



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: Five Gallery Suites Dedicated to Multidisciplinary Displays of Permanent Collection Artwork within a New Modern and Contemporary Exhibition Building

Institution: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Project Director: Gary Tinterow

Grant Program: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grants

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

Challenge Grant Request

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) requests a National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant of \$750,000 to support the construction of multidisciplinary galleries within a new exhibition building for modern and contemporary art¹ on the MFAH campus. Six galleries, ranging from 2,600 to 6,400 square feet, will provide generous space to display works in all media and allow for highly flexible, interdisciplinary presentations. The Museum will be able to display modern and contemporary works from Europe, the United States, Latin America, and Asia in a depth not found in any cultural institution within the region, and further, will be able to integrate works in different media across curatorial departments. Visitors to the Museum's new multidisciplinary galleries will discover installations that dissolve the boundaries of media, geography, and time, finding displays that are engaging and intellectually challenging. These galleries will bring the Museum's educational impact to a new level, transforming visitors' learning experiences by expanding the range of programs the Museum can offer, and attracting a larger audience to humanities-based programming.

I. RATIONALE

The MFAH is a 14-acre urban campus comprised of the Caroline Wiess Law Building, the Audrey Jones Beck Building, the Glassell School of Art, the Glassell Junior School, and the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden. Within these buildings, exhibition galleries and an educational resource center reside alongside the oldest repertory cinema in Houston and one of the largest art libraries in the Southwest. What began as a modest education initiative to bring art to Houston public schools in 1900, is now one of the preeminent cultural institutions in the United States that houses and cares for over 69,000 objects representing 6,000 years of human creativity.²

In January 2012, the MFAH Board of Trustees selected Steven Holl Architects for the commission of an overall campus redevelopment project that includes the construction of a new building devoted to modern and contemporary art.³ For the 164,000-square-foot new building, Holl and his senior partner Chris McVoy have designed a luminous, translucent glass structure that will feature an open lobby, new galleries, education spaces,

¹ "Modern and contemporary art," as discussed in this grant, connotes work created circa 1900 and beyond.

² View the video at <https://www.mfah.org/about/campus-redevelopment/> for further information on institutional history and project rationale for the Museum's campus redevelopment.

³ The Museum will observe all requirements for construction projects as outlined in the NEH challenge grant guidelines. Construction managers will adhere to Davis-Bacon requirements and the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Museum leadership has been in contact with Mr. Mark Wolfe of the State Historical Preservation Office to verify that no historic properties will be affected by the new building.

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

an auditorium, and facilities for fine and casual dining. This design is transparent at street level, inviting visitors and passersby to enter, engage, and learn. Holl and McVoy have provided two levels of galleries and a central gallery forum that are flexible and visitor-friendly. As visitors ascend through the central forum, they will be fully surrounded by art. Galleries will feature generous spaces for works in all media. Top-floor galleries will have the coved ceilings that are a signature of Holl's designs and will be partially illuminated through a roof membrane that will emit diffused natural light. This level will house a suite of six galleries—totaling 23,376 square feet of space—dedicated to rotating, multidisciplinary displays of the Museum's permanent collections.⁴

The need for the new exhibition building was identified through the exponential growth of the Museum's encyclopedic permanent collections. Modern and contemporary artworks make up 56% of the Museum's holdings, and is, at present, the fastest growing area of the collection. This extraordinary growth is attributed to the generosity of the institution's patrons, as well as to the establishment in 1992 of a restricted fund for the acquisition of modern and contemporary works. Indeed, more than 60% of the MFAH's accession endowment funds are restricted to the purchase of art from 1900 and beyond. The increase in the scope and depth of these holdings sharply contrasts with the limited space available in the Museum's footprint. With the exception of American art from the first half of the 20th century, there are currently no permanent galleries reserved for the display of modern and contemporary art on the Museum campus. The new exhibition building will provide 53,000 square feet of gallery space for modern and contemporary permanent collection displays.

The addition of a new exhibition building will enable the community to fully engage with the Museum's significant, yet little-seen, modern and contemporary holdings. As evidenced by the recent establishment of gallery spaces for the MFAH's Asian⁵ and Islamic holdings, having dedicated spaces for permanent collection holdings offer substantial opportunities: it aids the Museum in establishing and deepening relationships with Houston's diverse communities; it spurs the growth of partnerships with peer organizations; it facilitates the ability to mine the collections to develop and launch traveling exhibitions; and it creates occasions to focus humanities-based programming on the permanent collections. It is the latter opportunity that drives the display and interpretive plans for the new building's third-floor galleries.

