



21st Century Museum Professionals Program

Sample Application 21MP-256445-OMS-24

Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$116,770
Amount of cost share:	\$120,924

The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) will develop a pilot workforce training program for conservation technicians. The project responds to an identified need to expand career pathways in conservation for professionals without a graduate degree. CCAHA will partner with Drexel University's Lenfest Center for Cultural Partnerships to connect undergraduate students with experiential training opportunities working on Drexel collections as conservation technicians. Under the direction of CCAHA staff, students will learn key competencies related to the handling, treatment and care of museum objects, as well as specific skills related to the digitization of museum collections. The project will result in a toolkit for implementing similar initiatives between higher education institutions and conservation laboratories, so that undergraduates at other colleges may also benefit.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Project Justification

Program Goal and Associated Objectives

The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) and Drexel University's Lenfest Center for Cultural Partnerships propose a **Conservation Technician Training Pilot Initiative** to develop an alternative training pathway for 21st Century Collections Care Professionals. This effort ties to IMLS Goal 3: Advance Collections Stewardship and Access, and both of its Objectives; by supporting collections care and management, the program allows objects to be preserved for improved public access.

Over the course of the pilot program, four Drexel students will participate in a Co-Op experiential learning sequence in conservation technicianship and preventive care, working on Drexel collections. The grant period will allow leadership from CCAHA and Drexel to plan an academic sequence, supplementing the Co-Op experience, for potentially proposing as a future Certificate at Drexel.

The Pilot Initiative also supports Goals 1 and 2 of the 21st Century Museum Professionals program. By creating a more financially accessible training pathway, the project addresses "professional development of the museum workforce, including those from diverse and under-represented backgrounds." This proposal responds to Objective 1.1, as it creates an "enhanced ... training program for the museum workforce" that will expose students to preventive care skills that will be useful in a wide range of museum careers. Regarding Goal 2, the Pilot Initiative will define an academic training pathway that will be more accessible to students from "diverse and underrepresented backgrounds" (2.1) and is built around a paid internship (2.2). Objectives 1.2 and 2.3 will be addressed through evaluation of the Pilot Initiative and the creation of a Guide, to inform effective practices for implementing similar initiatives.

Project Partners

The **Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA)**, located in Philadelphia, PA, was founded in 1977. Its conservation laboratory specializes in treatment of paper-based art and archival documents, rare books, and historic and fine art photographs. Specialists in housing, framing and digitization allow CCAHA to provide holistic collections care services, and CCAHA is a critical partner for organizations who are not large enough to have this expertise in-house. A team of preservation field service specialists supports museums, libraries, archives and other groups in caring for a wide range of collections materials. CCAHA's staff are deeply attuned to the larger issues these organizations face, including the increasing demands of collections care in a changing climate, and in a context of equity and inclusion.

As a regional lab that sees a diverse range of materials and requires a wide variety of treatment techniques, CCAHA is well-positioned to host postgraduate fellows and interns from conservation training programs on a routine basis. In addition to our staff of fully credentialed conservators, CCAHA has had technicians on staff, some for decades, performing tasks such as: materials preparation, surface cleaning, basic mending, mold remediation, basic to complex housing, digitization capture, object handling, and packing. CCAHA's team values the skills that these staff members bring to the work of collections care. These staff are most often hired as full-time, permanent team members at CCAHA's lab; in many other settings, technician roles may be project-based, temporary positions, and the range of work performed (and therefore the training provided) may be limited to a specific technique and specific materials, rather than the well-rounded exposure that technicians attain at CCAHA.

Founded in 1891 in Philadelphia, **Drexel University** is a comprehensive global R1-level research university and experiential learning leader, with over 23,000 students worldwide. Drexel's innovative cooperative education program (Co-Op) balances classroom theory with real-world practice. Covering over 75 disciplines, it is one of the most comprehensive co-op programs, allowing students to gain up to 18

months of experience, exploring up to three career options/co-op positions before graduation. Drexel has over 80 undergraduate majors and as many minors, with a cross-disciplinary model of learning.

Drexel's Lenfest Center for Cultural Partnerships, launched in 2015, advances the University's mission and civic engagement commitment while contributing to the success of cultural nonprofit partners. Through strategic partnerships, the Center facilitates experiential learning (such as by funding a number of Co-Op positions with cultural nonprofits every cycle, with a dedicated endowment for this purpose) while promoting sustainable practices for nonprofits in the arts and culture sector, as well as leveraging the University's collective expertise through research and planning projects. The Lenfest Center also oversees Drexel's stewardship of the Atwater Kent Collection (of the former Philadelphia History Museum, which closed in 2018), which includes 133,000+ objects (approx. 1/3 archival material).

