

RESEARCH REPORT

Nurture, Sustain, Expand

A Retrospective Evaluation of the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Program

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Foreword

African American history is an integral part of American history and continues to be essential to the story of our nation.

For decades, African American museums and cultural institutions carried on this legacy, teaching people about the history and achievements of Black Americans. The movement that began in Black churches and schoolrooms grew to be celebrated and embodied across the country.

A century ago, the prominent Black scholar Dr. Carter G. Woodson put forth that if African Americans were to take their rightful place in society, young people of all races needed to learn about the contributions of Black people to U.S. history and culture. He was concerned that the artifacts and evidence of Blacks in American culture would disappear if they weren't preserved, and so in 1926, Dr. Woodson launched the first Black History Week.

In 2003, Congress passed historic legislation with the National Museum of African American History and Culture Act, which acknowledged the passionate work of so many museums, communities, and civil rights advocates.

The Act called upon the Institute of Museum and Library Services to create a program of financial support for African American museums, in consultation with the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, to ensure that all Americans benefit from the vitality, resourcefulness, and ingenuity of African American history and culture institutions all across the country.

It has been a distinct honor for IMLS to carry out this unique role through its Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AAHC) program ever since, empowering African American museums and HBCUs across the nation to better meet the needs of our communities. AAHC grants support the growth and development of museum professionals, build institutional capacity, and increase access to museum and archival collections at African American museums and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Besides offering these annual grants to strengthen the work of these institutions, IMLS has regularly convened AAHC grantees to listen and learn from them, as well as to offer valuable networking and educational opportunities. The feedback we have gained has helped us better align the program with the changing needs of our cultural and educational organizations and the communities they serve.

2020 marked the fifteenth year of this work, offering us a clear opportunity to pause, reflect, and examine how far we've come, and where we can go to better serve our constituents and showcase the phenomenal contributions of our nation's African American museums and HBCUs.

We followed the journeys and trajectories of organizations of all sizes who were supported through IMLS funding. We saw how adaptations and changes to the program, including increases in recent appropriations and our proactive outreach efforts, have shown significant interest and increases from applicants across the U.S.

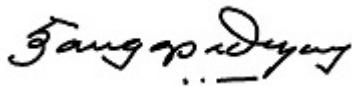
2020 also marked another turning point in our history, with protests against the systemic racism and injustice facing Black Americans. Now it is imperative that we forge new partnerships with the museum and the philanthropic communities to better serve African American history and culture

museums and HBCUs to protect our legacy, understand our history, and help us move forward together.

The resulting retrospective evaluation study has helped us gain critical insights about the universe of African American museums and HBCUs. Going forward, the report will help us identify opportunities to grow the program, improve our administrative practices, explore potential philanthropic partners who are also interested in supporting the African American museum sector, and most importantly, look at barriers that may be preventing certain museums and HBCUs from applying for AAHC grants.

We invite you to delve deeper into the findings of this report. Engage with us and with peers in ongoing conversations about how we can further grow and strengthen our African American museums and HBCUs so that they can continue to tell the stories that are essential to the fabric of our nation.

The AAHC grant program is one of many means towards a larger end. Join us in celebrating our history and collaboratively creating a better tomorrow.



Paula Gangopadhyay

Deputy Director of Museum Services, IMLS

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Executive Summary

African American museums and collections are important resources for preserving and telling the varied stories of the African American experience locally, nationally, and throughout the diaspora. They are also integral to many African American communities' present-day experience, providing educational and social programming for social activities and hosting community development activities. These museums present a rich and vibrant array of collections and are operated by dedicated, mission-focused staff and volunteers. Yet they have generally struggled to receive sufficient resources from the nation's charitable, philanthropic, and government institutions.¹ In recognition of these museums' national importance and to ensure they receive the strategic supports necessary to fulfill their missions, the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AAHC) program was established through the 2003 National Museum of African American History and Culture Act and housed at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

Between 2006 and 2020, the AAHC program awarded 215 grants totaling \$22,582,233 to 110 organizations. Most grant recipients are museums whose primary purpose is centered on African American life, history, and culture. These grants have supported a range of activities to advance professional development, build organizational capacity, and increase public access to collections.

This evaluation—the first since AAHC's inception—was designed to take stock of the grant program's reach and performance during its 15-year history. To this end, we conducted:

1. **an analysis of the program's reach** across the universe of eligible organizations,
2. **a comparative analysis of grant recipients and nonawarded applicants**, and
3. **an assessment of the influence of administrative practices** on the program's implementation, applicant pipeline, and selection decisions, with an overall assessment of how well the grant program has performed relative to the goals articulated in its enabling legislation.

A mixed-methods, retrospective evaluation of the program was done from December 2019 to December 2020 in two stages: analysis of program reach and analysis of program impact on grantees. The research approach involved using existing documentation to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the program, the universe of eligible organizations (i.e., African American museums

¹ Rick Cohen, "The State of Black Museums—Part 1," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, June 6, 2014, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/the-state-of-black-museums-part-i/>.

and historically Black colleges and universities [HBCUs]), and the profile of grantees. This was complemented by perceptions and reflections obtained from stakeholders through surveys and interviews.

Key Findings

This evaluation explored seven research questions (table 1) organized around two themes: the AAHC program and its reach, and the program’s impact. In this section, we highlight key findings corresponding to each research question and provide recommendations for the AAHC program.

TABLE 1
Research Questions

Theme	Research questions
The AAHC program and its reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Q1: What is the universe of African American museums and HBCUs? What share have participated in the AAHC program? ▪ Q2: Are there key factors that distinguish those organizations that have applied and obtained grants vis-à-vis those that have not? ▪ Q3: How have IMLS administrative practices for the AAHC program influenced applicant participation?
The AAHC program impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Q4: How has the AAHC program influenced the capacity of the nation’s African American museums and HBCUs? ▪ Q5: Are there certain parts of the AAHC grant portfolio that have performed better? ▪ Q6: How have IMLS administrative practices for the AAHC program influenced how awarded applicants implement their project awards? ▪ Q7: How has the AAHC grant program, now in its 15th year, performed overall in meeting its legislative goals?

Note: HBCUs = historically Black colleges and universities.

The AAHC Program and Its Reach

Q1. What is the universe of African American museums and HBCUs? What share have participated in the AAHC program?

The IMLS AAHC program has broad reach across eligible organizations. Since its inception, the program has received applications from 216 of 392 eligible organizations.² Of these 392, 293 are African American museums and 99 are HBCUs. The Institute of Museum and Library Services is reaching a large share of eligible museums and has made significant gains in reaching a significant

² Our estimate of the universe of eligible organizations is not intended as an official determination or an exhaustive list despite best efforts to fully populate and validate it.

share of HBCUs (one in four eligible organizations are HBCUs). The universe of eligible applicants represents all geographic regions of the United States, with southeastern organizations constituting half of the eligible population. Most eligible organizations are nonprofits, half are in the Southeast, and most have budgets under \$1 million. Of the 392 eligible organizations, 216 applied for an AAHC grant at least once and 176 never applied. Approximately half of all applicants received at least one award.

Q2: Are there key factors that distinguish those organizations that have applied and obtained grants vis-à-vis those that have applied but not obtained grants?

Some key differences exist between nonawarded and awarded applicants in terms of factors including organizational size and longevity, receipt of previous award, HBCU status, and geography. Larger nonprofits and museums in states with strong professional networks have a higher rate of successful applications, whereas newer museums (i.e., those established since 2000) have a lower success rate. Nearly half of awarded applicants have received an award more than once. Applications from HBCUs have increased and have had higher success rates than non-HBCUs. Awards have been granted in 31 states, and 14 states with eligible organizations have never received funding.

Q3: How have IMLS administrative practices for the AAHC program influenced applicant participation?

Despite administrative-capacity challenges faced by applicant organizations with limited resources, most awarded and nonawarded applicants reflected positively on the application process, with the vast majority indicating that the process was clear and that IMLS staff were supportive and responsive in answering questions, addressing concerns, and serving as a resource. Applicants' experiences and perceptions informed new directions for strengthening administrative practices, including broadening program goals, changing cost-share requirements, increasing funding, reviewing committees' build capacity, and increasing outreach, webinars, and engagement.

The AAHC Program Impact

Q4: How has the AAHC program influenced the capacity of the nation's African American museums and HBCUs?

Data show that the program has been successful in nurturing, sustaining, and expanding the reach and capacity of awarded organizations. Awarded applicants reported that the AAHC grants they received improved professional capacity and systems and improved and/or expanded collections. Most awarded applicants noted that they used the grant to attract additional funding or that they expect to do so. Awarded applicants also indicated that the grant helped them sustain their work. As one

awardee reported, “[the grant] enabled us to rapidly expand our program and our reach in a way that we wouldn’t have if we did not receive IMLS funding.” In addition to providing vital support to museums and HBCUs in support of AAHC’s programmatic goals, AAHC awards have also increased the financial resilience of organizations helping nonprofits to weather exogenous shocks such as Great Recession.

Q5: Are there certain parts of the AAHC grant portfolio that have performed better?

Data analyses yielded insights into which types of organizations performed better during the program’s 15-year history, showing that the extent to which the program has sustained, nurtured, and expanded awarded organizations has varied. Larger nonprofit grantees were particularly more likely to see staff benefits from professional development, whereas small nonprofit grantees improved their collections the most. Small nonprofits and repeat recipients were more successful at using AAHC grants to attract capital. Small nonprofit recipients were also more likely to be more financially resilient and report that they had deepened their audience engagement.

Q6: How have IMLS administrative practices for the AAHC program influenced how awarded applicants implement their project awards?

The AAHC grant has played an important role in the success of awarded organizations. Analyses of grantees’ experiences and perspectives show that IMLS administrative practices—including responsiveness to questions, clear guidance on reporting processes, beneficial training resources, and the facilitation of meaningful connections—has contributed to successful program implementation and the capturing and sharing of program knowledge. Survey respondents reported that the streamlining and transparency of administrative practices enabled them to implement funded projects without concerns about snafus or potential disruption of their work. The administrative practices enabled grantees to address emergent capacity-related needs and access resources and connections. Many respondents noted that these practices enabled them to continue projects after the grant. Awarded applicants would welcome clearer program expectations regarding performance metrics and more opportunities for peer learning to make the most out of the grant program.

Q7: How has the AAHC grant program, now in its 15th year, performed overall in meeting its legislative goals?

As envisioned by the AAHC program’s authorizing legislation (appendix D), the program has become a critical source of funding and trusted, reliable support for a national landscape of museums, archives, collections, and HBCUs dedicated to preserving and translating African American history and culture. Awarded applicants overwhelmingly cite the program as having enabled them to significantly expand

their reach, build capacity, strengthen professional training and development, improve financial resilience and sustainability, preserve and increase access to collections, and more effectively connect with audiences. The program's greatest limitation is its funding capacity. Although the enabling legislation authorizes up to \$15 million annually to support African American museums and institutions, funding ranged from \$842,000 in its first year to a high of \$2,731,000 in 2020.

Recommendations

Since 2006, the AAHC program has played a distinct and important role in the national funding ecosystem for African American museums and collections. Drawing from the evidence developed in the first-ever evaluation of the program, we propose the below recommendations to support IMLS' efforts to preserve the program's distinctive legacy, build on its documented successes, expand its reach, and strengthen its performance. An elaborated set of recommendations with supporting evidence from the evaluation is available at the end of this report. Our recommendations are as follows:

- **Expand program reach.** Although the program has reached a reasonably large and representative share of the eligible population, a sizeable number of organizations have never applied to AAHC, including some that are unaware of it. By periodically investing in updating a database of eligible organizations, leveraging and building relationships with state-level and regional networks, and strategically reaching out to nonapplicants (especially lower-resource organizations), IMLS can leverage staff time to improve program awareness and participation.
- **Invest in applicants' competitive capacity.** For some organizations, applying to the AAHC program can appear daunting. Concerted efforts to clarify the application process, expand and publicize guidance and training on applying, and implementing a two-step application process as some other funders have done can encourage more organizations to apply while increasing the quality and completeness of applications.
- **Include an intentional focus on capacity building for small organizations.** The AAHC program has provided valuable funding and learning opportunities for small organizations, including many with limited baseline capacity and resources. Adjusting some program requirements and creating tailored funding opportunities could encourage more small organizations to participate and strengthen the sustained benefits they derive from the program.

- **Continue to support and nurture museum professionals through learning and networking.** Awarded applicants value the technical assistance and networking connections the program provides, but IMLS can strengthen these by modifying the application process and expanding responsive technical assistance and peer learning opportunities.
- **Support continuous improvement and the replication of impactful approaches.** Leverage IMLS' robust administrative data system to integrate data from grant reports to streamline grant portfolio review, establish a culture of evidence to support periodic and real-time analysis, and enhance grantees' performance management capacities.
- **Engage partnerships in creative ways to expand the scope of the program.** By creating and expanding strategic partnerships, IMLS can work with other funders and field leaders to strengthen the funding ecosystem for African American museums and HBCUs and deepen collaborative impact.

Purpose

The Urban Institute, in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), has completed the first evaluation of the IMLS Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AAHC) program. The program was created by an act of Congress in 2003 and is the first program at the federal level to focus only on the needs of African American museums (Weiss 2018). The act directed IMLS to create a grant program to help African American museums improve operations, care for collections, and enhance professional development.

More than 100 years ago, the National Memorial Association, established in 1915 by the Committee of Colored Citizens, set aside funds to establish the Negro Memorial and National Museum (Brooks 2015). Congress passed the initial legislation authorizing a commission to establish a national memorial to celebrate the accomplishments of African Americans more than 75 years ago. In 2001, the House passed H.R. 3442, introduced by then-representative John Lewis (D-GA), for a presidential commission to develop a plan of action for the establishment and maintenance of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington, DC.³

Since its establishment in 1996, IMLS has sought to advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development. It acts as the primary source of federal financial support for the nation's museums and libraries, awarding over \$200 million annually through 13 competitive grant programs and its Grants to States program (IMLS 2014). The institute is a leader in preserving and promoting African American history and culture, having engaged with the work of the NMAAHC Plan for Action Presidential Commission since 2001 and in the establishment of the national museum in 2016.⁴

The AAHC grant program was created by the same act of congress that established the NMAAHC. After the program was officially authorized, IMLS, in partnership with NMAAHC, convened leaders in the African American museum community to design a grant program that would best meet the needs of the field, such as by building museums' organizational capacity and supporting the growth and development of museum professionals. Organizational capacity encompasses the organizational knowledge, systems, and processes that contribute to organizational effectiveness—that is, the ability of an organization to achieve its stated mission. Staff capacities include professional development and

³ National Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-106, 115 Stat. 1009 (2001)

⁴ National Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission Act of 2001.

management, data and evaluative skills, digital and technological competencies, and expertise in diversity and inclusion.

This evaluation is intended to provide an understanding of the contributions of the AAHC program to grantee outcomes, to inform efforts to strengthen the program and expand the pool of applicants in future years, and to enable the program to effectively communicate its contributions to prospective applicants, policymakers, and other audiences. The full scope of the evaluation is focused on the following aims:

1. **Develop a thorough understanding of the eligible population** of African American museums and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the characteristics of awarded applicants compared with this wider population of institutions, and steps that could be taken to expand the pool of eligible applicants.
2. **Evaluate the performance of the IMLS AAHC program**, including by understanding the program's role in enhancing awarded applicant capacity, analyzing portfolio performance, understanding the program's administrative practices, and reviewing the potential for better embedding evaluation into the program.
3. **Interpret the programmatic evaluation's findings in relation to the AAHC program's legislative goals**, as outlined in its enabling legislation.

The cultural impact of African American museums in the US cannot be overstated. In addition to contributing to the cultural vibrancy of American life, the museum field serves numerous constituents including a broad range of artists, scholars, museum professionals, and communities at the local, regional, and national level. Banks (2019, 1) wrote, "Philanthropy is not only partly responsible for the establishment of the NMAAHC, it also undergirds the broader black museum renaissance during which hundreds of African American museums have opened across the United States since the 1960s and 1970s."

African American museums, cultural institutions, and HBCUs have long been key to improving understanding of our shared national heritage and identifying solutions to our collective challenges. Events in 2020 have underscored the critical importance of these organizations. These events, which would have been difficult to anticipate when the evaluation's data collection and analysis phase began in December 2019, have reshaped our world and our priorities. The negative health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been disproportionately felt by communities of color. People of color, specifically Black people, Latinx people, and Native Americans, are more likely to contract,

require hospitalization for, and die from COVID-19 than whites in the US.⁵ Moreover, because of the economic recession and massive job losses across the country, Black and Latinx people are also more likely to report experiencing economic hardships including loss of employment income, food insufficiency, and worries about upcoming rent and mortgage payments.⁶ In addition to the toll that the pandemic has taken on people and families, businesses and nonprofits (particularly small ones) have struggled to recover from declining revenues. In fact, while collecting data, we learned how organizations acted quickly to maintain and sustain program staff salaries, adjust protocols to ensure adequate care of collections, expedite plans to digitize art and artifacts, and develop new ways to engage volunteers and museum visitors.

At a time when many organizations improvised to shore up operations and pivoted to virtual platforms for engagement, education, and fundraising, program staff and leadership at museums and HBCUs also witnessed and participated in a national moment of reckoning and urgent new calls for racial justice. Organizers, activists, artists, and community leaders have catalyzed and coordinated this latest iteration of a movement that demands that Black lives matter and calls for an end to systemic and institutional racism. Social movements and the arts are inextricable and are informed by history, making this moment particularly important for considering how to best sustain and strengthen African American-centered arts and cultural organizations and institutions, including African American museums and HBCUs.

⁵ “The COVID Racial Data Tracker,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://covidtracking.com/race>.

