



Museums Empowered

Sample Application ME-256185-OMS-24
Project Category: Diversity and Inclusion

New Bedford Whaling Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$164,638
Amount of cost share:	\$213,990

The New Bedford Whaling Museum will develop and implement a training program to increase cultural competency of museum volunteers and improve their ability to welcome and engage all visitors. Project activities will include an assessment of current volunteer policies and procedures, establishing a resource library, diversifying volunteer recruitment, and creating a sustainable training model that includes evaluation and professional growth. The project will generate a comprehensive training program that will support an expanded corps of volunteers with enhanced knowledge and skills, who can deliver inclusive and equitable services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities.

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.

New Bedford Whaling Museum

A New Era of Service: Increasing Cultural Competency by Building a Culture of Continual Learning.

The New Bedford Whaling Museum (NBWM) is requesting \$165,638 in support of the project *A New Era of Service: Increasing Cultural Competency by Building a Culture of Continual Learning*. The NBWM will develop and implement a new professional development program to increase cultural competency of museum volunteers, improve their ability to welcome and engage all visitors, and enhance the relevancy of guided programs for students, adults, and the general public. Project activities include auditing volunteer policies and procedures, establishing a resource library, implementing a flexible structure of volunteering, diversifying volunteer recruitment, developing a culture of evaluation and ongoing professional development, and creating a sustainable model of volunteer training. The project will generate a comprehensive training program to support a corps of diverse volunteers by enhancing their knowledge and skills and expanding their capacity to welcome and engage visitors of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities.

Project Justification

This project will address *Goal 2, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Objective 2.1* by supporting volunteers, who act as unpaid museum staff, in providing inclusive and equitable services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities. New training and learning opportunities will increase cultural competency of the museum's volunteer tour guides and enhance relevancy of the volunteer-led museum tours.

The NBWM's Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion (DEAI) work is woven into our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan with the priorities to *Welcome, Engage, Steward and Thrive*. This project will contribute to the important progress on several objectives closely tied to ongoing DEAI work:

- Create a space and feeling that actively invites all visitors to participate in a dynamic, customized, engaging experience
- Represent our community and express that through a commitment to DEAI
- Create inclusive, accessible, and exciting opportunities and programs for all audiences and our community
- Enrich and diversify public understanding of our stories through scholarship and research
- Assess our Narratives, History, and Collections through lens of DEAI
- Grow the capacity and diversity of the team: staff, volunteers, and board

Since the development of the strategic plan, the museum has prioritized DEAI work at the staff, board, and volunteer levels. As part of this work, the museum engaged Fletcher Consulting to partner on our DEAI efforts. They have been delivering diversity, equity and inclusion services since 2006. The firm demonstrated an expertise in DEI work and they understand the unique opportunities and challenges that museums face. In 2021, Fletcher Consulting conducted a series of DEI workshops for museum board members, staff and volunteers related to "The Impact of Unconscious Bias." In addition, the museum has conducted "Understanding Access: The Basics" training with access consultants Maria Cabrera and Hannah Goodwin for volunteers and staff. In 2022, Fletcher Consulting worked with a staff-level DEAI Task Force to draft a DEAI vision statement and develop a DEAI action plan. And in 2023, they conducted two interactive workshops for the Board of Trustees about promoting inclusion and recognizing and disrupting microaggressions. All of this work shows the museum's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion on all levels of board, staff and volunteers. This project builds on all of these steps and will continue to advance the museum's strategic plan specifically by improving cultural competency of front-facing volunteers to welcome and engage all visitors.

NBWM has relied on the generosity of volunteers through much of the museum's history, from its founding as part of the Old Dartmouth Historical Society in 1903 to the present. Our dedicated corps of 100+ active volunteers leads all regularly scheduled guided tours for school groups and the general public. Prior to pandemic disruptions, 120 volunteers provided over 18,500 hours of volunteer service in 2019, leading education programs, giving daily highlights tours, transcribing whaling logbooks, and assisting with digitization projects. In 2023, the Volunteer Council is celebrating its 50th anniversary as a formalized group of volunteers, with an organized structure of officers, work committees, monthly meetings and bylaws, and with a tradition of service and dedication to the museum. The volunteers exponentially increase the work of the Museum Learning division and the two educators (1.6 FTE) who schedule school programs, coordinate guided tours, and oversee museum learning programs. The NBWM is grateful for the volunteers' time, talents and contributions, and clearly could not serve over 80,000 annual visitors without their assistance.

