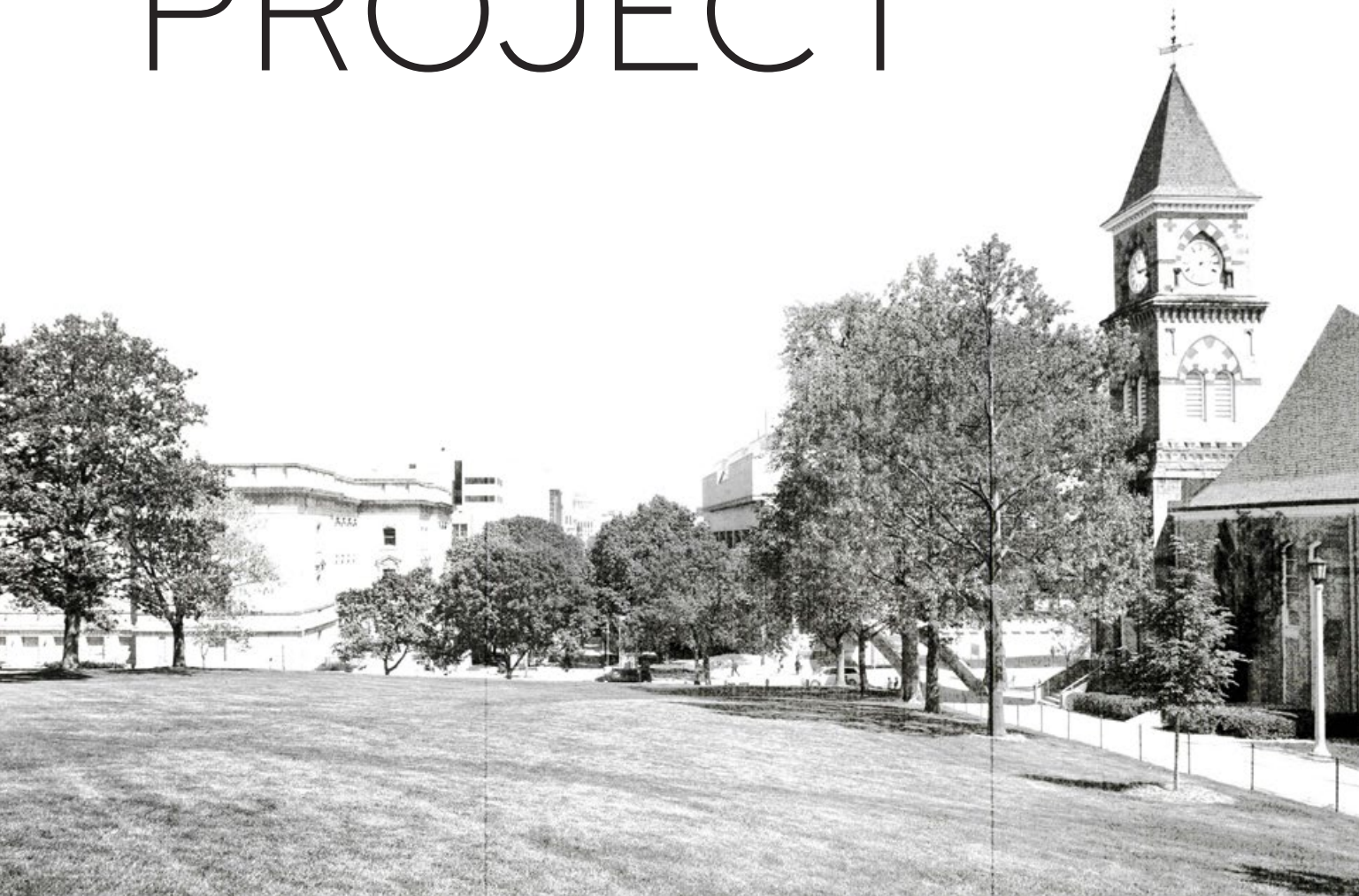


FINAL REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

# PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT



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# HISTORY & FOUNDING



In August 2017, the white supremacist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, jolted the nation into reckoning with histories of racism. In the wake of that tragedy, UW–Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank convened a study group to research two student organizations in the early 1920s that bore the name of the Ku Klux Klan. The [resulting report](#) identified the university as then having “a pervasive culture of racial and religious bigotry ... in which exclusion and indignity were routine, sanctioned in the institution’s daily life, and unchallenged by its leaders.” The study group urged the chancellor to “recover the voices of campus community members ... who struggled and endured in a climate of hostility and who sought to change it.”

The UW–Madison Public History Project was commissioned by Chancellor Blank in 2019 as a limited-term initiative to uncover and give voice to the many groups across the institution’s history who experienced and challenged discrimination and exclusion on campus and who worked to change the culture of the university. The Project was initially funded for three years at \$1 million. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Project’s initial three-year timeline was extended by one year.

### Structure

The Project was structured around an initial founding document developed by a working group of faculty and staff, which was empaneled by Chancellor Blank in summer 2018. This document included a draft mission statement, research priorities, outcomes and outputs, and a process overview for approaching the beginning of the Project. This document proved to be an important base for the work of the Project. As the



### INSIGHTS: *Structure*

One of the challenging aspects of the Project’s structure can be seen in its staff’s reporting relationships. The project director was administratively housed in the university’s history department yet reported directly to the vice provost for faculty and staff affairs. Later, the project director reported to the vice provost for teaching and learning. While this kept the project in close contact with university administration, it also left project staff siloed in one academic department. As a campuswide initiative with impacts felt across all departments and units, we believe it is best to house an initiative like this at the administrative level to ensure access across the whole of the institution.

Project progressed, many features of the founding document proved prescient – the research priorities remained so central to the work that they served as the exhibition’s published themes and the outcomes, and the outputs remained as the Project’s final deliverables.

One of the founding document’s most important contributions to the Project was establishing a steering committee. It was important to the university that the Project be free to follow its research agenda without interference. Further, it was important that the project director and project researchers be able to maintain their academic freedom.

To ensure this, the Project reported to a steering committee appointed by the chancellor that consisted of faculty, staff, students, and Madison community members. This committee met at least once per semester to consult on issues related to the Project, including research priorities, hiring, timeline, deliverables, and more. The steering committee also consulted on research priorities, supported the Project's blog, advised researchers, and line edited the final exhibition. They were constant, strategic partners, a "sounding board" for team members, and important vocal proponents of the Project.



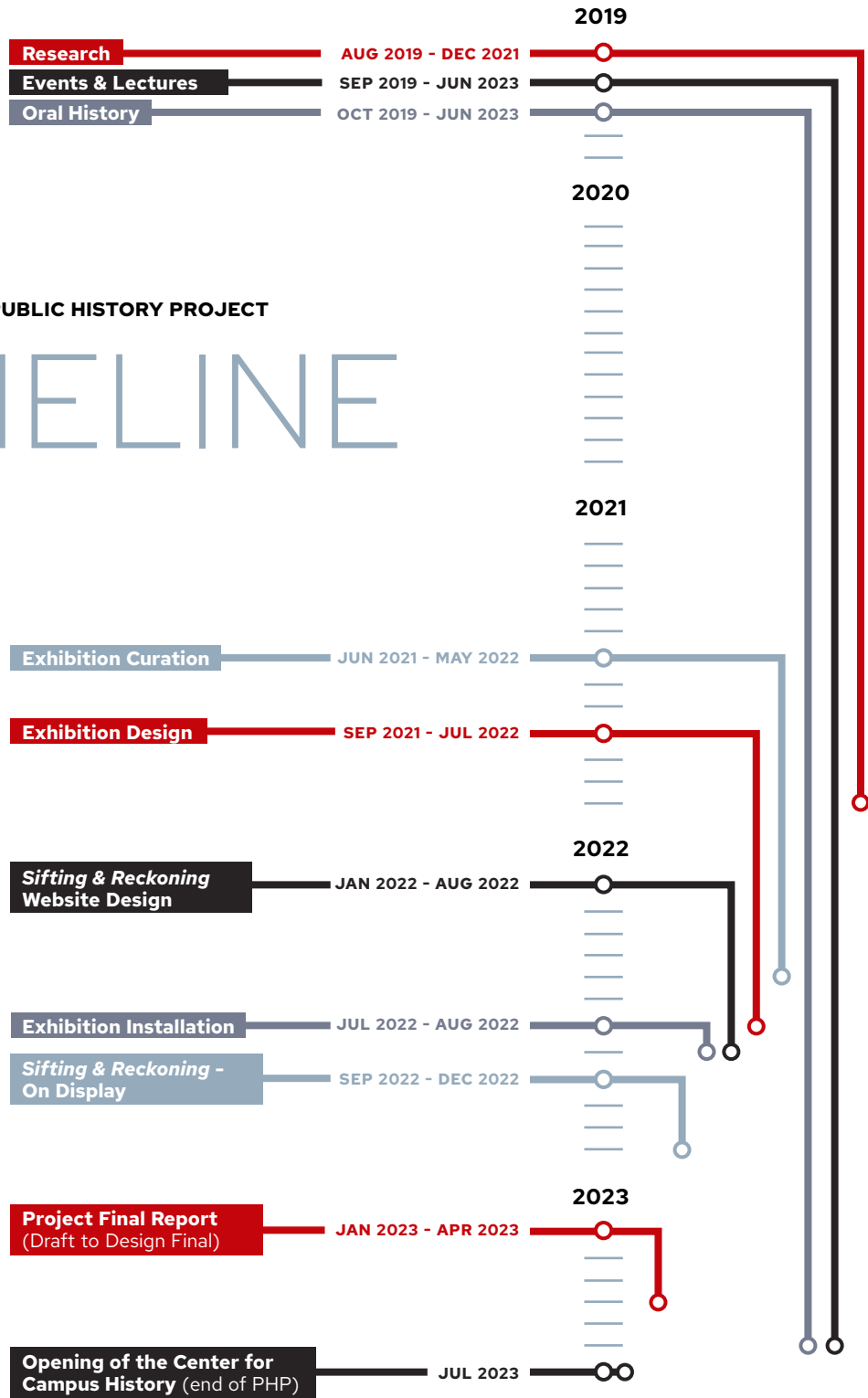
### **INSIGHTS:** *Structure*

The Project's steering committee proved important, not only to ensure academic freedom for staff and researchers, but also as a consultative, supportive, and strategic partner. The committee proved to be essential to the success of the Project.

