



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-255767-OMS-24
Project Category: Institutional Capacity
Project Type: Small Project (\$5,000-\$25,000)

Rowan University, Edelman Planetarium

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$23,488
Amount of cost share:	\$0

Edelman Planetarium at Rowan University will enhance the quality and access of its programs for families and patrons with autism spectrum disorder and sensory needs. Planetarium staff will complete training, certification, and on-site review to become a certified autism center through the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. With input from on-site reviewers and experts, the Planetarium will purchase materials to build kits to assist visitors with sensory needs. Specialized staff training will enable the planetarium to provide a more welcoming and inclusive environment and will benefit families and visitors with autism spectrum and sensory processing disorders.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Performance Measurement Plan

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.

Executive Summary

The Edelman Planetarium at Rowan University requests \$23,488 from the IMLS Inspire Grants for Small Museums IGSM- FY24 NOFO to fund *Reaching New Heights: Making the Edelman Planetarium More Inclusive*. If supported, the Edelman Planetarium will become a Certified Autism Center (CAC) by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). By becoming a CAC, the Edelman Planetarium will be able to serve our families and patrons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and sensory needs better. *Reaching New Heights* is aligned with the following IMLS goals: **1) Champion Lifelong Learning, 2) Strengthen Community Engagement, and 3) Advance Collections Stewardship and Access**. It also aligns with the Inspire Grants for Small Museums Program's Goal to **build the capacity of small museums to provide museum services to their communities**.

Project Justification

The Ric ('80) and Jean (McMenamin '81) Edelman Planetarium at Rowan University is a resource for public outreach and astronomy education with planetarium and laser projection systems, a 0.4m research observatory and amateur telescopes, and a suite of hands-on activity toolkits in a suburban community 15 miles south of Camden, NJ and 20 miles southeast of Philadelphia, PA. We have been an educational staple in the community for the past 20 years, offering planetarium shows, star parties, school field trips, and special events for the public. Our mission is to **create a sense of wonder about the night sky and its connections to the world around us**. We achieve this by advancing the understanding of the universe and serving as a resource for astronomical information for a broad and diverse audience. We serve over 35,000 visitors annually, including more than 15,000 students who attend free, thanks to a grant from our founding members.

Our programs and activities include elements of the natural sciences, education, communications, and the fine and performing arts. They are built on the strategic pillars of **access, affordability, quality, and economic engine** (see our Strategic Plan for

further details). We aim to improve access by providing a variety of programs and events highlighting diverse cultures, experiences, and interests, increasing attendance of audiences traditionally underrepresented and underserved in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and providing opportunities and accommodations to make the Planetarium an inclusive and welcoming place for all. The Edelman Planetarium will make itself affordable by managing costs, diversifying revenue, providing no-cost school admission, and limiting ticket increases. We will be an economic engine by enhancing our visitors' quality of life through engaging and experiential programming that supports the scholarly, research, and creative activities of Rowan University.

Reaching New Heights: Making the Edelman Planetarium More Inclusive strives to further our strategic goals by improving program quality and access for individuals with sensory processing difficulties (SPD) and/or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, millions of adults are living with ASD but may go undiagnosed. At the same time, 1 in 36 children are diagnosed with ASD¹ (references are provided in Supplementary Document 1). In addition, 1 in 6 people have sensory processing difficulties², including over 90% of people with ASD. People with SPD can be overresponsive to individual sensory inputs such as bright lights or loud noises. Or they may be underresponsive and seek stimulation through touching objects or rocking³.

Visits to museums can be overwhelming for people with ASD and SPD. Large crowds, bright lights, unfamiliar environments, and other challenges can make museums feel unwelcoming. Many museums have implemented autism-friendly programming, such as early opening hours, to keep crowds and noise levels low. However, these activities may not be enough “to serve and attract autistic guests or those with other sensory sensitivities⁴”. Through the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) Certified Autism Center (CAC) certification, the Edelman Planetarium can “improve [our] guest experience for all⁴” through training, certification, and an onsite review (see Supplemental Document 3 for more information about IBCCES and Certified Autism Centers).

