

**American Writers Museum**  
**Exhibition Planning Grant Narrative**  
***Becoming American: Immigrant and Refugee Writing in the 21st Century***

**A) Nature of the Request**

The American Writers Museum (AWM) requests a \$40,000 Exhibitions Planning grant for a temporary, single-site exhibit called *Becoming American: Immigrant and Refugee Writing in the 21st Century*. Planning for this exhibit will take place from April - October, 2019, and the exhibit will open in November, 2019. The exhibit will be on view for 12 months in the AWM's Meijer Exhibit Gallery, a 900-square-foot gallery space in the center of the museum; this exhibit will be the fourth temporary exhibit in this gallery. The American Writers Museum is the nation's first and only museum dedicated to American writers and their enduring influence. It is located in downtown Chicago on Michigan Avenue, in the heart of Chicago's cultural corridor. The AWM opened to the public in May, 2017.

*Becoming American: Immigrant and Refugee Writers in the 21st Century* will explore the development and influence of writing by immigrants and refugees to the United States, with a focus on immigrant and refugee writers and their work in the last 30 years and an exploration of how the experience of immigrants and refugees has changed since the preceding waves of migration to the United States. The title for this exhibit is taken from one of our primary advisor's earlier works, Professor Ilan Stavans' anthology, *Becoming Americans: Four Centuries of Immigrant Writing*. The title is important, since it establishes for visitors the notion that being American is not always something planned, immediate, or certain for many people.

The exhibit will celebrate immigrant and refugee writers through interactive spaces that will provide:

- 1) The scope and historical context - through video and interpretive graphics - of immigrant and refugee history and the immigrant and refugee writers that emerged out of these successive waves;
- 2) Significant and contemporary immigrant and refugee writers featured in interactive videos of the authors reading and discussing the relevance of their work, and the authors and stories that influence them;
- 3) Writing by refugees in the context of debates about the current refugee crisis; and
- 4) A writing station in which visitors can reflect upon their own relationships to, or experience with, immigration.

*Becoming American* will highlight writing in a variety of genres, including memoir, fiction, poetry, travel writing, songwriting, screenwriting, and more. The exhibit will heavily utilize multimedia, via large and small touch screens, which will carry readings and discussions from as many as 32 established writers who are themselves immigrants and refugees and whose work engages in various ways the issues faced by anyone who attempts to become an American. The large array of authors will allow for representation of stories from writers who come from all over the world.

*Becoming American* will reach underserved audiences. For the year that *Becoming American* is on view, it will be a major part of the curriculum for the AWM's youth education program, called Write In. Write In is an established program that uses the museum's exhibits and specially-designed curriculum to teach middle and high school students about American writers and their influence, and inspires students to be creative, confident writers. The AWM will work with the Great Books Foundation to develop curriculum around *Becoming American*, with activities that guide students through a deep dive into the exhibit's content and themes, and encourage them to make personal connections. The AWM's outreach for Write In primarily focuses on schools where at least 90 percent of families live below the poverty level. The cost of participation for these students is covered by museum donors, so the financial barrier is eliminated for the students' families and schools. These neighborhoods have limited access to organizations that present humanities content and interpretation and education surrounding it. During the 2018-2019 school year, the goal is to serve 10,000 students through this program, with at least 7,000 from low-income neighborhoods, who will participate at no cost to their families or schools. *Becoming American* will be an integral part of each student's experience at the AWM during the 2019-2020 school year.

## **B) Humanities Content**

If the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to W.E.B. DuBois, was defined by the color line, the 21<sup>st</sup> for most countries is surely defined by immigrant movement. There is no corner of our globe today that isn't marked by the inward and outward movement of people. According to the Pew Research Center, "If all of the world's international migrants (people living in a country that is different from their country or territory of birth) lived in a single country, it would be the world's fifth largest, with around 244 million people. Overall, international migrants make up 3.3% of the world's population today." Within that group of international migrants, according to the United Nations, there are at least 25 million refugees and asylum seekers.

From its inception, the United States has made immigrants an essential component. We refer to them in different ways: settlers, slaves, refugees, exiles, and of course immigrants. The pedestal of the Statue of Liberty displays the most famous poem in America, Emma Lazarus' "The New Colossus," which welcomes immigrants to these shores:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

As Ilan Stavans states in *Becoming Americans*, Lazarus's poem "is this country's most famous literary treatment for the theme of immigration," and "her poem affirmed the profound connection between the ideas of freedom and immigration." The lines of this poem have been read and reread by millions, influencing our culture deeply. This is why an exhibit, focused on writers who are immigrants and refugees themselves, allows us to deeply examine the impact of stories and language on an issue. Exploring the words of the writers who have lived these experiences in a highly interactive exhibit will allow the museum and its partners to expose a large number of visitors and students to a deeply important topic in the 21st century.

With the rise of populism and the controversy surrounding globalism, immigration has become a highly contested topic. Without taking sides, it is crucial for institutions that celebrate our culture and history to affirm the value of immigrants who enter a country in legal, orderly ways. They serve as a bridge with the rest of the world. They are also economic, political, and cultural engines, constantly reminding the present population of the importance of choice in the definition of one's life. And, when those immigrants and refugees become writers, they bring a unique perspective, that as David Cowart argues in his book *Trailing Clouds*, "readers learn much about the durability of or changes in the American way of life from writers who in recent years have come to this country."