The Drexel University Libraries hold Archives and Special Collections. Other Drexel Collections—in addition to the Atwater Kent Collection—include the: Founding Collection (flagship collection of 6,000 art objects founded alongside the University in 1891); Legacy Center Archives & Special Collections (repository for College of Medicine and predecessor institutions, including Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania—first medical college in the world for women); Robert and Penny Fox Historic Costume Collection (20,000 objects of dress, accessories, and objects relating to fashion); Polish Poster Collection; and Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University (affiliated in 2011; oldest natural history museum in the Americas, with 19 million specimens, as well as its significant library/archives).

Need Addressed by Proposed Work

The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts is an advocate for the field of cultural heritage conservation and collections care, and has closely followed the work of the Foundation for the Advancement of Conservation (FAIC) in defining the state of the conservation workforce and the future needs of the profession. In Spring 2023, FAIC released the results of an NEH-supported collaborative project which defined a sustainability plan for the field (See Supporting Document 4). The Education, Professional Development and Leadership subcommittee of this *Held In Trust* working group identified as challenges both the limited number of openings in conservation Master's Degree programs, and the "lack of nationally recognized standards to maintain certification." While professionals in Canada and the UK follow international standards, in the U.S. "there is no specific continuing education requirement for conservators ... Without transparent competency standards... Graduate degrees serve as a proxy credential. Conservation technicians, student workers, and volunteers are often trained in a narrow range of skills that pertain to a specific project. Once the project is over, their employment mobility and professional advancement is hampered by the absence of standardized training/credentials." To expand sustainable job opportunities for professionals without a graduate degree, the report noted, "AIC should also revisit the core competencies for conservation technicians. This would help promote equitable compensation and a path for career advancement for experienced technicians."

The *Held in Trust* subcommittee on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility cited several challenges to diversifying the field, including: "lack of effective recruitment and retainment efforts for students and professionals of diverse backgrounds," as well as "inaccessible entry points and professional development." In particular, the small number of openings in North American conservation graduate programs, the requirement of related pre-program experience, and the expectation of internships in between academic years (which are often unpaid and may involve relocation expenses) all create significant financial and lifestyle barriers to considering a conservator career path. The strategy of building connections between universities and cultural heritage institutions to develop solutions to these challenges was expressly recommended in the report, ultimately leading to "Establish[ment of]

new training pathways more broadly that allow for apprentice training, distance learning, and conservation certificates for trades that currently work in historic preservation.” By working toward designing an add-on Certificate that can be achieved by undergraduates in various majors, the project aims to develop and test aspects of a program that could create greater access to this professional path.

In 2005, The American Institute for Conservation developed its *Requisite Competencies for Conservation Technicians and Collections Care Specialists*. The report (See Supporting Document 5), the culmination of 10 years’ work by the Collections Care Task Force, sought to address the wide range of collections supported by technicians, under the supervision of conservators, and the span of skill levels represented in tasks assigned to technicians. Rather than define a core curriculum, the task force identified competencies and techniques, and left open the notion of a standard set of *expected* skills for the role. At the same time, they hoped the report could be a guide for curriculum development; our proposed Pilot Initiative attempts to design a training sequence inclusive of these competencies, working toward a curriculum. These competencies represent essential skills for a wide range of other job titles in the museum workforce (registrars, collections managers, etc.) and thus the ultimate definition of the proposed Certificate may be inclusive of other cultural heritage roles.

Target Group

Undergraduate students in majors such as art history, design (both part of Drexel’s Westphal College of Media Arts & Design), and materials science are the target audience for the pilot program and the potential academic certificate. Over 13,000 undergraduates are enrolled at Drexel University, and Co-Ops are a required part of all degree programs. The Lenfest Center’s experience funding Co-Ops in arts and culture has shown that these opportunities appeal to students in a wide range of majors, sometimes unexpected or seemingly unrelated (for example, a previous Drexel Co-Op at CCAHA, interested in conservation, was a Physics major). The opportunity will not be restricted to students in a specific department. Promotion of the proposed Co-Op placement may prompt students with different backgrounds and experiences to consider an opportunity they may not have been aware of or contemplated.

