



**The Innovation Lab for Museums**  
Supported by  
**MetLife Foundation**



**Request for Proposals**  
**Deadline: Monday, October 31, 2011**

The Innovation Lab for Museums is designed to help museums incubate and test innovative strategies to address major challenges in all areas of their operations. The Lab is a collaboration between EmcArts and the American Association of Museums' Center for the Future of Museums, with the generous support of MetLife Foundation.

In the inaugural round, up to three museums will be selected to participate in the 18–24-month program (see necessary background and application information below). Because the Innovation Lab is an unusual program with myriad elements, we strongly encourage applicants to discuss draft proposals with EmcArts in advance of their final submission. Contact information and instructions for assistance are detailed at the end of this RFP.

**What is the impetus for the Innovation Lab for Museums?**

Current conditions for the arts and culture sector mean that innovation is of unprecedented importance to the sustained success of American museums. Yet museums have typically struggled to unleash the power of innovation across their processes, structures and systems as a whole. The capacity of cultural organizations not just to conceive, but to research, incubate and prototype innovative approaches to their work across all aspects of the institution, is becoming a bellwether for their likelihood of continued success. Their “adaptive capacity,” effectively designing and executing series of innovations consistently over time, is now a leading indicator of long-term viability.

**How does the Lab define innovation?**

Based on research into the literature of innovation, discussion with nonprofit leaders, and reflections on its own work, EmcArts has developed the following working definition of organizational innovations for the social sector, which is now being widely adopted in the field:

*Organizational innovations are instances of change that result from a shift in underlying organizational assumptions, are discontinuous from previous practice, and provide new pathways to creating public value.*

While not all innovations meet these criteria, this definition provides a useful orientation toward change efforts and new strategies that are more than just incremental revisions to business-as-usual. At the same time, it steers away from new strategies that are simply “novel” and are unrelated to achieving the organization’s mission or creating public value. Above all, the definition draws attention to the

foundation of innovation in an underlying shift in the organization's assumptions – about its own processes and products and/or about the external operating environment. Organizations applying to the Innovation Lab for Museums should bear this definition of innovation in mind as they prepare their proposals. Innovation can encompass changes in programs, exhibits, operations, communications or governance. Innovative approaches to collaboration, restructuring, downsizing, or merging are welcome alongside proposals for new or expanded activity.

### **What are the goals of the Lab?**

The Innovation Lab for Museums has been created to help shape, focus and propel the development of new and innovative strategies that address well-defined opportunities or challenges. Participating organizations form a "laboratory" for testing new approaches to achieving programmatically vital and organizationally healthy cultural institutions and establish a number of contemporary best practices in the museum field.

### ***Areas of Focus***

Preference will be given to proposals that address innovation in one of the following three areas:

➤ Youth Education

Over the next decade, the most vibrant innovations in education will take place outside traditional institutions during a transition from the institutional/teacher era that is characterized by public schools, professional teachers and a core curriculum to a learner-based era driven by life-long learners drawing on a variety of resources outside traditional schools. Innovation will redefine how learning is organized, what network of resources comprises the broad "school community," and what the experiences of learners will be like in the future. Preference will be given to proposals focusing on museums' exploration of this evolving terrain and their role in developing personal learning communities. Innovative projects related to education may involve partnerships with traditional schools, but they may also reach out to other learning groups (such as homeschoolers) or experiment with new ways to provide learning resources to students either physically or via the web.

➤ Demographic Transformation

The U.S. population is shifting rapidly. Within four decades, the core audience for museums—non-Hispanic whites—will be a minority. This forecast paints a troubling picture of a future in which, if trends continue, museum audiences are radically less diverse than the American public and museums serve an ever-shrinking fragment of society. Current barriers to diversifying museum audiences include lack of specialized knowledge, no strong tradition of museum-going among some populations and the influence of social networks on the use of leisure time. Preference will be given to proposals addressing how museums can close this gap and serve a broader, more representative sample of American society. Innovative projects related to demographic transformation may help develop a deeper and more nuanced relationship with the diverse communities surrounding the museum, nurture a cadre of diverse future museum practitioners, or help the museum

serve unmet community needs that may be outside the scope of traditional museum operations.