This exhibit will look at the phenomenon of immigration from an interdisciplinary perspective: literary and artistic as well as social and cultural. Its educational value is found in the exploration of American culture as a mix of international ingredients that get assimilated into a distinct, autochthonous mix. American culture is therefore always on the move. Indeed, the one constant of this culture is change.

Upon arrival, immigrant groups are often perceived to be in the periphery. As Viet Thanh Nguyen describes so many of them in *The Displaced*, "These displaced are mostly unwanted where they fled from; unwanted where they are... , and unwanted where they want to go." Yet they immediately exert influence on the mainstream of where they are through the spoken word, music, fashion, cuisine, and other cultural manifestations. As those immigrants and refugees climb the economic hierarchy entering the middle class, their influence acquires new capital, ultimately becoming a commodity for the culture as a whole, meaning they become accepted in the larger national narrative and become a part of the story that is that country's history.

Starting with the diaries of missionaries, travelers, and settlers, immigrant and refugee writers have been a key component of the American literary canon. There is a long and rich tradition of immigrant voices, from all walks of life, whose stories are at the core of the American story: puritans, African slaves, Jews, Italians, Irish, Germans, French, Scandinavians, Russians, and others. The story of Native Americans, Hawaiians, Puerto Ricans, and Pacific Islanders is also a

story of immigration, albeit of a different kind. They have been pushed to migrate internally in the country, from one diaspora to another.

This exhibit will feature modern writers of different ages and genders, whose places of origin will range across the globe, including countries such as Cuba, Ghana, Japan, China, France, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Italy, Israel, Russia, Serbia, Colombia, Korea, Vietnam, Iran, Nigeria, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Dominican Republic. The importance of immigrant and refugee writers in the last two decades' is illustrated by the level of recognition their works continue to achieve. Pulitzer Prize winners and finalists illustrate this well: Viet Thanh Nguyen (Vietnamese), Jhumpa Lahiri (Indian), and Junot Díaz (Dominican) have won the Pulitzer for Fiction, while Hernan Diaz (Argentine/Swedish), Laila Lalami (Moroccan), Ha Jin (Chinese), and Chang-Rae Lee (Korean), have been finalists; Nilo Cruz (Cuban) has won a Pulitzer for Drama and Siddhartha Mukherjee (Indian) for Nonfiction, while other finalists have included, Luis Alberto Urrea (Mexican), and Suketo Mehta (Indian) in Nonfiction. Similarly in recent years the National Book Award for Fiction included Colum McCann (Irish) and finalist Aleksandar Hemon (Bosnian). Other examples of major award winners include former child soldiers turned memoirists and activists: Ishmael Beah (Sierra Leone) and John Dau (Sudanese); multi-genre authors and scholars Edwidge Danticat (Haitian), Michelle Cliff (Jamaican), Jessica Hagedorn (Filipino); journalist Daniel Alarcón (Peruvian); and many more.

The exhibit will give visitors the chance to see and hear authors like these, to have a direct and visceral experience that helps to make each writer and their story more grounded, and forces the visitor to see each of them as an individual, and all of them as part of the larger fabric that is this country.

In this exhibit, a number of central humanities themes will be highlighted:

**Bridges to and from America:** One of the most common challenges of any immigrant or refugee can be the attachment to the place once called home. With the growth of modern transportation and communications chains, those connections can remain stronger than they were in the past. However, some of those same advances, like social media, can allow people to isolate themselves away from other groups, and reduce daily face-to-face interactions that are essential for cultural interactions. The ability of groups to isolate themselves can disconnect the immigrant or refugee from the larger populations around them, and it can keep the current population from connecting with and seeing the humanity of the newly arriving populations. For many around the world, their perception of America will come through the messages and images they receive from immigrants and refugees here, reaching back to the place they called home. The success that immigrants and refugees find in their new home can go a long way to increasing the perception of American culture abroad.

This exhibit will bring the faces of immigrants into stark focus and make their voices and their stories much more human and real for everyone who visits. The questions and topics addressed

by the authors will explore these issues of connection to what was home and what has become or is becoming home.

**Assimilation and Change:** Immigrants and refugees bring new ideas, new customs and new perspectives into a country, highlighting its strengths and offering new ideas and perspectives. However, the resistance to change on the part of the existing population and the new population can be strong. While American culture has always claimed the notion of the melting pot as a portion of its nature, the struggle for new residents to maintain tradition and to resist cultural appropriation of bits and pieces of something that may be considered sacred, can also lead to isolation and misunderstanding between communities. Similarly, existing populations can feel threatened by the new traditions, especially when they are clearly visible, whether it is the building of a mosque or a radically different form of clothing.

In the exhibit, many of the passages and works chosen will reflect on and amplify these issues. Writers whose lives have been touched by these issues are keenly aware that the process of assimilation is not as simple as the melting pot metaphor presents it to be, and through exposure to their works, visitors to the exhibit will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of assimilation.

**Understanding of the Other:** So often, the work of humanities scholars will come down to an analysis of one group's need to see and to understand that which it classifies primarily as "the other." Whether it is the artist or the historian, the exploration of the other can run from an internal and personal struggle with a portion of one's self, to an understanding of something much larger and more imposing. Writers, very often, are individuals who have a heightened understanding of the the other, and they use their stories, their research, their songs and their screenplays to tell stories that document the quest for, or failure at, understanding that which is the other, or their own struggles at being defined as the other.

This exhibit, in its look at immigrant and refugee writers and the works and writers that have influenced them, will explore in its questioning of the authors their heightened perception of what it means to live as the other inside such a large and diverse culture as that which is loosely labeled American.

