

# Feasibility Study for a National War of 1812 Museum in Erie

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*June 2025 Pilot Project Grant Program*

## ***Jefferson Educational Society***

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# Application Form

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## *Purpose of Funding*

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### **Purpose of the Funding**

Pilot Program grants are designed to explore programs, concepts, and potential solutions which address documented problems and deficiencies within the Erie County community. Pilots are funded when they fall outside traditional grant programs and existing ECGRA grant programs. In addition, pilot projects will be funded when the staff and Board deem the idea worthy of a trial period to establish long-term feasibility, to attract additional funding, to refine a program, and to fulfill a need within Erie County. Pilots must fall within the following five impact areas: **Municipalities, Youth and Education, Quality of Place, Small Business Development, and Neighborhoods and Local Communities.**

Pilot Project applicants are encouraged to find creative and cooperative ways to operate in the most effective and cost-efficient manner. Pilot Project grants will provide vital matching funds to encourage leveraging other funding sources.

### **Basic requirements for a Pilot Project**

- The Pilot shall relate to the Strategic Plan passed by the ECGRA Board.
- The Pilot shall bridge a gap in the current system.
- The Pilot shall act as a catalyst for economic and community development.
- The Pilot shall relate to the purposes of the Economic Development Financing Law.

## *1. Eligibility*

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### **Qualifiers\***

All must apply in order to be eligible.

Applicant is in good standing with ECGRA's reporting requirements to date  
Applicant is in good standing with the IRS and state and local taxing bodies  
Applicant's headquarters is located in Erie County  
Applicant is 501(c)(3), a municipal authority, or a school district  
Applicant will be the recipient of the grant. (Pass through grants are not permissible.)  
Applicant is current on payment of any mandated workers compensation.  
Applicant is current on payment of unemployment or other required employee related insurances.  
Applicant's real estate taxes are not delinquent.

## 2. Organizational Information

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### Name of Organization\*

Jefferson Educational Society

### Organization Mission Statement

### Year Organization Was Established

### Municipality in which headquarters is located\*

City of Erie

### County Council District in which headquarters is located\*

[Click here to see a County Council District map](#)

County Council District #4

### Website Address

### Staff/Volunteer Leadership

List or upload a list of the names and titles of the organization's leadership.

### Board of Directors

List or upload a list of the names, email addresses, and occupations of the organization's board members.

### Annual Summary Statistics

Please click here to download the Annual Summary Statistics form

## 3. Project Information

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### Project Name\*

Feasibility Study for a National War of 1812 Museum in Erie

### Brief Project Summary\*

The JES seeks support for a feasibility study to explore creating a National War of 1812 Museum in Erie, Pennsylvania, uniting local historical sites into a world-class heritage destination, driving tourism, economic growth, and national recognition.

## Goals (broad) and Objectives (specific) of the project\*

### Goals:

- \* Assess the viability of creating a National War of 1812 Museum in Erie.
- \* Explore how Erie's historic assets can drive regional revitalization, economic development, and tourism.

### Objectives:

- \* Engage New Localism Associates to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study.
- \* Analyze lessons from other national war-related museums (e.g., WWII Museum, Museum of the American Revolution).
- \* Examine how Erie's Flagship Niagara, Maritime Museum, Hagen History Center, Presque Isle Peninsula Pennsylvania State Park, and the sites of French, British, and American forts can be integrated.
- \* Explore the potential for inclusion in the National Park System, building on discussions with the Secretary of the Interior and commitments of up to \$100 million from donors identified by historian Douglas Brinkley, who has experience working on similar projects.
- \* Deliver actionable recommendations and a stakeholder presentation by September 2025.
- \* Align the project with America250 and the commemoration of the War of 1812 as the final battle securing U.S. independence.

## Project Narrative\*

Describe your project in detail including the problem you are addressing and what you will do to solve that problem.

This pilot project addresses the need for a strategic plan to leverage Erie's unique War of 1812 and early American history. Erie's compact downtown and waterfront feature unmatched historic assets: the Flagship Niagara, the Maritime Museum, the Hagen History Center, Presque Isle Peninsula State Park, and the sites of French, British, and American forts. These elements, all within walking distance, tell the layered story of Erie's critical role in American independence.

