

# NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES



## SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE

### Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions Institution: Museum of Printing History

**NOTE:** This sample narrative conforms to a past set of grant guidelines. Please consult the revised guidelines for 2009 at: <http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pag.html>.

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

The grant will support the purchase of storage furniture and preservation supplies to rehouse the book and paper items in the permanent collection. The grant will also support the purchase of dataloggers to develop an environmental monitoring system for collections storage and for the permanent galleries. The goals of the conservation project are derived from recommendations based on a Conservation Assessment Program collection survey performed in 2002.

Book and paper items to be rehoused may be classified into 4 main categories: books, miniature books, flat prints, and newspaper and periodicals. Materials such as mat board, Bristol board, mylar, and document boxes will be used to construct enclosures for the largest portion of the Museum's collection that needs the most attention. A new flat file will also be purchased to improve crowded conditions for prints.

Funds from the grant will help to develop an environmental monitoring system for areas where collections are stored or exhibited. The Museum will purchase dataloggers to record temperature and relative humidity. The grant will also cover consultant fees to train the Museum curator on the use and installation of the equipment, as well as the interpretation of the data.

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

The Museum of Printing History displays a dynamic collection of historical documents, fine art prints, and antique printing equipment. A visitor will find the Dharani Scroll, an 8th-century Japanese text which is commonly considered the first example of printing words onto paper; a page from William Caxton, the first printer of the English language; a Spanish-Nahuatl dictionary printed by Juan Pablos, the first printer in the Americas; Old Master woodcuts and engravings; newspapers and pamphlets printed by Benjamin Franklin, and various other treasures. In addition, the Museum contains exhibit spaces devoted to examples of early Texas printing. Artifacts in the collection range in time from humanity's earliest writing to the beginning of printing in Europe with Gutenberg's invention of movable type, and illustrates printing of the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, through the twenty-first century.

The portion of the collection covered in this grant request includes the book and paper items currently on view in the Museum's permanent galleries and in storage in 3 flat files and a vault store room. The date range for these items varies significantly given the broad scope of the collections. In its collection, the Museum has old-master prints and woodcuts dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and colonial era newspapers which date to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The vast majority of the book and paper items date from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Book and paper items are approximately 52% of the Museum's entire collection, comprised of just less than 7000 items. Collection items to be rehoused include flat prints, books, miniature books, and newspaper and periodicals, totaling 3575 items. Flat prints number approximately 566 and include engravings, fine art prints, historical maps, posters, and book and bible leaves. There are 187 books, which include traditional codices, accordion structures, and leather bound volumes. The collections of miniature books equal 2471—the sum of the Hornak collection of 1090 and the McWhirter collection of 1381. Finally, the historical newspapers and periodicals number 351. The grant request does not cover the extensive collection of printing machinery, lead and wood type, or the various office machines found in the Museum's permanent collection.

The Museum of Printing History makes its book and document collections accessible through display in various galleries. In the Americana Gallery, a visitor may read from colonial period newspapers about the Stamp Act Riots and Washington Crossing the Delaware. One may also read an excerpt from "Liberty of the Spirit and the Flesh", a pamphlet printed by Benjamin Franklin in 1759. Civil War era newspapers currently on view include the printing of the Emancipation Proclamation in the *New York Herald* dated September 23, 1862. One may also read the Gettysburg Address published in the *New York Tribune* on November 20, 1863.

In the Hearst Gallery Hall of Historic Headlines, a visitor may read about the sinking of the Titanic from a newspaper dated April 16, 1912, or about Amelia Earhart's solo flight across the Atlantic in the *Dallas Morning News* dated May 21, 1932. Other historic headlines read "President Dead: Assassin's Bullet Kills Kennedy" and "Man Walks on Moon", among many others.

In the dedicated exhibit case entitled, the Spoken Word: Printing the Bible in the Vernacular, a visitor will see 9 examples of important printings of the Bible dating from 1517 to 1611. One can read from *Luther's Bible*, 1576 or a leaf from the *King James Version* of 1611. These leaves and books from the Museum's collection dramatize the Bible's history and its impact upon printing, learning, and literacy over the last five hundred years.

### **C. How are these humanities collections used?**

Through our permanent exhibits, the Museum of Printing History narrates the story of written communication and the ways in which the technologies of printing have transformed our lives. Our galleries trace significant developments from ancient Mesopotamian clay tablets, to the Chinese invention of movable type, to a replica of Johann Gutenberg's printing press. American history is dramatized through newspaper accounts of major events from the American Revolution to the Civil War; Texas history is told through the life of the state's first printer Samuel Bangs, with a press he owned and a display of the documents and newspapers he printed. The printing equipment on view in the Hearst Newspaper Gallery demonstrates the emergence of modern printing and represents a great leap forward in the history of mass communication. Our hall of historic headlines documents pivotal moments in recent history through original newspapers.

During our guided tours, visitors participate in the hands-on printing of a leaf of the Gutenberg Bible pulled from a period-accurate press, then move to the printing of the Declaration of Independence on a 19th-century Columbian iron handpress. Our tours complement a wide range of study, from science and technology to English Language Arts, from history to fine arts. Students of all ages, as well as senior groups regularly visit the Museum for guided tours.