Drexel’s Lenfest Center has demonstrated experience connecting collections with curriculum and offering internships: grants received in 2021 and 2022 from the Decorative Arts Trust supported IDEAL internships for students of color to work with the Atwater Kent Collection and develop interpretive materials for the public. The Lenfest Center also previously funded a full-time undergraduate Co-Op position in conservation with CCAHA. Nationally, examples of conservation-based undergraduate summer internships include the Andrew W. Mellon Opportunity for Diversity in Conservation (UCLA/Getty Conservation Institute), and the HBCU Library Alliance Conservation/Preservation Internship Program in partnership with the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation, for which CCAHA has previously served as an intern hosting site. See Supporting Doc 3 for more details.

Interest in conservation careers is demonstrated by the continuing rate of applicants to Association of North American Graduate Programs in Conservation (ANAGPIC) affiliated programs; the program at the University of Delaware, for example, receives 70 applicants for 10 openings each year. The project team is also aware of undergraduate training options, including conservation majors at the University of Delaware and Marist College, and a certificate in archaeological fieldwork at Trinity College. San Diego’s Balboa Art Conservation Center, is providing conservation training to students in Mesa College’s Museum Studies program. The project team will prepare a thorough market scan as part of its certificate proposal, including how the Certificate may enhance degrees like Museum Studies that prepare students for a range of workforce roles that benefit from collections care competencies.

Project Beneficiaries

This Pilot Initiative calls for Co-Op students to perform basic conservation treatment and digitization, and to create protective housings for archival material in the Atwater Kent Collection (AKC) at Drexel University. Particularly as Philadelphia prepares to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the United States, Drexel is planning exhibits of AKC objects in neighborhood venues throughout the city (e.g., Free Library of Philadelphia branches). Audiences around the city will thus also benefit from the project, as they may have the opportunity to view artifacts treated or digitized by the Co-Op students.

For the individual students, should they be interested in pursuing advanced academic degrees in Conservation or related disciplines, the Co-Op work experience will be beneficial in their applications.

Benefits to the Museum Field

The Conservation Technician Training Pilot Initiative will benefit the museum field by developing a new career preparation track for roles that benefit from conservation-related competencies, and by creating a model of how academic institutions can partner with conservation laboratories (internal or external) to offer a competency-based undergraduate credential. A robust program combining academic coursework and experiential learning will yield more versatile professionals, who have greater employability.

The project team will also assess, within the setting of Drexel's historical collections, the types of tasks that are best suited for execution by technicians under the supervision of conservators, and the related range of materials (i.e. archival material but perhaps not fine art), and to quantify the volume of work that this represents for the institution. These findings can be extrapolated to make the case for the role and training of conservation technicians in the field more broadly.

Project Work Plan

The Project will have three key components:

Overall Planning: CCAHA and Lenfest Center leadership will collaborate throughout the grant period to plan and evaluate the Pilot Initiative. Activity will include identification of work projects and recruitment of Co-Op students through the University's calendar cycle. On an ongoing basis, project leaders will examine the range of competencies and techniques that are most relevant to collections care across Drexel, and most appropriately taught through Drexel's academic offerings and CCAHA's expertise.

Training Module Rotation at CCAHA: Under the direction of Senior Conservators and CCAHA's Senior Conservation Assistant (a technician with over 35 years of experience) students will be exposed to key Competencies and Techniques identified by the American Institute of Conservation, to give them a foundation of understanding. They will be taught specific skills needed to perform their work projects:

1. **Introduction to Conservation/Object Handling and Registrarial Work:** After an introduction to the core principles of conservation and the profession's code of ethics, students will learn handling techniques for paper-based objects and will assist CCAHA's Registrar with inventory, chain of custody planning, documentation, and packing. They will be exposed to relevant database skills.
2. **Lab Materials:** Students will learn about a variety of materials and tools used in conservation treatment and how to prepare and maintain them as part of a conservation technician's duties. They will review health and safety considerations in the lab, and in collections environments.
3. **Object Examination:** Students will learn key conservation terminology, explore various object conditions, and learn about labeling and documentation by shadowing and assisting with condition

reporting and a condition survey. Students will be exposed to scientific testing techniques and instruments in the laboratory.