New Localism Associates will examine comparable national museums to identify best practices for design, financing, and long-term sustainability. The study will deliver recommendations on how to unify Erie's historic sites into a national destination, potentially as the 64th national park. The project aligns with America250, offering Erie a chance to commemorate the Declaration of Independence's promise through the War of 1812's final stand for freedom.

Douglas Brinkley has indicated federal interest in this concept and identified up to \$100 million in potential support from donors outside Erie. The feasibility study will provide the critical roadmap needed to pursue this once-in-a-generation opportunity.

## Project Justification\*

Describe why the pilot project is important and necessary (short and long term) to Erie County. Please provide evidence, research, and surveys documenting the problems. Standalone documents may be uploaded.

The War of 1812 was the final military struggle with England, securing America's independence and advancing the cause of self-government. Erie was at the center of that struggle, home to Oliver Hazard Perry's fleet and pivotal naval victories. Yet no national museum exists to honor this transformative history.

Erie's assets—including three recreated fort sites, the Flagship Niagara, the Maritime Museum, Hagen History Center, Presque Isle, and our working waterfront—offer the foundation for a national heritage site. A



unified vision would drive heritage tourism, economic growth, and civic pride, as seen in New Orleans with the WWII Museum's \$250M annual impact.

Douglas Brinkley's discussions with the Secretary of the Interior indicate federal openness to incorporating this vision into the National Park System. Brinkley has also identified potential donor commitments of up to \$100 million. Without this feasibility study, Erie risks losing this historic opportunity. The project offers long-term benefits by positioning Erie as a leader in America250 commemoration and heritage tourism.

### Do you anticipate other funding sources?\*

Please discuss your matching fund sources and financing partners.

Yes. We are requesting \$75,000 from ECGRA and anticipate securing \$75,000 in matching funds from other sources, including private philanthropy, state and federal heritage grants, and national donors interested in the project's national significance.

### Project Benefits\*

Please describe who will benefit and how. Will specific groups be targeted or served?

- \* Erie County residents will benefit through potential job creation, economic growth, and enhanced civic pride.
- \* Local businesses will gain from increased heritage tourism.
- \* Students and educators will access expanded history programming.
- \* Civic and cultural groups will find new opportunities for collaboration.

This project targets regional revitalization, cultural enrichment, and the creation of a destination that honors Erie's vital role in U.S. history and democracy's global legacy.

### Amount Requested from ECGRA\*

\$75,000.00

### Amount of Matching Funds\*

\$75,000.00

### Total Project Cost\*

\$150,000.00

### Project Budget\*

Please click here to download a budget form

[2025-pilot program-budget-JES.xlsx](#)

New Localism Associates will provide a comprehensive feasibility study, including: comparative research on national museums; analysis of Erie's historic assets (Flagship Niagara, Maritime Museum, Hagen History Center, Presque Isle, fort sites, and waterfront); stakeholder engagement; financial and operational recommendations; exploration of National Park Service designation potential; and delivery of a final report and stakeholder presentation with clear next steps.

## Long term plans\*

Is there a plan to continue the project? How will you sustain the project financially and administratively?

Yes. The feasibility study is designed as a first step toward a larger, sustained effort to establish a National War of 1812 Museum and heritage destination in Erie. The study will produce actionable recommendations, including a plan for financial sustainability, governance structure, and partnership development.

Based on preliminary interest—including Douglas Brinkley's identification of up to \$100 million in potential philanthropic support—the project would move from feasibility to detailed planning, fundraising, and coalition-building. We envision forming a formal steering committee or nonprofit entity dedicated to advancing the museum, pursuing National Park System designation, and securing major private, public, and federal investment.

Financially, long-term sustainability will draw from multiple revenue streams, including foundation and federal grants, private donations, earned income from admissions and events, and potential operational support from the National Park Service. Administratively, partnerships with local, state, and national organizations—including the Maritime Museum, Hagen History Center, and civic leaders—will ensure that the project benefits from broad expertise and shared responsibility as it advances beyond the pilot phase.

## Project Partners\*

Describe project partners and how they will be involved.

This project will bring together a strong network of partners with complementary expertise and resources:

- \* New Localism Associates (Bruce Katz and team) – Lead consultant conducting the feasibility study, analyzing peer institutions, and delivering strategic recommendations and a next-steps roadmap.