⁶ Margery Austin Turner and Monique King-Viehland, “Economic Hardships from COVID-19 Are Hitting Black and Latinx People Hardest. Here Are Five Actions Local Leaders Can Take,” *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, August 12, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/economic-hardships-covid-19-are-hitting-black-and-latinx-people-hardest-here-are-five-actions-local-leaders-can-take>.

Methodology

The Urban Institute used a mixed-methods approach to this evaluation with several components over the yearlong time frame. Urban launched the evaluation with an analysis of available secondary data, including a comprehensive analysis of AAHC program data (e.g., the program’s administrative database and grantees’ final reports). This was complemented by primary data collection, through which Urban surveyed nonapplicants and recently awarded applicants and conducted in-depth interviews with IMLS staff, awarded applicants, nonawarded applicants, funders, and stakeholders (box 1 includes definitions of program stakeholders).

BOX 1

Defining the Population

Awarded applicants are organizations that have applied for the AAHC program at least once and have received at least one grant throughout the program’s life-span (i.e., since 2006). *Repeat awarded applicants* have received two or more grants.

Nonawarded applicants are organizations that have applied at least once and never received a grant.^a

Nonapplicants are eligible organizations that have never applied to the AAHC program (these were identified in a field scan and have been vetted by IMLS staff).

Funders are peer funders to IMLS that are investing in African American History and Culture institutions and HBCUs that are eligible to participate in AAHC, either through a targeted program or as a part of their larger investment portfolios.

Other stakeholders include practitioners or thought leaders in this field who are knowledgeable about the landscape of organizations in this space, the challenges they face, and the potential for programs like AAHC to help them.

^a Ineligible applicants are excluded from this analysis and are not reflected in the nonawarded applicant data.

Data Collection

In collaboration with IMLS, Urban compiled IMLS administrative data from 2006 to 2020, assembling information on 110 awarded applicants and 105 nonawarded applicants, manually pulling data from 396 available applications and 97 grantee final reports and adding additional analysis to these (e.g.,

coding applicants by proposed activities, revenue category, number of repeat applicants/awards) to create a comprehensive picture of applicants (awarded and nonawarded).

To build a picture of the universe of eligible organizations, a list of nonapplicants was created by merging information provided by the Association of African American Museums (AAAM) and the National Museum of African American History and Culture and by examining the list of recognized HBCUs and lists of awarded applicants from funders providing similar funding. In partnership with IMLS, the evaluation team reviewed this list of nonapplicants to remove organizations that were likely ineligible for the funding. Using this refined list and the lists of awarded and nonawarded applicants from the administrative data, Urban conducted financial analyses using data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics.

In addition to analyzing administrative data, the evaluation team collected primary data. The following two surveys were administered to learn more about awarded applicants' and nonapplicants' experience with the AAHC program:

- **Awarded applicant survey:** A short 30-minute web-administered survey was sent to all 75 organizations that received at least one grant from FY 2014 to FY 2019 to collect information on the AAHC program's role in enhancing their capacity. Survey questions pertained to grant activities, observed outcomes, and reflections on the administrative practices of the program and IMLS program staff. The survey opened on May 20, 2020, and was officially closed on June 30, 2020, giving awarded applicants (who received one to two reminders a week) six weeks to respond to the 23-question survey.
- **Nonapplicant survey:** A short 5-minute web-administered survey to nonapplicants was used to gather information on why organizations had never applied to the AAHC program. The survey was designed to better understand barriers to applying and to better understand nonapplicants' primary sources of funding. The Urban research team contacted 174 nonapplicants to initiate the survey.⁷ The survey opened on May 20, 2020, and was officially closed on June 8, 2020, giving nonapplicants (who received one to two reminders a week) three weeks to respond to the 8-question survey.

The Urban research team also conducted 50 interviews with funders, nonawarded applicants, awarded applicants, IMLS staff, and other stakeholders. The interview process began in March 2020 and was completed in early July 2020. Based on the subgroup of interest, the interviews enabled the

⁷ Of the initial 181 eligible nonapplicants identified in early 2020, 7 lacked publicly available contact information.

team to collect detailed information on interviewees' experiences with the AAHC application process; barriers to participating and implementing the grant; the program's administrative management; perspectives on the program's alignment with needs in the field; the program's contributions to grantees' specific outcomes (including short- and long-term outcomes); and opportunities for program improvements.

Notably, most of the data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the nonprofit organizations, government entities, and higher-education institutions we asked to participate in the evaluation were also experiencing unexpected and unprecedented changes to their normal operations, including mandatory shutdowns and office closures, new government-mandated health and safety protocols, and declines in or complete stoppages of in-person museum visitation. Museum leadership and program staff had to quickly adapt their organizations' business models, virtually engage new and existing funders and supporters, and identify ways to quickly shift their programs, outreach, engagement, and collections online.

Response Rates and Representativeness

Table 2 shows the final adjusted response rates for each subset of the primary data analysis including the nonapplicant survey, awarded applicant survey, and interviews. Though targets were reached for the majority of subgroups, lower-than-expected overall response rates may be associated with the timing of the survey administration, which coincided with the required shutdowns and remote working conditions that localities implemented because of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

For example, the study design included a target awarded-applicant-survey response rate of 75 percent.⁸ We expected this rate because of the familiarity that awarded applicants tend to have with the AAHC program. The actual response rate (53 percent) was lower than the target. Moreover, the target response rate for the nonapplicant survey was 30 to 50 percent (54 to 90 organizations). Of the 174 organizations that received a request to complete the survey, 60 responded (4 of which were excluded because they had applied to the program through another organization or because of other reasons). The response rate for the nonapplicant survey was 32 percent (56 out of 174 organizations), which is at the lower end of the target range. Events such as natural disasters that impact a large proportion of a population are among the factors that can affect survey response rates, and the

⁸ Organizations that received more than one grant during the period only received one survey request.

COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding social and economic consequences for nonprofits (including museums) likely contributed to the lower-than-expected response rates.

TABLE 2
Response Rates

Instrument	Dates	Total ^a	Total sends	Anticipated responses	Valid responses	Actual response rate
Awarded applicant survey	5/20/20–6/30/20	75	75	56	40	53 percent
Nonapplicant survey	5/20/20–6/8/20	181	174 ^b	54–90	56	32 percent
Interviews with Nonawarded applicants	5/28/20–6/5/20	90	13 ^c	5	5	38 percent
Interviews with awarded applicants	6/8/20–7/8/20	101	101	33	30	30 percent
Interviews with funders	5/28/20–6/5/20	7	7	5	5	71 percent
Interviews with Stakeholders	5/28/20–6/5/20	14	14	5	6	42 percent
Interviews with IMLS staff	3/27/20–4/3/20	4	4	4	4	100 percent

Notes: IMLS = Institute of Museum and Library Services. Data collection occurred at the beginning of the COVID-19 health crisis, which the [World Health Organization](#) declared an international pandemic on March 11, 2020.

^a Totals reflect the administrative database up until FY 2019 and do not include FY 2020, which explains discrepancies with nonapplicant totals listed in subsequent sections into the report.

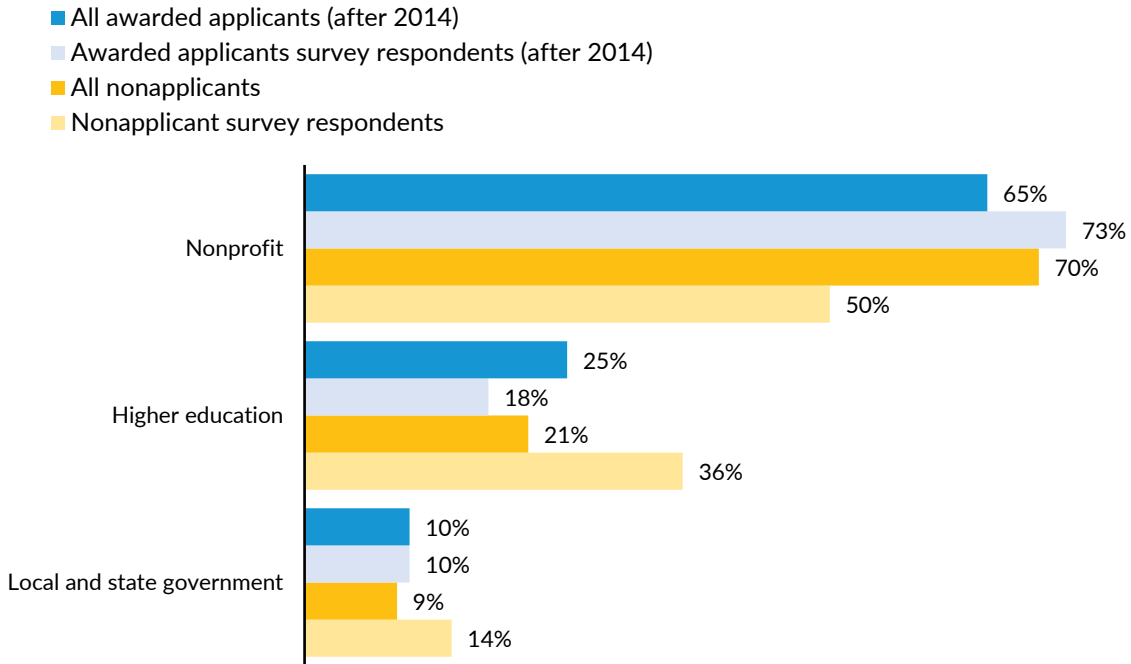
^b Seven of the initial 181 identified eligible nonapplicants did not have contact information available through publicly available sources.

^c We reached out to a random subset of non-awarded applicants to mitigate overscheduling.

Figure 1 shows the samples from the awarded applicant survey and the nonapplicant survey by organization type. The vast majority (more than 70 percent) of respondents to the awarded applicant survey were nonprofit organizations, and the remainder were higher-education institutions (18 percent) and local/state governments (10 percent). This is fairly representative of the awarded applicant pool. Average budget size among the sample of awarded applicants is comparable with the population. Of the nonprofits in the population, more than half (60 percent) have budgets of less than \$1 million, 12 percent have budgets between \$1 million and \$4.9 million, and the remainder have budgets of more than \$5 million or of indeterminate size.

FIGURE 1

Organization Type Representation of Survey Samples Compared with Population

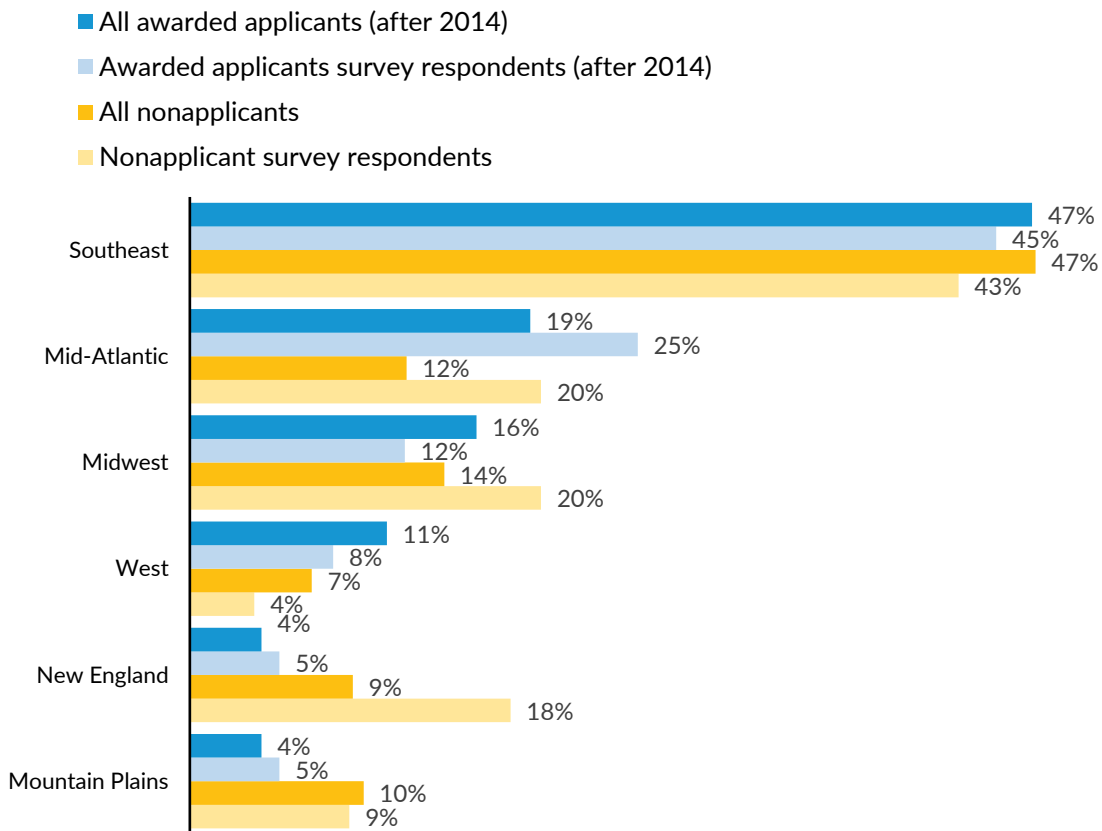


Note: This figure depicts all awarded applicants after 2014 (75), awarded applicant survey respondents (40), all nonapplicants (176), and nonapplicant survey respondents (56).

Figure 2 shows the regional representation of the two survey samples. The awarded applicant survey slightly oversamples respondents from the Mid-Atlantic, West, Mountain Plains, and New England and undersamples organizations from the Southeast and Midwest. Nonapplicant survey respondents slightly oversample for organizations from New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Midwest and slightly undersample for those from the Southeast, the Mountain-Plains, and the West.

FIGURE 2

Regional Representation of Survey Samples Compared with Population



Notes: This figure depicts all awarded applicants after 2014 (75), awarded applicant survey respondents (40), all nonapplicants (176) and nonapplicant survey respondents (56). This regional breakdown reflects the six regions (Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, Mountain Plains, New England, Southeastern, and Western) used to distinguish museum regional associations.

All awarded applicants and some nonawarded applicants were provided an opportunity to interview on a first come, first served basis. As interviews were being scheduled and conducted, the research team made minor changes (table 3) to the interview targets because of the following key factors:

- Engagement rates from awarded applicant cohort 3 were much higher than the other two cohorts, so we interviewed more awarded applicants from cohort 3.⁹

⁹ As shown in the breakdown of response rates in table 1, cohorts 2 and 3 had response rates greater than 30 percent. This does not account for the interest shown by awarded applicants from cohort 3 that were not scheduled as the 10 interview slots for that cohort filled up quickly. We hypothesize that cohort 3 grantees were eager to speak with the research team because they had received multiple grants over multiple time

- Additional funder names surfaced in our interviews and research that we wanted to pursue, so we interviewed two more funders than originally planned.
- One stakeholder was mentioned by name twice in interviews with awarded applicant and we wanted to include their perspective, so we reached out and interviewed them.

TABLE 3

Interviewee Respondents by Target Responses

Interviewee subgroup	Initially targeted responses	Actual responses
Nonawarded applicants	5	5
Awarded applicants (cohort 1: pre-2014)	5	4 (-1)
Awarded applicants (cohort 2: 2014-2019)	20	16 (-4)
Awarded applicants (cohort 3: pre-2014 and 2014-2019)	8	10 (+2)
Funders	3	5 (+2)
Stakeholders	5	6 (+1)
IMLS staff	4	4
Total	50	50

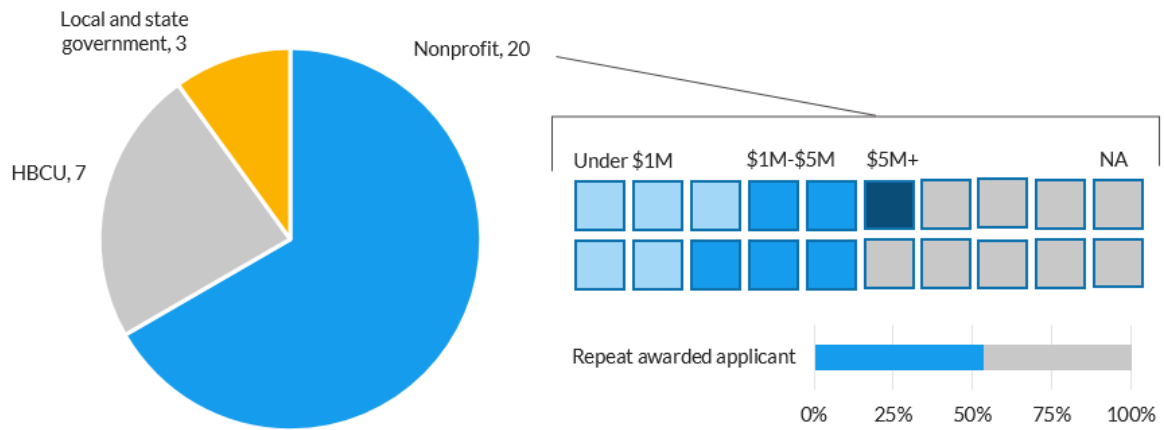
Note: IMLS = Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The research team completed 50 interviews (rather than conducting additional interviews to accommodate these changes) for reasons relating to budget and time (scheduling additional interviews would reduce the time available for analysis). After the target responses were reached for interview groups, no more interviews were scheduled, which may have contributed to lower response rates in some categories as the “valid responses” for interviews were fewer than could have been scheduled because of additional interest from potential respondents.

Of the 50 interviewees, 30 were awarded applicants, 6 were stakeholders, 5 were nonawarded applicants, 5 were funders, and 4 were IMLS staff. Of the 30 awarded applicants, 20 were nonprofits, 7 were HBCUs, and 3 were local or state governments (figure 3). Of the 20 nonprofits, 5 had annual budgets greater than \$1 million, 5 had budgets between \$1 and \$5 million, and 1 had a budget greater than \$5 million (budget information was unavailable for 9 organizations). Just over half of awarded applicants (16) were repeat awardees, and the others (14) were one-time grant recipients as of the 2019 award cycle.

periods. The research team recognizes that this could yield an oversample of repeat grantees and attempted to control for this in our analysis.

