

Below are the reasons for rejecting the PMOP grant proposal on Preservation and Access, sponsored by the United States' NEA. Criticism of the actual grant project is almost non-existent. The application was ultimately and unanimously rejected for reasons of the small size of the museum. I have included a few comments (italicized) in the document below. - Doug Dupin, PMOP Director

Dear Mr. Dupin,

In response to your request for further information about the evaluation of your application to the Division of Preservation and Access, I am enclosing copies of the evaluators' written comments with their ratings. (The rating scale is: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Merit, and Reject.) Any information that might identify evaluators has been excised.

Your application was considered carefully during the NEH review process, which includes peer review and specialist review along with deliberation by the National Council on the Humanities and the Office of the Chairman.

As you will see from the comments, panelists offered much advice about additional information that would be required to strengthen the request. For example, more detail about the museum, its collections, and its collection management policies and practices would be helpful.

I hope this information clarifies the reasons that NEH, like all federal agencies, charged with making careful use of scarce tax dollars, was unable to support your proposal. New guidelines for Humanities Collections and Reference Resources will be posted this spring at <http://www.neh.gov>. The deadline for applications will be July 15, 2009 for projects beginning in May 2010. A resubmitted proposal will be evaluated as if it were a new application. Since NEH does not maintain standing panels, the application will be read by persons who did not review the previous submission. While it is important to address questions that were raised in this past grant cycle, other issues might arise in a subsequent evaluation of the proposal.

All applicants must submit proposals electronically via [Grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). For information about registering for Grants.gov, please visit NEH's Web site at: <http://www.neh.gov/grants/grantsgov/about.html>.

If I can be of further assistance, please call me at (202) 606-8570 or contact me by email to lword@neh.gov.

Sincerely yours,

Laura Word
Senior Program Officer
Division of Preservation and Access

Panelist 1

The new Palisades Museum of Prehistory in Washington DC is dedicated to preserving and educating the local community on the prehistoric occupation of the area. The proposal seeks to use widely available platforms to make a portion of its collections available via the Web. I presume that the new exhibit will be linked through the Museum's existing web site, though this aspect of the work was not described.

The project has a modest budget and the project director has developed a reasonable work plan. The description makes clear that the Museum has larger collections than those destined for this exhibit (that sherds, projectile point fragments, scrapers, and other artifacts have not been recorded). The focus on complete and diagnostic artifacts certainly makes sense for the web exhibit, but the small "insignificant" artifacts also can potentially reveal a tremendous amount of important information, and should at the least be catalogued and assessed.

The Museum is active in disseminating information on its activities within the local community, and I presume will use those opportunities to inform the public on its new web exhibit.

Sustainability is probably the weakest aspect of the proposal. The Museum appears to be a one-man operation, and it is evident that Mr. Dupin is deeply committed to its mission. He has gained the support of local archaeologists. It would be valuable also to construct a museum board and mission statement to provide some further structure and support for the Museum. *(There is a museum board and mission statement for the museum. You had nearly a year to review this application, and this is the reason for rejection?)*

Preliminary Rating: G: Good; recommended, but at low priority

Additional comments after panel discussion:

While I am sympathetic to the goals of the project; there is not enough support for the museum or justification of the work plan to make the project sustainable

Final Rating: R: Reject

Panelist 2

This is an interesting proposal, requesting a very small amount of money, for a project with which I am in complete sympathy. The Palisades Museum of Prehistory seeks funds to preserve 155 Native American artifacts that speak to the history of Washington – both before, and possibly even after Contact – a history that has, because of DC’s later history, been buried, perhaps unfairly so.

However, the proposal is far from being ready for consideration. Although the applicant has spoken with some pretty well known and highly regarded archaeologists, and one – Feidel – is on their project, it is clear that the museum needs to professionalize itself much more. I say this with no sense of pejorative intent AT ALL – I have been involved in plenty of smaller organizations trying very hard to “rescue” history that gets sidelined.

But, to be successful, the museum needs to understand that artifacts get “locked up” to take care of them – and yes, it is a problem if a government agency doesn’t also make those objects accessible. Further, Indian technology is no longer referred to as “primitive technology” – sounds too demeaning, because primitive is in the eye of the beholder. *(I love getting lectured on this one! There is quite a movement of primitive technologists, and I believe they call themselves “primitive technologists” and do so without self-deprecation.)* Also, why some artifacts but not the pottery? *(Pottery sherds are part of the artifacts that would have been made public online, not just every single one.)* Stone tools are no more informative than pottery.

Draw on your colleague, Fiedel, to help you move in a direction that professionalizes your work – a museum of local DC Indians would be fantastic! *(It would have been!)*

Preliminary Rating: R: Reject

Final Rating: R: Reject

Panelist 3

The proposed project seeks funding to digitize archaeological artifacts from the Palisades Museum of Prehistory and display them in 3-dimensional format on the museum's website. The end result has visual appeal but almost no cultural or historical context, and as such offers little contribution to understanding the humanities in general or even the Washington metropolitan area's

deep history. *(Some interpretation was to be included in the online exhibit. I am not sure how the exhibition of artifacts has “little contribution to understanding the humanities” unless you think the people who made them do not really fit into “humanity”.)*

The PI appears well-qualified to undertake the proposed work. Insufficient information, however, is provided either on the Palisades Museum of Prehistory (its inception, its staff, its functions, its long-term plans, its articulation with locally-conducted CRM archaeology projects) to evaluate whether the institution has the resources to support this kind of work.

