

Statement of
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American Association of Museums
on the Fiscal Year 2008 funding for the Office of Museum Services
at the Institute of Museum and Library Services
submitted to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
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Chairman Obey, Representative Walsh and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, the American Association of Museums (AAM) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on the Fiscal Year 2008 budget for the museum program at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This agency is the primary federal entity devoted to assisting museums in fulfilling their role as centers for lifelong learning for all Americans. We respectfully request your approval of the Administration's budget request of \$39.897 million for grants to museums administered through the Office of Museum Services and the agency's overall budget request of \$271.246 million, which reflects a strong endorsement of the vital public service role museums play in their communities.

The American Association of Museums has been bringing museums together since 1906, helping to develop standards and best practices, gathering and sharing knowledge, and providing advocacy on issues of concern to the entire museum community. AAM is the only organization representing the full scope of museums and professionals and nonpaid staff who work for and with museums. AAM currently represents more than 15,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, 3,000 institutions, and 300 corporate members.

Our nation's museums are vital community assets. With more than 17,000 institutions collectively holding our nation's cultural and natural heritage, they serve as a catalyst for our citizens to pursue a greater understanding of the world around them. Every day museums save the memories of our civilization and help create new memories for our visitors. We feed preschoolers' imaginations at children's museums; engage elementary school students in learning about art, history and science; provide teenagers and college students with opportunities to share new found knowledge as tour guides and floor staff; stimulate adult learning with lectures on wide array of topics; and offer grandparents a place to share memories and stories with their grandchildren.

Within your own district, you could easily name with pride the museums in the communities you serve such as the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Chairman Obey's district or the Erie Canal Museum in Representative Walsh's district. The vast

majority of museums operate as private nonprofit organizations with nominal government funding unlike other community assets such as schools and libraries. According to our most recent financial survey, nonprofit museums receive approximately 16 percent of their budget from local, state, and the federal government. The bulk of their income is derived from private philanthropy in the form of donations, grants and corporate sponsorships and earned income from admission and gift shop sales.

It is critical, therefore, that the Federal government continue to show leadership by supporting investments to advance America's museums in four important areas – caring for and conserving our collections, improving museum programs and operations, supporting museum professional's development, and conducting research and collecting data to help policymakers, museum trustees and leaders make smart decisions.

Caring For and Conserving Our Collections

The Heritage Health Index, an example of IMLS-supported research, documented the condition of America's collections held in our nation's museums, libraries, archives, historical societies and scientific research organizations. It is the first comprehensive survey ever conducted of the condition and preservation needs of our nation's collections. Through the survey we learned that these collections are visited 2.5 billion times a year, and yet, more than 630 million artifacts – works of art, historic objects, photographs, natural science specimens, books and periodicals – are at risk and require immediate attention and care.

As a result of this study, IMLS has made a commitment to increase public awareness and support for collections care. A national conservation summit will be held here in Washington this spring with future forums planned in four cities across the country to discuss this issue. We are excited at the prospect of increasing attention to this issue, as museums are responsible for the care of hundreds of millions of works of art, artifacts, and scientific specimens, which continue to grow in numbers.

Information related to collections stewardship continues to be the most frequently requested area where AAM members seek guidance on professional standards and best practices. Resources for collections care are often limited, especially in our small and mid-size institutions. This is due in part to the behind-the-scenes nature of this work. It is an area that is probably least understood by the public and funders. We are hopeful that a renewed commitment to and increased public awareness of preservation and conservation will bring new resources to museums to address the full spectrum of risks such as exposure to hazardous environmental conditions including pests, light, temperature, and moisture; lack of proper storage areas and containers; and critical need for emergency and disaster planning that includes provisions for the collections.

IMLS assists museums with collections issues by providing consultation services through the Conservation and Museum Assessment Programs and financial assistance through the Conservation Project Support program to help ensure some basic

safekeeping of museum collections. Between 1984 and 2001 the agency made nearly 3,000 grants totaling more than \$48 million. The demand for this support regularly exceeds the funds available. In FY 2006, IMLS received 144 grant applications and funded 40 projects totaling nearly \$2.8 million which was matched by recipients with an additional \$4.6 million. The grants are helping these museums examine, document, treat, stabilize, and restore their collections. Support for conservation also extends to living collections. IMLS supported seven restoration ecology projects by the University of Wisconsin's Arboretum which removed non-native pest plants and revived the woodlands, wetlands, savannas, and prairies of pre-settlement Wisconsin. By doing so, the Arboretum is able to connect schoolchildren, scientists and plant-lovers to times before 1840 when Wisconsin was handsomely forested.

Improving Museum Programs and Operations

Since its inception, AAM has served as a forum for discussing, developing, disseminating, and measuring museum performance standards. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson asked the U.S. Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities to conduct a study on the status of American museums and recommend ways to support and strengthen them. Out of this study, *America's Museums: The Belmont Report*, the AAM accreditation program was born. In 1971, AAM first awarded accreditation to 16 museums, recognizing their achievement of meeting the highest standards of the profession. Accreditation has continued to evolve in the three decades since the program was founded. The program has been a critical tool in advancing the entire museum field. It has insured transparency and good governance in service to the public.

