



# Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative

REQUEST FOR CONCEPT PAPERS

2023

**L**illy Endowment is pleased to invite eligible museums and cultural organizations in the United States to submit concept papers that describe potential plans to mount exhibitions and conduct educational programs and/or engage in other activities to provide fair, accurate and balanced portrayals of the role religion has played and continues to play in the United States and around the world.

Through this open and competitive third round of its *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative*, the Endowment anticipates awarding **a total of up to \$78 million** through planning and implementation grants to select museums and cultural organizations to support projects that demonstrate significant promise to strengthen their organizations' capacities to incorporate religion more fully into their interpretive activities and public programs.

The Endowment will award by early 2024 **planning grants of up to \$100,000 each** to approximately 30 museums and cultural organizations that submit the most compelling concept papers. These planning grants, which may be used for up to one year, are intended to assist organizations in developing their concepts and preparing proposals for **implementation grants of up to \$2.5 million each** that may be used for up to a five-year period to execute their plans. The implementation proposals from invited museums are due in August 2024.

Eligible organizations may submit **concept papers** through the Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative online application form, which is on the Endowment's website, **by 12 noon (PDT) on Monday, October 30, 2023**.

The primary aim of *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative* is to improve the public understanding of religion and thus foster greater knowledge of and respect for diverse religious traditions.

A fuller discussion of the rationale of the initiative and application procedures is below.

## The Opportunity to Improve the Public Understanding of Religion

Many commentators have remarked that the United States is one of the most religious nations in the world. Although this bold statement may be debated, it accurately recognizes the crucial role religion plays in shaping the lives of individuals and families and in influencing public life. Grounded in foundational commitments to religious freedom and the separation of church and state, the United States has fostered conditions needed for diverse religious communities to flourish. One result is that religion touches nearly every aspect of American life. Although practiced in local faith communities and private homes, religious faith has often informed public debates and shaped civic life as well as inspired many of the social and political movements that have defined the nation.

The United States also is widely considered to be one of the most religiously diverse nations today. Major changes in U.S. immigration policies in the 1960s opened immigration to new populations of individuals and families from around the world, especially Asia, Africa and Latin America, who brought their religious beliefs and practices with them. These populations have grown significantly, and most U.S. cities and towns are now considerably more religiously diverse than ever before. Their landscapes are marked not only by churches and synagogues, but also by mosques, temples, gurdwaras and other religious gathering spaces. Increasing religious diversity is reshaping other aspects of cultural life, ranging from religious practices that influence the food individuals consume to legal codes that guide civic life, from clothing and fashion preferences that reflect diverse religious traditions and cultures to the production of fine arts that draw on various religious themes to portray individuals' and faith communities' deepest hopes and fears.

Although the United States is becoming even more religiously diverse, knowledge about the history, beliefs and practices of diverse religious communities has often not kept pace with this growth. This lack of understanding can lead too easily to the mischaracterization of the motives and practices of religious groups and generate suspicions that divide communities and hamper their ability to flourish. Thus, efforts to improve the public understanding of religion are critical today.

Through the *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative*, the Endowment seeks to support projects that inform individuals and families about the diverse religious beliefs and practices of their neighbors and people in communities around the world. Through these efforts, the Endowment also seeks to foster a better understanding about the religious dimensions of historic and contemporary events, as well as how religion continues to influence culture and society.

The Endowment is especially interested in supporting portrayals of religious life that would be:

- **Fair, accurate and balanced:** These portrayals would include how religious faith has served as a source of wisdom and inspiration that enhances the lives of individuals and unites communities as well as how it has been used as an exclusionary force that divides individuals, communities and wider societies.
- **Non-proselytizing and multivocal:** These portrayals would present the beliefs and practices of religious communities in ways that are non-proselytizing and recognize the multivocal character of religious traditions as well as the religiously plural context of American and global societies.
- **Authentic:** These portrayals would exhibit the convictions of religious communities in ways that ring true to their own experiences and, when appropriate, enable religious communities to tell their own stories.