According to the Volunteer Council bylaws, members must complete an introductory course of training led by the Museum Learning staff. A docent from the first class in 1973 described the volunteer group as mostly "stay-at-home mothers" who participated in the 12-week training program to prepare for the "respectable work of escorting school groups through the museum." Over the decades, museum staff has recruited new volunteers and run the annual training program. In recent years, volunteers-in-training have learned content that prepared them to talk about Yankee whaling and

other whaling cultures, scrimshaw, the settlement of the Old Dartmouth region, whale biology and ocean conservation. Potential tour guides learned a little about child development and tour techniques and then shadowed experienced guides to learn the school programs and standard tours. This model has been in place for many years, but the focus on initial training has not grown into a culture of continuing education or professional development. By tradition, only one Volunteer Council meeting a year has been dedicated to a museum-led continuing education session. As a group, volunteers are interested in new exhibits and will attend curator tours and exhibit openings, but overall, many volunteers believe that training on content and techniques should only be required for new volunteers.

The NWBM educators have identified this lack of interest in continuing education as a challenge. In 2018, an audit of school tours noted opportunities for improvements in the volunteer program, specifically training on “instructional moves” to shift field trip experiences towards place-based and inquiry-based learning, and a need for evaluation of school program tour guides. The consultant noted that “docents have enough materials and experience to provide a two-hour lecture tour, but they don’t have what it takes to provide a high quality student experience” and proceeded to recommend that the museum “build a docent culture where feedback is welcomed and improvement is celebrated.” At that time, the report also noted dead ends, recognizing that the museum was not yet ready to address the culture of the volunteers and their lack of interest in “better teaching” and unable to create a program of “better, more regular professional development” for volunteers that would ultimately improve the experience of countless visitors.

The introduction of the museum’s 2020-25 strategic plan, with its focus on DEAI, and pandemic disruptions of museum programs helped spark changes in guided tours. In 2021, museum staff discontinued old tours and developed two new hands-on, interactive programs, one specifically designed to include more diverse stories and perspectives related to the history of the region. However, the rollout of these programs was hampered by a lack of comprehensive continuing education and re-training for volunteers in general. For volunteers who have been used to old programs and old didactic methods of giving tours, the increased focus on diversity and inclusion in both tour content and methodology has been a difficult change. In a series of listening sessions in the summer of 2023, some volunteers admitted they did not feel comfortable talking about Paul Cuffe, a Black and Wampanoag whaling captain and abolitionist. And despite a virtual training session by a Wampanoag educator, some tour guides still use language that situates local Indigenous inhabitants only in the past. Other volunteers have made efforts to give more inclusive tours. Recently, a small group created a women’s history tour to elevate untold stories of women in whaling and in local history. Despite the volunteers’ intentions, staff noted that the tour narrative essentialized women’s roles which contributed to stereotypes rather than centering women’s important contributions to local history or highlighting women’s history-related objects in the galleries. This development of the tour shows that volunteers are interested in including more diverse stories, but that many currently do not have the skills or cultural competence to do so.

Visitors to the museum have also identified the need for additional changes in volunteer-led tours. Overall, guided tours for students, adult groups, and the general public are a popular option for visitor engagement. The museum collects feedback from teachers and tour groups about their experiences, although there is currently no official method of evaluation for the daily volunteer-led highlights tours. A review of these evaluations shows some positive points. In the last school year, 60% of survey respondents said the overall quality of the program was excellent and 82% said the program was very relevant to curriculum standards. But teachers also raised issues when volunteers did not meet the needs of all students. One teacher reported a volunteer who used degrading methods to get the attention of students with language-based learning differences and attentional difficulties. Another teacher responded that some students felt uncomfortable with the gender assumptions made by a tour guide. General visitors on daily highlights tours occasionally complain about volunteers who lead overly long tours and seem focused on the content they want to share rather than focused on the experience of visitors. The previous emphasis on content over technique in volunteer training has led to volunteer tour guides prioritizing facts and information over the visitor experience.

