Public Works: Providing Authentic Experience with Difference in the Arts and Humanities

A Proposal Submitted by Carleton College to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Summary. Carleton seeks $800,000 from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a four-year initiative centered on public-oriented work in the arts and humanities undertaken through collaborative partnerships with diverse organizations and communities beyond the Carleton campus. This public engagement will develop new models for reflection on diversity and civic responsibility, and on how digital technology can best serve diverse publics. Students and faculty will use these experiences to deepen their understanding and engagement with the challenges of building a more inclusive and civil society. The initiative will generate models for the responsible co-creation of public work that will reemphasize the importance of the arts and humanities for a democratic society. The four-year project will begin on July 1, 2017 and conclude on June 31, 2021.

Rationale. Institutions of higher education urgently need to grapple with issues related to diversity and inclusion, and to engage in meaningful conversations and critical reflection on topics of social inequality, religion, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, and cultural difference. While these conversations need to occur internally to ensure a positive campus climate, liberal arts colleges have a responsibility not only to educate our students but also to engage the world around us. The arts and humanities have a special responsibility, given their concerns with seeing, listening to, and understanding different human perspectives. Students increasingly struggle to see the real-world practicality of studying the arts and humanities and thus miss the insights that these disciplines offer. How can we ensure that students not only participate in meaningful conversations with each other, but also connect to diverse communities at our doorstep and across the globe? How can we provide more opportunities for authentic engagement honoring different perspectives and imparting the skills students need in a diverse society? In a time when the rancor of online discourse often spills into our campus and saturates our national politics, how do we help students engage critically with the digital world that is so important to them and teach the habits of tolerance and inclusion that will ensure more civil online communities? In this project, process will be as important as products. Our overarching principle will be to develop durable frameworks for ethical and responsible engagement with our collaborators based on careful, iterative discussions and shared decision-making that will ensure that we are co-creators, not unequal partners. We will collaborate with our partners in person and in joint events and trainings, but we are also excited about the ways in which digital technologies can facilitate connections with more far-flung national and international partners. When the products we create or the tools we use are digital, we will ensure that our students develop a critical understanding of the impacts of technologies that often go unseen but can be highly significant, and also ensure that this understanding informs the conception, tools, process, and product of the public works we develop.

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion. This project will further Carleton's stated commitment to diversity, including a responsibility to educate a diverse student body and to support our enrollment of underrepresented students. The College is dedicated to attracting and retaining a diverse faculty, staff, and student body, and the Board of Trustee sees this diversity as among the College's highest priorities. Carleton believes students must have meaningful encounters with difference as part of their education and their preparation to be engaged citizens. As will be evident throughout this proposal, Carleton has identified numerous challenges related to diversity, both in curriculum and in residential life, and the

College has involved faculty and students in piloting successful programs to overcome these challenges. The "Public Works" project will build on recent campus initiatives, equipping students to engage with diverse communities and reflect deeply on issues of diversity on and off campus. As we enable students to collaborate with diverse communities beyond our campus, we will be aiming to foster civil discourse and to make the arts and humanities more inclusive for underrepresented groups.

Activities and Responsibilities. Dean of the College Beverly Nagel will serve as principal investigator in the project, providing oversight and implementation of the project, compliance with all Foundation guidelines and policies, supervision of annual reports, and coordination of the cost-share resources that are essential for the success of the project. The faculty project director for the grant initiative will be Dr. Susannah Ottaway, Professor of History, an accomplished scholar of eighteenth-century English social history. A past director of the Carleton College Humanities Center, Professor Ottaway has extensive experience in incorporating digital strategies in her teaching, including outreach to public audiences.

Suitability and Timing. Now is the right time for Carleton to embark on this project, thanks to the groundwork laid by several recent, interconnected developments. Faculty members are increasingly invested in promoting thoughtful engagement with difference on our campus. The Perlman Learning and Teaching Center has developed a robust program of activities, including a faculty "learning cohort," book groups, and workshops focused on inclusive classroom pedagogy. Our faculty facilitate "Critical Conversations" and "Civil Discourse" programs that foster student living-learning communities and peer-led dialogue about inclusion and diversity. Faculty in a wide range of departments have started new research projects with significant public components. We have added new capacities that will provide support for public scholarship and digital arts and humanities work, including recent hirings in the Humanities Center, Weitz Center for Creativity, Library, Academic Technologies, Computer Science Department, and the Center for Civic and Community Engagement (CCCE). New performance spaces have been added to the Weitz Center. These human and capital resources will provide long-range sustainability for digital scholarship, technology-rich pedagogies, and public scholarship. Faculty have demonstrated robust interest in civic engagement projects in their courses: each academic year, over 50 courses across the curriculum incorporate academic civic engagement. For all these reasons, this is an opportune moment for the "Public Works" project.

