



# Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application MA-35-19-0055-19  
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Public Access

## Portsmouth Athenaeum

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$50,000  
Amount of cost share: \$7,550

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 Inspire! Grants for Small Museums 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: Portsmouth Athenaeum

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The Portsmouth Athenaeum seeks to complete the final planning phase of a Comprehensive Preservation Initiative, begun in 2014, aimed at achieving improved, sustainable preservation of and access to our museum and library collections, while preserving the integrity of our historic buildings. We propose to engage, as primary consultants for this project, our established museum HVAC/fire systems engineer and a preservation architect. Our established museum space planner and collections conservation consultant will provide additional guidance for the project's activities. The proposed Inspire! project's activities will include production of HVAC, fire suppression and electrical designs, specifications and equipment selections; preservation architectural support to ensure project compliance with state and federal historic preservation guidelines in our historic buildings; collections storage and collections conservation guidance as HVAC and fire suppression designs are synthesized with a new comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan; and production of construction cost estimates to kickstart fundraising for implementation of our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative.

Over its 200-year history, the Portsmouth Athenaeum has acquired, at times floor-by-floor, the three adjoining early 19th century buildings that today house our extensive museum and library collections, and provide space for all other public and operational activities. These buildings possess great beauty and historicity in their own right, and stand as iconic landmarks in the heart of Portsmouth's historic downtown. However, these historic structures, which were built to accommodate Portsmouth's maritime trade and its ancillary businesses, have for decades challenged the Athenaeum's efforts to provide safe environmental conditions for its collections and ready public access to them. Piecemeal expansion; a patchwork of aging, poorly-functioning residential-grade HVAC systems; inadequate HVAC ductwork for proper air distribution; building insulation and vapor barrier issues; and a reliance upon mixed-use spaces that combine public, office and work space with collections storage are damaging our collections, hindering public access, and placing the safety of both at risk.

To identify and address these issues, the Athenaeum has pursued a Comprehensive Preservation Initiative whose activities have spanned the last four years. Studies undertaken to date include an Energy Audit of the Athenaeum's buildings and systems; a Collections Conservation Assessment; an NEH-funded Fire and Life Safety Audit; and an IMLS-funded Comprehensive Preservation Needs Assessment of the Athenaeum's buildings and systems. *We are also currently engaged in an NEH-funded planning project, led by a museum space planner, our HVAC engineer and collections conservation consultant and scheduled for completion in June of 2019, that will produce a comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan.* Our proposed Inspire! project will complete the last step in our long-term efforts to plan comprehensive preservation improvements for the Athenaeum's collections and historic buildings: *final design, specifications and equipment selections for HVAC and fire suppression systems, as well as construction cost estimates, for the completed space reconfiguration and collections storage plan.*

Project activities will take place between September 2019 and May of 2020. The HVAC/fire suppression engineer, in consultation with the preservation architect, conservator and key Athenaeum personnel, will spend one day on site, reviewing the Athenaeum's existing HVAC, plumbing and electrical systems in relation to the new comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan. Over the next six months, the engineer, consulting remotely with the preservation architect, museum space planner and collections conservator, and with practical on-site support from the Athenaeum keeper and grant projects manager, will develop HVAC/fire suppression and electrical systems designs, specifications and equipment selections for the new comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan. The engineer will then deliver the final systems designs. In April of 2020 the preservation architect will develop construction cost estimates; and in May of 2020 the Athenaeum keeper and grant projects manager will evaluate the project and its results, and present a final report to the Athenaeum board.

Improving environmental and storage conditions for the Athenaeum's culturally and historically significant collections will benefit our local and regional communities—as well as visitors and historians worldwide—by extending the life of a unique historic legacy for future generations. The proposed Inspire! project will also further our efforts to advance our mission and achieve the preservation goals of our strategic plan, and will give us the evidence and impetus we will need to approach federal, state, corporate and private funding sources to fund implementation of our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative.

The proposed Inspire! project will be deemed successful if its products support the Athenaeum's efforts to compete for federal, state, corporate and private funding to implement our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative.

