Request for Proposals: Interpretive Plan

January 19, 2022

Project Overview

Revolutionary Spaces, which operates the Old South Meeting House and Old State House at the heart of Boston’s Freedom Trail, is requesting proposals from exhibition design firms and individuals to develop an interpretive plan connecting our two sites’ stories and making them relevant to broader audiences.

Project Background

Revolutionary Spaces, Inc. (RSI) was established in 2020 following the merger of the Bostonian Society (Old State House) and the Old South Association in Boston (Old South Meeting House), two of the oldest privately preserved historic sites in the United States. We are a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Our two sites are unique historical sites individually. The Old State House (OSH) is a brick structure built in 1713 to serve as the seat of British power in the Massachusetts Bay colony as well as the locus of government for the town of Boston; it also housed a “merchant’s exchange” where the mercantile elite engaged in trading and later served as the first capitol building of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts after independence. The Old South Meeting House (OSMH) is a Georgian Congregational meeting house built in 1729 to house the Third Church of Boston, which split from First Church in an acrimonious dispute over theology in the 1660s. It was the largest indoor meeting space in colonial Boston and was the
locus for numerous social, civic, and religious events, including the meetings that led to the Boston Tea Party and events that commemorated the Boston Massacre. Both buildings are on Boston’s Freedom Trail—a 2.5 mile trail connecting sixteen of Boston’s historic sites, which are operated variously by the National Park Service, the City of Boston, and numerous private organizations throughout the city’s Downtown, North End, and Charlestown neighborhoods. OSMH and OSH are adjacent sites situated in the middle section of the trail, and are uniquely positioned to interpret their own histories in relation to each other, as well as the surrounding landscape, which is directly connected to acts of protest, commerce, civic and family life.

During their time as separate institutions, OSH and OSMH built object collections specifically relevant to their respective histories. Acquiring artifact collections and archives, each site focused on the preservation and interpretation of its individual story. With the partnership of the two sites and their shared mission as Revolutionary Spaces, the organization now looks to further expand the way we interpret these cultural resources, using the object collections to weave together narratives built upon the spaces’ shared history. Finding the common historical threads, RSI seeks to use these object resources to illuminate the relationship between the two sites, while continuing to develop each building’s unique story. Ongoing projects have resulted in the majority of the collections currently residing in storage, with limited accessibility; while this imposes some limits to their use, RSI continues to pursue new and interesting ways to highlight these relevant objects through exhibits, social media spotlights, loans, reproductions, and more.

Revolutionary Spaces’ exhibits almost universally predate the newly formed organization, and reflect historical interpretations that lack modern or diverse perspectives. While the organization is in the process of creating temporary exhibits in two of its galleries to coincide with the Boston Tea Party 250th anniversary in 2023, we seek to create a new and innovative long-term interpretive plan for our gallery exhibits, as well as our guided interpretive experiences, which better reflect the organization’s new mission:

Revolutionary Spaces brings people together to explore the American struggle to create and sustain a free society, singularly evoked by Boston’s Old South Meeting House and Old State House. We steward these buildings as gathering spaces for the open exchange of ideas and the continuing practice of democracy, inspiring all who believe in the power of people to govern themselves.
Within the context of this new mission, RSI seeks to reinterpret our spaces through a series of core questions that allow connection between our two sites and the broader world, and to illustrate how the histories of these sites are relevant to modern visitors. Our core questions are:

- Who speaks for me?
- How is my voice heard?
- What is my ultimate recourse if I am silenced or marginalized?
- What ideals bind us together as a nation?
- How do we define “we” and draw the boundaries of the nation?

RSI envisions a transformation of OSH and OSMH from separate, tourist-centric American Revolutionary sites to a single destination. RSI seeks to become a local leader in telling the ongoing story of America from its founding to today in a way that allows for broader and more diverse audiences to see themselves in this nation’s history.

By leveraging the interrelated histories of the two buildings RSI looks to tell a fuller and more compelling story about the Revolution, and to reimagine how we tell the story of the Revolution in ways that deepen understanding not just of the past, but of the world we live in today, while supporting dialogue about the world we want for tomorrow.

We envision:

- A reimagined museum experience that makes Revolutionary Spaces the must-visit history destination of Downtown Boston
- Our sites as a regional hub for convening and creating community throughout Boston
- Experimental and innovative exhibits and corresponding programming that invites numerous entry points for visitors of all interest levels
- A site where narratives reflect a plurality of voices and diverse backgrounds

Project Deliverables

Proposals will focus on the first of two phases:
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<td><strong>PHASE 1</strong></td>
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| Produce interpretive plan report with recommendations for exhibits, interpretive strategy, accompanying public program and educational program themes, and possible marketing approaches | • 6 months of research and community engagement, including visitor surveys and facilitating 6 community listening sessions, 2-3 design workshops  
• Work with RSI team to identify partners, resources, and representation from target communities  
• **Final report, to be delivered by October 14, 2022, includes:**  
  • Interpretive plan  
  • Plan to implement experience from decision to visit to exit or post-visit engagement  
  • Identify opportunities for further research, including projects that can be pursued by academic partners, staff  
  • Design site-wide interpretive elements  
  • Estimated budget for implementation |
| **PHASE 2**  |                          |
| Implementation of Phase 1 interpretive plan, contingent on acquisition of funding. Expectation is to work with same team as Phase 1 along with necessary additions as outlined in Phase 1. | • Produce and install new exhibits, interpretive materials  
• Work with RSI to implement support programming  
• Work with RSI to implement new experience protocols with FOH interpretation staff (and retail staff if applicable)  
• Provide survey structure to be implemented by FOH staff and co-evaluated by RSI and contractor to measure success |
Phase 1 Partners include:

- Contractor
- Select Team from RSI Staff
- Scholars
- Public Historians
- Other relevant experts

Communities to engage with include:

- RS FOH Staff
- Local educators
- Representation from a broad swath of Greater Boston neighborhoods, including those traditionally excluded from main-line historical interpretation (Indigenous peoples, immigrants, people of color, LGBTQA+)
- Community leaders
- Historians, academic and public

Budget

The Phase 1 budget is $28,000, inclusive of all contractor expenses, including travel, printing, outside consultants, and any other expenses associated with developing the interpretive plan.

How to Submit

- Proposals must be submitted by March 7, 2022 to Sharon Kong-Perring, Exhibits Manager: sperring@revolutionaryspaces.org.
- Questions should be directed to Matthew Wilding, Director of Visitor Experience & Content Development: mwilding@revolutionaryspaces.org.
- Proposals will be evaluated by the Revolutionary Spaces Senior Leadership Team and follow-up interviews will be scheduled following the deadline, with an anticipated decision by April 4, 2022.
**Evaluation Criteria**

Revolutionary Spaces is open to proposals of all experience levels and encourages applicants from all walks of life. That said, proposals from consultants or firms with the following qualifications will be given priority:

- At least one previous example of successful execution of an interpretive plan
- At least one successfully implemented major exhibit from planning stages to execution
- Previous experience engaging with audiences outside of traditional historical tourist market, with a focus on collaborating with Indigenous and/or BIPOC communities

Please note that absence of one or more of these qualifications will not exclude proposals from consideration.