Although all of these incidents highlight isolated occurrences, many students, teachers, and other visitors may not feel comfortable reporting complaints about their guided experiences. They may just drop off tours or leave the museum not feeling welcome or engaged – and not returning in the future. As noted in the 2018 audit of school programs, “Perhaps right now a more professional volunteer staff is a ‘nice to have,’ but some day it may be a crucial ingredient in attracting visitors.” With our current strategic plan and focus on DEAI and welcoming and engaging all visitors, increasing the cultural competency of volunteers is crucial and needed now.

In the last 50 years, there has been a shift in the composition of the volunteer corps, from an early reliance on recruiting “stay-at-home mothers” to a current reliance on older retirees, some of whom are retired teachers, but others who come from a variety of backgrounds. Overall, there is a discrepancy between the demographics of the volunteer corps and the demographics of the students the museum serves from the immediate surrounding area. According to the 2018 audit, 94% of respondents identified as white ($n=69$) and 88% had a four-year college degree or higher. In comparison, 58% of the population of New Bedford identifies as white and 17% of residents have a four-year college degree or higher. In the survey, 68% of the volunteers identified as women and 95% were age 60 and older. Although the most recent training class included some younger volunteers and some who identify as Black, the museum needs to do more to recruit and retain volunteers who represent the community in which the museum is located in order to increase relevancy of tours.

Even though the museum’s DEAI action plan requires DEAI training for new and existing volunteers starting in 2024, this desire for increased learning opportunities is not just coming from museum staff. The volunteers themselves have expressed an interest in more trainings to increase their knowledge and skills. In a recent survey, volunteers ($n=45$) indicated that they wanted to learn more about Wampanoag people in history (44%) and Wampanoag people and the local Indigenous community today (38%). Volunteers also indicated that increased knowledge of women’s history, Black whaling, and immigration to New Bedford would contribute to their work at the museum. When asked about skills, volunteers expressed an interest in learning more about tour techniques (43%), engaging visitors with special needs (38%), and safety and security in the museum (36%). As part of the museum’s commitment to DEAI, some volunteers have attended new trainings in recent years. In 2021, approximately half of the volunteer corps participated in two trainings, one focused on unconscious bias and the other focused on accessibility in the museum. These online trainings took place at a time when some volunteers were still on a pandemic-related break from museum activities. In 2023, front-facing volunteers and staff are actively engaged in trainings through KultureCity to increase awareness of visitors with sensory needs and prepare the museum to be more sensory inclusive. These trainings show that the volunteer program is making small steps towards better understanding and serving all visitors, but the need still exists for a comprehensive professional development program for both new and existing volunteers.

The 100+ current active volunteers are the target group for the initial professional development training. The volunteers represent a variety of experience levels and interests. Some have joined the volunteer corps in recent years while others have been here for over 25 years. The target group has been involved in the planning through a series of listening sessions, program committee meetings, and surveys. Currently, the Associate Director of Museum Learning works directly with the volunteers and is the staff liaison to the Volunteer Council. In the 50 years of the Council’s existence, they have developed traditions and a culture of independence, while also supporting the museum with their time and talents. There have been a lot of changes in the museum in recent years, starting with a new mission and strategic plan. These changes were introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the museum’s closure and disruption of volunteer schedules made it difficult to make sure that all volunteers received the same updates. In addition, as part of a recent restructuring, what was previously the Education and Public Programs Department has shifted. Now, the Museum Learning team, including volunteers, is part of the Curatorial and Museum Learning Department which has opened new opportunities to increase relevancy of programs and diversity of content on an institutional level, aligning the work of curators, educators and volunteers. This shift has also coincided with staff turnover and a need to rebuild patterns and trust.

In the summer of 2023, the Associate Director of Museum Learning conducted a series of 6 listening sessions with 49 attendees, hearing from almost half of the active volunteers, about what is working well and what can be improved for the future. These sessions helped staff learn about the history and culture of the volunteer program and were an opportunity for volunteers to feel and be heard. The listening sessions led to the creation of smaller program committees, one focused on school tours and the other on guided tours for adults and general visitors. These committees provide opportunities for volunteers to communicate with staff, share ideas with each other, and allow volunteers to act as ambassadors for change within the larger group. Weekly survey questions in the volunteer lounge have also worked to gather information about the program and build a culture of feedback and trust, despite some hesitation on the part of volunteers to respond, as they wondered what the responses would be used for. Growing trust and improved communication between staff and volunteers has helped calm concerns and has laid the groundwork for future changes to the volunteer program. The current and past leadership of the Volunteer Council have expressed full support for this project (Supportingdoc1).