**The Effects of Language on Our Society and Culture:** The United States is by default an English language country, but it does not have an official national language like so many other countries. American English is a living language which is constantly changing and adapting, creating new words and incorporating elements from all of the waves of people who have become American, but who may not have spoken or written English when they came here. In exploring these writers, and their stories, this exhibit will look closely at the impact of English on these writers as well as the continual impact on English that these writers, and the communities they represent, bring to American English.

With the effect that language has on shaping thought, it is essential to understand how language shapes our understanding of the world. By exploring the shifts in American English, and the impact it has on those who write in it, most often as a second language, this exhibit will expose visitors to the writers whose works are so often a reflection of the complexity of translation.

**Shifting Values:** The mission of the American Writers Museum is to engage the public in celebrating American writers and exploring their influence on our history, our identity, our culture and our daily lives. The core idea of this museum, that writers do influence our history, identity and culture, means that to some extent they shape our values. In the 21st Century, the platforms for writers to reach and influence an audience are extremely broad and far more fragmented than they were in the past, and so writers can reach and influence large audiences in some instances, but because of fragmentation, in some ways some audiences may be harder to reach, and less likely to listen.

This exhibit will explore the refurbishing of American values through the infusion of new voices. It will explore how writers have an impact on audiences and how those audiences can impact the overall value the country has on those who were not born here, but are still American, or at least are becoming American. Also, through its interactive elements, the exhibit will allow visitors to reflect on what their values are, and if the words of these authors have an impact on them. The exhibit will explore how America changes immigrants and refugees and how immigrants and refugees change America.

### **C) Project Formats**

The AWM develops all temporary exhibits in tandem with related public programs and curriculum for Write In, our youth education program, to extend the reach of the exhibit's content and provide various channels to present themes and ideas in deep and diverse ways to different audiences.

#### Exhibit Description

A goal for *Becoming American* is to feature a range of authors and works in order to highlight perspectives visitors might not otherwise encounter in "mainstream" writing. Digital media allows for a greater amount of content to be delivered in a limited amount of space because digital content is only constrained by the amount of time and funding available to produce it. The AWM has already made use of existing consumer technology such as iPads to reduce the cost of digital media deployment and to extend the quantity of media that can be utilized in temporary exhibitions. We will extend this strategy more completely for *Becoming American*.

*Becoming American* will be a highly interactive experience delivered through a combination of exhibition techniques. The gallery will be animated by a series of small format touchscreens with stirring, close-up images of immigrant and refugee authors from around the world. Each touchscreen will be placed in a graphic backdrop featuring maps and contextual imagery. Visitors will approach any screen and will be invited to "touch to begin." A menu will appear with

a single author story, author reading and author commentary. If visitors desire more information they can select an “explore more” tab to see a menu of all featured authors, and may select any author for viewing.

The application for viewing authors will revert to an “attract” mode when a visitor completes their exploration, with author portraits as the default screen. Each time the screen returns to this “attract” mode a new author portrait will be displayed, thus at no time will the gallery present the same layout of authors.

In addition to the small, individual touchscreens, one large monitor will feature a three minute video that provides an overview of immigrant and refugee voices in American literature. This will be a looping video so that visitors can dip in and out of it, and it will feature commentary from Humanities Scholar Ilan Stavans and other scholar commenters.

Writing is consumed both in digital and in physical form. To provide a tactile counterpoint to the digital experiences in the exhibit, the gallery will feature examples of written work that can be held and perused. The current exhibit in this space, *Capturing Stories*, a photography exhibit of one photographer’s 50-year career as a photojournalist, and the authors that he photographed, currently includes shelf rails below the photographs with books by each author that can be picked up and read. In *Becoming American*, custom bookmarks will be inserted in the books, guiding visitors to specific passages, with blank bookmarks also available for visitors to write short notes that they can put into the books to call out what moves them.

The AWM has found that visitors are moved to contribute their observations and commentary to our exhibits. We expect this to be especially true for *Becoming American*, given the contested nature of the national dialogue on this subject. We know that museums in general and AWM specifically provide a valuable, safe place for dialogue about subjects that are often polarizing. With this in mind, visitor feedback will be encouraged with digital and physical writing stations. Written commentary may be posted by visitors in the gallery.

#### *Exhibit-related Curriculum for Middle and High School Students*

The AWM’s youth education program, called Write In, uses the museum’s exhibits, coupled with specially-designed curriculum, to give middle and high school students an immersive experience with writers, their work, and their influence. The general curriculum focuses on the themes of “American Identities” (for high school students) and “American Voices” (for middle school students) with exercises that encourage students to engage with the permanent exhibits and then make personal reflections through writing exercises.

The AWM develops additional Write In curriculum for temporary exhibits that relates to the specific content and themes of each temporary exhibit. The AWM will work with Louise Galpine from the Great Books Foundation and high school teachers Greg and Heather Sherwin to develop supplemental curriculum for *Becoming American*. We expect 10,000 middle and high school students to experience the exhibit and related curriculum during the exhibit’s 12-month

run. The exercises in the *Becoming American* curriculum will follow the development of the exhibit content. The preliminary plan for the curriculum includes:

- Two detailed lesson plans appropriate for both middle and high school students. Each lesson plan will equip students to analyze a number of authors or themes in the exhibit.
- Prompts for additional student work, which teachers can use following the template established in the detailed lesson plans.
- Inquiry-based professional development for teachers.

