U.S. AMBASSADORS FUND
for **CULTURAL PRESERVATION**

Project Design Tips

This guide is meant for both U.S. Embassy staff and their prospective AFCP implementers. In this guide, you will find suggestions that will help make your grant applications and, ultimately, your projects stronger. You will also find questions to think about. Giving careful thought to these questions will help you engage more deeply with your partners and stakeholders and arrive at a more impactful project. These are suggestions from specialists at the Cultural Heritage Center on ways projects might be improved. We are ready to provide consultation or to connect you with other U.S. government experts if you would like to discuss project ideas.

You *__do not__* have to read this whole document! There are multiple entries and topics. Choose the ones that relate most to you. There are tips based on the particular goals of your project, as well as general guidelines grouped by types of heritage your project may involve, such as historic buildings or archaeological sites. There are also tips for organizing your project around exchanges and suggestions for monitoring and evaluation. We hope that you find this document useful.

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I. IF YOUR GOALS INCLUDE...

Building Capacity and Transferring Skills

Training individuals, especially community members, in preservation skills can be a good way to increase the impact of a preservation project, but you should:

- Be realistic about the project's long-term economic effects. Will the transfer of skills and capacity building activities be sustained over time? Can the individuals volunteer or work at the site once the project ends? If not, are there other nearby sites where the individuals can apply their expertise?

- Consider the broader context. Are the skills that will be developed in your project transferable to other kinds of activities, for example the building trades? If the economic and other benefits of the project depend on the skills being transferable, build activities into the training elements to help the participants make the transfer happen.

- If the skills are not transferable or usable locally, then consider adding project elements that help the workers save or invest or enroll in other skills building. For example, augment the AFCP project with English Language Programs for the workers.

Engaging Communities

Engaging local community members in your project requires relationship building and mutual trust. Some steps to get started include:

- *Identify community voices.* This step can be time consuming, but it is important for authentic engagement. Beginning with a town-hall type event or an open call to community leaders to join an advisory panel are possible approaches, but some community members may not feel welcome. It is helpful to seek out and include diverse stakeholders with different views.

- *Identify community concerns and goals for the heritage you are preserving.* This step can also be complicated, especially if you have a diverse community with whom you are working. The key here is to get the community to define goals for themselves while your job is to determine what is a feasible scope for a project. It is good practice to hold off on voicing logistical concerns until basic goals are identified.

- *Develop a project plan based on shared short and long-term goals.* As you develop your project, you will likely only be able to address a piece, of your longer term goals. This is where having deep engagement in the community is important because they are invested for the long haul and can carry out activities and provide support for the goals long beyond the life of an individual project. It is also important for posts to provide support towards the

goals in other, perhaps smaller, ways that demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the goals.

- *Leverage traditional knowledge and community solutions, as appropriate.* Some preservation challenges invite traditional solutions whereas others require a modern approach. Many demand a combination of both to ensure authenticity and long-term sustainability. As you develop your project, involve conservation professionals who recognize the value and the place of traditional methods, community solutions, and modern technologies and techniques in addressing recurring preservation problems in durable and minimally invasive ways.

Empowering Women, Indigenous Communities, and Youth

Consider specific empowerment goals within the broader context of the social dynamics and systems that allow inequities to continue.

- Align project goals to address the fundamental reasons for the marginalization of the group you are working with, rather than merely addressing secondary consequences such as a lack of interest in traditional textile making among youth in a community.

- Look for, and partner with, groups or activities outside of the proposed project that are working to accomplish the same goal. Partnering with other groups shows a recognition of and commitment to the goal.

- Ensure that you have a deep and broad coalition of support from within the target group for your project. Leadership from within the target group can be very helpful.

- Regardless of whether empowerment is a goal, consider how your project may reinforce entrenched hierarchies.

- Consider what narrative(s) the preservation work will tell or reinforce. Be specific when considering who or what groups stand to benefit from the project.

Generating Income

Some proposals reflect an assumption that preserving cultural heritage attracts visitors and generates income automatically, but this is not always true.