There are two levels of beneficiaries of this project. The primary beneficiaries are the volunteers. Through improved professional development and training, they will be better prepared to engage all visitors and uphold the mission of the museum. Increased skills and knowledge will help them feel more confident talking about difficult topics, more

comfortable with diversity and inclusion, and better prepared to give engaging tours while welcoming all visitors. With changes to the standard course of training and increased flexibility in structure, the volunteer program will open up to a larger and more diverse group of community members. An increased diversity of perspectives and talents will reinvigorate the program and offer rewarding opportunities for people to contribute in ways that balance the needs of volunteers with the needs of the museum. The secondary beneficiaries are the visitors to the museum, including school groups and the visiting public. Part of the museum's commitment to DEAI is to better serve our current and growing audience, ensuring that students and local community members feel welcome and engaged at the museum. Through increased training of current and future volunteers who are front-facing representatives and who interact with a wide variety of visitors, the museum will be able to provide a relevant and truly visitor-centered experience through all steps of the visitation process.

Project Work Plan

As part of NBWM's commitment to DEAI, and prior to the start of the project period, the museum will establish a Volunteer DEAI Committee with self-selected representatives from each of the volunteer days. This structure has worked with other volunteer committees and allows individuals to contribute to projects that match their interests while also building a trusted network amongst the larger group of volunteers. This committee will begin work in early 2024 by reevaluating the women's history tour, and start to build a working group where NBWM staff and volunteers combine forces to address institutional DEAI goals. The committee will also help craft and administer a survey of active volunteers to provide a benchmark of current demographics, attitudes, and understandings of DEAI. Throughout the project, the Volunteer DEAI Committee will partner with staff to provide direction and support through a potentially difficult, but crucially important, transformation of the volunteer program.

The project will officially start with an assessment of the volunteer program's bylaws, handbook, and standard operating procedures through a DEAI lens. This will be a joint process with staff and volunteers as the Volunteer Council needs to vote on changes to the bylaws, staff is responsible for updating the handbook, and volunteers write the standard operating procedures with input from staff. Some areas of focus for the audit will be use of gender inclusive language, evaluation of the definition of volunteer service and level of commitment, and establishment of goals and procedures for recruitment of new volunteers. A two-thirds majority of Council membership is needed to approve bylaw changes, so the Volunteer DEAI Committee will be important in building support for changes that define the Volunteer Council and challenge long-standing traditions and culture. For example, the current bylaws state that Volunteer Council members must commit to a minimum service of three-years, which could be a barrier to attracting volunteers of a wide variety of ages and backgrounds. The updating of organizational documents and procedures will contribute to a more flexible volunteer program and lay the groundwork for recruiting a more diverse and inclusive volunteer corps for the future.

Another foundational activity will be to develop a library of resources to support volunteers and staff related to DEAI goals and improved training. At the present time, the volunteer library is comprised of books that focus on traditional narratives such as Yankee whaling and settler colonial perspectives of local history. New and used materials are typically added by donation and without an overall strategy of supporting volunteer service and knowledge. The volunteer library is lacking in resources about underrepresented people in history and materials that support the broadening focus of the museum. Similarly, the Museum Learning library and volunteer library are lacking in resources about DEAI, tour techniques, museum learning theory, and other materials that can support a modern and robust volunteer training program. At the start of the project, staff will purchase resources that will be available for individual and community learning. Possible titles include updated interpretations like *Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Philip's War* and recent publications like *From Small Wins to Sweeping Change: Working Together to Foster Equity, Inclusion, and Antiracism in Museums*. As the project progresses, staff and volunteers will have opportunities to purchase additional resources to fill in gaps or newly determined areas of need. A modern and growing volunteer library will be used in trainings and added to the list of volunteer benefits to encourage active engagement with these new resources.

