

A. What activity (or activities) would the grant support?

The High Desert Museum respectfully requests a \$8,653 NEH Preservation Assistance Grant to support improved care for and expanded public access to a significant collection of American Indian artifacts and artwork. With this funding, the Museum will contract consultant Ellen Pearlstein to conduct a general preservation assessment of the approximately 7,000 objects related to American Indians in the Museum's collection. Used in permanent and changing exhibitions and educational programs, this collection connects our over 187,000 annual visitors to the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous people in the Columbia Plateau—a history that has been understudied and is relatively unknown by the public.

Pearlstein will assess the current condition of the collection and the storage and display of objects to provide the Museum with an accurate understanding of the preservation needs of this collection. In addition to focusing on objects previously classified as unstable, Pearlstein will examine representative artifacts from throughout the collection to help establish conservation priorities and inform best practices for the long-term care of the collection. This assessment is essential for two main reasons. 1) In collaboration with tribal representatives, we are developing a culturally responsive collections care plan that will integrate Indigenous knowledge and traditional collection care practices. Incorporating recommendations from this assessment, this plan will guide the Museum in the long-term care of the collection. 2) We are in the initial planning stages of a renovation of our 4,500 square foot *By Hand Through Memory* permanent exhibition, which uses objects from this collection to convey the experiences of Plateau Indians during the 20th century. By helping to inform design decisions regarding lighting and casework, this assessment will ensure proper care of objects while on display for the public.

B. What are the content and size of the humanities collections that are the focus of the project?

The Museum's collection consists of over 28,000 objects that convey the diverse experiences of the people who lived and worked in the High Desert—a region that covers one-fifth of the continental United States—for the past 200 years. It encompasses cultural history objects, such as a complete set of Edward S. Curtis's *North American Indian*, contemporary artwork, including works by Charles M. Russell, Rick Bartow and James Lavadour, natural history objects, and a living wildlife collection comprised of mammals, raptors, and reptiles. The Museum uses this interdisciplinary collection to combine stories not usually told together and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the American West.

This assessment will focus on the Doris Swayze Bounds Collection, which contains “*some of the finest and rarest examples of Plateau cultural objects.*”¹ The collection represents many of the over 100 Indigenous groups, whose ancestral homeland is the Columbia River Plateau, including Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, Nez Perce, Warm Springs, Wasco, Klamath, Colville tribes and Yakama. Dating from the 1800s to 1960s, these objects span pre and post European contact and are crucial to increasing public understanding of the distinctive characteristics and experiences of Plateau Indians and the history of the region—topics that have been under studied and widely misunderstood. The comprehensive collection includes 620 bags; 300 baskets; 300 articles of clothing and other textiles; 3,830 tools, projectile points, worked stone and fishing implements; 70 pieces of horse trappings; 60 pipes; 25 cradleboards; 375 paintings, photographs and other graphic media; 175 pieces of jewelry; 75 dolls; and 6 tipis.²

The extensive scope of this collection is integral to understanding how Indigenous groups continued and adapted during a period of dramatic change in this region. For example, the range of design motifs and materials used in the over 300 baskets in the collection makes it possible to trace continuities and changes during a 200-year time period. Traditionally used for gathering, preparing and storing food, baskets served a practical purpose, and the artistic skill used to create intricate designs on these utilitarian objects reflects the value Plateau Indians placed on this work. While the reservation system, boarding schools,

¹ Susan E. Harless, ed., *Native Arts of the Columbia Plateau: The Doris Swayze Bounds Collection* (University of Washington Press, 1998), 27.

² See Appendices pages 27-28 for images of some of these items from the collection.

government policies and interactions with different cultures drastically changed their lives, women adapted rather than abandoned these artistic traditions. For instance, in the late 19th century, changes to their daily lives made hop farming an important source of income for Plateau Indians. Reflecting this adaptation to their traditional seasonal round, the collection includes several baskets made from the cotton strings used to support hop vines that retain the traditional weaving techniques apparent in cedar root baskets in the collection. Today, artists incorporate new designs and media, such as commercial string and yarn, into traditional basketry techniques and create baskets for contemporary uses.

Native artists' integration of new materials into traditional artforms is also apparent in the extensive beadwork in the collection. Beginning in the early 1800s, Native artists increasingly used beads acquired through trade networks to create detailed patterns on a variety of objects, such as bags, cradleboards and clothing. The collection includes several examples of bags that feature the contour beading method, in which artists create a central design and then fill the background with concentric lines of beads. This technique requires a tremendous amount of skill and results in vibrant and dynamic designs.