# TIMELINE



# PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT TIMELINE



**INSIGHTS:** *Timeline*

One of the most time-consuming portions of the Project was simply identifying an exhibition space on campus. Few gallery spaces exist on campus. Many gallery spaces on campus were not appropriate due to their size, location, staffing infrastructure, and more. The Project's director began searching for a space only a few months into the Project's creation and was only able to secure a space due to a partnership with the Chazen Museum of Art. If a physical exhibition is a planned final product, work to identify a location early.

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Partnerships across campus made seemingly large, time-consuming tasks more manageable. The Project's partnership with University Marketing to create a digital exhibition website saved project staff considerable time. While project staff still had to write and edit copy, provide primary and secondary source materials, draft alternative text and image captions, gather links and accompanying information, and consult on the overall design of the site, the marketing team bore the heavy responsibility of actually developing the digital exhibition – a task that would have been out of the expertise of Project staff and would have proved too financially difficult on a limited budget.

# BUDGET



## BUDGET

The Project's budget totaled approximately \$1 million over four years, with funding provided by the Office of the Chancellor from private sources and without use of public finances. The largest portion of the budget went toward staffing, including both full-time staff members and graduate and undergraduate student assistants. Other notable expenditures included printing/production of exhibition materials, design work for the exhibition from an external agency, events, technology and office supplies, professional development, and tuition support for student assistants.

Beyond direct funding, the Project also relied on in-kind support from other university entities. These included the Chazen Museum

of Art, which provided exhibition space, installation services, and expertise; and University Marketing, which provided web development services for the exhibition website.

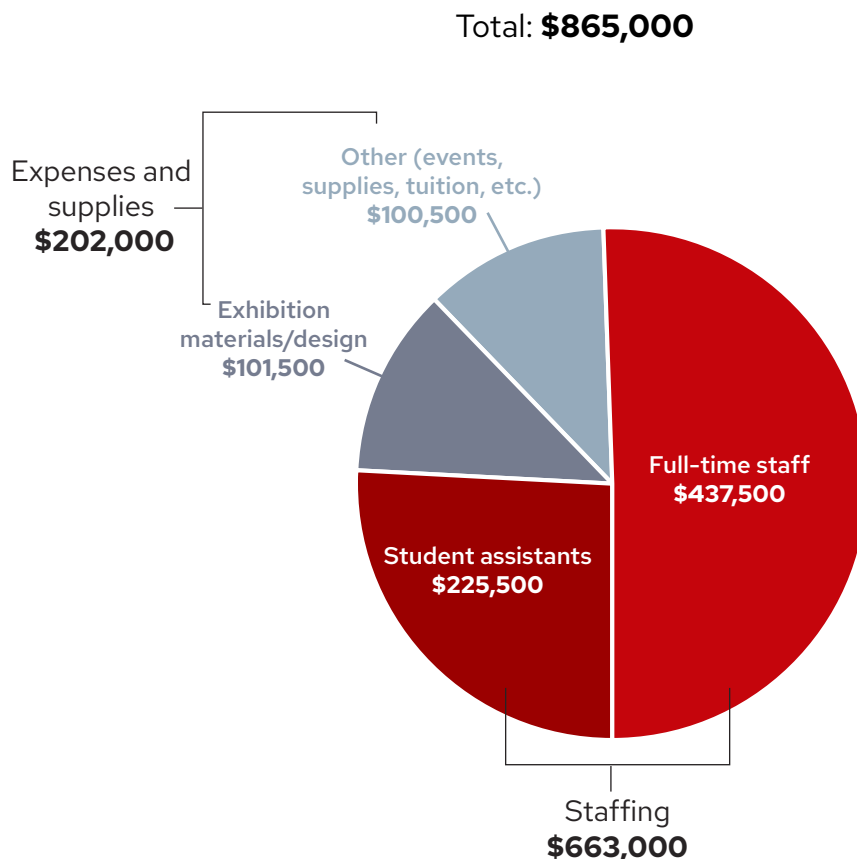
To date, expenditures have totaled an estimated \$865,000. Remaining funds from the \$1 million budget are expected to support development of the new Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History and the reinstallation of the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition.

An approximate breakdown of Project expenditures is as follows:



### INSIGHTS: Budget

Throughout the Project, even with the generous initial investment of \$1 million, budget challenges did arise. These were most apparent when it came to hiring full-time staff. We encourage others seeking to do this work to consider investing seriously in projects of this nature and to scale the budget appropriately to the final deliverables expected.



# STAFFING



Following the approval and funding of the Public History Project, there was a nationwide search for a project director. Kacie Lucchini Butcher, an award-winning public historian, was [hired](#) and began the role in August 2019. For the majority of the Project's four years, Lucchini Butcher was the sole full-time staff member. This proved to be incredibly challenging, and ultimately, untenable. With an ever-increasing workload in the lead-up to the release of the Project's final products, the Project reallocated funding to hire support.

In September 2021, the Project hired its first assistant director, Meri Rose Ekberg. With experience in arts administration and curation, Ekberg brought a wealth of knowledge to the Project. She served in her role for two months before taking a permanent position with the City of Madison. Prior to her departure, she implemented essential project management

systems for the team that were critical in the success of the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition.

In March 2022, the first project coordinator, [John K. Wilson](#), was hired. Wilson is an experienced multimedia communicator with a background in journalism who proved critical to the success of the Project's digital exhibition.

In June 2022, [Taylor L. Bailey](#) transitioned from her role as a graduate student curatorial assistant for the Project into her role as assistant director. She came with an intimate knowledge of the Project's innerworkings and extensive experience as a Black studies scholar with a proven track record in digital storytelling and exhibition curation. Lucchini Butcher, Bailey, and Wilson will remain on as staff of the forthcoming Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History.



### INSIGHTS: *Staffing*

It was critical to have a dedicated full-time employee directing the Project. While other university history projects appointed faculty to lead such efforts, we found that having a dedicated staff person to “steer the ship” ended up being essential to the later success of the work. With no pressure to teach, publish, or provide university service beyond the Project itself, Lucchini Butcher was free to focus solely on the Project and its outputs.



### **INSIGHTS:** *Staffing*

The Project began with stated deliverables, including a physical exhibition, a digital exhibition website, curricular materials, events, and lectures, alongside a robust research agenda, community engagement, communications, and stakeholder discussions. It was not a job for one person, or ultimately, even three. Projects of this scale and scope demand multiple dedicated staff members to ensure stated goals are met and deliverables are most impactful. If project deliverables are predetermined by university leadership, staffing must be scaled appropriately to the deliverables being requested, or conversely project leadership must alter deliverable requests based on available staffing.

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There is an inherent challenge in attracting and retaining talented professionals for positions of this nature, which are often short term and dispersed geographically across the country – a challenge that is not unique to this project but instead one faced across higher education. Yet, it is one worth noting and considering as projects are developed, positions are posted, and searches are conducted.

# RESEARCH



Conducting historical research was at the core of the Public History Project’s mission to give voice and space to histories of discrimination and resistance at UW–Madison. Our research covers over 175 years of UW–Madison’s history, highlighting the experiences of diverse racial and social groups, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community. Since the Project’s inception in 2019, we worked tirelessly to uncover lesser known histories and to reinterpret stories that had long been told about our institution. With marginalized people’s experiences at the center of our research questions, our small team of researchers – the History Corps – conducted archival research, recorded oral history interviews, and read and perused through countless books, journal articles, yearbooks, newspapers, and the like to help our campus reckon with how our history affects our present. The History Corps consisted of nearly three dozen student researchers – both graduate and undergraduate. Members of the Project staff, steering committee, and trusted scholars in our university and Madison communities also contributed research in their respective areas of expertise. The bulk of our research concluded in 2021, with small research projects continuing throughout the curation of *Sifting & Reckoning*, while the exhibition was on view, and in the final months of the Project.

