

Stephen H. Hart Research Center's Co-Created Model for Community Collections

History Colorado (HC) is requesting a project grant for \$248,220 to support History Colorado's Stephen H. Hart Research Center's development of a co-created model for traditional archives to address the priorities and needs of underrepresented communities to interpret, preserve, and make accessible their own historical past. As a contribution to the shift of the paradigm of archival work from custodianship to shared stewardship (Cook, 2013)¹, this project will produce a replicable framework for the direct involvement of communities in archival work. The project touches on important issues concerning the role of archival work in the memory and identity processes of marginalized communities and how archival institutions can support these processes.

The Research Center serves as the primary access point of the History Colorado archives--a 15 million+ item collection that serves over 5,000 people each year. A priority of the Research Center, in line with History Colorado's strategic plan, is to provide access to an inclusive collection that reflects a more robust and accurate representation of the diverse communities that call Colorado home. The Research Center will work with the Museum of Memory (MoM), HC's community-based public memory initiative, to develop and pilot a replicable model for shared stewardship. Ultimately, the model will produce a toolkit of resources for archivists and communities to initiate shared stewardship, spark meaningful collaborations, and maintain long-term community dialogue and access, aligning with the Community Catalyst principles and goals.

Statement of National Need

Underrepresented communities have made a national cry for authorship and control over how their stories and traditions are represented and interpreted in traditional archives. The current socio-political environment, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed the need for marginalized and unheard communities to document their past in their own terms and to engage in self-representation and memory work as a means for empowerment and social justice activism. A collaborative approach between the archival standards and practices of traditional archives and community needs is required for institutions to meet the demands of this important historical moment of social change.

Engaging in community outreach is not enough. The boundary between community and traditional archives needs to be critically examined: How can traditional archival work inject community-centered values into their practices? How can we reconceive of the relationship between the repository and the community authors, such that these two are not dichotomous but as interdependent? How to collaborate with the community to challenge the assumption that community and traditional archives are in antagonistic positions? To answer these questions, systemic change in archival and community work is needed. Efforts toward public engagement need to be accompanied with changing attitudes toward how traditional archives might work alongside communities. While community-based archives have already covered a lot of ground on this journey, traditional archives still need more tools to orient archival work towards the community in a sustainable and equitable manner.

This challenge is not unique in traditional archives and is also a challenge for the Research Center. We will co-develop and pilot a model that provides systemic change for community engagement by working with MoM's neighborhood memory project participants. Collection work from these community-led projects,

¹Cook, T. (2013). "Evidence, memory, identity, and community; four shifting archival paradigms". *Archival Science* 13 (2-3): 95-120.

conducted from 2015 to 2020 in five predominantly immigrant, Latino, and low-income communities in rural Southern Colorado, will serve as the foundation for the co-created model development. MoM projects are rooted in each community's desire to speak to their own experiences and identify what is of enduring value to them. MoM projects are aligned with health equity efforts led by resident teams with whom we partner, addressing intersections among memory, place, the social determinants of health and community wellbeing.

Project Design

Under the direction of the Museum of Memory Manager, Maria Islas-Lopez, Ph.D., and with the Research Center staff, we will partner with regional Hispanic Serving Institutions, HC Community Museums, MoM participants, and the State History Council to build and refine the model.

Year 1. 1) Hire Community/Diversity fellows; 2) Host community discovery sessions that include learning conversations and workshops to establish a co-determined framework that outlines roles and responsibilities, resources, tasks, and other protocols; 3) Establish a framework using the preservation and access tasks and objectives of MoM and the Research Center to establish roles and responsibilities and collaborative workflows.

Year 2. 1) Co-create the systems for preservation, interpretation, and access to community collections; 2) Pilot the joint implementation of the developed framework with the MoM communities' collections; 3) Create participatory assessment tools for improving the framework; 4) Co-design a resource toolkit with MoM communities and partners to ensure alignment with community priorities.

Year 3. 1) Complete elements of the framework and a sharable resource toolkit; 2) Implement framework and workflows for roles within History Colorado as a collaborator, preservation steward, and access point for community collections and knowledge; 3) Share the model that includes framework and toolkit with national partners.

Diversity Plan

History Colorado's MoM conducts community-based memory projects led by underserved and marginalized Colorado communities historically silenced by systems of oppression and inequality. The Diversity Fellowships will be hired from within the MoM communities to facilitate an authentic communication connection between the communities and the Research Center.

National Impact

This project will advance best practices by eliminating boundaries between communities and traditional archives. It will enhance community relationships and better serve stewardship needs for collections. The impacts on communities can be scaled for resounding impact on national levels, including healing from historical traumas, better health outcomes due to deeper connections between community members, and individual empowerment to engage in historical authorship, activism, and memory work. Across the nation, this project will improve the ability of traditional archives to reflect their communities and different ways of thinking and become trusted community repositories through collaborative authority, planning, social engagement, and public history. Additionally, the toolkit and process framework can be used to guide other institutions and communities in similar work.

Budget Summary

We request from IMLS a total budget of \$248,220 over a 3 year period (9/1/21-8/31/24). This includes \$198,576 for direct costs and \$49,644 for indirect costs (25% federal negotiated rate). Expenses include \$88,374 for salaries and benefits of History Colorado staff, \$17,000 for interstate travel and conferences, \$75,000 for two diversity fellowships, and \$18,202 for supplies and materials.