- **Appreciative:** These portrayals would show appreciation for religion and approach religious traditions and topics with respect and, while being fair and balanced, do not seek to promote sensationalistic or cynical portraits of the religious beliefs, rituals and practices of individuals, families and religious communities.

By providing fair, accurate and balanced portrayals about the beliefs and practices of religious individuals and communities, the Endowment believes that these projects will help to counter simplistic and self-serving interpretations of religious life that often mislead the public, breed fear and suspicion among diverse groups and advance narrow agendas. By improving the public understanding of religion, the Endowment hopes these projects will foster greater respect among people of diverse religious traditions, help to preserve religious freedom for all religious communities, and serve to enhance the lives of individuals, families, communities and the wider society.

## Building on Previous Endowment-supported Projects

During the last several years, the Endowment has awarded grants to 41 museums and cultural organizations located across the United States to design and implement projects to incorporate religion more fully into their interpretive activities. (See Appendix I for a list of Endowment-funded organizations.) Most of these grants were awarded through two invitational rounds of the *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative*. The grants are based on the recognition that museums and cultural organizations are highly trusted public institutions and play increasingly important roles in informing visitors about the world around them.

When the organizations received the Endowment's invitation to submit a proposal, many acknowledged that they had been reluctant or cautious about mounting exhibitions featuring religion. Yet most responded positively and enthusiastically. In their responses, many noted that they had been watching the growing religious diversity of their communities and recognized the importance of attending more closely to the influences of religious beliefs and practices on their audiences and constituencies. Many museum directors remarked that they found a new openness among their supporters and visitors, as well as their staffs, to pay greater attention to religion and were eager to explore ways to incorporate religion into their exhibitions and educational programs. As they considered the invitation, they rediscovered the breadth and depth of religious artifacts and objects already present in their collections and began exploring how they could present religious practices, traditions and themes in ways that aligned with their educational missions.

During these initial rounds of the *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative*, the Endowment invited select museums and cultural organizations to request grants to support projects that advanced the initiative's aim through a two-phase process. In the first phase, organizations received planning grants of up to \$100,000 each to explore approaches to religion that aligned with the organization's mission, design projects on religion and religious topics and prepare implementation grant proposals. In the second phase, organizations submitted proposals for implementation grants in amounts ranging from \$500,000 up to \$2.5 million to execute projects that presented fair, accurate and balanced portrayals of religion and religious topics.

*Through this new open and competitive round of the initiative, the Endowment intends to invite organizations that submit the most compelling concept papers to engage in a similar planning and project development process.*

The 41 museums and cultural organizations that have received Endowment grants related to the initiative have used a wide range of methods and taken a variety of approaches to mount exhibitions and conduct educational programs that present religion in ways that are fair, accurate, balanced, non-proselytizing, authentic and appreciative. These approaches include designing and implementing projects that engage religion in the following ways:

- Exploring the beliefs, practices and artistic expressions of particular religious traditions.
- Showing and interpreting the diversity of religious life in geographic regions.
- Portraying religious life in specific historical periods.
- Exploring religious topics, themes or practices.
- Creating exhibitions and educational programs that foster dialogue and understanding among visitors from different religious traditions.

Collectively, the organizations have launched promising projects to display and interpret the rich tapestry of religious life in the United States and around the world. (See Appendix II for examples of Endowment-funded projects.)

The Endowment believes that many more museums and cultural organizations are primed and ready to undertake similar efforts. This new open and competitive round of the *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative* is intended to support additional eligible organizations in designing and implementing projects with similar approaches to those listed above to expand the number and reach of these important efforts.

## Eligibility and Concept Paper Considerations

Museums and cultural organizations in the United States with Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3) and public charity status are eligible to apply for grants under this initiative.