The next step in the project will be to establish a program of continuing education for existing volunteers. The focus of the professional development will be increasing the cultural competency of volunteers to interact with all museum visitors. The continuing education workshops will be offered on a quarterly basis, with some sessions led by outside consultants and other led by staff from a variety of museum departments. Depending on arrangements with consultants, the workshops may be recorded and/or presented as hybrid workshops to make the learning opportunities available to all volunteers regardless of schedule and outside commitments. In order to build a new culture of continued learning, volunteers will be required to attend DEAI trainings to ensure that all representatives of the museum share common knowledge and abilities to welcome and engage individuals with disabilities and visitors of diverse geographical, cultural,

and socioeconomic backgrounds. At the same time, staff will solicit feedback from volunteers about the training in order to evaluate the impact, to measure the efficiency, and to maintain communication during this transformative process.

Outside consultants will be important partners in the training process. The NBWM will continue to work with Fletcher Consulting, who already have a track record of providing thoughtful training to volunteers, staff and trustees, and who provide workshops on topics like *Promoting Inclusion* and *Navigating Unconscious Bias*. Pending funding, staff will reach out to other area consultants to schedule training sessions about topics like LGBTQIA+ inclusion, talking about difficult topics, and creating accessible museum experiences. Staff will address topics like changing interpretations and multiple perspectives in museum exhibits, museum learning theory and tour techniques, and creating engaging museum experiences. Staff will also leverage additional resources, like the museum's Employee Assistance Program, which provides training in customer service, flexibility and adaptability at work, and mentoring.

Some existing volunteers may not adapt well to the new methodology or fully embrace the museum's commitment to DEAI. Although the museum values the service of all volunteers, staff recognizes that the transformation of the program may lead some volunteers to retire, creating a higher attrition rate than normal. In order to attract more volunteers and to diversify the volunteer corps in general, staff will work to build community connections and recruit volunteers of a variety of ages, backgrounds, and lived experiences. Museum staff will attend events like cultural festivals, parades, and networking opportunities to build connections between the museum and New Bedford's diverse communities. Adding to museum-wide efforts to connect in and out of the building, staff and volunteers will have recruitment tables at local events and advertise through social media and area radio stations. Changes in the structure of the volunteer program will allow for more flexible schedules that welcome a variety of volunteers beyond retirees with set schedules.

Another step in the project is the revision of the current volunteer training program, starting with an assessment of existing training materials that focus heavily on content knowledge and provide little instruction on tour techniques and skills necessary to lead engaging and relevant tours. Museum staff will create a new syllabus focused on visitor-centered engagement, with inclusive content, and materials from the series of DEAI continuing education classes. Staff will use culturally responsive teaching methods and model best practices in tour techniques and adult education. In early spring 2025, the first round of training for new volunteers will serve as a pilot project for the new syllabus and training materials. After new volunteers have completed the initial training and have started giving tours, staff will evaluate the success of new training materials and finalize the syllabus and resource list for an initial two-year cycle. During the next round of training in early fall 2025, staff will work with Digital Engagement colleagues to record the training sessions for the volunteer website. These recordings will increase flexibility of the training sessions, allowing potential volunteers to participate on their schedule. Having recorded training sessions will also increase sustainability of the volunteer program by enhancing staff's ability to coordinate more than one volunteer training in each calendar year. However, staff will also commit to reviewing the training materials through a DEAI lens every two years to make sure the training content, resources, and methodology remain current and incorporate best practices.

Starting with the new training class, staff will introduce a process of peer evaluation, developing a new culture that uses feedback to celebrate success and to identify areas for change. Although the museum has a tradition of collecting feedback from schools about guided programs, the evaluation responses have not been anonymous which tends to gather positive responses and celebrates success, but does not encourage critical responses. Furthermore, the museum has not had a process for evaluating any tour guide on an individual basis. And yet the volunteer tour guides provide a vast majority of all facilitated visitor experiences, making evaluation a crucial part to maintaining quality and ensuring the museum is meeting DEAI goals and welcoming all visitors. Having only two staff positions and 100+ active volunteers makes introducing a process of individual evaluations a challenge. Introducing a structure for peer evaluation with new tour guides will allow for piloting the procedure before expanding the process to the entire volunteer corps in year 2.

