



ASM/Museums Alaska Chat

September 13, 11 am

Session 51

Amy Steffian on Grant writing for CMF and Art Acquisition

Della Hall: Hi Amy!

Della Hall: Hi Shina!

Della Hall: Hi Kathi and Michael!

Della Hall: Hi Sue!

Michael: Good morning!

Della Hall: Welcome everyone! Amy Steffian is here to chat about grants. Amy, take it away!

Amy Steffian: Hi everyone. I thought I'd start today with the collections management fund. Just so you all know, I've been part of the team reviewing grant applications for museums Alaska, for both the art acquisition and CMF. I will share a few of the common issues we have with the applications, but please ask questions. One of the big issues with the CMF is being specific in your application. The review panel wants you to include information like - how many objects you will work with. Similarly, we have applications where people only put in the time for a collections aide to do the work, but forget to include time for supervision, logistics (purchasing supplies). It's important to model your project a bit - to show all of its part. Be detailed, but remember that we understand this is a projection, and that sometimes our best plans change. It's also nice to see that you plan time to complete grant reporting and include some promotion of your project. Maybe you will write a press release, or you will put an article in your newsletter. Show this as an in kind contribution. Questions about project development?

Amy Steffian: Ok - the next thing I want to touch on is following guidelines. One common mistake people make is applying for things that are beyond collections care.

Michael: Amy, could you talk about partnerships and collaboration in project development.

Amy Steffian: So - for example - it's OK to apply for project that support exhibit mounts and cases that will protect objects on display. But the program doesn't support exhibit panels, interpretation, etc. Sure - re: collaboration - it really strengthens a proposal to have two organization working together - sharing resources and expertise. One common way people do this is to host a training in collections management and invite nearby museums to send their staff to the training. Or, perhaps you are bringing a specialist to your area - can that person also be of service to another organization.

Michael: Amy, great, thank you!

Amy Steffian: I also want to point out that collections care grants can go for a variety or related things. For example, the Alutiiq Museum improved its security camera system with a CMF grant, and we tied this improvement specifically to collections care - and the areas with collections storage and use. Just be sure to tie your application very explicitly to collections care. Does anyone have questions about that?

Amy Steffian: OK - let's talk about attachments!

Della Hall: Feel free to chime in at any point with questions, and we can always go back to them! The applications for the grants include a number of places to attach documentation. People are pretty good about attaching quotes vendors, but get a little more creative. Take a photo of the problem you are trying to address! For example, send an image of the drawer that is overflowing and needs restoring. Or show the aging case that needs to be replaced or the rare object that needs a mount. You could attach a copy of a page your long range plan that shows how the project is related. Sometimes I highlight the portion of the plan that is relevant - to make it stand out. And don't forget letters of support. Scott Carrlee says this about the ASM grants too - "if other people don't care about your grant, why should the committee?" If you are hosting a training, attach the resume of the trainer and a draft meeting agenda. If you are working with a consultant, send their resume and a letter of intent them. Also - sometimes I use an attachment space to add a graphic that shows the schedule of the project. I make these in Excel - month in the column heads and task (with staff initials by them) in the row heads. So - in short - use attachments. They really help the committee and they give you more room to sell your project.

Amy Steffian: Questions?

Shina duVall: These are all very helpful suggestions!

Sarah Harrington: Agreed

Michael: Amy, this is great, thank you!

Amy Steffian: On to the budget. Please include ALL staff hours that will be devoted to the project, not just those that will be paid by the grant. This is a common mistake. So - as you CAN'T charge permanent staff hours to the CMF, show those as in kind. This is hours for supervision, teaching a collections aide, or just doing the work of the project. Also - SHOW YOUR OVERHEAD! Many of us don't have a federally negotiated overhead rate. However, OMB (the feds) allows all non-profits to use a de minimis rate of 10%. The point here, is that it does cost your organization to manage a grant and the work involved in the grant funded project. By including your overhead you are showing that you recognize that and are willing to provide that support. Overhead is always in kind on CMF grants.

Amy Steffian: Ok - those are my tips for CMF. Questions before I move on to art acquisition?

Della Hall: I don't want to derail your budget section, and you might be getting to this later, but can you talk a little about the size and scope of a project? I know often an issue the committee has is with a project not seeming feasible, or the proposal being for a jumble of seemingly unrelated things. What makes a project, a project? What's related? What's not related?

Amy Steffian: Good point Della. Yes- you need a well-defined project - not something that throws together a whole bunch of different things. Pick one thing and do it well. The "Kitchen Sink" approach is really obvious to grant reviewers. If you have a big project - divide it into parts. I do this a lot. So - you might split a project into 3 phases - and do a separate grant for each phase. It's also important not to over promise and underperform! You don't want to say you can rehouse for 10,000 in 2 months. Instead, think carefully about what your staff can accomplish in the grant period, and ask for funding to support that part. I often break down my budgets to show that a person will work 20 hours a week for 10 weeks and process XXX objects per week for a total of XXXX completed. The committee really looks for reasonableness. Can you reasonably accomplish what you are asking us to support?