The Endowment seeks to support organizations that demonstrate a readiness and commitment to mount exhibitions and conduct educational programs on religion, as well as engage in other capacity-building activities, that portray the role religion has played and continues to play in the United States and around the world. The Endowment is especially interested in funding the planning, development and implementation of projects on diverse religious traditions, beliefs and practices that are: 1) fair, accurate and balanced; 2) non-proselytizing and multivocal; 3) authentic; and 4) appreciative. Furthermore, the Endowment encourages organizations to submit concept papers that are aligned with their institutional and educational missions and appropriate for their visitors and constituencies.

Organizations are encouraged to submit concept papers for a wide variety of approaches to religion and religious topics. These concepts may be for projects that would require implementation grants from the Endowment of up to \$2.5 million to develop and execute. Please note that organizations may submit concept papers for larger projects that, in addition to the implementation grant from the Endowment, would require funding from other sources. In their implementation proposals, organizations will be required to identify the sources of these other funds. Note also that there is no minimum amount for implementation grants. Organizations may submit concept papers for smaller projects that are appropriate for their organizational capacities and would require smaller implementation grants to execute.

Concept papers will be evaluated on the quality and promise of the proposed projects, not on the projected amount of the implementation grant. Thus, the estimated size of an implementation grant needed to develop and execute the organization's proposed concept does not advantage or disadvantage its opportunity for receiving a grant. Organizations should propose concepts for projects that they have the capacity to execute and, if relevant, sustain beyond the implementation grant period.

Based on previous grant awards, the Endowment anticipates that many museums and cultural organizations may wish to propose concepts for projects that may focus on one or more of the following activities:

- Enhancing existing exhibitions and educational programs.
- Designing and mounting temporary (and/or traveling) exhibitions and accompanying programs.
- Designing and mounting permanent exhibitions and accompanying programs.
- Acquiring new religious objects for its collections and/or making more accessible religious objects already in its collections.
- Creating and/or updating religious storylines in its interpretative plan.
- Creating new and/or enhancing current staff positions with expertise in religion, such as curators, education or outreach specialists or fellowships.
- Training staff, docents and/or volunteers about religious traditions, beliefs and practices featured in the organization's exhibitions and programs.
- Strengthening outreach and/or relationships with local religious communities, religious leaders and religious scholars.

- Supporting capital improvements to enhance physical structures to present and interpret religion and religious topics.

This list is for illustrative purposes only. Organizations may present concepts for projects that use in-person and/or digital formats and that include additional activities not listed above.

## Application Procedures and Selection Criteria

Eligible museums and cultural organizations may submit concept papers that state their interest in participating in the *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative* and describe their strategies to incorporate religion more intentionally into their interpretive and educational activities. At this stage, it is not necessary to have certainty on every detail of a concept. Organizations should, however, articulate a clear rationale for their interest in the initiative and, based on this rationale, provide initial sketches of their strategies and proposed activities. In addition, the concept papers should include an estimate of the size of implementation grant that the organization would request to execute its concept. Concept papers also should include a description of activities that would help the organization to develop its concept more fully.

**The Endowment must receive concept papers by 12:00 noon (PDT) on Monday, October 30, 2023.** Instructions for submitting concept papers are below.

Selection criteria for concept papers will include the following considerations:

- The creativity of the proposed concept and its promise for advancing the initiative’s primary aim.
- The compelling nature of the organization’s rationale for developing and implementing the concept.
- The thoughtfulness of the organization’s approach to religion and the extent to which the proposed concept demonstrates the characteristics noted above.
- The potential reach of the concept and the extent of its likely impact(s) on the organization’s visitors and constituencies.
- The feasibility of developing the concept into a high-quality project.
- The commitment and capacity of the organization to execute a distinctive project, and, if relevant, sustain it into the future.

In addition, the Endowment will consider in the selection process the extent to which the organization intends to use new and imaginative interpretive approaches for creating or enhancing exhibitions and programs about religion. The Endowment also will consider the extent to which the organization will engage religious leaders, religious communities, scholars of religion and knowledgeable advisors in developing and implementing its concept and in achieving the concept’s intended outcomes.