⁴ See pages 31-39 for floor plans and gallery renderings.

⁵ See Appendix 2 for a discussion of the permanent collection displays of the Museum's Asian galleries.

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Modern and Contemporary Collections at the MFAH

Throughout its history, the Museum has pursued a pioneering approach to acquiring and presenting modern and contemporary work. The MFAH's holdings in this area number upward of 37,000 objects, overlapping multiple curatorial departments, including European, American, Latin American, and Asian art, and spanning varied media, including painting, sculpture, new media, photography, film and video, prints and drawings, and decorative arts and design. Even the campus itself reflects a forward-thinking perspective of the institution: the MFAH was among the first museums to hire two modern prize-winning architects—Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Rafael Moneo—for early building expansions, and to commission noted artist Isamu Noguchi to create the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden. With the construction of a third exhibition building by award-winning Steven Holl Architects, the MFAH will be able to present modern and contemporary works in a depth that will distinguish the Museum from its regional and national counterparts.

Works by Aristide Maillol and Diego Rivera were among the first works accessioned into the Museum's permanent collection in the 1920s, and over the ensuing decades, key works by European and American masters such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Paul Cézanne, Alexander Calder, Mark Rothko, and Claes Oldenburg entered the collection. Today, the modern and contemporary art department boasts particular strength in the American postwar areas of Abstract Expressionism and the New York School, Color Field Painting, Pop Art, the New Image movement of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the more independent developments of the Postmodernist era. European holdings complement American strengths, and the addition of contemporary works from artists based in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America have created cross-cultural dialogues both within the modern and contemporary art department and with the Museum's other curatorial areas.

Several distinct curatorial areas complement the modern and contemporary department's holdings. Since the establishment of the Latin American art department and its research arm, the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA), in 2001, the Museum has been systematically and aggressively collecting modern and contemporary art from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, as well as works by Latino artists in the United States. The collection currently numbers over 2,000 works, with strength in Constructive art from Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, and Uruguay; 1960s Neo-Figurative and Pop Art tendencies; and contemporary art and new media. The Museum's photography collection includes over 31,000 works

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

representing approximately 4,000 artists, reflecting both the mainstream history of the medium as well as the Museum's bold strategy to proactively acquire photographs by artists from Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. The MFAH's film department, along with the Museum's modern and contemporary, Latin American, and Asian departments have concurrently been collecting film, video, and digital works since the 1990s. The MFAH's encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings includes noteworthy holdings such as the monumental Peter Blum Edition Archive, which contains over 400 works created from 1980 to 1994 by contemporary American and European artists. The MFAH was one of the first institutions to focus on contemporary design as a distinct collecting area and to respect the field of craft as fine art. The Museum has strength in a number of international decorative arts and design movements, including early modern German and Viennese furniture and metalwork; American Arts and Crafts furniture, ceramics, and silver; Scandinavian glass, textiles, and furniture of the 1920s–70s; and contemporary design by established and emerging designers.

The result of decades of important and dynamic accessions is an overall heightened interest in the MFAH collections by academic scholars, museum curators, artists, students, and the general public. Over the years, the MFAH modern and contemporary collections have evolved within the confines of gallery spaces available in existing buildings. This lack of space significantly curtails the Museum's ability to educate audiences about the art of our time. Moreover, the surge in modern and contemporary art as a worldwide phenomenon has created a strong demand for engagement by the Museum's increasingly young and diverse audiences. The construction of a Museum building dedicated modern and contemporary art will address these difficulties and allow MFAH staff and visiting scholars to incorporate these works in research, exhibitions, and publications. The multidisciplinary galleries within the new Museum building will further respond to audience needs with cross-cultural displays and strong humanities-based programming.