## Portsmouth Athenaeum: Narrative p. 1

### Project Justification

• **What do you propose to do?** The Portsmouth Athenaeum seeks an IMLS Inspire! Grant of \$50,000 to complete the final planning phase of a Comprehensive Preservation Initiative, begun in 2014, aimed at achieving improved, sustainable preservation of and access to our museum and library collections, while preserving the integrity of our historic buildings. We propose to engage, as primary consultants for this project, our established museum HVAC/fire systems engineer and a preservation architect. Our established museum space planner and collections conservation consultant will provide additional guidance for the project's activities. Successful completion of the proposed project will:

1. Produce HVAC System Design and Specifications and Equipment Selections. These designs will incorporate the findings of a completed evaluation of the potential for geothermal technology at the Athenaeum.
2. Produce Fire Suppression System Design and Specifications, including routing through buildings and equipment selections. Evaluation of the need for a fire pump, and available water pressure to support it, will also be done.
3. Produce Electrical Design to support the proposed HVAC and fire suppression upgrades. These designs will incorporate the findings of a completed evaluation of the potential for solar technology at the Athenaeum.
4. Provide Preservation Architectural Support to ensure project compliance with state and federal historic preservation guidelines in our historic buildings, as well as analysis and evaluation of unforeseen conditions encountered during the scope of work.
5. Provide Collections Storage and Conservation Guidance as HVAC and fire suppression designs are synthesized with a completed comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan.
6. Produce Construction Cost Estimates to kickstart fundraising for implementation of our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative.

• **What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?** Over its 200-year history, the Portsmouth Athenaeum has acquired, at times floor-by-floor, the three adjoining early 19th century buildings that today house our extensive museum and library collections, and provide space for exhibits, public research, public programs and all other operational activities. These buildings possess great beauty and historicity in their own right, and stand as iconic landmarks in the heart of Portsmouth's historic downtown. However, these historic structures, which were built to accommodate Portsmouth's maritime trade and its ancillary businesses, have for decades challenged the Athenaeum's efforts to provide safe environmental conditions for its collections and ready public access to them. Piecemeal expansion; a patchwork of aging, poorly-functioning residential-grade HVAC systems; inadequate HVAC ductwork for proper air distribution; building insulation and vapor barrier issues; and a reliance upon mixed-use spaces that combine public, office and work space with collections storage are damaging our collections, hindering public access, and placing the safety of both at risk (See Supporting Document 2: Conditions at the Athenaeum).

To identify and address these issues, the Athenaeum has pursued a Comprehensive Preservation Initiative whose activities have spanned the last four years. Studies undertaken to date include an Energy Audit of the Athenaeum's buildings and systems; a Collections Conservation Assessment; an NEH-funded Fire and Life Safety Audit; and an IMLS-funded Comprehensive Preservation Needs Assessment of the Athenaeum's buildings and systems (See Supporting Document 3: Summaries of Previous Projects' Findings/Recommendations). *We are also currently engaged in an NEH-funded planning project, led by a museum space planner, our HVAC engineer and collections conservation consultant and scheduled for completion in June of 2019, that will produce a comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan, with preliminary HVAC and fire suppression options.* Our proposed Inspire! project will complete the last steps in our long-term efforts to plan comprehensive preservation improvements for the Athenaeum's collections and historic buildings: *1) final design, specifications and equipment selections for HVAC and fire suppression systems; and 2) construction cost estimates for the completed space reconfiguration and collections storage plan to kickstart fundraising for implementation.*

• **Who or what will benefit from your project?** The Portsmouth Athenaeum is steward to an extraordinary collection of manuscripts, objects, art, photographs, and rare and historic books and printed materials documenting the cultural, economic and political life of Portsmouth, New Hampshire's only major seaport, which played a significant role in American colonial, Revolutionary, and Early Republican history. Spanning four centuries and representing historic cultural encounters worldwide, the Athenaeum's collections are of

## Portsmouth Athenaeum: Narrative p. 2

regional, national and international importance (See Supporting Document 4: Building and Collections Highlights). The Athenaeum's collections include:

- The art and artifact collections, comprising 570 works of art and historic artifacts dating from prehistory to the 20th century, including 115 paintings; 67 original art prints and engravings; 20 busts of local and historical figures; a small collection of fine historic furniture; and 59 half-hull ship builders' models of 19th and early 20th c. vessels built in Portsmouth shipyards.
- 22,000 historic photographs, including approximately 50 daguerreotypes, many of them portraits of mid-19th century Portsmouth residents; over 500 glass lantern slides and film slide negatives; and thousands of prints and other photographic materials related to Portsmouth and its environs, spanning the mid-19th through the 20th centuries.
- 2,490 archive and manuscript collections (480 lineal feet), including papers of over 30 notable Portsmouth politicians, merchants, ship captains, community leaders and intellectuals spanning the 18th through the 20th centuries; records of 59 local businesses, churches, associations and private organizations dating to the early 18th century; and the papers of dozens of Portsmouth families spanning four centuries.
- 33,600 historic books and pamphlets acquired since 1817, including approximately 3,000 rare books, incunabula and volumes in collectors' bindings; nearly 2,000 books and pamphlets printed in Portsmouth before 1900; over 300 historic maps, marine charts and land surveys of local and regional significance; several complete 19th c. personal libraries; and a large collection of 18th and 19th c. newspapers and periodicals. The Athenaeum also maintains a comprehensive reference library, including city directories; cemetery and church records; town, state and regional histories; genealogical reference works; and multiple indices and finding aids.

First and foremost, preservation of the Athenaeum's culturally and historically significant collections, and the landmark buildings that house them, will benefit our local and regional communities—as well as visitors and historians worldwide—by extending the life of a unique historic legacy for future generations. The proposed Inspire! project will also benefit the Athenaeum by furthering our efforts to advance our mission and achieve the preservation goals of our strategic plan. In conjunction with the findings and recommendations documented across multiple recent assessments of the Athenaeum's collections and physical facilities, as mentioned above, this project will also give us the evidence, impetus and construction cost estimates we will need to approach federal and state agencies for funding, and to raise necessary matching funds to complete implementation of our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative.

• **How will your project advance your institution's strategic plan?** The Portsmouth Athenaeum's Strategic Plan, approved by the Board of Directors in July of 2013, includes five long-range goals to advance the Athenaeum's mission while preserving the organization's historic legacy as one of America's oldest cultural institutions. The proposed Inspire! project, which will produce the designs for new HVAC and fire suppression systems and construction cost estimates to implement the Athenaeum's Comprehensive Preservation Initiative, directly advances two of the Strategic Plan's long-range goals, to 1) "Identify and address the preservation needs of our historic collections to improve their accessibility to scholars and the community"; and to 2) "Identify, plan and implement necessary, architecturally sensitive improvements to our historic buildings and their systems to preserve these cultural landmarks". Critically, upon successful completion of this project, we will also be well-positioned to undertake fundraising for implementation of our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative—the ultimate goal of our strategic planning preservation priorities.

• **How will your project address the goals of Inspire! Grants for Small Museums (as described above in Section A, in particular A1)?** In addition to advancing collections and building preservation priorities identified in the Athenaeum's Strategic Plan—the primary goal of the IMLS Inspire! grant initiative—the proposed project also fulfills the Inspire! initiative's goal of "strengthening the role of museums as trusted stewards of the collections in their care". Detailed designs and specifications for HVAC and fire suppression systems, guided by an architect experienced in historic preservation and synthesized with a completed comprehensive space reconfiguration and collections storage plan, and accompanied by construction cost estimates, will complete the next step toward properly securing, preserving, and making accessible our historic collections for future generations of community members and researchers. The Athenaeum takes great pride in the rational, step-by-step process of assessment, planning and design we have followed in pursuing the goal of improved preservation of our historic collections and buildings; we believe that this process has both honored and affirmed the trust our constituents have placed in us as stewards of the region's rich history.

## Portsmouth Athenaeum: Narrative p. 3

• **How will your proposed project increase your museum's capability to meet the project category goals you have chosen?** The NEH-funded comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage planning project currently underway is advancing our efforts to transform our capacity to care for the Athenaeum's holdings and share them with the community. *The proposed Inspire! project will complete this transformative planning process* by allowing our HVAC/fire suppression engineer, in consultation with the museum space planner, the preservation architect and the collections conservator, to produce HVAC and fire suppression systems designs and specifications for the completed comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan. Additionally, construction cost estimates will provide the final body of information we need to pursue funding to implement our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative, which will allow us to preserve our collections to current standards while welcoming the public to access our collections with greater safety and convenience. Upon completion of this long-term initiative, our effectiveness as stewards of the collections placed in our trust will be transformed. Our newly-reconfigured and conditioned facilities will: 1) place collections in secure, environmentally controlled, custom-designed spaces; 2) improve public access to exhibited collections and our research library; and 3) separate collections storage from staff office and workspace to improve environmental conditions for both.