After reviewing the submissions, the Endowment anticipates awarding **planning grants of up to \$100,000 each to approximately 30 organizations** that submit the most compelling concepts to assist them in developing their concepts and preparing implementation grant proposals. When notified, the invited organizations will be asked to send the Endowment budgets for their planning grants indicating how they intend to expend their planning funds. Please note that the organization’s concept paper should describe the planning activities that would be funded by the planning grant to develop the organization’s concept. The Endowment anticipates announcing planning grant awards by early 2024.

Organizations that receive planning grants may submit proposals for **implementation grants up to \$2.5 million each** to execute their project. The Endowment intends to award implementation grants to organizations that submit complete proposals that demonstrate their capacities to execute high-quality projects that advance the initiative's aim. Although the Endowment hopes that all invited organizations submit compelling implementation proposals and receive funding, the awarding of implementation grants to invited organizations is not guaranteed and is at the complete discretion of the Endowment. **Implementation grant proposals are due Friday, August 5, 2024.** The Endowment anticipates announcing implementation grant awards in December 2024. Implementation proposal guidelines are available [here](#), as well as on the *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative* page on the [Endowment's website](#).

## Guidelines for Concept Papers

Complete concept papers must include the following components:

**Official Request Letter:** The concept paper must be accompanied by an official request letter signed by the organization's chief executive officer. This letter should be no more than one page in length.

**Summary Statement:** This brief summary should describe the organization's concept and what the organization hopes to accomplish if the concept is implemented. This statement should be no more than one page.

**Concept Paper Narrative:** This narrative must be **no more than five pages in length and should be written in 11-point font, single spaced with 1-inch margins**. In the narrative, organizations should do the following:

- **Organization profile:** Provide a brief description of the organization's mission, history, size of its collections, major programs, and annual operating budget. Include information about the organization's primary constituencies and number of annual visitors. The profile also should include information about the organization's accreditations from associations and agencies, where applicable.
- **Organizational appropriateness:** Explain the organization's rationale for strengthening its capacities to incorporate religion more fully into its interpretive activities and educational programs. What does the organization hope to accomplish?
- **Approach to religion:** Describe the organization's approach to religion and how it reflects the characteristics noted above (e.g., accurate, fair and balanced, non-proselytizing and multivocal, authentic and appreciative). Why is this approach appropriate to the organization's mission and constituencies?
- **Strategy:** Describe the organization's strategy for incorporating religion into its exhibitions and programs and which major religious traditions, ideas, themes and questions might be explored through the proposed concept. What are key elements of the organization's strategy? What activities would the organization undertake to implement the strategy? Why these activities?
- **Funding level:** Provide the estimated costs to develop and implement the proposed concept and indicate the level of funding the organization would seek from the Endowment. Why is this level of funding appropriate? (Please note that the Endowment understands that these costs are preliminary estimates and may increase or decrease during the planning period.) What, if any, other funders does the organization expect to support the proposed concept's implementation and what are estimates of the amounts of any such support?
- **Advisors:** List who might serve as advisors for the project. Please include scholars, educators and curators, as well as local, regional and/or national religious leaders and communities.
- **Concept Development:** Describe activities the organization intends to undertake to develop its concept more fully. Activities may include conducting research, visiting other museums and cultural organizations, convening key stakeholders, engaging religious scholars, religious and community leaders or other consultants, etc.

**Letters of Support (optional):** Organizations may include up to three (3) brief letters of support from community partners and/or potential collaborators. These letters should note the anticipated role of potential collaborators in the implementation of the proposed concepts and their intention and capacity to undertake



this role. Note: If an organization is invited to submit a full proposal in the second stage of this initiative, updated letters of support/endorsement will be required.

**Copy of Organization's Audited Annual Financial Statements:** A copy of the organization's most recently completed annual audited financial statements (reviewed by a certified public accounting firm) should be submitted. The financial statements should include a balance sheet, income and expense statement, and any footnotes or supporting schedules that provide an accurate assessment of the financial condition of the organization.

