



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

OFFICE OF CHALLENGE GRANTS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Infrastructure and Capacity Building application guidelines at www.neh.gov/grants/preservation/infrastructure-and-capacity-building-challenge-grants for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Office of Challenge Grants staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Preservation & Restoration through Campus Improvements

Institution: Dubuque County Historical Society

Project Director: Cristin J. Waterbury

Grant Program: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grants

Significance and intellectual quality of the Humanities Activities

The Dubuque County Historical Society (DCHS) is committed to humanities scholarship. Spanning more than five decades and across 14 acres, its museums have been collecting, preserving and interpreting life in Dubuque and the Mississippi River, and rivers of America. In that time the Society has been the physical and intellectual steward of historic structures, established expertise in humanities programming and exhibitions, which have substantially increased its effectiveness. This application to the *NEH Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant* will help the DCHS maintain and improve the quality of those humanities efforts by restoring our historic sites, preserving and conserving our collections, and increasing our capacity to raise significant funds.

The Society operates two museum sites, which collectively address the local, regional, and national history of the Mississippi River and rivers of America. The Mathias Ham Historic Site has been interpreting the humanities for more than 53 years. Residing on five acres, the Site interprets *Life At the Lead Mines* in early Dubuque from 1833 to 1883. The Italianate mansion was built in 1856 by Mathias and Zerilda Ham and, was designed by John Francis Rague, designer of the Iowa and Illinois first state capitols. The 32-room limestone house with a cupola overlooking the Mississippi River is on the National Register of Historic Places. The site includes an 1833 Arriandeau Log House (Iowa's oldest building), an 1840s granary, and the 1883 Humke one-room schoolhouse. These structures document Dubuque's role in the Federal Lead Mine District and the story of the immigrant miners who came as part of the nation's first major mineral rush. By the 1840s, these lead mines provided 90% of the country's lead and 10% of the world supply.

The National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium (River Museum) is a 14 acre riverfront site which includes five buildings, several historic vessels, and a purposeful array of indoor and outdoor exhibits. The River Museum's 51,000-item historical collection supports the Society's intellectual goals, documenting the story of people and rivers with artifacts of Native American life, settlement, growth of towns and cities, boat building, commerce, river art, music, literature, and conservation. Exhibitions and collections at the River Museum tell the compelling story of people and the river over time and their significance to rivers across America. The Museum also features 25 boats including the 277 foot long

paddlewheel steamboat *William M Black*, built in 1934, one of 23 National Historic Landmarks in the state of Iowa and one of only 360 large historic vessels in the country. The River Museum features award winning exhibitions and films, a living history boatyard, a living history wetland, object theatres, education stations, and archives.

The exhibits at the River Museum are highly engaging. Ideas, artifacts, and archival reproductions are combined with a compelling design to reach visitors intellectually as well as visually. Based on an exit survey of museum visitors conducted in 2004, 52% of respondents said that they have changed their attitudes about the Mississippi River as a result of their visit. Both museums are Smithsonian Institution affiliates, accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, and are designated Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Sites.

In all, the Society owns or maintains 13 buildings or large vessels, 11 of which are on or eligible for the National Register for Historic Places. The two sites provide a strong and diverse presentation of living and cultural history to local, regional, and national audiences. The historical collections reflect the material culture of people from Native Americans to modern river users from the source in Minnesota, to the Mississippi River Delta in Louisiana. Our collection conveys the connections between the Mississippi River, the rivers of America, and the seas into which they flow. The collections support the Society's strategic and intellectual goals to provide purposeful and diverse humanities exhibits and programs. The Society's long-term plan is to preserve, advance, and disseminate humanistic knowledge through our mission, personnel, governance, facilities, and resources. The Society's collection is divided into two distinct areas, ~29,000 artifacts and ~22,000 archival items. The material culture includes decorative arts, prehistoric artifacts, Native American artifacts, artifacts of exploration, maritime artifacts, boat building artifacts, mining and logging artifacts, local history artifacts, and textiles. They tell important stories about domestic life, environment, industry, river travel, social conventions, literature, art, music, and cultural expression. This collection is a significant record of the cultural and natural history in the Mississippi River Valley and along our nation's rivers. The Society's Library and Archives are comprised of lithographs, glass plate negatives, photographs, diaries, journals, financial records, organizational archives, boat building