One of the strengths of the volunteer program is the loyalty of volunteers and the sense of camaraderie that has formed with the cohorts because of the social nature of volunteering at the museum. Part of the success of this project relies on the dedication of volunteers and their love of the museum and interacting with visitors. During each year of the project, the museum will organize a field trip for volunteers, as a celebration for the hard work of the transformation, as an opportunity for continued learning, and as a social outing. One potential field trip location is the Peabody Essex Museum, which shares a similar institutional history to NBWM and a strong commitment to DEAI.

As a culmination to the two-year project, NBWM staff and volunteers will reflect on the success and challenges of transforming a large volunteer program while embedding a culture of continuing education and a commitment to DEAI. Internally, staff will re-administer the survey that measured demographics, attitudes and understandings of DEAI at the beginning of the project and compare results. Externally, the museum will organize a hybrid symposium to share results with community organizations and museums who are facing similar challenges. Offering the symposium both in-person and online will expand the potential audience and allow for attendees to participate in a way that best meets their needs.

The NBWM recognizes the need for transforming the existing volunteer program is crucial but the process is difficult. The 2018 audit of education programs revealed a long-standing resistance to change. Recent listening sessions show that aversion still exists, even as the museum has taken steps towards incorporating trainings at all levels as part of the commitment to DEAI. Institution-wide work since 2020 has helped volunteers acknowledge the need for change. For example, volunteers accepted that a popular school program in which students dressed in costumes to represent a whaling voyage around the world needed to stop because of a global pandemic. Now many volunteers accept that the program will not return because the activities involved cultural appropriation. There is still a need to get buy-in from all volunteers, but the museum staff is already working on building trust through listening sessions, improving communications, developing strategic alliances with the Volunteer Council executive committee, all working towards building the groundwork for the transformation. The comprehensive training program for new and existing volunteers will be grounded in theory and best practices for DEAI, tours, and adult education. Staff realizes that some volunteers may decide to retire if they are not up to the challenge of reflection and changing ways to be more inclusive and flexible. The concurrent focus on recruiting and training new volunteers while retraining existing volunteers will help maintain overall capacity. Staff is also prepared to adapt existing programs as needed if there is a large number of retirements. But this transformation of the volunteer program is crucial and will be even more successful with a committed group of volunteers rather than focusing on volunteers who are resistant or set in their old ways. Another potential risk is that the museum has trouble attracting a new and more diverse volunteer corps. But the museum's commitment to DEAI on all levels is helping to build more bridges into the community and changing the impression of the museum within the community. Staff has faith that volunteers share the museum's commitment to DEAI and to creating a culture of continual learning. As one volunteer recently explained: *I volunteer at NBWM for a variety of reasons. Firstly, I am a lifelong learner. Secondly, I love to share our importance to the visitors. Thirdly, each tour results with different learning experiences for our guests as well as for my personal growth. I have finished 17 years as a docent and hopefully will be able to do 17 more.*

The project will be led by Victoria Hughes, Associate Director of Museum Learning. With over 20 years' experience working in museum education and coordinating volunteers, Victoria has the capability and the understanding to guide the transformation of the volunteer program and oversee the development of the comprehensive program of continuing education. Naomi Slipp, Chief Curator & Director of Museum Learning will provide oversight and help build community connections. Emily Reinl, Education Assistant and staff DEAI committee member, will support the project with assistance in communicating with volunteers, scheduling trainings, and helping to coordinate the symposium in 2026 to share out project results. Michael Lapidés, Director of Digital Initiatives and staff DEAI committee leader, and Nathan Silveira, Digital Engagement Associate, will support digital needs of the project, including recording training sessions for the volunteer website and coordinating the technology for the hybrid symposium. Drew Furtado, Marketing Manager, will facilitate community outreach and volunteer recruitment through marketing, social media, and design work. The Volunteer Council Executive Committee and the Volunteer DEAI Committee will also be crucial in leading by example and getting fellow volunteers to commit to this important project.