- \* Douglas Brinkley, Presidential Historian – Providing guidance on national positioning, leveraging federal connections (including discussions with the Secretary of the Interior), and supporting outreach to potential major donors.

- \* Erie Maritime Museum and Flagship Niagara League – Contributing local historical expertise, operational insight, and collaboration on integrating current assets into a larger national vision.

- \* Hagen History Center – Partner in exploring ways to incorporate Erie's broader regional history, artifacts, and educational programming.

- \* City of Erie and Erie County government – Potential partners in land use planning, infrastructure coordination, and supporting connections to the National Park Service and America250 initiatives.

- \* Local philanthropic and business leaders – Engaged in helping secure matching funds and future operational support, as well as serving on a future steering committee.

Each partner will play an essential role in shaping, informing, and advancing the feasibility study outcomes and in working collaboratively toward the vision of a unified national heritage destination.



## Project Support

Provide evidence of project support within the community. (Letters of support, resolutions, memoranda of understanding, etc. can be uploaded at the end of the application.)

## Qualifications and Experience\*

Description of the qualifications and experience of the project administrators and project leaders.

This project will be led by a team with exceptional national, regional, and local experience in urban development, heritage preservation, strategic planning, and public engagement.

### Bruce Katz, Principal Consultant

Bruce Katz is one of the nation's foremost urban strategists and the founder of New Localism Associates. Katz served as vice president at the Brookings Institution and co-lead the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, where he focused on revitalizing U.S. cities through innovative economic and civic strategies. He has extensive experience guiding cities through large-scale, high-impact projects that blend economic development, cultural investment, and placemaking. Katz has worked directly with dozens of U.S. and international cities to design and implement transformative civic initiatives, and his work is widely recognized for its rigor and practicality. As lead consultant, Katz will oversee the feasibility study, direct the research and analysis, and engage stakeholders throughout the process.

### Douglas Brinkley, National Advisor

Douglas Brinkley, the presidential historian for CNN and professor at Rice University, brings unmatched expertise in American history, civic commemoration, and heritage tourism. Brinkley has been instrumental in advancing this project's national positioning. He has held direct conversations with the Secretary of the Interior regarding the potential for inclusion of Erie's assets in the National Park System, and has identified up to \$100 million in potential private donor commitments to support the museum's development. Brinkley's role as national advisor will focus on ensuring historical authenticity, securing federal support, and engaging high-level philanthropic partners.

### New Localism Associates Team

In addition to Bruce Katz, New Localism Associates brings together a skilled team including Benjamin Weiser, an experienced analyst specializing in urban development and civic innovation. The team's collective expertise spans research, stakeholder engagement, comparative case analysis, and strategic planning tailored to civic and cultural projects.

### Local Partners and Leaders

Local project leadership will be strengthened by partnerships with:

- \* Erie Maritime Museum / Flagship Niagara League – providing operational expertise in historic preservation and maritime interpretation.

- \* Hagen History Center – contributing knowledge of regional history and experience managing educational and cultural programming.

- \* Local government officials – ensuring alignment with Erie's broader development goals and integration with waterfront revitalization efforts.

- \* Regional philanthropic and business leaders – advising on community engagement, funding strategies, and long-term sustainability.

Together, this team combines national vision, proven project management, historical expertise, and deep local knowledge. Their collective qualifications position the feasibility study—and the broader initiative—for success, ensuring the project is thoughtful, ambitious, and achievable.

## Ability to Complete the Project\*

Describe your ability to complete the project within the allotted time.

The project is designed with a clear, focused plan and led by professionals with extensive experience delivering complex feasibility studies on time and within budget. With a 12-month period to utilize grant funding, we are confident in our ability to complete the project well within the timeline while allowing flexibility for stakeholder engagement and partner input.

New Localism Associates, led by Bruce Katz, has successfully managed feasibility studies and strategic plans for cities and civic institutions across the country, often within shorter timeframes. Their structured approach will guide this project from research through final recommendations. The scope includes:

- \* A detailed review of comparable national museums, their origins, funding models, design, and long-term sustainability.
- \* An assessment of Erie's unique assets—including historic forts, the Flagship Niagara, the Maritime Museum, Hagen History Center, Presque Isle Peninsula, and waterfront.
- \* Development of actionable recommendations and next steps.