- If income generation is a goal, assess the wider economic context. For instance, is the building or site in a remote area? Is it accessible? If so, to whom? Considering these aspects can help develop suitable project activities. For example, if the site is remote, consider including virtual tours led by community members that can receive tips via online platforms.

Increasing Resilience

There are two kinds of resilience building. In one, the aim is to make the site, building, or collection less vulnerable to short- and long-term threats such as natural disasters and climate change. In the other, the aim is to use cultural heritage to make communities less vulnerable to such threats or to mitigate risk, such as the risk of conflict.

- If the aim is to make a site, building, or collection more resilient to climate change or natural disasters, consider that you may need to address the social and economic impacts of climate change or disasters on the surrounding community along with potential physical or environmental impacts. For instance, will climate change affect land-use patterns around the site? To determine how to mitigate the social and economic impacts, include community events in the project design where people can learn about the challenges they face and discuss their shared fears, hopes, and options. Consider adding an educational or exchange component that would help communities connect with resources outside of the area.

- If your project is assuming that preserving a site will help make the community more resilient by building civic pride or by easing tensions between groups, then be sure you have a thorough understanding of the different groups in a community and how different groups may view the site or object being preserved. There may not be a shared history. In such cases, how the site is preserved – what elements are emphasized – can send divisive signals. Engage from the outset with the broadest possible set of groups from the community, including marginalized groups.

Promoting and Increasing Tourism

Promoting and increasing tourism are common stated goals of AFCP projects. Some things to consider are:

- Work with a partner who understands site logistics to ensure that increasing tourism will not have negative impacts on the site.

- Understand how increasing tourism will affect the local community, both socially and economically.

- How can heritage be shared without over-exploiting or distorting it and making tourists the sole target audiences and consumers of the heritage?

- Do not assume that preserving heritage will automatically attract visitors. Be sure to understand the wider economic context. Is the poor condition of the heritage the main reason it is not visited? Is the heritage of interest to a wide audience? Is it easily accessible? Once you have considered the wider economic context, you may find that your project will

need additional activities to attract tourists, such as exhibits that speak to wider audiences, or festivals and events that raise awareness. Consider building these activities into the project or follow up activities.

Sustainability

The best AFCP projects have the goal of continuing protection and preservation after the project itself is over. There are many ways to support this kind of sustainability.

- *Sustained community engagement*. Well-designed projects acknowledge the importance of the heritage to the community. If your project involves the preservation of a site, for example, and if you have a say in use planning, consider establishing a community space that will help establish or maintain the community's connection to the site or a community advisory council that can recommend programs there. For intangible heritage projects, consider opportunities for communities to explore or express their cultural practices and share them with new and different audiences.

- *Sustained global interest*. Digital platforms such as websites and social media properties are important not only to promote tourism interest, but also to provide a space where stories around the heritage can develop and be maintained. Periodic publishing or posting of community or visitor experiences creates a dynamic conversation where people can connect with each other.

Telling Stories

Inviting community members to share their experiences and memories around their cultural heritage is an effective way to build engagement around a site, practice, or collection.

- Identifying and inviting community elders and storytellers to share their experiences and memories builds trust and creates opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural learning.

- Consider how the stories will be shared and preserved. Sharing stories online can be a benefit to communities but it also requires relinquishing control over who can access them.

- When creating digital records of stories through videos, podcasts, or images, make every effort to stay focused on amplifying the community's voices. Engage the community on culturally sensitive ways to share content with a broader audience to educate and build awareness.

II. IF YOUR PROJECT INVOLVES…

Archaeological Sites

- Many archaeological sites have layered histories including use by different ethnic and other groups over time. If a site is being reconstructed and interpreted, be aware of the time period(s) chosen for reconstruction and interpretation. Consider the reasons for those choices and how the project can tell different versions of history, incorporate different perspectives, and address contested histories and uses.

- Include a damage assessment in your proposal if the site has a history of unauthorized excavations, looting, or was previously preserved using inappropriate materials (e.g., concrete) or methods that have led to damage of the site.