blueprints and contracts, and steamboat bills of lading. The archives include biographies and oral histories from several hundred figures in America's river history. The collection of nationally recognized Dr. William J. Petersen consists of original photographs, bills of lading, steamboat records, lead account books, manuscripts, and the original research notes for his landmark book *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi* and rare books recording lead mined near Dubuque in the 1830s. The Society's collections are an important resource for researchers and have been used for numerous scholarly and popular publications, including the 2013 *Boat Building on the Mississippi at the Dubuque Ice Harbor*, by Cynthia Peterson, the Iowa Office of State Archaeology.

From 1992 to 2003, the River Museum engaged in a major examination of its humanities potential funded in part by NEH Self-Study in 1992, an NEH interpretive planning grant in 1993, and NEH Implementation grants in 1996 and 2000. These grants enabled the museum to work with several scholars including a historical geographer Craig Colten, then Associate Curator of Geography for the Illinois State Museum and organizer of the floating Illinois River exhibit "River Harvest," Philip Scarpino, Director of Public History at Indiana University, David Edmunds, PhD, Watson Professor of American History at the University of Texas and consultant to *500 Nations*; and social historian Dr. Edward Hawes.

In his conclusion to the self-study, Dr. Scarpino wrote, "The museum's focus on the Upper Mississippi offers tremendous potential for creative, informative, exciting, humanities-based exhibits and related programming." Dr. Edward Hawes wrote, "The River Museum has the potential to be of regional and national significance through the development of a major focus on the Upper Mississippi River and its tributaries. The physical resources are at hand, the collections are being built to support this, and the research base for such development is well-founded."

With the help of these scholars, the Society has been able to combine ideas, artifacts, and archives with compelling designs to reach visitors intellectually and visually. The Fred W. Woodward Riverboat Museum (located at the River Museum) houses the River Museum's boat building collections from Iron Works and the Dubuque Boat and Boiler Works, which built over 500 boats and barges from 1870 to 1972. Exhibits in this 9,000 sq. ft. gallery offer a historical perspective of the culture and commerce of the

Mississippi River. The exhibits portray Native American construction of dugouts, bullboats, and birch bark canoes; to flatboats, and keelboats; and to steamboats, diesel towboats, and small boats for fishing, clamming, and recreation, and includes a working wooden boat shop. The exhibits have been augmented over the years, notably with the *Make Me a River* exhibit (funded by NEH), and Mark Twain's River exhibit (funded by Humanities Iowa).

In the coming months, the River Museum will transform the Woodward Museum to feature *River of Innovation (RoI)*. Supported by Humanities Iowa and Illinois Humanities Council grants, this new exhibit will consist of a 19th century belt-driven machine shop, hands-on exhibits, and a maker space to place the learner at the center of the experience. *RoI* will allow for intellectual discussion of cultural building and innovation patterns along the river to enhance the significant river story of innovation and industry that has long been a force of change in America – shaping our land, our culture, and our people.

Working with in-house and consulting scholars, educators, and Roto exhibit design company, these exhibits will interweave relevant history stories and interactive STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) activities; reveal to visitors their own power to innovate; present a robust vision of innovation that address social, cultural, personal, or technological examples of innovation and; provide authentic opportunities for visitors to create. This will broaden the museum's audience base and serve as an institutional model for future project development and community engagement.

The cumulative visitor experience of the River Museum provides a broad and far-reaching look at the historical, cultural, and living impact of the Mississippi River as well as in-depth examinations of particular aspects of the river.

