

2007 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 07-S-56MDAFRICANAMERICAN

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State

Maryland

Assign Program Category

Human Resources/Education

1. Program Name

An African-American Journey: A Guide to Learning African-American History in Maryland and the Nation

2. Administering Agency

Maryland State Department of Education

3. Contact Person (Name and Title)

Tracy El Fiki, Liaison to the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture

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9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

An African American Journey is a series of 43 lessons for students in grades 4–8 focused on the African-American experience and how it shaped the history, economy, and culture of Maryland and the nation. The curriculum—containing lessons that may be integrated into art, music, literature, history, geography, and economics—is tied to the exhibits of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African-American History and Culture, where students use the interactive learning centers and exhibits to extend their school-based activities.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on April 2, 2007, to be considered.

In October 2004, *An African American Journey* began a year-long pilot in Maryland schools. The final curriculum was distributed to schools in October 2005.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

African-American students comprise 38 percent of Maryland’s public school enrollment. Unfortunately, academic performance among African-American students has long lagged behind that of their White and Asian classmates.

In 2004—the year the curriculum was piloted—just 53 percent of African-American 5th graders met Maryland’s reading standard. Not even one-quarter of African-American 8th graders met the math standard. The 77-percent graduation rate among African-American students trailed that of their White classmates by more than 11 percentage points.

Maryland had already instituted a number of initiatives—as well as a landmark funding program—to close this seemingly intractable achievement gap. However, a survey conducted in 2000 found that fewer than one in five Maryland school districts explicitly addressed African-American history and culture in their curricula.

The architects of *An African American Journey* believed that a curriculum dedicated to African-American history and culture—one that would help students reflect on their own experiences and appreciate the experiences of others—would ultimately connect students with course content and in a new and powerful way. Of course, the curriculum isn’t intended solely for African-American students. It ensures that every Maryland public school student will understand how the African-American experience shaped our past and appreciate its implications for our future.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.
2000

George Russell, Esq., chair of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, approaches State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick to discuss how the museum—still 2½ years away from its groundbreaking—could partner with the Maryland State Department of Education to make the museum and its themes an important and engaging part of students’ lives,

maximize their learning opportunities, and ultimately bolster their achievement.

- October 2000** State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick appoints an Education Task Force, chaired by Dr. Charles Christian (then Professor of Geography at the University of Maryland) to define the educational component of the museum and begin drafting a corresponding curriculum. The task force consists of teachers, curriculum specialists, and experts in African-American history, culture, and art.
- October 2000** The Education Task Force surveys Maryland school systems regarding the inclusion of African-American content in their curricula. The survey indicates that only five of Maryland's 24 school systems explicitly incorporate African-American themes into their instruction.
- February 2003** The lessons under development are sent for review and revision to an expert panel of college faculty specializing in U.S. History and African-American Studies. They're also sent to a "talent pool" of former Maryland Teachers of the Year for an evaluation of teachability and practicality.
- December 2003** *An African American Journey*—43 elementary and middle school lessons exploring African Americans' role in and contributions to Maryland's history, culture, and economy—is unveiled at the Maryland State Department of Education.
- June–Aug 2004** Nearly 125 Maryland teachers selected to pilot *An African American Journey* gather in Baltimore for intensive training in the curriculum.
- September 2004** *An African American Journey* is piloted in classrooms statewide.
- October 2005** After one school year of piloting the lessons and a summer dedicated to refining them, *An African American Journey* is distributed to teachers in grades 4–8.
- June 2006–
Apr 2007** Additional lessons are developed by the Education Taskforce and vetted by the expert panel.
- September 2007** The new lessons are piloted in Maryland's schools.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

Even as exhibits were being designed and artifacts collected for Baltimore's Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, a task force of educators, historians, and museum staff began writing a statewide curriculum that borrowed the museum's themes and materials. It was the first time a state department of education and a museum of African-American history worked together to develop educational materials and museum content simultaneously.