Each lesson plan will comprise the following elements:

- An opening question that engages a key issue raised by the exhibit. Students write about this question and share their responses with other students, in pairs or small groups.
- Students explore the exhibit and its textual, audio, and visual elements in depth, using that initial key question as a framework for their exploration. Prompts, related to the opening question, help students analyze the exhibit's elements in depth.
- Question-led Shared Inquiry discussion that supports substantive exploration of the issues raised by the exhibit. A teacher will lead this discussion.
- A final writing activity in which students synthesize their response to the opening question and discussion questions, based on their own exploration and the ideas they have heard from their peers.

### **Student outcomes**

Through engaging in Shared Inquiry activities, students will demonstrate understanding of the ideas expressed in the exhibit and will articulate their own interpretations of the issues raised by those ideas, verbally and in writing. They will develop a better understanding of both the exhibit's content and their own responses and those of their peers.

Students will achieve this outcome by engaging in the following activities:

- Exploring, verbally and in writing, an open-ended question relevant to the exhibit's content.
- Noting their responses to the exhibit's content and their questions about it.
- Considering the significance of the exhibit's content by discussing questions of meaning in Shared Inquiry discussion.
- Supporting their assertions by citing evidence from the exhibit's content and explaining the pertinence of that evidence.
- Refining and expanding their ideas and responses by writing about the exhibit's content, incorporating both their own ideas and their reactions to their peers' comments.

The refinement of this curriculum will take place in fall, 2019 and be completed when the exhibit opens in November, 2019. Formative and summative evaluation of the curriculum's success at achieving the outcomes will be completed by Scott Burg of Rockman et al, the third-party evaluator for this project. Evaluation methodology is described in section G.



### Public Programs

Exhibit-related public programs for adults will include at least 10 events with immigrant and refugee authors. The AWM has an established program of weekly author events that take place in the museum. Author events usually feature the author being interviewed, reading from their work and answering questions from the audience. These programs are free with museum admission and typically attract about 100 people. The AWM has also hosted writing workshops and “mixtape” programs that offer even more interaction and writing practice for participants. It is likely that different types of programs will be offered on the theme of immigrant and refugee writing during the exhibit.

### **D) Project Resources**

The primary resources of this exhibit will be the video of the authors reading their works, the works of other writers who influenced them, and responses to questions posed by the team about what it means to them, as immigrant and refugee writers, to be in the process of becoming, or to have become, American.

The greatest resource the American Writers Museum has to enable this project is its connection to the authors who will bring it to life. The 34-member National Advisory Council of the American Writers Museum is the starting point from which the group can begin its outreach and identification of writers to include and contact for input on who to include. Current members of the Council are key members of this project, including Ilan Stavans, Marie Arana, and Viet Thanh Nguyen.

Since opening its doors just over one year ago, the American Writers Museum has hosted a number of author programs that have expanded its connections to writers beyond those on its National Advisory Council. Along with special programs on the topic of immigrant and refugee writers hosted by Ilan Stavans in 2017 and Viet Thanh Nguyen in 2018, other immigrant and refugee writers who have been featured in programs at the American Writers Museum include Andre Aciman, Deepak Unnikrishnan, Vu Tran, Juan Martinez, Dipika Mukherjee, Ana Simo, Kao, Kalia Yang, and Toni Nealie. These preparatory connections will increase the reach and input the museum can bring to this project.

Amaze Design, who has designed the entire museum from its inception and all of its temporary exhibits to date, will spearhead the development of this project. Amaze Design has extensive experience in creating interactive exhibits that elicit visitor engagement and provide unique interpretations of complex and abstract ideas. For an exhibit at the Perot Museum of Nature & Science in Dallas, Amaze Design created an interview /recording kit consisting of a laptop and hi-res camera that attached to the laptop. The kit was sent around the country to scientists in order for them to participate in Skype interviews in which they shared inspirational stories about their careers in science. The interviews were simultaneously recorded using the hi-res camera. The result was highly personal and compelling interviews presented in a high quality format at a very low cost. *Becoming American* will use this proven method to gather video of immigrant and

refugee writers from around the country. Participating writers will sign agreements giving their permission for this video content to be used in the exhibit.

### **E) Project History**

The American Writers Museum's permanent exhibits were curated by a team of nearly 50 scholars and authors from across the country, from 2010 through 2017. This curatorial approach ensured a diverse and comprehensive representation of American writing and its influence on our history, our identity, our culture, and our daily lives. The curating team understood the importance of representing the diversity of American writing, and as a result, the museum's permanent exhibits feature many of the writers that most people know, but many more who were under-recognized during and after their lifetimes. The AWM highlights writers who are Native Americans, women, LGBT, and immigrants from all parts of the world. One of the museum's core permanent exhibits explores the idea of "The American Voice" and the many diverse contributions to it.

Discussions of a temporary exhibit on immigrant writing began shortly after the museum opened in 2017, as a clear, natural and relevant theme extending from the AWM's permanent exhibits. The AWM's Exhibits Committee considers this a high priority and an opportunity to present this topic in a modern way to a broad audience.

The project team has researched other exhibits around the country that have explored the theme of immigration and the immigrant experience. These exhibits often explore the immigrant experience relative to the organization's focus — art, food, housing, jobs, or look at a specific segment of immigrants. *Becoming American* will be unique in its focus on immigrant *writing*, presented by the nation's first and only writers museum. *Becoming American* will draw strength from being in the context of the American Writers Museum's permanent exhibits that highlight the power of the written word, and how people use writing to effect change on both a personal and a societal level.