### Project Work Plan

- **What specific activities, including evaluation and performance measurements, will you carry out? When and in what sequence will your activities occur?** Please refer to the Schedule of Completion included in the application package. Our proposed Inspire! project will begin on September 1, 2019.
- **Sept 2019:** The HVAC/fire suppression engineer works remotely with the local utilities to obtain electrical and water service data for the building, and gathers information about appropriate HVAC systems for the buildings that meet environmental requirements.
  - **Oct 2019:** The HVAC/fire suppression engineer visits the Athenaeum to present system options to the museum staff and board, and to survey the buildings relative to the new comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan. The preservation architect, conservator and Athenaeum keeper join him on site that day to advise on existing systems, building structure and construction materials, and environmental needs of the collections.
  - **Oct 2019 – Mar 2020:** Consulting remotely with the preservation architect, museum space planner and conservator, and with on-site support from the Athenaeum keeper and grant projects manager, the HVAC/fire suppression engineer creates drawings, equipment selections, and specifications in sufficient detail to obtain accurate cost estimates. Museum space planner updates collection storage plans to illustrate refined collection equipment design.
  - **Apr 2020:** The preservation architect develops construction cost estimates based on final space reorganization, collections storage and HVAC/fire suppression designs and specifications.
  - **May 2020:** The Athenaeum keeper and grant projects manager evaluate the project process and its results, and present a final report to the Athenaeum board.
- **What are the risks to the project and are they accounted for in the work plan?** The greatest risk to this project is that the physical limitations of our historic buildings may not allow us, in some instances, to reconfigure and condition our existing spaces as initially planned. However, compromises and alternative solutions will be worked out with the help of our consultants over the six-month design development period, prioritizing the integrity of our historic structures and the safety of our collections, staff and visitors.
- **Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?** (See Supporting Document 5: Consultant Letters of Commitment.) The project planning and management team includes Athenaeum keeper Thomas Hardiman and grant projects manager Margaret Hodges. Both have directed previous successful IMLS and NEH grant projects at the Athenaeum. The project will be implemented by Paul Kreidler of Landmark Facilities Group, a mechanical consulting engineer with expertise in the design of specialized mechanical systems for climate control, preservation of architecturally significant facilities, and fire risk assessments; Shannon Alther, principal at TMS Architects, an award-winning architect with extensive experience in sensitive renovation of historic buildings; Jeff Weatherston of Weatherston-Bruer Associates, an architect specializing in the design and development of cultural facilities; and Barbara Moore, an independent objects conservator with expertise in collections storage and long-range conservation planning.

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- **What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?** The major resource the Athenaeum will tap to carry out the Inspire! project activities will be staff time to support, both on-site and remotely, the consultants' work. The Athenaeum keeper, a full-time paid staff member, and the volunteer Athenaeum grant projects manager, will contribute hours as identified in the attached budget to coordinating and documenting on-site work and remote consultant conferences; facilitating communication among the consultants; providing information and documentation requested by the consultants; and administering the project budget.
- **How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?** Because the proposed Inspire! project's goal is the delivery, within a specified time period, of tangible products—designs, specifications, equipment selections and cost estimates—tracking our progress toward that goal will be straightforward. The Athenaeum keeper and grant projects manager will monitor the consultants' progress in relation to the attached Schedule of Completion to track timely accomplishment of benchmark activities. Monthly conference calls will be scheduled to maintain communication and prevent missed benchmarks. If schedule slippage is noted, the Athenaeum keeper and grant projects manager will work to identify the problem and assist the consultants as necessary to complete all project activities within the stated project period.
- **How and with whom will you share your project's results?** We will share the results of the proposed Inspire! project with the Athenaeum membership and wider community through the Athenaeum newsletter, organizational email blasts and local media outlets. After the conclusion and evaluation of the project, the Athenaeum grant projects manager will present a public talk on the project and the Athenaeum's Comprehensive Preservation Initiative. The directors and staff of other small local history organizations will be invited to attend to learn more about the project and its potential relevance to their organizations.