➤ Participatory Experiences

Another demographic transformation shaping America is generational. Millennials, growing up in a world in which they can create, contribute, modify and share content, are primed to look for participatory and social activities in museums. Preference will be given to proposals that address how museums can meet this evolving expectation. Innovative projects related to participatory experiences may explore how museums can become places to hang out, engage and contribute; blur the boundaries between “back of the house” and “front of the house;” and act as moderators and filters of contributed wisdom and diverse perspectives, in addition to being sources of scholarship and opinion.

**What stages in the development of new initiatives are suited to participation in the Lab?**

Breakthrough strategies are often represented as having three stages:

1. The emergence of “big ideas” from a background of no ideas
2. Moving significant strategic ideas to the point of sufficient clarity and ownership within the organization
3. Getting fully shaped and supported strategies actually implemented

The Innovation Lab for Museums focuses on accelerating progress from the second to the third of these stages. Therefore successful applicants must demonstrate an organizational culture supportive of innovation and a track record of strategic innovations (failed or successful). The Lab is not intended to help museums generate new ideas, nor as a strategic planning initiative to advance projects that are fully conceived. Participants are expected to begin their work having already identified a major challenge or opportunity with possible innovative strategic responses (i.e. “half-baked ideas”) under consideration. These “half-baked ideas” are better suited for the services that the Lab provides than those that are fully cooked but need funding for implementation and they are likely to fare better in selection.

**What does the Lab provide?**

The Innovation Lab for Museums is an 18–24 month program in which EmcArts facilitators work with “Innovation Teams” comprised of senior managers and board representatives in combination with museum staff, artists and scientists, educationalists and/or external voices from inside and outside the cultural sector, such as community partners and end-users, to provide diverse perspectives. The Lab includes individual coaching, group facilitation, an Intensive Retreat and a variety of extended support systems tailored to the needs of each organization.

Specifically, the Lab provides each organization with:

- An initial four-month engagement (Phase 1) between an EmcArts facilitator and organizational leaders to explore and clarify the new strategy, strengthen the organization's Innovation Team and build momentum for the Intensive Retreat (aka "the Intensive") and subsequent prototyping of the strategy.
- A five-day residential Intensive Retreat (Phase 2) to catalyze implementation of the strategy for up to 10 participants from each of the three participating museums. Accommodations, meals and up to \$400 per person for travel are provided.
- Experts in organizational learning and teamwork at the Intensive, including one content specialist chosen in collaboration with each of the three Innovation Teams. Up to \$3,000 is available per organization for specialist fees, plus travel and accommodation.
- Stipends of up to \$1,200 per organization for members of the Team who are not affiliated with the museum, such as artists, scientists, or historians, who would otherwise have to forgo a week of paid work to attend the Intensive.
- A six-month period of implementation coaching and facilitation by EmcArts post-Intensive (Phase 3) to support innovation prototyping - tryout activities in low-stakes environments.
- Post-Intensive Support Grants of \$40,000 toward project prototyping.
- Up to \$1,500 for conference travel to share learning from the Lab experience (in Phase 4).
- An online resource center on innovation and hub for interaction among participants throughout the life of the Lab.

### **What are my organization's responsibilities?**

Participation in the Innovation Lab for Museums represents a serious commitment over 18-24 months by each organization. If selected, your Innovation Team agrees to engage in all four Phases of the program, including the full five-day Intensive. Activities and responsibilities for participating museums consist of:

**October 31, 2011:** Proposal deadline

**December 2011:** Notification of participants

**January–April 2012:** Phase 1—Each Innovation Team works with EmcArts to finalize the Team members, explore strategic options, compile relevant data, construct a detailed Lab workplan that matches your needs, and co-design the content and style of the Intensive.

