**Final Report on 2015 SEAC Public Outreach Grant**

**Promoting Prehistory Along the Mississippi River in the Southeast**

**By**

**Robert P. Connolly**

**October 25, 2016**

The report below is organized to address the relevant summary performance from the original grant application:

**B. Person/Agency Apply for Grant**

Robert P. Connolly, C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa, University of Memphis

In September of 2016, Connolly retired as the Director of the C.H. Nash Museum, University of Memphis. He is best reached now at:

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**C. List of Principals**

Allison Hennie – Project Research, Design, and Implementation

Ms. Hennie is no longer affiliated with the University of Memphis and is best reached via her email at:

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**D. Proposed Grant Period**

The terms of the grant project, less final report, were completed between March 1, 2015 and December 8, 2015.

**E – Description of Project Activities Completed**

Throughout the grant period, the Statement of Problem remained the focus of carrying out the grant project without amendment.

The Proposed Solutions from the Grant Proposal were addressed as follows:

* The revised brochure was not printed until August of 2015 as opposed to the originally scheduled May, 2015 date. The delay in completion was the result of a slow response from the museum venues included in the brochure and a significant challenge in the printing process. The original vendor from whom we received the price quote of $650.00 for 5000 copies ultimately determined that they could not print a two-sided oversized brochure. A considerable amount of time was spent in locating a vendor who could print the brochure at the $650.00 budgeted cost. By September of 2015 the brochure was distributed to the 18 venues listed.
* By August of 2015, a website that contained a digital version of the brochure was created and contained all of the content described in the proposal. As well, a blog was launched by August of 2015 as described in the proposal.
* In the Fall Semester of 2015, students in Connolly’s Museum Practices Graduate Seminar reviewed and offered suggested revision to the brochure and digital presence as needed.

**F. Audience**

**G. Plan for Publicity**

**H. Distribution Plan and Project Follow-up**

All proposal actions in Sections F – H were carried out as described in the original submission.

**I – Evaluation Plan** –

The evaluation plan as described in the proposal was modified as follows:

* Participating museums were contacted for their feedback.
* No website feedback form or formal website analytics were conducted as discussed below.
* From September through October of 2015, students in Connolly’s Museum Practices Graduate Seminar did perform a complete and detailed best practices evaluation of the brochure and website. However, this evaluation did not include the formal analytics noted in the approved proposal, as noted below.

The proposed budget was adhered to without modification.

**Discussion of Implementation Process**

Implementing the terms of the grant did not go smoothly and was met with challenges along the way. In noting these challenges, at the outset, I take full responsibility to the extent the terms of the grant were not completed.

* Timing – the actual scheduling of the grant proved overly-enthusiastic given the logistics. Without my day-to-day oversight in addressing the direct challenges, the project consistently became bogged down in waiting on decisions and feedback. This was particularly true in receiving responses from some museum venues. In fact, in a couple of instances, at major public venues we did not receive a response until the first brochure draft was circulated based on information that we obtained without the assistance of the venue. The venue response to the draft was then to correct errors. I regret that this level of feedback is somewhat consistent with my experience when students are charged with contacting venues for information, even after an initial invitation from me. That is, and quite unfortunately, when a PhD is affixed to the inquiry, venues are more likely to respond than when contacted by a student. The slow response pushed the project back several months, and past the height of the tourist season for most venues.
* Digital and Analytics - Weebly proved to be a poor choice for hosting the website. The analytics, social media sharing capabilities, and general flexibility to meet the needs of the project were poorly served by Weebly. Further, although all venues who responded were very favorable to the brochure, no venue integrated the website into their promotional activities. No museum wrote a blog post or provided any indication that they promoted the website. For these reasons, the formal website analytics were not followed up. The website was abandoned and the domain not renewed.

 **Discussion of Results**

* The brochure (attached) was a big success. All responding venues enthusiastically received the copies and provided anecdotal support for the project. All venues have a pdf copy of the brochure and can reprint same if desired. Several venues, particularly those operated by their respective state park systems, noted that they were formally prohibited from distributing brochures that promoted venues outside of their states, despite their doing so on a routine basis. Given this stipulation, it is not clear that all venues displayed and promoted the brochure equally.
* The website did not meet the expectations of the grant proposal. No venue ultimately followed through with any form of promotion or engagement with the digital presentation. This result is particularly problematic given the concern over the lack of visitation expressed at many of the venues, coupled with the survey results referenced in the grant proposal that demonstrate mobile technology is the leading tool used by the public to decide how to spend their discretionary time. This finding suggests that education is necessary for venues in promoting themselves. Unfortunately, because of the top down bureaucratic control over many of these public facilities, such decision-making is often beyond the scope of the individual venue. Ultimately the educational need on the cross-promoting of interstate cultural heritage venues needs to occur on the upper administrative level of the state agencies. Today, a cursory scan of venue websites included in the brochure shows no movement to cross-promote links outside of their respective state boundaries. The only exception on the list remains the C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa, from where this project arose.

**Conclusion**

The publication of Prehistoric Earthworks of the Mississippi Valley brochure and website with funds provided by the 2015 SEAC Public Outreach Grant is judged a qualified success. Grant oversight shortcomings on timing and other logistical considerations by the grant applicant caused unfortunate delays in response from participating venues. The brochure production is considered very successful. Because of platform and lack of engagement by participating venues, the website production did not achieve its goals. The needs outlined in the grant proposal remain and were addressed to a limited extent by the grant products. Hopefully, future projects will learn from our successes and shortcomings to better address the need of inter-state cultural heritage promotion.