

**Supporting Museums – Serving Communities:
An Evaluation of the Museums for America Program**

Appendix F: Case Studies

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Saving Our Basketry for the Next Seven Generations

Institution: Akwesasne Cultural Center

Location: Hogansburg, NY

Region: Mid Atlantic

Institution Size: Small

Institution Discipline: Specialized Native American Museum

Grant Size: \$11,255

Grant Period: 2006-2007

Project Background

The Akwesasne Cultural Center had benefited previously from IMLS funded projects focusing on basketmaking and the preservation of their Mohawk black ash splint and sweetgrass basket collection. For instance, The Center was a recipient of collections care training conducted by an IMLS National Leadership Grants for Museums grantee, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. These IMLS projects laid the groundwork for proposing an MFA project addressing research and documentation of their basket collection in order to 1) inform the development of future exhibits; 2) continue to preserve the basket collection; and 3) strengthen the engagement with the community. Considered a “good size” grant for The Center, it should be noted they also put a small grant from the New York State Council on the Arts toward this project.

Sue Ellen Herne, the Akwesasne Cultural Center Museum Coordinator, reported one of the project activities was interviewing twelve local basketmakers and elders about basket styles, uses, customs, use of the Mohawk language and philosophical ideas to guide The Cultural Center’s exhibits. A trip to another museum housing native baskets was planned for additional research. The Canadian Museum of Civilization was identified as the most beneficial to visit. One of the interviewed basketmakers was a nurse working for a community program, Mohawk Healthy Heart Project, who suggested having program participants join the museum staff in visiting The Canadian Museum of Civilization. Since The Center is known for providing community access to educational and cultural resources and services, Herne said they were happy to have the program participants join them.

After accepting The Cultural Center’s visit request, The Canadian Museum of Civilization offered to bring out their complete collection of over 100 baskets for the visiting group to view. The visiting group was given an overview on the basket styles and baskets from different time periods by the curator and followed up with informal viewing and questioning.

Key Factors in Success

The main factor attributing to the project’s success was having The Canadian Museum of Civilization so willing to accommodate the Cultural Center’s request to visit. Herne felt it was not typical for a museum to “actually do something out of their usual everyday business of the day”. That is, the effort put into bringing out their comprehensive collection of baskets into one space went beyond the typical museum offerings.

Another factor adding to the success of the visit to the museum was having community involvement. This had not been originally planned but having community members including Mohawk Healthy Heart Project participants and some local basketmakers join the Cultural Center staff made it even more rewarding in terms of sharing education and enrichment with the community.

Partnerships

There were no formal partnerships planned for this project, however, an informal arrangement was made with the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) and the Mohawk Healthy Heart Project during the implementation of the project. Hernes said both their museum and CMC benefitted from this partnership. “We were able to access additional information about native basketry from them”, “they can now access information from us” and they “utilized their collection more fully due to our request”, explains Hernes. The Iroquoian baskets had not been collected at any one time so they were never put in one space together before. Hernes also stated that The Pequot Museum and Research staff can be viewed as informal partner since they served as advisors prior to and during the MFA project.

Role of Evaluation

No formal external or internal evaluation was conducted.

Hernes said they received voluntary feedback from participants who enjoyed the trip to CMC. Some have recently asked if another trip like this could be planned.

Community Effects

The community of Akwesasne was touched by this project in many ways. The twelve interviewed elders and basketmakers were given the opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences within the context of the heritage of basketmaking. They have also strengthened their connection to the Center by contributing ideas about exhibit themes. One interviewee suggested focusing on “Honor Our Ancestors” since this is how she perceives the Center’s role.

The trip to the Canadian Museum of Civilization provided the community with access to other native basketry. The community members participating in the trip learned more about Iroquoian baskets and in turn were able to put the Center’s collection into a broader context. It was reported that the active basketmakers in the group looked upon the visit as inspiration for new works. In addition, those from the Mohawk Healthy Heart Project program were encouraged to integrate culture into the healthy lifestyles the program promotes. Overall, visitors’ cultural ties were strengthened by learning about native basketry, which their families were a part of.

Due to this project, community members and researchers now have access to the voices of basketmakers. An individual can listen to the different perspectives of the elders and active basketmakers. One graduate student has used these tapes in her research and is understanding how the museum can be a resource in research beyond an exhibit.

Organizational Effects

Due to Saving Our Basketry for the Next Seven Generations project, The Center staff established a system of basket preservation and storage. The organization gained insight into the differences in preservation practices between museums, libraries, and archives, which changed the course of action for part of the project. The Center changed their plans for off-site collection storage to on-site storage after receiving advice from the MFA proposal reviewers and consulting with advisors at The Pequot Museum. Refer to the Challenges section below for more detail on this issue. One of the Center staff members learned how to make storage boxes for the basket collection before implementing this project but the MFA funds allowed for the boxes to be created. Also, grant resources were put toward the collections manager adding additional images into their Past Perfect catalogue system.

With the MFA funding, The Center is in a better position to share with the community and researchers the stories of local basketmakers. Instead of having one staff member report what local basketmakers have to say, Hermes recalls how much easier it is to have a researcher read or listen to the different tapes\transcripts.

The culmination of the research conducted during this project (i.e. interviews, museum trip, and storage operations) resulted in reorganizing and enhancing their basketry exhibit. They are more capable of displaying more baskets since storage is on-site. The themes that came to the surface from the project were built upon while enriching the exhibits. The staff was sparked to create new labels describing the environment, native spirituality, and cultural customs like family ties in relation to the baskets. The Center has embraced a suggestion made by one of the interviewed basketmakers and a turtle clan clanmother, to use the theme of “Honor Our Ancestors” when planning for new exhibitions.

In addition, Hermes reported receiving recognition from the National Museum of the American Indian. During a visit to Akwesasne Cultural Center for researching their education website, their museum staff said they got a deeper understanding and sense of cultural and environmental connections from the displayed exhibits’ labeling.

Challenges

Hernes reported that “finding the right museum to visit was a small challenge”. They had not specified in the MFA proposal which museum they would visit, so time was spent researching the most beneficial place to visit. They had to take into consideration distance to the museum, similarities and differences in collections, the size of the collection, and the willingness of the museum to host the visit. Surprisingly, the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec is an hour and a half away, has a larger and older collection of baskets, and the museum was willing to bring out all of their collection for a private viewing.

One challenge the Cultural Center faced was deciding the best practice for storing their basket collection. Prior to the project, advice was given to the Cultural Center by an archivist to plan for off-site collection storage. The Cultural Center included these plans in their MFA project proposal. Upon getting feedback from the MFA proposal reviews with concern about the off-site storage plans, the Center looked into this further. They looked to their advisors at The Pequot Museum for best practices. The Center was told this is “common practice for libraries and archives but not commonly used by museums”. The Cultural Center staff learned that for museums the “potential for damage in transit and the inaccessibility for rotation on and off exhibit made it best to keep storage on-site.

Lessons Learned

When asked about lessons learned from the project, Hermes says “Ask and Do”. She is referring to museums and community members. She believes people may be hesitant to make a request because they worry their idea will be looked upon negatively but if you don’t ask how will you know how it will be perceived. In the Center’s case, they were surprisingly pleased to have CMC willing to bring together all of their baskets for a one-time showing. With regard to the community, they should “want to feel like you’re listening to them”, explains Hermes. She encourages museums to take the time to follow-up on community interests or requests which teaches the community what the museum has to offer.

Hermes advises other museums not to be afraid of trying to get a grant requiring matching funds. Knowing that staff time can be included in the matching funds is important. She says museums probably have resources they don’t realize can be put toward the matching funds like volunteers or in-kind resources. The process of writing a proposal can be helpful in making sense of the proposed project. For instance the schedule for completion gives the bigger picture at the same time keeping things on schedule during implementation.

“Utilize all the advice that you can get and know there are resources available to you” is what Hermes suggests to other museums applying for MFA grants. Also, be willing to make changes to a project when you realize the adjustments will result in better outcomes. Hermes said she found having informal partners for this project worked out well since they needed time to research the best partner within the context of the project.

The Akwesasne Cultural Center Museum appreciates that the MFA program allows for creativity and that they were able to build in different activities to “help us do things the community wanted to see done” such as providing access to their cultural heritage, reports Hermes. She also feels the project was very doable for a small museum such as theirs.

Sustainability

The connection with CMC has been maintained informally with phone calls periodically with the potential for another visit to CMC to see another type of collection. Hermes reports getting requests from the community for more trips to CMC and to other museums for “backroom tours”.

The Center is making the basketmakers’ interviews available to researchers and many of the project themes continue to be incorporated into their basketry exhibits

Linked Electronic Collections Access Catalogue

Institution: Chester County Historical Society

Institution Discipline: Historic Society

Location: West Chester, PA

Grant Size: \$92,873

Region: Mid Atlantic

Grant Period: 2004 - 2007

Institution Size: Medium

Project Background

The MFA grant was used to upgrade computer software and hardware across the three areas of collections (museum, library, and photo archive), implement a single electronic database and cataloguing system, and digitize a significant portion of the catalogue, including integrating photo archives into the main system. The new system incorporates OCLC's online cataloguing system, and Past Perfect, collection management software designed for libraries and museums. The new cataloguing system and database has unified the technical infrastructure, capabilities, and collections of the Society's museum, library, and photo archive. Visitors now have direct access to the collections from a computer in the Historical Society's library, obviating the need to work exclusively through staff and the old paper cataloguing system. Staff members' increased knowledge of their collections, ability to search, make connections, and do research have all enriched their capacity to fulfill the Society's mission – to preserve and interpret Chester County history. The grant enabled paid intern positions for completing the work. The MFA grant was "like a shot in the arm," according to the Director of Collections, who continued "It felt like we were making progress for the first time in ages." It conferred *gravitas* on the project at a time when transitions within the institution could easily have confounded the prodigious (and in many ways invisible) task of digitizing the institution's holdings.

Key Factors in Success

The Director of Collections highlighted the importance of the internship program in advancing the enormous task of data entry. Twenty-three interns, spread out across six semesters, participated in data entry, often keeping every computer in the collections department engaged in the task. The graduate, post-grad, and undergraduate students came from fifteen local colleges and universities, and received either pay or course credit. Students were able to work on this task undistracted and could thus accomplish more than staff who are constantly being pulled away from such work. The interns got a "real taste of what museum and library world was like," and almost all of the graduate students went on to meaningful employment afterwards.

Partnerships

No partnerships beyond intern recruitment were developed for this project.

Role of Evaluation

The Historical Society used the IMLS output model to guide their work on the project. No formal evaluation was conducted during or at the conclusion of the project.

Community Effects

Public visitors to the historical society comprise both local and national genealogical and other history researchers, interest group members (e.g., embroidery guilds), and casual museum visitors. Increased

accessibility of the collections is already apparent; visitors can access the database directly without working through museum staff and with some library collections and they can make connections between holdings in the three departments – museum, library and photo archive. Library staff report they are receiving increasing numbers of inquiries from casual museum visitors to see artifacts in the collection, and the 150 – 200 genealogical researchers who visit each month are increasingly requesting portraits and silhouettes of their ancestors—materials they didn't know to ask for previously. Visitors interested in particular collections are able to conduct far more focused searches; for instance, the Society's sampler collection is well known among embroidery guilds, and visitors interested in this collection can study the photographs on the database and collections staff can pull those items from the collection for the visitor. The same is true for the collections of furniture, paintings, artist biographies, and so on. The linked archive allows genealogy and other researchers to draw connections between historical periods and objects in the collection, creating a stronger sense of place. In turn, visitors are able to add their own knowledge and research to the database.

Organizational Effects

The database has increased the capacity of library staff to fulfill the Society's mission in a number of ways. It has increased institutional knowledge of the collections and made information about the holdings, such as the numbers or variety of pieces of a particular type, more accessible. Staff are able to make connections among different parts of the collection and conduct searches across the collection's three areas. For instance, The Director of Collections noted that the electronic database allowed them to connect items from two disparate holdings—a portrait miniature of a lady and a letter written about her. Information contained in the letter about social life can further be researched in the database placing the object in a broader historical context – and also connect the letter to a photograph in the photo archives. All of these increased capacities facilitate the staff's ability to curate new exhibits and make decisions regarding new acquisitions, and ultimately better serve the public. In addition, staff can more readily fulfill visitor queries – often providing immediate answers on the telephone.

The grant has brought greater unity among the collections staff and helped connect them to a larger universe of professional archivists, librarians and curators. As the Director of Collections noted that working with OCLC, which is a national catalogue “is a real boon in making us feel like we are a viable professional organization.” Working on the database increased the depth of interaction among collections staff in the three areas, giving them a common focus and shared endeavor.

Cataloguing the collection electronically has also had a powerful effect on the collections staff in making their work visible to others, particularly stakeholders unfamiliar with the work of collections departments. The Director of Collections explained that it “was an important and necessary step that validated work that people had done for years. ...It gives you a sense of gratification that something you had done has made it into the public realm.”

Challenges

The Director of Collections found the technical aspects of the installation challenging but ultimately within the capacity of the organization's IT consultants.

The staff had anticipated the time and effort needed to recruit and train interns but chose this route in order to provide professional training opportunities for the many students in the region. With six cohorts of interns, staff were required to interview and train a new group each semester; interns also required a degree of oversight. Staff members are still catching up on reviewing all of the intern's work.

Lessons Learned

Despite the time challenges interns posed, they were crucial to the project's success, and the Director of Collections was emphatic in encouraging other institutions to use interns: "Get the best people you can hire," she advised, and suggested working with local graduate programs. She also stressed the importance of paying interns, "Even if the pay is modest." Finally, she advised, "Have an idea of what you want to accomplish and don't sugarcoat it! Because if you want to have them sit at a computer half a day and move boxes the rest of the day, that's it. And give them something they can complete."

Sustainability

The MFA grant propelled the Chester County Historical Society into the information age. It underwrote both a unified, up-to-date system and the resources necessary to catalogue a chunk of their material. They now have the technological infrastructure to undertake other technology projects on a systemic basis and to access other grants. Now over the comprehensive cataloging hurdle, they have been able to address next steps such as adding new acquisitions, highlighting lesser known collections, adding photodocumentation of objects or details in the photo archives.

Chester County continues to maintain records, add more records and to improve the database and electronic access to the collections. The collections cataloguing project receives minimal ongoing support in the annual budget so this effort provided a solid foundation for the continuing search for ~~to~~ funding from IMLS and elsewhere, and to work with student interns who receive credit for their work.

The next steps in terms of accessibility will be to add more collections information and get the database online so that researchers from the 30-plus states who use the library and museum each year can use the materials to plan on-site visits or avoid traveling.

North Lawndale Career Training Program

Institution: Chicago Botanic Garden

Location: Chicago, IL

Region: Midwest

Institution Size: Large

Institution Discipline: Arboretum/ Botanic Garden

Grant Size: \$150,000

Grant Period: 2005-2007

Project Background

The Museums for America (MFA) grant enabled the Chicago Botanic Garden (CBG) to establish the North Lawndale Green Youth Farm. Garden staff wanted to expand on what they saw was a proven model developed at a farm 40 miles outside of Chicago. The North Lawndale program offered an opportunity to expand to an urban area with high needs. North Lawndale was selected because of the potential for the Farm to become an integral part of the community.

The North Lawndale program targeted high school youth in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. The MFA grant supported 20 high school students per year from local schools, including a stipend for four hours per week in the spring and fall and 20 hours per week in the summer working on the farm. Much of the first year of the grant was spent constructing raised beds, with the second year focused on enhancing the site through the addition of compost systems, more abundant crops, and artwork. Through the program, students learned about sustainable agriculture practices, healthy food preparation and eating habits, teamwork, responsibility, community service, entrepreneurship and careers in the green industries. CBG staff members modified the Food Project's Growing Together Curriculum to shape the North Lawndale Green Youth Farm.

The project allowed the Chicago Botanic Garden to extend existing community garden work, with a deeper commitment to communities, more extensive opportunities for youth education and explicit connections between gardening and food systems.

Key Factors in Success

The Manager of Green Youth Farm Programs (Eliza Fournier) highlighted the importance of creating a safe space and a very structured environment, having positive communication and feedback, as well as engaging teens in the role of community activist and environmental justice. In addition to weekly workshops that addressed sustainable agriculture, food systems, nutrition, and social justice, staff members engaged students in "straight talk" sessions to help them identify positive achievements and areas that need improvement. Ms. Fournier noted that students valued hearing these messages from a "responsible caring adult who talks to them directly and personally."

Another factor in the program's success was providing teens with stipends for their participation and giving them opportunities for paid leadership positions within the program. Students who participated in previous years were given priority and opportunity to become a crew leader for teams of four students in subsequent years.

Partnerships

Through the MFA grant a partnership was established with Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago. Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) provided office space and other working areas for the administrative aspects of the program. NHS staff also facilitated with negotiations between CBG and NeighborSpace for the

land. NeighborSpace, a public-private land trust, continues to hold the deed for the North Lawndale Garden site and provides access to an on-site water source.

The Chicago Botanic Garden developed a partnership with Umoja Student Development Corporation at Manley Career Academy to help recruit students. According to the CBG's Vice President of Community Education programs (Patsy Benveniste), Umoja's understanding of the community helped CBG recruit and retain high quality program participants. In 2005, Umoja provided CBG staff with training to work with students on job preparation and conflict resolution skills. In subsequent years, Umoja provided advisory assistance on an as-needed basis.

The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) provided curriculum support and technical assistance to CBG staff and North Lawndale students on the basics of business development, such as idea feasibility, product development, marketing and how to write a business plan. The involvement of NFTE enabled CBG to extend the North Lawndale Green Youth Farm Program into a year-round experience.

Role of Evaluation

Chicago Botanic Garden staff tracked descriptive information such as the number of students who apply and attendance patterns. Each year North Lawndale students completed pre and post-surveys that helped staff know if students increased their knowledge about sustainable agriculture, food systems, and nutrition and student behaviors changed, such as eating differently, drinking more water, and increased physical activity. CBG staff used post-surveys results for program improvement.

Community Effects

The MFA grant extended the exposure of the Chicago Botanic Garden to residents who may rarely if ever visit the Garden. Part of the CBG's mission is to "serve people where they live." The North Lawndale site was chosen deliberately to provide locally grown food and healthy fresh food to a community that did not have access to fresh produce. According to Ms. Fournier, the continued operation of the North Lawndale site raised general awareness of community residents about the importance of vegetables and good nutrition. Another reported benefit was that community residents saw North Lawndale students in useful and positive roles in the community.

The success of the Green Youth Farm program expanded the Garden's reputation in addressing food issues. Many organizations now seek the Chicago Botanic Garden for advice about health and nutrition programs or for resources. For example, the Northwestern University School Kellogg School of Management approached Garden staff to serve as expert resources in addressing business solutions for food desert situations. In another example, the Garden's Green Youth Farm staff were asked to serve as technical assistance providers for a county initiative to implement programs in schools addressing activity, diet, and nutrition.

Organizational Effects

Garden staff increased their capacity to meet the youth development needs of the program. With the addition of the North Lawndale Green Youth Farm site, CBG staff noticed the youth development component was implemented inconsistently. In addition, the management of two sites was too much for one full-time Garden employee. Several CBG staff reached out for professional development from a local agency and became credentialed youth development specialists. The staffing structure of the Green Youth Farm programs changed so that each site was supervised by a full-time Garden employee trained with youth development skills, while a traveling Farm Manager served all the Green Youth Farm sites. Furthermore, each CBG site

supervisor had the credentials to train students in youth development skills and hire students with strong skills to work as crew leaders.

Challenges

One challenge was getting people in the North Lawndale community “to accept that locally grown food is good, affordable, tastes better, and is better for you.” North Lawndale Farm staff and students tried different combinations of markets and times and approaches to get residents to feel comfortable to purchase the produce students offered at low prices. Staff and students saw an increase in the number of people attending when they moved the market from the morning to the afternoon. In addition, North Lawndale staff and students offered several benefits, such as accepting food stamps and giving coupons (supported by the Wholesale Wave Foundation) that doubled the value of each purchase. Ms. Benveniste noted that these strategies increased market sales, “created community ownership of this program, and gave students opportunities to provide valuable community service.”

Another challenge was the small size of the North Lawndale farm area which did not generate enough produce for students to sell. To address this challenge, CBG staff arranged for North Lawndale students to visit the other Farm site which was much larger. North Lawndale students helped the other Farm harvest their produce and had could take some back to the city to sell.. This joint venture benefitted both sites: North Lawndale gained enough produce to sell and the larger site received help in harvesting. Additionally a connection between the two sites evolved into other joint activities.

Student retention was a challenge early in the program. Students did not fully understand the amount of work involved in establishing and maintaining an urban organic farm. As a solution, Garden staff decided to hire more students than the Farm could accommodate in anticipation that several would leave the program. This approached worked and ensured that the program had enough students.

Lessons Leaned

CBG staff learned that students are the best advocates for the program. Funders, community residents, and other stakeholders learned about the impact of the program on students’ lives when they visited the farm, or listened to a student presentation. Ms. Benveniste highlighted that diverse audiences were impressed with students’ ability and confidence to discuss topics from plant science to organic farming techniques. Through these opportunities, funders and policymakers have continued to support the North Lawndale Green Youth Farm, and community residents have increased their visits to the Farm. Ms. Benveniste mentioned that the connection between students and the diverse audiences created a “unique feedback loop” that advanced program awareness, brought in support from numerous sectors, and spread “the message about the benefits of locally grown produce.”

CBG staff learned that the combination of tangible tasks, such as completing farm work, with positive feelings of self-esteem benefit students in meeting the challenges and expectations of the program. Ms Fournier noted that it was important to have the right staff, a structured program, and to pay students. Many of the students needed the income to support their families or themselves, and the social justice piece of the curriculum kept students engaged. In addition, by creating a safe environment with positive reinforcement and communication, students felt successful and stayed “open to the new experiences” of the program.

Sustainability

Support for the North Lawndale Youth Farm program continued after the MFA grant. The grant helped to leverage support for the North Lawndale Green Youth Farm from local foundations and national funders.

Furthermore, based on the demand and success of the North Lawndale Green Youth Farm, additional projects were developed. Currently the Chicago Botanic Garden operates four Green Youth Farm programs, including the North Lawndale site.