Collections come alive in the Museum's printmaking and letterpress workshops, papermaking studio, and bookbinding. These are operated and maintained by resident artists, volunteers, Guild Members, and visiting artists. The lithography studio houses two 1830's star wheel stone lithography presses, and early 20th century proof press, and a late 19th century engraving press. In the bindery, visitors can observe the processes of paper cutting, stitching and binding, and the cutting and application of leather, lettering and gold leaf. The Letterpress Workshop houses the Anita and Edward Bader type collections and numerous presses and equipment for traditional letterpress production. The papermaking shop is a production area fitted with contemporary equipment for making paper by hand. The Museum regularly offers classes in the various arts of the book.

In keeping with our educational outreach efforts, in 2007 the Museum created a traveling exhibition of prints from the Museum's collection by our Artist-in-Residence, Charles Criner, for tours to schools in the Houston area. At no cost to the schools, two sets of ten printed works by Criner, along with study guides for teachers and student workbooks, are designated to benefit those schools lacking resources for field trips, especially inner-city and minority schools.

Items from the collection are available for student research. One recent college student wrote an extensive research paper on the provenance of the Samuel Bangs Albion handpress, purported to have been used by the first printer in Texas. Last year another college student conducted original research on a collection of prints by Bernhardt Wall entitled *Following Sam Houston*. The Museum also maintains a reference library of approximately 1800 volumes that is available for use by qualified researchers from the public and members of the Museum community.

The Museum of Printing History was featured in *HoustonArtsView*, the quarterly publication of the Houston Arts Alliance. The editor writes, "The Museum emphasizes the importance of developments in printing to the dissemination of information and knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, ideas, and so printing's place in western history as a "democratic art." He continues to describe the collection, saying, "The permanent collection hits its stride with the replica of Gutenberg's 1450 press, the first in Europe with movable metal type. Gutenberg's press marks the beginning of the radical transformation of Europe from an oral to a written culture, from a culture where knowledge is handed down to a culture of knowledgeable debate."

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

The mission of the Museum of Printing History is to promote, preserve, and share the knowledge of printed communication and arts as the greatest contributors to the development of the civilized world and the continuing advancement of freedom and literacy. The Museum was founded in 1979 by Raoul Beasley, Vernon P. Hearn, Don Piercy, and J. V. Burnham, four printers with passions for preserving their vast collections and sharing them with the community. It was chartered in 1981 and had its official opening in 1982 with Dr. Hans Halaby, Director of the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz, Germany, cutting the ribbon.

The Museum of Printing History is governed by a Board of Directors of 24 individuals from the Houston community. The operating budget for FY 2007 was \$507,666. Sources of major funding include the

Houston Arts Alliance, the Houston Endowment, and the Brown Foundation. The Museum is supported by numerous foundations and corporations. Individual giving is through an active membership program and an annual fund drive.

The Museum of Printing History is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-5pm year round. There is no charge for admission. Visitorship numbers approximately 15,000 per year and continues to grow. The Museum employs 4 full-time staff and two part-time staff members.

Like many small institutions, the Museum relies on a dedicated team of volunteers, many of whom have been generously giving their time for many years. We have 2 volunteers who work every Wednesday, helping with collections and exhibitions. One volunteer comes in on Wednesdays to do data entry, while another works every Thursday doing graphic design. We have several volunteers who are always available to help out during special events and when installing exhibitions. The Museum of Printing History is also very fortunate to have 4 volunteer bookbinders who conduct tours and demonstrations in our bookbinding studio.

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

The Museum participated in a Conservation Assessment Program Collection Survey in the summer of 2002. The site visit and report was prepared by Mary Frederickson, Conservator. The 32 page report does not include an executive summary; pertinent pages have been scanned and are included as Appendix A.

Many of the short and medium term goals have been accomplished in the 6 years since the survey. For instance, safety conditions for the staff, visitors, and the collections have been greatly improved through the purchase and installation of chemical storage cabinets, fire extinguishers, eyewash stations, vent hoods, etc. Printing equipment has been moved out of old warehouse, into a newer offsite storage area that is climate controlled.

Climate control zones have been established throughout the Museum, where temperature and relative humidity may be controlled according to requirements. The lighting in the permanent galleries is now motion detected to help preserve book and paper items on display. Lights in the galleries remain off until a visitor walks into the vicinity. In addition, collection records are now organized in a Filemaker Pro database.

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

Based on previous improvements made to the storage and display of the permanent collection, purchasing necessary equipment and supplies is an appropriate next step in caring for the collection over the long term. The grant will jump-start an integrated conservation program beginning with a portion of the collection that needs the most attention—book and paper items. Currently these items are either on view in the Museum's permanent galleries or stored in collections storage (flat files and secure store room) located in the curator's office.