FIGURE 3
Awarded Applicant Interviewee Profile



Notes: HBCUs = historically Black colleges and universities. This figure provides a breakdown of the 30 grantees we interviewed.

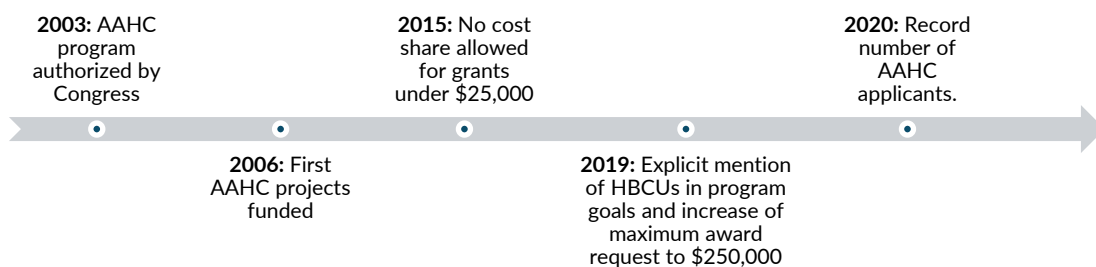
Overview of the AAHC Grant Program

How Long Has AAHC Been Building the Capacity of African American History and Culture Institutions?

The Institute of Museum and Library Services was authorized by Congress in late 2003 to create “a grant program with the purpose of improving operations, care of collections, and development of professional management at African American museums.” The African American History and Culture grant program has been investing in the capacity of African American History and Culture institutions since issuing its first grants in 2006.

FIGURE 4

Timeline of the AAHC Grant Program

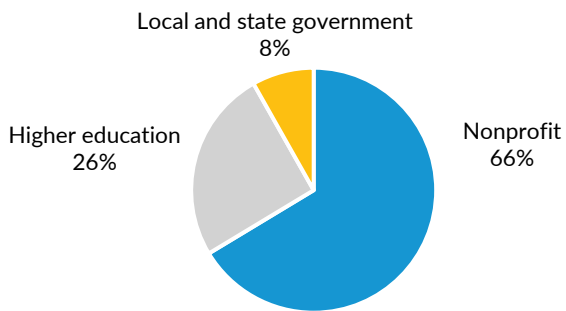


What Has Been the Total Investment in AAHC? How Many and What Types of Organizations Have Been Funded by AAHC?

Over the past 15 years, the IMLS AAHC program has invested \$22,582,233 in 215 projects to 110 distinct organizations (figure 5). On average, roughly 14 grants are selected each year from roughly 35 eligible applications. There have been 494 *eligible* applications submitted over the program’s history (the fewest was 22 in 2017 and the most was 47 in 2020).

FIGURE 5

Awarded Applicants by Organization Type



Who Can Apply?

To be eligible for an award under the AAHC Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), you must be an organization that meets all three of the following criteria:

- You must be either a unit of state, local, or tribal government or be a private, nonprofit organization that has tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code.
- You must be located in one of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, or the Republic of Palau.
- You must qualify as one of the following:
 - » a museum whose primary purpose, as reflected in its mission, is African American life, art, history, and/or culture,
 - » a museum service organization or association whose primary purpose, as reflected in its mission, is to support African American museums, or
 - » a historically Black college or university.

How Much Funding Is Available to Applicants? What Is the Match Requirement?

Applicants can request \$5,000 to \$50,000 with no cost share, or \$50,001-\$250,000 with a one-to one cost share. (Cost share can be met through contributions, earned income, in-kind contributions, materials and supplies, and/or equipment.)

What Is the Average Awarded Grant Size?

The average award size is \$105,066. Throughout the program's life-span, the average award size has fluctuated from \$82,764.71 (2015) to \$159,357.14 (2019). The maximum award request increased in FY 2019 to \$250,000, which explains the increase in the average award size.

What Kinds of Projects Are Eligible?

The AAHC program provides flexible project-based funding for a variety of activities, including but not limited to the following:

- cataloging, inventorying, documenting, and registering collections
- digitization of collections designed to enhance outreach, expand access, or improve collections management
- developing collection plans, interpretive plans, or strategic plans using consultants, researchers, and other sources of professional expertise
- implementing recommendations or action plans from planning activities
- exhibition development, design, and fabrication
- interpretive and educational programs, product development, and delivery
- design and printing of educational resources including training manuals, toolkits, and curricula that support educational programs and exhibitions
- creating environments, approaches, and tools for increased community collaboration, learning, debate, and dialogue
- audience research and evaluation, including using an evaluation consultant to help develop achievable performance goals and measurable outcomes
- gathering and incorporating collections information and relevant artifacts from stakeholders such as community members and scholars to capture and share multiple and dynamic perspectives on museum collections

When Can Organizations Apply?

The [NOFO](#) is released 60 to 90 days before the deadline. Most recently, NOFOs have been released in mid-August and the deadline has fallen in mid-November.

What Does It Look Like to Be an AAHC Awarded Applicant? For Example, What Are the Reporting Requirements and Disbursement Processes?

The AAHC program requires annual reporting based on a set of key indicators that are determined in the application stage. Awarded applicants are funded to attend an IMLS designated annual meeting. In some years these meetings are aligned with [the Association of African American Museums Conference](#), which includes AAHC-specific programming. In other years, the meetings are independent events in Washington, DC, or are aligned with other museum conferences. Grant payments are cost reimbursements that are disbursed after submitting necessary financial documentation.

Findings

This section presents findings from the evaluation, structured around two themes: the AAHC program and its reach (research questions 1, 2, and 3) and the performance of the AAHC program (research questions 4, 5, 6, and 7).

The AAHC Program and Its Reach

The evaluation produced evidence to answer **three main research questions**:

- **Question 01:** What is the universe of African American museums and HBCUs? What share have participated in the IMLS AAHC program?
- **Question 02:** Are there any key factors that distinguish those who have applied and obtained grants vis-à-vis those who have applied and not obtained grants?
- **Question 03:** How have IMLS administrative practices for the IMLS AAHC program influenced participation of applicants?

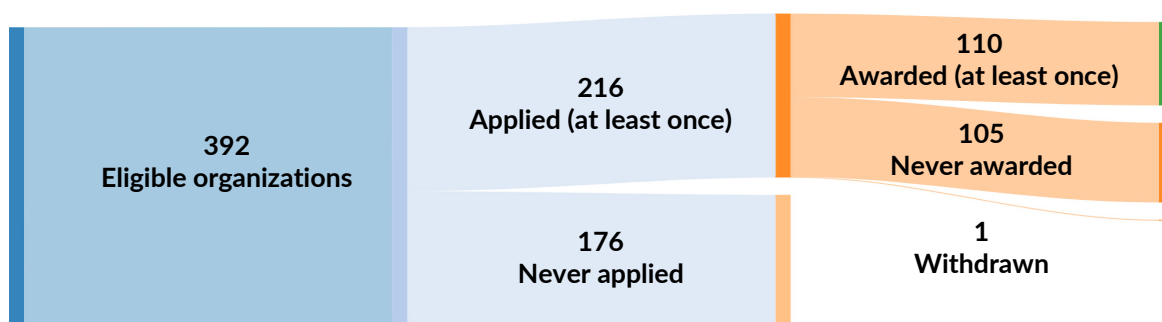
Question 01: What Is the Universe of African American Museums and HBCUs? What Share Have Participated in the IMLS AAHC Program?

Dickerson (1988) identified 150 institutions in 37 states whose purpose was to collect and preserve material that represents the history and cultural heritage of African Americans. In the more than 30 years since, the landscape of African American cultural institutions and organizations has shifted as some museums have closed and new ones have opened. In 2017, the AAHC program partnered with the Association of African American Museums to complete a national needs assessment using multiple sources and identified 215 African American museums, libraries, and archives (Banks 2019).

We have identified 392 organizations including museums, libraries, archives, and HBCUs in 45 states across the US that meet the AAHC's eligibility criteria for program funding. Of these 392, slightly more than half have applied for the program and 110 (28 percent) have applied and received at least one grant. This means 100 organizations have applied but never been awarded funding and 176

(61 of which are HBCUs) are likely eligible but have never applied (figure 6).¹⁰ Due to AAHC program eligibility, all official HBCUs (99 as determined by the Department of Education) are included in the eligible universe which contextualize the size relative to previous estimates.

FIGURE 6
Universe of Organizations Eligible for AAHC Funding



Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program. This figure includes program data from FY 2006 to FY 2020.

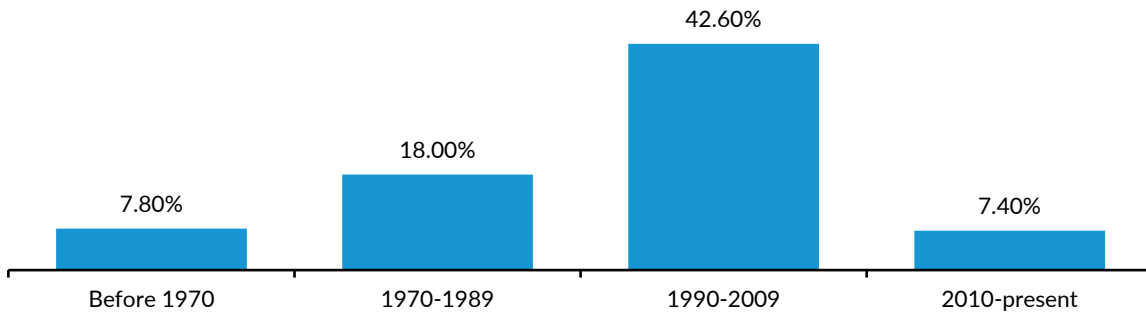
This universe of 392 organizations is broad and diverse. Although many African American museums were established in the 19th century, a surge in the numbers of African American museums and cultural institutions in the US can be traced to key social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, including the civil rights, Black power, and Black arts movements (Banks 2019). Many of these museums were founded in response to the civil rights movement in the South to memorialize the events that occurred there and to establish monuments, archives, and collections documenting African American struggle and achievement in the US.

Research on African American museums in the US shows that the growth in such museums in the South can be divided into four periods: before 1970, 1970 to 1989, 1990 to 2009, and 2010 to the present (Hayward and Larouche 2018). According to our estimates, roughly 8 percent of eligible organizations were founded before 1970 out of the struggle for racial equality and a movement “to make the history and culture of African America more public” (Burns 2013). Almost half (43 percent) of the eligible organizations in the universe were established between 1990 and 2009, 18 percent were established between 1970 and 1989, and 7 percent were established during the past decade (figure 7).

¹⁰ Five nonapplicants identified by the evaluation team in February 2020 applied to the AAHC program in August 2020, meaning the number of nonapplicants specified here (176) is different than the 181 identified in early 2020.

FIGURE 7

Shares of Organizations Eligible for AAHC Funding Founded during Each Period



Note: This includes all eligible nonprofits (244) except those without available data on when they were founded (24 percent of nonprofits in the universe).

The nonapplicant pool is reasonably similar to the overall universe of eligible organizations. More than half (56 percent) of nonapplicants are nonprofits, compared with 69.9 percent of all applicants (i.e., awarded and nonawarded); 30 percent of nonapplicants are higher-education institutions, compared with roughly 21.3 percent of all applicants.

Nonapplicants most commonly cite lack of awareness as the reason for not applying for grant funding (table 4). In the sample of survey respondents, 35 percent said they did not apply for grant funding because they were not aware of the program and 25 percent said that they lacked the time or the staff to apply, which is consistent across HBCUs and non-HBCUs surveyed. All respondents who indicated cost sharing as a barrier were HBCUs, suggesting that even organizations with larger operating budgets might have difficulty securing a cost share, which is a requirement to apply for awards of more than \$50,000. Nonapplicants indicating “other” as a reason for not applying (20 percent), all of whom represented nonprofits, identified a range of reasons, including that they were “new and needed to establish a solid history,” they felt that “smaller orgs like ours are discouraged from applying,” they did not know whether their organization was as mission-aligned as other institutions, they were not open yet, they had only recently received a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and confirmation of sam.gov registration, or they were unsure of their eligibility.

Survey results indicate that more eligible organizations would have applied if they were aware of the program. This presents an opportunity for building awareness among this eligible universe. All HBCUs are eligible for the AAHC program (regardless of whether they have a distinct museum entity

on campus), yet their lack of awareness of the program presents an opportunity for greater outreach and for clarifying eligibility.

TABLE 4
Barriers for Organizations That Did Not Apply to the AAHC Program

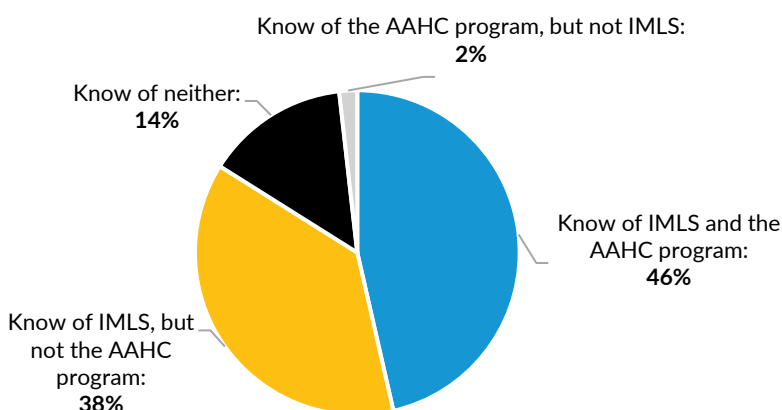
Survey response	All Nonapplicants	HBCUs	Non-HBCUs
We were not aware of this program	35 percent	36 percent	34 percent
We didn't have the time or staff to apply	25 percent	18 percent	28 percent
Other [please describe]	20 percent	0 percent	28 percent
I don't know	18 percent	45 percent	7 percent
The cost share requirement was a barrier	8 percent	27 percent	0 percent
We didn't meet the program's eligibility requirements	5 percent	0 percent	7 percent
The available funding wasn't large enough for the projects we wanted to fund	5 percent	0 percent	7 percent
Our organization's needs didn't align with the program's goals	5 percent	0 percent	7 percent

Notes: HBCUs = historically Black colleges and universities. The total population is the 56 nonapplicant respondents, yet only 40 (71.4 percent) responded to this question. Respondents could select every response that applies to this question, so the percentages herein are not summative.

Organizations that have not applied to the AAHC program may not be connected to strong state or regional networks that facilitate knowledge sharing and resources that enhance organizations' applications. Figure 8 shows the range of awareness among eligible organizations that did not apply to the program. Survey results indicate that there might be an opportunity to do more outreach that leverages nonapplicant knowledge of IMLS to boost visibility of the AAHC program in particular. Though organizations that have not applied to the program cite lack of awareness as the largest barrier to applying, IMLS has relatively high visibility among nonapplicants. Most respondents (46 percent) reported being familiar with the IMLS and AAHC programs, and more than one-third (38 percent) of all organizations that have never applied indicated that they were familiar with IMLS but not the AAHC program. Less than 15 percent of all organizations that have never applied were familiar with neither IMLS nor the AAHC program, suggesting that IMLS has good visibility among many African American museums and cultural institutions in the US but can focus on promoting AAHC specifically.

FIGURE 8

Awareness among Nonapplicant Organizations of the AAHC Program



Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program; IMLS = Institute of Museum and Library Services. Total population is the 56 nonapplicant respondents. All 56 (100 percent) responded to this question.

The regional distribution is remarkably consistent among organizations that never applied to the AAHC program, nonawarded applicants, and awarded applicants. In particular, Southeastern organizations constitute 50 percent of the total eligible population, 50 percent of awarded applicants, and 54 percent of nonawarded applicants.¹¹ This is consistent with research finding that approximately 60 percent of African American museums are located in the southern region of the country (Hayward and Larouche 2018). Because of regional variation in the number of African American museums in the US, there are also regional differences in AAHC outreach in the US.

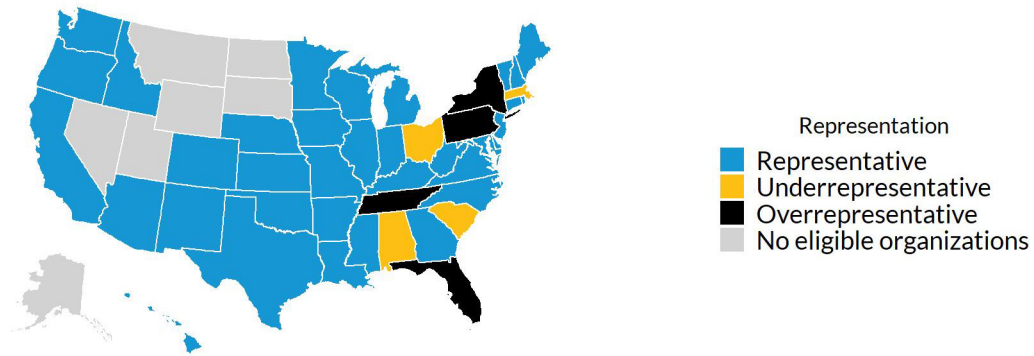
Figure 9 shows that the reach of the AAHC program is geographically representative. Of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, 36 states are considered representative, 4 are overrepresentative, 4 are underrepresentative, and 7 do not have any eligible organizations.¹² More outreach appears to be needed in Alabama, Massachusetts, Ohio, and South Carolina. The AAHC program is

¹¹ This regional breakdown mirrors the six regions (Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, Mountain Plains, New England, Southeast, and West) used to distinguish museum [regional associations](#). Southeastern organizations include organizations in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, the Virgin Islands, Virginia, and West Virginia.