NBWM staff will prioritize open communication and will continue to use small surveys to measure change over time, to celebrate success, and find opportunities for growth. Staff will collect feedback from volunteers and program participants, including teachers, students, and general visitors. The Volunteer Council leadership has committed to the project and will encourage active participation from colleagues to ensure the future of the volunteer program. Volunteers will be able to support and learn from each other through the new structure of peer evaluation and mentoring. The project will create a variety of paths for continuing education, including in-person and recorded sessions, prioritizing flexibility in scheduling balanced with a sense of responsibility. A focus on recruitment of a more diverse volunteer corps will strengthen the program by adding new energy and multiple perspectives, increasing rewarding interactions with visitors of all ages.

Museum Learning staff and volunteers will contribute significant time to this internal project. The museum will rely on the expertise of paid consultants to support continued DEAI work and provide necessary trainings. Administrative support includes the use of museum spaces for trainings and the symposium, use of museum equipment for recordings, and use of

the museum's websites for disseminating information. The museum will also purchase consumable resources like binders and copy paper to use in trainings, along with lasting resources like books for the volunteer library.

Staff will track progress toward achieving intended results through surveys, both internal to track volunteers' changing attitudes and abilities, and external to gather feedback from participants of volunteer-led programs. The museum will track the number of active volunteers, including the number of new recruits and the diversity of the volunteer corps. At the end of two years, the museum anticipates having approximately 120 active volunteers who have increased cultural competency and a commitment to create visitor-centered experiences while welcoming and engaging all visitors.

Project Results

This project will generate a comprehensive and sustainable program of volunteer training to support a corps of diverse volunteers who have increased cultural competency to welcome and engage all visitors, including students from the community and general visitors. The new culture of professional development, evaluation, and continual learning will contribute to the life-long learning of individual volunteers and to their success as leaders of programs at the museum. A flexible and diverse volunteer corps that more closely matches the demographics of New Bedford will transform the Volunteer Council and prepare the program for a new era of success and the next 50 years of service. By activating its commitment to DEAI, the NBWM will move forward towards fulfilling strategic plan goals and increasing visitor satisfaction. Externally, the increased cultural competency of volunteers will dramatically improve volunteer-led programs and contribute to the relevancy of guided programs for all visitors. Students from New Bedford and beyond will be able to see themselves in the museum, hear their stories in the guided tours, and feel a connection to the museum and the history and future of the area. More teachers will report that programs are relevant to the curriculum and to the students themselves. All members of the community will feel welcome in the museum because front-facing volunteers will enhance the work of staff and board to create inclusive, accessible, and relevant opportunities and programs.

As a result of this project, the target audience of current and new volunteers will report an increase in their knowledge of diverse stories and perspectives related to museum content and local history, and an expansion of their understanding of the importance of diversity and inclusion, including how to disrupt unconscious bias and how to elevate underrepresented histories. The volunteers will also improve their skills in leading interactive, inquiry-based tours for students and providing accessible and engaging tours for all visitors. Volunteers will report feeling more comfortable and confident talking about difficult topics and better able to respond to visitors with special needs. By creating a new culture of continual learning and embracing the use of feedback to celebrate success and uncover opportunities for improvement, volunteers will become more willing to engage in training sessions and more likely to ask for and accept feedback. All of these changes in the target group will build the capacity of museum volunteers to interact with visitors of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities in a welcoming and inclusive manner, thereby decreasing the number of complaints from visitors.

The project will also result in tangible products, including updated Volunteer Council bylaws and foundational documents, a library of DEAI and tour-related resources for staff and volunteers, and a new syllabus and training materials for upcoming volunteer classes. These new materials will be used internally and shared with others in the non-profit and museum community at the end-of-project symposium. Resources will also be collected and shared on the volunteer website. Printed marketing materials and banners will be used at community events during and after this project.

The NBWM Volunteer Council has served the museum for the last 50 years, and this project will prepare the volunteers to continue to contribute to the museum in meaningful ways for the future. The project will leverage the existing structure of the Volunteer Council to help the entire volunteer corps embrace a new culture of continual learning. Implementing a format for peer evaluation with new volunteers first will help build a new tradition of sharing feedback and learning together that will become embedded into the program and expand the capacity of the museum's small staff to provide feedback to the 100+ volunteers. Adding to the resource library and training materials on the volunteer website will enable volunteers to revisit training sessions and take control of their own learning. Developing a comprehensive training program for new volunteers, complete with recorded training materials, will allow for flexibility in recruiting and training new volunteers, improving the experience for both staff and potential volunteers, and adding to the sustainability of the volunteer program. Revising the operating documents of the Volunteer Council will create a more flexible and welcoming program that will contribute to the long-term strength of the organization. Ultimately, the project will embed the museum's commitment to DEAI in the volunteer program which will enhance the sustainability of the project. And providing better, more welcoming and engaging experiences for visitors of all backgrounds and abilities will improve the experience of museum visitors and contribute to the viability, success, and relevancy of the museum.