The extended grant period allows time for:

- \* Deeper engagement with local, state, and federal partners.
- \* Integration of feedback from stakeholders and the community.
- \* Careful coordination with other funding sources and America250 initiatives.

With strong local support and pre-existing relationships at the federal level (including interest from the Department of the Interior and major donors), the team is well positioned to deliver high-quality results comfortably within the 12-month window.

## Timeline\*

Please provide a project timeline with key milestones (12-month schedule).

Month 1-2 (Project Launch)

- \* Finalize contracts with New Localism Associates.
- \* Convene initial planning meeting with local partners (Maritime Museum, Hagen History Center, Flagship Niagara League, civic leaders).
- \* Confirm advisory role of Douglas Brinkley and major donor engagement strategy.

Month 3-5 (Research + Analysis Phase)

- \* Conduct detailed review of comparable national museums (e.g., WWII Museum, Museum of the American Revolution).
- \* Assess Erie's historic assets and opportunities (three forts, waterfront, peninsula, Flagship Niagara, museums).
- \* Begin initial stakeholder interviews (local, state, federal partners; tourism and economic leaders).

Month 6-7 (Draft Findings + Preliminary Recommendations)

- \* Develop draft report of key findings and early recommendations.
- \* Host interim stakeholder workshop for feedback on emerging ideas.

Month 8-9 (Refinement + Strategic Framework)

- \* Refine recommendations based on feedback.
- \* Explore federal partnership pathways, including National Park System potential.
- \* Further donor engagement to validate funding interest.

Month 10-11 (Final Deliverables)

- \* Finalize feasibility study report.



- \* Deliver formal presentation of findings and next steps to stakeholder group.

Month 12 (Wrap-Up + Transition to Next Phase)

- \* Share report publicly as appropriate.
- \* Convene final partner meeting to discuss implementation planning.
- \* Outline roadmap for forming a steering committee or nonprofit entity to carry the project forward.

## Outcome Measurement\*

Please describe how you will analyze the outcomes and gauge success of the project.

The primary outcome of this project is a comprehensive feasibility study that provides clear, actionable recommendations for advancing the vision of a National War of 1812 Museum and heritage destination in Erie. We will gauge success by:

- \*Completion of key deliverables: A thorough, well-researched feasibility report, a stakeholder presentation, and a next-steps memo delivered within the grant timeline.

- \* Quality of analysis: The study will incorporate insights from comparable national museums, detailed assessment of Erie's unique assets, and strategies for long-term sustainability and federal partnership (including National Park System potential).

- \* Stakeholder engagement: Success will be measured by active participation from local partners, civic leaders, state and federal officials, and donors during the study period. The number and quality of consultations, workshops, and feedback sessions will serve as key indicators.

- \* Foundation for future action: We will consider the project successful if it results in a clear and realistic roadmap for the next phase—whether that be formal pursuit of National Park designation, formation of a steering committee or nonprofit, or launch of a major funding campaign.

Additionally, we will document lessons learned, partner feedback, and opportunities identified during the process to ensure transparency and guide future efforts.

## 4. Additional Documents

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### Most Recent Annual Report or Year End Review\*

JES 2025 Annual Report (Compressed).pdf

### Current General Liability Insurance Certificate\*

General Liability Insurance Certificate 2024.pdf

### Organization Logo

### Letters of Support

## Other Supporting Material

## Other Supporting Material

### Links

Upload a link

## File Attachment Summary

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### *Applicant File Uploads*

- 2025-pilot program-budget-JES.xlsx
- JES 2025 Annual Report (Compressed).pdf
- General Liability Insurance Certificate 2024.pdf



## ECGRA Pilot Program Grant Budget

**Applicant Name:** Jefferson Education Society

**Project Name:** Feasibility Study for a National War of 1812 Museum in Erie

<u>Category</u>	<u>ECGRA Grant</u>	<u>Sponsor Match</u>	<u>Detailed Description</u>	<u>Total</u>
Personnel				
Marketing				
Construction				
Facility Expense				
Equipment & Supplies				
Professional Consultants	75,00	\$75,000.00	New Localism Associates will provide a com	\$150,000.00
Contracted Services				
Outcomes Measurement				
Totals	\$0.00	\$75,000.00		\$150,000.00