- Use best practices for site stabilization and reconstruction, such as installing architectural markers and noting where reconstruction has taken place.

- Incorporate training and other capacity building activities for local workers and volunteers who can later apply their acquired knowledge and skills on other projects and sites.

- Include a sustainability and security plan. A high volume of visitors to a site can exacerbate erosion and other forms of damage. How can directional signs, guides, and periodic changes in visitor routes through the site help minimize visitor impacts? Has the site experienced any looting or pillage? What steps will be taken to address damage and ensure the site's integrity?

- AFCP grants have been used to inventory and document archaeological sites. Inventories help document the location of sites, map their features, and monitor their conditions. Site inventories are important for monitoring sites and documenting looting and pillage.

- Volunteer programs are great ways to engage local communities in site protection and preservation. Two U.S. examples of volunteer programs are the National Park Service's Volunteer in Parks program and the U.S. Forest Service's Passport in Time.

Forms of Traditional Cultural Expression

Ceremonies, Crafts, Dance, Drama, Languages, Music, and Traditional Knowledge

Community will and interest should be the drivers behind a project. Consider the following issues to improve the design of your project and ensure that community partners are directly involved in project planning, execution, and post-project activities.

- Clearly articulate the community's goals for the project and how those goals will be met.

- Work with community members to identify aspects of their cultural heritage that are sensitive or require special consideration (e.g., some Native American stories are only told at certain times of the year and sharing them at other times is inappropriate).

- If a project involves a documentary film, broadcast, or other recording, give the community the lead in shaping and producing the story. Involve young people and use the project to promote intergenerational learning and the transfer of media and other skills.

- Some outside partners (such as Google Arts and Culture) may be available to assist with the production and distribution of digital media.

- Manage expectations! Documentation alone is not likely to keep a language, musical tradition, or craft alive or make it a viable source of income. If keeping the heritage alive is your goal, then it is vital that you have a thorough and realistic understanding of why the heritage is at risk. What are the factors putting it at risk – economic, social, political, environmental? Once you have identified the factors, be sure your project activities address them. For instance, if youth are not interested in learning the musical tradition, could an influential artist they follow be involved in preserving the musical tradition? Alternatively, make sure that any other, complementary projects address the identified factors and indicate how activities will be coordinated across projects.

Historic Buildings and Sites

- The best projects involving the preservation of historic buildings and sites follow standards developed by professional groups such as the [International Council on Monuments and Sites](#) (ICOMOS) and the [International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property](#) (ICCROM). These standards are especially important when working at UNESCO World Heritage sites. These and similar groups also offer free publications, guides, and other materials that can help you design a strong project.

- Projects to preserve historic buildings and sites vary widely in cost, complexity, and duration. Some may involve simple repairs under $20,000; others may involve several discrete activities and multiple structures requiring myriad technical experts, millions of dollars, and several years to complete. Regardless of size, all properly-conceived and well-managed building and site preservation projects follow the same general sequence of steps: document existing conditions, assess and prioritize preservation needs, develop a preservation plan (including all prioritized treatments), implement treatments (according to the plan but mindful that the plan might require revision due to unforeseen discoveries or developments), maintain the site. Knowing the steps can help you determine an appropriate scope and scale for your project that take into account your resource constraints and capacity to manage the work.

- In some cases, such as simple repairs to a single building, you may be able to incorporate most or all the steps into a single project. In others, you might have to limit your project to one or two steps, such as documentation or the implementation of one or more treatments (roof replacement, for example). If the latter, determine which step(s) best align with your goals.

- Building and site preservation projects may warrant or require stakeholder identification and engagement early in the process, especially if the maintenance and sustainability of a site as a museum or other facility providing a public good depend on community support. See "Engaging Communities" above for some tips on how to involve stakeholders in your project.

Inventories

Inventories help increase the accessibility of collections and their use in cultural exchanges. Museums and other institutions applying for support to make or update inventories of their collections may have multiple goals, such as documenting their collections, assessing the condition of their holdings, expanding access to their collections, and making it easier for them to request international loans of objects from other institutions.