The research process of the Public History Project was intensive and necessitated a group of dedicated scholars to produce a large breadth of work. Therefore, the recruiting process for the History Corps was selective. Both undergraduate and graduate student researchers were recruited from various departments across the humanities. Students applied, were interviewed, and were paid to conduct qualitative research and other

miscellaneous duties. All students had interest and experience in doing historical research and writing.

It was important for the Project to employ student researchers for two main reasons. First, we knew that much of a university’s history is shaped by students – who we argued had such great impacts on the institution – and wanted that detail reflected in the way the Project went about conducting the research. Allowing students to have a direct role in telling a different history of UW–Madison centered their impact in a direct way. Second, providing undergraduate and graduate scholars with research opportunities was a main priority of the Project. We were specifically interested in the ways we could enhance and expand the curricular goals of UW–Madison. It was important for the Project to help our students improve their



### **INSIGHTS: Research**

Navigating the university’s employment restrictions for students was difficult yet inevitable. We thought it was of the utmost importance to compensate students adequately for their labor. There were a few students in the History Corps who had specific employment restrictions that prohibited the Project from financially compensating them for their research. These students were compensated in other ways, like fulfilling service work hours. In any case, we believed working for the Project should be mutually beneficial for both the student and the Project.

researching and writing skills and techniques while also encouraging curiosity in historical research. Having students work alongside well-respected faculty and staff, have their work edited by published scholars and public historians, produce publications from their research with the Project, and have their work credited in a museum exhibition helped the Project further the work of our world-class research institution. We encourage other such projects to include student researchers.

### Archival Research

The History Corps diligently worked through each academic semester, summer term, and even the COVID-19 pandemic to produce historical accounts of the UW's history of discrimination and resistance. Much of that research was conducted in the UW-Madison Archives. Throughout the course of our research process, our researchers accessed more than 200 cubic feet of archival materials and read 170 volumes of the *Badger* yearbook and the *Daily Cardinal* newspaper. Research topics ranged from LGBTQ+ history, to histories of Black Greek-letter organizations, to groundbreaking research on Japanese American student experiences at the UW during the 1940s, to the history of disability and access, and much more. We approached this research with our mission to center the lives and experiences of marginalized communities in UW-Madison's history and to be as exhaustive and ethical as possible.

As the Project progressed, research decisions were made based on a variety of factors including the expertise and experience of student researchers, the availability of archival collections and/or willing oral history participants, and the history's proximity to our stated goals. Ultimately, we could not research everything. The Project maintains a list of



#### INSIGHTS: *Archival Research*

A strong partnership between the Project and the UW-Madison Archives proved to be critical to the success of the Project. From supporting student and staff research, to training staff and students on oral history and archival best practices, to hosting exhibition “sneak peeks” in the reading room, to loaning archival materials for the physical exhibition, and so much more – the UW-Madison Archives did not simply contribute to the success of the Public History Project. Without them, the Project would not have been possible.

topics we hope to yet research, and we solicit research leads from our campus community regularly to ensure we are researching things of interest to our community.

One of the most significant challenges for the project was contending with the UW-Madison Archives. As with all archives, the collections were not fully representative of the communities we were researching. Though our university archives were rich, many of the communities we centered did not have a significant presence within them. Some did not exist at all. Our research focused on moments of discrimination and exclusion of marginalized communities at a predominately white institution, which made navigating the predominately white archives particularly challenging. We chose to use this as an opportunity to reckon with our university's archival limitations and how it affected our ability to tell a story. Institutions with less

robust archives or even less representation of marginalized communities may have the same or more difficulties conducting this kind of research at their respective institutions.

The limitations of our archives often prevented us from being able to represent certain identity groups, cover some key events, and include notable alumni in our research. We often had to be prepared to answer questions from community members who were upset at these omissions. This required us to be transparent about our research limitations, restrictions, and ethics in order to sustain community bonds we had cultivated.

## Oral Histories

Conducting oral history interviews allowed us to address archival gaps, silences, and obscurities while centering marginalized individuals in the history of the university. The interviews also produced rich ways of knowing and understanding history from the exchange of first- and second-hand accounts of events and experiences that added tremendously to the breadth of our work. We take very seriously our mandate to tell the history of UW–Madison through the voices of those who experienced and resisted discrimination, and including oral histories in our research was one of the main ways we invested our time and resources in maintaining the integrity of that mandate. Our History Corps interviewed current students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members, all to help shape the story of the UW.

We had made concerted efforts to conduct and prioritize oral history projects when there were large archival gaps, which can be best seen in our work on Hmong alumni, the histories of Black Greek-letter organizations, and Native/Indigenous histories. Like the topics listed previously, we had a plan for these projects including targeted outreach to connect with members from these communities. Yet, other oral histories we completed by direct contact or seemingly at random. Our researchers often reached out directly to individuals who they had found in the process of archival research. Depending on the circumstance, individuals either enthusiastically agreed to be interviewed, sometimes politely declined, or some ignored our staff entirely. Yet, a good deal of interviews happened organically. Many alumni reached out to us directly, hoping to add their stories to the archives. Other folks found us



### INSIGHTS: *Archival Research*

Because UW–Madison is a large, public, land grant university, it has the privilege of having a very robust university archival collection. Though the UW–Madison Archives – like many across the nation – is not adequately funded, decades of dedicated archivists have done remarkable work preserving hundreds of yearbooks, newspapers, leadership and other administrator files, documents on student life and organizations, and memorabilia, all of which we reviewed during our research process. The Project focused primarily on the UW’s history – with momentary expansions to the city of Madison and state of Wisconsin in general – so we wanted to use this opportunity to showcase the breadth of our institution’s archives as we told this specific history of UW–Madison.

through community events or pieces written in local media.

No matter how people became connected to the Project, these interviews made our work more balanced and engaging, creating many opportunities for us to get various perspectives of one historical topic. The oral histories were also vital to our overall mission and mandate to research a history of discrimination and resistance at UW–Madison “through the voices of those who experienced and resisted it.” Utilizing oral history interviews as a critical form of research

allowed us to very directly center people who had experienced and resisted discrimination in our products – especially in the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition, where we included many direct quotations from interviews in the gallery space.

Throughout the course of the Project, our staff and researchers conducted approximately 127 oral history interviews, created almost 200 hours of audio archive, and analyzed many hours of oral history interviews already conducted and made available by the university.

# COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING & PARTNERSHIPS



## Blog

[The Public History Project blog](#) was developed early on to communicate research findings with the campus community in advance of final deliverables. It was our belief that the blog would aid in transparency for the Project – allowing others to see the research being done by the Project’s History Corps – while also advancing and continuing already unfolding historical conversations on campus. Further, it allowed History Corps members – many of whom were graduate students – to acquire publication lines while gaining experience with writing for public audiences.

The original plan was to post one blog post per month that highlighted recent research findings, archival research challenges, and updates on the direction of the Project. We envisioned other posts would be necessary to provide historical context to unfolding events on campus. In reality, blogs were posted as research from the Project became available, which resulted in two to three blogs per semester. The posts covered a wide range of topics and were promoted on the Project’s social media and in the Project newsletter.

While the blog was loosely structured from the outset, adjustments to process were made as the blog expanded publication. Originally, the blogs were edited solely by the project director. Later, faculty members contributed to the editing process, providing notes and guidance, and directly working with students to finalize posts. This ended up connecting students with faculty across campus while also taking some of the time-consuming editing process off the project director. It ultimately resulted in more engaging posts and better scholarship.

The blog’s editorial standards and style were also adjusted and solidified over time. All blog posts fall somewhere between 2,000–6,000 words, with a rare few being longer. All posts are cited using the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Due to the complicated nature of the histories being shared, blogs were reviewed individually and editorial standards were adjusted in partnership with blog authors. For example, [a blog post](#) that details the victims of the university’s “gay purges” uses pseudonyms for all victims to protect their identities; [a blog post](#) highlighting oral histories from Hmong alumni uses pseudonyms for individuals whose oral history interviews are restricted but names those who are not. In another unique situation, History Corps members who worked on [a blog post](#) about the history of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Police Department (UWPD) expressed concern about being publicly named in a post that critiqued the police; the article was then published without named authorship. In all cases, the project director tried to protect the integrity of the historical scholarship while also protecting History Corps members, many of whom were marginalized students.

Some of the topics covered on the blog were considered sensitive. We felt it was imperative for us to communicate that these blog posts are part of a larger initiative. The following text was approved to precede any blog post. Some posts also required a content warning that we provided when necessary.