Amy Steffian: Other questions / comments?

Della Hall: Thanks Amy!

Amy Steffian: I can move on to AAF (art acquisition fund) if you like. I would also add - get someone to read your application before you submit. Write it in a word file and have someone look it over to see if it makes sense to them.

Amy Steffian: OK - moving on to AAF. Again - follow the guidelines. This is a huge issue with the applications to this program. Rasmuson's mission is to support Alaska. Through AAF funds the purchase of artwork made by Alaskan residents. If the artists doesn't live in Alaska it is unlikely you will get funding. There have been a few exceptions - mostly for people who recently moved out of state. So - artist makes something a museum wants to buy, and then moves to Seattle. You can contact Della to discuss items out of state artists. That is a necessary first step.

Della Hall: yes, please contact me to discuss this if there is any question!

Amy Steffian: However, as the program is intended to support Alaskan artists, out of state artists (even if they are Alaska Native or former residents) get the lowest funding priority. There is debate every cycle about this. There are many museums that would like to buy from artists outside the state who don't request to do so - because they are following the guidelines. So, it's hard for the committee to support requests people who go beyond the guidelines, unless there is a hugely compelling reason. The other issue we've come across is the age of pieces. The AAF gives preference to pieces made within the past 5 years, but especially the last 3. We've had cases where people ask to buy things made 20 years ago. If there is a hugely compelling reason for purchasing an older work, speak to Della and be sure to address it in your application.

Shina duVall: Just curious about that guideline. How/why did that come about?

Amy Steffian: Also - please be sure to understand that issue surrounding the Indian Arts and Crafts Act as well as issue of appropriation of Alaska Native arts. We turned down an application for a purchase

where a non-Native artist made a piece depicting Native traditions in a Native style. Della can share a chart that helps you determine if appropriation is an issue. OR reach out and ask her for an opinion before you apply.

Another big issue is exhibit plans. Rasmuson wants the works purchased to be shared with the public. That is one of the reasons the application requires an exhibit plan. Della has copies of the Alutiiq Museum's plan, she can share with you if you want to see what ours looks like. The important thing is for you to have a plan to share the pieces you buy. Tie them to your exhibit plans.

Della Hall: In response to Shina's question about the 3-5 year rule, the AAF program is designed to support contemporary work of living Alaskan artists. Does that answer your question?

Amy Steffian: They don't have to be shown immediately, but there should be some effort to share them in upcoming plans.

Shina duVall: Yes, thank you!

Amy Steffian: And remember, there are lots of ways to share the art you purchase that enhances access. We set up an on line gallery of our purchases. We share pieces at special events - like a first Friday art walk. And please, please justify the asking price. Sometimes the pricing of an art piece seems reasonable and straight forward, but other times it is hard to understand where the price came from. Tell the committee how the price was arrived at - through the materials use and the hours the artists spent working perhaps. Or maybe other Alvin Amason paintings sell for \$15K in Anchorage. We've had applications where the museum ask for the full \$35K but doesn't tell us why the piece they want to buy should command this price. Finally - the image authorization forms are not required with the application, but it looks GREAT to the committee if you submit them up front. It also makes Della's job easier.

Della Hall: A lot easier :)

Amy Steffian: Those are my big points. Thoughts? Questions? I would encourage everyone to do a press release when they buy artwork to highlight the program and its supporters.

Email me and I can send you a sample if it would help. amy@alutiiqmuseum.org

Della Hall: Please chime in with ANY questions or comments you have. You can even ask about a specific proposal you are planning on submitting.

Amy Steffian: Another great way to learn more about this program is to serve on the grant review committee! I believe you can sign up at the annual meeting.

Della Hall: Yes, definitely! You can sign up at the conference, or email me if you're interested

director@museumsalaska.org

Michael: Great advice! Thanks!

Della Hall: Who's going to the conference?

Michael: You'll see me there!

Della Hall: Great, Michael!

Shina duVall: I will be there and will look forward to meeting many of you!

Sue Deyoe: I'll be there. AND because its in Anchorage, we have a volunteer/docent who is attending one of the days too.

Della Hall: Excellent, Shina and Sue! Looking forward to connecting with all of you. Does anyone have anything else for these last 3 minutes?

Della Hall: Thank you, Amy, for your preparation and great advice!

Michael: This has been helpful, thank you for taking the time to put this on.

Shina duVall: Yes, thank you!

Amy Steffian: My pleasure. Museums Alaska is lucky to have grants to give and we want strong proposals so we can give the money away.

Della Hall: Great! We'll send an announcement about the next Chat in October. Usually the 2nd or 3rd week on Wednesday at 11:00!

Amy Steffian: Bye All.

Della Hall: If anyone has any topic or guest suggestions, please email me or Scott Carrlee.

Next Chat Session

October 11, at 11am

We will discuss the Museums Alaska Annual meeting