¹² A state is considered well represented if the share of applicants (awarded and nonawarded) is within 1 percent of the share of the state's eligible organizations. A state is considered overrepresentative if the AAHC program applicants represent more than 1 percent above of the share of eligible organizations in the state and underrepresentative if the AAHC program applicants represent less than 1 percent below the percentage of eligible organizations in the state.

overrepresentative of the eligible universe in Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, likely because of strong local networks and information sharing.

FIGURE 9
Representativeness of the AAHC Program by State



Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program. Total population is 392 (sum of nonapplicants, applicants, and awarded applicants from 2006 to 2020).

Question 02: Are There Any Key Factors That Distinguish Those Who Have Applied and Obtained Grants vis-à-vis Those Who Have Not?

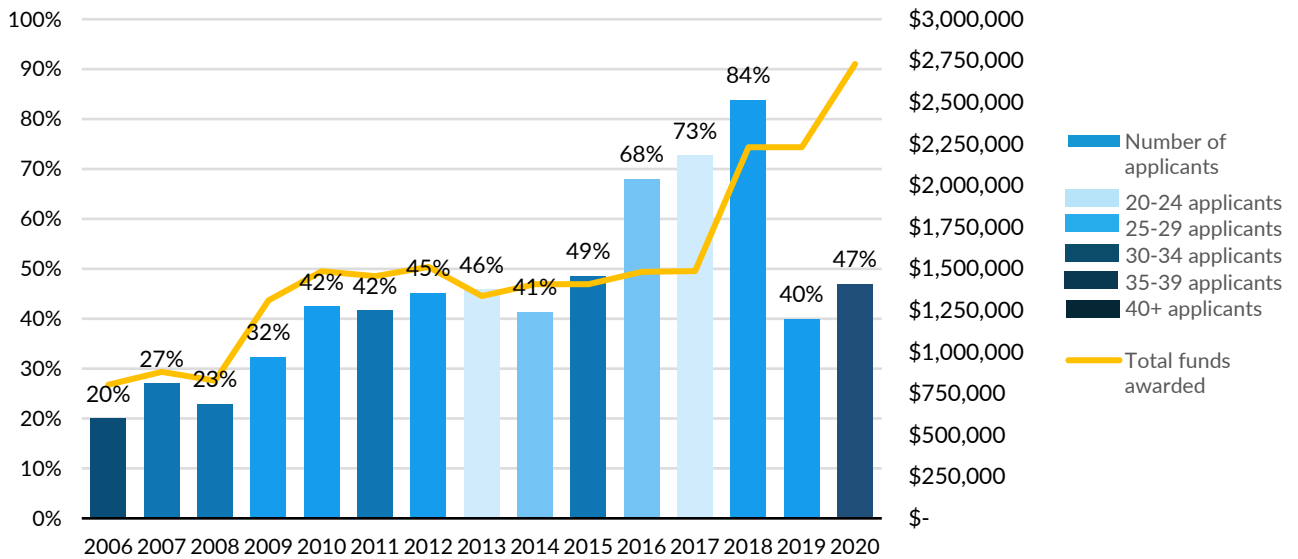
Even as the amount of applications and funding has fluctuated, applicants to the AAHC program have on average had roughly a 40-percent chance of receiving a grant award. Despite a few years when the rate increased significantly, since 2010, the success rate has hovered between 41 and 49 percent, higher than many other federal grant programs. For example, the National Endowment for the Humanities—a funder of many AAHC program applicants—reports a 16-percent average success rate, with specific program success rates ranging from 6 to 40 percent.¹³ It follows that grant programs dedicated to particular subsets of organizations (like the AAHC program) would fall higher in this range because they target eligibility to limit the scope of organizations that can apply.

Applicant success rate has increased since 2006, with a notable upward trend starting in 2015 owing to a new funding option to request \$25,000 or less without a cost share requirement (figure 10). This new funding option was especially used by small nonprofits by 2018, when their success rates increased to 89 percent, raising the average program success rate to 84 percent. The program has received larger allocations from Congress since 2006, allowing for continued high investment even

¹³ “NEH’s Application Review Process,” National Endowment for the Humanities, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://www.neh.gov/grants/application-process>.

as application numbers have risen. In 2019, the AAHC program changed its requirements to set a new maximum request award of \$250,000, shifting the success rate to what program staff consider its “baseline” of approximately 40 percent.

FIGURE 10
Applicant Success Rate and Total Funds Awarded by Year
Adjusted for inflation on December 2019 dollars



Notes: From 2006 to 2020, the total number of applications is 494 and the total amount awarded is \$22,582,233, adjusted for inflation based on December 2019 dollars.

Grant profiles for the AAHC program remained fairly consistent year to year between 2006 and 2020. The average grant tended to be roughly \$106,000 (adjusted for inflation based on December 2019 dollars) and the most commonly awarded applicants were nonprofits (66.4 percent) with budgets of less than \$1 million (61.6 percent of nonprofits), organizations based in the Southeast (47.2 percent), and organizations that have applied to the AAHC program at least once before (71 percent).

Compared with the overall success rate (43.7 percent), institutions of higher education (49.5 percent)—especially HBCUs (50.7 percent)—and local and state governments (48.7 percent) have above-average success rates.

TABLE 5

Number of Applications and Success Rate by Organization Type

Organization type	Number of applications	Success rate
Nonprofits (all budget sizes)	370	41.9 percent
Higher education	91	49.5 percent
Local and state government	31	48.7 percent
Total	492	43.7 percent

Source: African American History and Culture grant program database.

Note: The total 492 represents all eligible applications by organizations of all types.

Taken together, all nonprofit applicants had a success rate of 41.9 percent, slightly below the overall success rate of 43.7 percent. Nonprofit success rates vary widely by budget size: as table 6 shows, large nonprofits (62.5 percent) and midsize nonprofits (56.8 percent) have the highest success rates of all applicants (higher than institutions of higher education and local and state governments). Small nonprofits with budgets of less than \$1 million have the lowest success rates of all applicants at 37.8 percent.

TABLE 6

Number of Nonprofit Applications and Success Rate by Size of Budget

Budget size	Number of applications	Application success rate
Less than \$1 million	230	37.8 percent
\$1 to \$5 million	74	56.8 percent
\$5 million or greater	32	62.5 percent
Unknown	34	37.8 percent
Total	370	41.9 percent

Source: African American History and Culture grant program database.

Notes: The total of 370 represents all applications submitted by nonprofits since 2006. Owing to availability of financial data, only nonprofit applicants are included in this financial breakdown.

In terms of founding era, success rates are somewhat higher for long-established institutions than for newer ones. Nonprofit applicants founded before 1970 have the highest success rate (49 percent), whereas those founded since 2010 have success rates closer to the average (41 percent).

On average, awarded applicants tend to request less funding from IMLS than nonawarded applicants. Small awarded nonprofits (i.e. those with revenues of less than \$1 million) requested more than \$12,000 less than small nonawarded nonprofit applicants. Moreover, large awarded nonprofit applicants requested \$15,000 less on average than large nonawarded nonprofit applicants. This trend is largely consistent regionally: for instance, nonawarded applicants in New England requested \$20,000 more on average than did awarded applicants in the region.

In-depth knowledge, be it through personal experience (repeat applicants) or institutional support (professional networks), of the AAHC application process also makes applicants more successful. Almost half (47 percent, or 52 out of 110) of awarded applicants have had multiple projects funded by AAHC, with 15 organizations receiving four or more awards from the grant program. For instance, one organization applied nine times and was granted five awards.

Insights from interviews indicate that applicants are more likely to receive AAHC funding if they have institutional knowledge of the program or can tap professional networks for help navigating the process. Awarded applicants were more likely than nonawarded applicants to mention their connections to mentors and state or regional networks or associations that shared knowledge about navigating the federal application systems and other resources during the application phase. Awarded applicants were more likely than nonawarded applicants to mention either a former or current staff member or a peer at another institution who had applied for an IMLS or AAHC grant. Nonawarded applicants frequently mentioned lacking sufficient experience or guidance on how to navigate the AAHC application process.

Question 03: How Have IMLS Administrative Practices for the IMLS AAHC Program Influenced Participation of Applicants?

Although IMLS AAHC administrative practices comply with federal standards and regulations, the AAHC application process is designed to provide applicants access to knowledgeable program staff, to timely, relevant technical assistance, and to other resources including connections to regional arts and museums networks that equip new and returning applicants with the tools necessary for assembling a high-quality application. The five administrative practices and program-level decisions that follow have been particularly responsive to the needs of applicants to the AAHC program.

BROADENING OF PROGRAM GOALS

The AAHC grant program has made catalytic investments in its grantees during its 15-year history. Although it started with a specific focus on professional development for staff and volunteers in African American museums, it has become a multidimensional program that, in addition to professional development, funds museums and institutions to strengthen operations, facilitate organizational learning, strengthen financial capacity and networks, invest in the stewardship and quality of collections, digitize collections, develop new collection-driven scholarship, and bolster outreach and marketing and community visibility. Interviews with IMLS staff and applicants (awarded and nonawarded) validated this approach as being responsive to staff needs, ensuring that applicants are in

conversation with IMLS staff to request funding for things that they need and that they can accommodate to eligible outlined activities, rather than fitting applications to activities outlined in the NOFO.

COST-SHARE REQUIREMENT CHANGE

Until 2014, the AAHC program required a one-to-one match for all awarded funding. In 2015, a new award category was created that did not require a cost share for grants of less than \$25,000 (in 2018, this category was raised to \$50,000). This practice reduced barriers for small nonprofits to apply, increasing their success rate during this period.

EXPLICIT MENTION OF HBCUS IN PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The program has always listed HBCUs as eligible entities. However, in 2019 the program description and goal statement were adapted to include them explicitly, since which the annual average number of HBCU applicants has increased to 8 applications in 2019 and 11 in 2020, with 8 awards made to HBCUs in 2020 alone.

USE OF REVIEW COMMITTEES TO BUILD CAPACITY OF FIELD LEADERS

Awarded applicants considered the opportunity to participate in the application review process particularly rewarding. Several awarded applicants and stakeholders in the sample had the opportunity to participate as reviewers, and many of them described it as one of their most important professional development opportunities.

It's also, frankly, an excellent reviewer exercise. I've been a reviewer for other foundation grants that are competent but they're kind of narrow. All of my staff at [redacted] have been reviewers for IMLS because it's one of the best professional development opportunities, I feel, for them to be engaged in because it brings this expansive view of the field on a highly competitive basis for this program and for others.

—Stakeholder

INCREASE IN OUTREACH, WEBINARS, AND ENGAGEMENT

Data from the awarded applicant survey support the sentiment from interviewees that the application was relatively streamlined. In all, 93 percent of respondents said that the application process was clear and 90 percent indicated that IMLS staff were responsive and helpful in addressing questions and concerns.

FIGURE 11

Awarded Applicant Experience of Application Process



Notes: IMLS = Institute of Museum and Library Services. Total population is the 56 nonapplicant respondents. All 56 (100 percent) responded to this question.

Many awarded applicants specifically noted that the IMLS staff leading the AAHC program helped them with at least one component of the application process and that this support helped them succeed throughout the process. Some attributed this targeted support to their established relationships with AAHC program officers.

They're very helpful without being unprofessional, but they're very clear about it and they'll be honest with you. I think of all our funders, I feel like this particular grant we probably have the strongest relationship with [staff], with just having that kind of openness about things.

—Awarded applicant

In addition to providing timely feedback on proposal concepts, budget sizes and justifications, and project narratives, IMLS AAHC program staff also frequently responded to questions and inquiries about the application process and submission requirements. This guidance was particularly valuable to organizations that had never applied for a federal grant program and to smaller museums with limited staff capacity to apply to programs with application requirements that are more complex than many

other foundation grant awards. Some grantees mentioned that though the application was initially daunting, they were able to navigate the application process after becoming familiar with the process and with additional resources and supports. Still, concerns about the demands of the application were especially prominent among small organizations that might lack or have limited development staff.

When I first started, I was intimidated by the process of applying for the grant because of the magnitude of paperwork involved. I obviously got through it, but for small institutions like ours, there is usually no one to help us get through that initial process. I feel a little more confident now that I know you can reach out to staff, attend webinars and see other resources they provide.

—Awarded applicant

Through data collection with awarded and nonawarded applicants, we found that many described the AAHC grant application as fairly simple to submit and easier to complete than other federal grant applications. Terms they used to describe the application and application process include “simple,” “straightforward,” “very reasonable,” “fair,” and “clear.”

The way the application is set up you have a better chance of completing it. Often times with [redacted] you start the process, you go in gung ho, you think you have everything, and then it becomes overwhelming to provide the information that’s needed, particularly when you have to stop, go give a tour, stop take care of this, stop and take care of that.

—Awarded applicant

Data reveal that awarded applicants and nonawarded applicants generally characterize the AAHC grant application as fairly simple to submit and easier to complete than other federal grant applications. That said, evidence also shows that the application raises challenges for many organizations. Many grantees indicated that the budget and the project narrative were the most challenging components of the application. More specifically, understanding the cost-share

requirements (e.g., in-kind percentage matches), addressing all of the required components of the budget, and crafting a compelling, standout project narrative that included precise, well-aligned outcomes were commonly cited by applicants as challenging.

Although many grantees said that applying and reporting to the AAHC program was relatively easy and similar to other federal grants, they still considered the decision of whether to apply a significant burden. Organizations have to choose which funding opportunities to apply to, which necessitates evaluating the time, cost, and labor burdens associated with each application. Many nonawarded applicants and stakeholders described the potential tradeoffs involved in decisions about pursuing opportunities like AAHC.

But I think everyone knows exactly how to access IMLS. Now, whether or not they feel like they'll get a result is a different thing and so you prioritize as to whether or not that's worth your time at this point.

—Awarded applicant

AAHC Program Performance

In this section, we provide insights to answer **four main research questions**:

- **Question 04:** How has the IMLS AAHC program influenced the capacity of the nation's African American museums and HBCUs?
- **Question 05:** Are there certain parts of the AAHC grant portfolio that have performed better?
- **Question 06:** How have IMLS administrative practices for the AAHC program influenced awarded applicant implementation of their project awards?
- **Question 07:** How has the AAHC grant program, now in its 15th year, performed overall in meeting its legislative goals?

Question 04: How Has the IMLS AAHC Program Influenced the Capacity of the Nation’s African American Museums and HBCUs?

During the past 15 years, the AAHC program has invested in building the capacity of institutions dedicated to African American history and culture. Awarded projects during that period most frequently focused on community visibility (including educational programming), professional development of support staff, attracting or hiring new staff or interns, enhancing care of collections, and strengthening operations (table 7). The least commonly awarded projects were those facilitating organizational learning, strengthening financial capacity/networks, and focusing on growth/expansion of collections. Funded projects typically included multiple activities, offering capacity building across multiple domains within one grant.

TABLE 7
Activities in Awarded Grants

Project activity	Grants awarded (%)	Total number of grants
Community Visibility	42	82
Professional Development of Support Staff	40	78
Attract/Hire New Staff	39	76
Attract/Hire New Interns, Fellows or Volunteers	34	66
Care of Collections	34	66
Strengthen Operations	34	65
Development of Collection Driven New Scholarship	26	50
Digitization of Collections	25	49
Outreach/Marketing	25	49
Increase ability to think strategically	17	32
Professional Development of Executive Staff	16	30
Facilitate Organizational Learning	10	20
Strengthen Financial Capacity/Networks	9	17
Growth/Expansion of Collections	5	9

Notes: See appendix C for definitions of each project activity.

FIGURE 12

Students on Tour at the Museum of the African Diaspora

In line with the authorizing legislation, the African American History and Culture grant program funds programs focused on educational programming.



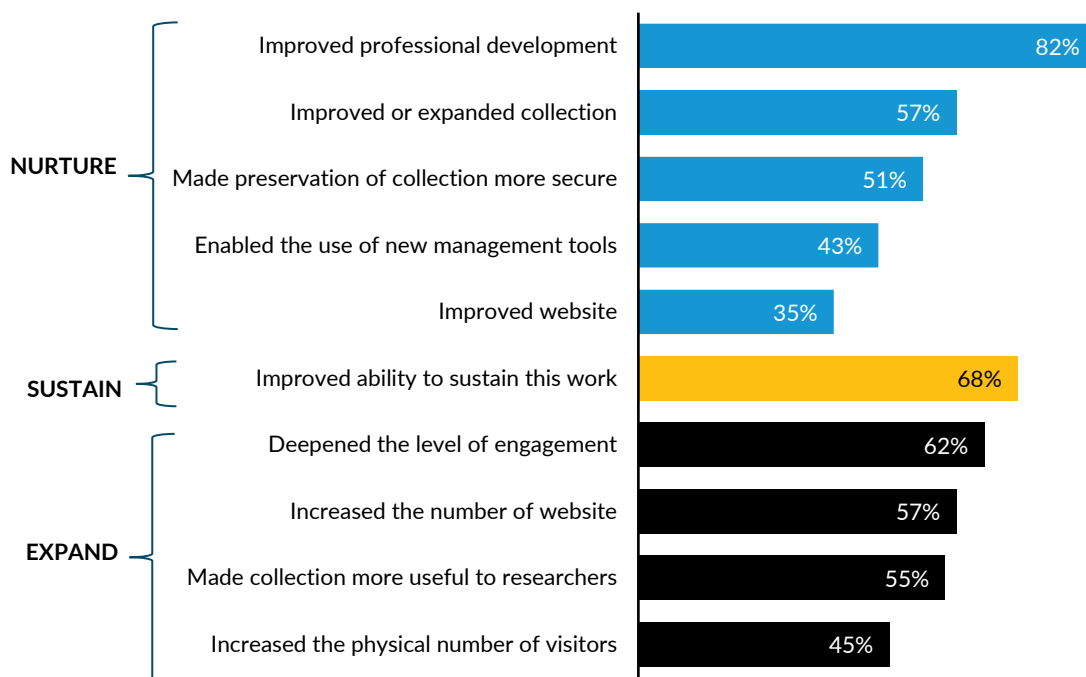
Source: Photo provided by the [Museum of the African Diaspora](#) to the evaluation team.