The "Public Works" project fully aligns with Carleton's current strategic plan (2012). The plan identifies the need to prepare students for fulfilling post-graduate lives and careers as a top priority. In our project, students working with diverse teams and acquiring digital skills in meaningful public projects will receive valuable training for twenty-first century careers. They will also gain a recognition for how the arts and humanities are essential elements of a fulfilling life. The strategic plan's second priority is to improve liberal arts teaching and learning. This priority includes a dedication to student research and to expanded opportunities for student-faculty collaboration in the arts and humanities—a goal directly supported by this project. The strategic plan commits Carleton to "promote programs and experiences that connect the education students receive on campus with communities beyond campus," which is precisely the aim of the "Public Works" project.

Goals and Activities. Our initiative will support collaborative partnerships, authentic student engagement, and public work in four overarching ways:

1. **Develop strong reciprocal partnerships with diverse publics.**

The foundation of this initiative is the building of strong, reciprocal, and enduring relationships with public partners. Building trust requires the development of a deep understanding of a partner's goals and aspirations for the relationship, as well as our own. Faculty, staff, and students engaged in this work need to develop a sensitivity to the context of a particular project, the prior history and experience of the partner organization, and the different forms of knowledge the partner brings to the project. In working with collaborators to develop clear understanding of shared objectives, and in guiding student involvement effectively, faculty will need to develop the skills—whether research, technological, interpersonal, political, or a combination of these—essential for developing productive partnerships. Carleton faculty and staff already have experience in establishing relationships with community partners. The College has supported a student volunteer program since 1985 and an academic civic engagement program since 2009. Both of these programs are now part of the CCCE, formed in 2011. More than half of our student body of approximately 2000 students participates in CCCE activities each year.

For the "Public Works" initiative, we will extend and deepen some of these existing partnerships, moving from limited-term, course-based projects and volunteer projects to more sustained and truly reciprocal collaborations that are more deeply built into our curriculum. Among the local partnerships we aim to deepen as part of this project are those with Greenvale Park Elementary School, where more than 40% of students are eligible for free/reduced-fee lunch; Faribault Community Education, with significant Hispanic and Somali populations; and HealthFinders, a community clinic serving Rice County. Regional partners include Ten Thousand Things Theater company, whose mission is to bring theater to underserved audiences in prisons, homeless shelters, and rural communities; and the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation, who have joined faculty and students in the Linguistics Department to begin to develop a pedagogical grammar of the endangered Dakota language that can be used by non-specialists. And we have learned from an ongoing partnership between History faculty and the Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum in Norfolk, England that digital humanities projects can be co-created with partners across great distances. These recent projects are pilots of the kind of durable, reciprocal relationships that we seek to extend and deepen through this initiative. We will also develop new partnerships. The many Twin Cities arts organizations that serve diverse audiences, such as the Mixed Blood Theater, Penumbra Theater, or the Loft Literary Center, will make natural partners. Faculty in Cinema and Media Studies are exploring the possibility of work in partnership with local youth organizations to collaborate on documentary videos and other creative art projects. We will also deepen incipient relationships with organizations serving new immigrant communities in our region. Developing partnerships and projects like these that truly serve both the partner organization and student learning takes considerable time and effort. To ensure that our faculty have the support they need to develop maintain and deepen these relationships through sustained collaboration, the grant will support the following activities:

- **Innovation grants** to support faculty work with partners during summer and winter breaks, to facilitate the creation of sustainable, long-term partnerships that have the possibility to involve a broad range of students and faculty at multiple stages as projects evolve.
- **Travel support** for faculty, staff, and students to travel to our partners' home locations, as well as to bring members of our partner organizations to Carleton for meetings, workshops, and collaborative work.
- **Reading groups and external consultants** so that we can learn from the experience of others. For example, we will bring in the Minnesota Humanities Center's Program Director and the staff member of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council who created the "Why Treaties Matter" exhibit

now on permanent display at the State Capitol. Workshops on topics like data ethics, management, and security will engage nationally prominent academic experts, many already identified by our faculty.