### **F) Audience, Marketing and Promotion**

During the 12 months that *Becoming American* will be on view, the AWM anticipates that approximately 45,000 visitors will experience it in person, which includes 10,000 middle and high school students in the Write In program. These numbers are based on past museum attendance (33,000 in our first 12 months), with more visitors expected as a result of increased targeted marketing efforts in Chicago and nationally, as well as a current upward trend of visitation.

As an exhibit built around digital video content, much of the the exhibit content will be available online as well as in person. This will serve as a means of enticing visitation, creating a virtual experience for those who cannot attend, and it will be extremely helpful to teachers and their students who want to review certain passages and discussion points even after their visit to the exhibit. This will be the first time the AWM has offered exhibit content in an online format.

Partnerships: We plan to host presentations at the the National Book Festival in Washington DC in September 2019 and the National Book Awards in New York in November 2019, where Project Director Carey Cranston and Humanities Scholar Ilan Stavans will present the exhibit in a public program that will be defined during the planning phase. In April 2020, we will present a similar program at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books. However, this event is outside of the grant period. Planning for the LA Festival of Books presentation is included in the attached Work Plan, but travel to LA is not included in the project budget. These presentations will help spread the word about the exhibit, which is national in scope, to new audiences, and engage them in discussing humanities ideas related to immigrant and refugee writing.

Local and National Media: The AWM will implement a multi-faceted marketing campaign to promote the exhibit and related programs. The AWM has successfully used advertising in magazines that are specific to exhibit content, radio and television promotions, and advertising on printed pieces such as brochures, postcards and rack cards. We will work with the Chicago Cultural Alliance to promote the exhibit through their social media outlets and e-newsletter. The Alliance is a consortium of 40 Chicago-area cultural heritage museums, centers and historical societies that represent over 30 different cultures.

Outreach to AWM Audience: The AWM promotes its exhibits and programs via a monthly e-newsletter, currently distributed to 11,000 (and counting) members and subscribers, emails to members and subscribers about specific exhibits and programs, and a printed donor newsletter. Outreach to schools for the Write In program includes ads in *Teach & Travel* magazine and emails to teachers and principals in Chicago Public Schools, Chicago private schools, and suburban schools. The AWM has compiled a list of 637 public and private schools throughout the Chicagoland area that will receive direct outreach about the exhibit and related curriculum. The exhibit will also be promoted on the Write In printed brochure that is distributed at the museum and at off-site events.

## **G) Evaluation of Impact**

The AWM will work with Scott Burg, Senior Researcher at Rockman et al (REA) to evaluate *Becoming American*. REA is an independent evaluation, research, and consulting firm focusing on education, technology, and media. Scott has conducted numerous qualitative research studies on the impact of arts and humanities with diverse populations.

REA will conduct a mixed methods formative and summative evaluation to:

1. Assess how visitors comprehend the exhibition and think about the humanities ideas and themes that will be presented
2. Develop evaluation tools to measure the impact of exhibit-related curriculum on students participating in AWM's *Write In* Youth Education Program

## **Visitor Studies**

REA will use two phases of evaluation to better understand visitors' reactions to key themes, ideas, concepts, and activities being developed for this project. The evaluation will:

- Measure visitors' understanding of terms and concepts of recent immigration

- Gauge visitors' interest in themes communicated in immigrant writings
- Assess visitor reaction to exhibit's themes, activities, and presentation methodologies

### Formative Evaluation

In designing a new museum exhibition, it is critical to understand how non-experts relate to specific content presented in the exhibition. It is also important to understand the elements of design, messaging, and storytelling that lead to visitors' engagement with, and understanding of, the exhibit.

Through surveys and interviews with selected museum audiences, REA will explore understanding of immigration with respect to humanities themes. Key questions to consider with study participants include:

- What do visitors think about specific writers and themes about immigrant writing?
- What words do they use to describe this topic?
- What concepts or themes about immigration and immigrant writing do visitors find overly challenging or complex?
- What do visitors imagine they will learn, see and experience in the exhibit?
- What prior knowledge or personal experience do visitors have about immigration?
- What elements from other museum exhibits do visitors find informative and engaging?

### Summative Evaluation

The summative evaluation of *Becoming American* will be driven by the following research questions:

- To what extent does the exhibition increase visitors' understanding of the recent immigration experience?
- To what extent does the exhibition raise visitors' awareness and interest in immigrant writing?
- Does the exhibit stimulate conversation and/or reconsideration of important immigration-related topics?
- Does the exhibit inspire visitors to learn more about exhibit topics and/or read immigrant writings?
- How effective were exhibition activities and presentation modalities in communicating exhibition themes?

Evaluators will conduct a mixed-method evaluation for the summative phase to include visitor surveys and interviews.

### Visitor Surveys

A comprehensive survey will be developed and administered to a random sample of visitors upon leaving the exhibition. Survey questions will be developed in collaboration with AWM staff and advisors.

### Post-Visit Phone Interviews and Web Surveys

One to two months after visiting *Becoming American*, visitors who completed surveys will be asked to complete a follow-up web survey or take part in a phone interview. REA will identify which specific exhibit elements, content and design features had the greatest longer-term impact on visitor knowledge and attitudes regarding the immigrant/refugee experience and immigrant/refugee writing.