4. Basic Treatment Techniques (2-week Module): Students will be taught basic techniques for surface cleaning and mending for flat paper artifacts, photographic prints, and rare books.
5. Collection Housing: Students will learn how to construct basic protective enclosures (folders, 4-flaps, boxes), and how to utilize these enclosures within larger storage containers.
6. Digitization: Students will shadow before- and after-treatment photo documentation, and will be trained in camera capture, scanning, and file review and naming basics for digitization projects.
7. Preservation: Students will shadow CCAHA Preservation Specialists and learn how to set up site monitoring for environmental conditions and pests and housekeeping techniques to protect collections. They will learn key ideas in emergency preparedness and attend a preservation needs assessment site visit. If possible, students will assist in outreach programs for the community.

Work Projects at Drexel and CCAHA: Students will be assigned a balance of treatment, housing and digitization tasks involving AKC materials and will work in Drexel collections workspaces and the CCAHA lab. Drexel and CCAHA personnel will share supervisory duties; the students will work full-time for approximately 16 weeks (following the training rotation). Additional skills practiced may include: documentation (photographic, narrative and data entry); exhibit preparation; lab maintenance and environmental monitoring. Supporting Doc 6 provides some examples of materials to be addressed.

During the Co-Op period, students will participate in educational webinars presented by CCAHA and any in-person workshops offered; they will be invited to tour other Drexel collections and conduct informational interviews with staff in various roles (approx. 1-1.25 days/month for these activities).

Project Timeline

August & Sept. 2024: Project Team (Drexel and CCAHA) will finalize terms of partnership, finalize Co-Op training plan based on competencies needed for AKC projects, and identify materials to be treated.

October 2024 – March 2025: Co-Op Recruitment Process, including promotion to targeted academic departments. Through the University's Co-Op identification calendar, students (2) may be selected as early as January. CCAHA team prepares practical curriculum and projects in anticipation of Co-Op start date, finalizes terms for treatment projects and confirms project supervisors. Project Team continues discussions to identify coursework for certificate offering and refine competencies to be addressed.

April – May 2025: Official commencement of the Co-Op term for Drexel students. Co-Op Students complete training rotations at CCAHA. In May, recruiting begins for the second cohort of Co-Op students. Additional AKC treatment/digitization projects are identified by Drexel.

June – September 2025: Co-Op Students complete supervised work assignments. Project Team evaluates Co-Op experience and discusses adjustments for next cohort. As early as July, but no later than September, 2 additional students are selected for the Fall/Winter Co-Op.

September- October 2025: Co-Op Students complete training rotations at CCAHA.

November – March 2026: Co-Op Students complete supervised work assignments.

April – July 2026: Project Team evaluates second cohort experience and refines a proposal for a Certificate to be proposed to Drexel academic leadership (including evaluation and date supporting its viability). Project Team creates a Guide describing the formula for replication of the program.

Risks to Project

CCAHA and Drexel have discussed the possibility that current students may not be interested in pursuing the Co-Op, but have determined that offering a competitive salary, marketing the benefits of the position to students, and taking time to identify candidates through faculty contacts in various departments will assist with recruitment. A project extension request may be necessary if additional Co-Op cycles are required to complete training of four students.

There is almost certainly no lack of materials from Drexel collections suitable for project work, but another risk may be limited availability of work space. Planning conversations have defined parameters to split the students' time between Drexel sites for digitization and CCAHA for treatment and housing.

Project Management

CCAHA's Executive Director and Director of Conservation will oversee the project at large, engaging in the planning talks with Drexel personnel and assisting with research about other undergraduate offerings. Key leaders at Drexel's Lenfest Center, as well as faculty representatives from key departments, will be engaged in the long-range conversations about a certificate option.

Maddie Cooper, Associate Preventive Conservator, will serve as the Project Manager to coordinate the key phases of the project – participating in the recruitment cycles, engaging appropriate personnel in recruitment, ensuring proper onboarding of the students, managing their training rotation, and connecting them with the Drexel work projects. A Co-Op Supervisor from either CCAHA or Drexel will be assigned to each student, based on the primary collection materials involved and work to be executed (i.e., basic treatment, housing or digitization). The Supervisor will provide initial training, examine materials that the Co-Op will work on, and be on-site with the student to perform quality control checks, provide additional training, and troubleshooting.

