**Narrative**

**Project Justification**

Proposed Project

The proposed project is an exhibition titled *Black Rights Activism in America*. It is planned and organized by The San Francisco Freedom Museum (referred to as Freedom Museum from here onwards), in collaboration with community members and partnering museums, archives, and collectives. The exhibition will begin on May 3rd, 2019 and end on October 27th, 2019, and will be hosted in one of the two large gallery spaces in the Freedom Museum. The exhibition will feature archival material regarding black rights activism, artwork by Kehinde Wiley and Kara Walker.

The exhibition will showcase information and material starting from the civil rights movement and moving on to the role of black activism in broader social movements including the feminist movement, labor movement and the LGBTQIA movement. The artwork exhibited looks at themes of power, racism, patriarchy, marginalization, and resistance, and will serve to engage with both historic and contemporary black rights movements. Alongside the exhibition, the Freedom Museum will organize a lecture series, a series of film screenings, and will design a series of programs to engage people with art and social change.

The Need for this Exhibition

People of color have always been marginalized, their arts, culture and lives under-represented in the mainstream. Moreover, community action undertaken by marginalized communities is often perceived as harmful to the social fabric. And so, not only are their lives marginalized, but, when people of color organize to overcome marginalization, their struggle for justice are not validated. The problem often is that dominant communities are unaware of structural inequities and institutional racism affecting everyday lives of people of color and therefore can see this kind of activism as counterproductive to progress. The Freedom Museum is built on the foundation that resistance by the marginalized is valuable to positive social change. And this exhibition addresses the need to support and validate social justice struggles of black people, while raising awareness about their lives, histories, oppressions, and resistances.

These needs were expressed to the Freedom Museum’s founders over the span for a few years, by community action groups including Black Lives Matter (in San Francisco), African American Speaker Bureau (AASB), and the African American Community Service Agency (AACSA). This need was also expressed by some of our partners, especially The Freedom Archives, the Museum of Tolerance, and the Museum of African Diaspora. This need was also expressed in ‘response books’ the Freedom Museum maintains, where visitors to the museum can contribute their reflections and responses to exhibits, and write suggestions regarding what they would like to see in an exhibit. The Freedom Museum works closely with the Freedom Archives who expressed the need for help with their collections, to organize, catalogue and disseminate them. And so, the Freedom Museum has relied on archival material from the Freedom Archives in preparing this exhibition; who will also manage the collections for this exhibition.

Community Benefits

This exhibition will benefit black communities associated with institutions such as The Freedom Archives and the Museum of African Diaspora, and organizations like Black Lives Matter, AASB, AACSA, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc., and National Coalition of 100 Black Men, Inc. The benefits of this exhibition include raised awareness about marginalization and social justice struggles of black communities, showing solidarity and validating the social justice causes expressed by black communities, creating a critical space where issues of intolerance are debated and where possible solutions are brainstormed, and extending support to black communities who wish to organize for specific causes. These benefits are part of the programming around the exhibition, which will be formed through collaborations with community groups mentioned above. The artwork complementing the information is meant to interrogate the oppression of black people, show their agency, and give them power. In these ways, the Freedom Museum, aims to validate the struggles and power of black communities.

This exhibition will also benefit people of color in general, as any social justice work, regardless of its specificities, benefits a broader group of marginalized people. We also recognize that black rights activism occurs across lines of class, gender, and sexuality; therefore, this exhibition will be beneficial in starting a critical conversation regarding issues of intersecting oppressions and the value of resistance. Furthermore, the museum gift shop - a separately managed entity - sells artwork and handicrafts made by community artists in San Francisco. This directly supports community artists and gives them a platform to sell their work.

The Exhibition and the Museum’s Strategic Plan

This exhibition ties directly into the Freedom Museum’s mission, goals and its strategic plan. As part of the strategic plan, the Museum intends to host at least one major exhibition per year, and this will be the major exhibition for 2019. The Freedom Museum also plans to curate exhibitions that articulate the value of social protest, accurately reflecting struggles for social justice, is aimed at increasing public engagement with and awareness of social justice issues, and organize exhibits planned in accordance to the needs of the community the Freedom Museum serves. The exhibition *Black Rights Movements in America* fits perfectly into the Museum’s strategic plan as it has come out of a community need, is being planned in collaboration with community groups, serves to increase public engagement and awareness regarding social justice issues, and accurately reflects and validates social justice struggles. The exhibition’s contribution to meeting the strategic plan can be measured through tracking visitors, media coverage of Museum events, and visitor responses in the ‘response book’.