### **Write In Curriculum evaluation tools**

REA will work with staff from the Great Books Foundation, developers of *Becoming American* curriculum, and teachers Greg and Heather Sherwin to create evaluation tools for assessing the impact of the curriculum on students participating in AWM's *Write In* Youth Education Program.

As part of the instrument development process, REA will examine other *Write In* curriculum, as well as review tools being used for evaluating the impact of AWM youth programs on participating students. To ensure development of authentic evaluation tools that measure varied outcomes, REA will work with the team who helped design the pedagogical framework and related learning outcomes for the *Becoming American* exhibit.

During the formative stage, REA will assist the curriculum development team to craft goals and objectives that are measurable and appropriate for the intended audience. REA will also help the team to explore what exhibit-driven knowledge and behavioral-related outcomes that could be most effectively studied and assessed.

During the summative phase, REA will assist in the development of specific evaluation questions and items, and may also pilot any resulting instruments with members of the target audience.

### **H) Organizational Profile**

The mission of the American Writers Museum is to engage the public in celebrating American writers and exploring their influence on our history, our identity, our culture, and our daily lives.

The American Writers Museum strives to:

- Educate the public about American writers – past and present;
- Engage visitors to the Museum in exploring the many exciting worlds created by the spoken and written word;
- Enrich and deepen appreciation for good writing in all its forms;
- Motivate visitors to discover, or rediscover, a love of reading and writing; and
- Inspire the young writers of tomorrow

The AWM was conceived in 2010 by founder Malcolm O'Hagan, after he discovered that there was no museum in the United States that celebrated American writers and their enduring relevance. Mr. O'Hagan formed an Executive Planning Team to conceptualize the museum and raise money. In 2011, Chicago was chosen as the location for the museum, with strong support from Mayor Rahm Emanuel. In 2014, the Board of Directors was formed, as well as a National Advisory Council of authors and experts from around the country, representing some of the most important voices in modern American writing. A national Curating Team of more than 50 authors and scholars provided content for the museum's exhibits. Working collaboratively with this large group ensured a broad, diverse perspective of American writing. Boston-based firm, Amaze Design, was hired to design the museum's exhibits.

In 2015, the AWM confirmed its home at 180 North Michigan Avenue, in the center of Chicago's cultural corridor. At the end of 2017, the museum completed a \$10 million campaign to establish the museum, including two planning grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as gifts from many individuals, foundations and corporations. The AWM opened to the public on May 16, 2017 as the nation's first and only museum of American writers.

The AWM's exhibits use innovative technology to make learning fun and show the enduring relevance of past writing to issues in our country today. The AWM is the opposite of a "don't touch" museum, with interactive displays, vintage typewriters, touch screens and multi-sensory elements that engage and delight visitors of all ages. In 2017, AWM topped the list of Fodor's World's 10 Best New Museums and was voted Illinois' Best Attraction by *USA Today*.

In our first year of operations (May 2017 - May 2018), the AWM welcomed 33,000 visitors from all 50 states and 30 foreign countries. The AWM fulfills its mission through educational programs for adults and youth, including author events, workshops and lectures. The AWM's youth education program, Write In, teaches and inspires middle and high school students to learn about great American writers and become bold writers of their own stories. The AWM's 2018 operating budget is \$2.1 million.

### ***Partner Organizations***

#### Great Books Foundation

Founded in Chicago in 1947, the Great Books Foundation (GBF) is a leader in the development of reading, discussion, and critical thinking programs for K-12 audiences. GBF has more than 50 years of experience helping teachers inspire students to read closely, think critically, and collaborate meaningfully as they explore open-ended questions about significant works.

In the past 15 years, Great Books has:

- Provided professional development to over 65,000 teachers
- Impacted over one million students
- Had its materials and/or training used in more than 50,000 schools
- Led over 11,000 training and coaching sessions for teachers and administrators.

In addition, GBF is publisher of numerous interdisciplinary anthologies for students at all levels, which are designed to encourage and support in-depth discussion of important ideas. These include the recent anthology *Immigrant Voices*, a collection of writing by 21st century immigrants to the USA.

#### Rockman et al

Rockman et al (REA) is an independent evaluation, research, and consulting firm focusing on studies of education, technology, and media. REA conducts rigorous, independent evaluations and research on educational programs and products. More information about Scott Burg, the project evaluator, is in section I.

## I) Project Team, including Humanities Scholars and Consultants

### Humanities Scholars

Ilan Stavans, Lead Curator, is the Lewis-Sebring Professor in the Humanities, Latin American, and Latino Culture at Amherst College, and the publisher of Restless Books. His books include *On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language*, *Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language*, and *Becoming Americans: Four Centuries of Immigrant Writing*. Stavans holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University and is known as an expert on American, Hispanic and Jewish cultures. Stavans is an immigrant to the United States from Mexico. Stavans will serve as Lead Curator of the exhibit and will be part of the team of Humanities Scholars.

Marie Arana is a Peruvian-American author of nonfiction and fiction, senior advisor to the U.S. Librarian of Congress, director of the National Book Festival, the John W. Kluge Center's Chair of the Cultures of the Countries of the South, and a Writer at Large for the *Washington Post*. She was editor-in-chief of the *Washington Post's* literary section, Book World, and has written for the *New York Times*, the *National Geographic*, the *International Herald Tribune*, Spain's *El País*, and Peru's *El Comercio*, among many other publications. Her biography of Simón Bolívar won the 2014 Los Angeles Times Book Prize; her memoir, *American Chica*, was a finalist for the National Book Award. She has also written two novels, *Cellophane* and *Lima Nights*.