**Exempt Status and Charity/Foundation Status Information Form:** This form is used to verify the organization's tax status as a qualified recipient of grants from private foundations such as Lilly Endowment. Please check a box in Section 3 of the form to reflect the organization's status. The organization's status may be located on an Internal Revenue Service exempt status determination letter, as indicated in Section 2 of the form and as described below. Access the form [here](#) or in the resources section at the bottom of the [online application page](#) for this initiative.

**Copy of Internal Revenue Service Exempt Status Determination Letter:** Most public charities that are qualified recipients for grants from private foundations will have received a tax-exempt status determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This letter provides verification of the organization's status as a 501(c)(3) organization and indicates the part of the tax code under which the organization's public charity status has been established. No grants will be awarded until the proper tax status is confirmed.

## Concept Paper Submission Instructions

**Complete concept papers must be submitted by 12:00 noon (PDT) on Monday, October 30, 2023**, through the *Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative* [online application form](#) on the Endowment's website. Concept papers and supporting documents must be uploaded as a **single PDF file in the order listed below** (a description of each item can be found on pages 8 and 9):

- Official Request Letter
- Summary Statement
- Concept Paper Narrative
- Letters of Support (optional)
- Copy of Organization's Audited Annual Financial Statements
- Exempt Status and Charity/Foundation Status Information Form
- Copy of IRS Exempt Status Determination Letter

**Information Sessions:** The Endowment will host two virtual information sessions to discuss the initiative's application guidelines for submission of concept papers. Organizations wishing to attend one of these sessions (dates and times listed below) must register via the [Endowment's website](#).

- Tuesday, August 29, 2023, at 2 p.m. (EDT)
- Wednesday, September 6, 2023, at 2 p.m. (EDT)

Please email any questions about this initiative to [religionandmuseums@lei.org](mailto:religionandmuseums@lei.org).

## Appendix I

### List of Museums and Cultural Organizations

The following museums and cultural organizations have received grants from Lilly Endowment to mount exhibitions and conduct educational programs and/or engage in other activities to provide fair, accurate and balanced portrayals of the role religion has played and continues to play in the United States and around the world. Please visit Lilly Endowment's website for details about their efforts.

- Angel Mounds State Historic Site, Evansville, IN (Indiana State Museum Foundation)
- Boston Children's Museum, Boston, MA
- Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL
- Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN
- Children's Museum Houston, Houston, TX
- Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, VA (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)
- Conner Prairie Museum, Fishers, IN
- Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI
- Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis, IN
- Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, IL
- Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA
- George Washington's Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon, VA (Mount Vernon Ladies Association)
- Heard Museum, Phoenix, AZ
- Historic New Harmony, New Harmony, IN (University of Southern Indiana)
- International African American Museum, Charleston, SC
- Jamestown Settlement and American History Museum of Yorktown, Jamestown and Yorktown, VA (Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, Inc.)
- The King Center, Atlanta, GA (Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Change, Inc.)
- Library of Congress, Washington, DC
- Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN (Indiana University Foundation)
- MFA Boston, Boston, MA (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)
- Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston, TX
- National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, PA
- National Museum of African American Music, Nashville, TN
- National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago, IL
- National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, OH
- National WWI Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, MO

- National World War II Memorial, Washington, DC (Friends of the National World War II Memorial)
- National World War II Museum, New Orleans, LA
- Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO
- Plimoth Patuxet Museums, Plymouth, MA
- Raclin Murphy Museum of Art at Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN (University of Notre Dame)
- Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, Harrodsburg, KY
- Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Washington, DC
- Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC
- Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC
- Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington, DC
- Smithsonian National Museum of the American Latino, Washington, DC
- Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, DC
- The Two Museums (Museum of Mississippi History and Mississippi Civil Rights Museum), Jackson, MS (Foundation of Mississippi History)
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC
- Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia, PA

## Appendix II

### Examples of Lilly Endowment-funded Projects in the Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative

The Endowment-supported projects at museums and cultural organizations have used a wide range of methods and taken a variety of approaches to mount exhibitions and educational programs that present religion in ways that are fair, accurate and balanced, non-proselytizing and multivocal, authentic and appreciative.