The Green Youth Farm Program also helped to refine the Chicago Botanical Garden's mission and commitment to communities around youth education, workforce training, and development of local food systems. The notion of addressing issues of food was a big shift for the Garden and extended the Garden's mission "beyond flowers, play gardens, and programs for visitors." Part of the current strategic plan includes commitment to conservation and management of endangered habitats and plants off-site. To advance this work, CBG staff form alliances through professional associations. For example, the CEO of the Garden serves on a national Task Force on Healthy Food Gardens to advance programming and community service on childhood obesity. The shift also changed some on-site work, for example, the fruit and vegetable garden grows organic produce, and all food harvested on the Garden's premises goes into their farmers market and meals prepared on site.

Appalachian Heritage Project

Institution: Children's Museum of Oak Ridge

Institution Discipline: Children/Youth

Location: Oak Ridge, TN

Grant Size: \$80,000

Region: Southeast

Grant Period: 2005-2008

Institution Size: Medium

Project Background

With MFA funding, the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge (CMOR) renovated its original, core exhibit on daily life in late 19th century Appalachia—three hand-hewn log cabins and related artifacts—and expanded outreach and staff capacity to create richer programming opportunities. The Appalachian Heritage Project entailed physically repairing and re-thinking the three cabins, expanding exhibit accessibility with respect to both mobility and hands-on activities, digitizing existing audio-visual historical materials, and developing a website and on-site kiosk presentation with the newly digitized materials. The exhibit is tied to the life of a woman who grew up in the area in earlier days and wrote about her family and the myriad skills, such as blacksmithing, carpentry, and farming, on which their life depended. The museum has published her account of Appalachian life. Grant funding also underwrote staff professional development in collections management and strategic planning. New storage cases were fabricated and more than 300 artifacts evaluated for conservation or “hands-on” use. Extensive interpretation of the artifacts and materials made the exhibit especially valuable to teachers and students on-site, while a traveling trunk of Appalachian arts and crafts used in daily life was created for outreach to local schools.

Key Factors in Success

New opportunities for engagement with the past have been central to bringing the experience alive for visitors, and bringing the exhibit in line with the museum's motto: “Please touch.” In conjunction with its dramatic face-lift, the exhibit was refocused to bring young visitors into a closer connection with life in rural Appalachia in the late nineteenth century. Numerous artifacts were judged capable of withstanding frequent contact and made available for children's play. A small stage and costume area was created, along with exhibits on weaving, quilting, gardening, metalworking, and cooking. Part of the exhibit was reconstructed for wheelchair accessibility.

Strong community support was instrumental in the success of the project. With the involvement of school officials, museum staff created an exhibit guide for school classes and made an interactive learning experience available through its website. Community support (volunteers, donations) was strong: when a corporation donation fell through, the community raised money from local businesses and volunteers worked tirelessly on the exhibit.

Partnerships

No formal partnerships were entered into but several informal partnerships were formed or sustained. The local Boy Scouts were instrumental in renovating the exhibit (three hand-hewn log cabins); other partners such as the University of Tennessee were valuable historical resources. A local business and church as well as the Oak Ridge Public Library and the City of Oak Ridge also supported the effort. The Tennessee History Museum and the Tennessee Heritage Museum both engaged with the CMOR through reciprocal visits and offered advice, particularly in orienting the exhibit toward Tennessee education standards.

CMOR also forged a strong partnership with Oak Ridge Schools. The school superintendent now describes the CMOR as “partner” in education, and museum staff work closely with a local low-income elementary school, hosting an afterschool program in the museum and tapping museum resources for afterschool activities.

Role of Evaluation

No formal summative evaluation was conducted to assess impact of the many new components of the Appalachian History Project. However, “stroke tallies” conducted by front desk staff following the exhibit renovation suggests numbers have risen. A Youth Advisory Council consults with CMOR on the effectiveness of the afterschool program.

Community Effects

The Appalachian Heritage Project significantly raised the museum’s profile in the community, initially through the receipt of the grant itself—a high profile “win” for this small community—and then through the very professional exhibit that followed. Interpretative aspects made it more usable to local schools. It was “a very professional looking exhibit that had obvious educational value for the community,” Director Mary Ann Damos explains. Perhaps the highest profile event was the Appalachian History Project’s receipt of awards for excellence from the Tennessee Association for Museums and the Southeastern Eastern Museum Conference.

The project also connected the museum to other organizations, such as a local oral history organization; museum staff digitized the collection of audio materials (collected as part of an earlier NEH grant), which were in danger of deteriorating. This project introduced the CMOR to other history museums in the area, making connections with scientists, historians of the national laboratory at Oak Ridge, and historians of Appalachia. Other connections formed were with the convention and visitors bureau, heritage groups in the area, and the Oak Ridge Preservation Association here. Press coverage extended to newspapers in Knoxville, 40 miles away.

Organizational Effects

The museum’s collections manager received considerable professional development in collections management; other staff members received training in strategic planning and exhibit fabrication through the MFA grant. Experts from collections assessment programs advised museum staff in reassessing all of the collected artifacts, determining what could be displayed and what needed to be protected. The collections manager and exhibit designer also built on their backgrounds in art exhibit fabrication, developing new skills in creating a history exhibit. Both also took courses in non-profit management. “It really did push us forward,” Damos says, adding that the museum staff now has a better understanding of the value of managing and storing the museum’s collections. The MFA also “opened the door,” for another IMLS grant and attracted other donations.

With the renovation of the Appalachian history exhibit, museum officials concluded that “collecting artifacts indigenous to the Appalachian culture was no longer really our primary goal,” and that future acquisitions would be extremely targeted explained Damos. While the Appalachian exhibit remains an important component of the museum’s offerings, the focus today has expanded to include activities related to environmental awareness and the celebration of international cultures.

Challenges

The major obstacle to successful use of the grant was acquiring matching funds, Damos says. The promise of a corporate donation fell through and CMOR required an additional year to complete its work. When the donation failed, the museum turned to the local community, garnering a \$40,000 grant from a local foundation. Other funds were donated by individuals and volunteer help was generous. Museum personnel spent a lot of time on the phone, soliciting donations, trying to explain how important the exhibit was. While they had broad support, getting large donations was difficult, Damos recalls.

Another challenge was the limited staff size—no staff members were full-time and the collections manager and exhibit designer fabricated the exhibit by themselves, with volunteer assistance. CMOR met this challenge through very hard work, the director said, adding that the two staff members who created the exhibit took a great deal of pride and expressed renewed commitment to the museum as a result of their work.

Lessons Learned

Damos was emphatic in her advice to other museums to have their funding in place: “I would never do a grant like that again ... without knowing exactly where the funding was coming from.” Another lesson learned was the value of professional assistance. Digitizing the more than 100 audio-visual materials was undertaken by a volunteer and ultimately had to be completed by someone else, she noted. With the new IMLS grant, the CMOR was able to hire a project manager. Hiring someone dedicated to the project was another piece of advice Damos would offer other museum administrators.

Sustainability

The Appalachian Heritage Project appears to have reversed a slightly declining visitorship. Memberships to the museum have grown and now include people from Knoxville and other counties, so that museum staff now considers CMOR a regional museum. The professionalism of the exhibit has set a precedent and standard of quality that CMOR is committed to maintaining.

Museum Multiple Intelligences Inclusion Project

Institution: Connecticut Children’s Museum, Inc.

Institution Discipline: Children’s/Youth

Location: New Haven, CT

Grant Size: \$48,708

Region: New England

Grant Period: 2005 - 2007

Institution Size: Medium

Project Background

With an MFA grant, the Connecticut Children’s Museum broadened its accessibility for children with special needs by adding more inclusive elements to Museum exhibits. The adaptation was designed using Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences and guided by the tenets of Universal Design. The MFA grant was used specifically to make the Museum *more* inclusive and supported activities such as designing and adding inclusion features to exhibits, developing an audio CD for visitors, creating textured maps, transcribing a selection of the Museum’s children’s picture books into Braille, and organizing and implementing a series of field trips. This funded project highlighted the importance of inclusion for all children by making it an expected part of the Museum’s configuration and “placing inclusion on the community agenda,” explains Director Sandra Malmquist.

Key Factors in Success

Through the project, Museum staff hired American sign language interpreters to attend and interpret the Museum’s weekly reading program for young children. Director Malmquist, notes that program attendance has increased by all children and their families, not only children who were deaf. She also reports that by having interpreters regularly, the Museum sent a critically important message to the community: “We don’t do this for the kids who are deaf only. We do it to put accessibility on the agenda.”

Partnerships

No partnerships were developed for this project.

Role of Evaluation

Staff members track museum attendance, numbers of repeat visitors, and gather visitor information such as ages of children, number of adults and children, and zip codes.

Community Effects

The Museum extended its reach to children with special needs and their families. For example, as part of the grant, the Museum organized and implemented a series of literacy program field trips. These literacy field trips provide a museum experience and literacy support for children who are blind or visually disabled. By organizing these trips, the number of students visiting the museum who are blind increased. The Board of Education and Services to the Blind continued to support these trips beyond the funding of this grant.

The grant was instrumental in enhancing The Connecticut Children’s Museum’s profile in New Haven, which received two community awards for accessibility. One award was the result of the city’s commissioning an

individual to go around and look at every cultural institution in New Haven: The Connecticut Children's Museum came in for praise for its thoughtful design, ensuring that "accessibility is the right of every child."

Organizational Effects

The museum increased its physical capacity to serve sight and hearing impaired. Staff already understood the challenges of serving this population, but the MFA grant, Malmquist asserts, helped to make the Museum "even better" and ensure that any child or grownup visiting the museum can "experience the Museum without our having to do something special."

Challenges

The relationship with IMLS staff was important in moving the project forward. Ms. Malmquist worked closely with IMLS staff to problem solve when proposed plans did not work as intended, such as the unanticipated costs of Braille handrails and installation of state-of-the-art accessibility entry doors. Museum staff found that some activities, such as making rain sticks in the music room accessible to children who are deaf was more challenging than anticipated. A cabinet maker was hired to cut the rain stick in half so that visitors could see its interior, and encase the stick in plexiglass. Museum staff wanted children to "see the sound" as the pebbles inside the stick "descend the cylinder." However, the tiny stones in the stick destroyed the plexiglass. After cutting through four or five rain sticks, the cabinet maker finally found an appropriate clear material to cover the opening.

Lessons Learned

The interviewee offered no information relevant to lessons learned.

Sustainability

With the MFA grant, the Museum was able to make permanent improvements to its exhibits that increased accessibility for all children. Museum staff used MFA funds (with permission) to purchase a Braille with which staff could hand-Braille their own books. Although part of the MFA grant involved transcribing selected children's books that are part of the exhibits into Braille, the new device allowed staff to translate books used for other programs, such as a weekly reading program for young children. After the reading each child receives a copy of the book; with the Braille, Museum staff can now offer books to a child or adult who is blind. The United Way of Greater New Haven, the Yale School of Nursing, and a professional sorority have all assigned volunteers to assist the Museum in Braille children's books. The Museum has also committed to hire an American sign interpreter for its monthly Saturday reading program. Although the Director prefers to have interpreters available more frequently, at least Museum staff can assure a family that a sign language person will be available monthly.

Science Café: Inquiry for Families

Institution: COSI Toledo

Institution Discipline: Science and Technology

Location: Toledo, OH

Project Focus: Exhibits

Region: Midwest

Grant Size: \$148,787

Institution Size: Large

Grant Period: 2005 –2007

Project Background

The MFA grant underwrote the creation of a public space within COSI Toledo (now Imagination Station) where visitors, especially families, could engage in inquiry-rich science exploration. The outgrowth of a decision to concentrate the many activities and demonstrations at COSI in one space, the Café was designed to establish a casual, non-threatening atmosphere. Carl Nelson, Director of Exhibits and Facilities, described it as “a highly orchestrated, hybrid space” containing “open-ended exhibits, science props, and experiments and creations in various stages of completion.” Nearly 80 volunteer Science Café hosts—Chefs—received hands-on training, with ongoing evaluation, in interacting with the public, gaining practice, for example, in initiating, extending, and deepening conversations with visitors. With grant funds, the Science Café purchased equipment and hired a Science Café coordinator.

For example, “Extreme Science,” a popular set of shows, included a feature on pressure that began with demonstrations of crushing a 55-gallon drum and concluded with smaller scale experiments visitors could conduct, such as supporting a small child with several rows of paper cups and using a small vacuum chamber to expand balloons and marshmallows. Visitors were encouraged to stay and talk with hosts. A Science Café website, www.sciencecafe.org, was developed and integrated into the larger COSI website. The Science Café website contains a database of long-term, open-end activities families can do at home; it also announces forthcoming visits by Guest Chefs (professionals from the community who work in science). Activity tables nearby are settings for more informal science puzzles and games. A related library of science books was developed as part of the Science Café. A “Recipe Rack” contains take-away cards that advertise events in the Science Café and describe activities families can re-create at home.

Key Factors in Success

Science Café staff employed numerous creative strategies to engage children and families. For example, for the theme of photography, an exploration of the science behind photography was followed by the distribution of disposable cameras to audience members, with instructions to take the cameras into the field and look for shapes and textures in nature. When participants returned the cameras, COSI developed the images and displayed them at COSI for a month. Science offerings changed daily and, with the growth of the activities binders, the Science Café team can develop science explorations on virtually any theme and audience request, says Nelson. The demonstrations, initially offered only periodically, were so popular they became a daily feature of the Science Café.

Science Café team members kept logs of all activities in an ongoing collection of “activity binders” containing ideas for demonstrations, suggestions for interacting with visitors, and the background science informing the activities; the binders have become the repository of the collective science knowledge and demonstration experience of the whole Café. All binder materials are also available online, free to anyone who registers; a weblog enables science conversations beyond the walls of COSI.

Partnerships

Informal relationships were maintained with numerous science professionals in the Toledo area, including chemistry professors at the University of Toledo, engineers, a local ophthalmologist, and others. Imagination Station has more formal partnerships with corporations such as British Petroleum.

Role of Evaluation

COSI Toledo engaged a professional evaluation company to conduct observations and gather information from COSI members for the evaluation plan. The evaluation company developed surveys for visitors and COSI team members and met regularly with the COSI team. Science Café staff also did informal surveys with visitors.

Community Effects

COSI's mission was to inspire a sense of wonder in children and prepare them to participate in the knowledge-based economy of the future; in this the Science Café was an undeniable success. Evaluations showed that the Science Café promoted an inquiry-rich way for adults and children to explore science and that COSI Toledo offered the community an effective, alternative way to learn and engage in science. The Science Café was a successful public space that promotes science inquiry; the café's flexibility and daily changes of offerings meant that audiences received a new experience each time they visited the café. More specifically, the evaluations found high levels of use of all three elements of the Café (activity tables, Extreme Science demonstrations, and the demonstration bench) and an overwhelming majority agreed that the Café encouraged people to work together. A strong majority expressed interest in learning more about the activities they took part in at the Café. Numerous anecdotes attested to the Café's "wow" and also described several moving experiences families experienced in the context of Café activities.

Organizational Effects

The Science Café has had a significant impact on COSI. Its success led COSI Toledo to re-organize all of its demonstrations; all demonstrators are now trained by a Science Café Coordinator and conduct ongoing peer-to-peer training; new "chefs" shadow more experienced staff. Indeed, in COSI's new incarnation as Imagination Station, the Science Café is a 5,000 square foot area near the museum's entry, notes Nelson.

All public and school demonstrations at COSI are facilitated by Science Café staff; the Café staff has grown. All demonstration, bench activities, and outreach materials are now stored in the Café, which serves as the hub for all demonstrations and outreach programming at COSI. The Science Café also serves as setting for prototyping demonstrations and workshops.

Challenges

COSI Toledo's financial difficulties had a major effect on the Science Café; when COSI closed, all but four staff members were let go. Reopened as Imagination Station, the new institution is on sounder financial footing, which now includes public as well as private funding.

Lessons Learned

The Science Café made clear that hands-on, inquiry-based opportunities attract and engage visitors. “The best exhibit,” Nelson says, “is a human being out there interacting with visitors.” In reflections on their work, staff confirmed the value of offering all staff appropriate training, emphasized the importance of flexibility as a key attribute of staff characteristics, and advised that two staff members should be in the Café at all times. Staff also concluded that team brainstorming was an effective means of generating new ideas and activities.

In conversations with other science museums interested in replicating the Science café, Nelson says, he noted some hesitancy to “dedicate space like that right up front in the museum ... there was so much angst over jumping off this ledge to start doing this program. I don’t know what possessed us, but we just went and did it,” adding, “I don’t think we could have gotten where we are now if we had been so cautious and analyzed and fretted over every little detail.”

Nelson notes that the name Café was “very clever but it confused our visitors,” who expected food service. “It worked against us over time,” he says. The name has since changed to Science Studio.

Sustainability

COSI lost its funding and closed at the end of 2007. However, vigorous fund-raising and public awareness generated new funding, and COSI reopened as Imagination Station. The activity binders continue to serve as a repository of knowledge and with its new, expanded space, the Science Café continues to engage children and families in hands-on science inquiry and exploration.

Project Curiosity

Institution: Denver Museum of Nature and Science

Location: Denver, CO

Region: West

Museum Size: Large

Institution Discipline: Natural History/
Anthropology

Grant size: \$118,197

Grant Period: 2005-2006

Project Background

Project Curiosity involved the design and implementation of a comprehensive package of educational offerings to stimulate curiosity and enrich visitors' Museum experiences and enable educators to teach through inquiry. The project addressed a component of the Museum's mission—to inspire curiosity—that museum staff recognized, during a strategic planning process, was not well attended to. To meet the challenge, staff conducted an internal, collaborative effort across departments which do not usually come together in project development. People from Education, Exhibits, Information Technology, Graphics, Museum Shop, Volunteer Department, and Research and Collections together developed a suite of new activities, programs, exhibit signage, and online resources aimed at inspiring curiosity as a building block of the inquiry process.

With MFA funding, staff embarked on an experimental design project that resulted in six new poster activities, two new microscope carts, one new passport guide, a new space science activity cart, and one new family activity. In addition, staff created an online guide and delivered programs and professional development opportunities to visitors and educators. Many of these activities continue to be offered at the museum and include interactive dioramas, a digital microscope cart, a revamped health exhibit and heart dissection cart, and an online educator guide. Commitment by museum staff to both inquiry-based learning and the role of curiosity in motivating audiences has deepened.

Key Factors in Success

Polly Andrews, Director of Youth and Teacher Programs, believes that key to the project's success was the experimental nature of the process. Museum staff piloted exhibits, signage and activities in an effort to create deeper audience engagement in their extensive exhibit halls, which include 90 dioramas. Staff experimented with engaging visitors with and without facilitation; the grant allowed them to experience both success and failure, and to learn from both. For example, staff found that posters were less effective than other media in engaging audiences, because posters did not attract people the way physical structures, carts or interactives did. By contrast, opportunities for audiences to interact physically in spaces that are traditionally more about viewing and reflection have proven very popular. For instance, painting footprints of a cheetah and antelope engaged in chase on the floor in front of the cheetah diorama transformed audiences' experiences and relationship to the extensive diorama halls and continues to be a popular attraction; visitors daily walk along the animals' path. In another case, signage encouraged people to walk like crocodiles—bent legged. The result helped audiences enter into the action portrayed in the dioramas without compromising the reflective experience for others.

Partnerships

No external partnerships were formed for the project. However, the project involved internal cross-department collaboration that exceeded previous Education project development efforts.

Role of Evaluation

The museum conducted both formative and summative evaluation activities that were essential to the process. During the grant writing process, the museum used IMLS evaluation resources, gaining their first experience using logic models and defining outcomes. Andrews says this was a useful process for homing in on what they wanted the project to be. It also reduced work with the external evaluator once the grant was funded, because staff had already thought through the goals. “We continue to use that type of methodology now” in all of their programs, she notes.

Gathering impact evidence was a valuable exercise. The evaluation was used to understand how well Project Curiosity activities attracted visitor attention, engaged visitors, and stimulated visitor’s curiosity about science. Overall, the evaluation confirmed a successful program that engages visitors in science and sparks curiosity. Specific results pointed to more and less successful exhibits and activities and were used to make further adjustments.

The museum worked with an external evaluator for the summative study. In order to meet the museum’s budget, the evaluator put the plan together and trained a team at the museum who did the actual observations. The evaluator compiled and analyzed the data for a final summative report.

Community Effects

The project changed the experience of the museum for visitors. “Everything else is more observational,” explains Andrews, “Having those interactives with the diorama has changed the way people experience those particular dioramas. Using the digital microscope—you could see they became more curious about everything around them.”

Project Curiosity was designed to extend the museum’s mission, but it also dovetailed with a current interest in school-based, inquiry-centered science education. Through the teacher professional development program, teachers saw the approach to curiosity and inquiry as a useful means of teaching science, according to Andrews.

Organizational Effects

The MFA grant created an opportunity for the museum staff to focus on both inquiry and curiosity, which Andrews explains are two different things, both of which have taken hold in how museum staff think about the experiences they design. “There were many spin-offs after Project Curiosity, because people started thinking about, how do we make people curious?,” Andrews says, “For example, the Discovery Zone itself—not just the microscope cart that was created under the grant—was modified and staff created a whole discovery lab. And because of the success of the Heart Zonette [another cart expanded under the grant], the Zonette is now even bigger, with multiple stations.”

The cross-department collaboration fostered new ways of communicating and improved relationships between departments. Staff members express pride in their work on the project.

Being part of an IMLS grant and being successful “has provided the opportunity for us to be successful with others,” Andrews says: the museum’s reputation in the field has been very important. “We’ve seen continued successes,” she adds, and the Project Curiosity initiative is used as an example of a successful grant experience when the museum submits other proposals.

Challenges

Working across so many departments required greater-than-expected effort to keep everyone involved and up to date on project developments. The team met this challenge through bi-weekly meetings held for several months during the development process, and monthly meetings after that. In addition, staff created a shared computer file for all records and meeting minutes, chart of tasks, and other supports to keep information flowing.

A second challenge related to the project's timing. Development and implementation of Project Curiosity overlapped with the arrival of the popular Body Worlds 2 exhibit, and marketing, exhibit and education efforts focused on the opening of the traveling exhibit. Despite that diversion, the team pulled off a successful launch with only minor delays in a few activities and signage for Project Curiosity.

