REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Literacy Consultant
In support of the “Innovative Informal Learning to Foster Early Childhood Literacy” Project
Funded by the Dr. Seuss Foundation and the Davis Foundation

ORGANIZATION SUMMARY

The Springfield Museums uses art, history, science and Dr. Seuss to explore our shared connections and unique perspectives to promote engagement, literacy and learning. Our first freestanding museum building, the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, opened to the public in 1896 as a space devoted to sharing the beauty of global cultures with the people of Springfield. This initial purpose has expanded to include themes of innovation, STEM learning, and literacy acquisition across many disciplines, all intertwined with playful, transformative, and inspiring learning. Today visitors benefit from permanent collections, changing exhibitions, educational programs, and special events at the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum (1896), the Springfield Science Museum (1899), the Michele and Donald D’Amour Museum of Fine Arts (1933), the Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden (2002), the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History (2009), and the Amazing World of Dr. Seuss Museum (2017).

In 2013, the Springfield Museums received national accreditation as a single institution by the American Alliance of Museums, the highest national recognition for a museum. Last year, we earned reaccredited by AAM. In 2016, the Springfield Museums became a Smithsonian Affiliate, a designation that has allowed us to bring the collections and resources of the Smithsonian Institution to our region.

With an eye on equity, the Museums aim to make our resources accessible to all people, especially people from our neighborhood – all Springfield city residents, 25% who live below poverty level, receive free admission. Additionally, veterans and active service military receive free admission, EBT recipients from any state receive $3 admission, and registered human service agencies can bring clients at no cost. The Springfield Museums also participate in the Art Bridges Foundation’s Access for All pilot program, offering free admission to all visitors on the first Wednesday of each month. Boosting literacy engagement and STEM learning is of the utmost importance, especially for our local community. In the Springfield Public Schools, 89% of students have high needs, and the district lags well behind the state averages on assessments.

At the Springfield Museums, one admission grants access to all five museums. This unique interdisciplinary structure makes the organization the only one of its kind in Massachusetts. Our daily visitors include babies and pre-school aged children and caregivers, school-aged children and teachers, families, college students, adults, seniors, local clubs and special interest networks. We strive for repeat visitation within our community, especially during school vacation weeks, summer break, and a host of annual community events, such as our holiday-time kick-off, The Lighting of the Quad, and the popular springtime event, The Festival of Flowers. Our robust education department works to provide memorable experiences for visitors by augmenting our daily and special event/exhibit programming with frequent performances, demonstrations, and drop-in activities.
**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

While there are many literacy building blocks that work together to form a skilled learner, our previous work with a literacy expert, referencing Scarborough’s Reading Rope (2001), identified two areas of language comprehension where we can make the greatest impact in the museum setting: background knowledge and vocabulary. Our goal is to provide succinct and effective learning opportunities within the brief time that young learners visit our drop-in spaces and interact with our educators, and to expand these opportunities across our Seuss, Art, Science, and History Museums.

To carry this out, we plan to engage a dedicated Literacy Consultant to perform an audit of our current drop-in spaces: Cat’s Corner (est. 2017) in the Dr. Seuss Museum and Smithsonian Spark!Lab (est. 2019) in the Science Museum, as well as our ongoing family engagement programs. From their findings, the Consultant will recommend modifications and support our education staff through the implementation of different strategies. The outcomes developed here will be used by museum staff to create new programs that can be shared and applied throughout our museum education programming.

**DELIVERABLES**

- **Report** outlining audit observations and findings, and a series of recommendations on how to increase literacy in various aspects of educational programming.
- **Guide** to best literacy practices in the museum environment.
- **Support** of staff during the implementation of report recommendations.

**PROPOSALS MUST INCLUDE**

Please describe your experience with similar projects, your methodology and approach to auditing programs and offering feedback, and your plan for co-creating and delivering the requested documents. We welcome innovative and creative ideas to address the selection criteria below.

**SCHEDULE & TIME FRAME**

**Phase 1: September 2024 – February 2025**

- Onsite, in-person program observations to take place September – December 2024.
  - Schedule will be jointly created between the Consultant and the Director of Education in order to provide a variety of program types and museum audiences.
  - It is anticipated that the Consultant will visit at least five times during the audit period.
  - A Saturday visit will be required.
- Planning meetings may be held remotely.
- During visits and planning meetings, staff input should be sought, regarding past program experience and background knowledge.
Phase 2: March 2025 – February 2026

- Present findings to education staff during an onsite meeting.
- Attend remote meetings every other month with staff to provide guidance and offer feedback as staff implement program changes and new strategies.
- Visit twice to observe new programming or initiatives.
- Participate in a final project evaluation with museum staff and the project manager.

OUT of SCOPE

All program planning, implementation, and facilitation will be conducted by Springfield Museums staff. The Literacy Consultant role's will be limited to observation, recommendation, and support through feedback. Likewise, Springfield Museums staff will determine how project funds are spent to implement new programming approaches.

BUDGET

Please share a proposed budget, not to exceed $40,000, for the work to be provided.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The proposal will be assessed against the following criteria, with equal weight being given to each criterion.

1. Demonstrated expertise in early childhood literacy.
2. Understanding of opportunities and constraints for literacy development in an informal learning context, including brief or one-off guest visitation.
3. Ability to work collaboratively with museum staff.
4. Expertise in designing inclusive literacy programs that engage and support a diverse community of learners.
5. Value for money.

PROPOSALS DUE

Proposals are due Monday, July 29, 2024. Please email or mail to Larissa Murray, Director of Education, Springfield Museums, 21 Edwards Street, Springfield, MA 01103; lmurray@springfieldmuseums.org

It is anticipated that interviews will take place in August, with a final decision communicated in early September.