

**F.M. KIRBY FOUNDATION SOLICITATION EVALUATION FORM**

**DATE:** March 8, 2023

**REQUEST DATE:** February 2, 2023

**Last grant acknowledgment:** Yes

**Program Area:** Arts, Culture, Humanities

**APPLICANT:**

The Morris Museum, Inc.  
6 Normandy Heights Road  
Morristown, NJ 07960

**CONTACT:** Ms. Mira Prives, Director of Development

**PHONE:** (973) 971-3700

**PAYEE OTHER THAN ADDRESSEE:**

**AMOUNT REQUESTED:** \$90,000 **NATURE OF REQUEST:** For general operating support - \$45,000; toward the replacement of the Main Gallery floors - \$45,000

**GRANT HISTORY**

**SUPPORT:** 1967 - 2022 **# OF GRANTS:** 58

**TOTAL DOLLARS:** \$1,878,650

**LAST GRANT DATE:** 5/31/2022

**LAST GRANT AMOUNT:** \$55,000

**FYE DATE:** 6/30/2022

**AFS DATE:** 8/30/2022

2018	\$45,000	3/30/2018	
2019	\$50,000	4/30/2019	
2019	\$5,000	9/30/2019	For: Support of The Bickford Theatre in honor of Dr. Wilson M. Compton
2020	\$55,000	3/31/2020	For: Support of The Bickford Theatre in honor of Dr. Wilson M. Compton-\$5,000
2021	\$55,000	5/28/2021	For: Support of The Bickford Theatre in honor of Dr. Wilson M. Compton-\$5,000
2022	\$55,000	5/31/2022	For: Support of the Bickford Theatre in honor of Dr. Wilson M. Compton-\$5,000

**SDK’s endorsement received.**

**DLK COMMENTS:** Financial analysis attached.

**GEB COMMENTS:** In January it was announced that Executive Director Andrew Sandall would be leaving the Museum after only one year of leadership. He is returning to Florida, where he worked prior to Morris Museum, and is taking a position with a natural history museum there. Until a new Executive Director is named, Board Chairman Edward von der Linde will serve in this role. Mr. von der Linde has been with the Museum for over 20 years. JFT and I spoke with Director of Development Mira Prives and Institutional Giving Associate Annabelle Winchell a few days after this announcement was made, who described the announcement as a “shock and a shake” for the Museum. Though it is certainly unfortunate that Mr. Sandall served only a year as ED, Mira spoke very confidently about the dedication and commitment to the Museum’s mission felt by the long-term staff. As per SDK’s endorsement, perhaps Mr. Sandall was not the right fit for the Museum

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and this will present an opportunity to secure consistent leadership for the future of the organization.

2022 gallery highlights include *Federico Solmi: The Joie de Vivre*, a retrospective collection that featured digital work, virtual reality components, and multimedia works. A second exhibit, which garnered a lot of attention from new visitors and even inspired new donors, was *RetroBlakesburg: Captured on Film: 1978-2998*. This was the first museum show by photographer Jay Blakesburg, who spent most of his career documenting music history with images of performances, musicians, and fans. Mira shared with us that Paul McCartney was one of the new Museum guests who visited to see this exhibit, although Museum staff did not know he had visited until after the fact! The fundraising campaign for this exhibit raised over \$37,000 contributed by 20 first-time donors. Beginning in March 2023, the Museum will host its third collaboration with local nonprofit Arts in the Atrium, a Morris County-based organization dedicated to sharing art pieces by contemporary Black artists. This exhibit, *Each One Teach One*, will focus on mentorship and community within the world of art.

The Live Arts series continues with performances in the Bickford Theatre. In addition to the traditional jazz shows that the Live Arts series is known for, Morris Museum also hosted Sylvio Milo and Nathan Davis as the 2022 artists in residence, while they worked on a multimedia artistic show titled, *I am the utterance of my name: Divining Mary Magdalene*. In 2023, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra will be returning to the Bickford Theatre, following their sold-out performance at the Bickford last April. The request mentions that a goal of the live performances at the Bickford is to make the Museum a destination for classical music performances; I feel that it will prove to be valuable for the Museum to occupy this niche given the many options for theatergoers in Morris County.

The Museum celebrated the one-year anniversary of the Spark!Lab in August 2022. It seems that the first year of this interactive, permanent exhibit for children ages 1-12 was a learning opportunity for the Museum staff. It became apparent that stations within the Lab needed to be rotated quarterly to entice families to keep returning to the experience. Because the Smithsonian only provides 10 stations for Spark!Labs, the Morris Museum Director of Education along with her volunteer Spark!Lab Ambassadors created their own stations to fit within the Lab. These new stations have been approved by the Smithsonian to be used in Spark!Labs across the country.