Lessons Learned

Andrews notes a key learning was the importance of testing new ideas and learning from those tests—"And if it's not working, adjust it or stop it. We learned the importance of being open to that." For instance, the passport idea—having visitors follow a set course and receive stamps as they proceeded through the museum—simply didn't work.

Staff learned that if they wanted to make diorama halls more interactive, they needed some type of related component—not just signage, Andrews says. They learned the importance of including a kinesthetic element through something that visitors can manipulate and that that doesn't detract from other's contemplative experience in the diorama hall. Through trial and error, activities that genuinely engaged audiences emerged: the "diorama is a richer experience when you provide other resources for them to experience them through," explains Andrews.

Another area of learning for museum staff concerns evaluation. Staff learned that evaluation is not easy: "You have to be very consistent with how you are managing it; approaching people and asking people to participate," Andrews observes. Staff now integrate outcomes-based planning into every new project. "We start by looking at goals, objectives and outcomes."

Sustainability

The DMNS remains committed to Project Curiosity. Museum administrators recognize that promoting curiosity is critical to creating a community of critical thinkers, which is at the heart of the museum's mission. "For us, this project set us down that path [teaching inquiry] for our team to think that way," Andrews observes. The Project Curiosity theme extended beyond the initial grant goals and period: in addition to the continuing exhibit components, activities, and programs (now funded out of operating budgets of their respective departments), the Museum shop created a Curiosity Shop and tabletop materials were integrated throughout the cafeteria with facts and other scientific information to spark curiosity. Summer and family camp-in programs were conducted under the theme of curiosity, such that the whole institution was caught up in the curiosity theme and continues with its Mission to inspire curiosity.

Our History Revealed: A Master Plan for Interpreting 19th Century American Life

Institution: Genesee Country Village and Museum

Location: Mumford, NY

Region: Mid Atlantic

Institution Size: Large

Institution Discipline: General

Grant Size: \$140,249

Grant Period: 2004 - 2008

Project Background

The Genesee Country Village and Museum (GCV&M) received a MFA grant in 2004 to create a comprehensive master interpretive plan to integrate the 19th century structures, artifacts, fine art, gardens and landscapes of GCV&M into a single, intellectually consistent resource. The IMLS grant was instrumental in helping the privately-held 700 acre institution make the transition from a highly idiosyncratic collection of 68 historical buildings, sporting and wildlife art, furniture and other artifacts amassed by the museum's founder, to a unified, living history museum, with a historical and geographical focus – a 19th century western New York state rural village. The MFA grant allowed museum staff to engage content experts in relevant academic subjects, such as 19th c. education, abolition and women's history, to assist in the development of a new master interpretive plan for the disparate collection of buildings and artifacts and to provide staff training in historical content. Recognizing the lack of expertise in “the visitor experience” in this initial set of advisors, the museum initiated a concurrent strategic planning process with assistance of a museum consultant. These twin processes allowed for not only a clearly defined thematic focus, but also allowed them to define a hands-on, living history approach to the visitor experience. And while they do not have a phased plan or timeline, the process resulted in “a vision of what we want the historical village... to be.”

Key Factors in Success

A central component of the master planning process was engaging in the local history. Academic content advisors conducted a series of workshops for staff and board members that were transformative in grounding the institution in the new content focus. A number of other activities contributed to the research foundation for the development of the new institutional plan. GCV&M conducted research and created a database of their buildings, including basic information that had never been centralized; created a historical timeline of western New York history; assessed various collections; and acquired research previously conducted on topics of interest to the museum.

The articulation of the new master plan allowed the museum to reconsider the value and use of their collections. For instance, GCV&M's collection of over forty carriages, wagonettes, and sleighs was assessed during the planning process and resulted in de-accessioning most of what was in storage. As part of the interpretive plan, executive staff laid out possibilities for a hands-on activity center, transportation exhibit, and hands-on animal exhibit.

Another key factor in the success was enlisting a museum strategic consultant to provide a visitor experience perspective.

Partnerships

Partnerships were not a significant part of the project

Role of Evaluation

GCV&M has conducted surveys and focus groups on particular visitor expectations and on particular programs and exhibits since articulating the plan. The results have already been used in shaping new offerings. For instance, visitor feedback resulted in development of both a historic dining experience and historic ride – offerings that were not important to the academic advisors, but of interest to visitors.

GCV&M, however, did not conduct evaluation work as part of the master planning process. In hindsight, they recognize now the value visitor surveys and feedback provide.

Community Effects

The institution now promotes itself as a more interactive, hands-on experience than in the past. Visitor numbers have gone up overall, with an increase in visitation of 6% in 2009, although museum staff indicate that an improved economy may also be a factor. They hope to see greater engagement of school groups as they extend the hands-on, ropes-down experiences to students, and to promote guided programs over self-guided tours for their educational visitors.

Organizational Effects

The re-visioning of the institution under the two-pronged MFA grant and strategic planning process has resulted in a change in the institution's mission. The mission now explicitly focuses on depicting change through time, depicting village life in western NY state, and illuminating how the past impacts people's lives today. The previous mission did not address these features of the museum, and there was no mention of the unique location of the institution, time period of the buildings and collections, or of other specifics of the actual collection.

The Senior Director of Programs and Collections relates that having the opportunity to develop both a strategic and master plan has paved the way for additional funding. The museum refers to both of these documents in new requests, and finds them invaluable for providing context and validating that there is a clearly thought out plan that has been approved by the organization's board.

The Director also notes that staff capacity has changed as a result of the grant. The academic consultants "opened eyes and minds to different ideas." And while they haven't yet developed exhibits and programs related to slavery, abolition and the underground railroad, they have widened their network of contacts. They have also increased staff capacity, including knowledge and contacts, related to agriculture, women's history, and Native American cultures.

Challenges

The museum faced two main challenges in instituting the grant. The greatest challenge was staff turnover. Five key staff members, as well as the President/CEO of the museum, changed during the period between writing the MFA grant and completion. Some of the content advisors also changed. This lack of consistency resulted in challenges in completing work on time and in maintaining consistent records. Despite these difficulties, GCV&M was able to reach its goal, albeit with an extended timeline.

The second challenge was that only two of the advisors brought on for the project had any significant museum experience in terms of understanding and planning for the visitor experience. The initiation of the strategic planning process during the master plan initiative allowed GCV&M to overcome this hurdle.

Lessons Learned

In reflecting on the master planning process, the Senior Director of Programs and Collection noted that it would have been beneficial to include advisors who can conceptualize the visitor experience and can help shape how the content will be translated for visitors from the start. He also suggested that a more comprehensive view of the existing resources and greater engagement of visitors in the process would have been valuable. In particular he would have liked to have assessed **all** of the collections as part of the process; including time to test concepts with the museum's visitors; and more time to acquire supporting research materials and consultation with other museum professionals.

Sustainability

The work continues. The MFA grant underwrote a visioning process for the museum. Based on the new interpretive plan, the museum has begun implementing the recommendations including changing the furnishings and interpretation in seven different buildings. Barriers are being taken down or altered to look more in keeping with the space, programmatic collections are replacing more valuable permanent collection items and activities for interpreters to engage the public are being developed. They continue to evaluate collections and make decisions about which items have historical value and should be kept behind barriers, which to de-accession, and which to use in hands-on experiences.

For instance, exhibitions in the Art Gallery are now more closely aligned with the Historic Village offerings. A 19th century costume collection they just received will be integrated into both Village and Gallery offerings. They are currently renovating the art gallery which will include not just nature art, as in the past, but will provide a taste of the collections throughout the Village, including decorative arts, and featuring the best pieces drawn from carriage, costume and other collections.

They also continue to enrich the view of village life, and offer greater opportunities for hands-on learning. For instance, the brewery is now functional and visitors can attend a demonstration of brewing. There are stations where visiting students can do woodworking and other historically accurate activities. They converted a female seminary building from a static look-only exhibit to an interactive, hands-on school room.

The current vision is for the Village to show that places evolve over time and to show the transitions from the turn of the 18th century to the turn of the 20th century. These features are slowly being put into place. They recently developed a visitor map that divided the historic village into three time periods: settlement, antebellum and turn-of-the-century in order to help visitors experience change over time during their visit. And they are currently creating interpretive signs to demarcate these different areas of the village by historical period, as well as installing ones in buildings not staffed by an interpreter.

Johnson County's Photographic History on the Web

Institution: Johnson County Museum

Institution Discipline: Historical Museum

Location: Shawnee, KS

Grant Size: \$90,745

Region: Midwest

Grant Period: 2004 – 2006

Institution Size: Small

Project Background

An MFA grant enabled the Johnson County Museum, a half-century old history museum in suburban Kansas City, Kansas, to create a web-accessible archive containing more than 22,000 photographs from the mid 1850s to the present, as well as historic atlases, and aerial and architectural photographs.

Working with a local historian and librarian, the Museum created www.JoCoHistory.net, a fully searchable website that expands the Museum's presence from a small building to the online environment. Museum staff also created online curriculum guides for students in grades four through twelve, a benefit in a time when funding for field trips is declining, said [title] Mindy Love.

The MFA grant underwrote services by an outside vendor to scan and store photographs, in both high resolution for archival and preservation purposes, and low-resolution for the Web. Previously, photographs were only made available to visitors through a professional photography studio, for a fee. The digitization project now saves the museum time and allows it to make low resolution images free to all Web users. Researchers may still access high resolution images.

Key Factors in Success

A key factor was the museum's close involvement with the Johnson County Library. The Library had digitized much of its collection of original historic material and took on the task of creating and maintaining the website and database, which houses materials from both the library and the museum. A local historian and the former (now retired) county librarian consulted with the project.

"We've done a really great job in our county of not duplicating resources," Love explains. The Library maintains a large collection of published materials, including all the local newspapers on microfilm as well as an obituary index, and works closely with the county genealogical society. The museum focuses more on original resources, so the partnership allows both institutions to broaden their holdings and their audiences.

Partnerships

The project was a collaborative effort with the Johnson County Library, which provided, and continues to provide, the technical resources and staff to catalogue and digitize the museum's many materials. The Library made significant contributions, financial as well as in-kind and volunteer, to the project.

Holdings on the website continue to expand through relationships with other local institutions, such as the Olathe Public Library, the county archive, and local historical societies. Preserving materials has been a major benefit to these smaller organizations, digitization had made it less necessary to handle the physical materials.

Role of Evaluation

Evaluation did not play a strong role in the project's implementation and remains, for Love, a "work in progress."

To date, the key measure of the project's success is the number of visits to the website, about one million image views per month. The museum's newsletter, now published online, has seen its readership grow from about 800 hard-copy readers to more than 6,000 online readers each month. The museum has also tracked the number and types of comments it has received. Museum staff members have presented on their work at conferences and have received extremely positive feedback from colleagues.

With different perspectives on collecting user data, the museum and library have slowly reached agreement on surveys, and Love recently instituted voluntary pop-up surveys for website visitors, collecting feedback both on the site's usability and its curriculum guides. An advisory committee of representatives from each of the six school districts in the county consults with the museum on the education content and promotes the website's use with local schools. Museum staff also survey walk-in visitors to the museum's building.

Community Effects

Having a web presence with rich resources has increased the museum's visibility, both locally and worldwide. With as many as one million images viewed monthly, "There is truly a greater awareness of our county's history by the public because of the site. And that was ultimately the goal." Although many people associate the county with post-war bedroom suburbs, she says, its past reaches back through the Civil War to Western migration trails and pre-Columbian Indians.

The strength of community involvement is evident in the great number of online comments visitors make. Many have identified or corrected mistakenly identified people and places portrayed in the online archive. A comment feature makes it easy for website visitors to add data. Numerous personal connections have been made; for example, a community in South Korea was also able to use the JoCo website to locate a photograph of an American soldier who had been active in building a school and other projects in South Korea.

In addition to comments, many community members have offered physical treasures. One donation comprised 100 volumes over 50 years of a suburban newspaper whose editor took a decidedly non-mainstream point of view of suburbia. This donation was extremely valuable in positioning the county in the larger history of American suburbia, Love says. Another donation has been a comprehensive photographic record of all county cemeteries.

Organizational Effects

The museum's education and collections staff worked more closely than before in developing this project and have strengthened their ability to work together, moving from occasional to regular collaboration, Love said.

The museum probably serves many fewer researchers on site that it did before, she conjectured. Many researchers are able to conduct searches on the website and make specific requests for information. This cuts down on staff time, Love said: "We know what they want before they come in and we can pull it and have it ready instead of the drop-in visit." With more time available, staff members are developing weblogs, and blogging about the collections routinely as another way to engage the larger community.

Staff members also increased their knowledge about scanning and digital files; they have a much better understanding of industry standards and are conversant with "all that jargon," Love says. She also perceives

that staff members are more engaged in their individual work; they have more interaction with the community as a result of the project, she says.

Challenges

With only seven full-time employees, staffing such a project was a challenge; the relationship with the library was critical. The library provides the Web presence and access to a larger community; organizational cultures are shaped to some extent by size, and initially, “we really worked very differently,” Love recalls. Museum staff had to learn to pace themselves in order to work with the much larger (300 employees to the museum’s 7) and slower library. Both organizations had similar goals, however, and created timelines they could both meet.

Lessons Learned

“A key learning for me was to take the risk,” says Mindi Love. “I think people hesitate to do things because they don’t think they have x, y and z, and I would say, ‘take the risk.’” When Johnson County Museum staff present their project at conferences, Love says, they receive strong interest from both large institutions, which are impressed by the scale and professionalism of the project, and from small institutions who are inspired by this significant undertaking by a small museum.

Sustainability

Today, a county agency that funds historical projects has supported the continuing project. The museum actively seeks new partnerships to expand its collection; a recent addition was the Kansas School for the Deaf, of which some 4,000 images are now online.

The completion of the digitization project has allowed the museum to move from the Civil War past to a focus on more recent history, specifically the area’s suburban history. With the completion of the project, museum staff decided to focus new exhibits on the area’s suburban history. They have created a toy-sized landscape young children can use to experience different environments, urban, suburban, and rural that was developed based on a hands-on early developmental learning model. Visitor numbers, particularly families with young children, have jumped 150%.

Kidscommons: Building Buildings

Institution: Kidscommons Children’s Museum

Institution Discipline: Children’s Museum

Location: Columbus, Indiana

Grant Size: \$93,302

Region: Midwest

Grant Period: 2004 - 2006

Institution Size: Small

Project Background

Kidscommons Children’s Museum received an IMLS grant in 2004 to create *ExploraHouse*, a combined exhibit and program about the built environment. Museum staff and Board members knew that for a children’s museum to be successful it had to reflect what was unique and special about their community. Columbus, Indiana is noted for its unique design and architecture. *ExploraHouse* was designed to look at the built environment differently. In addition to addressing architecture and building, the exhibit focused on the building process and making environmentally-responsible building choices. The 1,000 square foot exhibit, a modern multi-level home, contained recognizable spaces such as a foyer, living room, fireplace, hallway, and bathroom. Hidden places created opportunities for interaction and exploration “through exaggerated passageways such as the over-sized toilet, sliding bookshelves, a mouse hole, and the fireplace.” The MFA project focused on the final development, design, fabrication, and installation of the exhibition; and the development of educational programs associated with the exhibition.

ExploraHouse was the first major new exhibit in the Museum’s new location. Due to its small size, the previous location served primarily younger children on-site. A major goal of the Museum was to better serve middle-school students in the new facility. The timing of the award was made soon after the move into the new facility and served to rejuvenate community support and garner additional funding. The grant was also instrumental in moving the museum from a start-up organization to a sustainable institution in the community. It helped the Museum move forward and engage in a long-term planning process.

Key Factors in Success

Local students helped design the exhibit in one of the museum’s summer camp programs. They provided Museum staff with valuable input about secret passageways, etc. which led to “creating a number of things in the exhibit that people just love,” reports former Museum Director, Cheryl Buffo. For example, part of the exhibit is a giant toilet with its two-story plumbing slide to the water treatment room in the “basement.” Buffo also noted those creative and whimsical elements throughout the exhibit “have really been successful and have put us on the map.”

Partnerships

Kidscommons worked with the early childhood programs at the high school vocational program and Indiana Purdue University to develop curriculum for the exhibit. Students received high school and college credit to work with museum staff on learning how to develop curriculum for children.

Museum staff established a partnership with the local waste management company to provide specific educational programming tied to that water cycle component. The company offered programming at the landfill’s bioswale during the summer months. Museum staff helped manage the bioswale at the museum site and in return the waste management company conducted programming on site as well. Museum Director, Alan Degner, noted that the partnership helped visitors of all age groups to better understand the water cycle process and it’s applicability to their homes and where they live.

Role of Evaluation

Museum staff hired a consultant who used the IMLS tool to develop the evaluation plan for *ExploraHouse*. The process of developing and conducting an evaluation was new for Museum staff. They recognized its value but did not understand how to go about implementing it. Museum staff have since used the resources and tools IMLS provided in subsequent exhibit development. According Alan Degner, Kidscommons uses a variety of evaluation tools to collect information from visitors, students, teachers, and program attendees.

Community Effects

Previously a destination primarily for younger children, *ExploraHouse* expanded the age range served by the museum to include children 8-12 years old. Staff noted that they have been successful in reaching older children encouraging repeat visits meeting their goal of “extending that learning life cycle”.

The exhibit was designed to engage adults and children learning together through an arrangement of exhibits in which displays are just as interesting to adults as to children. Alan Degner reports that adults engaged with their children instead of standing behind and watching them. “One of the real magical pieces of *ExploraHouse* is this timeless, ageless appeal,” reports the Director, and that engagement follows throughout the museum.

Organizational Effects

ExploraHouse increased the capacity of staff to engage with older children (ages 8-12) and focus on working with children and parents in an intergenerational setting. Also, the types of objects and hands-on materials within the exhibit increased the range of their interpretive and teaching skills to accommodate multiple learning styles of children and youth. Regular staff meetings are used to bring people together to discuss different ways to engage visitors and explain the exhibit components and the learning principles.

Challenges

One challenge Museum staff faced was building *ExploraHouse* in the middle of the Museum while it was operating. Museum staff turned the challenge into an opportunity by making the building of the exhibit part of the learning experience. Low walls were erected around the construction site and plexiglass peep holes were cut out so that all visitors, including young children, could watch and experience the work in process.

Another challenge encountered was in making *ExploraHouse* as inclusive as possible for all visitors. *ExploraHouse* extended through two levels of the museum and involved gross motor activities such as sliding, climbing, and crawling in and out of spaces, and thus much of the exhibit was not accessible to physically challenged children. Kidscommons worked with The Inclusion Network of Cincinnati as well as a family who has a child in a wheelchair to increase accessibility. Museum staff used video, sound, and signage to create connections between the levels. For instance, a series of cameras and tubes enabled a visitor to connect and interact between levels, whether or not the visitor could be physically present in different parts of the exhibit.

Another challenge was staying within budget while making sure that the display components were robust enough to withstand the stomping, pounding and pulling that happens in a children’s museum, and the ideas behind the displays stayed fresh. Alan Degner reports that over time Museum staff have identified the kind of features that are resilient and would teach about the components of a house, and reach different age-groups.

Lessons learned

Partnerships with funding agencies, whether with IMLS or National Endowment for the Humanities, were considered valuable in shaping the focus for *ExploraHouse*. Cheryl Buffo noted, “They told us what to do to be successful.”

Another lesson learned by Museum staff was the value of designing *ExploraHouse* to address multiple content areas. The exhibit was designed to look at different components of a house, such as the whole building process, the water cycle, different uses of energy and how different materials react to heat and cool, what it takes to power different light sources, etc. Staff can build on these different components in developing programs without having to replace major exhibit features.

Sustainability

The Museum has corporate sponsors and foundation sponsors who’ve helped underwrite the costs in either programming development, or enhancements to *ExploraHouse*.

ExploraHouse serves as a foundation for educational programming components on a wide spectrum of topics. The exhibit embraces many themes, i.e., construction trade, architecture, community building, and the environment that allow staff to keep moving forward with new ideas and new concepts that weave into displays and educational programs. Educational programming associated with the exhibit continues to evolve, embracing new topics and technologies. Summer camp programs allow kids to delve more deeply into particular content areas. For example, staff initially discussed insulation and its use for heating and cooling purposes, and now introduce the notion of sound insulation and the explore the appropriate building materials.

Bug Buddies Inquiry Center

Institution: Lincoln Children's Zoo

Institution Discipline: Historic House/Site

Location: Lincoln, NE

Grant Size: \$68,554

Region: Mountain Plains

Grant Period: 2006-2007

Institution Size: Medium

Project Background

The Lincoln Children's Zoo received a Museums for America (MFA) grant in 2006 to create a Big Buddies Inquiry Exhibit. The interactive exhibit was designed to introduce and engage Zoo visitors in learning about arthropods, i.e., insects. Zoo volunteers and staff involved children and their families through the use of live animals, inquiry stations, and touch screen computers. The exhibit was aimed at reducing people's apprehension of bugs by igniting the curiosity of young children. Bug Buddies extended the Zoo's mission of "engaging children in wildlife and the diversity of wildlife on the planet." The funds supported the creation of education banners used for exhibit walls, photo cubes connected to the banners, programming for the touch screen computer stations, and equipment for displaying the eight different insects.

Key Factors in Success

One of the successful aspects of the exhibit was that children actually got to hold or touch the bug. According to the President and CEO of the Zoo, John Chapo, once a child can "touch the bug or hold the bug, it makes a connection; the bug and the child."

Another feature that made the Exhibit successful was fostering dialogue between visitors and zoo staff. Selected for their people skills, the Zoo engaged volunteers and paid staffers ("bug buddies") to inform and engage with children: "greeting the kids, getting on the kid's levels, listening to and observing the kids." This unique personal engagement created as part of Bug Buddies promoted a lot of repeat visitation. Mr. Chapo noted that many visitors returned at least once a week to check up on a "favorite" bug, or ask more questions of their "bug buddy."

Partnerships

The Zoo established a partnership with the University of Nebraska, College of Natural Resources to help with the technology for the exhibits. Because of changes within the university, the partnership was not sustained.