Vu Hoang Tran is Assistant Professor of Practice in English and Creative Writing at the University of Chicago. Tran is an award-winning fiction writer and novelist whose work focuses on the legacy of the Vietnam war. Tran's first novel, *Dragonfish*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book and was one of the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Best Books of the Year. His short fiction has appeared in the *O. Henry Prize Stories*, *the Best American Mystery Stories*, *Best of Fence*, and other publications. He is the winner of a Whiting Writers' Award and an NEA Fellowship, and has also been a fellow at Bread Loaf, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and the MacDowell Colony. Born in Vietnam and raised in Oklahoma, Tran received his MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and his PhD from the Black Mountain Institute at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

### Additional Humanities Scholar, African, TBD

The project team will identify an additional humanities scholar and writer with strong academic credentials who is an immigrant from an African country to join the project team. One had been identified, but a timing conflict arose for next year. The additional scholar will be identified before the end of 2018. Representing Africa, as well as Mexico, Latin American and Asia, is a priority for the project team to fully realize the 21st century immigrant/refugee experience through modern writers.

### Special Advisor

Viet Thanh Nguyen is the Aerol Arnold Chair of English and Professor of English, American Studies and Ethnicity, and Comparative Literature at the University of Southern California. Nguyen is a Pulitzer-prize winning author and has received fellowships from the MacArthur and

Guggenheim Foundations. Nguyen is a Vietnamese refugee whose work addresses a wide range of issues related to the experience of migration and assimilation into different cultures. Although his schedule does not allow him to serve as a Humanities Scholar, he will serve as a special advisor to the planning team as needed. Nguyen is a member of the AWM's National Advisory Council and has served as an advisor to the AWM for several years.

With humanities scholars representing Mexico, South America, Asia, and Africa, the project team represents a broad cross-section of the immigrant experience. The current national conversations about immigration policy, the impact and influence of immigrant populations, and the "refugee crisis" make this exhibit especially relevant and timely.

### **Project Team Consultants**

Andy Anway, Amaze Design designed the AWM's permanent exhibits and all temporary exhibits to date. His firm, Amaze Design, also engages in exhibition research and communications services and works with state-of-the-art media consultants. Anway has over 30 years of experience in project planning, interpretive design, and construction. The firm's portfolio includes several examples of bringing the written word to life in such institutions as the August Wilson Center, the Nathaniel Hawthorne House, the National Museum of Australia and national museums around the world.

Louise Galpine, Executive Director of Creative Development at the Great Books Foundation, holds a B.A. in English from the University of Cambridge, and an M.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of London, specializing in the literature in English of the South Asian diaspora. Louise has worked on numerous educational projects at GBF, including collaborating with the Studs Terkel Radio Archive to produce an audio-based high school curriculum, partnering with the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives to contribute discussion questions to a curriculum based on the work of Frederick Douglass for schools across the country, and publishing a literary anthology of writing by 21st century immigrants to the USA. In her role of developing curriculum to accompany the *Becoming American* exhibit, Louise will lead a team of GBF colleagues and project team members with extensive teaching, curriculum-writing, educational publishing, and partnership experience.

Scott Burg, MLS, Senior Researcher, Rockman et al has a formal background in adult education, instructional systems design, and qualitative research. Scott has managed a diverse range of formative and summative evaluation projects with schools, museums, youth development organizations, and public media. He has conducted numerous organizational development studies with clients exploring partnerships and capacity building activities that impact training and delivery of education and health services to diverse and underserved audiences. Scott has conducted visitor studies on science, art and humanities exhibits and education programs at museums across the country including the DeYoung Museum, the Exploratorium, the California Academy of Sciences, the Ithaca Sciencenter and the Cooper Hewitt Design Museum. He is the lead evaluator on a five-state education program supporting teachers and students in high poverty rural areas, and a project to study the impact of jazz



education in San Francisco Bay Area schools. Scott has a B.A. in Literature/Creative Writing from the University of Illinois, and a Masters in Library Science from the University of Maryland.

Two high school teachers (a husband and wife team) will work with the project team by participating in bi-weekly conference calls and working with Louise Galpine on curriculum development and Scott Burg on evaluation tools for that curriculum.

Greg Sherwin teaches AP Human Geography at Adlai E. Stevenson High School in the northern suburbs of Chicago. He also is an adjunct professor at Elmhurst College where he teaches a graduate level course for geography teachers. He served on the AP Human Geography Test Development Committee from 2002-2006. In 2007, he co-authored the AP Human Geography Teacher's Guide with Paul Gray, published by the College Board. Most recently, he co-authored the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> editions of Advanced Placement Study Guide for *Human Geography: People, Place and Culture* with Paul Gray. In 2015, Mr. Sherwin received a Distinguished Teaching Award from the National Council for Geography Education. He has taught three Advanced Placement Summer Institutes for Human Geography at Loyola University, Northwestern University, and Plainfield, Illinois High School District.

Heather Sherwin teaches English at Prospect High School in Mount Prospect, Illinois. She is active in curriculum development and test preparation, including creation of SAT and ACT summative and formative activities and assessments. Mrs. Sherwin is also a Professional Learning Community leader, charged with spearheading curriculum initiatives and mentoring new teachers. She has served on numerous educational committees during her years as a high school educator, all focused on improvements in student growth and learning. In addition to teaching high school English literature and writing, Mrs. Sherwin has also taught high school journalism and advised student publications. She worked in journalism for several years before and during her teaching career, writing for newspapers in Indiana and Illinois, including the *Daily Southtown* and the *Chicago Tribune*. She is a frequent presenter at the Northern Scholastic Press Association.