- **Project development workshops** for partners, faculty, and staff to meet and work together, either at the partner's location or at Carleton, to enable dedicated and in-depth planning and collaboration in project development. These may involve training or consultation with specialists. For example, clusters of faculty working in the public schools will meet with specialists in education on campus and beyond who can help ensure that their projects are appropriately crafted for the age groups with whom they will partner.
- **Faculty development workshops,** facilitated by CCCE staff and our Broom Faculty Fellow for Public Scholarship, that will focus on best practices in public scholarship and civic engagement. The workshops will include attention to issues of positionality and inclusion, ethical collaboration, deep listening, successful frameworks for sustaining communication, and ensuring co-supervision of work. On a more mundane, but equally crucial note, we will help faculty new to this work navigate the essential steps of creating Memoranda of Understanding, as well as the federally-mandated IRB process and legal requirements for projects involving work with minors.
- **Additional staff time** in the CCCE to provide support for faculty and partners in developing relationships and projects. CCCE staff will play a crucial role in the logistics of bringing together partners and faculty, maintaining communication, implementing projects, and providing training for faculty and students.

2. **Develop faculty expertise and equip students with the foundational skills needed to communicate and collaborate with diverse publics.**

To help students engage in meaningful, reciprocal work with diverse communities, we need to help them develop capacities to work in diverse teams, to understand the perspectives of others, and to complete complex digitally-based projects for multiple publics. We will provide more opportunities for demanding authentic work in civic engagement, public scholarship, and publicly-oriented creative arts, especially in the required Argument and Inquiry Seminars for first-year students and in introductory courses across the arts and humanities departments. We will train students to do public work by teaching them digital techniques, effective practices of community engagement, and the fundamental skills of how to see, listen to, and understand different perspectives. These experiences will often emphasize creative art as an opportunity to help others tell their stories, and teach digital literacies as a means of serving diverse publics. We know that experiential pedagogies highly impact student learning and can foster more inclusive learning environments. Recent Carleton assessment of such experiences has confirmed our sense that engagement with new and unfamiliar activities helps put students from very diverse backgrounds on a similar footing. We have seen the benefits of this approach in work undertaken with a grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, in which our science faculty have created opportunities for authentic research and public engagement in introductory courses, with positive effects for student learning and for retention and persistence of students from underrepresented groups. We seek to offer similar opportunities in introductory arts and humanities courses.

To prepare us for this work, we have piloted successful models in the current Carleton curriculum. The History department offers 100-level courses with civic engagement components located in the public schools, and students in Cinema and Media Studies have been learning the techniques of nonfiction filmmaking by helping create videos for the Northfield Community Action Center and Ruth's House (a local shelter for victims of domestic violence). These promising models will be expanded throughout the arts and humanities curriculum. Our faculty are eager to develop such projects. For example, a faculty

member in Spanish, working with a member of our Academic Technology team teaching documentary film skills, intends to pilot a project using an innovative course structure and pedagogies as she sends students out to partner with local youth groups to produce Spanish-language documentaries. Theater faculty have expressed a strong interest in creating collaborative performances with advocacy groups and local schools. Foundational courses in multiple disciplines will introduce the basic tools of digital humanities projects, including text markup, mapping, and web-based projects as assigned work.

Towards this goal, the initiative will fund the following activities:

- **Curriculum innovation grants** to develop new courses and course modules for public projects, especially in our first-year Argument and Inquiry seminars and introductory classes. Staff in the CCCE and our digital scholarship team will work with faculty in developing and implementing these curricular projects.
- **Workshops** to develop faculty expertise in techniques of digital humanities and arts, including digital storytelling, XML markup language, GIS and other mapping tools, or Omeka's archival platform; in skills, including project management skills, for public scholarship and arts; in pedagogical approaches for incorporating public scholarship and digital scholarship at the introductory as well as more advanced levels; and in developing pedagogies and frameworks for teaching students necessary skills for this work.
- **Arts and humanities residencies** closely connected to the curriculum, offering faculty and students opportunities to work with artists whose efforts directly engage diverse publics. We have had great success with short-term residencies involving digitally innovative dance groups from the Twin Cities, and such experiences could be replicated on a larger scale with theater groups, playwrights, dance troupes, and visual artists who will co-create work with community partners, students, and faculty on campus. We will offer curricular innovation grants to faculty to work with and learn from arts residents in order to develop projects and practices that will be incorporated into our curriculum in a sustainable way.