The range of materials in the collection, including Indian hemp, cedar root, animal skins and furs, porcupine quills, cornhusk and other natural plant fibers, illustrates Plateau Indians' knowledge of natural resources and how they incorporated these resources into their daily lives. For instance, the construction of a mid-19th century Nez Perce quill-wrapped horsehair shirt required the artist to dye quills and then flatten and widen the barb to fit around bundles of hair. Heavily beaded and intricately woven pieces demonstrate the extensive artistic skill invested into utilitarian objects. Bags and baskets in the collection include a variety of motifs, such as elk, sturgeon, condor, humans, flowers and geometric shapes. An early 20th century cornhusk bag represents a rare example of the use of dyed cornhusk for the background of the design. A Wyam coiled cedar-root basket dating from the late 19th century features an imbrication design, which requires knowledge of a complex folding technique used by only a few groups in the Columbia Plateau. The collection also contains several deer tail dresses, including a late 19th century Cayuse double-skin deer tail dress once owned by the family of one of Chief Joseph's wives. Made of large deerskins, artists often elaborately embellished these dresses with beadwork or cowrie shells.

The collection also includes objects from multiple generations of one family, demonstrating how Plateau Indians maintained their traditions during this period of formidable changes and relating this history to lived experiences. For instance, the collection includes a cradleboard, dating from the 1800s, used by four generations of the Showaway family (Umatilla). Placed alongside items from the Burke family (Walla Walla) and Thompson family (Yakama) these objects demonstrate family and tribal values and the similarities and subtle differences between tribes in the region.

C. How are these humanities collections used?

Our interdisciplinary collection supports our place-based mission by using objects in exhibitions and programs to increase public understanding of the dynamic relationships between the people, landscapes and wildlife of the High Desert. Used in permanent and changing exhibitions and educational programs, the Bounds Collection highlights the experiences and perspectives of Plateau Indians, increasing respect for Tribal sovereignty and Indigenous cultural traditions. Situated alongside other objects in our collection, the Bounds Collection places Plateau Indian experiences into the larger context of the history of the American West, weaving together stories of American Indians, Chinese Americans, Basques, African Americans and Euro-Americans to convey complex humanities themes to broad audiences.³

Opened in 1999, the 4,500-square foot *By Hand Through Memory* permanent exhibition uses objects from the Bounds Collection to demonstrate the ways Plateau tribes actively maintained their cultures, traditions and languages and adapted to changes to their ways of life during the 20th century. As one of the few

³ See Appendices pages 29-35 for images of how we use the collection in permanent and changing exhibitions and community programs.

museum exhibits in the nation focused on the experiences of Plateau Indians, this exhibition is essential to increasing public understanding of these tribes and their continued role in the region. Immersive scenes and interdisciplinary content places artifacts within the context of boarding school experiences, the devastating consequences of the reservation and allotment systems, continued colonization and incredible examples of revitalization. This framework makes objects a vehicle for engaging audiences in complex humanities themes. For example, combining artifacts with contemporary voices and artwork helps visitors understand the continuation of Indigenous cultures and challenges popular stereotypes such as the “vanishing Indian.” Linking materials used to construct a bag, basket or article of clothing to the landscape of the Columbia Plateau connects visitors to a sense of place and builds understanding of its significance to Plateau tribes. Where possible, the exhibition includes information about particular artists and incorporates Native artists’ perspectives on process and meaning. This approach to the collection associates objects with real people within real contexts and connects them to larger humanities themes.

We regularly use objects from the collection in our changing exhibitions. For instance, *By Her Hand: Native American Women, Their Art and the Photographs of Edward S. Curtis* (2018) juxtaposed Edward Curtis’s photographs with Plateau Indian bags, baskets, and clothing and quotes from contemporary Native artists to increase understanding of the continuation of Indigenous cultures. For *Art Through Ancestry* (2009), three Native artists—Rick Bartow, Pat Courtney Gold and Lillian Pitt—used the collection as inspiration for the creation of new, original artwork. Displayed together, artifacts and artwork reinforced the dynamic nature of Plateau culture. Pitt discussed the significance of this exhibition: “*These types of shows are very important as they show an ancient culture that has not died out or ‘vanished.’ We are still here creating work in our own medium, with the same care and consideration; to do the best we can to honor our ancestors.*” Changing exhibitions also use the collection to integrate Plateau Indian experiences into the broader history of the American West. *Growing Up Western* (2015) explored childhood in early 19th century American West. Placing a beaded Plateau cradleboard alongside a hand-sewn baptismal quilt and a Chinese American girl’s binding shoes enabled visitors to learn about universal aspects of childhood and how families maintained their cultural traditions.