Projects involving community visibility included new educational programming to connect the public with curated exhibits by traveling to schools or hosting groups of students (see figure 12). Professional development activities often included funding travel, skills and training workshops, expert subject-matter consultants (to teach specific skills), and curatorial, registrarial, and/or archival staff to attend conferences. Some funded projects focused on attracting, hiring and training new professionally trained curatorial, registrarial, executive, and/or archival staff, and/or on expanding funding for current volunteers or part-time staff to meet organizational needs. Projects that involved strengthening operations often created processes to make systems more efficient, including by incorporating advanced digital technology, implementing evaluation and assessment processes, updating collections stewardship, and creating or updating policies and procedures.

Grantees we surveyed reported that these grant-funded project activities helped them build a variety of capacities (figure 13) that have nurtured, sustained, and expanded their impact.

FIGURE 13

Nurture, Sustain, Expand: How AAHC Grantees Enhanced Core Capacities



Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program. Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents, all respondents responded to this question. The figures above are sums of respondents that indicate “Somewhat” and “To a great extent.” There are three potential reasons why awarded applicants did not report developing certain capacities: (1) the capacity was not the purpose of their grant; (2) the belief that the grant hurt or didn’t help their team build this capacity; or (3) not identifying the capacity as a top benefit for whatever reason.

NURTURE

Grantees reported through surveys that their AAHC grants helped them improve professional capacity and systems (82 percent of grantees), improve or expand collections (57 percent), make the preservation of their collections more secure (51 percent), use new management tools (43 percent), and improve their websites (35 percent). Moreover, at least one grantee noted that in addition to providing key support for collections and staff, they used the grant to create and test a replicable program model to access additional funding and support. This kind of support for project planning is essential to grantees because it provides organizations the resources to take risks and innovate.

The federal grant was just the development piece, but now that we have the model and we have the program, we're able to market it with a product. A viable product for the quality assessment, which is huge.

—Awarded applicant

SUSTAIN

Awarded applicants indicated that the AAHC grant improved their ability to sustain the work after the grant period (68 percent). In addition to building specific organizational capacities, grantees leveraged grant funding to approach other funders and boost their own credibility to access additional funding.

In response to one survey question, grantees overwhelmingly noted that they have leveraged the grant to attract additional funding (55 percent) or that they expect to do so in the future (33 percent).¹⁴ In interviews, grantees indicated that the award and corresponding networking opportunities allowed them to build new relationships with funders they otherwise would not have connected with. For example, getting exposure to the Association of African American Museums through IMLS was a catalyst for some organizations to access additional funding. Other grantees indicated that the duration and timing of the AAHC grant allowed for sustainable support for projects and staffing. Taken together, these findings suggest that the grant enables African American museums and HBCUs to attract additional funding to support key projects and programs.

I just saw that once we got IMLS, all these foundations that we had approached for years were finally like, "Okay we'll take a risk on you." So, it's enabled us to rapidly expand our program and our reach in a way that we wouldn't have if we did not receive IMLS funding.

—Awarded applicant

¹⁴ Consistent with the grant requirements, AAHC funding was not used for fundraising or any other direct efforts to attract additional funding. Rather, the grant most often raised grantees' profile with other funders or strengthened their capacity to pursue other funding opportunities.

Awarded applicants are more financially resilient than nonawarded applicants and nonapplicants. A key indicator used to measure nonprofits' financial resilience is "disappearance." Nonprofits that have budgets of at least \$50,000 are required to file full 990 forms and are represented in the NCCS data from year to year. Nonprofits that have operating budgets of less than \$50,000 are not required to file their 990 forms to the Internal Revenue Service annually, so they often drop out of the NCCS dataset when their operating budgets fall below this threshold. Measuring whether nonprofits stop filing is a better indicator of minimal activity or inactivity than closure, as nonprofit closures are particularly rare.

By analyzing which nonprofits disappeared from the 990 data throughout the AAHC program's lifespan, we identified key distinctions between awarded applicants and nonapplicants (table 8). No nonprofit grantees disappeared from the data, meaning the AAHC program placed good bets on nonprofits that are resilient. In contrast, 27 percent of nonawarded nonprofits (15 out of 56) and 13 percent of nonprofit nonapplicants (8 out of 61) disappeared throughout the AAHC program's lifespan. It is particularly notable that even during the Great Recession, no organizations funded by the AAHC program disappeared, which is a testament to the importance of investing in organizations during the economic downturn occurring because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE 8

Nonprofit Disappearance Rates by Award Status

Award status	Number of Nonprofits	Number of Nonprofits Disappearing from 990 Data	Disappearance Rate (%)
Under \$1 million	146	23	16
Awarded applicant	45	0	0
Nonawarded Applicant	53	15	28
Non Applicant	48	8	17
\$1–4.9 million	28	0	0
Awarded applicant	17	0	0
Nonawarded Applicant	1	0	0
Non Applicant	10	0	0
\$5 million and over	11	0	0
Awarded applicant	6	0	0
Nonawarded Applicant	2	0	0
Non Applicant	3	0	0
Total	185	23	12

Note: Total population is 244 (the sum of nonapplicants, applicants, and grantees with 990 data), excluding 59 nonprofits for which financial data are unavailable.

EXPAND

Awarded applicants used AAHC grant funding to expand their reach in a variety of ways. Through survey responses, grantees reported having deepened audience engagement (62 percent), increased website traffic (57 percent), increased the utility of collections to researchers (55 percent), and increased physical visitors (45 percent).

The program also helped several applicants digitize their collections, an expensive and labor-intensive effort that can make collections significantly more accessible. One grantee capitalized on their digitized collections by including some images of their collections in their email newsletters, which has been especially helpful for keeping their audience engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a “real-time reflection of historically how systemic violence is aimed at black communities,” this organization disseminated journal entries from a prolific writer about the urban disturbances that occurred after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination to call attention to the similarities of the current moment.

One of the things we started doing four to five years ago is taking samples of some of the digitized items and sending them out to our email blasts with links to it. And so, on the days that we send out those blasts, you literally go to Google Analytics and see the arc just jump on those days in our digital archives and the number of people who are engaging with them. So, we realized that was a really easy way to drive access and knowledge about our collections.

—Awarded applicant

Question 05: Are There Certain Parts of the AAHC Grant Portfolio That Have Performed Better?

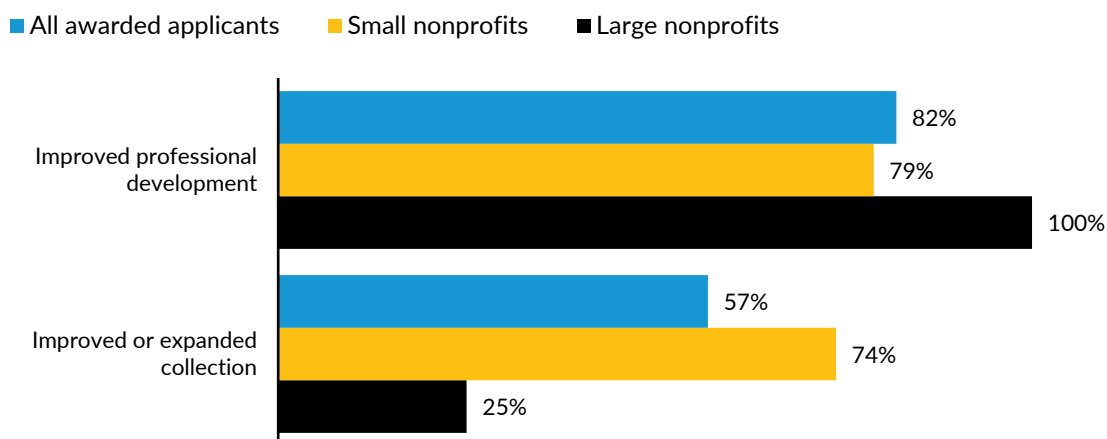
Awarded and nonawarded applicants include a range of organizational types, including small to large museums, state and local government offices, and HBCUs and other institutions of higher learning of varying sizes. Given this range, it is useful to break down the grant portfolio to examine how different types of organizations benefit from the program. By disaggregating the portfolio by organization type, size, and capacities strengthened, we can more precisely describe how the AAHC award has nurtured, sustained, and expanded the capacities and impact of different parts of the AAHC program's grant portfolio.

NURTURE

The data show (figure 14) that large nonprofit grantees were more likely than nonprofits of other sizes to see benefits from the AAHC grant on the professional development of their staff: 100 percent of large awarded applicants surveyed reported having improved professional development. However, large nonprofits were the least likely to report having improved or expanded their collection (25 percent), whereas, small nonprofits were the most likely to report this (74 percent), significantly more likely than the average nonprofit (57 percent).

FIGURE 14

Most Large Nonprofits Improved Professional Capacities, Most Small Nonprofits Improved Collections



Notes: Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents; all respondents responded to this question. There were 19 small nonprofits, and 4 large nonprofits in this sample. This figure shows sums of respondents indicating “Somewhat” and “To a great extent” in response to the survey question about whether the grant had helped them sustain their work after the grant period.

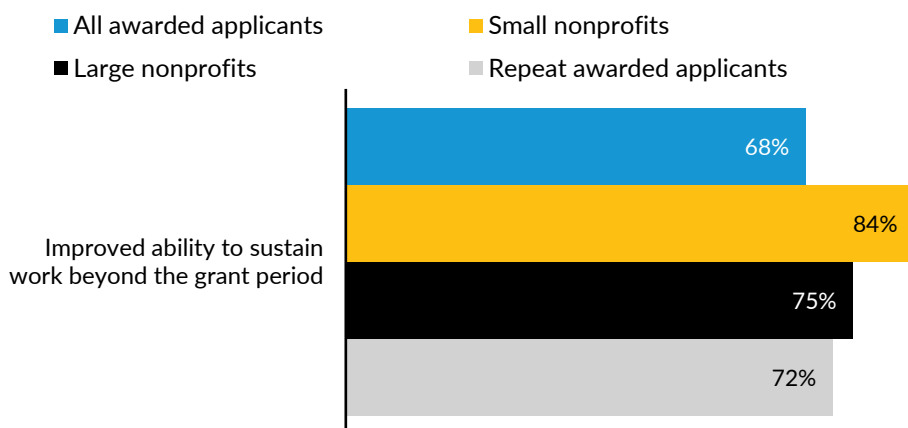
Small nonprofits also showed higher-than-average rates of having used new management tools (10 percent above average), having improved their website (23 percent above average), and having invested in preserving their collection (12 percent above average). This indicates that the program is especially useful for large nonprofits to nurture their staff development and for small nonprofits to invest in the care of their collections.

SUSTAIN

In all, 68 percent of nonprofits reported that the AAHC award helped sustain their work beyond the grant period. Small nonprofits (84 percent) and large nonprofits (75 percent) were most likely to report that the grant had helped them sustain funded work after the grant period. Repeat awarded applicants (72 percent) were also highly likely to indicate that the grant helped them sustain their work after the grant period (figure 15).

FIGURE 15

Nonprofits of All Sizes and Repeat Grantees Reported That the Grant Helped Sustain Their Work after the Grant Period



Note: Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents; all respondents responded to this question. There were 19 small nonprofits, 6 medium nonprofits, and 4 large nonprofits in this sample. There were 20 repeat applicants in this sample. This figure shows sums of respondents indicating “Somewhat” and “To a great extent” in response to the survey question about whether the grant had helped them sustain their work after the grant period.

Moreover, there was more variation in responses to the question of whether the grant helped grantees attract additional funding (table 9). Small (63 percent) and medium (83 percent) nonprofits were more likely to answer affirmatively than large nonprofits (25 percent).

TABLE 9

Responses to the Question of Whether the Grant Helped Grantees Attract Additional Funding

Survey response	All awarded applicants	As share of total	Repeat awarded applicant	Small nonprofit
Yes	22	55.0 percent	64 percent	63 percent
Not yet but we expect to	13	32.5 percent	24 percent	26 percent
No	3	7.5 percent	4 percent	11 percent
Not sure	2	5.0 percent	8 percent	0 percent
Total (respondents)	40		25	19
No response (NA)	0		0	0

Notes: Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents; all respondents responded to this question. There were 25 repeat awarded applicants and 19 small nonprofits in this sample.

A third of HBCU respondents indicated that they used the AAHC grant to attract additional funding, and two-thirds indicated that they had not yet done so but expected to. Surprisingly, only 17 percent (1 of 6) of HBCU respondents reported that the program helped them better sustain their project work. Notably, interviews confirmed that higher-education institutions tend to prioritize STEM

programs and other professional programs (e.g., medicine). This finding, which is relevant for libraries, arts programs, and museums associated with HBCUs, suggests that AAHC can help legitimize and possibly raise the profiles of offices that are often overlooked by colleges and university systems.

Small nonprofits were the only subgroup found to be more financially resilient than nonawarded applicants and nonapplicants since AAHC's inception. No organizations with budgets greater than \$1 million dropped out of the 990 data. In contrast, 28 percent of small nonprofit nonawarded applicants and 17 percent of nonapplicants "disappeared" from the 990 data compared with 0 percent of awarded applicants (table 10). Evaluated throughout the Great Recession, small nonprofits with budgets of less than \$250,000 were the most likely nonprofits to rely on grants and contributions (74 percent) than program revenue (17 percent) or other revenue (9 percent). This emphasizes the importance of grantmaking for supporting smaller organizations in this field, especially during economic downturns.

TABLE 10
Nonprofit Disappearance Rates by Award Status and Budget Size

Award status	Number of nonprofits	Number of nonprofits disappearing from 990 data	Disappearance rate
Less than \$1 million	146	23	16 percent
Awarded applicant	45	0	0 percent
Nonawarded Applicant	53	15	28 percent
Non Applicant	48	8	17 percent
\$1 million–\$4.9 million	28	0	0 percent
Awarded applicant	17	0	0 percent
Nonawarded Applicant	1	0	0 percent
Non Applicant	10	0	0 percent
\$5 million and greater	11	0	0 percent
Awarded applicant	6	0	0 percent
Nonawarded Applicant	2	0	0 percent
Non Applicant	3	0	0 percent
Total	185	23	12 percent

Note: Total population is 244 (sum of nonapplicants, applicants, and grantees with 990 data), excluding 59 nonprofits for which financial data are unavailable.

Importantly, financial resiliency amidst the COVID-19 pandemic might look different than during the last recession. Owing to closures and social-distancing protocols, organizations that rely on visitors and/or programming for revenue will face obstacles in generating the amount of revenue they did before the pandemic. We found that large nonprofits with budgets greater than \$5 million rely more on program revenue (50 percent of total revenue) than grants and contributions (40 percent of total

revenue) or other revenue streams (10 percent of total revenue), which may make them more financially volatile.

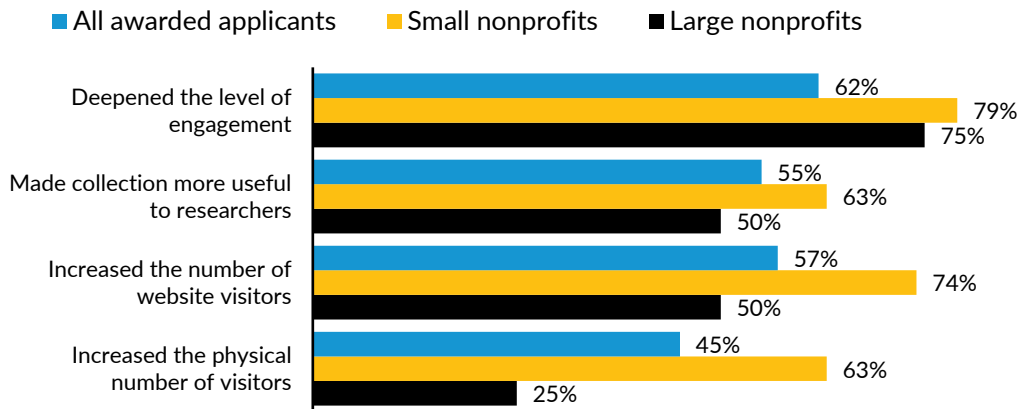
EXPAND

Smaller nonprofits were the most likely to say that the AAHC grant helped them deepen their engagement with their audiences (79 percent) and to report that the grant increased the number of visitors to their website (74 percent) and to their institution (63 percent; figure 16). Large nonprofits also expanded their reach with AAHC funding, but did so at a lower rate than smaller nonprofits.

FIGURE 16

Small Nonprofits in Particular Used Grant Funding to Expand Reach

Ways that nonprofits reported using grant funds to expand reach



Notes: Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents; all respondents responded to this question. There were 19 small nonprofits in this sample. This figure shows sums of respondents indicating “Somewhat” and “To a great extent” in response to questions about that capacities they built with grant funding.

Though many grantees have used AAHC funding for digitization projects, small organizations have especially benefited from making their collections publicly available and raising the profile of their work.

When we started the grant, we were thinking we just wanted to digitize the information that we have so it can reach the greatest number of people. But it seems like the unexpected result is that this increase of information will bring more people to actually come to our museum...we were thinking we just want to get the information out to as

many people as we can, but it's had this great secondary effect where now it's made people interested in coming to actually see in person the...artifacts and we didn't expect that, so that's kind of exciting.

—Awarded applicant

Question 06: How Have IMLS Administrative Practices for the AAHC Program Influenced Awarded Applicant Implementation of their Project Awards?