Were this project to include a substantial culture history component (so that people could learn about the area's history and prehistory by clicking on different spots on the Google map) it might be more compelling.

Preliminary Rating: R: Reject

Final Rating: R: Reject

Panelist 4

- This proposal addresses the archaeology of the Native Americans in a lesser known region of the U.S. thus this topic will certainly increase the understanding of the history, living habits and migration patterns of the Native cultures who dwelled in this area. However, the proposal does not provide enough detail regarding the nature of the 155 objects discussed in the narrative so it is unknown how these will further scholarship or research of this topic.

- The project does not follow any national standards or best practices as it's not explained fully. For example, the methodology does not include how the objects will be handled or if the objects would be re-housed after photography. There is no standard vocabulary or indexing, except for utilizing free software via Google Maps or Youtube, etc. While the project is sound in terms of procedures for capturing the images, it seems experimental so little is really known about how this will actually function in the long-term. *(Yes, it is a new concept in the field of the Humanities. I am not sure why this would disqualify the project though. The monetary contribution is really peanuts compared to other programs.)*

- The work plan seems basically viable, but concerns arise that the project will not be completed within the grant time line. Again, the artifacts will be handled, but there is no clear explanation or

evidence of best handling practices, etc. Also, what is the protocol for transporting the objects? (*The protocol for transporting the objects - I wear a large robe and long silken gloves, and prior to touching the objects I invoke our Lord, Manito, the great provider.*)

This proposal might be re-submitted keeping in mind the following points: further discussion and explanation on cataloging the specimens within a standard vocabulary (using Getty, LCSH, etc.), provide a better mechanism for sustaining the data (rather than relying on Youtube or Google platforms and providing a cost share to match the NEH funds).

- The staff members are qualified, particularly in the area of digital mapping, etc., but they do not appear to have advisors regarding cataloging or data management.
- The PMOP's website is a great way to disseminate the information, however, beyond Youtube or Google, the proposal does not mention other mechanisms for information dissemination (via outreach efforts, newsletters, lectures, etc.).
- Google Maps and Youtube will serve as a data platform---but it's not clear how the data is managed in the long-term. Will the data need to be migrated from Google/Youtube's platform in the future? Although the data storage services are free, it would be much safer to have other backup mechanisms (even on DVD's or at another repository) should the software/hardware fail or should these 'free' storage sites begin charging for their services. (*I did not think of stating the obvious during the application process.*)
- The budget does not show any cost-share by the PMOP and appears incomplete. This should be re-calculated to show the cost share. (*Cost share is not required for this [grant](#). As someone so heavily reliant on proper bureaucratic procedures, how could you get this wrong?*)

Preliminary Rating: M: Merit; but not recommended for funding

Additional comments after panel discussion:

This project is just not viable. There is no match on the budget. Also, the sustainability is unworkable.

Final Rating: R: Reject

Panelist 5

SIGNIFICANCE OF COLLECTION AND IMPACT

155 archaeological artifacts will be imaged and made available online via Google Earth and YouTube videos in order to educate the public about the prehistory of the Palisades. The proposal does not make clear whether the artifacts are regularly accessible and whether the project will have a long-term benefit to research, education, or public programming. Have the sites from which the artifacts derive been mapped? Are the sites recorded with the district? Are all of the artifacts owned by the Palisades Museum of Prehistory? There was not enough information provided about the organization, facility, and the status of the collections.

Do other regional institutions and museums curate similar material? If so, how do their holdings compare to the Palisades Museum collection? Based on the size (155 artifacts) and the lack of data on some artifacts, why is digitization a priority?

METHODOLOGY AND WORKPLAN

The director will digitize artifacts on a mechanized electronic dolly and edit and upload images to Youtube. Associated data and the Youtube address will be entered into an Excel spreadsheet and transferred to Google Earth, where artifact records will be geocoded by site locations. Since most of the artifacts derive from private property, there may be privacy issues. Have land owners been informed of the project? Could identifying the precise location of finds result in the recovery of other non-systematically collected artifacts?

The Palisades Museum is a very young organization and as such is clearly still developing its curation and collections management practices. It's not clear what, if any, standards are being employed. How are the collections cataloged (provide a sample record)? How and in what materials are the collections physically housed? Does the facility provide adequate environmental and security protection?

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

The director has a diverse background in video and web site production and design, but has no formal training or professional development activities in museum administration, curation, or collections management. How will the director, who appears to be the sole staff member, balance other on-going responsibilities during the project?

DISSEMINATION AND ACCESS

155 archaeological artifacts will be imaged and made available online via Google Earth and YouTube videos.

SUSTAINABILITY

How will the museum ensure the long-term sustainability of the data? Where will funds come from after the grant period to cover the cost of Google Earth Pro? What about the sustainability of the Museum itself; how is it funded?

(Nevermind.)

Preliminary Rating: R: Reject

Final Rating: R: Reject