- Inventories come in several forms, from paper registries to digital records. Digital inventories are typically the most versatile, useful, and accessible.

- The best museum inventory projects follow standards, preferably Object ID, the international documentation standard created by the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

- Consider how your project will connect with work in other museums, both public and private. Identify potential international people-to-people exchanges with an eye to creating partnerships or sister-museum programs that can endure beyond the project period.

- Is there a need for capacity building? Consider whether staff trained to inventory one museum's collection can be hired to inventory other local or regional museums.

- Can the inventory occur in conjunction with community events? Work in the collection can open opportunities to engage ethnic or indigenous communities and connect (or reconnect) them with objects that are special or relevant to them. They can add information, interpret objects, or tell museums if they need special care in accordance with traditional ceremonial practices.

Objects and Collections

Archaeological and Ethnographic Objects, Books and Manuscripts, Paintings and Sculpture, Photographs and Film

- The best projects involving the conservation and management of museum objects and collections follow standards developed by professional groups such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC), and the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI). These and similar groups also offer free publications, guides, and other materials that can help you design a strong project.

- Digitization projects alone are not conservation! The scanning or digitization of manuscripts, photographs, or other collections serve the important purpose of increasing access to the objects while minimizing human handling of them. However, digitization projects should be one part of a larger program of physical or preventive conservation for collections. Keep in mind, too, that digitization projects result in digital images, databases, and websites that require on-going preservation and maintenance.

- Storage conditions for objects after they are conserved should be stable and, to the extent possible, up to international standards. This means, among other things, that climate and pest controls and fire suppression mechanisms are in place and that the collection is secured. You do not want your hard work of conserving a collection to be undone by a storage environment that will negatively affect your objects.

- The physical conservation of objects, paintings, photographs, and film is important, but awareness of the activity can be limited to a small number of experts and curators, particularly if the items are not part of an active exhibit. Increase the impact of projects like these by including additional elements such as:

  - Consider creating documentaries or short videos of the conservation process itself (these could be student-led).
  - Consider configuring public space to accommodate and showcase conservation work as it proceeds.
  - Ensure conserved items are exhibited.
  - Consider creating joint exhibitions with American Spaces or U.S. institutions.
  - Showcase preserved or digitized films with film festivals.
  - Organize lectures about the creators of the objects, paintings, photographs, or films.
  - Involve source communities (if known) in the conservation process.

Small and Rural Museums

Supporting projects at small and rural museums is an attractive way to engage with communities that have few opportunities to interact with Americans. Projects at small and rural museums might involve the rehabilitation of an existing museum building or storage space, the installation of display cases, the restoration of a historic building for eventual use as a museum, the creation or modernization of a museum inventory, or the publication of a museum catalogue.

- When supporting such projects it is important to think through how the museum will sustain itself. The maintenance of the building and the proper storage and conservation of the objects and collections are incredibly important, but the museum managers should also be planning outreach and programming to engage the local community and tourists.

- Consider the museum's current and potential audience and visitor base. Is the audience mainly local? Does the museum have the potential to attract international visitors? If the current visitor base is too small to support the museum, consider ways to broaden its appeal and base. For instance, can the museum be used as a community space, resource room, library, or school? Can you add program activities, either funded by the project or other U.S. programs to attract visitors, such as performances, English language programs, exhibits, and talks?

III. EXCHANGES

Nearly all AFCP projects can benefit from an exchange component of some kind. An exchange of perspectives, best practices, and learning between U.S. and local cultural heritage professionals and stakeholder communities can increase the public diplomacy impact of the actual preservation work. Below are some ideas for exchange activities you might consider adding to your project. They can be virtual or in-person once COVID-related travel restrictions are eased.

- Support studies, research, or instruction for foreign nationals associated in a U.S. educational institution located in or outside the U.S. (for example, archaeological field schools);

- Support visits and interchanges between American and foreign students, trainees, teachers, instructors, professors, leaders, or experts in fields of specialized knowledge or skill;

- Support programs involving influential diaspora artists from the U.S.