Several museums and cultural organizations have used their grants for exhibitions and educational programs that explore the beliefs, practices and artistic expressions of particular religious traditions. The **Heard Museum in Phoenix, AZ** created *Substance of Stars*, an exhibition that explores the origin stories of four North American indigenous tribes—the Seneca in the Northeast, the Yup'ik in the Arctic, the Akimel O'odham and the Navajo in the Southwest—in an immersive and educational presentation that seeks to educate visitors and the online public about the diversity and beauty of indigenous religion and spiritual practices. The **MFA Boston in Boston, MA** established an endowment for a new Assistant Curator of Islamic Art to work in collaboration with Islamic communities in the greater Boston area and beyond to create exhibitions, publications and public programs that will illuminate the importance of religion within the richness and diversity of Islamic cultures. The **Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC** received a grant to endow a curator position in African American religion and establish its Center for the Study of African American Religious Life to portray fully and accurately the role of religion in African American life.

Other organizations are focusing on interpreting the diversity of religious life in geographic regions. The **Chicago History Museum in Chicago, IL** established an endowment for a curator of Religious Community History and an endowment for a new fellowship program for early career curators in religious history collections. Through exhibitions, public programs, digital platforms and publications, the new curator provides the public with ongoing accurate and authentic illustrations of the central role of religion in shaping Chicago history and culture. The **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in Houston, TX** is developing a comprehensive religion program to provide in-depth artistic and interpretive materials about major world religions and has hired a consulting curator for its Judaica Gallery who will develop exhibitions and programs in collaboration with Houston's local Jewish community. The **Fowler Museum at UCLA in Los Angeles, CA** initiated the Engaging Lived Religion in the 21st Century program, which aims to expand the museum's ability to mount thoughtful exhibitions on religion that explore the way it shows up in everyday life in greater Los Angeles and that acknowledge the diversity within religious traditions. These efforts include an exhibition on Jain embroidered shrine hangings from Western India and on Jain religious practices and recent programs on Black and Latino Muslims in Los Angeles.

Some organizations, including living history museums, are teaching about religious life in specific historical periods. **Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Williamsburg, VA** is reconstructing the original First Baptist Church, the first church in Williamsburg established by enslaved and free Black Americans. In addition, Colonial Williamsburg will create a history interpretation program at the church site and establish an endowment to support actor interpreters for religion programs. The **Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History in Washington, DC** received a grant to endow a curator position in American religion and establish a new gallery to depict the role of religion in American life.

Other museums are mounting exhibitions and programs that explore religious topics, themes or practices. The **Children's Museum of Indianapolis in Indianapolis, IN** will mount an immersive family exhibition called *Sacred Places* that will showcase some of the world's most sacred spaces to help visitors learn about and

develop respect for diverse religious traditions. The **Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, IL** developed an exhibition, "Death: Life's Greatest Mystery," that explores universal experiences of mortality alongside distinctive ways that religious beliefs and practices help communities respond to death. The **National Museum of African American Music in Nashville, TN** will mount an exhibition about the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a group of Black performers from Nashville's Fisk University that broke racial barriers in the late 1800s by increasing awareness of African American spirituals across the United States and around the world.

Some organizations are creating exhibitions and educational programming on religion that seek to foster dialogue and understanding. The **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC** established an endowment for the director for the Program on Ethics, Religion and the Holocaust and helped expand programming in religion. Efforts will include helping clergy and other religious leaders examine the relationship between the Holocaust and Christian traditions. The **Children's Museum Houston in Houston, TX** will mount an exhibition to encourage children and families to build tolerance, respect and love for those who have religious beliefs and traditions different from their own. **Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, PA** will renovate its core exhibition space to expand public understanding of Judaism and promote a greater respect for people of diverse religious backgrounds by incorporating religious objects, images and texts from different Jewish traditions.