III. IMPACT

New Collection Display

The construction of an additional facility is only part of the equation when it comes to displaying the MFAH's 20th- and 21st-century art collections. At the core of this enterprise lies a major challenge—how will the institution use its new space to exhibit artworks that tell the multiple, diverse stories that make up the complex history of art? The model proposed for the Museum's new exhibition building consists of a two-pronged approach that takes into account cross-cultural dialogue and integration across media. Galleries on the second

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

floor will center on a general narrative that brings together modern and contemporary art from Europe and the United States in dialogue with concurrent manifestations from Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere. These galleries will be complemented by a suite of six galleries on the third floor devoted to artists, movements, or media across disciplines and geographic regions that are represented in the Museum's collections in depth. Within these third-floor galleries, collection displays will not only present works from different cultures and time periods side-by-side, but will also integrate works in different media (photography, film, painting, sculpture, prints and drawings, decorative arts and design, and new media) across curatorial departments.⁶ The chief benefits of this two-pronged approach are that the resulting installations will help viewers compare and contrast works of art and cultures, and present persuasive arguments for a new way of looking at art and its place in history. Visitors to the Museum's new exhibition spaces will discover installations that are fresh, engaging, and intellectually challenging. The new galleries will provide visitors with opportunities to fully grasp the ideas, evolutions, and styles of modern and contemporary art—art with which visitors often lack familiarity or understanding. Further, the galleries dedicated to multidisciplinary displays will serve as catalysts, inspiring inventive, humanities-based programming that will engage audiences on several levels.

Current and Proposed Humanities Programming

In 1996, the NEH awarded the Museum a challenge grant of \$575,000 to endow public programs, which provides a stable source of funding to implement interdisciplinary interpretations of the permanent collection. This grant enabled the Museum to expand beyond the traditional aesthetic approach to interpreting the collection from a humanities perspective. To implement a multi-faceted approach, the Museum's learning and interpretation department collaborates with a wide range of organizations and individuals from Houston, across the nation, and around the world. These include performing arts groups, scholars, writers, visual artists, cultural organizations, social service agencies, schools serving students from pre-school to medical school, and regional libraries. These programs and materials have diversified, broadened, and deepened visitor participation at the MFAH, with program attendance reaching nearly 115,000 last fiscal year alone.

The MFAH demonstrates its capacity to present compelling, humanities-based programming through a robust schedule of 30+ exhibitions each year that allow staff to experiment with and evaluate formats that

⁶ See Appendix I for discussion of cross-curatorial collaborations featuring the MFAH permanent collections.

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

interpret art from differing academic and social perspectives. Temporary exhibitions and permanent collection displays include a wide range of materials to help orient the visitor and establish a cultural and historical context for objects. Informative labels, films, brochures, lectures, audio-visual presentations, docent-led tours, and an array of student, educator, and family programs accompany exhibitions at the MFAH. Current Museum programming connects visitors with the humanities through lectures and symposia; programs linking music, literature, poetry, and art; and resources that integrate art into humanities curricula for teachers, professors, and K-16 students across the Houston metropolitan area and the entire southeast region of Texas.⁷

Opportunities for community engagement will increase exponentially with the completion of the Museum's campus redevelopment, and it is imperative that the Museum be prepared to offer innovative and inclusive interpretive programming that engages broad audiences. Leading up to the 2020 public opening of the new modern and contemporary exhibition building, MFAH staff has time to plan, experiment, educate, and importantly, obtain audience buy-in for new interpretive programming. In May 2015, the MFAH contracted Slover Linett Audience Research, a social research and evaluation firm, to explore definitions of engagement and better equip the Museum with insights to inform ongoing experimentation with new programming approaches. In 2017, the MFAH received a grant from Humanities Texas to conduct strategic planning for the third-floor galleries within the new building. This funding will inform—through the guidance of a core group of humanities advisors and participation/feedback from public audiences—the development, piloting, and evaluation of a new humanities-based interpretation model for the Museum's interdisciplinary installations.⁸

The MFAH will also utilize digital strategies to fully engage its rapidly evolving, tech-savvy audience. Experiments with digital content will span multiple content delivery modes to help provide visitors with a contextual understanding of the works on view. The Museum is currently engaged in planning for enhanced mobile interpretive technology, which will link the need for way finding across the expanded campus with the opportunity for enhanced in-gallery interpretation. As an initial step, the MFAH is piloting the Guide ID audio delivery system, which works with beacon technology to provide seamless, sound-based interpretive experiences

⁷ See Appendix 2 for an in-depth look at humanities-centered programming for two representative MFAH exhibitions.

⁸ See Appendix 3 for further discussion of these learning and interpretation projects and an overview of L&I strategic planning for the new modern and contemporary exhibition building.

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

in the galleries. A more robust platform, however, is being investigated to achieve geo-location both indoors and out, with the capacity to deliver audio and video interpretation.