The Exhibition, Museums for America and Community Anchors

As mentioned in the section above, this exhibition will contribute significantly to the Museum’s strategic plan and will have a significant institutional impact. Experts from the Freedom Archives and other partners will contribute to in creating the information presented in the exhibition. Moreover, the idea for the exhibition has arisen out of needs expressed to the Museum’s founders by various community organizations.

This exhibition specifically meets the requirements for the community anchors project category as the exhibition has been planned to address community needs; specifically to support and validate social justice struggles of black people and raise awareness about their lives, history, oppression, and resistance. The exhibition also seeks to start a conversation whereby specific issues and possible resolutions can be debated. Through exhibitions such as *Black Rights Movements in America* the Freedom Museum aims to strategically enable civic engagement among communities of color, to become a community resource, and a catalyst for positive change. Importantly, much of the programming for this exhibition will be created in collaboration with community action groups; and will be designed to facilitate an informed dialogue regarding social justice issues.

**Project Work Plan**

Specific Activities Undertaken

As part of the exhibit the Freedom Museum will display archival information including but not limited to photographs, pamphlets, and news stories substantiated with audio recordings and well informed labels that enhance the content and provide context and additional information. This information is derived from the Freedom Archives. The Freedom Museum will work with collaborating community organizations and institutional partners for additional information about black rights activism. *Black Rights Activism in America* showcases artwork by artists, Kehinde Wiley and Kara Walker. Public tours through this exhibition will also be conducted to highlight key aspects of this exhibition.

As part of the exhibition, The Freedom Museum with partnering organizations will organize a series of lectures delivered by artists, by local community action leaders, and by academics of color who research themes of power, resistance, and oppression. The Freedom Museum will also host a series of film screenings, in collaboration with the Black Association of Documentary Filmmakers West (BADWEST). Each film screening will be followed by a discussion lead by a community volunteer. A focus of both the lectures and film screening will be on how art can have a positive impact in changing the world.

The Freedom Museum will create a guide for ‘memory walks’ looking specifically at the history of black rights activism in relation to San Francisco’s cityscape. These ‘memory walks’ will be designed in collaboration with the Freedom Archives and associated community groups. In delivering the walks, the Freedom Museum will partner with Shaping San Francisco, an organization that conducts bike and foot tours in the bay area, to explore the social movement history of the region. The guide created by the Freedom Museum will be available to visitors in the form of a pamphlet and an online app. It will include three walking routes that visitors can take in San Francisco County, to learn more about the history of places along these routes as it corresponds to black rights activism. Pamphlets will have printed information on it, while the app will have both written information and audio information. These walks will be offered through Shaping San Francisco and visitors can go on these walks by themselves or in groups. The Freedom Museum will provide a time for visitors to come to the museum and discuss their ‘memory walk’, where a gallery guide will facilitate the discussion.

The Freedom Museum will also organize public programs that engage visitors with the artwork displayed. Artwork will be used to critically engage visitors with issues of race, power, patriarchy, and look for avenues of social change. These public programs will be available to the general public, to K12 students and teachers, to college students and teachers, and also for community leaders and members who are looking to organize and affect change. Broadly, the goals for the programs include understanding how protest is valuable to social justice and how artwork engages with oppression and resistance to have an impact on current social change. A range of museum education strategies will be employed in public programming, these include Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), Discipline Based Arts Education (DBAE), theatre/role playing strategies, and art production. VTS is an method used in arts education, designed to develop critical thinking and analytic skills of participants, specifically in relation to art appreciation. Typically a program using VTS will ask the participant questions designed to provoke them to look carefully at an artwork, talk about what they see, use evidence present in the artwork to explain why they see what they see, and discuss alternative interpretations (Visual Thinking Strategies, n.d.). DBAE is a museum education technique pioneered by Elliot Eisner and is designed to promote reflection on the history and context of the artwork, in addition to its artistic form (Brandt, 1987). This approach is especially useful in programming for *Black Rights Movements in America* as it engages with context. In addition to these goals, public programs organized for community action groups will focus on strategies for effective action and how to use the arts to have a greater impact.

Evaluation Strategies

The exhibition, in addition to the gallery exhibits, has a total of five activities; public tours, lecture series, film screenings, public programs, and memory walks offered by a partnering organization. Visitor tracking is an effective evaluation strategy for all these activities, including gallery visits. But success of exhibition activities is dependant largely on qualitative change in community attitudes and knowledge. And so, evaluation strategies for exhibition activities will include surveys and questionnaires, observations conducted by gallery guides, and focus group discussions. Surveys and questionnaires will consist of ranked questions and open ended questions that track visitor experience, attitudes, and knowledge before and after their Museum visit. Structured observation will be used in the exhibition where gallery guides will observe visitors in the *Black Rights Activism in America* gallery and listen to if/how they vocalize their experience, where they stop and how long, can they understand what they see, and how they interact with the exhibition. Focus groups will be conducted as a form of summative evaluation, for the exhibition as a whole and for each public program (Falk and Dierking, 2013).