**May 2012:** Phase 2 (Intensive Retreat)—The Innovation Team takes part in a five-day Intensive, which serves as an "accelerator" to fully develop the intended innovation and ready it for prototyping. ***All Team members are expected to be in residence for the full duration of the Intensive, which is scheduled for Sunday, May 6–Friday, May 11, 2012 at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia.***

**June–November 2012:** Phase 3—The Innovation Team works to prototype the developed strategy and to integrate it with the organization as a whole, supported by Post-Intensive Support Grants of \$40,000 and follow-up coaching and on-site facilitation by EmcArts. Prototyping consists of one or more limited trials of the strategy followed by evaluation and revision.

**November 2012–July 2013:** Phase 4—EmcArts works with the leadership of each museum to implement a program of capacity-building and further strengthen the museum’s ability to continue innovating in the future. Each participating museum is also expected to write and speak about the Innovation Lab experience, sharing success and analyzing challenges, through social media or other online platforms, traditional presentations, and at professional meetings. Each museum receives a \$1,500 travel grant to support meeting presentations.

**Ongoing:** Throughout the program, the Innovation Team works with EmcArts and AAM to document the development and implementation of the innovation and to craft an evaluation framework.

Up to three organizations will be selected for the inaugural round of the Innovation Lab for Museums.

### **Who is being invited to apply?**

The Innovation Lab for Museums is open to all U.S. nonprofit museums that meet the eligibility requirements listed in this RFP.

Applications to explore partnerships, joint ventures and mergers are also encouraged. Potential partners can include organizations operating in or outside of the museum field and may also include international organizations, but a US-based nonprofit museum must be the lead applicant and participant. Partners may participate fully in the Lab’s activities; however, the museum acting as lead is responsible for submission of all necessary materials. During selection, AAM may request additional information as needed.

### **What are the selection criteria?**

The Lab’s selection criteria draw on established research regarding qualities that contribute to effective organizational change and innovation. Applicants are not expected to exhibit all characteristics, but selection is based in part on **specific evidence of the presence of these factors in the proposal.**

- Evidence of adaptive leadership and readiness for innovative change
- An organizational culture that shows a high level of critical self-awareness and is supportive of innovation (e.g., evidence that independent thinking, idea generation, and challenging “business-as-usual” are valued by the organization and facilitated by its structures and systems)
- Proven institutional capacity to implement innovative projects (whether successful or not) as well as a track record of doing so and of learning lessons as an institution from such attempts
- Evidence of a high level of community engagement

- A defined major opportunity or challenge to which existing organizational strategies are recognized as an inadequate response
- Possible strategic responses to the major opportunity or challenge that are explicit, enjoy organizational momentum, but are not yet finalized ("half-baked")
- The organization's strategic response to opportunity/challenge is likely to contribute sustainable value to the organization, its community and the field
- The capacity of the applicant (the organization as a whole and individual staff) to share what is learned through the Innovation Lab with their colleagues in the field
- Consideration will be given to balancing selected participants to ensure diversity of museum type (discipline), size (operating expenses) and geographic distribution.

Candidates must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- An incorporated nonprofit organization with no fewer than the equivalent of 10 full-time staff members (generally equating to a minimum operating budget of around \$1,000,000)
- Stable programmatic and executive leadership for the last 18 months and continuity in board leadership (subject to term limits)
- No competing major institutional initiatives (e.g., a building move, a capital campaign)

### **How are participants selected?**

AAM staff compiles and reviews all the applications, and may ask applicants to submit revisions, updates, or additional information.

A Selection Panel of five experts in innovation, organizational change and museums reviews application materials and additional information. The Panel recommends organizations for participation in the Lab.

### **What is the deadline for applying?**

AAM must receive all applications, electronically or by mail, on October 31, 2011 by 5 pm ET (see contact information below).

If all or part of your application is mailed, please also send an email to Güzel duChateau at AAM (see contact information below) with the date posted. All applications are acknowledged by email upon receipt. Decisions are announced approximately two weeks after the Selection Panel meets. (For a detailed timeline, see pages 4 and 5.)

### **Is it possible to get feedback on draft applications?**

Because the Lab is both complex and specific in its benefits, we encourage all applicants to seek feedback on their ideas and draft applications. Members of the EmcArts Lab team will provide telephone counseling on initial proposal ideas or general questions about the Lab. If requested, EmcArts staff also review draft applications and provide up to 30 minutes of telephone feedback.