3. **Develop frameworks for faculty and students to learn from their experiences with diverse publics through reflection.**

To ensure that students engaged in public humanities and arts projects reflect on their experiences in deeply meaningful ways, faculty will need to refine current pedagogies, share best practices, and develop new knowledge and skills. Through the Perlman Learning and Teaching Center, in collaboration with the CCCE, we will train faculty in pedagogies that push students to reflect on their public engagement as it relates to diversity and inclusion in society at large, but that also help students foster inclusion and open discourse on our own campus. This reflection will also include consideration of students' agency in the new public forums of social media, and how civil discourse can be promoted in communities both real and virtual. Carleton has used student reflective essays in several contexts, including our required sophomore writing portfolio, and in the reflective essays on privilege, race, gender, and other markers of identity that are part of our Critical Conversations course. However, our recent assessment examining the use of reflective assignments related to off-campus study has shown that too often these assignments do not successfully prompt complex reflection. The campus has considerable work to do to ensure that student experiences with public humanities and arts projects generate genuine metacognition and deepen ethical inquiry and reflection about difference and inclusion. The need for this reflection is especially evident when students work with communities that have not historically partnered with liberal arts colleges like ours. Some existing courses, including SOAN 285: Ethics of Civic Engagement and IDSC

128: Civil Discourse on a Diverse Campus, can serve as models for spreading these crucial topics throughout our curriculum.

Towards this goal, the grant will fund the following activities:

- **Reading groups, learning communities, and seminars** for faculty and staff focused on reflective practices in the classroom, inclusive pedagogies, and the ethics of digital scholarship and civic engagement. Our Humanities Center's "Humanities in Focus" program will support seminars and bring in experts to speak on these themes. Specific topics might include the use of narrative to understand diverse political perspectives, or the challenges of inequality in and beyond higher education.
- **Curriculum innovation grants** to develop activities and assignments in courses that promote deep reflection and student learning about difference. We will also provide grants to encourage the creation of new courses that take up questions of civil discourse (especially, but not only, in digital environments) and the ethics of public work. Many arts and humanities majors have a required "methods" course, and these can be ideal locations for engaging the question of scholarly responsibility in public work.

4. **Build sustainable, long-term collaborative projects that meet partners' goals and that provide integrated curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students.**

Because the process of learning through experience is necessarily iterative, we will also develop curricular pathways to help students move from the foundational skills learned in introductory courses to more advanced work, building their skills as they go. Developing more robust connections among faculty whose teaching, research, and service relate to the public humanities and arts will help to ensure that knowledge is shared and pathways among courses and projects become clearly marked. Faculty, having just passed new rules recognizing minors at Carleton, will want to explore various models, including the potential benefits of building new digital and/or public scholarship minors within the curriculum. Strong partnerships and meaningful projects are not easily achieved within the confines of a single course module or an entire ten-week course. Community partners often express their disappointment when a project goes on hold during the winter and summer breaks, and many projects require sustained faculty-student involvement. To make our collaborative relationships most effective for our partners, and for faculty and students, we need to create opportunities for faculty-student teams to engage in projects that go beyond the confines of our usual ten-week academic term; that allow students, faculty and partners to work on complex, long-term projects; and that enable students to develop their skills and a deeper and more multi-faceted understanding of a project or issue. Students who first encounter a project in a course will have opportunities for more advanced collaboration with community partners beyond the end of the course. For example, Carleton students in multiple iterations of two Religion courses met with local religious communities, including Hindu temples, Sudanese Lutheran congregations, Evangelical megachurches, multilingual Catholic parishes, Ojibwe sacred sites, and Buddhist Temples serving Hmong immigrants. The students gathered historical background, data, interviews, images, and videos documenting 95 case studies, now archived on a public Omeka-based website. The next phase of this project involves collaborations with community partners (building on the work already conducted with Faribault Public Schools and the Minnesota National Guard) to co-create curricula for workshops that facilitate difficult conversations about and across religious difference. Such projects give students a chance to see how course work can turn into public work with lasting impact.