*The research in this blog post was completed as a part of the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Public History Project. The multi-year project aims to reckon with the university’s history of racism, exclusion, and discrimination. The Project will culminate in an exhibit in the fall of 2022, an interactive*

*online website, and curricular tools. By sharing research before the opening of the exhibit, we hope to begin conversations about the history of UW–Madison and discuss how we can all work towards building a more equitable campus community. The nature of historical research is that it will always be incomplete. It is impossible for us to know everything that happened in the past. Therefore, the research in this post is imperfect, as all history is. Our student researchers have completed the research below with all of the historical documents available to them at the time of publication. There will be alternative perspectives to those detailed below. We believe that the discussions that arise out of these differing perspectives are an integral part of the process of reckoning with our history. We welcome responses and discussion. Responses submitted by email will be posted in a response and discussion post within one week after the original publication date. Responses with vulgar or offensive language will not be posted.*

Each blog post ended with our Project’s call to action:

*Individuals are not often taught to think of themselves as sources of historical knowledge, but they are. Individuals hold intimate knowledge of their campus, their neighborhoods, and their communities. That is why we want to hear from you. We believe that this project will be the most successful when it deeply engages all of those in our community. If you have a story to share, an event you think should be researched, or a person you think has been overlooked, please contact us. [publichistoryproject@wisc.edu](mailto:publichistoryproject@wisc.edu)*

Because of the nature of the content covered in the blog posts, we made the decision to not have a comment section. The energy and time that would be required to keep the comment sections respectful were beyond the staff available to the Project. Instead, the Project called for email responses to posts. These email responses would then be compiled and posted within one week after the original publication date. This would allow us to field responses from students, faculty, staff, and alumni, as well as units and departments covered in the posts, while still being able to monitor the tenor and tone of the discussion. In the end, the Project only received written responses or statements from departments or units covered in the blogs. The Project never received any responses from the broader campus community.

While a seemingly simple idea, the blog proved to be challenging. Each blog post was time-consuming to edit, format, and, ultimately, post on the Project’s website. We estimate that each blog took anywhere from 10 to 12 hours (not including research hours) to complete and post. Further, from



**INSIGHTS:**  
**Communications  
Planning & Partnership**

While we believe transparency with key stakeholders is important, we also believe that academic freedom is equally, if not more, important. In communicating in advance about Project findings, it is crucial to communicate that findings are being shared for courtesy only – not for editing. Further, it proved important to refine this process and to communicate clearly about the purpose of advanced sharing. We implemented a seven-day review period with clear language that we were not seeking feedback, but if feedback were to be provided, it should be provided in writing.

the introduction of the concept of blog posts, the Project faced pushback from university leaders who were concerned about the impacts of the blogs – on students, on departments and units, and on campus communicators. To ensure transparency, all blog posts were sent to a predetermined list of campus stakeholders for a short review period. This was intended to be a courtesy review that would allow campus stakeholders an opportunity to prepare for possible impacts and to draft and provide written statements to accompany posts. However, it unintentionally opened up an avenue for critique and requests for editorial changes. While some of these critiques were valuable and resulted in minor changes to posts, many were not. The critique often proved stressful as the Project leadership was put into an uncomfortable position of trying to maintain important stakeholder relationships while also needing to protect the academic freedom of its students and researchers. To be clear, the Project staff had no academic or employment protections like tenure, leaving staff and student researchers feeling vulnerable. The presence of the Project’s steering committee in these conversations to provide support in the face of leadership critique proved important in protecting the Project and its blog posts.

While the blog was challenging at times, ultimately, it proved to be a key

communication tool for the Project to share its unfolding findings. The Project’s five most-popular blog posts – which cover the “gay purges,” Hmong alumni, blackface and minstrelsy, the UWPD, and the history of Black Greek-letter organizations – received 12,232 unique page views. Not only did the blog posts prove to be an important curricular tool, as faculty assigned blog posts in their courses to enhance their curriculum with a hyper-local history, but it also introduced the broader Madison community to the scholarship being produced by the Project. With the publication of the *Sifting & Reckoning* virtual exhibition, the blog posts proved even more valuable as a deeper dive on core histories, allowing for an even more rigorous engagement with historical topics.



**INSIGHTS:**  
*Communications  
Planning & Partnership*

The existence of the Project’s steering committee proved immediately useful in dealing with critiques and challenges related to the blog. Many of the steering committee members had tenure and used their protected status to advocate for the blog posts and to ensure they were posted in a way that protected researcher findings.

## Social Media

Our staff used several digital engagement platforms to keep the campus community up to date on the happenings of the Project. Instagram provided a far-reaching way to ensure information about *Sifting & Reckoning* and the Project – including our event and lecture series, curricular materials, and exhibition-related press – was communicated to our community in accessible and creative ways. [Our Instagram account](#) gained a steady following prior to the exhibition, which happened over the course of two years through highlighting historical facts about UW–Madison, archival photos and documents, and promoting our other engagement platforms like our newsletter. As the Project shifted from conducting research to curating the physical and digital exhibitions, we made a concerted effort to share information on

the planning process with our community. In addition to our standard content sharing plans for the summer term, our team created a separate plan specific to promoting the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition.

The team put together a press kit for campus partners to publicize the exhibition on their individual platforms. This press kit included PR images used in the exhibition, promotional graphics complete with language to use in captions, promotional posters for printing, and the press release on the exhibition for consideration. All promotional graphics were created by the Project using Adobe Photoshop and Canva.

Our social content rollout plan for August and September was structured to ensure *Sifting & Reckoning* was promoted in some way every week, with promotion increasing to almost daily as opening day came closer. We maximized our use of Instagram by communicating in three main ways on the app: grid, story, and reel posts. This, along with the use of hashtags, allowed us to utilize Instagram’s specific algorithm to our advantage to keep our page relevant to our followers and potential new followers.

The promotion of *Sifting & Reckoning* on Instagram worked primarily to get people intrigued by the research and objects that were included in the exhibition. In the month leading up to the exhibition we shared exclusive footage of exhibition curation and installation in addition to our regularly scheduled content (e.g., event promotion, history highlights, etc.) to give our followers a “behind-the-scenes” look at the work of the Project and to entice people to visit the exhibition to see the creative ways we chose to put the university’s history on display.



### INSIGHTS: Social Media

It was imperative to build and sustain a steady group of followers on Instagram well prior to the exhibition’s opening date. Utilizing all of our communication tools to their full potential was key in promoting the exhibition, our final products, and our brand, which ultimately led to establishing stronger bonds with our audiences and stakeholders. Though social media campaigning was only one of those communications tools, having the steady follower list that the Project Instagram account had earned before 2021 allowed our team to take full advantage of the app to gain followers, extend our reach, and increase our engagement. We would recommend being proactive in establishing social media so it can be a good promotional tool and marketing asset.

This social media plan proved to be fruitful. Our insights on Instagram provided quantitative measurements that detailed not only the growth in our followers, but also in our engagements. Between July 2 and September 30 – a 90-day period that included the targeted *Sifting & Reckoning* promotional plan – we reached 24,100 accounts, engaged 1,147 accounts, and had 1,324 total followers. These data increased by 242 percent, 189 percent, and 20.4 percent respectively compared to the previous 90-day period (April 4–July 2). Beyond quantitative measurements, our Instagram account allowed us to stay connected to campus groups, students, and supporters across the Madison area and the world. The account provided an easy and informal way for our community to feel comfortable reaching out to us to express their excitement over the work of the Project. Many of those engagements happened via direct messages and comments on posts, stories, and reshares.

Once *Sifting & Reckoning* opened, our focus shifted from advertising the opening of the exhibition weekly to also advertising our events and lecture series, partnerships with campus community members, and press coverage. We posted about these in tandem with sharing fun facts about UW–Madison history included in the exhibition and behind-the-scenes footage of installation in the gallery. This method of sharing and re-sharing ensured that *Sifting & Reckoning* was kept relevant online and allowed us to provide our audiences with an intimate view of the Project’s mission and work across campus. We shared this information on Instagram frequently – posting on the app at least once a week – during the months of the exhibition.



### INSIGHTS: Social Media

Every social media app’s algorithm is different, which poses a challenge when trying to maximize reach. It was difficult to navigate Instagram’s ever-changing algorithm when trying to maximize the promotional value of posts. It was helpful to research specifics on how to maximize your reach and engagement on Instagram specifically. It would be helpful to do research or attend training on how to do so for other apps, especially if you manage multiple accounts or use social media as a primary form of marketing.

Our final push to get visitors in the last month of the exhibition required another separate rollout plan similar to the pre-opening plan. We spent the last 23 days of the exhibition doing what was called “#23DaysofSiftingandReckoning,” where we enticed the community to visit the exhibition through sharing special factoids and photos from the planning of *Sifting & Reckoning*. This plan included Instagram grid, story, and reel posts that gained more traction as we counted down the days. We used the last few posts in this plan to thank our followers for their ardent support and participation in our events and invite them to continue watching our page for more updates on what the Project had in store for the future.

## Newsletter

Alongside social media, Project staff created a more traditional [monthly email newsletter](#) to spread awareness about the Project's work, share news and developments, promote events, and cultivate engagement with the campus community. The newsletter was launched in November 2021 and continued on a monthly basis for the remainder of the Project.

Each newsletter featured a mix of content in several short sections including links to Project blog posts and other research, promotion of events hosted by the Project and partner groups, recommendations for books and other media, and updates on the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition, as well as "behind-the-scenes" items like staff and student bios, highlighted archival objects, and answers to history questions submitted by the public.

The newsletters were created and distributed using Eloqua, an email marketing system supported by the university. Project staff created an initial subscription list of interested campus stakeholders and then relied on organic growth from subscription forms and individual requests. While the peak subscriber number was relatively modest, open rates were consistently quite high, averaging between 40 and 60 percent each month.



### INSIGHTS: *Newsletter*

The newsletter proved to be an easy but effective way to communicate about the work of the Project. Each monthly newsletter followed a similar structure, meaning they were easy to curate and write, and with saved email templates in Eloqua, project staff were able to "plug and play" with each month's newsletter content. With a significant open rate, it was a high-value communication tool for our team.

