

Applicant Organization: Boston Athenaeum	Amount: \$21,500
Proposal Title: Contextualizing the Catalog: Increasing Access to Native Collections at the Boston Athenaeum	
Project Goal: The Boston Athenaeum seeks funding for a project to enhance the stewardship and accessibility of Native collections. This entails a comprehensive survey and the creation of a digital guide to contextualize and make these collections more accessible, addressing historical oversight and promoting a respectful representation of Indigenous knowledge. The project will develop collection descriptions and education approaches that accurately and respectfully represent tribal histories and knowledge.	

Describe the problem, need, issue or challenge that your project will address, why your project is innovative, how it could help others or advance knowledge or practice for the field, and its potential to scale as a solution for others.

If the Proposal is a continuation of previously funded work, describe how the previous project met its goals and how the new proposal builds upon earlier work.

Describe your project plan, including activities, timeframe, resource requirements and, if relevant, collaborators and sustainability plans.

Projects involving OSS must *briefly* address sustainability, including governance, resources, community engagement, and technology as described in the ITAV framework at <https://www.lyrasis.org/programs/Pages/IMLS-OSS.aspx>

The Boston Athenaeum, a member-supported library, museum, and cultural center, stewards a collection of over 500,000 circulating items and over 250,000 rare items that span from the 15th century to the present day and encompass major periods of Boston, U.S., and world history. While important groupings of the collections and rare items have been identified and made accessible, there has been relatively little work done to identify and address the complexity of collections related to and made by Indigenous people and communities.

We seek funding for a 1-year pilot project to improve the stewardship, discoverability, access, and use of Native collections at the Boston Athenaeum. The project will be completed in two key phases: first, a broad survey of the BA's collections created by Indigenous makers or about Indigenous communities will be conducted. Then we will create a digital research guide to improve access, contextualize the collections, and acknowledge potentially culturally sensitive materials.

Phase 1 of the project is a broad, 8-month survey of the BA's Schoolcraft collection, a discreet body of over 200 printed documents in both English and Indigenous languages originally collected or written by ethnologist and Indian Agent for the American government, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Historically, the Schoolcraft Collection and other Native materials were cataloged and written about from a white, Euro-American perspective. This survey will allow the BA to identify the scope of materials, how they might potentially inform one another, and begin identifying materials that may be culturally sensitive and require further assessment of their cataloging description and physical access to comply with both our harmful language guide and best practices for Indigenous materials. Paul Grant Costa, Co-Director of the Northeast Native Research Collaborative, has agreed to serve in an advisory role and has already worked with the Native collections committee. Further partners for this exploration will be determined by the results of the survey.



Phase 2 of the project is the creation of a digital research guide to the Native collections, with a special focus on the Schoolcraft collection. The written descriptions currently surrounding the Schoolcraft collection will also be revised to prioritize the Native communities represented within the collection. The digital collection guide will be a dynamic document that links previously distinct collections and newly digitized materials to make the Athenaeum's Native collections more comprehensive and accessible. Sited on the Special Collections landing page, the guide will provide an introduction to the origin and scope of the Athenaeum's Indigenous materials, define key vocabulary terms used within the guide, and structure our holdings into discrete categories, such as Documents in Indigenous languages; Documents and Records by Indigenous People; and Missionary work, among others. Further, the guide will provide links and instructions for locating and accessing items through our online library catalog, Athena, and our Online Collections repository, ContentDM. Within the first year, the research guide would go live on our website, providing greatly improved access and interpretation for researchers, students, and educators. We will also explore the possibility of a future implementation of Mukurtu, an open-source freely available content management system and digital access tool for cultural heritage, that would work in parallel with our in-house content management system. Together, the two systems would create space for traditional narratives and knowledge labels that foreground Indigenous knowledge in the metadata of digitized cultural heritage materials.

Funding will be used to hire a research fellow to carry out the on-site collections survey and production of the research guide. Funding will support travel by the fellow and consultation with librarians and curators in the area who are working on similar projects, such as the Massachusetts Historical Society, Brown University, and Amherst College, as well as with Native communities and consultants. The Northeast Native Research Collaborative has been particularly helpful with preliminary project research. The grant will also support increased and improved access to the collection through digitization of materials from the collection yet to be available online and working with an experienced designer to create a user-friendly research guide that will live in a distinct location on our website.

We intend to leverage this project as a first, scalable step in a longer-term effort to develop a holistic approach to collection description, access, and education in a manner that more accurately and respectfully represents tribal histories and knowledge. Starting with past cataloging and contextualizing work around the BA's Schoolcraft collection will provide a manageable starting point for identifying current issues, developing mitigation procedures, and informing our approach to the broader collection which can be scaled up, and our digital research guide is planned as an adaptable framework for expansive future growth.

The Boston Athenaeum's grant concept represents an innovative approach by focusing on improving the access of Native collections, which have historically been marginalized. By conducting a comprehensive survey of Indigenous materials and creating a digital research guide, the project actively addresses the need for a more inclusive and respectful representation of Indigenous knowledge. This initiative sets a new standard for how libraries can engage with and present Indigenous collections, making it a model for cultural sensitivity, accessibility, and educational outreach in the field. The project's emphasis on revising existing cataloging practices to reflect Indigenous perspectives and its collaborative approach with Native communities to share institutional authority further underscore its new and transformative potential in library science.



Provide names and titles for the principal investigator(s) and other key participants in the project.

Michelle LeBlanc, Project Coordinator
 Boston Athenaeum Director of Education
 Native Collections Sub-Committee, DEAI Working Group

Lauren Graves
 Boston Athenaeum Assistant Curator
 Native Collections Sub-Committee, DEAI Working Group

Daniel Axmacher
 Boston Athenaeum Senior Rare Materials Catalog Librarian
 Native Collections Sub-Committee, DEAI Working Group

Jennifer Anderson
 Boston Athenaeum Rare Materials Catalog Librarian
 Native Collections Sub-Committee, DEAI Working Group

Paul Grant-Costa
 Native Northeast Research Collaborative
 Historian, Native Collections Sub-Committee

Budget. Add/remove and complete rows as needed in the table below.

Line	Basis	Cost
Cataloging Research Fellow	½ time, 8 months @\$19/hr	13,500
Intern Research & Travel	Various, local and New England	1,000
Consultant Honoraria	1 year-long honoraria @\$5,000	5,000
Digital landing page	Estimate for a graphic designer	2,000
Total Budget Request		\$21,500