



National Leadership Grants - Museums

Sample Application MG-255708-OMS-24
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

Washington Museum Association

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$74,180
Amount of cost share:	\$106,364

The Washington Museum Association will conduct a pilot program that provides basic training in core museum competencies to individuals working in volunteer-run museums. In partnership with the Washington State Historical Society, the program will build capacity amongst Washington's smallest history organizations through a cohort-based approach, connecting them to well-established professional development opportunities offered by national organizations. The pilot will result in a sustainable model that other state museum associations, state historical societies, and heritage organizations can adapt for their own use.

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.

Project Narrative

The Washington Museum Association (WaMA) requests a \$74,180 National Leadership Grant (NLG) over a one-year period to pilot and evaluate the Volunteer Museum Learning Community (VMLC) program in partnership with the Washington State Historical Society (WSHS). This program will be a cohort-based professional development series focused on essential museum competencies and designed to specifically meet the needs of organizations with no paid staff. The goal is to build confidence and capacity amongst Washington's smallest history organizations to improve their practices to better engage with well-established professional development opportunities offered by national organizations like the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). This project aligns with *Goal 1: Champion Lifelong Learning* and *Objective 1.2: Support the training and professional development of the museum workforce.*

According to the Washington State Historical Society's 2020 Washington State Heritage Census, 60% of heritage organizations surveyed had an annual operating budget of less than \$50,000, and 64% operated with no paid staff. Data from AASLH's 2022 National Census of History Organizations confirms that Washington is typical, with 63.6% of history organizations nationwide operating on less than \$50,000 a year. Through our relationship-building with small museums in our state and in surveying the currently available professional development resources in the museum field, we have determined that this large group of museums and the volunteers who run them are currently underserved. It is our hope that VMLC can serve as a model for similar programs across the country designed to meet the needs of our nation's smallest museums to ensure they can remain relevant, better serve their communities, and thrive in perpetuity.

WaMA and WSHS know Washington's smallest, all-volunteer museums well. This is a museum community that both organizations already serve in a variety of ways. Through listening sessions and survey responses, these small museums have expressed a desire for more training and capacity-building support. They often operate with a small crew of devoted volunteers who bring with them various skills but have little or no formal museum training. Through active participation in existing free programming offered by the WSHS, these organizations have demonstrated their commitment to understanding and implementing strong museum practices,

but many have expressed a lack of confidence and/or ability to effectively engage with offerings of professional groups like AASLH or AAM. The ultimate goal for VMLC is to meet our smallest museums where they are and create an onramp to engage with these national organizations in order to further their journey toward better practices.

The Volunteer Museum Learning Community will be a 12-month program with virtual sessions held monthly, each focused on a different topic or area of museum practice. For the pilot year, we plan to serve a cohort of eight organizations from across Washington who will be invited to participate, with the only eligibility requirement being that these organizations have no full or part-time paid staff. Our goal is to create a geographically diverse cohort of peer museums with similar structures and resources. WaMA is well positioned to begin recruiting for the program, having recently completed our “Museums Connect” initiative during which we located and gathered basic information about every existing museum in Washington. This museum inventory was completed in 2023 and will be valuable for identifying currently underserved organizations.

Organizations participating in VMLC will be expected to commit at least three designated representatives who will attend all sessions, but are welcome to invite more individuals from their organization to participate. Sessions will be recorded so that participants can share the content with additional volunteers and board members from their organizations. By encouraging broad participation from within participating organizations, we hope to build a shared sense of responsibility for not only implementation of the practices introduced in the program, but also to encourage continuity of those practices over time, especially through changes in leadership. In addition to the 10 virtual sessions, VMLC will include a site visit by WaMA and WSHS staff to each participating museum. The program will culminate with participants gathering together at the annual Washington Museum Association conference, where they will participate in sessions and be recognized for their contributions to the VMLC.

The VMLC curriculum will draw on the many excellent webinars and articles readily available on core museum practices. WaMA will provide participants with videos and/or readings to review in preparation for each session, and the time together will focus on facilitated discussions, allowing cohort members to share and learn more about how these practices can be

adapted for very small museums. Each seminar will feature two presenters, a museum professional with specific expertise and a small museum practitioner with particular experience in the topic being covered who can help ground the discussion and ensure the content is accessible to museum volunteers. WaMA will host office hours in the days following the seminar and will include either the subject matter expert presenter or a museum professional with specific expertise. WaMA will also arrange and facilitate eighty-minute quarterly coaching sessions for individual organizations, which will occur in November, February, May, and August and will include either the subject matter presenter or a museum professional with specific expertise based on the need of the organization.