## ***Sifting & Reckoning*** **Communications Planning**

In order to maximize the reach of this work and to ensure a smooth communications process, the Project participated in the creation of an extensive communications plan. This plan was essential to ensure that the Project would guide the narrative surrounding why the university was committed to doing this work, how we hoped the work would impact the UW–Madison community, and the importance of centering marginalized people and stories in the history of the university.

Preparations began before the exhibition opened, with the Project team hosting three “retreats” dedicated to relaying key information and updates to university leadership and communication professionals from across campus. Spread out between the fall, spring, and summer prior to the exhibition’s opening date, each retreat focused on the progress of the Project’s deliverables and asked our campus stakeholders for insights on how to move the work forward or mitigate any challenges we would potentially face. This formed key partnerships with leaders, administrators, and communicators from the following areas of the university:

- Vice Chancellors (Student Affairs, Legal Affairs, Diversity and Inclusion, University Relations, Finance and Administration)
- Provost and Vice Provosts (Teaching and Learning, Enrollment Management, Libraries, Division of the Arts)
- Chief Diversity Officer
- Deans (Letters & Science, Law, Business, Education, Human Ecology, Continuing Studies)

- University Communications
- University Marketing
- University Health Services
- Chazen Museum of Art

Months prior to the opening of the exhibition, the Project team held what we called exhibition “sneak peek” sessions at the UW–Madison Archives with the key campus leaders and stakeholders listed above. These were organized to share the themes of the exhibition as well as histories and specific objects that would be featured. While the chancellor was clear that university leadership had no editorial control over the exhibition or the Project’s findings, we felt it was important to be transparent with leadership about the exhibition so the campus could adequately prepare. These “sneak peek” sessions proved an important piece of that transparency plan. Further, they highlighted UW–Madison Archives’ extensive collections and brought university leaders to the archives reading room, a space many of them had never visited before.

Once these sessions were completed, we shifted focus to preparing with a team of university leaders and communicators on the way the Project and the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition would be communicated to the public. Because of the nature of our research and the current political and social climate, it was important to us to both maintain the integrity of our work and the safety and integrity of the people in the stories we would put on display. To do so, a working group was formed that was dedicated to communicating about the Project in advance of the exhibition’s opening to the public. This working group included leaders from the Office of the Chancellor; Office of Legal Affairs; Office of the Provost; Division of

Diversity, Equity & Educational Achievement; and University Communications. For two months prior to the exhibition's opening, each biweekly meeting focused on resolving any issues regarding the exhibition and its content, drafting and editing press releases, consulting on the larger narrative of reckoning work at UW–Madison, planning large-scale events, and much more.

These meetings were vital in not only preparing for the way we would communicate about the exhibition and the Project's mission, but also in creating continuity among university leaders. With the nature of our team's work, there were few opportunities to guarantee that key leaders across campus obtained the same information about how the Project functioned and the place of *Sifting & Reckoning* on campus. This working group allowed leadership to have a clear involvement in the work and prepare for how it would be received.



### **INSIGHTS:** **Sifting & Reckoning** *Communications Planning*

We approached communications planning collaboratively and methodically with a broad group of important campus figures. Our hope was to make leaders and communicators across campus *true* stakeholders, thus eliminating the adversarial or defensive relationships that can often emerge within the university. While these communication planning sessions were time-consuming, and sometimes frustrating, they resulted in a campuswide communications cohesion that proved to be critical in telling the story of the Project and the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition. When communicating about work of this nature, it became clear that it pays to be proactive.

# PRODUCTS



## Exhibition

Planning the Project’s physical exhibition – *Sifting & Reckoning: UW–Madison’s History of Exclusion and Resistance* – took an entire calendar year. Although our team had been preparing for the exhibition since the Project began, the curation and design of the exhibition began in earnest a year before it opened. Both processes necessitated a close working relationship with the exhibition and collections manager of the Chazen Museum of Art, Kate Wanberg, and the exhibition designer from the Distillery agency, Maria Tran.

## CURATION

The curation of the Project’s largest deliverable, the physical exhibit, began first with determining the overall mission and purpose of the exhibition. Our team held multiple brainstorming sessions to find ways to imbue the exhibition’s title and purpose with the feedback our community gave us during the research process. We began by asking multiple questions about the research our team had conducted, who our projected audiences were, and how we wanted our audiences to interpret the research. Some of those guiding questions were:

- What is our responsibility as scholars and curators in putting the UW’s history of discrimination, exclusion, and resistance on display?
- What is at stake for marginalized community members and the university in sharing these histories?
- Who is confronting this history? How do/should we confront this history as a collective campus community?
- How can this research transform the ways the university presents its own

history? How did marginalized students transform the university in the midst of discrimination?

- How does power manifest in these histories? What do people/systems in power owe to these stories/people?
- What is the role of “truth” in this work? How can we maintain the integrity of marginalized peoples’ truths in this work?
- Thinking through these questions helped us in our formation of both the title and the “big idea” – which functions in museum exhibitions similarly to a thesis statement.

We ultimately titled the exhibition *Sifting & Reckoning* as a play on one of UW–Madison’s most foundational ideas – “sifting and winnowing.”

*“Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found.”* – UW President Charles Kendall Adams, 1894

The “sifting and winnowing” statement has been called Wisconsin’s “Magna Carta.” It is a beloved idea at the university – a call for academic freedom and the fearless pursuit of knowledge. Ultimately this statement seemed an apt reminder for a method with which the campus could approach this challenging exhibition and the histories displayed. By playing on this known and respected idea, we hoped to remind the campus community that the scholarship displayed in the exhibition was within the practice of academic freedom and that we ultimately needed to seek the truth of our own universities.

This was vital in helping to create continuity in which stories would be displayed and how. We wanted to tell a different story about UW–Madison than had been told in the past – to display different histories that had been previously unseen and unheard. We also knew that we wanted to showcase them in creative ways that allowed us to maintain the integrity of marginalized communities. With these things in mind, we set off to draft our big idea and eventually landed on this: **Marginalized communities, in the face of discrimination, have challenged their marginalization by asserting their agency and fighting to transform the culture of UW–Madison.** The big idea was instrumental in helping us make tough decisions during the curation process. As we had to choose which stories would take priority in the physical gallery vs. gallery book vs. website vs. tabled for the next project, assessing each story against the thesis of our exhibition helped immensely.

Initially, we decided that we wanted to curate the gallery in chronological order. This idea, though, was something that proved to be untenable. Many of our most complex histories happened in or around similar periods of time, making the feat of processing them all at once potentially very difficult for our visitors. Further, we hoped to avoid a progress narrative, one that painted the university on a march toward utopic equality. While change has surely occurred on campus, we hoped to challenge visitors to see the ways that campus has improved while also noting the work still yet to do. With our audience in mind, we opted to do a thematic approach to our curation, coming up with six specific themes and eight sections for our exhibition. Within each theme we kept our central mission of discussing discrimination and resistance. The themes were as follows: the 10,000-year Indigenous history of the university’s occupied land, student life, academics, housing, athletics, and social action, with an introduction and conclusion at each end. This layout allowed us to tackle similar histories at a time, giving our visitors the most space and opportunity to process as possible before moving on to a new section.



### INSIGHTS: *Curation*

As the centerpiece in the Project’s final deliverables, our team took special care in curating the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition. At all stages in the process, we continued to reflect on our “big idea” and to remain focused on whom we were doing this exhibition for and why we felt it was important. This type of careful curation and community collaboration is time-consuming, tedious, and often challenging. But it is essential. To be able to engage in this level of careful curation, we allotted extra time for exhibition curation to ensure that we could collaborate broadly and reflect deeply, while leaving time and space to adapt as necessary.

Once we solidified our logistical planning, we began curating the physical gallery space. As visual thinkers, we chose to do so in an empty room with laminated “story cards” that contained a synopsis of each story we considered featuring in the exhibition. Lamination made it easy to write notes on each card about what needed to be added, how vital the information was to be on display in the physical space, and details about its place in our plan. Planning it out this way allowed us to better visualize the flow of the exhibition as well as its density. The finalized flow of the exhibition was transferred into both a Google Doc (for drafting the exhibition

text) and a project management tool, Airtable (for tracking exhibition development, objects, images, etc.).

### EXHIBITION REVIEW SESSIONS

To ensure that we collaborated not only on which stories were told but also *how* they were told, the project hosted exhibition text feedback sessions with a targeted group of project stakeholders. Invitations were extended to over 60 individuals who represented faculty, staff, students, and alumni who had been actively involved in aspects of the project. This group did not include university administrators. Participants in the feedback sessions were asked to review sections of exhibition text in advance, leave comments in a Google Doc, and then attend a two-hour session over Zoom. Due to university policy, we were unable to compensate UW employees for doing this work, and due to the digital venue, we were unable to provide food. Instead, we offered participants an invitation to the private opening of the exhibition and featured their names in the exhibition space. We were thrilled that our community generously engaged in this process with us. It is hard to understate the importance of these feedback sessions. Participants pointed out gaps in the history, gaps we were ultimately able to supplement prior to opening; they challenged our team on language choices, resulting in a clear editorial style throughout the exhibition and a language statement in our gallery guide explaining how language choices were made; and they helped our team to understand areas where we were not as clear or concise, where our storytelling needed refinement. While these sessions were tedious to organize and time-consuming to plan and execute, they ultimately resulted in a stronger exhibition.