#### ***AWM Staff***

Carey Cranston, President will serve as Project Director and manager of the project team and consultants. Mr. Cranston joined the American Writers Museum in September 2016. He was previously the President of Fox College, a private career college in Chicago, and held leadership positions at two Chicago public relations firms. Mr. Cranston also taught college composition at the University of Illinois at Chicago and DePaul University. He holds a B.A. in English from DePaul, summa cum laude, an M.A. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and an M.S. in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Allison Sansone, Program Director will work with the project team and contribute to the discussion about exhibit themes and relevance to the Write In curriculum. She will also be responsible for scheduling public programs with immigrant and refugee writers. Sansone is on

the team that developed the Write In curriculum and provides ongoing program direction. She is also responsible for identifying and scheduling all of the AWM's live author events. She served as Executive Director of the Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park for nine years and created the organization's online presence, inaugurated its writing residency and coordinated the 17th Biennial Hemingway International Conference. She holds a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

#### **J) Work Plan**

A work plan outlining specific tasks, people involved, and timelines for work completed during the grant period can be found on page 20. Before the grant period, the AWM Exhibits Committee, made up of AWM Board members, identified a working group to focus on *Becoming American*. From this working group, Marie Arana, AWM Board Member and *Becoming American* working group member, identified Ilan Stavans, Vu Tran and Viet Thanh Nguyen as scholars who should contribute to this exhibit, and Andy Anway as the exhibit designer. Before the grant period, this group will meet two to three more times to discuss all aspects of exhibit, program, evaluation and curriculum development.

#### **K) Project Funding**

The total direct costs for this exhibit planning project is \$82,182. No other funds have been raised to date for this planning project. The \$40,000 requested from the NEH will cover:

- Honoraria for Humanities Scholars,
- Fees paid to Amaze Design for consultation and exhibit design,
- Payment to the Great Books Foundation for the development of curriculum to be used with the Write In program that uses *Becoming American* as a teaching tool, and
- Payment to Rockman et al to design and conduct evaluation of the exhibit's success in conveying humanities content with visitors, as well as design and implementation of evaluation for students participating in the Write In program.

The AWM will contribute the cost of salaries and fringe benefits of the program staff who will work on the project, and the remainder of direct costs above \$40,000. These funds will come from the AWM's operating budget.

Note that the proposal budget includes exhibit *planning* costs. Some of the activities described in this proposal and on the work plan are exhibit implementation, which overlap with some planning activities. Costs for activities such as collection of videos of writers and exhibit fabrication are not included in the budget that accompanies this proposal, because the focus of this proposal and budget is on the cost of planning activities.

During the NEH grant period, while the exhibit is being planned, the AWM will raise funds from its pool of major donors and other prospects with an interest in this topic. Funds raised during this time will offset costs for the implementation of the exhibit, as well as outreach and promotion. The AWM successfully completed a \$10 million campaign at the end of 2017 to conceptualize and build the museum. Since the museum opened, the AWM has raised

sponsorship funds for other temporary exhibits from individual, corporate and foundation donors by identifying donors with an interest in the exhibit and making personalized solicitations. The same fundraising strategy will be used to raise the funds needed to make *Becoming American* a reality in November 2019.

Work Plan	April 2019	May 2019	June 2019	July 2019	August 2019	Sept. 2019	Oct. 2019	Nov. 2019	Dec. 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	March 2020	Project Participants
<b>Content Development</b>													
Bi-weekly conference calls with entire project team to: <i>Develop Exhibit Issues/Themes</i> <i>Determine Writers to be included</i>													CC, AS, IS, VT, MA, TBD, AA, GS, HS
Concept Design													AA
Team Reviews Design and suggests changes													CC, IS, VT, MA, TBD, AA
Detailed Design													AA
Final Exhibit Design													AA
Collect Videos from Authors													CC, AA
Curate and Edit Author Videos													CC, IS, VT, MA, TBD, AA
Develop Exhibit/Interpretive Text													AA, IS
Final Reviews and Edits of Interpretive Text													CC, IS, VT, MA, TBD, AA
Fabrication of Exhibit Elements													AA
Exhibit Opens to the Public													CC, AA
<b>Evaluation</b>													
Formative - General Audience													SB, CC
Summative - General Audience													SB, CC
Formative - Write In participants													SB, AS, LG, GS, HS
Summative - Write In participants													SB, AS, LG, GS, HS
<b>Curriculum Development for Write In Program</b>													
Create Curriculum, using formative eval. results													LG, AS, GS, HS
Use with school groups													AS
<b>Related Programs</b>													
AWM Author Events - planning and execution													CC, AS
National Programs													
National Book Festival preparation and execution (September 2019 in DC)													CC, IS
National Book Awards preparation and execution (November, 2019 in NY)													CC, IS
LA Times Book Festival preparation (April, 2020 in LA)													trip is outside grant period
CC: Carey Cranston													
IS: Ian Stavans													
VT: Vu Tran													
MA: Marie Arana													
TBD: Additional African Scholar to be determined													
AA: Andy Anway													
SB: Scott Burg													
LG: Louise Galpine													
AS: Allison Sansone													
GS: Greg Sherwin													
HS: Heather Sherwin													