Awarded applicants overwhelmingly considered IMLS staff support invaluable. Surveyed grantees overwhelmingly report that IMLS was responsive and helpful in addressing questions (93 percent) and that IMLS program staff leading AAHC understand the challenges grantees face (90 percent). From interviews with grantees, we learned of several ways that AAHC's administrative practices enhanced their experience. During the application process and after being granted funding, grantees were on the whole very impressed by how communicative and responsive the AAHC staff were, especially when they encountered challenges in completing their project. They commonly referred to AAHC staff as approachable, supportive, and easy to communicate with, with one applicant mentioning, "There was never a time where I had to reach out to them where either I didn't get a hold of them that day, that they didn't call me back by the next day."

Grantees often mentioned past and current AAHC staff directly, sometimes by name, highlighting that the program fosters personal relationships and that AAHC staff were helpful throughout their participation in the program.

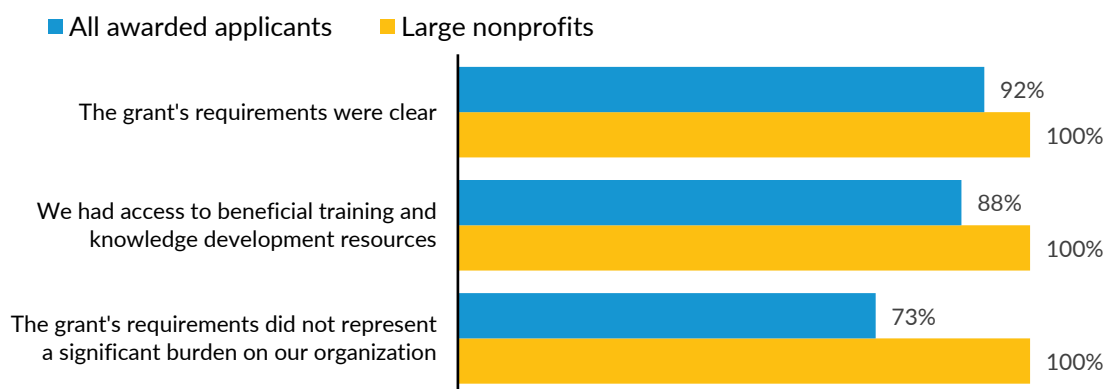
I feel like [AAHC staff members]...want everybody to grow, and they want everyone to experience success and they are rooting for us...they know what our projects are. They remember what we've done and so from that sense the reporting, I feel like everything that they ask us to do is well thought out.

—Awarded applicant

Awarded applicants indicated that IMLS program staff provided clear guidance on grant requirements (92 percent), offered beneficial resources for training and knowledge development (88 percent), and prescribed grant requirements that did not represent a significant burden (73 percent). It is worth noting that large nonprofits had the most positive feedback toward AAHC's grant reporting practices. All of these respondents indicated that IMLS and its AAHC program staff provided them beneficial training and knowledge, clear grant requirements, and useful advice and guidance. Though the majority of grantees felt the administrative practices were helpful and responsive, first-time grantees were the least likely to indicate that the grant requirements did not represent a significant burden to their organization (60 percent).

FIGURE 17

Perspectives of Large Nonprofits toward Administrative Practices

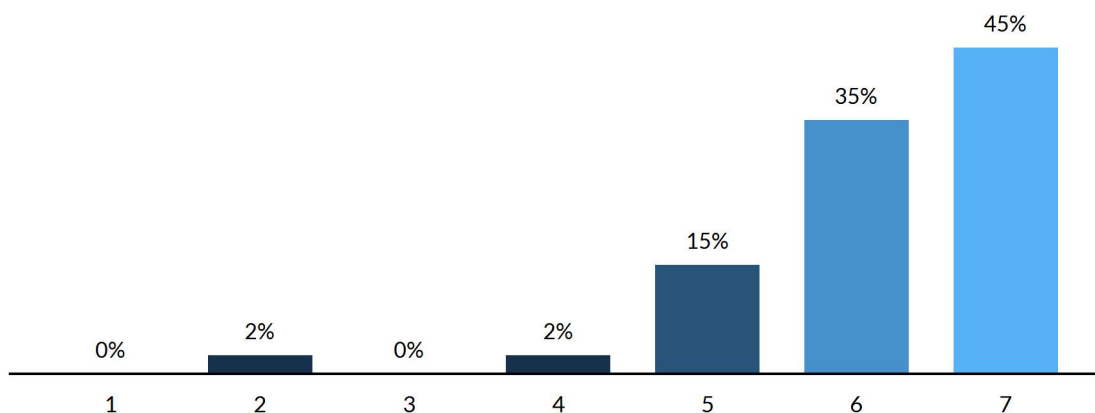


Notes: Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents, all respondents responded to this question. There were 15 first time awarded applicants in this sample. This figure shows sums of respondents indicating “Agree” and “Strongly agree” in response to survey statements about administrative practices relating to the grant.

Because performance measurement is a priority for IMLS and the AAHC program, it is prioritized as a part of the AAHC grantee experience. Because interest in and requirements for program evaluation continue to expand in the sector, we surveyed grantees to determine their interest in expanding the measurement and reporting required by AAHC. As performance measurement becomes more of a priority for IMLS and other funders aiming to build staff capacity at African American museums and HBCUs, we wanted to evaluate the extent to which grantees believed IMLS prioritized the measurement and evaluation of grant funded projects as a part of the AAHC program. A significant majority (80 percent) of all grantees agreed (i.e., selected “6” or “7” on a scale of 1 to 7) that measuring and reporting on project results is important to IMLS).

FIGURE 18

Extent to Which Survey Respondents Agreed That Measuring and Reporting on Project Results is Important to IMLS



Notes: Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents, all of which responded to this question. Responses represent a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Many grantees said they would be interested in making program evaluation a more prominent part of grant reporting. Grantees welcomed the opportunity to develop new measurement skills to strengthen their program measurement and reporting, and they also mentioned they could benefit from access to additional funds and/or training, optional adoption of some performance metrics, and a recognition by IMLS that performance measurement should be flexible to reflect the diversity of projects and organizational capacity. A greater emphasis on performance measurement would, several respondents felt, help them better track and convey the impact of their grant-funded projects and improve overall program and organizational management beyond the life and scope of the grant.

Maybe it would be helpful to get some training or guidance on program evaluation. I would love that. To help grantees along the way and to help them better utilize those evaluation methods and the results.

—Awarded applicant

In addition to providing grantees of varying data and evaluative capacities with the opportunity to develop and refine their measurement skills, IMLS can strengthen and enhance its engagement with them by supporting additional opportunities for peer learning: only 63 percent of respondents

indicated that AAHC helped them create meaningful connections. This ranged from a low of 33 percent of midsize nonprofits and 50 percent of HBCUs to a high of 75 percent of large nonprofits and 74 percent of small nonprofits.

That said, grantees often mentioned that the AAAM conference, which allowed them to convene and network, was the highlight of their experience. Grantees remarked on how beneficial it is to meet each other and learn from other awarded applicants.

I enjoyed being in a space with other people who also have IMLS grants [and] that we were able to share...It gave me an opportunity to have close up time with people who are doing the work that we aspire to do, and who are doing it successfully, and who have been doing it over a long period of time.

—Awarded applicant

FIGURE 19

2016 AAHC Grantee Convening

Representatives from AAHC-funded projects gather to share lessons learned at IMLS offices in Washington, DC



Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program; IMLS = Institute of Museum and Library Services. This photo was provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services to the evaluation team.

Several grantees specifically said that they made lasting relationships or partnerships with other awarded applicants, and one in particular began an organic mentor/mentee relationship with a museum professional at a different institution. This is an example of the networking opportunities and knowledge sharing that the convening afforded their organization.

When he got his first grant, he was fairly new and we both ended up in a convening...we were so close in proximity...we were able to meet up a couple of times for coffee...I was able to share my experiences. We were able to connect because of IMLS. I don't think we would have connected on that level, had it not been for that convening.

Question 07: How Has the AAHC Grant Program, Now in Its 15th Year, Performed Overall in Meeting Its Legislative Goals?

The AAHC grant program was created by an act of Congress in 2003 that authorized the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, and the IMLS-housed AAHC grant program. Most relevant to the AAHC program is the second section of the legislation (20 USC 80r-5b), which outlines the requirements of the grant and scholarship programs (appendix D). The first section of the authorizing legislation provides general guidance on NMAAHC’s priorities, which include educational and liaison programs related to African American life, art, history, and culture. The director of IMLS and the director of NMAAHC are expected to collaborate on the grants and scholarship programs. Although IMLS leadership and program staff developed AAHC in accordance with the authorizing legislation, they have operationalized the grant program to meet the diverse, evolving needs of the African American museum community.

The AAHC program has undergone administrative changes related to its goals, cost-sharing requirements, submission deadlines, and the increase of the maximum proposed award size (table 11). The program’s goals have evolved from building the professional development capacities of African American museum staff through trainings, technical assistance, and internships and professional development to focusing on increasing African American museums’ organizational capacities by improving their operations, care of collections, and professional development. Grant sizes, which between FY 2006 and FY 2018 were consistently between \$5,000 and \$150,000, were expanded, and in FY 2019, the maximum award size was \$250,000. This gave applicants more flexibility to conceptualize large, impactful projects and focus on the quality, strengths, and real costs of their proposed projects.

The AAHC program has also changed its cost-share requirement. One of the most significant adaptations was the modification of the cost-share requirement for projects with budgets of \$50,000 or less. We learned from interviews that grantees had mixed reactions to the cost-share requirement. For some who had other sources of grant funding or who were aware they could use in-kind support (e.g., volunteer hours) to meet the cost-share requirement, the cost share did not present any barrier to application. Other nonawarded and awarded applicants strategically set their budget amounts to a level at which the cost share would not be required, or they requested less funding support than was

actually required to execute the project because they could not come up with the funding necessary to meet the cost-share requirement.

TABLE 11
Features of AAHC Grant Program by Period

Period	Goals	Grant size	Cost share	Submission deadline
2006	Intended to build professional capacity in the African American museum community with a specific focus on training, technical assistance, and internships/professional development.	\$5,000 to \$150,000	One-to-one match for all grants. Grantees share may consist of cash contributions; earned income; in-kind contributions; materials and supplies; and/or equipment.	July
2007–14	No change	No change	No change	January ^a
2015–18	Simplified the programmatic goals: program now intended to improve operations, care of collections, and professional development for the African American museum community	No change	No cost share allowed for grants under \$25,000; one-to-one for grants over \$25,000,000	December
2019	Simplified the programmatic goals: nurture museum professionals, build institutional capacity, and increase access to museum and archival collections at African American museums and HBCUs (first explicit inclusion of HBCUs in programmatic description and goals.)	\$5,000 to \$250,000 Cap raised for first time (to \$250,000) to accommodate museums thinking big and developing substantive projects.	No cost share required for grants between \$5,000 and under \$50,000; one-to-one for grants over \$50,000.	November

Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program; HBCUs = historically Black colleges and universities.

^a In 2014, the submission deadline was moved to December, but no other program features changed.

The overwhelming majority of awarded applicants cited the critical role that IMLS and the AAHC program play for African American museums and HBCUs. Survey respondents and interviewees expressed that AAHC provides much-needed funding and key capacity-building support, and that IMLS lends its strong reputation and brand to support emerging museums and institutions.

Through AAHC, IMLS is one of a small subset of government and philanthropic funders providing funding specifically to African American museums, but respondents stressed that the program is a unique resource for capacity building with a specific focus on African American collections. Only 28 percent of grantees reported that they knew of other national or local funders that could have provided similar support for their funded projects. Funding from AAHC is also viewed by many respondents as an essential resource. In response to the survey of awarded applicants, 71 percent said

they could not have completed their projects without the AHHC grant. In particular, respondents from smaller organizations expressed that the program provides a unique opportunity for African American museums that might otherwise be “locked out” of the competitive grant programs that are open to larger pools of museums.

In addition to being an important source of funding, the technical assistance opportunities provided to grantees was commonly cited as highly valuable. Grantees frequently remarked on how beneficial it is to have the opportunity to meet and learn from peer organizations. Awarded applicants commonly mentioned that convening at the AAAM conference was the highlight of the grantee experience. Several grantees and stakeholders in the sample also had the opportunity to participate as application reviewers, and many described it as one of their most important professional development opportunities.

Recommendations

The AAHC program is unique in its focus on African American history and culture among government agencies and foundations. Its success extends beyond grant funding and owes largely to its complementary learning and networking opportunities and its dedicated program staff. These factors have made the program key to fulfilling the enabling legislation's vision of supporting and enhancing the vibrancy of the national network of organizations devoted to African American history and culture. Organizations have used the program's funding and capacity-building support to make crucial advances in professional development for their staff, to enhance their digital capacities, and to make other important investments in their people and systems.

Though the data show consistently high regard for the program and its contribution to organizations and institutions around the country, we also found that the program is not yet funded at the level designated by the enabling legislation. According to our estimates, the program is currently funded at \$2.7 million (the total amount awarded in FY 2020) but is eligible for funding of up to \$15 million. Adding funding to the program's budget could significantly increase its capacity to reach and impact museums and HBCUs and to strengthen and enhance their organizational and staff capacities. With additional resources, IMLS and AAHC program staff will be better positioned to implement many of the recommendations outlined in the sections that follow.

Looking to the future of this program and the unique role it plays in the funding ecosystem for these organizations, we offer these recommendations to IMLS as ways to expand the program's reach, strengthen its opportunities for peer learning and networking, and broaden the scope of activities to cover more of the programmatic possibilities described in the enabling legislation. The recommendations are drawn from the evidence developed in our evaluation and are designed to inform operational and strategic decisions.

Recommendation 1: Expand Program Reach

Achieving broader and more equitable access to AAHC program funding will require the implementation of thoughtful, deliberate, and persistent outreach strategies to help all eligible organizations learn about the availability of program resources. The evaluation findings surfaced an awareness gap: nearly 35 percent of eligible organizations that responded to the nonapplicant survey said they had never applied because they were not aware of the program.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services and other program stakeholders can ensure effective outreach to the eligible universe through the following key steps:

- **Leverage existing networks, relationships, and other key actors.** To reach organizations that are most isolated and least likely to know about the grant program, it is crucial to build respectful partnerships with the people and institutions they most know and trust, including the National Museum of African American History and Culture.
- **Develop an outreach and application infrastructure that reflects and responds to organizations' needs.** The forms, materials, websites, and technology used to inform organizations about the program should be informative and accessible to all organizations. It is important to dedicate funding to support outreach activities for staff and to create the infrastructure to help organizations prepare applications.
- **Continue building relationships between program staff and African American museums and HBCUs.** Organization leaders are more likely to want to learn about the grant program and to spend time applying if they feel that they are connected and can be supported while navigating the process.

To date, AAHC program staff have made tremendous efforts to broaden awareness of the program throughout the field of African American museums through regional site visits and convenings, professional associations like AAAM and through other direct outreach, including through NMAAHC.

By posting the grant opportunity through regional arts organizations, state arts councils, and local arts agencies, and by asking philanthropic peers to share the opportunity with their grantee communities, the IMLS AAHC program can reach more eligible applicants. Other partners could include Museum Hue and the [Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society](#). Applicants most commonly mentioned having learned about the program through AAAM and regional networks, so extending outreach through related networks may be the best way to increase awareness. What follows is a list of other agencies and organizations that could be included in outreach efforts:

- state-level historical and humanities agencies
- African American History museum luminaries
- Museum Hue (this organization has a [directory](#) of eligible applicants)
- HBCU Library Alliance and other HBCU fairs/listservs

- Black Caucus of the American Library Association
- African American heritage organizations (at the state level)
- Southeastern Museums Conference
- Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society

To strengthen outreach to people, AAHC program staff and other IMLS staff are encouraged to make introductions and connections between leaders and staff at established institutions and HBCUs and to send personalized emails to new museums and members of relevant associations and networks, such as the Black Caucus of the American Library Association and the National Conference of African American Librarians. Program staff can bolster outreach about AAHC by using the following strategies:

- **Coordinate outreach to HBCUs with other federal agencies and executive office initiatives.** To expand its reach to improve awareness of the AAHC program among HBCUs and to encourage more applications from HBCU applicants, the program could partner with federal programs such as the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which is designed to work with federal agencies, the private sector, philanthropy, and other partners to increase the capacity and competitiveness of HBCUs. Given AAHC's unique focus on strengthening the organizational and staff capacity of its grantees and its long-standing commitment to HBCUs, AAHC could leverage the initiative's connections, relationships, and communications with HBCUs to raise awareness about the grant program and to communicate widely to all HBCUs about the application process, including available webinars and technical assistance. Moreover, in July 2020, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched the HBCU Cultural Heritage Stewardship Initiative to provide technical assistance and fund preservation-based stewardship plans at HBCU campuses. The Institute of Museum and Library Services can coordinate with the trust to communicate to HBCUs about their programs, funding opportunities, and technical assistance offerings.
- **Tailor targeted communications and engagements with specific offices at various HBCUs.** As the field continues to expand and change and new organizations are established in new regions, it is important to continually expand and update the grant announcement contact lists to ensure eligible organizations are aware of the program. Most HBCUs, including Morehouse College, Prairie View A&M University, and Tennessee State University, have offices of institutional advancement, development offices, and sponsored programs.
- **Develop outreach and application infrastructure.** The updated database of eligible organizations generated through this study is the latest count since 2017 and will provide

needed information to update contact lists. We recommend that IMLS continue to periodically invest in updates of the universe of eligible organizations to identify new and emerging organizations that, because of the vulnerability during early stages of development, can especially benefit from funding, from peer learning and networking, and from the capacity-building benefits that result from completing the application (even if they do not receive funding). Historically, the growth in the number of new institutions dedicated to African American history and culture has been tied to social movements (e.g., the civil rights movement), and it may be especially important to expect and monitor for new entrants that may arise in response to the current social justice movement. Because many African American museums are established as nonprofits, one low-cost method of monitoring new entrants is to scan the publicly available data from Internal Revenue Service Form 1023 for newly formed organizations with missions that meet the program eligibility requirements.

