



MAM CARES: Catalyzing Access, Research, and Education Solutions Mid-Year Report, November 2017 – May 2018

The Missoula Art Museum has completed the public program component of *CARES: Catalyzing Access, Research, and Education Solutions*, a one-year project funded with a prestigious \$25,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services Museums for America Program, with additional funding from Humanities Montana and support from the Montana Arts Council. CARES is designed to engage museum, libraries, civic agencies, and other cultural organizations in activities to improve access to collections and increase resources for preservation. The project will help determine the potential for collaborations in collections-driven research, education, storage, and preservation efforts, and will inform the conceptual design of a MAM collections facility.

CARES launched on November 1, 2017 with a statewide needs assessment of museum, library, and archive collections. The survey was designed and analyzed by Beth Heller, a peer-reviewed Professional Associate of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works based in Denver, Colorado. MAM invited more than 200 directors from Montana's public, private, state, local, tribal, and university-affiliated museums, libraries, and archives to participate. While the response rate was lower than desired, the survey still yielded insights for the purposes of CARES. For example, the top three areas of interest for collaborative programming were Continuing Education for Staff, Digitized Archives, and Exhibit Development, and these ideas would become recurring themes in spring 2018 programs. The [complete report](#) is posted online.

With survey results in mind, the MAM Project Team designed a series of two workshops and three design charrettes to increase capacity and explore the topics of Preservation & Conservation, Research & Education, and Physical & Digital Storage. MAM advertised the programs through e-blasts, a postcard mailing to more than 800 statewide contacts, and a [dedicated web page](#).

On March 23, 2018, Beth Heller presented a three-hour preservation workshop to 15 non-profit professionals, business owners, students, artists, and volunteer leaders from the community. Next, MAM hosted a design charrette focused on preservation issues that was facilitated by Cinda Holt, Business Development Specialist from the Montana Arts Council. Takeaways included an interest in developing proof-of-concept collaborative projects, sharing training opportunities, and an acceptance that in a state as large as Montana, shared resources might only function effectively on a local level, such as the tri-county area of Ravalli, Missoula, and Lake counties. MAM also discovered that the afternoon's free-ranging conversation drew as many attendees and was as impactful as the morning's targeted training. Charrette participants commented that they valued meeting with colleagues and discussing ideas in a relaxed but energetic and collaborative atmosphere. The charrette was unanimously praised as stimulating, appropriate, well-facilitated, and organized, and there was a strong call for more events and opportunities like this.

The second design charrette on April 23 focused on Research & Education. Attendance increased 18%, with repeat attendees showing deep engagement with the topics. Participants valued the cross-pollination of ideas and diverse perspectives and desired more contact, collaboration, and information sharing. Takeaway ideas included interests in cultural organizations asserting more active roles in curriculum development and in a task force on education.

At each of these three events, regional colleagues voiced a clear stake in CARES's goals. In advance of the final two programs scheduled for May 11, Humanities Montana awarded MAM a \$1,000 Opportunity Grant to provide \$100 stipends to ten participants from rural communities. The award broadened attendance and allowed MAM to extend its original IMLS budget. Slowly but surely, the CARES message was reaching a larger geographic region. Attendance doubled to 35 and drew participants from Lewistown and Bozeman, as well as Salmon, Idaho.

First, Donna McCrae, Head of Archives and Special Collections at the Mansfield Library, presented a Basic Archives Management Workshop. She covered a range of professional practices, from taking physical and intellectual control to developing practical approaches for access, digitization, and storage. Discussion and activities helped participants to clarify needs and set practical goals.

The following design charrette focused on physical and digital storage. Participants unanimously shared needs for expanded storage and security improvements. Each had a uniquely harrowing tale of dangerously close quarters, failing technology, lack of climate and security controls, and staffing shortages to keep pace with identifying, organizing, and researching collections for public use. We could not formulate long-term solutions in one afternoon, but the interactive, multidisciplinary atmosphere catalyzed fresh ideas. These included cultural and educational institutions strengthening goals through mutually beneficial internships and a "best practices boot camp."

The specter of funding such collaborations loomed large. Though we may increase public awareness of the consequences of losing cultural collections, loss itself won't sell an ambitious solution. Instead, we need to find ways to share the stories within our collections, within each object. This work will resonate with our supporters. Working together, we might achieve a critical mass for increased support.

In summary, CARES activities tapped the needs and goals of Montana's cultural stewards. MAM is grateful to be at the nexus of this exciting conversation, and we thank our state-wide colleagues for their trust, camaraderie, and generosity. Looking forward, we will seek to transform our inspirations and aspirations into concept designs for a collection facility that supports safe storage, accessible resources, engaging programming, and professional development opportunities.

Organizations with staff and volunteers participating in CARES programs:

Adventure Cycling, Missoula
Bonner Milltown History Center, Bonner
City of Missoula-Office of Historic Preservation
City of Bozeman-Office of Historic Preservation
C.M. Russell Museum, Great Falls
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes-Tribal Historic Preservation Department, Pablo
Historical Museum at Fort Missoula
Holter Museum of Art, Helena
Humanities Montana
Lewistown Art Center
Missoula County Public Schools
Missoula Art Museum
Missoula Public Library
Montana Historical Society, Helena
Montana State University-Department of History & Philosophy, Bozeman
Museum of the Plains Indian, Browning
The People's Center, Pablo

Travelers Rest State Park, Lolo
Salish Kootenai College-Art Department, Pablo
Salmon Public Library, Salmon, Idaho
University of Montana-Art Department, Missoula
University of Montana-Mansfield Library, Missoula
University of Montana-Montana Museum of Art and Culture, Missoula
Victor School
Virginia City Heritage Commission

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