Role of Evaluation

An evaluation of the Bug Buddies exhibit was conducted in the summer of 2007. Two hundred (200) visitors were interviewed and 74 were "tracked" through the exhibit. The evaluation looked at visitor interactions within the exhibit, changes in apprehension levels about bugs, most visited exhibit components, gains in knowledge about insects, and satisfaction with the exhibit. Evaluation findings indicated that most visitors liked the exhibit, and reported changes in knowledge (increase) and apprehensions levels (decrease). Results also showed that visitors moved "41% slower through the Bug Buddies exhibit" than through other exhibits in the Zoo. Zoo staff also used the evaluation results to make changes in exhibit components. The Education Director (Aimee Johns) reported that she uses evaluation informally to learn more about the trends (e.g.,

which components are most popular, how long do kids stay, what are kids most excited about, etc.) for exhibit improvement.

Community Effects

The Bug Buddies exhibit expanded the experiences of visitors to the Zoo. Through displays and interaction with their bug buddies, children and their parents became involved in the process of scientific inquiry and had opportunities “to observe with a purpose, formulate predictions, record data, and share conclusions.” Mr. Chapo noted the Bug Buddies exhibit showed Zoo staff that children and their families will spend more time at an exhibit if they are engaged in meaningful conversations that elicit excitement and curiosity.

Organizational Effects

Mr. Chapo reported that Bug Buddies taught the zoo about the importance of people skills. When hiring staff, he has become more attentive to bringing on people “who are engagers.” In addition, there has been more collaborative work across departments. Ms. Johns, the Education Director, has started to work with other departments to take the lessons of engagement and apply them to other exhibits. For example, Ms. Johns and the Animal Curator will work together to make zoo keepers’ notes more accessible to visitors and engage the public better. Ms. Johns mentioned that she has a binder full of notes of what she wants to do “regarding better engagement in the rest of the zoo.”

Additionally, more efforts have been made to connect the volunteers with the “bigger picture” of the zoo and bring in more volunteers. A new Volunteer Coordinator was hired recently. His goals are to explore new ways of using volunteers and nurturing them in their roles at the zoo. Ms. Johns and the Volunteer Coordinator have started to work together to refine the process of recruiting, interviewing and training volunteers.

Challenges

An early challenge was to devise strategies for fostering public engagement. Exhibit staff realized that placing facilitators at each display was not the most effective strategy. They then devised a system whereby several staff members, including both paid staff and volunteers were available throughout the exhibit area. That way, visitors could develop more extensive relationships with Zoo staff members, who would shepherd them throughout the whole experience, rather than the more limited interactions that were confined to a single display area.

Another challenge was with the technology and building a touch screen program “that could stand up to young children poking relentlessly. The touch screen computers stations were programmed to focus visitors’ attention on a specific bug, and its behavior, habitat or diet. However, the computers did not work as intended; Zoo staff noticed that quite often children would touch the screen “just because they can touch screens.” Also the staff believed that the computers were not effectively used in the exhibit. Museum staff continued to include the touch screen programs, making adjustments as needed.

A third challenge was in specimen selection and working through the rules and regulations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which made it difficult for the Zoo to obtain the insects. The process was facilitated by working through the university’s education department, and using them as the point of contact with the USDA

Lessons Learned

Mr. Chapo noted that the success of an exhibit depends on the engager, “and the best engager may not always be the best educated – it all depends on people skills and sincerity of the engager.”

Another lesson learned was that exhibits do not have to be elaborate to pull in visitors. The design of the Bug Buddies exhibit was quite simple: insects were housed in plexiglass containers that secured the animals, were practical and easy to clean and allowed visitors opportunities for unobstructed and unmediated observation.

Zoo staff also learned what species children could and could not handle. For example, children may be excited to hold an insect but they are also likely to drop them which can damage the insect. So, for some species the trained staff would handle the insect and the children could still touch it. Also, staff learned that it is important to have multiple animals in backup to rotate through the exhibit.

Sustainability

In the words of Mr. Chapo, “Bug Buddies has taught us so much about what to do with the rest of the zoo” regarding engagement and presentation, and getting people to stop and slow down at exhibits. The Lincoln Zoo continues to support the Bug Buddies exhibit; it is part of the Zoo’s operating budget. The success of the exhibit has affirmed Zoo staff members’ thinking to keep pushing for engagement, to enhance the education programs, and to evolve the special events on the zoo grounds.

The success of Bug Buddies encouraged the Zoo to build a new butterfly pavilion integrating some of the lessons learned about promoting engagement and learning. For instance, facilitators are key to success and two to three staff people work in the pavilion, “showing the kids, explaining, engaging, and answering questions.” The pavilion opened in the summer of 2009 and is focused on stimulating children’s curiosity about butterflies. The exhibit shows the different stages of life, and provides content knowledge and support for observing butterflies in visitors’ yards at home.

Star-Spangled Center Interpretive Exhibits, Educational Programming and Assessment

Institution: Magic House, St. Louis Children's Museum

Institution Size: Large

Location: St. Louis, MO

Institution Discipline: Children's/Youth

Region: Midwest

Grant Size: \$124,288

Grant Period: 2006-2008

Project Background

The Magic House was awarded an MFA grant to create the Star-Spangled Center learning environment for citizenship education. The focal point of the Museum's \$15 million capital expansion, the Center featured a domed Rotunda space, a Legislative Chamber, a Courtroom, and an Oval Office where visitors can learn about the duties and responsibilities of the three branches of government. MFA funding enabled The Magic House to create the exhibit areas, produce interpretive exhibits on American history and government, and to pilot and implement educational programs and develop assessment tools to evaluate their effectiveness.

The Magic House received MFA funding early in its capital campaign, enabling staff to leverage the grant monies to gain additional community support. With the opening of the new expansion, the Museum's attendance grew from about 350,000 year to about 600,000 visitors a year. The budget also grew from \$3 to \$5 million in one year.

Key Factors in Success

Museum staff highlight the success of the education programs, which were offered to students in kindergarten through 8th grade and were aligned school curricula and with state education standards. According to feedback from teachers, the programs engaged students and made the "whole idea of government" more "concrete" for them. For example, students took part in simulated activities related to all three branches of the government, such as making a speech from the Oval Office and debating issues in the Legislative Chamber. Debate topics were selected to engage older school-age students with issues meaningful to them, including healthy choices for lunch programs, wearing seat belts on buses, and allowing skateboards on sidewalks.

Partnerships

A partnership was established with the director of the Center for Civic Engagement and Democracy at Maryville University. This faculty member was instrumental in working with Museum staff in designing the exhibits about democracy for children and has since joined the Museum's education advisory committee.

Role of Evaluation

The Magic House worked with an evaluation consultant to design assessment instruments for the Star-Spangled Center's education programs. Online teacher surveys were developed to assess the program's effectiveness in increasing students' understanding of underlying civics concepts, citizenship and public service; the programs' effectiveness in meeting curricular goals in social studies and history; and teachers' satisfaction with the programs. The consultant also conducted observations of classroom field trips at the Center and interviewed teachers, Museum educators who conducted the programs, and parents who

accompanied their children to the programs. Museum staff used the information to understand the strengths of the civic education programs, and make changes accordingly.

Museum staff have continued to use online surveys to measure success of their Star-Spangled Center education programs in meeting the needs of teachers and students. The feedback has also been valuable for making program modifications, such as using “smart” boards to do quick assessments of how much students are learning.

Community Effects

The Star-Spangled Center was designed to extend the Museum’s programming to reach children between 10 and 13 years, in order to address findings from a feasibility study showing that the community wanted the Museum to offer more opportunities for older students. Museum staff report that they have been successful in reaching this group and their families.

Museum staff also report that the Center has changed the community’s view of The Magic House: “We are seen as a place where children can learn about civic education,” says Beth Fitzgerald, president of the Magic House. The Center is now² seen as a venue for civic engagement, hosting election launch parties, veterans groups, and city council representatives; it also serves as a site for local TV station broadcasts on election nights. One staff member notes, “This sends a message out to the community that we are a resource in terms of civic education.” Adds another, “I think we have been more involved in the democratic process just by having the Center.”

Organizational Effects

For the Star-Spangled Center, the Museum hired additional teachers to host education field trips, choosing retired civic education teachers who had expertise in the content area, good rapport with children, and the ability to communicate information in an engaging manner. The Museum has continued to support the additional teaching staff by including them in its business plan.

Museum staff also established regular communication channels to inform all staff about the Center; for example, monthly staff meetings bring people from all departments together to share information. Staff from the Education Department meet monthly with visitor service staff members, mostly high school and college students, and the Education Program Manager holds monthly meetings with field trip teachers.

Challenges

Museum staff found that technology was their biggest challenge. In seeking to appeal to an older age group, staff tried to integrate more technology into the Center than they had in previous exhibits. The most challenging issues arose with audio features. The Center had one sound system with several microphones throughout the space. Initially, the audio system was set up in a closet area used by visitors, so that staff could not access the system as planned. Further, the microphones were equipped with volume controls which were difficult to manage in the Center. Finally, with so many children using the sound system, staff found it difficult to keep the equipment operational. The original microphones were replaced with ones equipped with an on/off switch instead of volume control, and the wiring was simplified so adjustments were not needed from the closet. As one staff member explains, “it was probably overdesigned and we simplified it.”

Lessons Learned

Museum staff highlight the importance of listening to local educators and getting their feedback in terms of guiding program development. Before designing the Center, staff sought the input of leading local educators, including faculty and staff from colleges and universities, public and private schools, and educational organizations, to learn about their needs. Museum staff wanted their insights on how best to serve the educational community and, staff say, the educators were quick to identify civic education and programming for middle school-age students as outstanding needs. The Museum President notes, “Because we listened to those in the community who are closest to students, we [the Museum] really gained a huge amount.”

Sustainability

Civic engagement has continued as a strong influence on the Museum’s work. The Star Spangled Center has enabled Museum staff to seek funding from different sources. For example, through working with a Benjamin Franklin impersonator who was a trained actor, the Center made a connection that led to a grant through the regional arts commission to bring professional artists throughout the year to The Magic House. Because the Legislative Chamber doubles as a theater, the Museum can incorporate live theater interactions. The Museum has received funding from the Boeing Company to host a civic education forum for teachers, and from a local foundation committed to supporting projects related to the democratic process.

Sustaining Change of the American Farm: A Farmer – Artist Dialogue

Institution: Maryhill Museum of Art

Institution Discipline: Art

Location: Goldendale, WA

Grant Size: \$44, 535

Region: West

Grant Period: 2004-2006

Institution Size: Medium

Project Background

The MFA grant underwrote an innovative pairing of artists with farmers in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The Maryhill Museum of Art, on the Columbia Gorge in southern Washington, worked with the American Farmland Trust to develop the project. The Museum owns close to 6,000 acres of land that it leases to farmers and ranchers, and Museum Director Colleen Schafroth was interested in engaging those farmers and ranchers more in the life of the museum. In partnership with the Trust, the Maryhill Museum selected 12 farmers, based on their use of sustainable, environmentally sound practices. Based on their past work and with an eye to ensuring diversity, 12 emerging artists were chosen by the Museum. Over the course of the grant period, the artists were expected to spend two weeks, minimally, on the farms, observing and exploring the daily life of farmers, and to create new work out of that encounter. The project sought to raise awareness of sustainable farming, support new work by emerging artists of the Pacific Northwest, and provide insight, mediated by artists, into the lives of working farmers.

The exhibit opened March 15, 2006 and was followed three days later by a presentation by the artists and farmers to the general public. From its opening until July 30, 2006, some 25,000 visitors viewed the exhibit. The Museum produced a four-color exhibit brochure that highlighted sustainable agriculture issues, reproduced the resulting art, and presented statements about their work by the participating farmers. In addition, museum staff created activity guides for families with children, and developed a series of educational programs on related topics such as pioneer music, clog dancing, cowgirl poets, wheat weaving, wool spinning, leather saddle restoration, and frayed knot dolls as well as pre-industrial farming methods and the preservation of historic tractors. Museum staff also conducted a week-long Teachers Institute on Art and Change on the American Farm and produced a dvd and K – 12 curriculum materials for each attending teacher. In conjunction with the Klickitat County Historical Society, the Museum organized a tour for museum visitors and the general public of local farms, including a dry land farm, local vineyards, and a wind farm.

Several artists and a curator associated with the project were guests on regional radio programs and four artists, two farmers, and a curator gave a presentation on their collaboration at City Hall in Portland, OR. Materials related to the exhibit were displayed in Portland's City Hall from April 6 to May 2, 2006. When the Maryhill exhibit closed, the Washington State Historical Society adapted the exhibit materials for a traveling educational exhibit which continues to tour, on a non-fee basis, to schools, community centers, granges, and libraries throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Key Factors in Success

The great strength of the project was in bringing people with extremely different perspectives, life patterns, and creative modalities together to engage each other with a view to producing art that reflected that encounter. The project brought emerging artists and family farmers together in a way that allowed the pairs of artists and farmers to develop close relationships and overturn misconceptions the two groups may have had about each other. Although the grant funded two-week sojourns by artists on the farms, many artists returned repeatedly and remained connected to the farmers and farms. The artists gained valuable exposure at the

beginnings of their careers; many have continued to work with themes that emerged out of their time on the farm.

As initiators of the farmer – artist relationships, museum staff monitored the project closely throughout, ensuring that relationships between farmers and artists were working out and that art was being made; staff also worked with the farmers to produce the essays they contributed as part of the final exhibit.

Partnerships

The key partnership was with the American Farmland Trust; Maryhill staff also worked with the 4H, Grange, and other local organizations related to farming. Additional support came from the West Coast Wealth Advisors and New Seasons Market.

Role of Evaluation

Evaluation did not play a strong role in this project.

Community Effects

The project was a popular success, drawing new audiences and strengthening the museum’s relationship with local farmers and ranchers. Response to the exhibit was strong and the farm exhibit continues to elicit praise from community members. The museum is better known, both locally and across the Pacific Northwest and membership in the museum increased.

In a broader sense, the project sought to bridge two divergent cultures of the Northwest, the urban “east side” and the rural “west side.” It raised issues for city dwellers about where food comes from and the role of family farms in an industrial food system and increased awareness among rural farmers about sustainable farming practices. The project addressed the myth of farming—the closeness to nature, the gratification of “real” work, the fresh air and sunshine—by showing non-farmers the more nuanced reality.

The farmers had an opportunity to see their world through a very different perspective that wove aspects of their daily lives into art pieces that celebrated and honored their work. Farmers got to experience art and artists close at hand, and expanded their own understandings of art. The project was covered by both mainstream media (an AP writer followed the project throughout) and the agricultural press. Many farmers were honored and deeply moved to have their work taken seriously by non-farmers.

Organizational Effects

Museum staff have a greater awareness of and appreciation for their farming and ranching partners—“who they were and what they were up against,” as Schafroth says. A significant element of the museum’s revenue stream comes from leasing land to ranchers and farmers, and strengthening that connection was beneficial all around.

The exhibit also seemed to build staff commitment to the museum; front desk staff received numerous positive comments about the exhibit and the exhibit helped them sell new memberships.

Challenges

Beyond typical challenges of funding, the chief challenge was in initially persuading the curator: he wasn't sure that the artists would be willing to go to the farms, Schafroth says, but they artists "just seemed to thrive on it." Bringing people together from widely different backgrounds can also be challenging, Schafroth admits: "There has to be a lot of tolerance" among people with different cultural backgrounds or outlooks on the world. This extends to museum staff, who have learned to be sensitive to cultural differences and let go of their habitual or preferred ways of working. Installing the art exhibit itself presented some challenges, too: some works incorporated dirt or straw, not materials museum staff were used to dealing with in exhibit spaces.

Lessons Learned

Schafroth says she would encourage any institution or library considering a complicated project to "just do it." The rewards far outweigh the challenges, she asserts, describing, for example, the excitement of seeing very different people at the opening "engaged and talking about art. I like it when people talk about art," she says, "But I like it when people talk about art that means something to them."

Sustainability

The traveling exhibit continues to tour the Northwest. Relationships between the museum and neighboring farmers and ranchers were strengthened. The relationship with the American Farmland Trust is also secure; a similar project could be easily undertaken with the Trust, she says, although nothing has emerged to date.

Hands on History

Institution: Mission Inn Foundation

Institution Discipline: History

Location: Riverside, CA

Project Focus: Supporting Lifelong Learning

Region: West

Grant Size: \$79,423

Institution Size: Small

Grant Period: 10/1/2004 – 9/30/2007

Project Background

MFA grant funds underwrote the development of “Hands on History,” a new, interactive website that integrates the Inn’s collection of historical artifacts related to the history of southern California into an object-based learning curriculum for students in grades 3 through 12. Mission Inn, a National Historic Landmark, represents several styles of southern California architecture and contains a wealth of objects from the personal collection of the Inn’s founder whose value was enhanced by contextualization; working with a history research committee and contributing experts, museum staff interpreted and framed the large, associative collection by themes. The curriculum, based on historical research vetted by experts and crafted in collaboration with educators, features 10 educational modules and 23 lesson plans aligned to the California education framework.

The project proceeded toward three goals: to incorporate previous and current educational projects into the website, to deepen and improve the quality of staff’s historic research and make it user-friendly and accessible, and to focus directly on students and educators. Materials collected as part of a “Family Voices” project that paired students with a writer, performance artist, and a photographer to tell stories important to students’ families were adapted from an exhibit and video for use on the website. Finally, the materials were integrated into the California English and Language Arts standards, taught at every grade level, rather than the History and Social Science standards, which affect fewer students. Materials were made accessible to teachers at all levels of technological expertise and capacity, available both digitally and in a printable format.

Key Factors in Success

The project targeted the general public, including Inn guests; museum researchers and historians; and educators and students. While the website materials are accessible to educators and students everywhere, the Mission Inn Foundation has a strong history of collaboration with local schools, particular with the three districts in Riverside. Following on the seven-year “Family Voices” project, which proved a powerful way to engage students from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds in social history, the “Hands on History” project arranges the history content into eight themes (for example, aviation, the citrus industry, architecture) within which the historical object are contextualized. Lesson plans were designed for diverse groups of students, from English language learners and gifted and talented students to first-generation college-bound students. By opting to use Language Arts rather than history standards, the project reaches a broader student audience with research and communication skills that are applicable in a range of academic disciplines. The online materials are strongly visual, easy to use, and historically accurate.

By involving voluntary expert committees in history, design, and education, the project created buy-in by intended user groups. It also expanded the Mission Inn’s audience from largely older vacationers to students from a many diverse backgrounds. The docents program was upgraded to provide hotel guests with high-quality tours and the website serves as a repository for the collected knowledge of the history of the Inn and the area.

Digitizing many rare and fragile objects made them available without subjecting them to handling. The website also became a valuable repository for making new historical research available in a cumulative and thematic manner.

Partnerships

Partnerships were formed with the three Riverside school districts and the County office of education as well as, less formally, with the Riverside Metropolitan Museum, the University of California Riverside, the Riverside Public Library and the California Missions Foundation.

The volunteer committees of experts were instrumental in the project's success. In addition to offering feedback and expertise to the Foundation, the committees were able to use the website as a research laboratory themselves. An advisory network of educators spanned from high-level administrators and curriculum development specialist to teachers at a range of grade levels. This network in particular far exceeded Foundation expectations.

Role of Evaluation

To measure student learning, Foundation staff and educators worked at length to develop appropriate outcomes and then conceived of instruments to measure them during pilot testing. Once the project was underway, website visits—described not as page views but as users' looking at lesson plans—exceed one million annually.

Through pilot testing, chiefly through pre and post surveys with teachers and students, museum staff confirmed that the website increased the public's access to and use of the historic site and collections, enhanced students' and teachers' awareness of the site and southern California history, and had an impact on student research and communication skills. While educational effects were difficult to measure beyond the pilot phase, Foundation staff point to several other indicators of success, such as positive media coverage of the education effort and positive responses by community groups to outreach presentations on the project. "It raised the bar on what is possible from a history museum," John Worden, Executive Director, says, noting that the response seemed to characterize a sense of collective, historical identity—"unusual for a southern California community."

Community Effects

The project raised the Inn's local profile: "People were amazed that we pulled it off," says Worden. It generated a great deal of favorable press and well as positive feedback from educators; anecdotal evidence suggests that it has raised the bar for educational programming. The Foundation also regularly participates in a consortium of more than 20 cultural organizations in Riverside to share information, resources, marketing, and some joint activities. The Foundation is now regarded as an authority on the history of the Inn and Riverside itself, relied on by local papers and city government

Organizational Effects

In connection with the Hands on History project, Foundation staff embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process with a professional consultant, which added a "broader organizational overlay" to the project, Worden says, and the educational focus became an integral part of the Foundation's identity, embraced by the board of trustees, stakeholder partners, and the broader community. The Foundation board now contains two school board members and a retired assistant superintendent.

The process by which the Foundation developed the project, through extensive consultation with expert advisory committees, has been adopted throughout the Foundation. The project also raised the Foundation's technological resources and capacity. Staff now conceive of the website as less of a static product and more as one that fosters interactivity between the Foundation and educators. Within its own organization, collaboration was strong and continual; many staff gained capacity in coordinating meetings and work groups; others developed skills in photography and image management.

Challenges

A major challenge was developing the necessary process and support structure for the project, Worden says. While Foundation staff had a strong general concept, they struggled to pull committees together and provide sufficient direction for the many volunteers who joined the project. Staff resolved this issue by hiring a lead teacher to develop the lesson plans; this teacher quickly catalyzed the project into motion and was instrumental in stimulating and involving other teachers.

A related challenge emerged in negotiating the specific reality of education, with its own language, priorities, and methods. Although some similar challenges had arisen in connection with "Family Voices," Foundation staff had trouble conveying the project in a way that engaged already burdened educators; this slowed the processes of developing the audience and marketing the website, but efforts were ultimately successful.

With a small staff, burnout was a constant threat, Worden says, but out of that grew a sense of camaraderie, of satisfaction, team work, and a renewed sense of possibility.

Once created, the website content also demanded a great deal of extremely careful editing; every module had a contextual statement and each object was described. Ultimately the Foundation hired a professional writer and editor to review all of the written materials and ensure standards and consistency of terms.