During our January conversation with Mira and Annabelle, JFT and I gained insight into recent Museum membership and attendance. Halfway through FY23, the Museum's membership is up \$90K, putting them on track to meet their membership goal for the first time in Mira's tenure. The Museum is averaging between 500 and 700 visitors in a weekend, many of whom are booking a timed ticket for the Spark!Lab. The Lab's attendance is up 300% over last fiscal year. Student membership fees have been dropped to \$20 and they are looking to become more engaged with the three local universities (St. Elizabeth's, Drew, and Fairleigh Dickinson). School groups are booked through the Spring. In 2022, the Morris School District received universal approval for visits to the Morris Museum. This will increase opportunities for Morristown and Morris Township students to visit the Museum and partake in special tours curated by the Director of Education. The goal of this initiative is for Morris Museum visits to become integrated into Morris School District curriculum, such that students visit the Museum annually for special programming and tours related to their current courses of study. With a wide offering of programming and exhibits for a number of age groups, including Spark!Lab visits, Digging Dinosaurs, and the Native American Gallery, this integration into the curriculum may occur at many grade levels.

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The Board has 13 members, down from 14 in 2022. One member is new.

The Museum has two large capital projects planned for the upcoming year: a \$2M roof replacement and a renovation of the floors in the main gallery. Funds for the roof replacement have been provided through grants from the State and County to protect the historic mansion portion of the Museum. The 2023 capital ask of FMKF is for funding to assist with the renovation of the floors in the Museum's main gallery. The current ceramic tile flooring is cracked in many places, presenting a hazard to staff and guests and an impediment to moving art in and out of the space. The Museum plans to replace these floors with polished concrete and the total project cost is \$98K. The Museum has already received a \$10K grant towards this project; an additional, \$45K capital grant from FMKF would mean the Museum has accounted for over 50% of the funding for this project. This capital project is vital to the future health of the Museum. Not only is it imperative that the floors be repaired in order to remediate the safety concern, but the current state of the floors could deter other museums from loaning art to the Museum if they determine the conditions unsuitable. The Museum plans to remain open throughout both renovations, with the roof replacement commencing in 2023 and the floor restoration beginning in February 2024.

Morris Museum is one of FMKF's longest-standing grantees, with 55 continuous years of support beginning in 1967. Given the positive attendance numbers, increase in memberships, and new programming and exhibits, the Museum seems poised to succeed post-pandemic. As the only Smithsonian Affiliate Museum in New Jersey, implementing Smithsonian-sponsored exhibits like the Spark!Lab seems like a valuable means for attracting a younger visitor demographic by enticing families with young children. I do hope the next Executive Director is committed to the Museum's mission for the long term; such frequent leadership changes can cause uneasiness no matter how committed the rest of the staff is. I support keeping our general operating support at \$50K with \$5K for the Bickford Theatre and an additional \$45K designated for the capital floor project, for a total of \$100K.

**JJK COMMENTS:** Good to see in FY22 Actuals that memberships, admissions, special events, educational programs, and performing arts have all brought in higher earned revenues than FY21, all signs that Morris Museum is chipping away at revenues and patrons lost in the pandemic.

In the winter of 2021, I visited the Morris Museum with my family. Consider that this was still a Morris Museum very much challenged by the pandemic. But I could not help but feel, despite its thematic emphasis on "art in motion," the museum was very much stuck in the past. Maybe it was the children's section, which seemed to be both dated and scattered in theme. Maybe it was just seeing the same trains I had always seen there as a kid! The SparkLab was still at the time under development, and the Guinness Collection seemed to be dusty at best, with many of the automata broken and not working.

Fast forward to our visit in the summer of 2022, I felt like I walked into a very changed museum. For starters, I felt a bolt of energy in the SparkLab, which was led by a very dynamic and engaging Director of Education, Gabrielle Meyer. As the proposal mentions, Ms. Meyer, a teacher by training, not only has helped improve the Smithsonian-branded program at the Museum itself but brought those same ideas to other Smithsonian institutions. Moreover, the connections she has resurrected with the Morris School District will both enhance the museum and our local schools. Following that, we were brought to an exhibit of contemporary art in motion, which I found inspiring, provocative, and even at times funny. It gave a new breath of life to the Guinness collection-inspired theme of art in motion. Smartly, the curatorial team paired this contemporary art in motion with some of the historical automata in the Guinness collection.