The collection also supports public programs and scholarly research. Last summer, we hosted an *Indigenous Arts Day* during which artists from the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs demonstrated traditional artwork, such as leatherwork, beadwork, and basket and cornhusk weaving. Through these demonstrations, visitors learned about the skill required to create the objects in the collection and how artists today are revitalizing these traditional artforms. A National Heritage Fellow and Wasco artist, Pat Courtney Gold, frequently hosts weaving workshops at the Museum, which provides hands-on opportunities for participants to better understand objects in the collection. The collection has been and continues to be open to scholars for research. Upon its arrival at the Museum, art experts, historians, archaeologists and anthropologists studied the collection to publish *Native Arts of the Columbia Plateau: The Doris Swayze Bounds Collection*—a compilation of essays that explored the importance of the collection to understanding Plateau Indian cultures and identity.

Because of its significance to Native communities, we are using partnerships and traveling exhibitions to facilitate tribal members’ access to the collection. Developed in partnership with the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, *Head to Toe: The Language of Plateau Indian Clothing* (2013), blended objects from our collections and traveled between our institutions—making these objects more accessible in our rural region. In partnership with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs’s Culture and Heritage Office, Museum Curators regularly bring objects from the collection to Warm Springs to provide educational opportunities for tribal youth.

Through exhibitions and programs, the collection is broadly accessible to our over 187,000 annual visitors, including 12,000 students. Last year, 37% of our visitors were from Central Oregon, 39% from other Oregon locations, 20% from other states and 3% were international travelers. The Museum also uses our social media sites and blog as educational outreach tools, and these sites frequently feature

unique objects from the collection along with information about them, furthering access to these items. We currently have over 15,000 followers on Facebook and over 2,500 Twitter followers.

D. What is the nature and mission of your institution?

Don Kerr founded the High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon in 1974 on the premise that museums should be collections of unique experiences, repositories of memories and places of discovery for learners of all ages. Our mission is *to explore the High Desert's unique landscape, cultures, wildlife, history and arts, connecting our visitors to the past and helping them discover their role in the present and responsibility to the future*. The Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, and in 2016, we became a Smithsonian Affiliate. We are open 362 days a year and have 41 full-time and 23 part-time staff members and 200 volunteers. Our annual operating budget is \$4.4 million. We are an interdisciplinary institution, and the Museum's Collections Department represents a much smaller portion of this overall budget with one full-time staff member and a budget of \$(b) (6) (including salary).

On the Museum's 135 forested acres, visitors can explore Silver City in the 1880s, watch a porcupine eat a watermelon, feel a bird of prey fly overhead, pump water on a 1904 living history ranch and become immersed in Plateau Indians' seasonal round. We strive to ensure these important moments of discovery are accessible to all community members. Last year, over 12,000 individuals visited the Museum for free or at a reduced rate through our access initiatives. We are a National Endowment for the Arts *Blue Star Museum*, offering free admission to active duty military and their families. *Little Wonders* provides free memberships and \$10 gas cards to Head Start families, and *Museum & Me* enables individuals with disabilities to visit the Museum after hours at no cost. We also host two free days for seniors and the public each year, and passes are available at local libraries and social service organizations.

The Museum serves a primarily rural community. We are 130 miles away from a major metropolitan center and are the largest cultural institute in central and eastern Oregon. In recognition of our service to our community, in spring 2018, the Institute of Museum and Library Services named us a finalist for a National Medal—the highest honor in the nation for museums.

E. Has your institution ever had a preservation or conservation assessment or consultation?

Over the past 30 years, the Museum has had four previous assessments of the collection. There have been two surveys of the storage conditions and display of the Museum's entire 28,000 object collection. In 1991, Jonathan Taggart of Taggart Objects Conservation completed a Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) survey, and in 2007, Alexis Miller of Balboa Art Conservation Center conducted a Subsidized Preservation Survey. In addition, there have been two previous audits of the Bounds Collection—in 1995 by Nancy Blomberg, Curator of Native Arts at the Denver Art Museum, and in 2012 by Susan Maltby of Maltby & Associates, Inc. The Maltby assessment was limited to recommendations from the more general Balboa survey and did not include an extensive examination of the collection. This more in-depth assessment will build on this survey to assess if current practices are working to ensure the long-term stability of objects, provide advice on conservation priorities for objects listed as unstable in previous audits, and offer recommendations on lighting and rotating objects in the renovated exhibition.