Surveys and questionnaires will be made available to visitors if they choose to fill them out. These will be made available to the visitor for every exhibition activity. Additionally observations will be used as an evaluation strategy during the lecture series and the film screening series. At the end of both these series, key participants will be invited to participate in a focus groups discussion. Similarly, observations and focus group discussions will be used to evaluate visitor experience, knowledge, and change in attitudes as a result of memory walk and public program participation. The Museum will also organize focus group discussions at the exhibition’s conclusion. The focus group discussions for programs will include open ended questions encouraging participants to talk about their experience, what worked and what didn’t, changes in their knowledge and/or attitudes, changes in their everyday behavior, and any suggestions for future exhibitions and programming.

Risks of the Exhibition

As with any cultural activity that deals with political issues, there is the risk of controversy and negative image branding. But, the Freedom Museum believes that the potential benefits of this exhibition are far greater than any controversy it might create. At this point, the Freedom Museum chooses to show solidarity to community action groups like Black Lives Matter and lend support to the struggle for social justice. A related risk is low turnout, and the Freedom Museum through its partners will work to ensure that the exhibit is advertised to the fullest extent possible and work with communities to address any concerns about the exhibition which might result in low turnout. Over the last decade, the demographics for the Mission District in San Francisco have shifted significantly whereby black people are the numerical minority in this area. While we have exhibitions that address resistance among people of color in general, the Museum has chosen to showcase and validate the struggles of black people, in 2019, as they are a minority in the Mission District and the Museum’s goals are to give voice to those most marginalized.

Planning, Implementing and Managing the Exhibition

The primary organizer of this exhibition is The Freedom Museum. And the exhibition will be housed in one of it’s larger gallery spaces. The planning for this exhibition will be a process of collaboration between the Freedom Museum and a range of groups including The Freedom Archives, Black Lives Matter, AASB, AACSA, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc., and National Coalition of 100 Black Men, Inc., BADWEST, Shaping San Francisco’, and individuals who are affiliated with these organizations. Partnering organizations of the Freedom Museum will be asked to advertise this exhibition on their websites, and through pamphlets distributed at their centers, in their respective cities. The website advertisement and the pamphlets will be designed by the Freedom Museum, and the pamphlets will be printed and shipped to partnering organizations by the Freedom Museum. On a daily basis, the exhibition will be managed by Museum staff, volunteers, and gallery guides; community members who volunteer in the Museum’s galleries to oversee and lend interpretation to the artwork.

Sequence of Activities

All activities for that are part of this exhibition will be ongoing. The opening week will host two lectures, one by the artist Kehinde Wiley and another by a representative of the Freedom Archive, addressing the role of black activism in labor struggles in lieu of International Workers Day. There will be a total of ten lectures associated with this exhibition, one artist lecture organized in the opening week of the exhibition. Other lectures will be organized at various times in the six months of the exhibition and will feature community leaders and academics of color. Tickets will be sold to each of these lectures, and pricing will be organized on a sliding scale.

Public tours will be organized on the first and third Saturday of every month, and will be open to the public, included in the Museum admission which is on a sliding scale. The film series will be organized in July and August, 2019 with a film screening followed by volunteer-led discussion every Sunday of those months. Tickets will be sold to each of the film screenings, and the pricing will be organized on a sliding scale. The memory walks are self directed activities and can be availed by visitors through Shaping San Francisco. The Museum will reserve a table in its cafe for memory walk discussions on the second Saturday of each month. Public programs that specifically engage with the artwork will be organized twice in the exhibition’s duration. Otherwise, groups who wish to be part of a program can request a program.

Personnel and Resources Involved in these Activities

Since this is a major exhibition, all Museum personnel will be involved in activities pertaining to planning, implementing, and managing the exhibition. At a glance, personnel who will be involved include the executive director, Director of Finance, Director of Operations, Security Coordinator, Security Guards, Human Resources Manager, Director of Marketing and Communications, Development Coordinator, Director of Inspiration, Volunteer Coordinator, Programs and Education Coordinator, and the Curatorial Coordinator. The level of personnel involvement is reflected in the budget included in this grant proposal packet. Volunteers who are involved in exhibition activities include the finance intern, Front Desk volunteers, Office Coordinator, Graphics Coordinator, Brand Coordinator, Social Media Coordinator and PR Coordinator. Gallery guides, who are community volunteers will also be involved in managing, planning, and implementing the exhibition. The amount of time spent by volunteers in exhibition activities is also reflected in the budget included in this grant proposal packet. Other resources used for the exhibition and activities includes one large gallery where the exhibition is displayed, the Museum’s auditorium which will host lectures, film screenings, and post-screening discussions, a space in the cafe which will be reserved once a month for visitors who want to come in and discuss their memory walks, and the studio where some of the public programs will be delivered.