The curator's office and the permanent galleries are areas of the Museum where temperature and relative humidity can be tightly controlled. Environmental monitoring is an important concern for Houston, with a humid subtropical climate. Winds bring heat from the deserts of Mexico and moisture from the Gulf of Mexico during most of the year. The average daily high temperature peaks at 94 °F at the end of July, with an average of 99 days per year above 90 °F. During the summer months, the average relative humidity ranges from over 90 percent in the morning to around 60 percent in the afternoon.

Preservation procedures have been applied sporadically over the years, and no clear guidelines exist when new items are accessioned into the collection. This has resulted in inadequate housing and display conditions for a large portion of the collection. For example, the large and significant collection of miniature books remains in zip lock bags and cardboard boxes, and a large portion of prints are in vinyl sleeves and crowded into flat file drawers. Furthermore, items on display have not been rotated according to a schedule. Re-housing flat printed items in mats will facilitate rotating these items that are most sensitive to light.

Since the recent hire of a new curator, the Collections Management Committee has been reinvigorated. New members to the committee include 2 special collections librarians. This committee is currently amending the Collections Management Policy to address the preservation needs of specific items as well as the collection as a whole. Amending the Collection Management Policy to outline preservation needs for each type of item in the collection will aid in establishing consistent guidelines for current and future staff. Collection records have been added to a collections database, and recording preservation information at the item level is a goal for collections management. Tremendous strides have been made since the CAP Survey in 2002, but the committee is in agreement that preservation issues are ongoing and need to be constantly addressed, with long-term collections care plans.

As a result of this project, preservation concerns will be addressed at the item level when the object is placed in the collection. The curator will apply proper housing conditions to each item when it is accessioned according to established guidelines. For example, when a book is accessioned, a 4 flap enclosure or a clamshell box will be constructed at that time. Or, when a print is added to the collection, it will be enclosed in a mat with a mylar cover, or with a Bristol board folder before being placed in collection storage.

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

Cara Bovet holds a Masters in Information Studies from the University of Texas at Austin, as well as a Certificate in the Conservation of Library and Archival Materials from the Kilgarlin Center for Preservation of the Cultural Record located at the University of Texas at Austin. As part of her training she completed two six month conservation internships at the Indiana Historical Society and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Since moving to Houston in August 2007, she has volunteered at the Museum, primarily in the bookbinding studio and consulting on preservation matters.

Amanda Stevenson has been the Curator at the Museum of Printing History since November 2007. She holds a Masters in Library Science from Pratt Institute in New York City, with a concentration in special collections management. Before coming to the Museum, she worked for three years at the Center for Book Arts in Manhattan as the Registrar/Administrator. In addition to organizing exhibitions and collections management, she learned bookbinding and basics of conservation of book and paper items. During her tenure at the Center for Book Arts, she rehoused the entire collection of over 600 artist books, and made conservation enclosures for over 50% of the collection. At the Museum of Printing History, Amanda is responsible for organizing exhibitions, collections management, and education programs.

The Museum of Printing History has a unique advantage over humanities institutions of similar size, in that resources include a fully equipped bindery and a small, dedicated team of volunteer bookbinders. Professional binders work in the studio on various projects, while giving tours and demonstrations to Museum visitors. These volunteer bookbinders will give a portion of their time at the Museum during the entirety of 2009 to help the curator rehouse the book and paper items in the collection.

## H. What is the plan of work for the project?

### **Phase 1: Begin implementing environmental monitoring system; Concentration on preservation concerns with flat paper items like fine art prints, maps, bible leaves**

January 2009:

- Proper housing guidelines will be established for each type of book and paper item in the collection
- Curator will purchase dataloggers and receive training on their use from Cara Bovet
- Curator will purchase new flat file
- Curator will purchase mats, mylar, document boxes, interleaving, and Bristol board for flat paper items like prints, maps, newspapers, and leaves

February through June 2009:

- Training session for volunteer bookbinders for proper handling of materials and an introduction to preservation materials and structures, with an emphasis on items stored in flat files
- Working at least one full day per week, the curator and volunteer bookbinders will reorganize flat files, arranging according to size and media format, examining each item to determine proper preservation action according to guidelines
- As items are treated under this grant request, notes concerning condition and action taken will be added to the object record

### **Phase 2: Concentration on preservation concerns with book items, including leather bound volumes, historical periodicals, and large collection of miniature books**

July 2009:

- Curator will purchase materials 20pt Bristol board and adhesive for 4 flap enclosures for books and miniature books
- Curator will purchase mylar and document boxes for historical periodicals

August-December 2009

- Training session for volunteer bookbinders for proper handling of materials and an introduction to preservation materials and structures, with an emphasis on books, miniature books, and newspapers and periodicals
- Continuing to work at least one full day per week, the curator and volunteer bookbinders will construct preservation enclosures for books, rehouse historical newspapers and periodical using Bristol board and mylar sleeves, and rehouse miniature books with small enclosures
- As items are treated under this grant request, notes concerning condition and action taken will be added to the object record

January-March 2010

- After collecting a year's worth of information, curator will evaluate environmental monitoring data to make adjustments where necessary
- Finish any rehousing of book and paper items

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