IBCCES is “the industry leader in cognitive disorder training and certification for education, healthcare, corporate, and travel and entertainment professionals around the

globe⁵.” They provide “evidence-based training and certification programs created with its board of clinical and subject matter experts and autistic individuals to provide professionals with a better understanding of autism and other neurodivergencies⁵.” To become a CAC, Edelman Planetarium staff must complete position-specific online training while the museum commits to an onsite review and ongoing training for at least two years. Following the onsite review, IBCCES experts will provide sensory guides for activities and a report with suggestions for improving accessibility.

Reaching New Heights is aligned with IMLS goals 1-3: **1) Champion Lifelong Learning, 2) Strengthen Community Engagement, and 3) Advance Collections Stewardship and Access.** It also aligns with the Inspire Grants for Small Museums Program's Goal to **build the capacity of small museums to provide museum services to their communities.** In particular, *Reaching New Heights* aligns with IMLS objectives: 1.2) Support the training and professional development of the museum and library workforce, 2.1) Promote inclusive engagement across diverse audiences, and 3.2) Promote access to museum and library collections. In addition to Inspire Grant objectives: 2) Support the professional development of the small-museum workforce, and 3) Support the development of policies and institutional plans for small museums.

Edelman Planetarium staff will participate in online, position-specific training culminating in an individual autism certification credential for each of the two full-time and three part-time staff (see our Organizational Profile for more details regarding our museum's size and structure). With this credential, Edelman Planetarium staff can improve program and activity quality and create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all visitors. Sensory guides developed during the onsite review will empower autistic individuals and their companions by informing them about sensory activities within each program, allowing visitors to customize their visits to their specific sensory needs. The Edelman Planetarium will further improve its accessibility to individuals with ASD and SPD by building sensory kits that assist visitors in managing their sensory needs. Items typically found in sensory bags are noise-canceling headphones, sunglasses, tactile objects, and fidget toys. We will build our sensory kits with input from the onsite review and recommendations from IBCCES experts.

Although our target group is our staff, the ultimate beneficiaries will be visitors with ASD and those with sensory sensitivities. By becoming a Certified Autism Center, we can become a more welcoming and inclusive space and take advantage of marketing opportunities provided by IBCCES. Once we receive the CAC designation, we can provide educational and entertainment opportunities for an underserved market. According to IBCCES, travelers with disabilities spend \$29 billion annually on travel and entertainment, including museums². Edelman Planetarium can tap into this market with a listing on the International Online Registry of Certified Autism Centers, a feature on AutismTravel.com, online badges for websites and social media that showcase our CAC status, and an IBCCES press release announcing our official designation.

Project Work Plan

If funded, *Reaching New Heights* PI and Edelman Planetarium Director Amy Barraclough will initiate a partnership with IBCCES to earn a Certified Autism Center designation. The project will take one year to complete, starting in September 2024 (see the Schedule of Completion for more details). After contracting with IBCCES, Edelman Planetarium's director and assistant (see the Key Staff document and Resumes for further details) will begin the 14-credit hour Autism Certificate training for high-contact staff. Our key staff will spend 3% of their time working on the *Reaching New Heights* project, completing the training in 3.5 months.

Beginning in the second quarter of the project, our part-time educators will begin their 8-credit hour autism certification for hospitality leadership. Although the training for part-time educators is shorter, we have allocated the same amount of time for completion as our full-time staff. Our part-time staff are all students at our parent institution, Rowan University, so their primary focus will be their respective degree programs.

We will schedule a site review with IBCCES experts once 80% of our staff have completed their autism training. We anticipate this will happen in March 2025. After the site review, we will begin marketing our CAC designation and await the comprehensive report from IBCCES, including sensory guides and recommendations for improving and modifying our programs. Following these recommendations, we will

implement changes and purchase materials for sensory kits to be loaned to visitors at no charge during our programs.