Considering the limited financial capacity of these smallest museums, in addition to providing the information they need to elevate their knowledge and confidence around core museum competencies, we feel that it is essential to also provide some basic tools to implement professional museum standards. Participating organizations will receive fundamental items like a data logger to collect information about the status of their HVAC system, a flatbed scanner to understand the time it takes to digitize archival materials, and emergency response kits to demonstrate the scope of various risks to their collections. The information and collected data gained through these tools can support future grant applications for projects like capital upgrades to collections storage spaces or funding for digitization projects.

VMLC will rely on robust partnerships with agencies and organizations that have particular expertise in various areas of museum practice and/or who regularly provide technical assistance to small nonprofits. The Washington State Historical Society's heritage outreach department will serve as the primary partner on VMLC and will help recruit applicants as well as advise on content, session presentations, and field trips. The WSHS heritage outreach team provides field services to all museums across Washington, including trainings, on-site consultations, and technical support, and is eager to see more offerings in the space, especially those specifically designed for volunteer-run museums. In addition to drawing on the expertise available through the WSHS heritage outreach team and other WSHS departments, WaMA will engage a variety of professional museum partners and industry experts from across the state. It will also be important to involve personnel from other all-volunteer museums around the state that are doing excellent work in various areas of practice who can represent the small museum

perspective alongside industry experts. All non-WSHS presenters will be compensated for their time.

Participation in VMLC will be provided free of charge to participating organizations. However, they will be expected to join the Washington Museum Association as an organizational member (\$50/yr) and sign up for the Washington State Historical Society's free affiliate program. These memberships will help ensure that participating organizations continue to be connected to the statewide network of museums and receive regular information about trainings, conferences, and grant opportunities in the future. Registration for the Washington Museum Association conference will be waived for three attendees from each participation organization in that year's cohort. Attendees will also receive a travel stipend for conference attendance.

The curriculum for the VMLC is intended to serve as an "onramp" to AASLH's Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPS), for which WaMA and the staff at WSHS can provide ongoing support for should organizations choose to follow up their VMLC experience with formal participation in the StEPS program. Organizations that are part of WSHS's free affiliate program receive a discount on AASLH membership and enrollment in the StEPS program.

Following the pilot year of VMLC, WaMA will conduct surveys and interviews with participating organizations to evaluate the success of their experience in the program and their confidence and ability to implement the practices they learned. This initial cohort of participants, and each subsequent cohort, will be invited to share feedback in the years following their participation as a way to determine how VMLC is impacting the health of these organizations. The curriculum will be revised annually in response to immediate participant feedback, long-range trends in participant feedback, as well as changes impacting the cultural sector in Washington. Over time, the program will be designed to continually evolve to meet the emerging needs of our smallest museums and adapt to shifts and trends in the sector more broadly.

WaMA believes museums that strive to be relevant and engaging will grow communities of supporters who are diverse and eager to step up when called upon to serve as volunteers, donors, and advocates. With the vast majority of history museums in Washington, and across the

country, operated by volunteers working with a shoestring budget, we hope that VMLC will meet the need for collegial spaces where volunteer museum practitioners gather with peers to learn and share and work towards essential museum competencies in order to better serve their communities.

We have identified two potential presenters for each seminar, and the tentative outline of the session topics are:

- Month 1: Mission/Vision/Values - *Who are you?*
- Month 2: Governance - *Making good decisions*
- Month 3: Audience - *Serving your community*
- Month 4: Interpretation - *Finding your story*
- Month 5: Collections I - *Should it stay or should it go?*
- Month 6: Collections II - *Taking care of your stuff*
- Month 7: Tribal Consultation - *Being a good friend and neighbor*
- Month 8: Operations - *Managing facilities*
- Month 9: Volunteers - *Finding (and keeping) good help*
- Month 10: Fundraising - *Paying the bills*

Project Work Plan:

August 2024

WaMA will instigate an application process and select eight organizations to participate in the VMLC in consultation with WSHS.

September – October 2024

The first round of supplies will be ordered: emergency response kits, data loggers, flatbed scanners, voice recorders, and external hard drives and shipped to the participating museum. Program presenters will be contacted, and the program schedule will be finalized. All course materials will be finalized.

October – November 2024

Weather permitting, WaMA will complete site visits to the selected cohort museums with assistance from WSHS staff as needed.