### INSIGHTS: *Curation*

It is often the standard in academia for scholars to work alone, delivering their findings to the world upon completion in academic works like books and journal articles. However, public history is not merely about communicating with the public, but actively involving them in the process of historical work. We took this framework seriously from the beginning of the Project and sought to include our community at all levels of the work, including the exhibition's curation. The exhibition text went through multiple drafts, with the bulk of the writing done by the Project team, steering committee, and researchers. However, various campus stakeholders were consulted to aid in writing, drafting, and/or editing specific sections of the exhibition text as well.

The project's steering committee also participated in multiple exhibition text review sessions. These sessions were much more detailed, as the steering committee was asked to review the whole of the exhibition text multiple times over several months. Steering committee members reviewed the text individually, leaving comments in a Google Doc, and then met multiple times as a large group to discuss. It was in these sessions that Project staff and steering committee members collaborated to strengthen the exhibition. Steering committee members pointed out organizational or structural issues and brainstormed solutions. They also highlighted important missing pieces of the exhibition. One steering committee member,



### INSIGHTS: *Curation*

We faced many challenges during the curation process, with the main challenge being the inability to tell every story we had researched or wanted to include. We had physical limitations with the exhibition space, and we also did not want to overwhelm our visitors with too much information. Understanding that we had a unique opportunity to publicly display previously marginalized, obscured, or forgotten stories, we often asked ourselves, “If this story doesn’t get told here, will it ever be told?” With some stories, we did not have enough research to do justice to the nuanced history. With others, we simply lacked the physical space to tell another individual story in a certain section. In these moments, recalling our “big idea” helped immensely with making a final decision on what would be included in any form of the exhibition. No matter the justification, each story we chose to leave out posed a moral dilemma for our team.

Professor Cindy I-Fen Cheng, raised an important note about the missing presence of Hmong students in the exhibition even as Hmong students have a significant presence on campus and in the state of Wisconsin. Cheng worked with graduate student Chong Moua to add history on UW–Madison’s first Hmong graduate, Song Kue, and an additional section on Hmong students on campus today. In this instance, among others, steering committee members volunteered to write sections, particularly those falling outside of the knowledge expertise of Project staff, and assisted in the overall vision of the exhibition.

Once the content was deemed final by our team and steering committee, the final

draft was sent to University Marketing for copy editing. In the guidelines laid out by the chancellor’s office at the outset of the Project, the university had no jurisdiction over the text of the exhibition, and this extended to the editing process. For many university leaders, opening night was the first exposure to the full text of the exhibition. While this may have been anxiety-producing for some, it proved important to protecting the academic freedom and integrity of the Project’s historical findings.

The objects and images used in the exhibition also had to be curated. There were multiple images, documents, or objects that could be on view. The Project team spent weeks in the UW–Madison Archives determining which objects would be on display in the physical gallery, which would be digitized for the digital exhibition, and which would not be on view at all. We worked closely with the UW–Madison Archives to prepare the objects and images for shipment to the Chazen Museum of Art. The Airtable tool allowed our team to keep track of objects that were packaged, shipped, measured, and pulled for ease in the curation process. Once all items were finalized, labeled, and packaged, they were sent to the Chazen to be prepared for installation.

### DESIGN

The design of the exhibition was led by Maria Tran of Distillery, a local agency that had a previous working relationship with the Chazen. The Project team held biweekly meetings with Tran and Kate Wanberg, the exhibition and collections manager of the Chazen Museum of Art, for six months prior to the opening of the exhibition. These meetings were designated times for Tran to show the design-in-progress of *Sifting & Reckoning*, for us to suggest any changes, and for Wanberg to communicate the Chazen’s capabilities and needs.

With such a text-heavy historical exhibition, we needed to utilize various modalities to display the research in creative and engaging ways. Our team had general ideas about how we wanted specific objects, images, and stories displayed. We created a to-scale mock gallery with a rough layout of our ideas for the flow of the exhibition and presented it to Tran during early meetings about the design of the Chazen’s Rowland Gallery. From there, we collectively made decisions – “big idea” in mind – about the flow of the space and how it contributed to our patrons’ access to the materials.

During these meetings, our team would give and review notes on two-dimensional renderings of each separate thematic section of the gallery space that had been provided by Tran. This played a key role in narrowing down what was vital to keep in the exhibition when we ran into logistical issues (e.g., lack of wall space, text-heavy sections, too many images/documents, etc.), what could be consolidated, and what would ultimately need to be removed. The renderings allowed us to imagine the physical space in a way that let us quickly determine if things were too overwhelming for our audiences, not engaging enough, or lacked continuity. In earlier design meetings, we confirmed the layout of the space, whether we would be using multiple video/audio media in the gallery, and how the design would adhere to the exhibition style guide. It was also during this time when decisions were made about which materials (e.g., vinyl, acrylic, Sintra board, etc.) would be used for images or text and how objects would be displayed (e.g., in vitrine, in frames, on video screens, etc.). As the exhibition’s opening date neared, our meetings shifted to confirming finite details, approving or nixing extra stylistic choices, and making

final decisions on the placement of objects, documents, and images.

When these details were finalized, the design went through a final approval process, which included the Project team reviewing every single part of the exhibition for errors, including exhibition text, titles, images and caption, objects and labels, interactive activities, and gallery placement. After our team’s final approval, the text was sent for final copy editing by University Marketing. With all parties’ approval, materials were sent off to be printed and delivered to the Chazen. The print process was coordinated by our main designer.



**INSIGHTS: *Design***

The process of designing the exhibition took nearly as long as curating the exhibition. Working collaboratively with a design team to bring an exhibition to life is extremely time-consuming, and appropriate time should be allotted to ensure the ability to review exhibition design thoughtfully and to be agile to design changes. In particular, due to supply chain constraints, we were forced to speed up our design review timeline to account for printing delays. Luckily, we had planned our timeline with a bit of flexibility, meaning our team was able to adapt our schedules to allow for appropriate reviews prior to printing approval. When able, always plan “wiggle room” in your project timeline to account for unforeseen circumstances.

The Project team kept track of all materials that had been approved and sent to printing in our exhibition development Airtable. This allowed everyone to remain on the same page about the status of each moving part of the design. Once the exhibition was in print stage, our team worked closely with Tran, Wanberg, and the Chazen preparators and curators to discuss our installation timeline.

The Chazen team handled the bulk of installation with occasional outsourced labor, and the Project team assisted with the vision and any questions regarding materials and content. Vinyl was installed first, followed by panels, acrylics, and objects. An intricate, well-planned, and staggered installation plan allowed us to correct any large mistakes and make any last-minute changes without much hassle. Installation was complete a few days before the exhibition’s opening date.

**INTERACTIVES**

It was important to us to provide moments of respite and reflection in the exhibition. This was not only because we wanted people to be able to process the sometimes-heavy content featured, but also to give visitors the opportunity to think with us in and contribute to the physical space. For these reasons, we included two interactives in the physical gallery for *Sifting & Reckoning*, both of which produced a rich breadth of responses to questions that tackled belonging, commitment, and the future of reckoning work at UW–Madison.

***Do you call yourself a Badger? Why or why not?***

University leadership strives in messaging to create a shared sense of community and belonging at UW–Madison, which is vital to its branding. The mascot Bucky Badger

plays a key role in representing this image of camaraderie and community, due in large part to its large presence at athletic events. The omnipresence of Bucky in the university’s culture and “Badger” identity in the university’s branding create an environment where belonging is never questioned and always assumed (i.e., if you are a part of this university, then you must be a “Badger”).

The first interactive activity challenged the narrative of universities homogenizing experiences through the idea of “belonging.” Situated near panels discussing accessibility for people with disabilities at sporting events and the origins of Bucky Badger, the interactive asked visitors to think about what it meant to be a “Badger.” When we curated this portion of the exhibition, we wanted to allow visitors to think through what it meant to take ownership of and belong to an institution in this way that is often assumed in university spaces. We had many discussions about



**INSIGHTS: *Interactives***

It was very helpful for us to beta test the interactive activities in the exhibition text review sessions. We wanted to make sure the questions we asked would be relevant to our community, further our mission, and help us understand how the campus community reckons with this history. We would recommend tailoring the interactives to work best for your specific community and to be intentional about what purpose the activities serve for your overall goals.

the assumptions of belonging and feeling welcomed on campus being tied to the idea of being a “Badger” – claiming a part of the unique community here. This interactive space served as a way for our visitors to add complexity to this conversation and to wrestle with the idea of belonging within the context of discrimination, inaccessibility, and resistance.