Lessons Learned

The project was a large undertaking for a small institution and staff were not fully cognizant of the magnitude of resources the project would require. "Perhaps we were blissfully aware and this allowed us to achieve what we might have been discouraged from if we had known too much at the onset," Worden says.

A key lesson, adds Virginia Fesunoff, Director of Marketing, is the need for continued attention. "With something of this magnitude ... you have to plan to keep working on it and keep it fresh and promoting and growing it."

Sustainability

The volunteer History Research Committee, formed to review the Inn's materials before they were posted online, continues to meet regularly and contribute to historic research on the Inn; the Committee also helps ensure the quality of the Inn's docent program through an eight-month training for the more than 125 volunteer docents.

The Foundation's conception of the website audience did not initially include tourists and hotel guests (the Mission Inn is a four-star hotel as well as a museum); Foundation staff are working to make the website more attractive to visitors and to expand the "Hands on History" model to encourage heritage tourism in the Riverside area.

Marketing "Hands on History" continues, both to school and tourism audiences, and the Foundation is working to link the website more closely to visits to the physical site, so that the website inspires visits to the

building and the experience of visitors to the building (including hotel guests) is enriched by the online resources.

The Foundation aspires to play a leadership role in the local heritage community through actions such as conducting a needs assessment, developing a heritage consortium, offering programming forums for speakers from a range of heritage groups, and exploring a partnership with a statewide history organization and an annual distinguished lecture series.

“Fare for All at the Mount Vernon Hotel” & “People of Our Past”

Institution: Mount Vernon Hotel Museum and Garden

Location: New York, NY

Region: Mid-Atlantic

Institution Size: small

Institution Discipline: Historic House/ Site

Grant Size: \$74,895

Grant Period: 2005-2007

Project Background

The Mount Vernon Hotel Museum and Garden received a MFA grant in 2005 to enhance and expand two theater-museum programs offered by the museum. The first program, “Fare for All at the Mount Vernon Hotel” (“Fare for All”) was an interactive musical targeted at school age children. It was a hands-on exploration of history told as a day in life of the Mount Vernon Hotel. The second was the “People of Our Past” program, a character-based theater presentation aimed toward older adults living in nursing homes. This outreach program served older adults who physically cannot get to the museum. The presentation used historic drama to tell the story of the Mount Vernon Hotel and life in the 1800’s in New York City.

The grant enabled the Museum to put on two weeks of performances of “Fare for All” in 2006 and 2007. The funds supported actors for their rehearsals and performances, the director, accompanist, choreographer, and costume repair and updating. Written in 1995, “Fare for All” received funding intermittently. Prior to this 2005 MFA grant, the performance was last supported in 2002.

The grant also enabled Museum staff to expand the “People of Our Past” program. Museum staff researched and developed the script, “Jim Lowe Taps Manhattan,” focusing on tap dancing to tell the story about the rich cultural life of African Americans post-slavery in 1830 New York City. MFA funds also supported the performances of a tap dancer, transportable staging, and travels to senior centers.

Key Factors in Success

The part of “Fare for All” that made it special was that the students engaged with the actors to “bring history to life” and put the past “into the context with day-to-day life today.” Each performance brought students onto the stage to recreate activities of daily lives at the Mount Vernon Hotel with the actors. In this way, students were introduced to period reproduction pieces, such as a bed warmer, foot warmer, and a wick trimmer, and why and how these objects were used.

According to the education director, another key to the production’s success was employing professional actors. Students experienced a high-quality musical production, written by a Tony Award winner, with professional actors and singers.

Similarly, the participatory nature of the “People of Our Past” program was instrumental in its success. As audience members learned about dance history, participants were engaged in learning a few tap dancing steps and to dance a waltz. They also had opportunities to interact with the actors and perform on stage. Nursing home and senior center directors and personnel frequently thanked the performer and museum staff for giving their residents an opportunity to move about as part of the performance.

Partnerships

A new partnership established with the Ramaz School, a religious educational institution, in New York City, was instrumental to the expansion of the “Jim Lowe Taps Manhattan” program for middle school students. Mount Vernon worked with the teachers to develop a standards-based curriculum to perform in the classroom with pre- and post-visit activities. One teacher has since joined the Museum’s advisory board.

Role of Evaluation

After school visits, teachers completed an evaluation of “Fare for All”. Results showed that there was a demand for “Fare for All” and that teachers valued the hands-on approach for teaching social studies. In addition, museum staff used teacher feedback to revise the script, making it “snappier” by eliminating sections that were too long, and providing additional opportunities for students to get involved during the performance.

Evaluations were also used to obtain feedback from teachers about the value of the pre-visit activities which were designed to advance students’ understanding of key social studies concepts addressed in “Fare for All.” Museum staff learned that many teachers did not have the time to use the pre-visit activities. Of those teachers who used the activities, most found them useful for preparing students for the performance.

Community Effects

Both productions extended the Museum’s reach to new audiences. “Fare for All” targeted school-age children. MFA grant funds also provided support for two public performance of the musical. According to the Education Director (Deborah O’Neill) the public performances gave the museum another program to offer the community, “we’re little but we had 80 people come and I think that was really great.” Additionally, the museum received a Theater Development Fund grant to provide sign language interpreters for two school performances, making “Fare for All” accessible to hearing impaired students.

The outreach program, “Jim Lowe Taps Manhattan” reached older adults from a wide range of backgrounds in senior centers and nursing homes in diverse neighborhoods throughout New York City, including Harlem, Jamaica, Queens, and the Upper East Side. These included sizable percentages of foreign language speakers (30% spoke English as a second language) and adults with dementia (10%).

Organizational Effects

Ms. O’Neill noted that the grant did a lot to bring staff together and “tap into some of the talents in our organization.” For example, during the planning phase of the grant, staff discovered that a co-worker had been trained as an actor and dancer. This person led the script-writing initiative for the Jim Lowe performance, and had a role in the performance. The education director believes this experience increased staff buy-in and commitment to the “People of our Past” program. It also increased the awareness of full-time staff to the importance of building on the skills of all staff, including part-time staff and volunteers, for creating a culture of ownership from individual staff members.

Museum staff also increased their capacity to coordinate and formalize communication efforts. This change was sparked by the departure of two staff members before the grant was completed. The turnover in staff interrupted the continuity in implementing the programs supported by the grant. In response, Ms. O’Neill reported that efforts were made to keep all staff informed about Museum activities. Regular staff meetings were scheduled, and procedures were established to create clear paper trails for staff who may be taking on projects mid-cycle.

Challenges

The primary challenge was covering the costs for each program. Museum staff hired professional performers for each program and paid them to scale, which made the programs expensive. Although the MFA grant covered most of the costs of the productions, museum staff hoped to offset some of their costs by charging

fees. Museum staff discovered that it was difficult to get people to pay even a nominal amount for these programs. Therefore, once the MFA funding ended the Museum could not sustain either program.

Another challenge related to the outreach program conducted off-site: the difficulties of tap dancing on tile. Museum staff attempted to offset this challenge by taking a three foot square piece of plywood to use at all performances. Although the board alleviated the actor's fear of slipping, museum staff found it difficult to transport the board to senior and neighborhood centers. Museum staff continued with the performances, though they were unable to find a suitable solution.

Lessons Learned

The education director noted the need to set aside money for getting the word out about the programs, especially for "Fare for All." Last performed in 2002, museum staff discovered that school groups and museum visitors had forgotten about "Fare for All" or were unaware of it. It took more effort (e.g., sending out post cards, creating fliers, making phone calls) than anticipated for museum staff to get people interested in the performance, "when you lose it for a couple of years you do have to work a little harder to get it back on track."

Sustainability

The museum's education director indicated that "Fare for All" has been an inspiration for many of the museum's school programs. Teachers value and enjoy the use of historical characters and student role-playing to teach history. Several of the museum's school programs now assign students with names of characters who "would have lived, worked, or visited the Mount Vernon Hotel."

Museum staff continued performing "Jim Lowe Taps Manhattan" for two years after the grant ended. During this time, they worked with teachers at the Ramaz School to expand the program for middle school students and to align the program with the social studies curriculum. Funding from a local community grant provided support for a professional tap-dancer to perform in the school.

Fine Art of Service

Institution: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Institution Discipline: Art

Location: Boston, MA

Grant Size: \$150,000

Region: New England

Grant Period: 2005-2007

Institution Size: Large

Project Background

With MFA funding, the Museum of Fine Arts implemented the Fine Art of Service, an institution-wide professional development and visitor service initiative aimed at building a world class visitor experience. The grant enabled the museum to create a Training and Development Manager position, develop new visitor service training modules, institute a rewards and recognition program, and conduct several professional development training programs as part of an effort to put the visitor experience “front and center” for all museum staff and volunteers. As described by the Director of Member and Visitor Services, Lisa Krassner, just ten years ago there was little thought of customer service as a priority at the Museum, whereas now the Fine Art of Service “has become part of the culture of the museum.” The Fine Art of Service was developed to provide consistent and superior service by frontline staff, including the guards, ticketing, and gift shop personnel and a desire to increase the sense of welcome for all visitors. Preparations for the opening of the museum’s new Art of the Americas wing in fall 2010 brought with it increased attention to the visitor experience which further helped to motivate this initiative.

Key Factors in Success

The MFA grant built on a core training program developed with internal seed money to engage every staff member and volunteer through a newly created Fine Art of Service training workshop. The message of the first program was that all employees and volunteers have a responsibility to serve visitors and members. The program focused on changing the attitudes of staff who do not usually interact with visitors, so that they too felt invested in the visitor experience. The program included instituting the concept of an “area of influence”—that is, anything that happens within a 20 foot radius around a staff member as he or she walks around the museum should be attended to, so curators, conservation experts, security guards, gift shop attendees—essentially every staff member—is expected to give directions, pick up trash, or do whatever else is needed as they circulate through the museum. This program was designed to reach the museum’s 800 staff and 1200 volunteers. The success of this initial training and the receipt of IMLS funding enabled the museum to extend and enrich the professional development offerings and to create resources to improve visitor service throughout the institution.

Another factor in the project’s success was the development of a new strategic plan that overlapped with the MFA grant. This “gave the Fine Art of Service program legs in terms of institutionalizing it as a priority,” explains Krassner. Under the MFA grant, the museum developed a service standard, a vision statement related to the visitor experience that is now part of every employee’s performance standards and annual evaluation. For some trainings, the museum brings in consultants and for others they have implemented a train-the-trainer model in which museum staff conduct workshops. Some training workshops are open to all staff and volunteers, whereas others are targeted to particular populations.

Partnerships

No partnerships were developed for this project.

Role of Evaluation

The Fine Art of Service team used a variety of research and evaluation throughout the project, conducting visitor research, observing visitors and debriefing with them to understand how they learn, what they want to see and how they want to experience the art, as well as various aspects of the museum experience, such as the importance of food, bathrooms, and other amenities. For ideas about custom service programs, staff benchmarked with employees from other museums and reached out to the Boston hospitality industry, the Disney Institute, and others. To develop the rewards and recognition program, they conducted focus groups with staff members.

All training curricula are evaluated and new workshops are piloted with the staff members they feel will provide the richest feedback. Feedback gathered during debriefing sessions informs program modification. Once a program is instituted, evaluation is ongoing through the use of end-of-training evaluation surveys. Visitor satisfaction continues to be monitored through JD Power customer satisfaction surveys, twice monthly Secret Shopper visits, and email feedback.

Community Effects

The Director of Member and Visitor Services believes that the project has removed some barriers for people who might not have felt comfortable going to the MFA in the past. Twenty years ago, she explains, “the Museum of Fine Arts felt closed to the community and we have really aimed to make it more accessible..” The Fine Art of Service grant award enabled the development of four new Fine Art of Service training modules, including a basic program for all staff on museum resources, such as the location of museum exits, where wheelchairs are stored, lists of MFA staff members who can act as translators for non-English speaking visitors, performance management classes for managers, and a front-line manager program. Additional training provided under the grant has included classes in ESOL for staff wanting to improve their proficiency in English, and American Sign Language interpretation. Subsequent trainings have touched on diversity training, conflict management, accessibility training and related topics. This project was one initiative among others to make the museum more accessible to its diverse neighboring community. The Director of Member and Visitor Services noted that the project’s results can be seen in the increasingly diverse visitors and volunteers.

Organizational Effects

The Fine Art of Service program affected the culture of the museum, generating unity and a singular vision that the visitor experience is not just about the works of art on the walls, according to the Director of Member and Visitor Services. She believes that the grant created a culture of interest, ownership and responsibility for the visitor experience throughout the museum. The program has also done a lot to bring the frontline departments together through more regular meetings.

The grant increased the museum’s capacity to serve visitors. It offered professional development opportunities to many staff, such as security guards, who do not normally receive such training, and has improved both the current staff’s and the institutional understanding of customer needs, facilitating, for instance the hiring of staff specifically to act as greeters and to manage lines for the opening of the new wing. Transcending hierarchies within the museum has been another positive effect. The Director of Member and Visitor Services noted that during the early cross-departmental trainings, it was clear that sometimes the “guards knew a lot more than the professional staff” about the workings of the museum, creating new appreciation for the participation of different types of staff members in the museum community.

Challenges

A major challenge was reaching across a large hierarchical institution to inculcate a single message of the importance of and professional relevance for every staff person and volunteer in contributing to the visitor experience. Some challenges included finding ways to engage personnel from a range of salary levels and with different benefits and expectations. At the individual level, staff members responded differently to the expectation that they contribute to the visitor experience: while some were thrilled by the professional development opportunity, others were less enthusiastic. The Fine Art of Service team met this challenge by ensuring that all staff members were paid to attend the trainings and by generating buy-in at the departmental and managerial levels.

Lessons Learned

The Director of Member and Visitor Services found that for the visitor service ethic “to really take hold and become part of an institution’s culture, and to make it a priority, it has to be institution-wide.”

Sustainability

The Fine Art of Service MFA grant transformed the institutional culture that continues to shape the Museum of Fine Arts. The original Fine Art of Service program is required for new staff and volunteers. Since receipt of the grant, the museum has continued to develop new curricula and add to its resources. For instance, in 2009 staff focused on accessibility training. In preparation for the opening of the new Wing of the Americas, all current front-line staff did a Fine Art of Service refresher, focusing on topics such as continuum of assistance, area of influence, and conflict resolution. Managers also attended a brief refresher class and a one-hour session on coaching and setting the model for service. The Fine Art of Service grant has also propelled other initiatives focused on the visitor experience. In fall 2010, the museum staff implemented an e-communications program aimed at customer feedback – sending out emails a day or two after a visit. In the first week alone, they received over 500 responses to the 2500 emails they sent.

The Training and Development Staff position created under the IMLS grant was cut in museum-wide layoffs in early 2009. However, the museum has established an endowment fund for the program which covers the costs of consultants in developing new curricula and conducting training as well as a part-time staff person to help schedule and manage the programs.

Seal Rescue Clinic Innovative Exhibit Enrichment

Institution: Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration

Location: Mystic, CT

Region: New England

Institution Size: Large

Institution Discipline: Aquarium

Grant Size: \$21,572

Grant Period: 2006 - 2007

Project Background

With a modest grant from the MFA program, the Mystic Aquarium transformed its seal rescue clinic into an interactive educational exhibit. The ten-year old clinic provides stranded seals with rescue, rehabilitation, and eventual releases back into the water. In keeping with its mission of conservation through education and exploration, aquarium staff conceived and executed an exhibit that presents their work while educating visitors. Explains Jonathan Scoones, the director of exhibits and interpretation, “the aquarium was missing an opportunity to tell our story about what we do beyond the fish tanks and mammal exhibits.” Instead of developing a back-of-the-house tour, museum staff brought a back-of-the-house function to the front.

Staff used MFA grant funds to transform the façade and clinic viewing area, installing cameras in the clinic areas connected to a monitor in the visitor area that allows visitors to watch rehabilitation operations and equipment live. Microphones encourage visitors to talk with rescue clinic staff about the operations and pose questions they may have about seal rehabilitation or release. Educational videotapes and graphic panels were also created to enhance visitors’ educational experience. A monitor connected to the clinic camera shows quarantine units, the pre-release pool, the work station prep area, and the critical care area. Viewing portholes are always open to the public unless there a seal is about to be released and is forming an attachment with a staff member.

A closed-off area once thought of as unattractive is now highly trafficked, informing the 75,000 yearly visitors about the aquarium’s mission and opening a window to better understanding of seals and their safety.

Key Factors in Success

The director regards one of the main factors in the exhibit’s success was that it galvanized all staff: “they wanted this to happen since it tied so well into the mission of the organization, which is to inspire people to care for and protect our ocean planet through education, research, and exploration,” he said.

Aquarium staff also knew, through visitor surveys, that visitors were interested in seeing rescued seals and the clinic operations. Staff also understood that the experience visitors wanted from a potential “behind the scenes” tour, such as touching or feeding a seal, was impossible to provide. Balancing visitors’ interests and the safety and security of the seals was critical to the exhibit’s success.

Receiving the MFA grant was “the tip of the iceberg” for the Mystic Aquarium, Scoones said. It arrived at a time when the museum had little resources for exhibit development and MFA funds allowed the aquarium to start a new project and have trustees, management, and sponsors see its success, which led to sustaining and improving the project after the grant period ended.

Partnerships

No partnerships beyond the use of contractors were developed for this project.

Role of Evaluation

The director of exhibits reported that typically the marketing department oversees internal evaluations, periodically conducting visitor surveys about public interest and administering follow-up surveys after new exhibits are implemented. He believes museum staff have an attitude of, “it’s not about the exhibit that I want to build; it’s about the exhibit the visitors want to see or are interested in seeing.”

Visitors were surveyed before staff changed the façade of the rescue clinic. Clinic staff wanted to block the viewing area because of the potential impact on the seals but due to visitors’ input, they arrived at a compromise, installing portholes rather than open windows. Education classes held at the aquarium were also tapped into for opinions and knowledge retention as a result of visits to the new seal rescue clinic exhibit. Surveys found that some graphic panels were confusing and were revised and reinstalled.

A few years after the MFA project, aquarium staff conducted a survey on visitors’ take-away messages. Survey findings suggested that the museum was successful in informing the public about how to identify seals and sea lions, what to do in terms of safety issues in case of encountering a stranded seal, and whom to contact for further assistance. Of greatest interest to museum staff was how the exhibit heightened visitors’ level of interest level in seals in general. An increase in clinic volunteers has meant that more people go out to watch seals, and go out more often. The director reports an increase in phone calls about spotting stranded seals each year but is hesitant to attribute that to the project since the increase may also be due to climate conditions.

Community Effects

The project increased educational opportunities for the general public while maintaining a quarantined environment for the rescued seals. Although the project did not include school outreach, when school groups visit the aquarium, students are now exposed to the role of the seal rescue clinic and how it operates.

Beyond the educational component, museum staff found visitors are very interested in the seal rescue and rehabilitation process. The exhibit encourages visitors to be a part of the process and go beyond the museum walls to explore local areas for seals. Director Scoones says the exhibit keeps a lot of kids coming back, especially locals who have seen seals in the area, noting that the kids return and say “I saw one of those. I saw a harp seal or harbor seal”. He also reports that having families see the exhibit generates conversation between children and their parents.

Organizational Effects

The Director of Exhibits and Interpretation reported an overall “stronger increased pride in the program and increased resources for the seal rescue program as a result of seeing how much the visitors really liked it”.

A welcomed and unexpected organizational effect was an increase in volunteers for the program. By exposing the seal rescue clinic to visitors, more people became aware and interested in the program. Before the exhibit’s opening, visitors were likely unaware of the seal rescue program and that it is a volunteer effort, the director noted. Currently the rescue clinic program has two full-time staff members and several hundred volunteers.

The Seal Rescue Clinic Exhibit advanced the Mystic Aquarium mission by providing an additional way to address the museum’s commitment to conservation issues such as global warming and humans’ role in nature.

Through the project planning phase and implementation, new working relationships were formed within the organization. Scoones said it was a unique opportunity to have the facilities department, education

department, exhibits, the audio visual team, and the seal rescue clinic staff all work together on one project. Recently, working relationships have been strengthened between the director of exhibits and the seal rescue clinic manager by renovating and updating the original graphic panels.

The same MFA project team has come together now, four years later, to work on a much larger project to renovate an entire museum unit and exhibit. The team's cohesiveness, an outgrowth of the MFA project, allows new members to be easily brought up to speed on the development process.

Challenges

Balancing the interests of the visitors and the best interests of the seals was a constant concern for project staff. One solution was installing portholes instead of full windows; staff also decided to close the viewing area when a seal is about to be released, a critical time for a rescued seal.

One project component viewed as stressful was creating the educational videotape, which Scoones recognizes is typical but was probably more so since staff were inexperienced in videotape production at the time of the project.

An unanticipated outcome was a traffic flow problem from the lines of visitors trying to view the seals and watch the monitors. An animal encounter station was moved nearby to engage visitors in alternate activities.

Lessons Learned

The director advises others that it was critical that the proposal was well written and backed by certainty that staff could provide and be held accountable for everything as promised—"always challenging but worthwhile," he said.

The educational videotape was created by an internal staff member on the audio-visual team. Although the product was good, Scoones thinks it would have been better to hire a video consultant. The aquarium currently has access to a more sophisticated production studio which they will use when redoing the videotape.

Another suggestion to other museums is to not underestimate the success of something so obvious and simple as installing television monitors and cutting holes in the wall in order for people to see what is going on behind the scenes. Visitors "are interested in our story, not just the fancy fish we put on exhibit," Scoones said, "They are interested in what we do and how we do it".

The aquarium staff learned that it is not always the revenue-generating exhibits that can be viewed as successful. However, before generating ideas of transformations, the director advises making sure the proposed project is something visitors are clearly interested in seeing and learning about, not simply the fulfillment of a dream. "Survey, survey, survey ahead of time to make sure you are going down the right road," he cautions.

Scoones suggests having a developed plan and all stakeholders on board before applying for a grant. Although their stakeholders were solely internal, he recommends "having consistent messages and thoughts of what the outcome is going to be and provide commitment to the project". Having senior management commit to the project financially and supportively is crucial in the event there is a problem, he notes.