Resources Needed

Funding sought through IMLS will support staff involvement from CCAHA and Drexel to train and supervise the Co-Op students, and to perform examinations and prepare treatment plans for materials the students will work on. Staff whose time will be supported by grant funds are detailed in the Project Budget. Drexel's Lenfest Center will provide stipends for the Co-Op students (cost share). Both Drexel and CCAHA will commit in-kind time (cost share) from key administrators to participate in planning discussions, and to identify collections materials for the Co-Op work projects. Drexel and CCAHA will provide tools, treatment and housing materials, as well as digitization equipment and storage media, that are necessary for training and for work projects.

Progress Monitoring

Evaluation throughout the project will be essential, as these Co-Op experiences will be a pilot for a formal offering as part of a proposed new Certificate at Drexel. At the conclusion of each training rotation, the students and supervising staff will complete a qualitative review of the instruction provided, the value of the shadowing opportunities, and the level of skill competency the student achieved during initial training. For the work project portion of the Co-Op, the students will be asked to reflect on their comfort with the work tasks over the course of the project period, and to assess any gains in proficiency due to increased practice with key treatment, housing and digitization tasks. The team will track the work completed by the Co-Op students in metrics that are meaningful to collections processing (i.e, number of digital captures, number of leaves cleaned and rehoused), in addition to tracking hours of student work time. CCAHA will also ask students' permission to review their Drexel-required evaluation at the end of their Co-Op. Before recruitment for the second Co-Op cohort, project leadership will review any feedback that can inform the approach to identifying new students and any

recommended adjustments to the training curriculum. CCAHA will also engage with leadership at the American Institute for Conservation to ensure that the program's scope is in line with any advancement in the formalization of competencies for conservation technicians, and the Lenfest Center will examine the need for conservation technician labor across long-range plans for collections at Drexel.

Project Results

Connecting diverse communities with material culture and the historical record is an important opportunity for museums in the 21st century. As museums face the challenge of accessioning and preserving more materials, the need for collections care professionals will grow. The intended result of the Conservation Technician Training Pilot Initiative is to demonstrate the potential for an undergraduate credential, with a core experiential learning sequence tied to recognized professional competencies, that can offer a more accessible pathway to sustainable careers in collections care.

The goal would be to develop a sequence that can be replicated at other universities with an interdisciplinary emphasis, in partnership with a regional conservation laboratory, private practice conservation studio, or in-house lab at a museum. By defining curriculum requirements, learning objectives, time commitments and other logistical considerations in a how-to Guide (work product), CCAHA and Drexel will make it easier for other institutions to launch a similar successful effort, in addition to continuing to build the program at Drexel. By documenting the extensive training the students receive, the project will also make a case for hiring well-rounded conservation technicians to work under the supervision of Conservators in other museum collections. This will benefit students in other conservation undergraduate programs and ultimately offer museums more options for their collections care workforce. Drawing from a wider candidate pool, museums can make critical progress on collections care tasks in a demanding and rapidly changing environment. The Project Team aims to share the Guide via professional networks such as regional museum associations.

Changing Knowledge, Skills, Behaviors and Attitudes

As described above, the Pilot Initiative will build critical knowledge and skills for collections care for the participating Co-Op students, while allowing them to expand their attitudes about conservation technician roles as a career option or gain valuable related experience, object-handling skills, and insight for any museum/collections-related career. The project is also designed to promote more expansive attitudes among museum leadership hiring collections care workers, encouraging them to scope job requirements for well-rounded technicians who have a base of academic knowledge that will enable them to contribute at the institution on a long-term basis, rather than as a short-term hire.

Return on Federal Investment

Another important result of the grant will be the collections care work performed by the Co-Op students for the Atwater Kent Collection, which is slated to be exhibited at neighborhood-based sites in Philadelphia throughout the Semiquincentennial celebration. The students' time will represent 1.3 FTE staff working on these materials, which illuminate a range of historic periods, personages and cultures.

Sustaining Our Progress

CCAHA and Drexel aim to run the Co-Op sequence on an ongoing basis and would seek additional private funding to support staff involvement. If a Certificate is approved, CCAHA will work with AIC's Emerging Conservators Professional Network, and other museum professional associations, to promote the opportunity. Drexel and CCAHA will also promote the opportunity at events focused on career awareness for high school students and to Drexel undergraduates, through relevant faculty.

Conservation Technician Training Pilot Initiative

The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts

-  Project Team Planning
-  Co-Op Recruitment
-  Co-Op Training & Work

2024-2025