### Project Results

- **Referring to the Agency-Level Goal selected on the Program Information Sheet prepared for your application (i.e. Increase Public Access), write one or more statements to describe what success will look like for your project and identify the relevant data that you will collect and report.** The proposed Inspire! project responds to the IMLS Agency-Level Goal to *Increase Public Access*. The project will be deemed successful upon delivery of detailed designs, specifications and equipment selections for HVAC and fire suppression systems, as well as construction cost estimates, to support a completed comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan at the Athenaeum. Delivery of these products will complete the last step in the Athenaeum's long-term efforts to properly secure, preserve, and improve accessibility to our historic collections. The delivered products will be incorporated into the extensive body of assessment and planning documents we have accumulated over the past four years, and will support future implementation of the Athenaeum's Comprehensive Preservation Initiative. We will report the delivered products' contribution to our progress toward this final implementation goal, including their effectiveness in positioning the Athenaeum to compete for federal, state, corporate and private funding for implementation.
- **Referring to your Project Justification, describe your project's intended results that will address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified.** Piecemeal expansion; a patchwork of aging, poorly-functioning residential-grade HVAC systems; inadequate HVAC ductwork for proper air distribution; building insulation and vapor barrier issues; and a reliance upon mixed-use spaces that combine public, office and work space with collections storage are currently damaging our collections, hindering public access, and placing the safety of both at risk. Our proposed Inspire! project will complete the last step in the Athenaeum's long-term efforts to plan comprehensive preservation and access improvements for its collections by delivering HVAC and fire suppression designs, specifications, equipment selections and construction cost estimates to support improved climate control and collections safety for a new comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plan.
- **How will the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum collections and/or records that define the focus of your project improve?** Environmental conditions for and access to the Athenaeum's collections will not improve immediately as a result of the proposed Inspire! project. However, the HVAC and fire suppression designs, specifications, equipment selections and construction cost estimates produced by

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the project are the critical final step in planning our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative, which will, when implemented, achieve improved preservation of and access to the Athenaeum collections through space reorganization, collections storage upgrades, and HVAC and fire suppression upgrades throughout the Athenaeum.

- **What tangible products will result from your project?** Tangible products resulting from the proposed Inspire! project will include:
  - Fire Suppression System Design and Specifications, including routing through buildings and equipment selections. The need for a fire pump, and available water pressure to support it, will also be evaluated and documented.
  - HVAC System Design and Specifications and Equipment Selections. These designs will incorporate the findings of a completed evaluation of the potential for geothermal technology at the Athenaeum.
  - Electrical Design to support the proposed HVAC and fire suppression upgrades. These designs will incorporate the findings of a completed evaluation of the potential for solar technology at the Athenaeum.
  - Construction Cost Estimates to kickstart fundraising for implementation of our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative.
- **How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project?** We will sustain the benefits of the proposed Inspire! project by *leveraging its results to undertake effective fundraising for implementation of space reorganization, HVAC, fire suppression and collections storage upgrades throughout the Athenaeum*. The HVAC and fire suppression designs, completed comprehensive space reorganization and collections storage plans, and construction cost estimates will give us the evidence and impetus we will need to approach federal and state agencies for funding, and to raise necessary matching funds to complete implementation of our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative. We anticipate broad peer and community support for this carefully documented, transformative Athenaeum initiative, which will achieve improved preservation of and access to the Athenaeum collections.
- **How do you define success for your project and how will you assess achievement or progress?** The proposed Inspire! project will be deemed successful if its products support the Athenaeum's efforts to compete for federal, state, corporate and private funding to implement our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative. Project progress will be measured against the established timetable for activity completion; project completion will be achieved upon delivery of the proposed project's products.
- **How will your organization's capabilities and activities change as a result of the project?** The Athenaeum's capabilities and activities will not change immediately as a result of the proposed Inspire! project. However, the HVAC and fire suppression designs, specifications, equipment selections and construction cost estimates produced by the project will kickstart fundraising for implementation of our Comprehensive Preservation Initiative which, upon completion, will allow us to preserve our collections to current standards while welcoming the public to access our collections with greater safety and convenience.
- **How will your organization better accomplish its mission?** The Portsmouth Athenaeum strives to *collect, preserve and share materials relevant to the history and culture of Portsmouth and the Piscataqua River and Seacoast region for the benefit of the community and future generations*. The proposed Inspire! project will help us better accomplish our mission in the following ways:
  - Most immediately, the proposed project will:
    - Augment the extensive body of information we have amassed over four years to inform, secure funding for, and ultimately guide implementation of comprehensive collections preservation and access improvements at the Athenaeum.
  - Ultimately, the proposed project will lead to:
    - Reorganized spaces to better support operational priorities, improve separation of people and collections, and provide safer and more convenient public access to our facilities and collections.
    - Improved collections storage, HVAC upgrades and fire suppression to extend the life and improve the safety of our collections.