Appropriateness of Resources and Plans

For its first 14 years, 1964-1977, the Society operated just the Mathias Ham House with volunteers and part-time docents. In 1978, the Society began work to establish the River Museum and greatly increased its capacity. From 1978 to 2002, attendance grew from 3,000 to 75,000 people, staff increased from 1 to 35, and revenues and support increased from \$13,000 to \$750,000 annually.

In 1995, the Society began major planning with the help of NEH-funded scholars. This led to major expansions in 2003 and 2010 to create what is now, the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium. The substantial support from NEH Challenge and Public Program grants was incorporated into two major capital campaigns. This provided for significant growth in intellectual quality, as well as improvements in facilities, exhibits, audience, programs, and increased annual budget. The first expansion in 2003 established the Museum as a national leader in river studies. The second expansion in 2010 empowered DCHS to increase endowment, develop exhibits, establish programs, and provide outreach that advances scholarship, awareness, and knowledge of historical and humanistic themes specific to the Mississippi River Valley and Rivers of America. These expansions increased the intellectual vigor of the Society, and our community. During this time, a strong partnership was created between the City of Dubuque and DCHS. The City was recognized with an All-America City Award by the National Civic League in 2007 and named the Most Livable Small City in America in 2008 by the US Conference of Mayors. In 2008, Dubuque was selected by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of three incubator cities for its green restoration effort—the other two cities being Seattle and San Francisco. In March of 2018, River Museum was profiled in the National Humanities Alliance Project, *NEH for All*, representative of an influential project funded by NEH that significantly impacted the community. Support from NEH Challenge Grants enabled DCHS to transform the River Museum from a small, regional museum into a world class institution dedicated to the Mississippi River and its history.

Hired in 2010, Cristin Waterbury, Director of Curatorial Services supervises the care and management of artifacts, archival materials, historic sites and structures including preservation and restoration, and manages all facets of historical exhibits. With 16 years of experience in curatorial services she has worked on many projects supported by NEH, IMLS, and National Maritime Heritage. She is on the Executive Board for the Iowa Museum Association, serves on the Registrar's Committee of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and on the Midwest Registrar's Committee. She holds an M.A. in Museum Studies from Cooperstown, NY (SUNY) and a B.A. in History from Luther College, Decorah, IA. Waterbury, with a staff of 4 (Collections Registrar, Archivist, and two Collections Inventory Assistants)

implemented a collection inventory project to catalogue, inventory and rehouse approximately 6,200 under-documented objects in our collection (funded by IMLS), and an archival processing project to process more than 370 linear feet of river-related substantial files including tribal water rights, water policy and resource documents that lend significant insight into the people and cultures of the river in the 19th and 20th centuries (funded by the State Historical Society of Iowa).

Through investment in strategic planning, increased infrastructure, commitment by the Board, supporting platforms for exhibits, research, and community partnerships, DCHS has significantly grown our museums and strengthened our organization. We have since increased our capacity to 43 full-time, and 75 part-time employees, 240 active volunteers, and a \$7.8 million dollar annual budget. This capacity building resulted in expanding our audience to 205,000 annual on-site visitors, increased visitor length of stay from 1.5 to 3 hours, increased significant partnerships for both historical and living collections, expanded interpretive programming, and integrated web and digital technology to reach diverse audiences.

As we look to the future, we focus on preserving and maintaining the historical structures and intellectual property, expanding the river story, and reinvigorating our interpretation model to provide the 21st century learner with real-world, vital, interdisciplinary, and design-based learning that relates directly to the humanities.

In awarding NEH support in 2000, William Ferris, then chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, wrote “Going far beyond the scope of most county historical societies, your organization has become the vehicle for telling the big story of the Mississippi River to local, regional and national audiences.” (February 15, 2000).

