataloged. One hundred fifty-six (156) item-level records will be created in the library's online public access catalog and four finding aids that use DACS (*Describing Archives: A Content Standard*) will be created in ArchiveSpace.
- All 599 tapes in these four collections will be digitized in accordance with FADGI (Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative) recommendations and will result in the production of 156 master and derivative digital files. Each digitized recording will contain embedded technical, administrative, descriptive, and preservation metadata implemented in accordance with PREMIS recommendations. The inclusion of PREMIS-based preservation metadata will also help ensure the integrity and authenticity of these newly created digital masters well into the future.
- The *Silver Voices* project will be fully accessible through the museum's website where contextual information about the recordings and optimized links to derivative files will be provided. Site visitors will be encouraged to create transcriptions of the recordings using a free, open source interactive community-transcription tool such as Scripto.
- For the first time since their creation, the *Silver Voices* project will provide full public access to nearly 300 hours of culturally and historically significant audio and audiovisual recordings about photography, photograph conservation, and cinema. Web access to these recordings will render unnecessary physical trips to the museum in order to hear or view the tapes, thus opening these collections to anyone without the means, time, or ability to travel.
- Online access to the recordings will reduce physical handling of the fragile original items, thereby prolonging preservation of the collections.
- The number of visitors to the microsite will be tracked using Google Analytics and the number of transcribed recordings posted to the site will provide an indicator of success.

**Sustainability:** Inclusion of PREMIS metadata is designed to support preservation efforts such as migration of data into more current formats and verification of data integrity with checksum information to ensure future usability. Usage of the community transcription feature will render improved transcriptions over time. Information derived from the transcriptions will further inform and improve the finding aids and the MARC records in the Voyager OPAC.



<b>YEAR ONE (Cont'd)</b>	<b>Year 1 First Qtr.</b>			<b>Year 1 Second Qtr.</b>			<b>Year 1 Third Qtr.</b>			<b>Year 1 Fourth Qtr.</b>		
<b>ACCESS</b>												
Project Director sends monthly batches of descriptive metadata to Editor & Publications Manager for review.												
Director of Publications provides monthly review of metadata.												
Manager of Digital Engagement plans and creates microsite.												
Microsite testing and launch.												
<b>DISSEMINATION</b>												
Press releases issued to announce grant award and launch of microsite.												
Project Director and Manager of Digital Engagement shares project information at various milestones via museum newsletter, blog, and social networking sites: Facebook, Twitter.												
Project Director presents Focus 45 Talk to share information with museum visitors and members.												
Information sharing at SAA conference, Chicago.												
<b>REPORTING</b>												
Manager of Digital Engagement periodically tracks online collection access via Google Analytics												
Interim Report submitted												

<b>YEAR TWO</b>	<b>Year 2 First Qtr.</b>			<b>Year 2 Second Qtr.</b>			<b>Year 2 Third Qtr.</b>			<b>Year 2 Fourth Qtr.</b>		
<b>Project Activities</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sept</b>
<b>ACCESS</b>												
Manager of Digital Engagement creates interactive community transcription application at microsite.												
Targeted outreach to promote microsite and transcription feature to deaf and hard-of-hearing communities.												
<b>DISSEMINATION</b>												
Information sharing via museum newsletter, blog, and social networking sites: Facebook, Twitter.												
Focus 45 Talk with ASL interpreter to promote online access with emphasis on transcription features.												
Manager of Digital Engagement tracks site visits and online collection access via Google Analytics												
<b>REPORTING</b>												
Manager of Digital Engagement periodically tracks online collection access via Google Analytics												
Final report submitted												