- Support participation by groups and individuals from other countries in educational, scientific, and technical meetings held under U.S. auspices in or outside the U.S.

In addition to the above activities, you might consider some of the following. Some of these might be good ways of producing some of your desired results. For example, a conservation plan for a collection or site could be a result of a training exchange or exchange of experts. Digitization of a site, monument, or collection could similarly be the result of a training exchange.

- Support interchange of educational and research materials, including laboratory and technical equipment for education and research;

- Support establishing and operating in the U.S. and abroad centers for cultural and technical interchanges to promote better relations through cooperative study, training, and research;

- Support, scientific, cultural, and educational research and development;

- Support the establishment, expansion, maintenance, and operation of schools and institutions of learning abroad, founded, operated, or sponsored by citizens or nonprofit institutions of the U.S., including such schools and institutions serving as demonstration centers for cultural heritage preservation methods and practices employed in the U.S.

- Support independent research into the problems of educational and cultural exchange; for instance – challenges preventing exchanges of exhibits between U.S. and foreign museums.

IV. MONITORING & EVALUATION

AFCP projects have specific monitoring and reporting requirements, such as periodic progress and financial reports. This year, AFCP will also ask implementers to complete an online survey about their project and experience with the AFCP program. In cases where the proposed public diplomacy or other expected impacts may not be fully realized at the immediate conclusion of the project, AFCP may request continued voluntary reporting on specific topics to evaluate a project's impact.

Project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are most effective when woven into the project cycle and adjusted as necessary. Good M&E enables everyone to determine whether a project met its stated goals.

Consider the following list of questions and indicators when thinking about M&E and the specific goals of your project. This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, it is indicative of the kinds of questions and indicators that embassies and project implementers can develop jointly in consultation with AFCP.

1. Building Capacity and Transferring Skills
   o Identify and establish baseline measures of skill level and number of skilled workers to measure progress against.
   o What skills were being developed/transferred? How?
   o How many more skilled workers are there at the end of the project? What is proficiency level of those workers?
   o Are there additional employment opportunities to use those skills?

2. Engaging Communities
   o How many meetings were held to discuss and identify shared goals?
   o What are the demographics of the community members participating in engagements?
   o Solicit feedback from community members about how they thought the meeting went and measure changes in perception over time.

3. Empowering Women, Indigenous Communities, and Youth
   o Do community members understand that empowerment is an explicit goal of the project?
   o Identify and establish baseline measures of disenfranchisement to measure progress against, e.g. number of women attending/speaking-up at local community meetings.
   o How many women, indigenous people, or youth are attending or speaking-up at local community meetings at the end of the project?
   o Are there more women, indigenous people, or youth in positions of authority at the end of the project than at the start?

4. Generating Income
   o Identify and establish baseline measures of the local economy to measure progress against, e.g. number of job sectors, number of people working (full-time and part-time), demographics of wage earners, and average salary.
   o Are dark economies emerging or becoming more prominent to reap the windfall of new income?

5. Increasing Resilience
   o Are workers happy? Do they find their work "dignified"?
   o Identify and establish baseline measures of the damage wrought by the last climate disaster.
   o Are climate change mitigating strategies being followed after the intervention?
   o Did the community respond or recover differently to subsequent climate events?
   o If measuring pride, consider metrics such as, number of cultural events following the project and the number and demographics of people attending those events.
   o If measuring social cohesion, consider metrics such as, demographics of powerful institutions, demographics of social events, changes against measures of the problem before the project, such as overt examples of discrimination.

6. Promoting and Increasing Tourism
   o Identify and establish baseline measures of the number of tourists visiting a place before the project, how long they stayed, and how much money on average they spent per capita.

7. Sustainability
   o Measure job retention, salary, demographics, etc. after the project.
   o Are there more women, indigenous people, or youth in positions of authority or participating in regular community meetings?

8. Telling Stories
   o Identify and establish baseline measures of the number of public storytelling events, who were the storytellers, how many people attended these events, how many were recorded, etc.
   o Quantify dissemination of the stories, e.g. are there ways community members can access recordings of the stories, how many people consumed the stories digitally.