- **Continue to build relationships.** Funding program staff to travel to museums, especially in regions like the Midwest and Mountain Plains where knowledge of IMLS and AAHC is somewhat limited, could facilitate opportunities for face-to-face engagement with prospective applicants and for raising awareness about the program. One way of organizing these visits is to focus on a city or regional tour that allows a member of the AAHC program staff to visit several institutions or organizations in one trip and build community and connection during these visits. By facilitating city, state, and regional connections, AAHC staff also indirectly help to build relationships and networks to enhance knowledge sharing and encourage collaboration among museums and organizations in geographies where there might not be a state or regional arts association focused on African American history or culture.

Recommendation 2: Invest in Applicants' Competitive Capacity

From 2006 to 2008, AAHC awarded \$800,000 in grant awards. After years of stagnant levels of funding, the program received a funding increase of almost \$600,000 and awarded approximately \$1.4 million in grant awards between 2009 and 2017. The program maintained this level of funding and slightly expanded it in to \$2.2 million in FY 2018 and FY 2019 and to \$2.7 million in FY 2020. This funding boost offers an opportunity to invest in more organizations, particularly those facing intersecting forms of disadvantage and experiencing the greatest barriers to program funding.

To increase the number of competitive applications the AAHC program receives from small museums and HBCUs, IMLS should explore the feasibility of piloting programs to provide them enhanced technical assistance on how to best pursue grants and overcome challenges they face in securing funding. It could offer such technical assistance directly or contract to an external partner.

The AAHC program uses a competitive grant-funding process. Though the application process is clear, the federal application can be difficult for many applicants to complete. Although grant writing is a valuable skill for applicants to develop, potential applicants may be unable to feasibly navigate the competitive funding process or may be reluctant to invest time and effort, problems that can contribute to barriers and burdens restricting program participation. Interviewees from all subgroups mentioned that the federal process could be unfamiliar or even “daunting” (a word used seven times) to many in the field and could deter applications. One applicant noted that application processes in general might be a barrier for many eligible institutions and mentioned that the training the AAHC program provides helps applicants navigate other applications in the future. One of the AAHC program’s strengths is the way it prepares applicants and awarded applicants to apply to other federal and philanthropic grant programs.

Furthermore, the operational strain that applying to federal programs places on smaller organizations cannot be underestimated. The complexity of the federal grant process requires applicants to have a well-developed organizational skill set. They must prove they have the capacity to effectively carry out the awards they apply for and that they possess the fiscal capacity to document and manage funding use. These demands require that organizations be robust and have strong grants-management capacities, in addition to other operational responsibilities.

To make the AAHC application more accessible and to streamline the application process, IMLS can post examples of successful grant applications (especially ones submitted by smaller organizations) and provide applicants more specific, detailed guidance on its website regarding what reviewers are looking for and how to succeed. Clear communications about grant requirements, frequently asked questions, tools and tips for producing quality applications, and posting samples of successful applications would all help new and smaller organizations make their applications more competitive. Several awarded and nonawarded applicants indicated that they would benefit from clarity on specific sections of the application, especially the budget.

Interviewees noted that IMLS staff were instrumental in offering counseling and guidance about the application process via phone calls and webinars. In addition, IMLS can provide more lead time on the availability of grants and the categories of submissions. Starting outreach earlier gives institutions

more time to prepare project ideas and application materials before the Notice of the Funding Opportunity is released. Continuing to conduct early outreach will support new and small organizations. Moreover, adding technical assistance offerings will strengthen the program. What follows are examples of sessions and webinars that would support organizations preparing their applications:

- more informational sessions (and more extensive trainings than just traditional grant-review webinars) throughout the year, especially for first-time applicants who have never completed a federal application
- listening sessions where prospective applicants can hear grantees' stories about what completing the process is like
- cohosted webinars with state-level and/or local agencies that can collaborate on outreach
- provide applicants with an opportunity to receive initial, early feedback so that they can revise and improve their applications before final award decisions are made
- email and phone assistance for applicants
- open house-style coffee chats to discuss ideas and talk through concepts
- writing workshops to help applicants draft ideas before submission

Updating the website resources may also be valuable to applicants. One area in particular that was raised by interviewees is the need for more clarity around the cost-share requirement so it is clear that an in-kind match in the form of the value of personnel, goods, and services from the organization or a third party meets the requirement. There are [fact sheets](#) available from other federal grant programs that can provide inspiration.

There are also ways that IMLS can adapt the grant program design to advance equity and streamline the application process. Rather than having a one-stage application process, IMLS could divide the process into two stages. Two philanthropic funders mentioned that they rely on this approach, and one mentioned that its team preferred screening calls so applications could be an ongoing conversation. Grantees also mentioned this allowed for more time to think through competitive proposals. Structuring the application this way lowers the barrier to application for smaller organizations and creates opportunities for organizations to articulate their proposed projects in a concise, more manageable way before completing the full AAHC application.

Recommendation 3: Include an Intentional Focus on Capacity Building for Small Organizations

One core finding of the evaluation is the difference between the extent to which small organizations that have received AAHC funding and small organizations that have applied but have not received funding could weather the Great Recession. Given the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a particularly important point. Research on nonprofits characterizes organizational resilience as the ability of an organization to productively respond to a disruption and turn challenges into opportunities. Competitive nonprofits that can secure funding from diverse sources including individual donations and major gifts, corporate contributions, and foundation and government grants are better positioned to weather economic shocks than organizations that are not competitive for grant dollars. Because the evidence suggests grant recipients become more resilient, IMLS may want to target this as a key function of the grant program. Among grant recipients, 63 percent of small organizations indicated that receiving AAHC funding helped them secure additional funding. Adaptations made to the AAHC program's requirements and focus show that IMLS has always worked to ensure that it developed the AAHC program in a way that would best serve the African American museum community's needs and challenges. The sustainability of small organizations is a systemic challenge and the AAHC program is one way to alleviate the obstacles these organizations face in building the capacity to withstand economic shocks.

One adaptation IMLS should consider is targeting a program to provide funding in one or more of the following three categories:

- **bridge funding**, to allow staff to work on a project that is experiencing a temporary gap in funding
- **seed funding**, to encourage organizations to launch exciting new directions that might need to be piloted before a case can be made to solicit other funding
- **enabling infrastructure**, to provide small amounts of funding to purchase (or upgrade) critical equipment or systems

Many applicants, grantees, and stakeholders mentioned that cost sharing was difficult for small organizations to meet, limiting them to asking for the lower funding threshold that does not require a cost share. By reducing the cost share or eliminating the requirement altogether for smaller museums, the number of small museums applying for AAHC funding would likely increase and smaller museums would be better able to grow and expand their operations.

Furthermore, data suggest that the cost share is an administrative barrier for some HBCUs, albeit to a lesser extent than for smaller museums. Because many colleges and universities have institutional priorities that focus on STEM, leadership and staff from some HBCU museums, collections, and archives may find it challenging to secure funds from college or university administration when annual funding for the humanities is tenuous and much of the funding is prioritized for STEM departments and centers.

Moreover, AAHC funding could also be used to evaluate ways to invest in sustainable general-operating support that can help fund positions, especially at smaller museums and HBCUs, to address staff turnover and the vulnerability of smaller, less-resourced museums to losing highly skilled, qualified staff members.

Recommendation 4: Continue to Support and Nurture Museum Professionals through Learning and Networking

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has historically made considerable efforts to convene AAHC grantees to provide them with technical assistance and training and enable them to learn from one another's experience. Respondents considered these experiences to be particularly helpful and generative components of the grant experience, and they welcomed more opportunities to engage and learn from one another. Our recommendation calls on IMLS to continue investing in learning, networking, and peer-to-peer experiences and to consider opportunities to extend some of the learning to the broader African American museum field and to the larger museum field represented by, for example, the American Alliance of Museums, whose annual meeting would provide AAHC grantees with broader networking opportunities and ensure that staff are engaged with the most current museum-based policies and practices.

One specific opportunity is for IMLS to leverage the grant review process for additional learning and networking opportunities and to extend this opportunity to new and emerging museums as a form of capacity building. The review process was not a core part of the inquiry for this evaluation. However, stakeholders mentioned it in interviews as one of the unique assets of the AAHC program for capacity building and network building. Many grantees and stakeholders commented that evaluating and critiquing other grant applications to improve their own writing and project planning was their best professional development experience. Peer reviewers not only provide an important

service to the field—they also gain knowledge, experience, and enhanced professional connections with their peers, and they gain exposure to promising practices and innovations throughout the field. All AAHC grant applicants receive comments from peer reviewers about their applications, which enhances their understanding of the review process, and gives them insight into how to write more competitive applications for funding and to build capacity in their institutions.

Another way to strengthen application review is to diversify the reviewer pool by including smaller organizations more so they are involved in decisionmaking. Several reviewers mentioned that the panel of reviewers could be more diverse to reflect the composition or makeup of the broader field of museums and HBCUs.

Another area ripe for peer learning is building capacity for performance measurement. Our research, which includes examination of final reports and interviews, indicates varied levels of performance measurement and reporting capabilities among grant recipients. The Institute of Museum and Library Services may consider sponsoring seminars, workshops, or webinars on performance measurement that feature grant recipients and their performance measurement practices. The sessions could also include segments on writing performance results in grant reports.

In addition to expanding the pool of reviewers to include more diverse participants and expanding the offerings to strengthen grantee performance measurement, the AAHC program can use the grantee convening and exposure to the AAAM conference to create opportunities for grantees to learn from each other. Grantees indicated that they would benefit from attending additional sessions or convenings that allow them to foster better relationships with other grantees and create stronger networks. Creating and strengthening these professional networks will also create space for knowledge sharing and problem solving among grantees.

Moreover, HBCUs are pillars in their communities and provide critical economic and social support to their communities. Program staff from HBCUs make key contributions to the AAHC program as reviewers and program champions. The grant program provides much-needed organizational and staff-capacity support to HBCU grantees and is uniquely positioned to build on this support by making museum staff more diverse and supporting professionals at HBCUs. In 2019, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Rockefeller Foundation awarded three HBCUs—Morehouse College, Spelman College, and Prairie View A&M University—\$3 million in total to invest in faculty development. The AAHC program is similarly positioned to invest in increasing and enhancing HBCUs' museum training programs to diversify the field of museum professionals, and to

help ensure there are viable pipeline programs for young people and college-aged students to pursue careers on museum staffs at HBCUs.

Recommendation 5: Support Continuous Improvement and the Replication of Impactful Approaches

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has a robust administrative data system populated with data from grant applications, and there is an opportunity, as grantees strengthen their grant reporting capacities, to further integrate data from grant reports to allow for a more streamlined review of the grant portfolio. Program staff are already well positioned to use the grant application data to establish a culture of evidence and could use the grant reporting data to conduct real-time analysis that can illuminate areas of progress and improvement on a regular basis and to identify innovative approaches that result from completion of the funded projects. With improved performance reporting in the grant reports (recommendation 4) the program team's ability to use the data to make decisions about the design and administration of the grant program can be strengthened.

Furthermore, IMLS could significantly strengthen performance measurement among grantees and the broader universe of eligible organizations. It could offer assistance on performance measurement to new grantees so it is available at the start of project work and reasonable provisions can be made to capture baseline performance-indicator data. This work should not be costly or labor intensive. The most important part of this opportunity is that each grantee should receive help from a technical expert to set up data collection tools and procedures. Grantees could be encouraged to identify grants or partnerships that would help them secure no-cost or low-cost help from faculty or students at local community colleges, universities, or even businesses. Applicants could be encouraged to find a data and evaluative partner and note this capacity in their grantee application.

To strengthen and refine AAHC performance measurement, we recommend the following strategies:

- **training on performance measurement and management** for grantees at the start of the grant for purposes of the grant-funded project and wider management (discussing things like outcomes versus outputs, adaptive learning with performance data, collecting and using baseline data, and best practices for surveys)
- **a menu of optional performance metrics** for grantees to consider (to help those without any metrics get started)

- **an additional training or discussion at the midpoint (or later) to discuss course corrections on performance data** and how to use the data for longer-term project sustainability and organizational performance management more broadly
- **an improved and clearer requirement for performance reporting** in the final report

As part of broader agency-wide performance measurement planning, the program team could consider establishing some core metrics to track. These could be related to the defining attributes of the management of any successful competitive grants program: quality, fairness, relevance, and flexibility, which we give the following definitions:

- The **quality** of funding for capacity building might be demonstrated by the successful implementation of new capacities, such as new management practices, new products, new systems, new programs, or new levels of engagement.
- **Fairness** refers to the likelihood that a proposal will be evaluated with adherence to a set of evaluation criteria and that each application is considered seriously and appropriately by a well-qualified group of reviewers. In practice, this works by ensuring reviewers are broadly representative of the field. A fair process also ensures that grant applications are solicited from as wide a variety of applicants as possible.
- A **relevant** grants program provides funding for projects that will most effectively further the goals of the program.
- **Flexibility** refers to the program's capacity to shift in response to emerging needs in the field.

In addition, the data from the interim and final reports can be used to showcase promising practices to the broader field of African American museums and other stakeholders through case studies highlighting the value of funded projects. This practice can encourage broader learning as other museums look to these case studies for innovations they can adopt in their organizations or to spawn connections and partnerships across the network of African American museums. The findings could include an analysis of the projects that did not work well, as African American museums can learn from these projects as well as from successful ones. These findings could also be compiled in learning reports and disseminated to all African American museums.

Recommendation 6: Engage Partnerships in Creative Ways to Expand the Scope of the Program

The AAHC program was designed to ensure the growth of a dynamic network of leaders and organizations devoted to African American history and culture. The amount of funding appropriated, however, has never approached the authorized level in the enabling legislation. Through conscientious stewardship of the AAHC program, IMLS is a leading funder for African American museums and is well positioned to encourage other funders to support such museums. Although few national foundations and other government agencies have dedicated funding programs for African American museums, the programs could share more information and align their efforts.

Through coordination and partnership, IMLS can create opportunities for federal and philanthropic resources to align with the legislative goals. For example, opportunities for internships and fellowships at African American museums could be provided. Funders like the [Fund II Foundation](#) (Robert F. Smith) have provided substantial pipeline support by [providing fellowship opportunities](#) in African American museums. Moreover, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has provided internships to NMAAHC through the [Andrew W. Mellon Conservation Internship Program](#) to promote diversity in the museum conservation profession. This effort could be linked to AAHC program applicants whose projects align well with internship and fellowship opportunities or where the effort could be elevated as a targeted resource for matching funds. An appetite exists for this among funders we interviewed.

Other funders, including the National Park Service's African American Civil Rights Grant Program and the National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, have been able to invest in institutions dedicated to African American history and culture in ways that IMLS cannot by supporting brick-and-mortar repair and capital construction for historic sites. Staff from IMLS can continue being a resource by connecting applicants to other funding opportunities that best align with their needs.

By strengthening the ties between the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the IMLS AAHC program, a tremendous opportunity exists to leverage the national museum's networks and convening power to raise the profile of the AAHC program among broader audiences. An opportunity also exists to form strategic partnerships between the AAHC program staff and NMAAHC staff to collaboratively build new, innovative streams of work, including supporting grantees with visibility at the national museum or on its website.

Another opportunity exists to partner with corporate and philanthropic partners funding this kind of work. Target Corporation, Kaiser Permanente, Bank of America, Prudential Financial, and Toyota each provided \$2 million sponsorships to support the grand opening of NMAAHC. The AAHC program could identify corporate sponsorships or partnerships that could contribute to AAHC's annual operating budget and help IMLS get closer to its target yearly grants budget or provide much-needed support to community and arts organizations and partnerships led by Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color to reach additional program goals. An example of this kind of work that has been coordinated and led by philanthropy is America's Cultural Treasures, an initiative led by the Ford Foundation and supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the MacArthur Foundation, the Abrams Foundation, and the Alice L. Walton Foundation. The fund has dedicated more than \$160 million to support arts organizations and has provided sizeable grants to arts organizations for Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color.

Moreover, IMLS can facilitate strong connections for HBCUs and African American museums by helping them engage with other federal agencies, philanthropic organizations, and partners it has relationships with. For example, potential partnership opportunities for HBCUS include the following:

- The Institute for Museum and Library Services could work with the Corporation for National and Community Service to connect AmeriCorps service members from HBCUs with African American museums.
- Historically Black colleges and universities and African American museums that fall within the Appalachian Regional Commission region may be eligible for support aimed at strengthening community development by leveraging the region's cultural heritage assets.
- The US Department of Labor's [Education Training Administration](#) plans to establish partnerships with HBCUs to create apprenticeship opportunities as part of its strategic priority to enroll one million new apprentices over the next five years.

Appendix A. Snapshot of HBCUs

Historically Black colleges and universities are an essential component of the higher-education landscape in the United States. These institutions were established before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (the first was established in the late 1830s) to provide postsecondary education for African Americans, who were largely excluded from attending predominantly white institutions. Most HBCUs are in southern states and house art galleries, archival collections, museums, and cultural centers. These museums and cultural centers are a fundamental source of knowledge and memory for African Americans and all Americans interested in the contributions of African American artists, writers, and cultural figures. Hampton University Museum, for example, is the oldest African American museum in the US and one of the oldest museums in Virginia. Other HBCU museums and collections include the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University, the Lillie Carroll Jackson Civil Rights Museum and the James E. Lewis Museum of Art at Morgan State University, the African Art Gallery at Norfolk State University, and the Eaton Black Archives at Florida A&M University, among many others. In addition to the museums and collections at HBCUs, these institutions have historically been key training grounds for museum professionals since the early 1900s. Many founding directors of African American collections, archives, and museums were inspired by or exposed to training at HBCUs, and many modern African American museum professionals have either attended or worked at HBCUs.