Once underway, he continues, staff should not hesitate to make changes if something is not working. In the MFA project, Mystic Aquarium staff found some of the content on the graphic panels was confusing; the panels were removed, reworked and reinstalled.

Sustainability

This project was viewed as so successful in changing museum appearance and enhancing the education level that it has continued with support by the organization. Even though the exhibit does not directly generate revenue, management acknowledges its success in visitors' eyes and voted to maintain it. The graphic panels are currently being reprinted with future plans of revising the educational videotape.

The area became a destination spot within the facility and has attracted the placement of an animal encounter station nearby. Because of the success of the original project and subsequent enhancements, museum management invested more resources to renovate the facility again to accommodate and upgrade these exhibits.

The aquarium has also added interpreters and staff to interact with visitors in this area during the busy summer months.

Watershed Moments

Institution: National Aquarium in Baltimore

Institution Discipline: Aquarium

Location: Baltimore, MD

Grant Size: \$139,133

Region: Mid-Atlantic

Grant Period: 2005-2007

Institution Size: Large

Project Background

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, MD received an MFA grant to develop an auditorium program called “watershed moments” aimed at conveying practices that would improve public stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay. The project used front- end evaluation to shape the message and format of the final program – a mix of live presentations, video clips, audience interaction on the auditorium stage, “Stewy” the sturgeon temporary tattoos, and concluding with a conservation pledge to commit to certain behaviors. Senior Director of Visitor Experiences, Nancy Hotchkiss explains that the project crystallized a series of actionable messages which have continued to frame and enhance exhibits and visitor experiences throughout the aquarium. The aquarium has made a strategic commitment to developing and understanding transformative experiences focused on bringing about behavioral change.

Key Factors in Success

A key factor was the flexibility of the MFA funding in allowing an experimental approach to program development. The National Aquarium team began the development process with a clear idea of the desired outcome—activating visitors’ potential to make a difference in the health of the watershed—but didn’t know what the final product or visitor experience would be. The MFA funding was unique in underwriting an extensive front-end, evaluation-driven process that shaped not only the content but the format of the final experience.

Focusing on actionable solutions for visitors—answers rather than reflections on their behaviors—in meeting the conservation challenge was another factor in the program’s success. Hotchkiss explains that the project designers wanted visitors to be able to say, “Yeah, I could do that.” In order to craft these messages, the aquarium staff enlisted the services of the Institute of Learning Innovation (ILI) to conduct a front-end evaluation. ILI designed a card sorting activity in which visitors sorted activities into things that they already do, things they never do, and things they might do now based on input from the aquarium. This helped museum staff understand where visitors were in terms of their watershed conservation behaviors; for example, they learned that many people are already recycling, and focused on how to move behavior forward from this point. The evaluation also helped aquarium staff test which behaviors would resonate with people and how to help visitors see themselves in the watershed preservation picture.

Partnerships

The Institute for Learning Innovation was a full partner in the project and was responsible for front-end formative and summative evaluation activities. The aquarium also reached out to a number of Chesapeake Bay groups and ocean literacy educators for ideas about effective conservation behaviors and feedback on the program. These groups were involved in an advisory capacity.

Role of Evaluation

Evaluation was an integral part of this process. In addition to the front end evaluation work described above, aquarium staff tested what the word “watershed” meant to people, piloted the new program and gathered two rounds of formative data which were used to modify the program, and conducted summative and follow-up evaluation activities. Although evaluation had been a part of project development in the past, this was the first time the program development team worked closely with evaluators.

In follow-up evaluation activities staff were pleased to find that people who said they would try different behaviors actually did. Now that it is evident that visitors will adapt their behaviors (for example, adopting bayscaping), in future programming staff would like to connect visitors to workshops and resources that will further their environmental practice.

Community Effects

The program was designed to transform audience behavior, and to target in particular, families with 6-12 year old children. This age range was selected because of their impact on what happens in the household, as well as the large number of aquarium visitors who fit this demographic. Visitors found the presentation interesting and informative, left the program with a greater understanding of what a watershed is, and rated highly the importance of learning ways to protect the watershed. In a follow-up study, the majority of participants indicated they were engaged in conservation behaviors that either they had done previously or had adopted some of the easier activities introduced in the program.

Organizational Effects

Hotchkiss believes that the program development team increased its capacity in several important ways. The team worked collaboratively in designing a program, a task usually accomplished by an individual program developer. The team learned about the value of testing and providing feedback for one another as an integral part of the process. The collaborative development process included the in-house visual production team, who rarely get to be involved in program development.

In addition, staff have already applied what they learned from this program to other areas of the aquarium, revising graphics and messaging throughout. And the project has had a long-term impact on the role of visitor service staff in the aquarium. Based on the Watershed Moments program, staff changed how they use the host in the dolphin show and now include a secondary narrator from the visitor service department to speak about conservation behaviors. Whereas visitor service staff previously focused on safety behaviors in the aquarium, they are now engaged in mission-based work—purveying the fundamental conservation messaging. Staff also are more comfortable with including evaluation throughout the formative and summative phases of project development and launch.

Challenges

An ongoing challenge was related to staging the program in a sometimes sparsely populated 200-seat auditorium. Aquarium staff came to accept that even when the auditorium had only a handful of families the program was still a success.

This was the first time the Aquarium had taken on a grant project without a product in mind and the sense of risk was strong. Before submitting the proposal, aquarium staff had good conversations with MFA program officers, and Hotchkiss was pleased that IMLS supported the process-based program development. She also felt that her experience as a grant reviewer was instrumental in understanding how to put together a

compelling proposal. In that sense, the MFA funding was unique in providing support for a process of discovering where they wanted to go as an institution, and in helping them get there.

Lessons Learned

“Create experiences targeted at behavior change,” is the most important lesson learned, according to Hotchkiss. The success of this project has transformed staff they think about exhibits. Where in the past they assumed that visitors would take away a message of behavior change from a broader discussion of conservation issues, staff developed an entire strategic initiative to create transformative experiences for visitors. They are investigating how to determine that transformation has occurred and how to measure transformation, with the hope that their work will be a resource for others. They have reached out to people in other fields such as public health, to learn about strategies for promoting behavior change.

Hotchkiss offered one warning: “Don’t fall in love with the technology.” She feels that some of the project’s success came from early discussions about what would be a good program. This created a deeper commitment to the program among all the staff involved and they were able to find an effective mix of “live presenter with personality and passion and incredible video footage.” Four different hosts each brought their own personalities to the program. One unforeseen effect of the process was how emotionally invested staff became in the program, which Hotchkiss attributes to the close connection between the program and the institution’s mission.

Sustainability

In 2009, the auditorium for which the program was designed was converted into a 4-D theater. The aquarium ended the original program, targeted to visiting families, but now offers it daily to school groups, grades 4 through 6. In reshaping their message for this older audience of children staff now promote an advocacy role for children, emphasizing that they have power in the household and providing concrete actions the children can help their parents take to save the watershed. The program fits nicely with a new school requirement that every student in Maryland have a significant bay experience. The Watershed Moments Program offers a first step in fulfilling that requirement.

The Watershed Moments exhibit was instrumental in promoting a new strategic initiative at the aquarium focused on creating and understanding transformative experiences. Not only have staff integrated this throughout the institution by including integrate concrete suggestions for behavior change, they have made an institutional commitment to understanding transformational experiences. They continue to create new programs, such as a film in development, with this in mind. Staff hope to take a leadership role in terms of research and as a laboratory for different ways of creating transformative experiences.

Chinese Textile Collections Access

Institution: Pacific Asia Museum

Location: Pasadena, CA

Region: West

Institution Size: Medium

Institution Discipline: Art

Grant Size: \$65,030

Grant Period: 2004-2008

Project Background

The MFA grant enabled the creation of an electronic catalogue of the museum's collection of approximately 1,000 Chinese textile, costumes, and accessories from all levels of Chinese society. The digital catalogue offered wide access to a fragile collection that is rarely exhibited and, with its attendant online educational module, provided important socio-historical context for instance, about social organization in pre-Maoist China and. The project grew out of the Museum's Chinese Community Initiative, a multi-year effort to engage the local Chinese American community in museum programs, and also had significant interest to textile artists, scholars, and collectors in southern California. A series of public tours, lectures, and family-oriented workshops, performances and activities, developed by the Museum's volunteer Chinese Arts Council, were created in association with the ensuing exhibit, "Rank and Style: Power Dressing in Imperial China."

Through the project, the museum established a permanent, dedicated textile digital photography studio in the textile storage wing, obviating the need to transport the fragile textiles across an open courtyard. The photography studio continues to see use as staff complete the digital catalogue of non-Chinese costumes and textiles and will be used to photograph new textile acquisitions. As textiles were photographed, they were evaluated and carefully re-stored and reorganized.

Key Factors in Success

The project was a component of the museum's Chinese Community Initiative, launched in 2001 to engage the local Chinese American community in using the museum as a cultural resource. An Advisory Council of prominent members of the local Chinese American community identified the museum's collections of Chinese ceramics, jade, and textiles as three of the community's most important cultural resources, and urged the museum staff to increase access to these resources. Given the fragility of the textiles and the museum's limited exhibition space, museum staff proposed to develop an electronic resource of high-resolution images and related programs and educational resources.

The project simultaneously alleviated crowded storage conditions and made the museum's Chinese textile holdings accessible to the public without exposing the fragile materials to excessive light and handling. The website created to showcase the digital collection has become a resource for students, scholars, teachers, and interested members of the public around the world and the high resolution images have facilitated the detailed study of Chinese textile techniques. The project strengthened ties between the museum and the local Chinese American community and also generated a great deal of interest from textile enthusiasts in Los Angeles and southern California and attracted a number of very high level Chinese textile scholars to the museum for public tours associated with the Rank and Style exhibit.

Partnerships

No formal partnerships were established as a result of this project. Museum staff worked extensively with the Chinese Arts Council; four extremely accomplished textile scholars served as consulting curators on this project. Their services to the museum included consultations on conservation issues.

Role of Evaluation

Evaluation was largely informal. Visitor data are collected by the front desk; not all visitors agree to share data or even stop at the front desk. Data were not compiled systematically until 2008; 2009 data show that 17% of visitors identified themselves as of Chinese descent, 29% identified themselves as Asian, 29% as white, 7% as Latino, and 16% did not specify their ethnicity. The surveys also asked visitors' zip code numbers, what motivated their visit, and how they learned of the Pacific Asia Museum. Bray confesses that surveying and analyzing visitorship and event attendance is an issue the museum struggles with, a factor of the institution's size and already multi-tasking staff; a larger institution might be better able to capture data on the multitude of events and exhibits the museum provides, she says.

Community Effects

Bray was struck by the depth of response to the exhibit by the local Chinese American community, calling it a "wake-up call" to see how some members of the Chinese American community have such a rich connection to textiles, a visceral appreciation for what they mean today and what they meant several centuries ago. The museum has a much clearer sense of the community serves. As a result of the project, the Chinese American community now sees the museum as serious about and willing to prioritize its collection of Chinese artifacts.

Organizational Effects

Working with the textile scholars was extremely beneficial to museum staff, Bray says: "this was just sort of an ongoing art history and art conservation course, which was a great unforeseen benefit of the project." The transfer of information from the scholars to museum staff helped make connections between collections, for example between Japanese and Chinese textiles and educated staff on optimal conservation practices. The ongoing staff exposure to the Chinese textile holdings also built staff commitment to the museum, Bray says: it enhanced staff's feeling about "what a pleasure and honor it is to work with the art" in the collection. Bray also observed a productive interaction between the education and curatorial/ collection departments in the course of developing the online module: it was an opportunity, she says, to assess how interpretative demands would change based on delivering content online as opposed to by gallery; numerous interdepartmental content sessions emerged. The marketing department was also extremely pleased to have a local "hook" for promotional efforts.

Challenges

Soon after the MFA grant was awarded, the museum's basement storage facilities were seriously damaged during a flood, necessitating the removal of much of the museum's decorative art collection to the space designated for the Digital Textile Photography Studio. Renovations to the basement took longer than anticipating, and the museum made several requests for extensions. Beyond delaying completion of the grant, however, the flood posed no extraordinary challenges.

The small size of the museum's staff meant that some plans, such as making all materials on the website accessible in both Mandarin and English proved insurmountable, says Assistant Curator and Collections Manager Bridget Bray. All text labels and signage in the exhibit space are in both Mandarin and English, however, and multilingual pdfs are available on the website.

Lessons Learned

"We are small but we are mighty," Bray says was a significant learning for the museum. More specifically, she believes, the lesson was about interdepartmental cooperation. This was a big project for the Pacific Asia Museum, she says, one that could not be achieved solely by the curatorial, or collections, or education department, but was the result of collaboration among all three on "an equal footing." As a result, she says, the staff now has a vision of how much more can be achieved and how much more dynamic a project can be when the departments work together: "when you get all the departments around a table to tackle a project ... I think that's when you really see the kind of creative sparks that you hope to see in museums around America."

Sustainability

The Pacific Asia Museum's virtual presence continues through the maintenance of the website. Another sustainability feature of this project is that in consultation with textile scholars, museum staff were able to identify pieces in need of immediate conservation efforts and to ensure optimally safe, long-term storage for the pieces once they were scanned. This process also enabled museum staff to assess which pieces could endure ultraviolet light exposure and be used in exhibits.

With the success of this project, the museum has made plans, contingent on funding, to continue to digitize its entire collection. Because of staff size constraints, digitization will proceed by ethnic subgroup, such as the Pacific Islands or Himalayan art collections.

ARTreach: Experience Mali

Institution: Peninsula Fine Arts Center

Location: Newport News, VA

Region: Mid Atlantic

Institution Size: Medium

Project Background

Institution Discipline: Art

Grant Size: \$64,235

Grant Period: 2006 - 2008

One of the largest grants ever received by the Peninsula Fine Arts Center, MFA funding for ARTreach: Experience Mali enabled the Center to expand an existing exhibit about the West African country of Mali into interactive educational performances and ultimately into distance learning modules supporting the Standards of Learning for third grade students in the state of Virginia. Michael Preble, program director/curator, attributes the MFA grant for “reshaping our philosophy and helping us modernize how we do the business we do.” Preble explained that the grant helped the institution get “out of our own building and out in the community in a way we hadn’t before”.

The Center staff had long been frustrated in “trying to get kids to the Center, trying to get bus time” and all the other complicated logistics of bringing students to the museum. Multimedia products, distance learning and traveling exhibits all offered a solution to these challenges. The grant funds supported two years of program development and offerings about art and culture in Mali for local social studies and art educators. This includes four videotaped musical performances broadcast live from the Center’s transformed studio space with a third-grade class audience, viewed by other third-grade classes over the Internet in real time, and now available to others on the Center’s website. Four more Mali programs were produced at different sites, such as other museums, and a collector’s home, and posted on a dedicated learning website.

Once the Center recognized the benefits of taking materials to the classroom, they enhanced the traveling exhibit, Seeing Mali, with photographs, didactic panels, a map, DVD, mud cloth and other examples of materials that students could interact with. The exhibit was constructed so teachers did not experience a big learning curve and could quickly teach the lesson. The success of the MFA project has propelled the Center to make a commitment to distance-learning as an integral part of its programming.

Key Factors in Success

Preble explained that the Center looked to the Newport News school district for advice in developing the distance learning programming, a new endeavor for them. They worked closely with the art, social studies, and curriculum supervisors for content and alignment with the Standards of Learning. To improve upon the programs created the first year, Center staff debriefed with participating teachers, and consulted with curriculum specialists, art and social studies supervisors, and presenters of online programming.

Educator feedback after the first year’s performances, particularly suggestions about improving the accessibility of the materials was instrumental in evolving their approach. Although Preble feels the first year’s live broadcasts were successful, particularly “having performances with dancers and drummers, and the excitement and drama of a live audience”, he thinks the second round of programming had a bigger impact. These discussions led to creating shorter, on-demand availability, and more arts focused presentations. Preble’s team acted on teachers concerns that the live broadcast for this subject area was less critical to them than simply having the information available when they needed it. Their feedback “really did help shape the project especially when it took the turn to being an online program that schools could connect to when they needed to”, he explained.

Preble further noted that offering the live broadcasts, the traveling exhibit, and the four online programs without a fee was a factor contributing to the project's success. It was reported that over 10,000 students benefited from the program offerings.

Partnerships

No formal partnerships were established for the funded project.

However, several informal partnerships were developed during the project implementation. The Center worked with Young Audiences in Virginia, a group that specializes in gathering performance groups for schools. In addition, the Center tapped into the expertise of other museums conducting online programming including Mariner's Museum, Newport News, and Colonial Williamsburg.

Informal partnerships with the local school teachers were strengthened during this project. As stated, the Center looked to them for improving the Mali programming and utilization for classroom teachers.

A working relationship was developed with a local university with regard to internet connectivity for the live broadcast programming.

Role of Evaluation

The Center conducted as-needed formative evaluation activities which shaped program refinements. Visitor surveys were administered by the Center, and teacher forums were convened to gather feedback on the traveling exhibit. Preble notes that they also sought out informal feedback from educators in Newport News and surrounding areas.

In addition, the Center conducted some pre-test and post-test surveys with students to assess changes in content knowledge. They found that educators were more willing to provide verbal feedback than to complete surveys. Despite these efforts, Preble said they never felt as though they obtained the information needed to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Community Effects

The main beneficiaries of the program are third grade teachers and students in the Newport News area, for whom the supplemental Mali programs are available online. Preble reports the programming has become a standard part of their curriculum. Educators also have access to the traveling exhibit, which allows the students to have interactions with the cultural artifacts.

Since the MFA project, local educators are relying more on the Center as an educational resource. Preble described schools requesting the Center to conduct a tour or provide activities that align with a specific Standard of Learning, other than the subject of Mali.

In addition to the schools, the Center has made the traveling show available to libraries and community members, adding to the cultural and educational enrichment of the community.

Organizational Effects

The MFA project shifted how the Center viewed their outreach activities. They realized they can be more successful at reaching audiences by using online technology and making their programming accessible beyond the Center walls. The impact on the Center was "planting the seed for both... a philosophy as well as a

practical way to do our business that we just hadn't been doing in the past. And for a little place with big intentions, that was critical" stated Preble.

Preble views the grant as a "nucleus for other grants we've gotten, and other things we've succeeded in doing". Taking into account that the Center is considered small in a large financially competitive region, it is important to have successful programs like ARTreach Experience: Mali to attract future funding. The Center received funding from a local hospital, Riverside Hospital, to develop audio tours for the sight impaired to see art a little better. Preble continues, "I think it all goes back to this grant. It all goes back to the philosophy that this grant kind of helped us retune for ourselves".

The MFA grant gave the Center the training and confidence needed to engage in new types of programming. The grant funds allowed the Center to invest in video and sound equipment. During the first grant year, Center staff learned as much as they could about filming from the contracted videographer. Building on the idea of expanding the Center's opportunities, Preble appreciates that he has a camera sitting on his table ready to use. "I don't think every grant in every program that one does, you get to say that the effects of it have changed your habits in the best possible way", stated Preble. Since the completion of this project the Center has created a successful Facebook site and plan to utilize their camera for postings.

The MFA project has brought increased recognition of the Peninsula Fine Arts Center by students. Preble said "we have kids who come here and when they visit other shows, they say Oh, I know your place because we've seen it online and we saw all these programs. And it's at a point of familiarity for them".

Challenges

Staging performances in school classrooms and expecting to broadcast them live through the internet was a challenge. The internet service in the Newport News school district classrooms did not have sufficient bandwidth for broadcasting the performances, and internet connectivity had to be arranged through a local university. Unfortunately some of the classrooms that had signed up to see the broadcasts also faced technical challenges and were unable to participate. These technical challenges were solved in the second year, when the Center's presentations were posted to a dedicated website for on-demand access.

The Center needed to reach outside of their comfort zone to bring in the expertise needed for producing the videos. In the first year, they hired a videographer to film and edit the productions; and in the second year, the Center did the filming and hired a film editor to complete the project. Directing the project was also a challenge since each production involved coordinating youth audiences, performers, presenters, film crew, and teachers. Preble feels that it was strong coordination of activities that made this work.

There were initial conversations about charging a fee for obtaining access to the broadcast segments of the project. It is not unusual for museums to charge for curriculum based programming but Preble said their intention was to have as many people experience what they were doing so the idea of charging a fee was dropped.

Lessons Learned

When asked about advice to other museums venturing into a similar project, Preble's first response is partnerships. "I think you have to have the right partners in line and I think you have to have the right people representing those partners in line. And you have to work with them regularly. You can't just bring them in at the end and hope that they're going to buy into what you're doing. We think of these partnerships as long term associations – that it's just not for a little project and then everybody says good, thanks, glad that worked, and then they all go away" says Preble.

He also recommends being open to what happens within the project; talk about what you are doing and if it makes sense. Upon going into a project, be prepared to assess the progress and quality and remain flexible to make adjustments.

Sustainability

All of the project products are still in use. In Preble's words, "We're trying to do it a little bit more efficiently but everything that this grant left us as a legacy, both in terms of what's online, it's still online and in terms of those traveling components, are still active and still going out and still being used". The Center continues to maintain the traveling exhibit from their annual budget.

"One of the most valuable things to us was also the equipment that we purchased because we're still using that camera", said Preble. The technical skills and expertise the Center gained has been instrumental in obtaining additional funding for new projects as well as enhancing other programming. Preble describes a program called Artistic Verses in which creative writing classes in the Newport News school system visit the Center for a particular show and then return to the classroom and write poetry based on their experience. In addition to the publication of a small catalog with the artwork and poetry, students return to the Center to make presentations. "We realized that we need to put this [student work] online. This needs to live for a while. We need to interview the kids to have them talk about poetry and the inspiration that the visual arts give them and that it needs to step up now, a whole dramatic level", says Preble. The Center's capacity to entertain these ideas and execute them is attributed to implementing the MFA project. Additional education resources have been created by filming and interviewing, all of which is accessible on the www.pfaclearning.org website.

Preble finishes, "I didn't expect things to be as popular as they were." He said that he has learned not to think of their "four walls" as the sole venue for programming.