F. What is the importance of this project to your institution?

Our collection serves a central role in our programs and how we connect visitors to the past, present and future of the region. Therefore, the long-term care of our collection is a high priority for the Museum. This assessment will provide valuable recommendations in four key areas of concern. 1) Identify the immediate conservation priorities and long-term needs of items previously classified as unstable. 2) Designate items needing arsenic testing and educate staff on proper handling of possibly contaminated objects. 3) Make recommendations with a focus on preventive care to be incorporated into the culturally responsive collections care plan we are currently developing, helping to inform the long-term care of the collection. 4) Identify needs for the display of objects in our permanent exhibition to inform the renovation of the exhibition.

Most important, this assessment is essential to ensuring the renovation of our *By Hand Through Memory* exhibition provides access to significant cultural objects while also preserving them for future generations. One of our goals for the renovation is to incorporate flexible spaces that will enable us to rotate objects, increasing access to different objects and themes in the collection, promoting better collections care, and extending the longevity of the exhibition. For instance, we plan to include an 840 square-foot changing collection gallery within the exhibition. Recommendations from this assessment will help inform lighting, casework and layout of the exhibition and this gallery space.

G. What are the names and qualifications of the consultant(s) and staff involved in the project?

Ellen Pearlstein is a Professor in the Information Studies Department and the UCLA/Getty Program in the Conservation of Ethnographic and Archaeological Materials at the University of California, Los Angeles. She has an Advanced Certificate in Conservation from the New York University Conservation Center and a MA in Art History and Archaeology from Columbia University. Pearlstein has over 35 years' experience in conservation and specializes in plant materials used on cultural objects, artifacts related to Indigenous communities, and preventive conservation.

Dana Whitelaw, Executive Director, will serve as project lead. She has a Ph.D. in Anthropology and over 20 years of experience developing and managing educational programs and organizations. Prior to becoming Executive Director in 2014, she was the Vice President of Programs at the Museum. Whitelaw also serves on the board of the Central Oregon Visitor Association, Western Museum Association and Cultural Advocacy Coalition.

In addition, the consultant will work with members of our Collections and Exhibit Teams to conduct the assessment and provide recommendations. We are in the process of hiring a new Collections Manager and Exhibitions Coordinator. A qualified candidate will have a BA/BS in Museum Studies, American Indian Studies, Anthropology, Art History, History or equivalent; knowledge of culturally responsive collections management practices; and demonstrated experience in collections management procedures. Laura Ferguson, Curator of Western History, has a Ph.D. in History from the University of Michigan and extensive experience researching and interpreting the history of the American West. Prior to joining the Museum in 2015, she was a Visiting Assistant Professor at Whitman College where she served as faculty advisor to the American Indian Association. Dustin Cockerham, Chief Exhibits Preparator, has a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute and over 10 years of experience designing, fabricating and installing exhibitions, including at The Grace Museum and ARTworks of Kansas City.

H. What is the work plan for the project?

In the summer of 2020, consultant Ellen Pearlstein will spend 6.5 days at the Museum to conduct an extensive assessment of the Bounds Collection.⁴ She will closely examine 35 items that a previous audit identified as unstable. For the rest of the collection, Pearlstein will randomly sample items and review the storage and environmental conditions surrounding them. She will compose a report that summarizes her finding and recommendations for preventive upgrades and for treatment, including short, intermediate and long-term activities for the care of the collection. Throughout the process, Pearlstein will consult with key project staff as necessary and will review her final report and recommendations with key staff. Per our agreement with the collection donor, the Museum will make the audit report public and provide a copy to the Governor of Oregon, the State Historic Preservation Office, the Oregon Historical Society and members of the Bounds family. After the assessment is complete, the Museum will implement the consultant's short-term recommendations and incorporate intermediate and long-term recommendations into the design of the renovated exhibition and new culturally responsive collections care plan.

⁴ See Appendices pages 20-21 for an estimate of how many days Pearlstein will spend with each object grouping.