In recent years, AAHC outreach to HBCUs has acknowledged their unique role and place in African American history and as repositories of materials that have historical and cultural significance. Though not explicitly mentioned in the authorizing legislation, HBCUs have always been included as eligible entities for the AAHC program and have been funded every year since the program's inception. In 2019, HBCUs were specifically added to the AAHC grant program goals to support the focus on training and professional development with the hope that including HBCUs might create and sustain partnerships with museums. This aligns with the broader goals of the NMAAHC legislation that authorized the creation of the grant program.

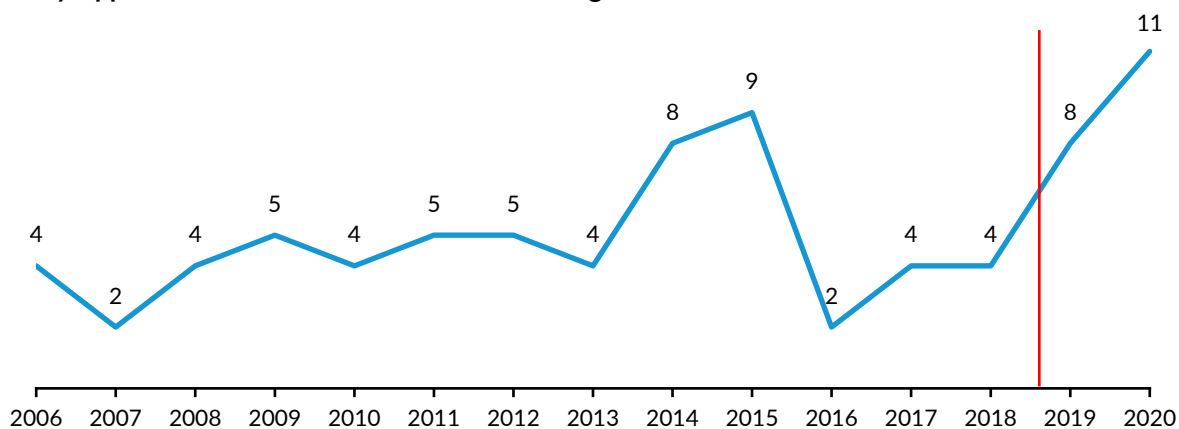
Because all HBCUs are eligible for AAHC funding, regardless of whether they have a distinct museum on campus, a total of 99 HBCUs are included in the universe of eligible organizations.¹⁵ Given this, HBCUs are slightly underestimated in the AAHC grantee mix: 20 percent of awarded applicants

¹⁵ Our evaluation used the Department of Education's [official list](#) of historically Black colleges and universities. Two HBCUs have been excluded from the eligible applicant universe because they have only submitted ineligible applications to date.

are HBCUs, and HBCUs constitute 34 percent of nonapplicants. Of the 99 HBCUs included in the eligible universe, 39 have applied to the AAHC program and 23 have received funding. There have been 37 awards made to HBCUs with a total investment of \$3,951,787. Since the AAHC program's inception, HBCUs have had a success rate of 51 percent, slightly higher than the program's average of roughly 44 percent.

From 2006 to 2018, there were on average four to five HBCU applicants and roughly two to three awards to HBCUs every year, with a notable spike to roughly eight applications in 2014 and 2015. The decline in applications from HBCUs between 2015 (when nine applied) and 2016 (when only two applied) can be explained by shifting institutional priorities within IMLS. In FY 2016, IMLS and the Office of Museum Services could not dedicate the amount of resources to HBCU outreach as it had in previous years. Since 2016, IMLS leadership and program staff have progressively and proactively supported outreach to HBCUs and dedicated internal resources to increasing the number of HBCU applications, and IMLS saw a corresponding increase in the number of applications this year. After including HBCUs in the program description and goal statement in FY 2019, the annual average number of HBCU applicants increased to 9 to 10, with 8 awards made to HBCUs in 2020 alone (figure A1).

FIGURE A1
Yearly Applications from HBCUs to the AAHC Program



Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program; HBCUS = historically Black colleges and universities. There have been 79 applications submitted by HBCUs (2006 to 2020). Though HBCUs have always been eligible, the red line indicates an explicit inclusion of HBCUs in the program description and goals.

Though HBCUs represented a smaller share of the awarded applicant respondent pool than did African American museums (only six respondents were HBCUs), all HBCU respondents noted that IMLS was responsive and helpful in addressing their questions or concerns (100 percent) and most (83

percent) indicated that the AAHC application process was clear. It is important to note that a much smaller share of HBCUs (50 percent) than of African American museums echoed the sentiment that the grant requirements were not a significant burden on their organization. This may owe partly to internal challenges with securing university support to pursue an AAHC grant, including securing a matching grant and negotiating indirect costs for the universities. This was a common theme among HBCU grantees we interviewed, who mentioned that they face significant institutional barriers when applying for funding and vying for matching funds. One institution mentioned that the competition for funding within universities is especially challenging for humanities-focused projects.

I'll be completely honest with you; the focus is STEM. STEM gets the money. STEM gets the support. And when there needs to be a cut, it comes from the humanities. So, our budgets are fluctuating.

—Awarded applicant

Historically Black colleges and universities have especially benefited from participating in the AAHC program: more than 80 percent of HBCU grantees that responded to the survey reported that they would not have been able to accomplish their projects without IMLS support through the AAHC program, and these respondents were the most likely to report that the grant had improved the professional development of their staff (83 percent), made their collection more available to researchers (67 percent), and made the preservation of their collection more secure for future use (67 percent).

FIGURE A2

Hampton University Students Learning about Museum Studies



Source: Photo provided by Hampton University to the evaluation team.

Since HBCUs were first explicitly mentioned in communications about the funding opportunity, IMLS has seen an increase in the number of applications from HBCUs that have their own museums, and many of these applications involved projects focusing on the maintenance of collections and the programming needs of the museums. This increased participation did not, however, increase or expand the professional development or training of the next generation of museum professionals. In future iterations of the AAHC program and in future grantee cohorts, the program should aim to expand its emphasis on nurturing and sustaining the pipeline of museum educators, researchers, curators, and leadership through partnerships with HBCUs.

Appendix B. Snapshot of Repeat Grantees

The nonprofit sector is central in the US economy, providing services including higher education, health care, and research. As many as 90 percent of all nonprofit leaders, including leaders of African American museums and HBCUs, actively apply for foundation grant funding every year, and organizational characteristics including nonprofit age, size, and operating ratios typically explain their success in grant markets (Blackbaud 2010; Faulk, Lecy, and McGinnis Johnson 2012). African American museums face well-documented financial challenges, including the fact that many are smaller and struggle to maintain and grow their operations owing partly to lack of sustainable government, foundation, and private support.¹⁶ For many African American museums, the AAHC program is a lifeline for targeted support to build organizational and staff capacity and, for some, as a source of repeat awards. These awards have allowed AAHC grantees to gain professional development capacities, phase projects over time, leverage additional funding, and improve on key core capacities.

There is measurable value in sustaining investments in organizations over time. Almost half (47 percent, or 52 out of 110) of awarded applicants have had multiple projects funded by the AAHC program, with 15 having received four or more awards from the program. Repeat awarded applicants were more likely to credit the AAHC program for benefits to their capacity than one-time awarded applicants across nearly every capacity measured (table B1).

TABLE B1
Impact of the AAHC Grant on Core Capacities by Repeat Applicants

Reflecting on the goals of your project, to what extent has the AAHC grant...	All awarded applicants	Repeat awarded applicants
Improved the professional development of your personnel (staff, volunteers, interns)?	82%	80%
Improved your ability to sustain this work beyond the grant period?	68%	72%
Deepened the level of engagement with your audiences?	62%	64%
Improved or expanded your collection?	57%	52%
Increased the number of visitors to your website?	57%	68%
Made your collection more useful to researchers?	55%	56%
Made preservation of your collection more secure for future use?	51%	42%
Increased the physical number of visitors to your organization?	45%	48%

¹⁶ Cohen, “The State of Black Museums—Part 1.”

Enabled you to purchase or implement new management tools (e.g., project management, collections management, or accounting software)?	43%	44%
Improved your website?	35%	36%
<i>Total (respondents, not responses)</i>	40	25
<i>No response (NA)</i>	0	0

Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program. Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents; all respondents responded to this question. The percentages above represent the sum of those that responded either “To a great extent” or “somewhat.”

Repeat awarded applicants and awarded applicants that have received funding throughout the lifespan of the program were able to attract more additional capital than their counterparts. This finding suggests that those with multiple awards can better leverage the AAHC reputation and name in order to support their institutions. Small and midsize organizations were especially successful in leveraging additional funds using the AAHC grant. This suggests that the AAHC grant is a vital source of project-based support for small nonprofits and institutions that may struggle to attract funding.

TABLE SB2

Using AAHC to Attract Additional Funding by Repeat Applicants

Were you able to use the AAHC grant to attract additional funding for your organization?	All awarded applicants	Repeat awarded applicant
<i>Yes</i>	55 percent	64 percent
<i>Not yet but we expect to</i>	32.5 percent	24 percent
<i>No</i>	7.5 percent	4 percent
<i>Not sure</i>	5 percent	8 percent
<i>Total (respondents)</i>	40	25
<i>No response (NA)</i>	0	0

Notes: AAHC = African American History and Culture grant program. Total population is the 40 awarded applicant respondents, all respondents responded to this question.

These distinctions are important to keep in mind in thinking about how the AAHC program can best support first-time awarded applicants and more recently awarded applicants in leveraging additional funding with the grant.

Appendix C. Project Activities

Type of Activity	Activities	Definitions
Leadership and staffing	Professional development of executive staff	Funding for executive director or senior-level staff (conference travel, skills and training workshops, subject matter expert consultants to teach specific skills, etc.)
	Professional development of support staff	Funding for support staff, including curatorial, registrarial, and/or archival staff (conference travel, skills and training workshops, subject matter expert consultants to teach specific skills, etc.)
	Attract/hire new staff	Hiring adequate number of professionally trained curatorial, registrarial, executive and/or archival staff, and/or expand funding for current volunteers or part-time staff, etc. to meet the needs of the organization
	Attract/hire interns or create an internship program	Hiring interns/fellows or create internship programs to grow capacity in the museum field or to fill future positions in the organization
Organizational structures and systems	Strengthen operations	Creating processes to improve existing systems for efficiency (incorporating advanced digital technology, evaluation and assessment processes, collections stewardship, etc.), creating or updating policies and procedures
	Facilitate organizational learning	Building infrastructure, conducting an internal evaluation or hiring consultants/new staff to identify how to strengthen internal processes; implementing recommendations or action plans from planning activities
	Increase ability to be nimble/plan/think strategically	Creating or revising a strategic plan by funding current staff or consultants to evaluate long-term goals/decisions of the organization; audience research and evaluation, including using an evaluation consultant to help develop achievable performance goals and measurable outcomes
	Strengthen financial capacity/networks	Activities that increase engagement with and awareness of other funders, generate connections with local or regional governments, improve recognition in local community; test and develop new sources of earned revenue such as new programs or exhibitions, etc.; Improvement in financial position (including debt and revenue), diversification and stability of funding.
Stewardship and quality of collection	Care of collections	Maintaining current collections by cataloguing, collections management, ensuring adequate storage facilities with proper humidity, temperature and other controls, and storage systems that allow for easily accessible retrieval of objects; assessing and addressing conservation needs, etc.
	Growth/expansion of collections	Conducting research on themes and topics to identify gaps in collection; connect with other museums with similar missions to identify source materials; engage with community members to identify, document, and collect materials and stories relevant to museum's mission; improving stewardship of collection items (digital or physical) added to the organization's collection

Accessibility of collection	Digitization of collections	Using online software (new or current) to catalogue collections online (for the public or for internal cataloging purposes), events and symposiums
	Development of collection-driven new scholarship	Curating new exhibits with collections (on site or online) or funding research/scholarship that furthers insights about the collection
	Outreach/marketing	Upgrade or enhance website, bolstering social media presence, engaging in outreach to new visitors, public relations campaigns, advertisements related to new public programs or exhibitions supported by the grant, membership maintenance, or newsletters
	Community visibility	Creating educational programming to connect public with curated exhibits (traveling to schools, hosting groups of students); design and printing of educational resources including training manuals, toolkits, and curricula that support educational programs and exhibitions

Appendix D. Authorizing Legislation

20 USC 80r-5: Educational and Liaison Programs

(A) In general

- (1) Programs authorized: The Director of the Museum may carry out educational and liaison programs in support of the goals of the Museum.
- (2) Specific activities described: In carrying out this section, the Director shall-
 - a) carry out educational programs relating to African American life, art, history, and culture, including-
 - i. programs using digital, electronic, and interactive technologies; and
 - ii. programs carried out in collaboration with elementary schools, secondary schools, and postsecondary schools; and
 - b) consult with the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services concerning the grant and scholarship programs carried out under subsection (b).

(B) Grant and scholarship programs

- (1) In general: In consultation with the Council and the Director of the Museum, the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services shall establish:
 - a) a grant program with the purpose of improving operations, care of collections, and the development of professional management at African American museums;
 - b) a grant program with the purpose of providing internship and fellowship opportunities at African American museums;
 - c) a scholarship program with the purpose of assisting individuals who are pursuing careers or carrying out studies in the arts, humanities, and sciences in the study of African American life, art, history, and culture;
 - d) in cooperation with other museums, historical societies, and educational institutions, a grant program with the purpose of promoting the understanding of modern-day practices of slavery throughout the world; and
 - e) a grant program under which an African-American museum (including a nonprofit education organization the primary mission of which is to promote the study of the African American diaspora) may use the funds provided under the grant to increase an endowment fund established by the museum (or organization) as of May 1, 2003, for the purposes of:
 - i. enhancing educational programming; and

- ii. maintaining and operating traveling educational exhibits.
- (2) Authorization of Appropriations: There are authorized to be appropriated to the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services to carry out this subsection -
- a) \$15,000,000 for fiscal year 2004; and
 - b) such sums as are necessary for each fiscal year thereafter.

Appendix E. List of Grantees

9th & 10th Horse Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers Museum	Bethune-Cookman University Inc.	Emmett Till Memorial Commission of Tallahatchie County, Inc.
African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation	Birmingham Black Radio Museum	Evansville African American Museum
African American Cultural Center	Birmingham Civil Rights Institute	Expanding and Preserving Our Cultural Heritage, Inc. AKA Spady Cultural Heritage Museum
African American Diversity Cultural Center Hawaii	Black Archives of Mid-America	Ferris State University
African American Firefighter Museum	Black Archives, History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc.	Florida Memorial University
African American Museum in Philadelphia	Bronzeville Children's Museum	Fort Des Moines Memorial Park Inc
African American National Heritage Society	Broward Public Library Foundation	Friends of Lincolnville, Inc.
African-American Heritage Foundation	Center for African American Military History, Inc	Friends, The Foundation of the California African-American Museum
Afro American Cultural Center	Challenges of the Twenty First Century, Inc.	Goldsboro Westside Historical Museum
Alabama State University	Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History	Great Blacks in Wax Museum
American Jazz Museum, Inc.	Clara White Mission, Inc.	Great Plains Black Museum, Archives and Interpretive Center Inc
Amistad Center for Art & Culture, Inc	Delaware State University	Haitian Heritage Museum Corp
Amistad Research Center	Denver Public Library	Hampton University
Association of African American Museums	Diaspora Connections Unlimited	Harrison Museum of African American Culture
AUC Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective, Spelman College	Diaspora Vibe & Gallery	Hinds Community College - Utica Campus
B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center	DuSable Museum of African American History, Inc., The	Howard University
Beck Cultural Exchange Center	East Tennessee Public Communications Corporation	Jack Hadley's Black History Memorabilia
Benedict College	Elizabeth City State University	Jackson State University
Bennett College		

John G Riley Center and Museum of African American History Culture	National Blues Museum	Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford- Stuyvesant History
Johnson C. Smith University	National Jazz Museum in Harlem, The	Soulsville Foundation
Kansas African American Museum	National Underground Railroad Freedom Center	Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency
Legacy Project, Inc.	New Orleans African American Museum of Art, Culture, and History	Studio Museum in Harlem, Inc.
Lewis H. Latimer Fund, Inc., The	New York Public Library	Tangipahoa African American Heritage Museum & Veterans' Archives
Lillie Carroll Jackson Civil Rights Museum	North Carolina Central University	Temple University - Of the Commonwealth System of Higher Education
Living Classrooms Foundation	North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources	Texas Southern University
Lorraine Civil Rights Museum	Northwest African American Museum	The I. P. Stanback Museum & Planetarium, South Carolina State University
Malcolm X Memorial Foundation	Oakland Public Library	Troy University
Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture	Ohio Historical Society	Trustees of Indiana University
Mayme A. Clayton Library & Museum	Penn Center	Tubman African American Museum
Meeks Eaton Black Archives	Prince George's African American Museum & Cultural Center	Tuskegee University
Miami, City of	Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African- American History & Culture	University of Maryland
Mosaic Templars Cultural Center	Ritz Theatre & Lavilla Museum Foundation, Inc.	University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Muhammad Ali Museum and Education Center	River Road African American Museum	Virginia State University
Museum of African American History, Incorporated	Robbins House, Inc., The	Withers Collection, Inc.
Museum of Contemporary African Diasporian Arts, Inc.	Savannah State University	World Beat Balboa Park
Museum of the African Diaspora	School Board of Marion County, Florida	Xavier University of Louisiana
	Shorefront, N.F.P.	

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