The MFAH engages students from pre-school to professional school in object-based learning (OBL) through original works of art. This method conceives the Museum galleries as laboratories for learning, using works of art as case studies for learning across disciplines and for practice of 21st-century skills. The global collections of modern and contemporary art, which will finally have ample permanent gallery space in 2020, provide a rich set of opportunities for educators and students of all ages to concretize their learning in the arts and humanities through objects that challenge preconceived categories of art, medium, and culture.

Concurrently, the Museum is experimenting with greater participatory program formats, including a Mobile Story Booth, to bring the MFAH to distant and underserved community sites in the Houston metropolitan area. Visitors to the MFAH Mobile Story Booth will hear narratives about works of art from the Museum's collections and, through guided prompts, be encouraged to tell their own stories and personal responses. Some of these community stories will be interwoven into the digital soundscapes used to interpret works of art in the multidisciplinary galleries. In total, the MFAH aims to use the multidisciplinary galleries and new program design as a doorway for those who may not see the traditional museum experience as being relevant to their lives, and as a platform for deepening and enriching the relationship that current visitors have with the MFAH, with art, and with the humanities.

IV. AUDIENCE

The MFAH is situated in a rapidly-expanding and ethnically diverse metropolitan area of over 6 million people and serves people of every ethnic heritage, economic stratum, educational background, age group, and level of ability. As an important regional resource for art education, the Museum collaborates with a broad spectrum of community organizations and maintains partnerships with local public schools, institutions of higher learning, libraries, other art organizations, and community groups. The Museum has particularly strong relationships with K-12 schools in Houston and throughout southeast Texas, facilitating over 1,000 student group tours each year. The Museum regularly collaborates with community organizations such as the Houston and Harris County Public Libraries, Texas Medical Center, Houston Parks Department, and Baker Ripley Neighborhood Centers, among others. The MFAH recently expanded relationships with Rice University, the University of Houston, and the University of Texas at Austin. Through internships, collaborative lecture series

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

and symposia, mutual site visits, and special faculty/scholar access, the Museum is working jointly with these institutions to strengthen research and scholarship in the arts and humanities across the region. The humanities-based displays and programs developed as direct result of the NEH Challenge Grant will impact children, students, adults, families, teachers, and scholars, including under-represented populations of all ages.

V. INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITY

Long-Range Plan/Board of Directors/Staff

The MFAH is dedicated to pioneering research and educating audiences to transform community understanding of visual arts and the humanities. Trustees and staff advance this mission in accordance with a long-range plan. The Long Range Plan is reviewed annually by the MFAH board, taking into consideration input from committee consultants with extensive community representation. This ongoing review and revision process keeps the Museum focused on long-term goals while allowing for the flexibility needed to respond to shifts in priorities. The construction of an exhibition building for modern and contemporary art, approved and adopted by trustees in 2007, is a key element of the Museum's current Long Range Plan.

The MFAH is governed by a board of 104 trustees comprising life members, elected members, ex-officio members representing the City of Houston and affiliated organizations; and honorary members. The board reflects the diversity of the community and includes corporate officers, civic leaders, scholars, and art collectors. Through a committee structure, trustees monitor activities, review and approve purchases and programming, and set policies for asset management. Museum trustees and executive staff have made several strategic hiring decisions that provide foundational leadership to an institution transformed by a major campus redevelopment program. Gary Tinterow, an internationally recognized curator and scholar, joined the MFAH as its seventh director in early 2012. Eric Anyah, former executive vice president and chief financial officer of the Art Institute of Chicago, became the MFAH's chief financial officer in 2013. Caroline Goeser became the W.T. and Louise J. Moran Chair of the Department of Learning and Interpretation in 2014. Formerly the director of education and interpretation at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Dr. Goeser brings to the MFAH 25 years of experience and a distinguished roster of achievements in museum education.