Kachemak Bay: An Exploration of People and Place Education Project

Institution: Pratt Museum

Institution Discipline: General

Location: Homer, Alaska

Grant Size: \$149,278

Region: West (rural)

Grant Period: 2005-2007

Institution Size: Medium

Project Background

The Kachemak Bay: An Exploration of People and Place Education Project coordinated and expanded the Pratt Museum's education programs under the institution's new thematic focus on People and Place. The museum's revisioning process, begun years earlier, served to unify the museum's diverse content areas (natural history, cultural history, and art) and renovation of the museum's exhibits were underway at the time of the grant. The MFA grant allowed the Pratt Museum to bring its educational programming in line with this new focus and to market itself to year-round and summer residents in Homer, Alaska, including adults and children, artists, scientists, Native Americans, and others. Among the many public offerings created are a National Park Service Laureate Program involving work on a BearCam; sixteen Special Speaker, exhibit-based training and learning sessions for museum staff, partners, and interested members of the public; and numerous ongoing programs and activities for adults and children. Ongoing programs include "Evening with the Gardener," "Forest Ecology Trail Evening Hike," "Feed the Fish" and "Object at Hand," which feature science, art, and cultural activities. In addition, hands-on activities and study kits were provided to visiting school and education groups; new internship opportunities were created for middle and high school students and non-school Native Americans that included preserving a whale skeleton, conducting a Homestead Cabin Visitor Survey, and participating in local archaeological work; The Museum also revised and disseminated an Education Program brochure. The project involved a number of partnerships with federal agencies such as the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as local science and arts organizations; these partnerships continue to evolve.

Key Factors in Success

Former museum Director Heather Beggs attributes the project's success to the collaboration with institutions and individuals in the community. Just four hours south of Anchorage, Homer, Alaska and set among mountains, rolling hills, and a bay, the community is a "meeting place of cultures," in Beggs's words, historically home to seafaring natives as well as land-based hunter-gatherer populations, and near a number of Native villages. Homesteading, begun in the 1920s, was the start of a European settlement that today includes a population of fisherman, artists, and scientists. More recently, Homer became the headquarters of several federal Agencies such as the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, as well as numerous non-profits.

The project was aided by both paid and volunteer collaboration with 200 community members, who offered diverse professional expertise, such as a "bone man" who helped with skeleton reconstructions, and a local humanities scholar who wrote papers about Community Conversations convened by the museum that were instrumental to the program's success.

Most important, however, was the development of new institutional partners and the expansion and formalization of existing partners during the grant period. The art and science collaborative exhibit demonstrates these partnerships: The museum created programming in collaboration with local science agencies and non-profits, focusing in the first year, on plankton. Working with the new lab at Fish and Wildlife, museum staff created a predominantly lab-based program that, under the tutelage of scientists,

engaged artists, students and others in looking into microscopes and dyeing plankton different colors. Artwork subsequently produced by participants based on these laboratory experiences were then displayed in an exhibit. Subsequent programs have focused on topics such as Beauty and the Bug, and Climate Change and Ocean Acidification. The annual culminating exhibits have become one of the most popular museum events each year.

Another factor in the success of the museum's new educational programming initiative was the MFA grant's flexibility in allowing such a broad spectrum of actual programs under the rubric of engaging the community. Beggs notes that no other grant program allows for this type of support.

Partnerships

New partnerships developed for the project included partnerships with the Fish and Wildlife Service, described above, with the National Park Service, and several non-profit arts and science organizations in Homer. The Park Service partnership began through a core collaboration on stewardship and brown bear behavior focused on BearCams already in use by the Park Service. As a result, the Park Service has promoted its work with the Pratt Museum as an example of a model partnership. Pratt Museum continues to work with the Park Service on bear stewardship and has developed new projects as well.

The grant also allowed the Museum to expand programs in partnership with native communities and villages, particularly by adding thematic programming to the an annual Native traditions event. Beginning in 2006 and continuing today, the museum convenes a series of events to celebrate and honor Alaska Native traditions. Summer events include local gatherings of tribal members, dancers, and drummers to share food and culture in several communities. A culminating weekend gathering in Homer, *Tamamta Katurlluta – A Gathering of Native Tradition*, includes a vessel landing and beach ceremony, community potluck with native foods, sports, dance, and cultural performances. The museum continues to work with Native communities on this and other projects.

Role of Evaluation

Beggs indicates that evaluation was conducted throughout the project; however she was not able to recall any of the specifics. Reports contain no evaluation details.

Community Effect

Beggs described three ways in which the grant activities have affected both specific audience groups and the community more broadly. First was increased involvement of middle-school children, an audience the museum had struggled to engage. The week-long thematic programs on topics such as bugs and bear stewardship marked the first time museum staff succeeded in providing extended experiences for this age group. The grant has also helped attract Native audiences in museum programs, particularly, through changes in the Gathering of Native Tradition programming, multi-generational audiences. She also believes that the museum has had an impact on community ideas about stewardship, promoted through the Museum's joint programming with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Organizational Effects

The grant strengthened the museum's reputation in the community. Its timing was crucial: Receipt of the grant came just a year after opening of the Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center, a joint venture of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Kachemak

Bay Research Reserve, run by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). The grant enabled the Museum and the Fish and Wildlife Service, and other organizations, to mutually define their roles as complementary at a point when the Pratt Museum feared being overshadowed by these large federal agencies and the new visitor center.

Challenges

The main challenge in conducting the MFA grant was related to personnel turnover. The director of arts and culture—a position that encompassed both education and exhibits—became ill early in the grant period. Ultimately, the museum hired two full time people—an Education Director and an Exhibit Director. The transition was difficult, but the museum has been able to sustain the two positions, now required by the extensive educational programming it offers.

Lessons Learned

“What I learned from the project was thinking outside the box with our partners,” states Beggs, She continued, stressing the need to nurture partnerships, even the strong ones. And she suggested that museums even try to take on ideas initiated by partners, “You might need to work through an idea together to make it mutually beneficial, but it is that process that makes it a real partnership.” She has found that the process of working together – finding mutual goals, and distinct individual roles and activities are fundamental to building strong partnerships. She concluded, stating that “working toward a mutual partnership and giving equal amounts to the relationship is what pays off in terms of sustainability of programs.”

Sustainability

The grant allowed the Pratt Museum to evaluate which of its existing programs were relevant to the new thematic approach, guiding it in which programs should be and which dropped, and identifying areas for new development. The cohesive and thematic approach to educational programming has been sustained.

Even more importantl the MFA grant allowed staff to develop partnerships that have been important in sustaining its educational programming, particularly during the economic downturn. For instance, the Whiz Kids program, which provides winter afterschool program for elementary school-aged kids, has grown and would be unsustainable without the commitment of a project partner, the Center for Alaskan Cultural Studies. Beggs explains that the grant helped the Museum “develop collaborations more strategically with sustainability in mind.” She singled out the National Parks Service as a good new partner and noted that the smaller non-profits in town have also made a bigger commitment to human resources and collaboration with the Pratt than in the past.

In a subsequent IMLS grant, the Pratt Museum has reached out to another part of the wider Homer community, the Russian orthodox community that has lived in the region since the 1970s.

Corona Plaza: Center of Everywhere

Institution: Queens Museum of Art

Institution Discipline: Art Museum

Location: Queens, NY

Grant Size: \$150,000

Institution Size: Large

Grant Period: 2006-2008

Region: Mid-Atlantic

Project Background

The MFA grant was a vital piece in the Queens Museum of Art's extended engagement with local community members, the majority of whom are Spanish-speaking with origins in the Caribbean and Central and South America. Part of a broad goal to create a community "center" in Corona Plaza, where the museum is located, the Queens Museum of Art used the MFA funds specifically to inject contemporary, social oriented art in its larger community outreach. The MFA funds underwrote the development of new educational offerings, financed artist and performance fees, and supported two Acting Associate Curators who worked with the Museum's public events department and with emerging artists to create art projects in conjunction with community-wide festivals. The grant also enabled the hiring of a community organizer who developed and maintained relationships with community members and ensured that they had a voice in all stages of the project and the specific pieces of art that emerged. Educational offerings at the QMA were also expanded as part of the MFA grant project.

Beyond connecting New Yorkers, program participants, museumgoers and Corona residents, the project also helped the Museum highlight the need to connect local community members with health and wellness services. The culminating project activities were festivals held in and around Corona that featured health screenings, immigration assistance, registration for classes, traditional foods, art workshops for children and families. Corona Plaza: The Center of Everywhere art installations were integrated into the Plaza and surrounding businesses and were featured at the festivals.

Eight art projects emerged from the project: a cookbook of recipes and stories co-developed with local residents; a performance piece based on Mexican *luchador* fighting of "El Conquistador" battling the Invisible Man; the construction of an interactive wall in Corona Plaza that raised questions about borders; a free-standing photography studio with a backdrop of an idyllic natural scene before which residents could have their portraits taken (photos were later hand-printed, signed, and given to the residents); a festival booth to solicit community input on an animation series, new installments of which were screened at QMA weekly; a multi-media mobile public art work based on a street vendor's cart; a video of interactions between local residents and barbers and hair stylists; and a series of different kinds of lenses installed in store fronts and park fences that literally offered a new perspective.

Key Factors in Success

The MFA grant underwrote the resources to integrate a "complex, contemporary art project" into the larger community engagement effort, says Tom Finkelppearl, Executive Director of the Queens Museum of Art. The aim, he says, was to celebrate the folk art traditions of community members—every culture in this highly diverse community has its own dance traditions, he notes—and to introduce thought-provoking and challenging art. Artists were commissioned to create pieces based on an open competition. The large-scale festival atmosphere drew many non-traditional museumgoers to the events, fostering exchange between the Museum and the community and allowed artists to introduce their work to a large public. Many local businesses and restaurants actively sought opportunities to host art work in their buildings.

In collaboration with local businesses and consultants, QMA developed a strong, bilingual marketing and public relations strategy to reach its intended audiences. Flyers were distributed at local schools and businesses and to commuters at the Corona Plaza subway stop in the days leading up to each festival. More than 2,000 free admission passes to QMA were also distributed and the Corona Plaza project was featured in the QMA brochure, website, and e-newsletter. An exhibition room at QMA was devoted to the Corona Plaza: Center of Everywhere art installations and the project and museum were featured in the New York City arts press and national media.

Partnerships

The Queens Museum did extensive outreach to all elements of the Corona community, making contacts from the New York City Council to local restaurants and businesses. Formal partnerships were made with the Queens Library, and the Corona Community Action Network (Corona CAN), and informal partnership were formed with more than forty-six entities.

Local partners such as MetroPlus Health Plan underwrote the costs of printing advertising flyers for the festivals. Other partners included Elmhurst Hospital, the American Heart Association, the NYC Parks Department, several major corporations, and numerous churches, local businesses, and sports and civic organizations. Through the Corona Plaza project, WNYC is now a cultural arts partner of QMA.

Role of Evaluation

Project development was informed by input from a state assembly member and a report by Hunter College Masters level students in Urban Planning. In the project's planning phases, QMA developed relationships with local residents, organizations, and businesses to inform the ongoing project and build interest in the festivals. During the first year of implementation, the Museum staff worked with the community to gauge needs and responses, such that the project's second year targeted community needs and interests even more precisely.

Museum staff conducted audience surveys based on zip codes to measure participation, and surveyed businesses that housed projects and the participating artists. Project Director and the museum's Director of Public Events Prerana Reddy explains that the evaluation questions probed beyond audience satisfaction to explore how the art installations influenced residents to think about art and culture in their daily lives and what kinds of roles they might play in their community. Every festival included an "artist's booth" where artists could gather first-hand, informal feedback from festival participants. QMA also did exhibitor interviews with the artists about how the Museum could improve its offering and conducted observations to see how people interacted with the art installations. Informal feedback from local businesses showed an uptick in customers linked to the festivals and art projects.

To measure the project's longer-term impact, QMA has partnered with C3D, a Williams College social network mapping project, to gather data about community members' participation in and satisfaction with the Museum's public art, street festivals, and beautification efforts. The resulting map of "creative community development" is expected to identify how the Museum is building increasingly complex and interrelated social networks.

Community Effects

The project's goal was to engage non-traditional museum audiences, produce public art works about which local residents could feel a sense of ownership, and to draw QMA out into its local neighborhood. No fewer than 2,500 people attended the festivals, and one attracted more than 4,000. Many thousands more were

exposed to the art through installations in local businesses and informal artists' talks at local schools and celebrations. Over the grant's two years, more than 1,500 festival attendees received health screenings, 900 attendees signed up for or renewed free or low-cost health insurance plans, and more than 500 students received training in nutrition. These numbers suggest that the Museum's public profile was enhanced through this project.

The Museum also expanded its art therapy and educational programs as part of Corona Plaza: Center of Everywhere. Numerous community members were inspired by the art to seek classes in art-making themselves, and the QMA education department was able to respond with an array of very popular programs that spoke to that interest. Courses remain at high capacity, with ongoing waiting lists.

Numerous relationships between the Museum and local organizations have taken shape, and QMA has hosted events celebrating Spanish cultures and offers an array of college prep, ESOL, Spanish language, photography, video, and graphic design classes. Many new artists, performers, and educators from the community have actively sought opportunities and relationships with departments of QMA.

Organizational Effects

Looking to the future, the QMA has refined its plans for new programming as it seeks to maximize its visibility and community involvement. Reddy sees the Corona Plaza as having advanced the Museum's mission by supporting community members in transcending psychological, physical, and economic barriers to understanding and appreciating art.

Over the course of the project, QMA "fundamentally altered" its vocabulary and its thinking about its core competencies and imperatives, explains Project Director Reddy. The Museum is continuing to turn from traditional "museum-centered paradigms" of audience development toward a more reciprocal role as a "coalition and consensus builder among myriad constituents." Reddy attributes the Corona Plaza project with a strong outpouring of donations for the planned reconstruction and expansion of the museum, including the largest individual donation in the museum's history.

Internally, the museum has seen much greater collaboration among departments, particularly between the education and public events departments as a result of Corona Plaza; the number of native Spanish speakers employed by the museum has risen from zero to 28%, and the community organizer/ curator position pioneered by the Acting Associate Curators during the project is now a permanent position at the museum co-developed between the curatorial and public events departments. MFA funds also expanded the scope of the Museum's audio-visual equipment for outdoor presentations

Challenges

With many different cultures represented by many different cultural organizations in Corona, Finkelpearl says, territorial issues arose, but the Museum managed to maintain relationships. The disparities in resources between QMA and many local groups also created tension at times, in that QMA was perceived as a wealthy institution and was expected to underwrite some community events that were not part of its mission. Furthermore, he notes, it can be challenging to present complex or confusing art. By way of answer he points to the generative, imaginative power of art that does not simply reflect back to the community what it already knows.

A challenge Reddy notes is that while the project garnered great general publicity, it received little art press. She is seeking ways to talk about the QMA's public, socially engaged art in ways that contribute critically to the field. One step she has taken to address this has been to start a blog to invite dialogue.

Lessons Learned

The success of this project, Finkelppearl maintains, grew out of the community relationships and coalitions that were formed early in its implementation. Corona Plaza confirmed for him the value of doing art projects as part of community engagement. He advises museums to hire community organizers—or train existing staff to take on the role—because the strength of the community-museum relationship was what allowed the Museum to engage the community with sophisticated and complex art.

Prerana Reddy describes the most successful projects as those where the artists spent a lot of time in the community, and particularly artists who were fluent in Spanish. “If we are going to do this again, we want to do the projects for longer and require even more presence.”

Sustainability

The MFA grant has been followed by funding from the Rockefeller Foundation to underwrite “Corona Studios,” a project to support emerging artists with six-month residencies and studio space in the Museum where they can present workshops. A related new project involves three pairs of artists to create new work around themes generated by QMA curators; because much of the museum space will be inaccessible during reconstruction, QMA is relying on relationships with local organizations and businesses formed in conjunction with Corona Plaza: Center of Everywhere to host these exhibits.

As a result of the project, QMA staff now serve on a New York City Language Access Task Force to establish standards for translation and interpretation services for City agencies and the Museum is in negotiations to become partner with the New York City Department of Transportation to spearhead and manage the transformation of Corona Plaza into a designated pedestrian zone.

QMA has built on the cookbook originally created in connection with the project, working with health organizations to create a cookbook with nutritionally sound recipes from local residents and businesses, distributing more than 7,500 copies of the cookbook, which features photographs of Corona residents and shots from the street festivals. The street festivals continue.

Traveling Ecosystems

Institution: Round Lake Area Park District
Prairie Grass Nature Museum

Location: Round Lake, IL

Region: Midwest

Institution Size: Small

Institution Discipline: Nature Center

Grant Size: \$38,530

Grant Period: 2005 - 2008

Project Background

The Round Lake Area Park District's Nature Museum used an MFA grant to create Traveling Ecosystems, a traveling science show that was presented to more than 2,400 elementary school children. Aimed at familiarizing students with the kinds of natural habitats surrounding them, the Traveling Ecosystems project brought monthly presentations on three local habitats—wetlands, prairie, and woodland—to elementary school students at five local schools over a three-month period. The presentations involved taxidermied animals, photographs, and other natural objects. The MFA grant underwrote the fabrication of the traveling exhibit and the staff time in the schools.

Each class received a live animal exhibit tied to a habitat (ladybugs, ants, butterflies [prairie], tadpoles [wetlands] and earthworms [woodland]) which remained in the class throughout the project. Students made daily and enthusiastic observations of the animals. Classes also received microscopes and slides as well as vocabulary games and puzzles developed by project staff. Science concepts were linked to students' lives, such as the notion that walking through a field causes pollen to be spread.

The goal of the project was to offer students “[an] encounter with real animals they could touch, hold, and see,” says Assistant Superintendent of Recreation, Frank Palmisano: “They had an ant farm, a butterfly enclosure. What seemed to reach students was the reality of it all.” The grant was ultimately instrumental in shifting the institution's thinking fundamentally, reconceptualizing its mission from zoological collections to education through presenting native animals in the context of their ecological habitats.

Key Factors in Success

Traveling Ecosystems was the result of extensive and ongoing development. A key factor in its success was the strong relationship between project presenters and classes of students and teachers who assisted in shaping the project. Museum staff were in regular email contact with teachers, gathering feedback both informally and through regular surveys to keep the presentations fresh; they also invited students to Nature Center activities that took place outside school, such as during winter breaks. The project's developers included a former teacher, who created the curriculum in accordance with Illinois state standards in science. In addition, presentations were fine-tuned to meet the needs of individual classes. Staff members' continual incorporation of feedback helped them deliver high-quality, well-structured presentations.

The animals had intrinsic appeal to elementary school-aged students. Student engagement stayed strong throughout the three-month period of engagement; students were fascinated by the daily activities of the live animals in the classrooms that Traveling Ecosystems provided.

Partnerships

The Museum reached out to local schools. In forming partnerships with schools, Museum staff sought to accommodate schools that lacked travel (i.e., field trip) funds. Partnerships with schools were strengthened, although they have not endured to the same degree in the absence of outside funding. Teachers involved with

the program were very positive and expressed interest in continuing it, although funding cuts have stalled any such efforts; school budgets have even frozen field trip funding. “Teachers would love to get us back,” Palmisano says, but funding is not there. The Museum subsequently developed partnerships with the Girl Scouts and the Park Child Care Center, an onsite childcare center; Girl Scouts take part in activities; Center staff offer nature presentations at the childcare center.

Role of Evaluation

Project staff used evaluation extensively in fine-tuning the project and as evidence of its success. All students took pre and post tests that entailed drawing and labeling habitats; analysis showed students were using basic science concepts and terminology correctly, and creating more detailed drawings. Regular pre-tests associated with each habitat suggested student knowledge was limited; some students even left their papers blank. In the post tests, however, they might add trees, water, or plants and animals. They would be more specific, “recognizing, for example, that a crane would not live in a woodland. We always saw some kind of knowledge increase.”

Evaluation with teachers was also ongoing. In surveys they received along with activity materials, teachers were asked about the relevance of information, the speaker’s style, the age appropriateness of materials, interaction with students, and the quality and effectiveness of props. Based on teacher feedback, staff adapted and retooled their presentations. Teachers praised the classroom materials and the hands-on demonstrations and confirmed that students remained more on-task than in previous years and retained more information between presentations. “I wish all my lessons were as engaging,” a teacher remarked on one survey.

Center staff videotaped the classroom presentations to improve their performance and to train incoming staff members. They also conducted debriefing conversations as part of programming they now do with the on-site child care center and seek to maintain a “culture of evaluation” that extends to the governing board.

Community Effects

As a school-based project, Traveling Ecosystems had its greatest impact on teachers and students. Teachers were enthusiastic about the Museum’s science presentations and materials. Some teachers expressed longing to engage students with the kind of interest the museum staff were. Student engagement was high, and evaluation tests indicated that they increased their knowledge of different ecosystems. Students who were involved in the program do visit the museum and have made a connection with it as well.

Organizational Effects

Palmisano credits the program with increasing staff commitment: people have “more ownership over projects,” he says, and a greater ability to “continue things that are working and retool or drop something that isn’t working well.” Although staff members have turned over since the Traveling Ecosystems project, he sees the project’s legacy in staff members’ greater sense of ownership in the Museum and their confidence and skill in developing new projects.

The project has also informed the Center’s understanding of how to engage audiences. Staff change Nature Center activities, such as scavenger hunts, more frequently, and are more about “presentation than display,” Palmisano says. He credits the grant with helping the Center evolve its purpose and maximize staff time and efforts. Products fabricated as part of Traveling Ecosystems have been incorporated into regular Center activities, repurposed for use with younger children. Traveling kits may be quickly assembled as needed.

Ironically, Palmisano said the Traveling Ecosystems raised the pressure on the Center to continually improve. “It’s hard to live up to your success. We didn’t foresee the threat of over-delivering,” he says.

Challenges

The chief challenge the project faced was scheduling with schools, complicated by the need for the exhibits to be high-quality, well-organized, reliable, and portable. In order to work within the school schedule, “Exhibits had to be unpacked within ten minutes,” Palmisano notes. There were also financial constraints, although with planning, the Museum was not as affected by the recession as other organizations. “We found ways to cut costs and still be of value to community.”

Lessons Learned

A key lesson, Palmisano said, was to keep the end in mind from the beginning. Museum staff learned, he said, “to be more conscious about future goals, to be more realistic about what would it take,” reducing costs, and anticipating obstacles. He advises other organizations to “always work backwards,” with a clear goal in view, and then consider how to finance it. Grants are time-consuming, he warns, “Don’t do it just to do it.”

