



CALL FOR POET MADAM C.J. WALKER MURAL PROJECT

[Indiana Humanities](#) and the [Indy Arts Council](#) seek to commission an Indiana poet to write an original poem inspired by the life, career, and legacy of Madam C.J. Walker to accompany a new portrait mural of the entrepreneur to be installed in the fall of 2022.

COMMISSION AMOUNT: \$1,000

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Sunday, July 24, 2022 11:59 p.m.

HOW TO APPLY: [Application form here](#)

About Madam C.J. Walker

An entrepreneur, philanthropist, and activist, Madam C.J. Walker (1867 – 1919) rose from poverty in the South to become one of the wealthiest Black women of her time. From her hair products empire's base in Indianapolis, she used her position to advocate for the advancement of Black Americans locally and nationally. Though most of her activities were aimed toward employment, education, and the building of personal and racial pride, Madam Walker fought against prejudice on many fronts, including publicly decrying lynching and protesting the War Department's segregationist policies. For more information about Madam Walker's life and work, please review [these collected resources](#).

About the Mural

The Arts Council is working with the [Madam Walker Legacy Center](#), the [Indianapolis Cultural Trail Inc.](#), and Indianapolis artist [Tasha Beckwith](#) to reconfigure Beckwith's [100-ft-long Madam Walker mural](#), originally designed as a temporary installation indoors at Indianapolis International Airport, as a more long-term artwork to last up to 15 years outdoors.

The mural will be installed in October 2022 on the northwest wall of the Martens Building, 315 N. Senate Avenue, at the corner of Indiana Avenue and directly behind the Pathways to Peace Park. Lead funding support is provided by the City of Indianapolis Bicentennial Commission and the State of Indiana through the Indiana Destination Development Corporation. Public donations through a GoFundMe campaign and philanthropic contributions through the Madam Walker Legacy Center will also support the mural project.

The project team has made the following observations about the mural, which are the goals of the commissioned poem as well.

- The mural connects Madam C.J. Walker directly to the rich legacy of Indiana Avenue as a hub for vibrant Black culture.
- The mural design focuses on Madam Walker's success as an entrepreneur in the Black hair care industry, showcasing her life and wisdom as an inspiration to entrepreneurs today and into the future.
- Viewers are encouraged to understand, through the mural, Madam Walker's principled determination to enable and support the excellence inherent in the Black community
- People should feel a sense of Madam Walker's strength, while understanding how much she cared about her employees and her community.
- This mural also honors Madam Walker's philanthropy and her commitment to using her unique position as a well-off Black woman in the early years of the 20th century to benefit others.

About the Poetry Commission

The poem should aim to bring further context and understanding to the life of Madam C.J. Walker, allowing readers to experience the struggles and triumphs of Madam's 's remarkable life and understand its meaning for today. The poem will be posted alongside the mural, with hopes that visitors to the mural will read and reflect, finding further connection and inspiration in Madam's life through the written word. The poem must be completed by September 15, 2022 and will be unveiled alongside the mural at a ceremony before the end of October, 2022.

Commission Fee and Terms

The selected poet will receive a \$1,000 stipend, with half the stipend paid at the outset of the project, and the second half paid upon delivery of the final poem.

In addition to the stipend, there may be opportunities for live or recorded performances and readings of the poem at programs related to the mural. Additional compensation for readings and performances will be offered as those programs are developed.

Review and Selection Process

Applications will be reviewed by a conflict-free panel that includes a writer-journalist, a historian, and two literary artists. The Madam Walker Legacy Center is also represented on the panel. One applicant will be identified by the panel and awarded the commission.

How to Apply

- Provide a brief statement describing your interest in the project and your preliminary vision for the poem. Here are a few questions you might consider addressing in the statement:
 - Why do I want to take on this project?
 - What do I find compelling about Madam Walker's life and work?
 - What do I hope readers would take away from my poem?
 - How can poetry help readers get a better understanding of Madam Walker's life, in a way that complements the mural?

- Provide writing samples: 5-8 previous poems to help reviewers get a sense of your poetic style and approach. You can upload them individually, or you can collate them into a single Word or PDF document and upload that document.

Apply using [this form](#) before midnight on Sunday, July 24, 2022. Applicants will be notified of the committee’s decision in early August and will be provided with images of the mural design for reference.

Questions?

- For more information about the poetry competition and how best to apply, contact Megan Telligman, mtelligman@indianahumanities.org or at 317.616.9409.
- For more information about Madam C.J. Walker, contact Tanasha Anders, tanders@madamwalkerlegacycenter.com

Image of the Madam Walker Legends mural (preliminary concept):