Please note the following deadlines:

|                                                             | <b><i>Start Date</i></b>       | <b><i>End Date</i></b>      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Telephone counseling regarding initial proposal concept     | Tuesday,<br>September 27, 2011 | Friday,<br>October 14, 2011 |
| Submit draft application for review by EmcArts coach        | Monday,<br>October 3, 2011     | Friday,<br>October 14, 2011 |
| Telephone feedback (up to 30 minutes) on draft applications | Monday, October<br>10, 2011    | Friday,<br>October 21, 2011 |

Requests for initial counseling and/or draft application review should be emailed to Liz Dreyer at EmcArts (see contact information below), with the draft application attached, as appropriate. Only one review can be conducted per applicant.

While EmcArts provides coaching services to assist applicants in fully understanding the scope of the Lab and better fitting their proposals to its design and resources, there is no guarantee that a review can make an application more competitive. EmcArts does not intercede with the Selection Panel on behalf of any applicant.

### **What should the application include?**

It is important to stress that the Innovation Lab for Museums is not looking for traditional grant proposals. Some ambiguity and a degree of messiness typically characterize applicants' work in progress—indeed, these qualities are often part of achieving new ways of thinking and acting. Certainty of direction, clarity on the purpose of proposed new strategies, an understanding of what needs to be learned, and a high level of critical self-awareness are essential; but detailed, neatly packaged plans for implementation are not required, nor encouraged. The Lab's role, in part, is to assist in developing means for effective implementation, once deep institutional commitment to an innovative strategy is achieved.

Applications should therefore be open about expressing the conflicting ideas, creative tensions and hard choices that innovation always entails. We strongly recommend that applicants make use of the coaching services described above as they prepare their proposals. Please submit all materials (except Audits and marketing materials) as one document, PDF preferred.

The materials submitted should include the voices of all constituency leaders. Direct quotations can provide nuanced insights, alongside narrative and analysis.

### **Who should be involved in preparing and signing the application?**

The full set of organizational leaders who are likely to be responsible for strategic development should be closely involved in compiling the application. While the nature of proposed strategies may involve one type of organizational constituent in particular (curators, educators, executive staff, board), the engagement of leaders across all constituencies, including the Director, is seen as evidence that the institution is supportive of the strategic thinking and that the necessary "permissions" have been given for the initiative to have a chance of being successfully implemented. The explicit commitment of any relevant partners in the community is also important. The application must be signed by the museum's Director/CEO and the head of its legal governing authority,

## **How are applications submitted?**

Applications should be sent as email attachments, preferably in PDF format, to Güzel duChateau, CFM program coordinator. If submitting a PDF, please include the Cover Sheet, Proposal Narrative, and all Organizational Information, with the exception of audits/financial statements and marketing materials as necessary, in one document; please do not send multiple PDFs. Please also number the pages of your application. Additional audit/financial statements and market materials may be sent through standard mail.

Güzel duChateau  
CFM Program Coordinator  
American Association of Museums  
1575 Eye St NW, Ste 400  
Washington, DC 20005  
Tel: (202) 218-7681  
Email: [gduchateau@aam-us.org](mailto:gduchateau@aam-us.org)

## **Who can provide further guidance regarding content?**

We encourage applicants to discuss their innovation plans with EmcArts. For clarification about the Lab program as a whole, please contact Liz Dreyer, preferably via email. If you want to discuss a specific project or explore in more detail whether an application would be appropriate and timely, Liz can schedule a time for you to talk with EmcArts leadership.