The Society has also invested in the scholarship and visitor outreach at the Ham House Historic Site. In 2010, the Society developed a landscape plan with historic landscape scholar Robert Harvey and Bill Gundmann who also helped develop the landscape plan for the Abraham Lincoln Home in Springfield. The plan for the Mathias Ham Site apportioned the site into three interpretive precincts: 1) the 1833 Arriandeau Log House (Iowa’s oldest building), 2) the Ham House and its landscaping, and 3) the remaining

grounds, which includes the 1840s granary, one-room school house and exhibits of historic gardens. This project will address over five decades of needed infrastructure, preservation, and restoration at both Sites.

Restoration & Preservation Campus Improvements include:

At River Museum Site:

- Tuckpoint the Freight House (Fred W. Woodward Riverboat Museum) and replace HVAC chillers, water-to-water pump, and boiler in all Site buildings which preserve 81% of our collections in order to maintain humidity and temperature controls based on MichaelsEnergy Retrocommissioning Study (year).
- Contract a planned giving consultant for fundraising efforts toward NEH matching contributions and launch a comprehensive campaign (2016).
- Restore geothermal units, restore and repaint roof, walls, and ceiling of *Wm. M. Black* post-lead paint abatement project.

At Ham House Site:

- Evaluate, refine, and implement landscape elements from the Site and Landscape Development Study developed by Robert Harvey (2010).
- Ham House: Restore HVAC, install UV film on all windows, plaster and tuckpoint in five rooms.
- Log House: Implement log house assessment plan to preserve this historic structure (2017).
- School House: Use cost estimate to implement full preservation and restoration of wood structure including wood stabilization and re-painting. (2017).

The Society already has a strong base with well-developed facilities and a dedicated staff. Investing in preservation and restoration through campus improvements ensure that our historic resources will be here to continue our humanities conversation with audiences.

The Impact of Challenge Grant Funds

DCHS has been aided both financially and intellectually, from past investments by the NEH since 1983. Most recently, in 2009 the Museum was awarded an NEH Challenge Grant of \$750,000, which increased

our endowment to \$3,000,000. This has helped maintain its commitment to the humanities, encourage non-federal funding support, and provide leadership staffing and exhibit and program funding at our two museums. The Society was successful in completing this challenge in 2015.

Audience Served

Since 1977, our museums have served 4.3 million visitors. Our audience comes from all 50 states and 70 countries each year and totals 205,000 on-site visitors annually including 75,000 school-aged children and ~300 teachers. We reach an additional 75,000 people each year through traveling exhibits and outreach programs. Our target population is families of Dubuque and the Tri-State (IA, IL, and WI) area as well as visitors to Iowa. We provide 4,000 free family memberships to local families on qualifying federal assistance programs and free educational tours to all students at Dubuque's four at-risk elementary schools. In addition, our online collection is accessible to researchers all over the world and we field an average of 84 requests for archival materials each year.

The majority of our visitors hail from Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Minority visitation represents 19% of our audience, more than twice our local minority population percentage (2.3% Hispanic/Latino, 3.9% African Americans, 1% Asian). With 1.5 million people living within 75 miles of our museums, we are in a unique position to make a significant impact on local informal learning through exhibits, interactive spaces, and program-based learning opportunities.

Since its major expansion in 2010, the River Museum has welcomed 1.75 million visitors. This is sizable audience for a city with a population of 60,000 people. The River Museum engages its audience as shown by dwell time. According to a professional survey conducted in 2004 of our audience, 47% of visitors stay three hours or more and 11% of visitors stay five to six hours. Memberships have increased from 470 members to 3,100. Representing approximately 5% of the population of the city of Dubuque.

Feasibility of Fundraising

DCCHS is prepared to meet this fundraising challenge. We fully understand the work ahead of us and are confident and enthusiastic about our ability to meet campaign and NEH matching goals. The Society has already raised funds towards its humanities efforts in anticipation of a possible NEH Challenge

Grant. Since November 2017, we have \$1.2 million in non-federal grants, corporate and personal gifts. If funding is secured we will fast-approach our match goal of \$1,500,000.