Every response to this interactive activity was saved and recorded. We thought it was important to not only read what the community had to say about belonging at UW–Madison, but also to determine if there were any trends in the ways visitors responded to the question. As we aggregated the data, we noticed that the responses fell into three main categories: yes, I call myself a Badger; no, I do not call myself a Badger; and other, which was usually a response that was somewhere between yes and no. From analyzing the data, we saw that 42 percent of the 1,016 participants answered neither “yes” nor “no” to the question. These data revealed that our community’s ideas of belonging were

more complicated than could be captured with a simple yes or no. Many respondents noted that their feelings toward “belonging” at the UW shifted based on their thoughts on how the university handled certain equity and discrimination issues, how they were treated at the university, or their general feelings about the university. On the other hand, 38 percent of participants responded “yes” to the activity while 20 percent responded “no.” Over 60 percent of participants did not answer “yes” to the question “Do you call yourself a Badger?” which creates an intriguing conversation on the state of belonging on campus and how it is influenced by the campus climate, diversity efforts, and the like.

***How will we reckon with the truths in our past to create a better future?***

Our final interactive activity was placed near the conclusion of the exhibition, next to the section on student activism and social action. It served as a space for visitors to process the entire exhibition and encourage forward thinking about how the work can, should, and will continue in various aspects. In an effort to allow visitors to process their thoughts and feelings in a variety of ways, we provided three possible ways to respond to this interactive activity. Those responses were: “I commit to ...,” “I’m inspired by ...,” and “The university needs to ...” When we curated this activity, we determined that these three responses allowed visitors to think about individual responsibility, reflect on community efforts, and call on the university to contribute to the work of reckoning with these histories.

Every response to this interactive activity was saved and recorded. We thought these were especially important to keep because



**INSIGHTS: *Interactives***

We wanted to allow everyone to express whatever feeling they wanted to in the space; however, that did not come without challenges. Some of the responses we received were inappropriate (albeit sometimes humorous) and otherwise unhelpful to the overall purpose of the interactive activities. We were legally not able to remove any inappropriate responses, but all responses were taken down on a routine schedule to make room for new voices to have space in the gallery every week.

many responses contained ideas about what the university should do to help integrate the history in their decision- and policy-making. The responses tended to be robust, with answers ranging from themes like calling for the university to commit more resources to marginalized people across campus to being inspired by the small acts of resistance on display in the gallery. Of the 1,135 visitors to participate in this activity during the exhibition, 38 percent responded with “The University needs to ...,” making this response the most popular of the three. These data show us that many visitors opted to use this processing space as a way to talk back to the university and call its leaders to action. The other responses were more evenly split, with 31 percent responding to “I commit to ...,” and 32 percent responding to “I’m inspired by ...” This interactive activity allows us to have a broader conversation about our community’s reaction and reception to reckoning work, how they want to see it continue, and how more difficult histories are processed in public spaces across campus.

## Digital Exhibition

While the physical exhibition was in many ways the Project’s marquee deliverable, a dedicated [Sifting & Reckoning website](#) was identified as a critical element of the Project’s work from the outset. Conceived of as a full digital version of the exhibition, the site served multiple functions – making all exhibition materials accessible to those unable to visit in person at the Chazen; providing a setting to present additional histories and research that the team was unable to include in the physical exhibition because of space limitations; and creating a permanent home where all content would be available as an ongoing resource after the physical exhibition closed.

The Project team’s work on the website largely began once initial drafts of the exhibition text and layout were completed, allowing the site’s structure to mirror the layout of the exhibition and create a content-rich, immersive experience similar to exploring *Sifting & Reckoning* in person. With the exhibition text as a starting point, the team added additional material from the gallery guide and other content that we were unable to fit in the physical layout to create an expanded digital exhibition text.

To source images and other historical objects for the exhibition and the website, the Project team worked closely with staff at the UW–Madison Archives and Digitized Collections, compiling a list of hundreds of photographs, newspaper clippings, correspondence, official university documents, posters, yearbooks, and other media for possible inclusion. UW–Madison Archives and Digitized Collections staff then took on the enormous task of organizing and digitizing the materials, making many of them available to the public outside the physical archives for the first time. As the items were being digitized in batches, the Project team reviewed them and began creating a spreadsheet master list of images, captions, and metadata that was directly indexed to the digital exhibition text, outlining exactly where and how the items should be used to illustrate the histories presented.

Meanwhile, the Project team collaborated with University Marketing (UMark) to complete the design and development of the website itself. The Project team and several UMark staff members began with a series of large group meetings in spring 2022 to lay out a vision, goals, and structure for the website. As work progressed through the summer and early fall before the exhibition opening, Project staff and the UMark web team held weekly

check-in meetings to share updates and address questions. The site was developed using WordPress with the basic design identity (colors, typefaces, etc.) matching the physical exhibition materials. However, the web team created the majority of the site’s layout and design elements from scratch with special attention paid to presenting the historical content in a visually engaging way, including timelines, lightbox features, cutouts, and dynamic elements.

Aside from the core exhibition content, the website also included several other functional elements and sections of collateral material such as an events calendar, feedback forms, footnotes and other citations, curatorial notes, and acknowledgements. The site went live in September 2022 in conjunction with the exhibition opening and has continued to see steady traffic since then with tens of thousands of visits to date.

## Curriculum

To further expand the reach of materials, Project staff was tasked with creating a set of curricular materials to bring findings into campus classrooms. The Project found that faculty and instructional staff were eager to incorporate these into their courses. Throughout the Project, staff visited hundreds of classrooms, giving presentations, engaging in discussions, and supporting course assignments and papers.

## TEACHING GUIDES

Knowing that the findings of the project would touch many different fields and understanding that the research of the Project was complex and challenging, we aimed to make it as easy as possible for instructors to fold project materials into their existing course outlines. Project staff partnered with the Department

of Curriculum and Instruction to create a suite of teaching guides. To ensure accessibility across departments, units, and fields, we created an “à la carte” approach to forming our [teaching guides](#). We created 10 teaching guides in total, nine of which were themed for the exhibition, and an additional guide related to Go Big Read (a campuswide reading initiative). Each guide could be taken as a whole or used in pieces depending on the instructor’s needs. The guides included primary and secondary sources, reading recommendations such as books and journal articles, discussion questions and protocols, and citations. The guides proved to be so successful that instructors have called for them to be expanded to include additional resources and thematic topics.

## CLASS VISITS

Our team made it a priority to establish strong connections with instructors across campus. We hoped that the research on UW–Madison’s history of injustice, marginalized people, and



### INSIGHTS: *Class Visits*

Our classroom visits proved to be very successful – often due to the effort our team put in to establish connections with departments, make research materials relevant to student and instructor interest, and craft a pedagogical ethics in how to impart the research in responsible and exciting ways. It is worth investing the time not only in crafting teaching guides but also in connecting with faculty and departments to ensure strong connections.

resistance would permeate classroom spaces and would incite positive change through using history as a tool to challenge inequities. It was especially important for us to make this research and information as available as possible and to contribute to the curricular mission of the university. For this reason, we made a concerted effort to give lectures and presentations in a myriad of courses across disciplines throughout the four years of the Project's existence. We gave lectures in many courses in history, English, African American studies, American Indian studies, dance, genetics, engineering, journalism and mass communications, material culture, and more. Class visits prior to the exhibition's opening happened by the dozens throughout each semester. While the exhibition was on view, however, the demand for class lectures from the Project grew exponentially. In fall 2022, we conducted over 160 visits related to *Sifting & Reckoning*, about one-third of which were presentations and lectures for courses. The remainder of those visits happened around events and presentations for departments and units.

### Events & Lectures

As one of our core deliverables, our events and lecture series was a primary focus for the Project team even before the official planning of the exhibition. Prior to *Sifting & Reckoning*, our lectures were given across campus in a myriad of instructional spaces and in partnership with various instructors, and our events were often used as a space to both foster connections in the community and keep the campus informed of the research we were conducting. When the exhibition opened, much of our focus shifted to giving lectures specifically on the contents of *Sifting & Reckoning* and hosting and partnering on events related to the exhibition.

### LECTURES

Due to the nature of our wide-ranging research on various histories of discrimination and resistance at UW–Madison, we made it as easy as possible for potential partners to know exactly what content was available for guest lectures. Each lecture included a summary of the mission, approach, and latest updates on the Public History Project and its final products. On our website, we provided a full list of topics on which our team was prepared to present in either a brief presentation-style lecture or full guest lecture at no cost. The topics included:

- The History of Protest and Resistance at UW–Madison
- Violence and Non-Violence at the University
- Feminist Protest & Organizing
- The Black Power Movement & The 1969 Black Student Strike
- The Anti-War Movement
- Anti-Racist Protest
- LGBTQ+ Activism & Organizing
- The KKK at UW–Madison and in the city of Madison
- Fascism and White Supremacy at UW–Madison
- The Eugenics Movement on Campus and in the State of Wisconsin
- The History of Blackface and Minstrelsy at UW–Madison
- Latinx History at UW–Madison
- Disability History at UW–Madison
- LGBTQ+ History at UW–Madison
- The History of Housing Discrimination in Madison

## PRODUCTS

- The History of The Color Line and Desegregation in College Athletics
- Monuments & Memorialization Controversies on Campus
- Public History – What It Is and Why We Use This Approach

We also made our services available outside of these research topics, allowing potential partners to contact us if they wanted us to give a more customized lecture with research not included in this list but covered in the Project. The lectures given across campus prior to the exhibition's opening served as a great way for our team to establish relationships with faculty, academic staff, departments/units, and students while intrinsically showcasing the in-depth research conducted by the team and our graduate and undergraduate student researchers. They not only spread knowledge about previously lesser-known histories, but also created awareness of and excitement for the exhibition and the impact it would have on campus.