Sustainability

The MFA grant helped the museum focus its intentions and underwrote the creation of permanent and portable exhibits. “We’re on a new track now,” Palmisano says, “We went from ‘here’s an animal’ to ‘here’s the animal’s place in its environment. Here’s your place.’” Museum staff now understand the mission is one of education rather than zoological collections. “We shifted from ‘animal-centric’ to ‘science-centric,’” he says. The exhibits are more interactive, “More like a classroom instead of a zoo.”

With the grant’s conclusion, the staff has adapted the materials for use in the museum, which is funded by tax dollars and is free to the public. Center staff continue to offer environmental presentations, now adapted for young children at the on-site Park Child Care Center. Efforts continue to work with schools, and outreach is ongoing with libraries and environmental clubs.

Suquamish Museum Digitization of Oral History Tapes Project

Institution: Suquamish Museum

Institution Discipline: Specialized Native American Museum

Location: Suquamish, WA

Grant Size: \$21,830

Region: West

Institution Size: Small

Grant Period: 2006 – 2008 including 1 extension

Project Background

The MFA grant funds allowed the Suquamish Museum, a tribal museum focused on history and culture of Suquamish and other Puget Sound Salish tribes, to invest in equipment and receive technical training as part of an effort to digitize existing taped oral histories. The oral history project started in the 1980s when approximately 65 elders (65-100 years old) were recorded to capture a dying population's language speakers and bearers of the tribal culture. The tapes captured typical customs including fishing and gathering. Twenty five years later, concerned that the tapes would soon disintegrate, the museum saw an immediate need to preserve the recording for future generations, as well as the potential for presenting them to current museum visitors. Although they had been included in written form in exhibit catalogues and on museum walls, the oral histories in the voices of their speakers can now be integrated in new exhibits. Songs and stories in the native Lushosteed language as performed by Suquamish elders will enhance exhibits for the new museum building currently under construction.

Museum Director, Marilyn Jones, conducted the interviews in the 1980s, but despite the support of the Tribal Council, they were unable to find the resources needed to preserve the collection. After an unsuccessful attempt to get funding through another IMLS grant program, the Tribe proposed the project successfully to the MFA program. The MFA funds covered the hardware, software, and professional training for the staff, including a day and a half of a consultant's time to train them on the specific technical procedure needed for the project. Jones reported the project "opened the eyes of a lot of our tribal and council members" to the importance of preserving our culture and what resources it takes to do so.

The oral history digitization project directly furthers the museum's mission to collect, protect, educate, and preserve the history and culture of the Suquamish and other Puget Sound Salish Tribes. The 400 hours-worth of digitizing cassette tapes was completed by Stephanie Alexander, then a museum tour guide, using the newly purchased computer and CDs. This was a moving and sentimental experience for both Jones and Alexander since the tapes included the voices of some of their immediate family members (mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother). Although an existing exhibit uses quotes from these interviews, for Alexander, listening to the original interviews has made the exhibit "come alive for her". For Jones, hearing their voices was "awesome".

Key Factors in Success

Jones feels the project was an accomplishment since all of the tapes were successfully transferred to digital format. Museum staff employed a system with several steps to ensure that the conversions were done correctly. First they made sure the tapes were clear and concise before converting to them to CDs and then they checked the CDs for clarity. As a final step in quality assurance they asked Council members to review the CDs periodically. Museum staff were thrilled with the quality of the final recordings: during digitization, they were able to remove background noise, making the new recordings of the oral histories easier to listen to than the original recordings.

Partnerships

There were no external partnerships developed for this project except for a consultant hired to conduct technical training.

Role of Evaluation

There was no formal external evaluation during or after the project implemented.

Community Effects

While the project was being implemented, the museum submitted status reports to the Tribal Council who in turn published preservation awareness and project progress in their newsletters to the tribal community. The final products of the project – easily accessible and reproducible digital files stored on CDs – have already made their way into the community. With approval from the Tribal Council, the museum has provided CDs of the oral histories to the elders' family members. And plans are already in effect to include the audio materials in exhibits when the museum opens at its new location.

Another immediate way in which the community has benefitted from the project has been through enriched museum tours. The information gleaned during the process of reviewing and digitizing the tapes by the museum tour guide has made its way into the tours. By going back to the original source material, Alexander can now share more about the elders, their personalities, and the context for the museum's existing exhibit, which includes quotes taken from the interviews.

Organizational Effects

The museum staffs' preservation skills were enhanced by learning how to transfer the tapes to computer and CD. Specifically, the museum has stored the oral histories on "gold" CDs, which have a shelf life of more than 100 years, and which will ensure the museum of preserving their culture for future generations as long as the CDs are compatible with current hardware. The skills gained will be valuable for digitally archiving other materials. Jones reported that the digitized oral history tapes are about one third of the museum's audio recordings that need to be preserved. Even though the museum has had staff turnover, current staff are available to train new staff members in the transfer process. The increased technical skills have already been utilized in other ways in the community. The museum has received requests for recording Tribal Council meetings, creating CDs for the education department, and for research projects. The museum staff intends to train others associated with the museum so they can use the equipment as well.

Increased accessibility to the original interviews has not only deepened staff knowledge of tribal history, but the process of digitizing the tapes made visible a whole arena of cultural resources and preservation within the community. The Tribal Council members were brought to a "higher plane" explained Jones. They were not as aware of the museum's function in preserving and protecting the cultural history as they are now after the Oral History project. The Director feels it has helped the elders be more aware of the effects of preservation and that the museum's responsibilities go beyond conducting museum tours.

The Director also stated that having received the MFA grant strengthened their relationship with their Information Systems Department (IS) by helping them learn how to better operate the computer equipment. She feels having the MFA-funded equipment and a stronger working relationship with IS was instrumental in a recently successful bid for additional grant funding for digitizing other museum resources.

Challenges

“For a while we weren’t sure we were actually going to be able to do it [transfer all tapes]”, reported Jones. On the basis of faulty technical advice, the museum originally purchased a computer system that no one within the museum was able to operate. They spent four months trying to figure out how to use the system before bringing in a consultant. The consultant confirmed that the system was inappropriate for their needs and recommended another purchase. This time it was “basically plug it in, plug the tape recorder in and everything went right to the computer very quickly.”

The consultant trained a couple of the staff and helped overcome a problem with some of the tapes. The museum found some of the recorded tapes had been duplicated backwards and feared they might not be transferable. Bringing in a consultant was important; it showed them how to turn the tapes around and restore them for the digitization process.

The Director noted a personal challenge for herself since she conducted most of the original interviews with the elders 25 years ago. She said she had been very close to several of the deceased elders and now hearing their voices again was upsetting. This issue was addressed by having Alexander work on specific tapes over the weekend when Jones was not in the building.

Lessons Learned

The Suquamish Museum recommends other museums be proactive in preserving cassette tapes, and encourages them to preserve those valuable resources before it’s too late. They also realize now that even after materials are preserved, it is imperative to stay aware of the lifespan of the current storage solution and keep abreast of technical changes to maintain the resources.

The Suquamish Museum director found working with a technical consultant to be invaluable. Get advice before purchasing any computer equipment so you know what you are buying, she suggested. In addition, have a trainer or consultant spend quality time in training staff. She further suggested arranging some follow-up sessions to ensure things are being done correctly.

The transfer process was not as burdensome as originally expected. Instead, staff found doing the conversions easy and straight forward once they learned the process. Nevertheless, some initial missteps, such as incorrectly labeling the first batch of CDs, reminded them of the importance of scheduling time for planning the workflow, including testing the process, prior to beginning the actual transfers.

When the project is done, The Director recommends thanking everyone who worked on the project because “it is a big undertaking, requires a lot of time and patience, but is well worth it”.

Sustainability

The Museum’s focus since the completion of the oral history tapes project, has been on preparing the museum for relocating to a new site. Time is being spent taking inventory and packing up all the museum’s collections including artifacts, photographic negatives and originals, oral histories, catalogue cards and archival records.

While the museum has not continued with digitizing audio archives, they have received a National Park grant to digitize print and photographic collections in their archives. In addition, once the museum moves, they intend to train new staff on how to preserve audio and visual artifacts. This includes training on the equipment purchased with the MFA funds and reel-to-reel tape equipment.

Their plan for the new museum includes making the Suquamish oral histories accessible to both visitors and researchers in a couple of ways. For general audiences, the converted oral histories will be presented in audio kiosks and outreach programs. The museum intends to create exhibits that will include visual and audio so the hearing impaired can also experience the tribal culture. It is the museum’s hope to develop programs that

can go out to schools and nursing homes where people who may not be able to visit the museum can experience the voices of the elders and learn about the tribal culture and its history.

The archive and research room of the new museum will provide increased access to documents and artifacts including the oral histories, for tribal and community members and visiting scholars. Those portions of the oral history that are considered sacred or family owned will be restricted, whereas oral history that is community owned will be accessible to everyone. The oral histories will also be used in their language classes so students can hear authentic samples of Lushosteed speech.

Thomas Jefferson's Libraries, An Annotated Bibliographic Database

Institution: Monticello/Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation

Location: Charlottesville, VA

Region: Southeast

Institution Size: Large

Institution Discipline: Specialized historic

Grant Size: \$140,140

Grant Period: 2004-2007

Project Background

The project was developed to provide complete and definitive bibliographic data, in a web-searchable environment, for every book that Thomas Jefferson owned during his lifetime, accompanied by editorial notes on the titles and links to and from the bibliographic data. The project began because there were a half dozen important manuscript lists, in Jefferson's own hand, that had never been compiled. They included handwritten lists of titles of published books that Jefferson knew about, collected, owned, and discussed in his correspondence. The library was founded to fill the gaps in knowledge about Thomas Jefferson and his books.

Museum staff worked with two scholars who had been working on Jefferson's books independently. Beginning before the MFA grant, they had taken Jefferson's short handwritten lists of titles and created full bibliographic citations. The MFA grant allowed museum staff to continue working with these scholars, conducting initial bibliographic surveying, identifying titles, and checking the historical evidence to create a rich, chronological view of Jefferson's reading and his awareness of specific books over time. The project has enabled museum staff to "bring light to one of the most important sources for Thomas Jefferson's ideas—his books," explained Jack Robertson, the Foundation Librarian. The MFA funding was seed money for this enormous undertaking. As Robertson states, "that was just enough to give us progress, commitment and excitement to pursue it."

Key Factors in Success

Flexibility in the MFA grant was crucial, allowing the museum to modify its process, scope, methodology throughout the project. "Every time I did a six month report, I had to explain the differences in the scope and character of the work," explains Robertson. Staff moved from the idea of creating marked records in the library's online catalogue, to using an XML-based content management system. They ultimately decided that the best way to create and share data would be a three-point system in which information was linked from the digital versions of the handwritten manuscripts pages to the transcriptions and finally, to the bibliographic citations. This allowed the easy integration of new lists of Jefferson's books as they became digitally available from the Library of Congress, which holds the original manuscripts. The use of XML made the resources easily accessible to colleagues and scholars.

Robertson attributes the ability to be dynamic in their technology needs ultimately served the project well. He claims that through the technology they have been able to bring a very fine-grained level of information to bear on Jefferson's library and to interlink different information and sources of information. The web-based environment allows people to conduct their own surveys of the information available, statistical analyses, and chronological reporting, etc.

Robertson calls the museum a "21st century library." Its holdings are entirely electronic, facsimiles, or duplications. It contains digital copies of the books that Thomas Jefferson owned as well as more than 350,000 17th and 18th century publications. Museum staff have, however, identified the locations of extant copies of Jefferson's books, and include that information in the database.

Partnerships

The Library worked with three key partners—The Library of Congress, the Massachusetts Historical society, and University of Virginia—as advisors. Their collaboration involved discussion and sharing information, which led to holding scholarly events, sharing artifacts for exhibitions, and broadening awareness of Monticello and the Thomas Jefferson library in the larger American historical and cultural environment. Monticello is a small player compared with the Library of Congress and Antiquarian Society, but the institutions have been able to share information and work together. These relationships have been maintained and include several joint editing projects with the Massachusetts Historical Society. Connections were also forged with public libraries in Philadelphia and the Boston Public Library.

Role of Evaluation

No formal evaluation has been conducted for the project, although informal assessment has been conducted with users and partners.

Community Effects

The project was designed to fulfill an established need—expressed by teachers, scholars, and the general public—to make information about Jefferson and his books available online and user friendly. Letters and emails received by the museum since the library’s inception in 2000 suggested a desire for authoritative information about Jefferson and his books. The MFA project created an online resource accessible to all, and freed library staff from what had become a brisk business in providing references for requests via emails and letters. Web data suggests that interest in the Thomas Jefferson library database has increased overall traffic on the Monticello website.

Informal observation on the part of library staff suggests greater interest among scholars in using the historical bibliographic information leading to a greater depth of historical context in the work of visiting scholars. As Robertson explains, people can make chronological and topographical assessments that weren’t possible previously; they can see who owns a book that was once in Jefferson’s collection; they can access information about Jefferson’s holdings, including what books, editions, and when he owned them.

The new database has affected how museum staff present Monticello to visitors, and used the database extensively in research for the new visitor center.

Organizational Effects

The project served the Foundation’s mission of educating the public and preserving “Jeffersonia.” The Jefferson Library was a major step in providing educational resources and services to multifaceted clientele. Increasingly, outreach has involved educational activities and scholarly events, not simply tours. The museum is “now seen as being more open, cooperative and giving of interesting, valuable information. This has added to the institution’s reputation,” states Robertson. It has also established the museum as an authoritative source on Thomas Jefferson, and staff at the Library of Congress, MA Historical Society and other institutions now recommend the museum as an expert source.

The MFA grant strengthened the professional capacities of the small library staff of three (though assisted by 2,000 volunteers and several student interns each year). Staff learned how data can be processed and delivered, and built valuable relationships with colleagues at other institutions. The grant also underwrote the technical infrastructure which made participation in the global community of scholars, and libraries possible.

Challenges

The amount and complexity of information made it difficult to design a system to hold and deliver it on the Internet. Developing a working methodology, bibliographic procedures, and the right technology were all challenges. Staff had to be flexible and see which tools were emerging and which tools others were using, so that the materials would be maximally usable. Since 2002, staff have gone through four generations of technology. Instead of a complex database, they created a cloud of information, with each part retaining its own character, as appropriate. The ways in which the parts are linked, however are invisible to the user.

Lessons Learned

Robertson describes a key learning as the importance of being flexible: “Be ready for changing how you are managing the tools you are using to carry out the project. Look for it, and expect it!” he cautions, adding to ensure that any standards and systems selected will work well with others.

Finally, he stresses the importance of the network and being part of a larger system. The fact that museum staff don’t maintain data on site suggests ways that institutions—even relatively small ones, such as a library with a staff of three—can participate in these broader systems and structures.

Sustainability

An ongoing challenge of the work involves “staying closely attuned to the hardware, software and network changes,” Robertson says. That entails an institutional commitment to support computing capabilities. “To keep us dynamic and vital we have to keep on top of the computing environment in which people are exploring and inventing new programs, new ways of compiling and disseminating data.”

The work of updating the technology and increasing accessibility continues. Staff are now working to connect their resources with the Libraries of Early America, a consortium of institutions and individuals who are creating and combining a collection of bibliographic information on book ownership at different times and places in early America. The Jefferson Library staff are currently migrating all their data to a Web-based application, through which they will join a broader community of library data—a relational database that will allow users, for instance, to compare data on Thomas Jefferson data with data on Benjamin Franklin.

The project has received no additional staff or computer hardware or software. However, staff now participate in Library Thing, obviating the need to host their own database or pay maintenance costs. And one-third of the Associate Foundation Librarian’s time is now dedicated to ongoing work on the project, including working with volunteers and students.

The library continues to add new manuscripts, such as reading lists Jefferson gave friends and colleagues, and staff are reviewing his correspondence and other writings for references to books, and including that information in the database. Although the library does not have extensive holdings of its own, the library directors feel they are fulfilling their vision to make the Jefferson Library a global resource. By digitizing their resources, and making them accessible online, they can transcend geography and have enormous reach.

“As a librarian, nothing is every finished,” Robertson notes, “To define a final product of a grant is difficult ... a project is sustainable if it is dynamic and expandable.”

Mining the Records: Bringing “Old Ironsides” to Life

Institution: USS Constitution Museum
Foundation

Location: Charlestown, MA

Region: New England

Institution Size: Large

Institution Discipline: History

Grant Size: \$150,000

Grant Period: 2005 – 2008

Project Background

With a Museums for America (MFA) grant, the USS Constitution Museum conducted historic research to fill in gaps about the lives of the crew members who served on the USS Constitution during the War of 1812. Museum staff wanted to create an exhibit that followed the course of a journey on the ship and looked to primary sources to enrich that experience. This research project was part of the Museum’s 10 year initiative called Sailors Speak to uncover the voices of the crew members who served on the ship. Activities supported by the MFA grant included identifying and documenting data sources, developing databases and profiles of crew members, compiling research subject notebooks, transcribing documents, and preparing papers and presentations.

The research project was successful in creating a crew database detailing the lives of over 1,180 men and boys on the ship between 1812 and 1815. The funding was also instrumental for the Museum in establishing a focus for its activities; the research from this project – detailing the social history and broader context in which these lives were lived -- became the foundation for all of the Museum’s programming and exhibits.

Key Factors in Success

The MFA grant allowed the Museum to hire dedicated researchers for this project and make the research a priority for the Museum. The Museum hired two research coordinators responsible for identifying and delving into the primary resources housed around the county. Other staff hired included two part-time research assistants in the Washington D.C. area to retrieve documents in the National Archives, two database assistants to enter the “masses of new data into the database,” and volunteers who helped with research activities as well as writing crew profiles and visiting archival repositories. The Director of Collections and Learning (Sarah Watkins) noted that having a committed cadre of researchers enabled Museum staff to move forward to create the Sailors Speak exhibit as well as other projects.

A second important factor was the receipt of other grants overlapping with the MFA grant. The Museum had also received an IMLS grant for engaging audiences. So, while the research project was underway, Museum staff also concerned themselves with how to present the information in a meaningful way that encouraged conversations about history. The combination of these two grants led to the development of research-based personal narratives about the lives of crew members aboard the USS Constitution. An NEH Implementation grant supported exhibit fabrication to share the research with the public.

Partnerships

No partnerships were developed for this project.

Role of Evaluation

Museum staff used evaluation for formative purposes in developing the 2009 exhibit, *Sailors Speak*. The exhibit featured the research supported by the grant. Visitors were first surveyed about the types of stories they wanted to hear about. Using these findings, museum staff then tested what exhibit features most engaged visitors.

Community Effects

According to the President (Anne Rand), the research generated by the project feeds directly into all of their educational, interpretive, and outreach programs. These programs reach visitors to the USS Constitution Museum and Ship, as well as national and regional audiences. For example, some of the research was used to develop a summer theater presentation about the lives of eight crew members and their widows, as well as a musical piece and a one-person presentation telling the story of a young African American boy in the crew. This story was presented in predominately black communities in Boston and the surrounding area, which extended the Museum's reach to the African-American community. The Museum staff also plan to reach national audiences through a website that will allow "users to interact with the crew's stories in engaging ways." (Now live at www.asailorslifeforme.org thanks to funding from a 2007 IMLS Museums for America grant.)

Organizational Effects

The research project strengthened staff collaboration across departments. The position of Curator changed to Director of Collections and Learning as a means of bringing together departments to work on similar themes and ensuring that the curatorial staff's extensive content knowledge was integrated throughout the museum's offerings. Ms. Rand noted that different members of each department now work together in developing content and stories for programming and exhibits.

Several strategies also were introduced to make sure all staff members, including volunteers, were aware of the research from the project. These included offering brown bag lunches to all Museum departments; making the research available electronically so all staff knew what resources were available, and creating notebooks for front line staff.

Furthermore, the timing of the grant coincided with the Museum's strategic plan to have all departments focus on the same goals. The research from the grant provided the foundation for the Museum's collective focus; "the research feeds the exhibits which fuel the programming." Ms. Rand noted that this approach – and a shared body of content – has helped formalize the collaborative culture among Museum staff.

Challenges

Museum staff found that migrating data across databases was more time consuming than anticipated. The Museum had been given a database on crew members to update and move to a new platform. Because of the way the data fields were structured, the data set had to be broken into parts to move it from one format to another. Also, the complexity and size of the database made it unwieldy to work with. According to Ms. Rand, many volunteers and interns "spent several hundred hours" migrating the data from one platform to another. As well as enlisting volunteers, the museum sought help from outside computer consultants to help with solving complex data problems.

Lessons Learned

The Museum intended to hire one research coordinator for the three years. However, two strong candidates applied for the position and the Museum decided to hire both researchers for 18 months. Ms. Rand highlighted that by hiring two researchers, “we were able to significantly increase the speed at which research, analysis, and dissemination could proceed.” This helped the museum to “advance the project,” allowing more time for processing and interpreting the data. Additionally, the museum could develop research-based outreach programs more quickly than anticipated.

Sustainability

The project greatly augmented the Museum’s institutional knowledge. Prior to this research project Museum staff knew about 450 men, primarily officers, who served on the USS Constitution. Through the research, Museum researchers learned about the lives of over 1,180 ‘ordinary’ crew members and established a solid base of research to build on. Ms. Rand described the research as “transformative” for the Museum. Museum staff continue to consider new ways to further disseminate the research collected, as well as add to that body of knowledge. For example, the Museum received a subsequent MFA grant to develop an interactive website called “A Sailor’s Life for Me?” The website uses the research from this project to bring to life the lives of the enlisted sailors who served on the USS Constitution through “illustrations, crew profiles, quotes, objects, and games.” In addition, Museum staff have used the research resources to create curriculum units, and will work with the Navy to create a 2012 curriculum unit that ties into the 2012 bicentennial celebration “and will make that lasting impact.”

The Museum has made a commitment to continue supporting one research position. Ms. Rand noted that as an institution, the research is critical to everything they do. To date, support has been provided through subsequent grants. These grants build from the research supported by the MFA grant. Museum staff will continue to look for grant projects that can support the position and use the research resources.