

The HBCU Digital Art Project

What is H-DAP?

The HBCU Digital Art Project (H-DAP) is a groundbreaking technology-based art history project, that was conceived by HBCU Morgan State University graduate and Art Consultant Valerie A. Cooper, and since 2023, is supported by the Smithsonian. H-DAP's goal is to benefit the American Art canon at large and the project has a threefold purpose: 1) provide digital access to select works of art from HBCU Permanent Fine Art Collections nationwide; 2) correct the omission of Black artists from the American art canon by bringing to light the rich fine artworks that have been stewarded by HBCUs since the 1800s and 3) create opportunities for African Diaspora artists by including fine artworks by those who identify as African, African American, Caribbean, Latinx, and American Indian.

H-DAP will produce significant deliverables exclusively for research, education, and cultural enrichment in three phases:

Phase I: A Digital HBCU Fine Art Collections Directory designed to provide a high-level overview of each collection's characteristics. After being permissioned by the HBCU President, HBCU Art Collection managers will be invited to complete a "20 Questions Survey" and this data will be summarized in the Directory. The goal is to have 100% participation from all HBCUs. Timeline: Publish the 1st Edition of the Directory in July 2026, during HBCU Legacy Week on Martha's Vineyard.

Phase II: A HBCU Art Collections Searchable Database of ~ 100 digital images from HBCUs who desire to participate and find it valuable to provide a sample of their collection's fine art contents. Each HBCU will independently determine which of their artworks will be added to the database, sharing the priority of selecting works that are most relevant for education and research. Timeline: 2026 – 2030.

Phase III: Education & Research Materials designed to educate H-DAP's three target audiences: 1) Academic Institutions (K-12 through higher ed), 2) Appraiser Associations, Auction Houses, Museums and Non-profit Organizations (e.g. The Links, Incorporated, The Society, Incorporated, supporting the Arts, etc.), and 3) Corporate America Workforce and Career Development Teams. Timeline: 2026 – ongoing.

How can HBCU Art Collections solve the problem?

HBCUs' museums, galleries, libraries, and archives have long collected and protected African American art, beginning with the Hampton University Museum, which in 1894 acquired Henry Ossawa Tanner's "The Banjo Lesson" and "Lion's Head".

Why is the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) Engaged with H-DAP?

The Smithsonian joined forces with H-DAP when SAAM bought Valerie Cooper onboard as a consultant and visionary for SAAM's Community Outreach initiatives. SAAM is well-positioned to assist in H-DAP's development due to its expertise in American art and craft, commitment to shaping the field through research and scholarship, and its vast collection of African American art. SAAM can also host and preserve a H-DAP database and establish a permanent H-DAP Kiosk with related research materials for museum visitors.

When and where will the Digital HBCU Art Collections Directory be Available?

The 2026 launch of the HBCU Digital Art Collections Directory will celebrate OUR SHARED FUTURE in conjunction with the United States' 250th Anniversary. Celebratory festivities will occur during HBCU Legacy Week on Martha's Vineyard at Oak Bluffs Library, the week of July 27, 2026. The Directory will be made accessible as a complimentary Digital Flipbook. A variety of nationwide educational platforms will be invited to host the Directory including all HBCUs, African American Research Centers, Smithsonian Institution Education Learning Labs, and SAAM's Research portal.

Where and when are the H-DAP convenings held?

H-DAP has convened three cohorts of HBCUs at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM), in Washington, DC. The fourth convening will take place in December 2025 at the historic Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library.

1 st Cohort September 2024 - Completed	2 nd Cohort June 2025 - Completed	3 rd Cohort September 2025 - Completed	4 th Cohort December 2025 - Scheduled
1. Benedict College 2. Florida Memorial University 3. Fort Valley State University 4. Livingstone College 5. Morehouse College 6. Morgan State University 7. Savannah State University 8. Talladega College 9. University of the District of Columbia	1. Clark Atlanta University 2. Coppin State University 3. Grambling State University 4. Howard University 5. Spelman College 6. Tuskegee University	1. Alabama State University 2. Bowie State University 3. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania 4. Claflin University 5. Meharry Medical College 6. North Carolina A&T University 7. Prairie View A&M University 8. South Carolina State University 9. Winston-Salem State University	1. AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library 2. Alabama A&M University 3. Bennett College 4. Fayetteville State University 5. Harris-Stowe State University 6. Jackson State University 7. Southern University and A&M College 8. Voorhees University 9. West Virginia State University 10. Xavier University of Louisiana