



Press Release

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UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE WINS NSF GRANT TO FORM NEW LANGUAGE SCIENCE LAB AT PLANET WORD

(Washington, D.C.) A team of researchers from the DMV have received a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation that will allow them to create a “living language laboratory” program at the museum. A team of language science specialists from the University of Maryland, Howard University, and Gallaudet University will conduct research studies and public engagement that will give visitors to Planet Word a unique lens into the scientific study of language. The hands-on approach will serve as a model for other museums and researchers conducting public-facing programs focused on language.

“We’re designing a completely new system that addresses the needs of university researchers to collect data, and the need for a museum to provide a positive public educational experience,” said Ann Friedman founder and CEO of Planet Word. “This new partnership will lay the foundation for how language research can be done in museums now and in the future. Our collaborators and our visitors will both be a part of crafting the communications science of tomorrow.”

Educational activities with visitors will connect the research to the museum’s exhibitions and to bigger concepts. “I’m excited for our research team to engage with Planet Word visitors’ natural curiosity about language. We hope that the innovative ways we’ll involve visitors in language science research will lead them to think about language differently in their own lives,” said Charlotte Vaughn, the project’s lead and Assistant Research Professor at University of Maryland.

The program will train university students from DC-area schools to work with museum visitors, providing them with unique hands-on experience in research and science communication. A focal point of the recruitment effort will be to engage students from populations historically underrepresented in the field. In this way, the project broadens participation in language science in terms of both the researchers and the participants in the research.

The collaborative project is funded jointly by three NSF programs: Advancing Informal STEM Learning, Build and Broaden, and Linguistics. The program will begin to roll out in 2022, with a staggered schedule that is responsive to COVID changes.

For more info about Planet Word visit: planetwordmuseum.org. For more information about the program visit: <https://go.umd.edu/planetwordresearchcollab>.

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