

City of Alexandria, Virginia
FY 2023 Proposed Operating Budget & CIP
Budget Questions & Answers

April 12, 2022

Question: What staffing considerations are included in the proposed budget to support the reopening of the Freedom House Museum? What additional supplemental staffing has been considered, but not funded, to expand interpretation of existing and future black history resources? Please provide a memo on funding needed to open Freedom House.

How can the City improve the visibility and awareness of the Watson Reading Room collection? What would be the cost if the current collection were added to the Alexandria Library's public online catalog similar to the materials in the Law Library and Local History /Special Collections branch?

Response: The Freedom House Museum is planned to re-open to the public by May 27, 2022. The site will remain open through December 2023, when it will close again for a full restoration (pending funding). The museum will be open to the public Thursday through Monday.

OHA received \$150,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Tranche #1 funding for frontline staffing hours for Freedom House through December 2023. This work includes guest services, facilitating dialogue with visitors, introducing exhibitions, and answering questions. These staff are also responsible for the security of the building, property, and personnel, and for preparing and submitting daily activities reports.

Additionally, the FY 2023 Proposed Budget recommends the allocation of \$26,052 of ARPA Tranche #2 for seasonal frontline staff across all other museums. HR is currently conducting an equity review of front of house staffing pay; the review is not yet complete, but preliminary estimates are suggesting that additional funding will be needed. The exact amount will be determined when the review is complete. Appropriately compensating front of house staff is critical in both attracting and retaining individuals who are essential in not only keeping the City's museums open, but accurately and skillfully interpreting Alexandria's rich and diverse history, with specific training in African American History and facilitating dialogue.

To increase engagement in the broader community and more deeply embed diverse voices into the work of the department, a 1.0 FTE Community Engagement Coordinator is a targeted aspirational position for the re-envisioned OHA. This position would focus on community connections and community-driven projects as OHA continues to pursue social justice initiatives. Examples of current projects this staff position would play a key role in include the Douglass Cemetery restoration, implementing the Fort Ward Interpretive Plan, community engagement around the Freedom House Museum, and actively engaging Alexandria's immigrant community. If funded, this staff member would work alongside existing community partners as well as forge relationships with new ones. Their work would help inform the experiences, programs, and services of OHA to help the department in their mission to use history to enrich the present and inspire the future. With the FY 2023 proposed pay scale at an estimated GS 14/8, the cost of a 1.0 FTE Community Engagement Coordinator position would be approximately \$89,427 with salary and benefits.

To increase the department’s capacity to share underrepresented histories in a variety of media and programs, a 1.0 FTE Education Specialist: Underrepresented Histories is a targeted aspirational position for the re-envisioned OHA. This position would guide programming and interpretive materials for a wide variety of ages as part of broader efforts to tell more diverse and inclusive histories. Examples of current projects this position would play a key role in include developing school programming (on-site and online materials) for Freedom House Museum, creating short videos sharing Alexandria’s diverse history (for use in social media and classrooms), assisting with the development of materials about Alexandria’s racial history for the Race and Social Equity Office, and leading efforts to engage diverse members of the community in US 250th planning. If funded, this staff member would enhance OHA’s ability to respond to community requests and needs, which often revolve around more effective sharing of our City’s diverse history. With the FY 2023 proposed pay scale at GS 14/8, the cost of a 1.0 FTE Education Specialist position would be approximately \$89,427 with salary and benefits.

Watson Reading Room Response

The Watson Reading Room is currently available to researchers and residents by appointment. It is a non-circulating library collection. To enhance public access and use of the research materials and books in the Watson Reading Room, staff have been cataloging the collection with support from museum volunteers. To date, 2,700 of the 4,500 publications have been entered into the museum’s collections management software database called Past Perfect. Once completed, this database can be accessed through the Office of Historic Alexandria’s website.

In 2020, the following costs were estimated to add the current collection to the Alexandria Library’s public online catalog (these numbers have not been escalated to 2022):

Vendor extract, format, import any data “rescuable” from the current collection resource database. Estimated 4,000 items (3months).	\$6,810-\$7,700
Creation and addition of an “Office of Historic Alexandria Branch” module into theLibrary’s current online system.	\$1,720
Cataloging Librarian \$35-\$50 per hour or Cataloging Paraprofessional (copy-cataloguer) (\$30-\$40 per hour)	Part Time Cataloger: \$26,400 (6 months) Part Time Paraprofessional: \$21,120 (6months)
Library supplies (Labels, label covers, printerink, book covers, etc.).	\$2,500
Total	\$32,150 - \$38,320