

## **AAR Regional Development Grant Application**

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Project Interfaith, an interfaith organization whose director is an AAR member, requests \$4,000 to partner with the AAR Rocky Mountain Region to prepare resources for its Community Mosaic Video Project (CMVP) which aims to increase public dialogue about belief, religious diversity, and identity. As part of this program, Project Interfaith will create a set of discussion guides—one for high school students, one for college students, and one for the general community—that will help encourage and steer conversations on religion concerning issues of identity, stereotypes, diversity, and building an inclusive community.

### **Project Description**

The CMVP began in July 2010 with a call for volunteer interviewers. After receiving 41 applications, Project Interfaith chose 35 volunteers to serve as interviewers for this project. These individuals fanned out throughout the Omaha metropolitan area to gather people's responses to a series of questions on their religious or spiritual identity, stereotypes that impact them based on this identity, and how comfortable they find Omaha to practice their spiritual or religious path. Originally, Project Interfaith planned to interview through December 2010, but due to the overwhelming interest by community members in being interviewed for this project, the interview period was extended through March 2011. Originally, Project Interfaith hoped to collect 150 videos; interviewers ended up gathering over 700 videos. Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and followers of Native American ways, non-believers, Sikhs, and many more told their stories on camera. People came from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, classes, and professions as well. Staff even made sure to interview recent immigrants to Omaha. These videos will be placed on a new interactive section of the Project Interfaith website, complete with a comment forum, a rating system based on video content and utility, and links to reliable resources on religious and cultural diversity. In addition to updating and compiling new resources for educators and community members, Project Interfaith is creating a set of discussion guides for high school educators, college campuses, and general community members. These will prompt conversation about how religion acts as an identity, the diversity within Omaha and within identity groups and belief systems, the destructive power of stereotypes, and ways to build a community inclusive of religious and spiritual diversity. Project Interfaith will make additional hard copies of the discussion guides and corresponding videos to distribute to college professors, high school educators, and college and high school student groups throughout the region.

## **Background on Project Interfaith's work on these issues**

Launched in December 2005, Project Interfaith, Project Interfaith's mission is to grow understanding, respect and relationships among people of all faiths, beliefs and cultures. Project Interfaith does this through a variety of community and online programs including interfaith arts programs, interfaith study circles and trainings for professionals on religious and cultural diversity. Because of the limited contact between people of different beliefs and the large amounts of misinformation about religions, Project Interfaith aims to increase the levels of awareness, education and interaction among people of diverse beliefs and cultures in our community and beyond. To bring together community members of various belief systems and to dispel stereotypes about religious/spiritual identity, Project Interfaith increasingly is using online programming to educate and engage community members. In February and March of 2010, Project Interfaith initiated its first online program, its Interfaith Youth Service Project. In it, eight Omaha youth of different faiths and backgrounds volunteered together, sharing their stories and helping break down stereotypes about their beliefs. Project Interfaith asked each participant to record a video blog of their experiences, responding to different questions asked each week on belief, identity and service. Project Interfaith then posted these videos on the website to show the community. In the six weeks of the program, the videos received over 1,500 views. This program inspired the Community Mosaic Video Project.

## **Project benefits to AAR members and the work of the region**

As Omaha grows more diverse and people begin to discover different religions and belief systems, college professors, educators, professionals, and community members will increasingly need accurate resources as well as ongoing opportunities to learn about the religious diversity in our community and world. The CMVP acts not only as a platform for people to discuss their beliefs, but as an outreach tool to educators and community members. By interacting with Project Interfaith through the CMVP, we people will become connected with the credible, academic resources on religion available through the site as well as tools for them to foment discussion in the classroom or elsewhere. Since the CMVP uses personal stories, this provides an approachable way for people to begin learning about religion. Too often community members stray away from scholarly information about religions, viewing these texts as too complicated. The CMVP provides an entry point for general community members to begin learning about religions so they will not fear academic resources as their interest grows. Additionally, the conversation guides will help college professors and educators discuss religion in the classroom and the diversity and complexity within each tradition. Project Interfaith will hold focus groups of both college professors and students before CMVP launches to ensure the guides are user-friendly, helpful and effective tools for dialogue and learning. Finally, the videos catalogue provides AAR members with a research tool to study the religious diversity within different traditions and in Omaha. We believe AAR's support with this program will help provide AAR members with a tool to actively engage their students and community members in discussions about religion, lead community members to materials written by AAR members, and provide a large collection of videos to aid AAR members' research.

## **Implications for other regions**

Project Interfaith hopes religious scholars and educator across the nation will access and use the CMVP. With hundreds of personal interviews conducted with people across the Omaha metropolitan area, the CMVP acts as a valuable resource for anyone interested in studying the spirituality or religiosity of the region as well as how people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century construct their religious identities. Visitors to the Project Interfaith's site may also recognize the value of the CMVP and wish to duplicate the project in their own communities. As more people document their own communities' mosaics, they may rely on Project Interfaith for reliable resources, who may in turn seek partnerships with other AAR regions in order to help provide resources most relevant to the communities. Funding the CMVP provides a way that Project Interfaith and AAR can partner on a project with the potential to grow to other regions.

## **Budget for Project Interfaith's Community Mosaic Video Project**

### **Editing and Launch Phase**

Executive Director (500 hours)

Project Coordinator (720 hours)

Communications Director (200 hours)

Research Intern

Project Intern

Communications Intern

Rough-Cutting Videos

Trailer Video

Discussion Guides

Website Design Fees (Oxide Design)

Website Coding (Juicio Brennan)

Film Editing

Community Reception and Launch

Interviewer Trainings

Hosting Charges (half cost)

Testing Project Pages

Advertisement & Recruitment

**Total:**