As our partner in helping museums achieve excellence, IMLS has supported the Museum Assessment Program (MAP). MAP is a program that helps museums maintain and improve their operations through a consultative process that provides guidance to help them meet priorities and goals and helps museums understand how they compare to current standards and best practices in the field. As a result of the participating in this program, museums learn their strengths and weaknesses, receive guidance on how to improve their operations and set institutional priorities. The public benefits by having museums that are striving to improve their operations to be in a better position to serve them through their public programs and fulfilling their collections stewardship responsibilities.

IMLS also supports museums in their efforts to continue to improve and expand their public service through the Museums for America program. In the program's first three years, FY 2004 – FY 2006, the Museums for America program has awarded more than 500 grants totaling \$50.2 million. The flexibility of the program has been invaluable to our museums. It allows them to apply for funds to address those high-priority activities that advance their institution's strategic plans. Grants have helped museums deal with a range of issues such as behind-the-scenes collections management projects and staff training, investments in digital technology to broaden public access, planning new public programs, and improving visitor experiences. In FY 2006, the agency received 425 eligible grant applications and only 177 awards could be made.

Among those who were successful, the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA) received a Museums for America grant to mount two major exhibitions at its Fenimore Art Museum, with accompanying programs and publications: “Frederic Remington: Not Just Cowboy Art” (2007) and “Through the Eyes of Others: African American Images from the NYSHA Collection” (2008). Both exhibitions will tour nationally, and both will include self-representations by Plains Indian and African American artists. The exhibitions will encourage visitors on- and offsite to appreciate and analyze American art in terms of how it reinforces or breaks down racial stereotypes and how artists choose to represent their own race or culture. NYSHA will offer public and school programs, including distance learning units, in conjunction with the exhibitions.

Supporting Museum Professional Development

While museums have long supported the public pursuit of lifelong learning, the staff of museums must also continue to learn. Building the 21st century museum workforce is critical to ensure that museums have both intellectual leadership and financial stability to carry out their mission. The skills required of today’s museum directors have changed. In the past, trustees sought individuals with a scholarly knowledge in the area of the museum’s collection. Today museum boards are primarily looking for strategic thinkers, excellent communicators, and outstanding fundraisers who have energy, creativity, and an entrepreneurial focus. Museum operations have grown more complex and their leaders need much broader business skills.

Successful museum directors also need capable professionals at all levels who have the skills and knowledge to both move the institution forward and attend to the daily operations of running a museum. According to AAM’s most recent financial survey, the median number of employees in a museum is 6 full-time and 4 part-time paid staff with 60 volunteers. This includes curators, educators, registrars, accountants, marketing and development professionals with some wearing more than one hat. Unlike our business counterparts, nonprofit museums are not investing time and money to develop and train their staff. Unfortunately, resources for training and career development are scarce. We see this as a looming problem as museums compete with other nonprofits to find and hire future leaders from a shrinking pool of qualified applicants.

In creating the 21st Century Museum Professionals program, IMLS is just beginning to help our field identify strategies for addressing these challenges. In the first year of the program, IMLS received 55 applications but only had the resources to award four grants. There is much work to be done. We urge you to provide the \$2.14 million request by the agency and to consider increasing future investment in workforce development substantially.

Conducting Research and Collecting Data

It is critical for IMLS to gather sound and current data to assist museum professionals in making critical decisions about their daily operations, demonstrating their public value,

ensuring their long-term viability and most effectively meet the needs of the diverse communities they serve. As a field, we need basic census data about museums, such as how many museums there are in the United States, how many people work in museums (both paid, professional staff and volunteers), and how many people visit museums annually. A commitment to collect this data on a regular basis will be critical in identifying trends that could inform decision-making by both IMLS and the museum community.

For example the 2002 IMLS study, “True Needs, True Partners”, about museums serving schools, has documented not only the growth in the number of schools, students and teachers served, but also the changing nature of the services provided by museums. This research has helped museum professionals and their school partners understand the evolving nature of their work and documented the growing financial commitment museums have made to public education and how museums have expanded the learning experience for K-12 students.

In addition to understanding the contributions of museums to public education, there are a number of other topics which should be the subject of future research, such as: measuring the impact of museums at the national level while building capacity of institutions to measure their own local impact; studying the evolving skills and requirements necessary to be a 21st century museum professional; supporting ongoing and existing field research that collects core data, such as financial benchmarks and attendance figures; and examining areas of special interest to segments of the museum field, such as informal learning and collections stewardship.

We need this information and data so that museum leaders and trustees, policy makers at all levels of government and private funders can make informed decisions about the future of our nation’s more than 17,000 museums.

Conclusion

Each year we recognize that you face difficult choices in allocating resources to all the many worthy and necessary programs that are within this subcommittee’s jurisdiction. Our appeal is to ask you to consider what we lose if we do not continue to invest in our nation’s museums. The public places a great deal of trust in our ability to preserve not only physical artifacts, but even more importantly the stories and memories of our people and our nation. We need museums where you can learn about the past and dream of the future, explore the smallest bugs to the vast expanses of our universe, and experience awe and wonder in the beauty of our world. We cannot do this alone. With leadership from the federal government and our partners from the private sector, we will fulfill these important responsibilities. Working together we can and will continue to inspire future generations of citizens to become thoughtful leaders, creative entrepreneurs, scientists, artists and educators.