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## **Application**

**Deadline: Monday, October 31, 2011**  
**Email to: [gduchateau@aam-us.org](mailto:gduchateau@aam-us.org)**

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- ***Please submit one PDF file including the Cover Sheet, Proposal Narrative and all Organizational Information except audits/financial statements and marketing materials.***
  - ***Please number the pages of your application.***
  - ***Additional audit/financial statements and market materials may be sent as additional PDFs or in hard copy.***
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The application must include:

1. **A completed Application Cover Sheet** (see Application Format attached to this RFP)
2. **A Proposal Narrative of no more than 8 pages** (minimum 11-point type)
3. **Applicant Organizational Information**

### **1. Cover Sheet**

Please send as your first page a Cover Sheet in the following format:

- Official name of your museum (as it appears on your tax-exempt letter from the IRS) to which a grant would be paid
- Common name of your museum (if different)
- Date your museum was founded
- Total operating income and expenses for your current fiscal year
- Address of your museum, telephone and fax numbers, web address
- Contact person for the Lab (name and job title, contact information)
- Name of your President or Executive Director (if different from contact person)
- Name of your innovation project
- Summary of your innovation project, in no more than 250 words

Please include the purpose of the innovation, the likely scope of project activities, and the contribution you hope the project will make to your museum's vitality. Also indicate how the project relates to the definition of innovation given on page 2 of this RFP (shift in underlying assumptions—distinct break from past practices—new pathway to public value).

**2. The Proposal Narrative**, of no more than 8 pages with minimum 11-point type, must include:

- Statement of challenge, goal and rationale  
A clear, concise statement of the major challenge or opportunity that you are seeking to address, the goal that is driving your innovative thinking, and the rationale for your response. Why are existing organizational strategies inadequate or inappropriate?
- Description of your proposed project  
What new strategic responses to your opportunity or challenge are you explicitly considering, and why? Do they address any of the areas of Lab focus? What organizational momentum does each of these enjoy? Is anything finalized?
- Innovative nature of your project  
How does your project relate to the definition of innovation given on page 2 of this RFP? What shift in underlying assumptions is propelling it? How would it be a distinct break from your past practice? Could it provide a new pathway to creating public value?
- Statement of intended impacts  
Why does this innovation matter to your organization? What is it likely to contribute to you and to your community? What broader field impact might this innovation have?
- Learning from previous attempts at innovation  
Describe previous innovative strategies that you attempted to develop and implement, including at least one which failed at some point; and discuss what you learned from those experiences.
- Assets and barriers in supporting innovation work  
Describe the capacities, approaches and structures in your organization that specifically foster innovation (such things as the attitude of leaders, board involvement, organizational culture, external relations, the ways you engage stakeholders, your capacity to implement innovative projects). What barriers exist that inhibit innovation in your organization? Where do your assets most need further strengthening?
- Work to date  
A history of how your work on your proposed innovation has evolved to date, who has been involved, if and how potential strategies have been tested, and what obstacles have been overcome; and a description of the scope of institutional change that your likely innovation will require.
- Resources you will allocate to the innovation  
Details of the human and financial resources that your organization will make available for strategy implementation (estimated where necessary), and details of related reductions in other activities needed to free up these resources. Please include a list of individuals (staff, outside experts, board and potential partners) that you anticipate will comprise the core of your Innovation Team; explain why each person was selected and what he or she will bring to the project.

- Questions to address  
A discussion of hard questions that have arisen around the early development of your innovation, and which remain unanswered for your organization.
- Expectations of the Innovation Lab  
A description of how you imagine the Innovation Lab helping your staff, project, and/or organization, given the description of services provided.

**3. The Organizational Information** must include:

- Eligibility statement: Confirmation that your organization meets the five criteria given above: stability of leadership, orderly management of board composition, number of aggregate full-time equivalent staff, nonprofit status, and ability to commit time and resources to the Innovation Lab. If you are in the midst of another major organizational initiative, or anticipate beginning such an initiative within the next twelve months, please explain how you would insulate your innovation project from any potential draining of resources and attention (human and financial).
- Brief organizational background and history.
- Brief biographies for the key individuals on the Innovation Team you are initially proposing (EmcArts facilitators may suggest membership changes in the initial phase of the Lab).
- Operational budget for 2011/12 and audited accounts or most recent financial statements for the 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 fiscal years; you may provide an explanation of unusual recent features and trends if you wish.
- Current year and last year's programs of events and activities in all departments of your organization.
- Supplemental materials you feel are relevant to your proposal.

Please send audits/financial statements separately. Please provide two copies of all financial information.