November 2024 – August 2025

WaMA will organize and host the ten (10) seminars, each featuring two presenters; a professional with specific expertise will be paired with a small museum practitioner. Seminars will run for one hour, with time for questions. Office hours will occur in the days following the seminar with WaMA and WSHS staff and will include either the subject matter expert presenter or another museum professional. Eighty-minute quarterly coaching sessions will occur in November, February, May, and August, and will include either the subject matter expert presenter or a museum professional. WaMA and/or WSHS staff will attend all seminars, office hours, and quarterly coaching sessions.

March 2025

After attending Seminar 7: Collections 1. Each cohort will receive a \$2,500 stipend for curation supplies specific to their museum's needs.

April/May 2025

WaMA will complete site visits to the remaining cohort museums with assistance from WSHS staff as needed.

June 2025

The cohort will attend WaMA's 2025 conference in Walla Walla, which includes an opening reception and two full days of sessions. WaMA and WSHS staff will hold in-person office hours while at the conference.

July – August 2025

The final program evaluation will occur. This includes incorporating all surveys, questionnaires, and feedback gathered throughout the program and will culminate with a final evaluation of the overall program.

Project Risks/Mitigation

Expected Risk: A cohort organization pulls out of the VMLC prior to completing the year-long program.

Contingency Plan: We will work to ensure that organizations selected to participate clearly understand the time commitment they are making and have the capacity to complete the

program. If a museum chooses to withdraw, we will find out why the volunteer cohort did not complete the program. We will not bring a replacement cohort in once the program starts.

Expected Risk: A cohort organization is attending sporadically or inconsistently.

Contingency Plan: We will again work to ensure expectations are clear, but should attendance prove to be an issue, WaMA will meet with the organization to reassess their readiness for the program. We will work with them to mitigate the root cause of the attendance issue (are reminders needed, should another representative be selected, etc.) and set up an attendance plan for moving forward.

Expected Risk: Scheduling conflicts with presenters, VMLC cohort, WaMA, and WSHS staff.

Contingency Plan: All presenters and seminars (dates and times) will be scheduled far in advance. Seminars will be recorded so that the VMLC will have access to each seminar if there is a scheduling conflict.

Expected Risk: A presenter backs out of or must cancel a scheduled seminar with advance or limited notice.

Contingency Plan: Presenters will be expected to sign an agreement once they commit to participating in the program that clearly outlines the scope of work. If the schedule allows, we will reschedule the speaker. If we do not think that we have the flexibility in our schedule to reschedule the original presenter or should a presenter need to step away completely due to circumstances outside of their control, WaMA and WSHS are well connected to the museum community and will work together to quickly secure another speaker with expertise in the subject matter.

Project Planning, Implementation, and Management:

The VMLC is a partnership between WaMA and WSHS with WaMA as the lead project manager and WSHS serving as project advisor. The scope of work that WaMA will complete includes:

- Scheduling all speakers
- Developing the seminar, office hours, and one-on-one coaching schedule
- Processing speaker and travel stipends
- Ordering all outlined supplies and equipment

- Evaluation process (surveys)
- Adhering to the project timeline
- Managing digital products
- Submitting grant reports

Joint WaMA and WSHS tasks include:

- Advising on speakers and seminar materials
- Advising on the selection of cohort
- Attending seminars, office hours, and quarterly coaching sessions
- Making site visits to each of the participating museums

The VMLC will run from September 2024 through the end of August 2025. All stipends and payments will be processed through WaMA's accounting system.

Progress Tracking:

Progress tracking will occur throughout the pilot year of this program. We will solicit feedback, suggestions, and ideas from the cohort and the seminar presenters throughout this program. After each seminar, we will send out a short survey/questionnaire to each cohort member to evaluate the session topic materials. At the end of the VMLC, we will have a questionnaire for each cohort member in the program to assess the overall value of the VMLC and to understand better how each museum has implemented or plans on implementing what was covered in the VMLC. WaMA will follow up with each organization a year or two after the completion of the VMLC to see how the organization has been impacted by the VMLC program.

Project Results:

Intended results include, but are not limited to: The overall outcome of the VMLC is to provide awareness of and basic training in core museum competencies to volunteers working in volunteer-run museums. These volunteers have varied professional backgrounds that are not necessarily in museum operations, collections curation, and interpretation. However, they have a passion and duty for preserving their community's heritage. VMLC will help build the capacity of these museums to better engage with their communities, serve their communities, and thrive in perpetuity.