The Society will formally launch a comprehensive campaign in 2019 with a goal of \$25,000,000 to raise funds to restore and maintain our historic sites, preserve and conserve our collections, create new dynamic exhibits, expand our ability to interpret humanities scholarship, and to increase endowment. A significant amount will be dedicated strictly to endow humanities scholarship and interpretation. DCHS has excellent promise of stability. Our operating and income expenses over the last few years have left us with an average surplus of \$250,000 not including depreciation. While depreciation accounts for expense in excess of \$1,700,000, addressing this will be top priority in our 2019 comprehensive campaign.

To help raise these funds, the Society has hired a professional firm to create our campaign case statement and cultivate new donors. The majority of our fundraising team is in place including 26 board members our CEO, VP of Development, and three additional staff members to lead this effort. Upon the launch of the comprehensive campaign we will add two additional development staff members focused on planned giving and database management to round out a robust development team.

The Society has lead and completed two major successful capital campaigns starting in 1997, and 2009. These campaigns have had major success in raising local, state, regional and national funds. For example, in 2009, the Society secured \$8.5 million from the state of Iowa and \$5.5 million in federal grant awards from the National Park Service, White House Preserve America grant, IMLS and NEH. Our local City and County of Dubuque provided \$1,206,000 for capital or project improvements. Private giving included a \$1 million challenge grant from The Kresge Foundation. In addition, we raised \$8 million in private gifts from the first 60 donors. The original goal in 2009 was tested by a feasibility study and assessed the potential for a private giving campaign, and also gauged the opinions and attitudes towards the Society and identified potential champions for the campaign. The fund raising feasibility study had several conclusions, which pointed to success: DCHS is held in very high regard, with 91.5% of those responding expressing a positive opinion; the River Museum received an even higher level of support,

with 95% of those giving it high marks. They said, “A well-respected, well-known institution delivering a high quality visitor experience,” “Generating significant economic impact on the region,” and “A remarkable window to this part of the world”; the River Museum’s expansion and the plans for local history were viewed as exciting and appealing; endowment was viewed as crucial to the ongoing financial health of the Society; When asked about moving forward with a private giving campaign, 71% indicated positive reaction 50% indicated they would definitely support the project with a gift or pledge, and 27.5% indicated it was possible. The conclusion of the fundraising feasibility study was that the proposed goal of \$12 million could be achieved, but only with concerted effort and a strong relationship based campaign effort.

Fundraising efforts will be led by VP of Development, Erin Dragotto in close partnership with President and CEO, Kurt Strand whose focus is to broaden the local and national donor relationships. Dragotto will be the lead the comprehensive campaign and NEH Challenge Grant, development strategy, coordinate all donor contact, and lead development team. She will work closely with the President and CEO and the Board of Directors throughout the campaign. Since 2014 she has raised \$3,000,000 through major gifts and/or grants from corporations, foundations, organizations, and individuals.

Board members will serve as members of the Campaign Committee and key community leaders to serve as the Campaign Leadership Cabinet. Team members and Museum staff will fully assess the impact of both campaigns, identify 5 potential donors in the asking range of \$1,000,000 - \$2,500,000, 20 potential donors ranging from \$100,000 to \$250,000, 40 prospects in the \$25,000 to \$100,000 range, and over 90 donors in the asking range of \$5,000 to \$25,000. There will also be several gifts at levels below \$5,000. We continue to maintain close contact with potential donors. This makes an NEH Challenge Grant that much more valuable and more crucial—first to secure the funds for the Historical Society, and second, to insure that they are designated for the humanities endowment.

This is why an NEH Challenge Grant will be so important. An NEH Challenge will help make the difference in donor giving. Donors do not want to see that potential challenge grant dollars might be lost.