## EVENTS

Our event series allowed us to bring local and national scholars to campus to share knowledge, facilitate connections between campus community members, and keep our supporters well versed on the happenings of the Project. Due to the nature of much of the Project occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic, many events prior to fall 2021 were held virtually, recorded, and made available on our website. When deemed safe to do so by health, campus, and government officials, our events resumed in person, many with the option to participate virtually. Many community members expressed their gratitude for virtual, hybrid, and recorded event options, which may influence future event modalities.

Our events occurred in two main ways:

1. Student groups, committees, and scholars reached out to us with requests to partner on events with topics related to those we covered in the Project's research.
2. Our team created events surrounding our research and either conducted the event with only our team or reached out to others for partnerships.

Allowing others to reach out to us for partnerships on events enabled us to establish bonds and connections through scholarship while also broadening the reach of the Project through linking our research on UW-Madison to the more wide-ranging research of our partners. Planning our own events allowed us to establish a positive reputation for the Project outside of research and the classroom. Either way, our events had great turnouts, largely due to the level of promotion, partnerships, and community engagement.



### **INSIGHTS: Lectures**

Planning for events and lectures, particularly those on specific UW-Madison history, was time-consuming. However, once PowerPoints and lecture notes were created, it became easier to present on those topics in the future. Investing the time at the outset to prepare these materials meant spending less time later, while still allowing us to have a broad impact in campus classrooms.

Some of our largest events included a private opening reception with the Chazen Museum of Art for *Sifting & Reckoning*, an opening “student night” reception with First Wave (a four-year, full-tuition scholarship program for hip-hop artists, activists, and scholars) for *Sifting & Reckoning*, a partnership with the university common-book “Go Big Read” program with Clint Smith around *How the Word is Passed*, an exclusive screening of a previously restricted film on housing discrimination in Madison with PBS Wisconsin, partnerships with the UW Diversity Forum with keynote speaker Tiya Miles, and many more.

We hosted many intellectuals for campus discussions, including scholars like Eddie R. Cole for a discussion on the campus color line (in partnership with the Friends of the UW–Madison Libraries) and Rund Abdelfatah and Ramtin Arablouei of NPR’s *Throughline* for a discussion on historical reckoning and memory (in partnership with the UW Journalist in Residence program). Our partnerships with committees, student groups, and other campus entities proved especially fruitful. Events like the one held on disability history at UW–Madison with the McBurney Disability Resource Center and Associated Students of Madison (student government body) and on the history of eugenics and former UW–Madison President Charles Van Hise with the Committee on Disability, Access, and Inclusion (a university shared-governance committee) gave us space to elevate the work of our fellow campus scholars while also showcasing our research.

There were many events where our campus partnerships asked us to speak to the field of public history, the specific work we conducted for *Sifting & Reckoning*, and how to mobilize the history into actionable steps for those interested in countering injustice

in the classroom and beyond. Events like the Wisconsin Alumni Association’s Wisconsin Idea Spotlight series, the Friends of the Libraries’ event on archival research, and the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Mentoring’s event series allowed us to talk to a wide range of alumni, students, and instructors who were interested in using our findings and approaches to imbue their work with these challenging histories.

As an ethical practice, we tried our best to elevate all of our partners through linking their websites and social media in our promotional materials, and did this especially for our student group partners and campus unit stakeholders. We made it a priority to promote the events of each entity within the Multicultural Student Center, the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center, First Wave, Office of Inclusion Education, and many others, even



### INSIGHTS: Events

Due to the Project’s staffing constraints, it proved instrumental to find and leverage campus and community partnerships to support events. While financial partnership was always appreciated, we particularly benefited from the staffing and structural support provided. Partnering with groups like the Friends of the UW–Madison Libraries and PBS Wisconsin gave us access to staff with event planning expertise and allowed us to utilize established, robust marketing infrastructure. The events were highly organized, better attended, and often recorded for continued use because of these partnerships.

if we had no formal part in co-sponsoring these events. Throughout the entirety of the Project, we hosted or co-hosted nearly 50 events, with appearances, partnerships, and consulting for countless other events.

## Report

Originally the Public History Project was asked to create a final report. This is a common practice for institutional history projects in higher education. The report was meant to provide an academic summary of the Project's historical findings in a 10,000-word document with full source citations. However, upon reflection with the Project team and steering committee, we felt this task was effectively addressed in the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition and digital exhibition. Instead, we decided to adjust the focus of the final report to being about the process of completing the Public History Project. As other institutions look to do historical reckoning work, we believe that we can contribute by being transparent about our work. This report aims to be a detailed overview of the work of the Project, but if you have additional questions, please contact us.



## INSIGHTS: *Products*

As we worked to develop the final deliverables of the Public History Project, we continued to reflect on the utility and audience of every final product. *Who* and *how* would these deliverables be used? While highly academic reports detailing the scholarship of a project can prove to be useful, they can often be arduous to read and used only by other academics. We ultimately decided to invest our time and energy in products that would be engaging to a broad public and could be leveraged on campus, in Madison, and beyond. By continually reflecting on the goals of the project, we were able to ensure that all of our deliverables met our mission and purpose.

# COMMUNITY FEEDBACK



**THE UNIVERSITY NEEDS TO...**

Be willing to course correct. Just because the ship takes time to turn doesn't mean it doesn't need to

The pioneers who were dedicated to creating a better future for all Badgers

Those who look like me & stand up for the students that can't

**THE UNIVERSITY NEEDS TO...**

Listen to the needs of STUDENTS

I'M INSPIRED BY...  
THIS EVE-OPEN EXHIBIT. HOW LOW IS NOT SH... IN PAST ACT... RESEARCH?

I COMMIT TO...

## Post-visit survey

To gather public feedback about the exhibition, the Project team developed a brief digital survey using Google Forms. When scheduling group visits to the Chazen, the team provided the survey link to group visitors following their visits. In total, more than 350 people responded.

The survey featured a series of multiple-choice questions, including affiliation (faculty, staff, students, etc.), whether the exhibition increased visitors' knowledge about the history of the university and marginalized groups, and whether they were inspired to create change in the campus community. It also included short-answer questions about what parts of the exhibition visitors found most compelling, what histories they felt were missing/could be expanded, and additional questions and feedback.

Notable highlights/themes from the survey responses include:

- A large majority of respondents felt the exhibition expanded their knowledge of the university's history and the experiences of marginalized people.
- A majority of respondents felt inspired to create change in the campus community after visiting the exhibition.
- Among suggestions for histories that could be expanded, the common topics included LGBTQ+ history, experiences of faculty and staff, recent history/current experiences of marginalized groups on campus, and Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) history.
- Themes/histories in the exhibition that respondents found most compelling or striking included stories of racism on campus, histories of housing discrimination, and the gay purges at the university.
- Common questions visitors expressed included where the Project/exhibition will go from here, what the university will do to continue to address marginalization going forward, and how they can make a difference in the campus community.



### **INSIGHTS:** *Community Feedback*

Reflection is a key part of the practice of public history. The post-exhibition visit survey was a low-cost, low-maintenance method to gain feedback on the visitor experience of the exhibition. This feedback was not only useful for our team to see areas for further research, but it also proved useful as a data set about the impacts of the Project and the exhibition on campus.

# CENTER FOR CAMPUS HISTORY



The Public History Project was originally conceived as a temporary initiative. As the Project team worked diligently throughout its time on campus, it quickly gained ample community support. As the end of the *Sifting & Reckoning* exhibition neared, supporters of the Project continuously acknowledged the impact that it had on them as individuals, the campus, and the Madison community. Many called for the work of the Project to continue in a permanent capacity at UW–Madison and cited the university’s need for more reckoning with its history as one of the main reasons to continue these efforts. Over a hundred letters written in support of the Project’s continuation were written and sent to the chancellor’s office, in addition to a wealth of positive feedback submitted to an online forum monitored by university leadership.

On January 26, 2023, Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin officially announced the establishment of a permanent center with full-time staff to continue and expand upon the work of the Project. The new center is to be housed in the Division of Teaching and Learning and named the Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History after the late chancellor emerita whose office commissioned the Project in 2019. Among the center’s primary functions will be to educate the campus community about the university’s history in ways that enrich curriculum, inform administrative decisions, and bolster efforts

toward achieving a more equitable university. The Center for Campus History is set to officially begin operations in July 2023. Until then, the Project team is working to establish the foundation of this new center that will, hopefully, have a legacy at UW–Madison for decades to come.

To begin laying the foundation, Project staff are hosting listening sessions with key campus and community stakeholders and supporters to gain insight and allow our community to help shape the mission, purpose, and goals of the center. We also have an online feedback survey to get this insight from the general campus body in an anonymous fashion. We plan to use all feedback in our planning sessions to help us build the educational, professional, and creative resources the center will provide the campus community.



**INSIGHTS:**  
*Center for Campus History*

The ardent support from our campus and Madison communities cannot be understated – their voices were vital in getting this work to continue.

# CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions about the Public History Project, please reach out. We are happy to answer any additional questions you may have about our work!

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