The point was to make the museum more than just a field trip. The curriculum—dealing with the museum's three themes: Families and Communities, Labor and the Black Experience, and Black Art and Intellect—links the museum to the classroom in a way that provides for multi-year, multi-course study. The curriculum requires that students intensively prepare for their trip to the museum (or for the museum's trip to them, as traveling exhibits are one of the museum's features), reflect upon it afterward, and use its lessons to guide future learning.

An African American Journey is an evolving resource intended to stimulate and broaden the way students view themselves as agents of change, and challenge them to make this nation fulfill its promise as a just, inclusive, and equitable society. Our ultimate goal is not merely to educate students about the richness of African-American history and culture, but also to

prompt a meaningful dialogue on the issues of race that continue to dominate the American consciousness.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

The creation of the 43 lessons currently constituting the elementary and middle school curriculum—approximately five years in development—cost nearly \$1 million. Included in that figure is the following:

- the annual salary and expenses of the Maryland State Department of Education's full-time liaison to the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture;
- stipends paid to the 25 curriculum writers;
- the production and distribution of 20,000 CDs containing the curriculum and instructional resources;
- professional development provided to 5,000+ teachers implementing the curriculum.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Once the curriculum is operational, it costs nothing to deliver. Costs associated with development are indicated above.

16. How is the program funded?

The museum and its curricular component are funded through grants and contributions from nearly 60 individuals, endowments, organizations, and corporations in Maryland and the region.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

While the state's financial contribution to the capital construction and annual operating costs of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African-American History and Culture required legislation, the companion curriculum required no such authorization.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

The curriculum requires no special technology to deliver. The Maryland State Department of Education produced 20,000 CDs for distribution to teachers in grades 4–8. The CDs contain the 1,030-page curriculum and additional learning resources.

19. **To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.**

This program originated in Maryland.

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20. **Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?**

We are aware of no other comparable programs.

21. **Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?**

No. The core elementary and middle school lessons comprising *An African American Journey* were delivered to schools in October 2005. However, those lessons will be continually reviewed and refined. Additional elementary and middle school lessons have been written and will be sent this summer to a panel of experts—university faculty in African-American Studies and U.S. History—for vetting and paring.

A high school curriculum is now in development and will be piloted during the 2007–08 school year. After it's finalized for statewide distribution in fall 2008, work will begin on a prekindergarten–grade 3 curriculum.

22. **Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.**

While achievement among African-American students has risen since the curriculum's implementation, there is no evidence that the increase is attributable to it. However, museum staff are now in preliminary discussions regarding hiring an outside evaluator to analyze the curriculum's and museum's effect on students—that is, whether students are making connections between the exhibits and instructional materials and their own lives, and how that sense of identification is influencing their decisions, actions, beliefs, and achievement.

23. **How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?**

Certainly the program has grown—and will for some time. In the summer of 2005, work began on a high school curriculum, following the same development process as the elementary/middle school curriculum. The high school curriculum will be piloted during the

2007–08 school year and finalized for the 2008–09 school year. At the same time, additional elementary and middle school lessons will debut in Maryland schools. (Fifty additional elementary/middle school lessons have been written, but those will be vetted and pared by experts.) Following the high school curriculum’s finalization, work will begin on a prekindergarten–grade 3 curriculum. Of course, all of the lessons are continually subject to review and refinement.

Clearly, the curriculum writers change according to the school level (elementary, middle, and high) in question, but the development process established for the elementary and middle school lessons has been replicated well for the high school curriculum and will be again for preK–3.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

The Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African-American History and Culture is the largest African-American museum on the East Coast and the second-largest in the country. Obviously, states without a comparable museum—one with the staff, expertise, resources, and reach of Baltimore’s—will likely be unable to replicate the kind of partnership we’ve achieved. Certainly, the museum is a tremendous resource for Maryland’s students, allowing them to expand, apply, and reflect on their classroom learning.

Nevertheless, several states have contacted Maryland asking for guidance on developing and implementing a statewide African-American curriculum. They understand that the curriculum can stand on its own, that the lessons are engaging, informative, and powerful—even without the museum’s connected exhibits and artifacts. And they acknowledge that research and enrichment opportunities for students abound regardless of a facility dedicated to the African-American experience.