Facilities and Resources

The current Museum campus, which includes the Caroline Wiess Law and Audrey Jones Beck buildings, provides 270,000 square feet of space dedicated to the display of art. The MFAH is one of the few museums in the country with a studio school. The Glassell School of Art offers courses in art history and studio

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

arts for adults, and its Junior School offers year-round art instruction for children ages 3 to 18. As part of the Museum's overall campus redevelopment project, the MFAH will construct a new 85,000 square-foot Glassell School building. The new Blaffer Foundation Center for Conservation will unite currently dispersed areas of conservation practice into one, state-of-the-art facility. Located a short distance from the main campus are the MFAH's two house museums—Rienzi and Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens; Rienzi houses the Museum's substantial collection of European decorative art, and Bayou Bend is home to one of the finest assemblages of early American furniture, silver, ceramics, and paintings outside of New England. In 2007, the MFAH received a \$400,000 challenge grant from the NEH to help build a new Visitor and Education Center for Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens. Completed in 2010, the new Visitor Center has dramatically increased Bayou Bend's capacity to serve the public, with attendance increasing from 50,000 prior to the Visitor Center's opening to over 100,000 last fiscal year. The MFAH libraries—Hirsch Library on the main campus and the Kitty King Powell Library at Bayou Bend—offer over 160,000 volumes devoted to the visual arts from ancient times to the present.

VI. FUNDRAISING

NEH challenge grant funds would directly support construction costs of six interdisciplinary galleries in the new exhibition building for modern and contemporary art. At an estimated \$700 per square foot, the total cost of these galleries will be \$16 million dollars. Challenge grant funds in the amount of \$750,000 would greatly impact fundraising efforts for these galleries, as an additional \$3 million will be raised in direct response to the grant. The Museum's trustees are confident in the institution's ability to raise the matching funds.

Fiscal Responsibility and Fundraising Plan

The Museum's endowment is one of the largest and consistently top-performing cultural endowments in the nation. With an annual operating budget of approximately \$65 million, the Museum has continuously balanced its budget since 1982, as mandated to do so through trustee resolutions. Dynamic fundraising within the community further enhances the Museum's financial profile. The Museum receives 95% of its support from the individuals, foundations, corporations, and civic organizations that make up our audience, with approximately 5% coming from government sources.

Upon completion of the new modern and contemporary exhibition building, overall Museum operating costs will increase in three primary areas: building operations and maintenance; interpretive programming; and additional staff in areas such as visitor services, buildings and grounds, learning and interpretation, and retail.

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

National Endowment for the Humanities: Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant

Narrative

For this reason, the MFAH is raising funds for endowment support of these costs apart from capital goals. While retail spaces and refreshment areas located throughout campus are expected to produce additional income and attract new visitors, the Museum is setting realistic expectations with a goal of a 20% increase in admissions.

The campus redevelopment campaign began in 2012, with principal gifts pledged by Fayez S. Sarofim (\$70 million) and the Kinder Foundation (\$50 million). Over the past six years, additional lead gifts have been pledged and to date, the Museum has received a total of 288 donations. As the MFAH enters the final phase of its fundraising campaign, a NEH challenge grant would be a powerful tool in leveraging private funding—one to which Houstonians respond. With the majority of \$500,000+ donations in pocket, the Museum must now focus on more modest donors through strategic solicitations. As example, during the final NEH-supported public phase of the Bayou Bend Visitor Center capital campaign, 574 pledges were booked—83% at \$25,000 or less. NEH funding is extremely effective in helping the Museum draw on this fiscally conservative constituent pool by not only allowing us to offer “more bang for their buck,” so to speak, but by also underscoring the financial stability of the project through government endorsement.⁹

The MFAH formed a committee of nine life trustees and major donors to steer campus redevelopment fundraising efforts. The campaign committee works closely with MFAH staff to ensure goals are achieved. Staff members central to leading the Museum’s fundraising efforts include: MFAH director Gary Tinterow, who is working closely with board chairman, Richard Kinder, and the campaign committee to secure capital and endowment funds for the project. Mr. Tinterow successfully directed two significant renovation projects while at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Amy Purvis, the Museum’s chief development officer, is a 20-year veteran of nonprofit fundraising and was instrumental in the Museum’s most recent \$25 million capital campaign for the Visitor and Education Center at Bayou Bend. Prior to becoming the MFAH chief financial officer, Eric Anyah oversaw the financial management of the Art Institute of Chicago’s \$400 million capital campaign.

The MFAH has established a long history of receiving both state and federal government grants. As noted, the MFAH has met two NEH challenge grants: a 1996 grant to endow public programs (\$575,000), and a 2007 award to support a Visitor and Education Center at Bayou Bend (\$400,000). Please see Appendix 5 for a comprehensive discussion of past awards and list of current NEH grants and pending applications.

⁹ See Appendix 4 for details on the final phases of the Museum’s current campaign fundraising plan.