



**THE CHARLES H. WRIGHT
MUSEUM OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN HISTORY**



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Mary Sheffield, President, Detroit City Council

FROM: Neil A. Barclay, J.D., President and CEO

DATE: March 17, 2023

RE: 2023-2024 Budget Questions

Attached are the written responses to your budget questions.

Please contact us if you have any questions or require additional information.

cc: Councilmembers
Auditor General's Office
Jay Rising, Chief Financial Officer
Tanya Stoudemire, Chief Deputy CFO
Steve Watson, Budget Director
Donald Rencher, Group Executive
James George, Agency CFO
Doug Ortiz, Budget Analyst
Malik Washington, Mayor's Office
David Whitaker, Legislative Policy Division

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RESPONSES TO COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARY SHEFFIELD'S BUDGET QUESTIONS

1. To date, has the museum received any ARPA funding? If so, how has that money been used?

The museum was allocated \$1.8M in ARPA funding by the mayor which has not yet been disbursed. Those funds have been allocated to the renovation of the theater. In 1997, the theater technology was state-of-the-art; now the lighting, sound, and control systems are obsolete and must be completely overhauled. In addition, the theater is not ADA compliant and is difficult to navigate for those with health challenges. The condition of the theater has limited our ability to capitalize on the opportunities from many movie studios who would like to premiere African American movies at our facility.

2. What is the rate of employee turnover at the museum? Is the museum currently experiencing any staffing shortage?

The turnover rate for FY 2023 is 5%. The museum is impacted by the current shortage of candidates for open positions. We are taking measures to mitigate the impact by securing search firms for higher level positions; posting open positions with career-specific regional and national associations; and hosting a job fair in May 2023.

3. The museum hosts several ongoing sustainability initiatives that focus on three core impact areas: water, energy, and waste. What results have you seen from those initiatives? What is the educational impact of those initiatives and programs?

The Wright has adopted practices to decrease our carbon footprint, including reducing waste by supporting local brands and vendors, using sustainable packaging in our museum shop, and producing The Wright merchandise with 100% natural materials. We are providing an innovative



and comprehensive array of programming for Earth Month and will expand these experiences in the coming years.

The Wright continues to ensure that all major capital projects are completed to ensure systems operate at maximum efficiency and use green practices and materials when feasible.

The Wright also hosted the d.Tree Studio project in conjunction with The College for Creative Studies. This project transformed dying Zelcova trees into artistic projects that explored the interconnectedness between object making, storytelling, and belonging in African American History. Subsequently, this project continued with Treeposium, a virtual conversation attended by more than 900 attendees to have a conversation related to the African American experience in Detroit, the science of trees, and how they are connected.

Wright's efforts and programs in sustainability have received regional, state, and national recognition.

Our President and Chief Sustainability Officer have been invited to present at several major museum conferences, the American Alliance of Museums, African American Association of Museums. The Wright is a partner in the "Held in Trust" program, which is a 3-year collaboration between the National Endowment for Humanities and the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation of Cultural Heritage. It examines existing infrastructure, challenges and opportunities in the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage, with the intent of establishing a forward-looking vision for the future. The project focuses on the intersection of conservation and preservation with critical areas of study, including environmental resilience, science and technology, inclusivity, equity, and collaboration in professional practice, education, philosophy, and ethics.

4. As we continue to transition back to normal, what protocols does the museum have in place to ensure member and public safety?



The Wright has a mandatory vaccination policy for its employees and requires each employee to undergo temperature monitoring prior to entering the facility. In addition, our admissions area is separated with plexiglass to further protect the safety of our visitors. While we encourage masks, we do not insist our visitors wear masks while enjoying the museum experience. The Wright also has capacity protocols in place to control the flow of groups through our exhibitions.

- 5. The museum provides a range of educational opportunities for children. One of the opportunities is Museum Educator, which offers classroom talks, assemblies, and interactive workshops that enhance a child's knowledge in social studies, language arts, and geography. Does the museum still provide Museum Educator? What analysis can the museum provide proving that this opportunity strengthens the youth's ability to excel in school?**

The Wright continues the Museum Educator program, and it is slated to expand in FY 24. The Wright does not have specific analyses regarding our museum, however according to the American Alliance of Museums' (AAM) website:

Museums have a deep impact on lifelong learning process where they are active tools to enhance social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development.

In addition to the benefits cited above, it is life-affirming for African American youth to come to the museum and on a deeper level, learn about their history, heritage and impact on society.



Part of our FY 24 strategic plan is to secure funding for programs supporting paid fellowships and mentorships to create a pipeline of African American museum professionals on a national scale.

6. Does the museum have any severe infrastructure needs?

Yes. The museum is currently addressing the infrastructure needs created by years of deferred maintenance. In the next 5 years the museum will need to spend nearly \$20M to address the infrastructure needs of a building owned by the City of Detroit. Funding that should be used on presenting culturally enriching educational programs, technologically innovative exhibitions, and just as important-- thought provoking discussions with local and national thought leaders that explore ways to heal and recover from the system racial inequities, socioeconomic issues, and environmental disparities that plague our communities. The projects are presented in our FY 2023 Budget and supporting schedules and further explained in responses submitted just before this communication to the Council. We are hoping that this information will help to support our request that additional funding be provided.