We are especially interested in building durable partnerships and projects that can intersect with the curriculum and student experience in multiple ways. Students who encounter a project with a partner in an introductory course might have an opportunity to take an upper-level course that includes more advanced work on the same project. This work might include an embedded internship during the summer (supported by our endowed funds for social justice internships), and follow-up work on an advanced faculty-directed project with the same partner later on in the student's junior or senior year. Such a structure will make more clearly visible the enduring value of engagement with the arts and humanities and give students in these fields a stronger preparation for life after Carleton. To help students find ways to continue work with partners beyond the classroom, we will utilize Carleton's career development services and the CCCE's administrative support to provide students with information about related curricular and co-curricular opportunities, including internships or volunteer activities.

To facilitate complex projects that extend beyond a single course and build integrated curricular and co-curricular structures that deepen student learning, the initiative will provide the following support:

- **Curriculum innovation grants** to support the creation of linked courses, development of integrated modules that can be embedded in introductory and more advanced courses, and labs or course-trailers to enable focused work on projects through several different courses.
- **Support for faculty-student research teams** to undertake intensive work with partners during the summer or winter breaks. Drawing from our models of Digital Humanities Associates and the CCCE's Fellows program, faculty and students working in small groups will pursue sustained, ambitious projects. Support may include funding for faculty travel and technical support.
- **Workshops and teaching circles** for faculty and staff to foster curricular connections and co-curricular collaborations. Faculty and staff will need to share their experiences and explore connections among the new projects. Shared class visits and co-teaching opportunities will help reveal and strengthen these connections, and workshops might include thoughtful advancement towards the development of new minors, integrative senior capstone projects, co-curricular experiences, or strategies (such as e-portfolios) that help students integrate experiences.

Outcomes and Sustainability. This initiative will raise the profile of the arts and humanities on our campus and in our communities by bringing more attention to these disciplines and by connecting humanities and arts faculty and students in new ways. By demonstrating to students that the arts and humanities can provide authentic experience in working with diverse publics, the initiative will provide evidence of the continuing value of these disciplines. In close collaboration with our partners, we can create sustainable models for public engagement. Towards that end, grant funds will provide faculty, students, and partners with opportunities to share lessons learned with community audiences, and funding will also enable dissemination of findings and experiences at conferences and national events.

This project will also advance long-term changes in our institution. The greatest impact will be on the curriculum, where we will create networks of linked, deliberately structured modules and courses that incorporate a substantial focus on the public arts and humanities. Thirty faculty and staff participated in the planning for this proposal, and there is widespread enthusiasm for bringing this work into the heart of our teaching. In addition to the many new and revised courses the project will generate, firmly embedding public work in our existing arts and humanities majors, the project may result in new minors in Digital Humanities or Arts and Technology. We recognize that any new initiative requires the institution to leave behind or re-focus some current activities and programs. Rather than requiring new resources, we anticipate that the project will align and focus current capacities that will support faculty as they reshape their teaching to more fully incorporate diversity, digital projects, and team-based student learning.

At liberal arts colleges such as Carleton, audiences for faculty work have typically been limited to the specialist readership of fellow academics and to demographically predictable local or regional communities. However, those communities, like our student body, are increasingly diverse. New pedagogies and technologies offer an opportunity for colleges like Carleton to seek out these new publics and to engage them as partners. The "Public Works" project has the potential to result in a long-term transformation of the arts and humanities curriculum at Carleton. Via dissemination of our work regionally (through our ACM partners, especially St. Olaf and Macalester) and in conversation nationally (such as Davidson), we intend to contribute to an emerging conversation about the efficacy of engaged learning in the arts and humanities and the significance of this learning for the future of liberal arts institutions.

Grant Administration. Grant funds will be deposited in an interest-bearing account. Current interest rates are near zero at .01%. Income earned will be allocated to the grant. Carleton has identified and approved cost-share to ensure full and robust implementation of the project. Cost-share will be equal to or exceed the total grant award.