New Bedford Whaling Museum: A New Era of Service: Increasing Cultural Competency by Building a Culture of Continual Learning

Schedule of Completion (page 1)

Year 1 - September 2024-August 2025	pre-work	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Responsibility
Establish Volunteer DEAI Committee; develop survey of demographics, attitudes, DEAI awareness														Volunteers, AD Mus Learn
Quarterly Volunteer DEAI Committee meetings to guide project and maintain communication														AD Mus Learn, Vol DEAI Comm
Audit volunteer program structure thru DEAI lens, including bylaws, handbook, and procedures														AD Mus Lrn, Vol Con Exec Co
Work with Volunteer Council Executive Committee to update bylaws, handbook, and procedures														AD Mus Lrn, Vol Con Exec Co
Develop library of DEAI resources & training materials to support individual & community learning														AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Vols
Finalize consultant list and schedule DEAI trainings														AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Cnslts
Hold training sessions, led by consultants and staff, for DEAI, content, and techniques; evaluate sessions														AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Cnslts
Incorporate new learning into tours & visitor interactions														Current Volunteers
Build community connections thru participation and outreach at community events like parades, festivals														AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Dir ML
Recruit diverse group of new volunteers thru targeted social media and media outreach														AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Mrtk Mgr
Develop new training syllabus; pilot materials while training new volunteers; evaluate new materials														AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Vols
Establish and pilot new peer evaluation program with new volunteers; evaluate and formalize program														AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, New Vols
Lead tours for school groups and visitors; collect feedback and evaluate thru DEAI lens														Volunteers; AD Mus Lrn
Record trainings and post on volunteer website														Dir Dgtl Int; Dgtl Engt Assoc
Coordinate and lead volunteer field trip for continued learning														AD Mus Lrn, Vol DEAI Comm
End of Year 1 listening sessions and assessment, and planning for Year 2														AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Dir ML

New Bedford Whaling Museum: A New Era of Service: Increasing Cultural Competency by Building a Culture of Continual Learning

Schedule of Completion (page 2)

Year 2 - September 2025-August 2026	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Responsibility
Quarterly Volunteer DEAI Committee meetings to guide project and maintain communication													AD Mus Lrn, Vol DEAI Comm
Add to library of DEAI resources and training materials to support individual and community													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Vols
Integrate peer evaluation into standard operations													AD Mus Lrn, Volunteers
Schedule additional DEAI trainings and continuing education workshops for all volunteers													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Cnslts
Hold training sessions, led by consultants and staff, for DEAI, content, and techniques; evaluate sessions													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Cnslts
Incorporate new learning into tours & visitor interactions													Volunteers
Continue to build community connections and recruit diverse group of new volunteers													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Mrkt Mgr
Lead training series for new volunteers using updated materials and new syllabus; evaluate materials													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Vols
Mentor new volunteers to build a cohesive community and incorporate new ideas and attitudes													Volunteers
Record trainings and post on volunteer website as needed													Dir Dgtl Int; Dgtl Engt Assoc
Lead tours for school groups and visitors; collect feedback and evaluate thru DEAI lens													Volunteers; AD Mus Lrn
Plan hybrid end-of-project symposium, coordinate speakers, technology, registrations, food													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Dir ML
Hold end-of-project symposium to share learning with colleagues in non-profit & museum community													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Ast, D ML, Vols
Coordinate and lead volunteer field trip for continued learning													AD Mus Lrn, Vol DEAI Comm
Repeat survey of demographics, attitudes, DEAI awareness, compare results and celebrate successes													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Asst, Vols
Wrap up project; embrace & carry forward commitment to DEAI & culture of continual learning													AD Mus Lrn, Ed Ast, D ML, Vols