Tracking Progress Towards Achieving Intended Results

Based on the exhibition and related programming, progress towards intended results will be reflected in visitor counts and other data tracking, in media response to the exhibition, by tracking information in the ‘response book’ the Museum maintains. Progress towards achieving intended results will also be seen through evaluations that are tied to exhibition activities, these include results of survey questionnaires, observations and focus group discussions.

Dissemination of Results

A report of the results will made available to the public, on the Museum’s website. These results will also be disseminated to to key constituencies like community action groups and partnering organizations.

**Project Results**

Performance Goal and Performance Measure Statements

The performance goal selected for this exhibition is related to ‘Community’ and is to “strengthen museums and libraries as essential partners in addressing the needs of their communities”. Corresponding Performance Measure Statements selected for this exhibition include; 1. The Museum or Library offers programs, services, or resources that address community needs, and 2. The Museum or library is an active contributor to problem solving in the community. As listed on the grant application website, the data to be collected for measuring performance is quantitative and is based on responses ranked as follows; strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. Based on these measures, the data to be collected includes the number of total responses, the number of responses per answer option, and the number of non responses. This data will be collected through a survey which will include questions based on the two measures stated above. These surveys will be administered to a representative sample who is selected with the help of the Museum’s partners.

Exhibition’s Intended Results

The benefits of this exhibition are detailed in this narrative. They include increased awareness about activism in black communities, solidarity towards social justice causes expressed by black communities, creation of critical spaces to discuss social justice issues and possible solutions, and strategic support extended to communities who are organizing for social justice. These benefits will be achieved in local communities through specific programming activities around the exhibition, including public tours, a series of lectures and films, public programs, and memory walks. The intended outcomes for this exhibition include raised awareness about the marginalization of people of color and the value of social justice activism. Another intended outcome is the creation of tangible support and solidarity networks for people of color, these include the creation of community based informal networks intended to show solidarity with social justice activism by canvassing for specific causes and/or providing resource support to social justice activists. Additionally, an intended result is community organized public forums for discussing issues of discrimination and debating possible solutions. Success in achieving these outcomes will be measured through evaluation activities - questionnaires, observations, and focus group discussions - undertaken by the Museum as part of this exhibition. Progress towards meeting intended outcomes will also be measured through visitor counts and other data tracking, media attention, tracking visitor responses written in the ‘response book’, the number of public forums organized, and tracking the kind of community support networks generated.

Community Change as a Result of Exhibition

As this exhibition is informed by community needs, the Freedom Museum believes that the exhibition will be successful in supporting community actions, specifically those undertaken by community action groups like Black Lives Matter. Through this exhibition and corresponding programming, the Freedom Museum also shows solidarity with people’s struggles. Solidarity and support are also engendered by raising awareness among the general public about the value of resistance. We believe that there will be greater awareness, solidarity and greater turnout at community actions, and increased direct participation in working through social issues. To this end, the community will change as a result of the community support networks created and community public forums organized.

Tangible Products from the Exhibition

Our partners, the Freedom Archives will document and archive materials pertaining to this exhibition. Tangible products derived from this exhibition include recording of lectures delivered, a catalogue of the films screened, and recordings of post-film screening discussions; all of which will be available to the public on the Museum website. Other tangible products include memory walk guides, exhibit catalogue, catalogue of lectures and their synopsis, a DVD and booklet produced by the Freedom Archives chronicling the highlights of the exhibition. Prints of Kehinde Wiley’s work will also be available for purchase the community gift shop housed in the Museum.

Sustaining the Benefits of the Exhibition

Benefits of this particular exhibition include increased awareness regarding black rights activism and its social value, support extended to community action groups, and solidarity expressed through the exhibition and programming towards the struggles and organizations of people of color. These benefits tie into the mission of the Freedom Museum and will be sustained through other exhibitions the Museum organizes. All Museum exhibits and programming seek to validate and support people’s struggles towards social justice. Additionally benefits of this exhibition will be sustained through preservation of the lectures delivered, as this content will be made available to the public beyond the closing of the exhibition. Furthermore, after the exhibition closes the museum will organize a monthly open forum where communities of color and allies can come together and talk about issues and strategize solutions.