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Finally, we stepped into the Art in the Atrium exhibit, which had bold, brightly colored, and emotionally resonant pieces that I wanted to keep looking at. How refreshing it felt to see more contemporary art in this museum and from artists of color to boot!

I should note that we also saw just how badly chipped and cracked the floor in the main exhibition hall was. This is indeed an urgent project.

I wish I could say our visit with Andrew Sandall was as impressive, as I left really not knowing what to make of him. He barely said a word in our first hour, though became more animated once we sat down. As his departure seems to demonstrate, it seems he didn't know what to make of his position either. Fingers crossed Morris Museum can find a new director that can build on some of these positive developments that have occurred under both Cleveland Johnson's tenure and Andrew's brief year of leadership.

I recommend \$50K for general operating support for the museum, \$5K for the Bickford Theatre in honor of Wilson Compton, and \$45K for the replacement of the Main Gallery floors.

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<b>FM KIRBY FOUNDATION</b>			
<b>Financial Statement Analysis</b>			
<b>Grantee Name:</b>	The Morris Museum	<b>Date:</b>	2/13/2023
<b>Prepared By:</b>	DLK		
<b>Grant Request Amt.</b>	\$ 90,000	<b>Type of Financial Report Submitted</b>	Audit
<b>Budgeted Amt.</b>	\$ 100,000	<b>Period Covered in Financial Report</b>	FYE 6/30/22
<b>Audit Firm</b>	Nisivoccia LLP	<b>Date of Report Issuance</b>	8/30/2022
<b>Opinion</b>	Present fairly		
<b>Basis of Acctg.</b>	GAAP		
<b>Current Ratio (Liquidity Ratio/Working Capital Ratio)</b>	3.15	<b>Amount of Unrestricted Net Assets (Operating Reserve)</b>	\$ 6,335,947

**Note:** A current ratio measures an organization's ability to pay short-term and long-term obligations. The higher the ratio, the more capable the organization is of paying its obligations. A ratio under 1 indicates that the organization's liabilities are greater than its assets.

<b>Allocation of Functional Expenses</b>	<b>6/30/2022</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Must Read Financial Statement Notes</b>
<b>A. Program Service Expenses</b>	\$ 2,316,120	71%	Ideally program expenses should be at least 70% of total budget.
<b>B. Management and General</b>	\$ 367,373	11%	
<b>C. Fundraising</b>	\$ 570,618	18%	
<b>D. Total Expenses</b>	\$ 3,254,111	100%	

**Comments/ Notes:**

**Budget:** The FY23 budget is projected to essentially break even with a 5% reduction in revenues (\$147K) and 5% reduction in expenses (\$135K) vs FY22. Increases in government grants (\$591K), foundations (\$40K) and corporate matches (\$37K) are being offset by small decreases in other lines, as well as anticipated declines in investments of \$283K. The Museum has requested \$45K GOS and \$45K towards repairing the gallery floors. The entire project is estimated to cost \$98K and they have received \$10K in foundation monies thus far. Essentially the Foundation will be covering half of the expense (if we fund the \$45K requested).

**FY22 Audit:** The Museum had an operating deficit of \$1.5M for FY22 vs a surplus of \$1.3M for FY21. Total support and revenue declined \$2.2M (56%). \$1.9M was attributable to a negative swing on realized/unrealized gains of investments as well as unique FY21 monies for PPP of \$263K and employee retention \$124K. Government grants and program fees grew \$505K (178%) and \$138K (43%), respectively, over FY21. Both exhibit and theatre programs grew in FY22, with total program expenses growing \$341K (17%). Supporting services grew \$237K (34%). The Museum had investments of \$7.2M as of June 30, 2022, of which \$6.2M are endowment-related. I will note that underwater endowments totaled \$891K, comprised of 2 donor restricted endowment funds, at June 30, 2022. The Museum has a \$200K line of credit available to meet cash flow needs, with no balance outstanding as of June 30, 2022. The Museum has financial assets on hand to meet approximately 6 months of normal operating expenses (with a goal of 2 months on hand). There were no issues of material weaknesses or instances of noncompliance in the auditors report on internal control over financial reporting. All-in-all, no red flags as a result of my review.

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**DISPOSITION:**

- Declination
- Hold for review on/about:
- Approval for: **\$100,000**
- Hold for Board Review
- Insert Information: **For: General Operating Support-\$50,000; toward support of The Bickford Theatre in honor of Dr. Wilson M. Compton-\$5,000; toward replacement of the Main Gallery floors-\$45,000**
- Other:

Initials: JJK Date: 3/28/23

Check #: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_