The most significant risk to the project is completing the autism training, particularly by our part-time staff. As full-time students, they will not have as much time available nor personal interest in completing the autism certification. We will mitigate this risk by providing sufficient time in the project schedule for training. We have also budgeted staff wages into the project budget to further incentivize students (See Budget and Budget Justification for more details. A quote from IBCCES is provided in Supplemental Document 2).

PI Barraclough will monitor training completion dates, attendance data, and visitor satisfaction surveys to track our effectiveness, efficiency, quality, and timeliness. **Effectiveness** will be measured using current and historical attendance data to determine how much attendance increases after CAC designation and how often sensory kits are used by visitors. Satisfaction surveys will assess how well we meet visitor needs. **Efficiency** will be measured by comparison of project expenditures against the submitted Schedule of Completion. **Quality** will be measured through visitor satisfaction surveys and continued monitoring of attendance and sensory kit loans beyond the project completion date. A measure of our **Timeliness** will come from monitoring activity completion dates against the proposed Schedule of Completion. Further details regarding our performance are provided in the submitted Performance Measures document.

Project Results

Becoming a Certified Autism Center would enhance Edelman Planetarium's inclusivity and hospitality, unlocking marketing advantages offered by IBCCES. By acquiring the CAC designation, we can offer educational and entertainment experiences tailored for a historically overlooked market. CAC designation is valid for two years and can be renewed, provided that a minimum of 80% of guest-facing staff are autism certified, ensuring the community continues to benefit long after project completion. Empowering staff to handle visitor needs allows us to fulfill our mission and strategic plan while furthering the goals of the IMLS Inspire Grants for Small Museums.



Reaching New Heights: Making the Edelman Planetarium More Inclusive

Schedule of Completion

September 1, 2024 - August 31, 2025

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug
Contract with IBCCES	█											
Key Personnel Training		█	█	█	█							
Student Educator Training				█	█	█	█					
IBCCES On-Site Visit							█					
Purchase Materials For Sensory Kits								█	█			
Market CAC Designation								█	█	█	█	█
CAC Program Implementation										█	█	█

Performance Measure	Data We Will Collect (e.g., counts, costs, weights, volumes, temperatures, percentages, hours, observations, opinions, feelings)	Source of Our Data (e.g., members of the target group, project staff, stakeholders, internal/external documents, recording devices, databases)	Method We Will Use (e.g., survey, questionnaire, interview, focus group, informal discussion, observation, assessment, document analysis)	Schedule (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually, beginning/end)
<p>Effectiveness: The extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results</p>	<p>Measure 1: At the end of each quarter, using observation and attendance data, we will determine how many times sensory kits have been used by visitors.</p> <p>Measure 2: At the end of the project, using current and historical attendance data, we will calculate how much, if any, attendance has increased since becoming a Certified Autism Center.</p> <p>Measure 3: Using surveys at the end of the project year, we will assess how well we meet visitor needs.</p>			
<p>Efficiency: How well resources (e.g., funds, expertise, time) are used and costs are minimized while generating maximum value for the target group</p>	<p>Measure 1: Each quarter, we will check our expenditures compared to our proposed Schedule of Completion.</p> <p>Measure 2: At the end of the project year, we will calculate our expenditures for sensory backpacks on a per-person-served basis.</p>			

<p>Quality: How well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group</p>	<p>Measure 1: At the beginning, mid-point, and end of the project, we will administer a satisfaction survey to every 5th visitor.</p> <p>Measure 2: Beyond the project completion date, we will continue monitoring the number of sensory kits and sensory cards visitors use.</p>
<p>Timeliness: The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the proposed timeframe</p>	<p>Measure 1: Every quarter, the Principal Investigator will monitor activity completion dates compared to the proposed Schedule of Completion.</p> <p>Measure 2: Planetarium full- and part-time staff will report their progress towards completing training every month.</p>