By facilitating and supporting training to all-volunteer operated museums on essential museum competencies and connecting these museums to regional and state networks of professionals, their organizational capacity to govern, curate, interpret, and serve their communities will expand. Throughout the VMLC, we will survey the cohort to get a better understanding of what program elements worked, what areas need fine-tuning – and how to improve the program in subsequent years.

Another goal of this pilot program is to create a sustainable model that other state museum associations or state historical/heritage organizations can adapt for their own use. We are developing a model that relies on both our preexisting relationships with our partnering agencies and forging new relationships with non-profit organizations to incorporate their subject matter expertise, and many states already have the project elements and partner organizations available as resources to support a program like the Volunteer Museum Learning Community. We aim to demonstrate that this program is effective and replicable. WaMA and WSHS will attend regional and national museum conferences and present a panel on the project to highlight the VMLC, both its successes and areas for improvement.

We will seek funding for subsequent years of this program and continue to fine-tune the program format and structure to meet the needs of volunteer-run museums. WaMA will also follow up in the following years with each participating museum to evaluate the success of their experience in the VMLC and how the VMLC is impacting the health of their organizations long term.

Schedule of Completion

	2024					2025							
	Prior	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Select the Volunteer Museum Learning Community Cohort (8 Museums)													
Purchase first round of equipment (Emergency Response Kits, Data Loggers, Flatbed Scanners, Voice Recorders, External Hard Drives)													
Finalize Program Schedule, Program Presenters, and Program Content													
On-site Museum Visits													
Mission/Vision/Values													
Office Hours													
Project Timeline Tracking, and Program Evaluation													
Quarterly Coaching Session													
Cohort Seminar 2: Governance													
Office Hours													
Project Timeline Tracking, and Program Evaluation													
Cohort Seminar 3: Audience													
Office Hours													
Project Timeline Tracking, and Program Evaluation													
Cohort Seminar 4: Interpretation													
Office Hours													
Quarterly Coaching Session													
Project Timeline Tracking, and Program Evaluation													
Cohort Seminar 5: Collections I													
Office Hours													
Project Timeline Tracking, and Program Evaluation													
Purchase Curation Supplies													

Applicant Name: Washington Museum Association

Project Title: Volunteer Museum Learning Community

<p>Performance Measure</p>	<p>Data We Will Collect (e.g., counts, costs, weights, volumes, temperatures, percentages, hours, observations, opinions, feelings)</p>	<p>Source of Our Data (e.g., members of the target group, project staff, stakeholders, internal/ external documents, recording devices, databases)</p>	<p>Method We Will Use (e.g., survey, questionnaire, interview, focus group, informal discussion, observation, assessment, document analysis)</p>	<p>Schedule (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually, beginning/end)</p>
<p>Effectiveness: The extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results</p>	<p>Example: At the end of each month, using a report prepared by the registrar, we will compare the cumulative count of rehoused objects against the total number proposed for the project. Example: At the end of each project year, our external consultant will present results of the ongoing observation-based evaluation and compare them against our intended project results.</p>			
<p>Quality: How well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group</p>	<p>1.) At the end of each month (10 topical seminars and after the homework hours are completed), we will have a questionnaire for each cohort member to provide feedback on each of the session materials and presenters.</p> <p>2.) At the end of the project year, we will survey each of the cohort organizations to understand better how the Volunteer Museum Learning Community impacted their overall organization and request general feedback on the program.</p>			
<p>Timeliness: The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the proposed timeframe</p>	<p>Example: At the beginning, the mid-point, and end of the project, we will administer a satisfaction survey to staff who have participated in the training. Example: We will gather opinions about our online services through questionnaires provided to every 20th user.</p> <p>1.) At the end of each session (10 topical seminars and after the homework hours are completed), we will have a questionnaire for each cohort member to provide feedback on each of the session materials and presenters.</p> <p>2.) At the end of the project year, we will survey each of the cohort organizations to understand better how the Volunteer Museum Learning Community impacted their overall organization and the overall structure of the cohort program.</p>			
<p>Timeliness: The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the proposed timeframe</p>	<p>Example: Every six months, our Project Director will assess the fit between our proposed Schedule of Completion and actual activity completion dates. Example: Each quarter, each project partner will submit to our Project Director a templated report showing their progress on meeting project milestones.</p> <p>1.) Every month, staff from WaMA and WSHS will evaluate the proposed project timeline and actual activity completion dates.</p> <p>2.) Every month, we will ask each of the cohort how they feel that they are progressing in the Volunteer Museum Learning Community.</p>			