

Memo to President-elect Obama's Transition Team

To: The Honorable Bill Ivey, Office of Presidential Transition

From: American Association of Museums  
American Association for State and Local History  
American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works  
American Public Gardens Association  
Association of African American Museums  
Association of Art Museum Directors  
Association of Children's Museums  
Association of College and University Museums and Galleries  
Association of Railway Museums  
Association of Science Museum Directors  
Association of Science-Technology Centers  
Association of Zoos and Aquariums  
College Art Association  
Council of American Jewish Museums  
Council of American Maritime Museums  
Heritage Preservation  
International Museum Theater Alliance  
Museum Store Association  
Museum Trustee Association  
National Council on Public History  
National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Natural Science Collections Alliance  
Small Museum Association  
Society for American Archaeology  
Society for the Preservation of Natural Collections  
United States Committee of the International Council of Museums

Association of Midwest Museums  
Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums  
Mountain-Plains Museums Association  
New England Museum Association  
Southeastern Museums Conference  
Western Museums Association

Alabama Museums Association  
Museums Alaska  
Museum Association of Arizona  
Arkansas Museums Association  
California Association of Museums  
Colorado-Wyoming Association of Museums  
Connecticut League of History Organizations  
Delaware Museum Association

Florida Association of Museums  
Hawaii Museums Association  
Idaho Association of Museums  
Illinois Association of Museums  
Illinois Heritage Association  
Association of Indiana Museums  
Iowa Museum Association  
Kansas Museums Association  
Kansas Humanities Council  
Kentucky Museum and Heritage Alliance  
Louisiana Association of Museums  
Historical Society of Michigan  
Minnesota Association of Museums  
Mississippi Museums Association  
Missouri Museums Association  
Nevada Museums Association  
Advocates for New Jersey History  
New Mexico Association of Museums  
Museum Association of New York  
Museums in North Dakota  
Ohio Museums Association  
Oklahoma Museums Association  
Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations  
South Carolina Federation of Museums  
Tennessee Association of Museums  
Texas Association of Museums  
Utah Museums Association  
Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance  
Virginia Association of Museums  
Washington Museum Association  
West Virginia Association of Museums

Date: December 22, 2008

**RE: Museum Policy in the Obama Administration**

The museum field is pleased to present our policy recommendations to assist the Obama Administration in its transition planning. Our nation faces many challenges, but we look forward to working with you to help address them in new and innovative ways. Indeed, we stand at a critical time in our nation's history, one that millions of Americans will some day learn about by visiting a museum.

Our national, regional, and state museum organizations represent a diverse and vibrant museum field. We are aquariums, arboretums, archaeological museums, art museums, botanical gardens, children's museums, culturally specific museums, historic sites,

history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, zoological parks, and other specialty museums.

We recognize that President-elect Obama's vision for America reflects many of the objectives that museums are striving to achieve every day: educating and inspiring the public, encouraging volunteerism and national service, creating energy efficient public buildings, to name just a few. Museums are engaged in all of these areas, and are part of a robust nonprofit community, working to address our nation's greatest challenges.

The current financial crisis has created a difficult economic reality for many of our nation's museums. Some are seeing a decline in charitable gifts. Some have had to lay off staff and cut back on community offerings. Some are struggling just to keep their doors open, and some have shut down altogether. At a time when many families are re-discovering museums as an affordable family activity, museums are being squeezed by state and local budget cuts, limiting public access to some of our nation's treasured collections.

While the museum field as a whole is affected by numerous federal agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the Departments of Education, Interior, State, Homeland Security, and Commerce, we would like to take this opportunity to specifically lay out our vision for the future of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which is due to be reauthorized by September 30, 2009.

First, we would like to provide some background information on the museum field.

American museums receive 850 million visits per year, with 542 million additional online visits to museums. In fact, two-thirds of American adults visit a museum – either in person or online – each year. More than one-third (35%) of U.S. museums do not charge any admission fee, and more than 97% of the rest offer discounts, special fee schedules, or free admission days.

Museums provide lifelong learning opportunities to Americans of all ages. Every day, people from all walks of life – senior citizens, students, parents, immigrants, and more – enjoy educational programs in a museum.

Museums are also helping to educate our children, spending more than \$1 billion annually on K-12 educational programming. In fact, museums offer educational programs in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography, and social studies, often in coordination with state and local curriculum standards.

Teachers, students, and researchers benefit from increased access to trustworthy information through online collections and exhibits, although most museums need more help in digitizing collections to meet this need. This is especially important when geographical distance prevents travel to a wide range of museums.

Museums are economic engines, spending more than \$14.5 billion a year in their communities. Museums rank among the top three family vacation destinations, with cultural and heritage activities accounting for more than 23% of all domestic tourism. Both the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Governors Association agree that cultural assets such as museums are essential to attracting businesses, a skilled workforce, and local, regional, and international tourism.

As you know, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary federal agency responsible for supporting the nation's 17,500+ museums, and is due to be reauthorized by September 30, 2009.

IMLS' Office of Museum Services has been woefully underfunded over the years, with funding remaining flat at about \$31 million. Although the agency has been successful in creating and supporting advancements in areas such as technology, lifelong community learning, conservation and preservation efforts, much more needs to be done. Only a small fraction of the nation's museums are currently being reached, and many highly rated grant applications go unfunded each year.

- In 2008, out of 40 African American History and Culture applications, only 9 were funded (22.5%).
- In 2008, out of 50 21st Century Museum Professionals applications, only 9 were funded (18%).
- In 2008, out of 109 Conservation Project Support applications, only 34 were funded (31.2%).
- In 2008, out of 415 Museums for America applications, only 158 were funded (38.1%).

**We recommend a significant new investment in our nation's museums to support the important work they are doing in our communities. Specifically, we urge the Obama Administration to request \$50 million for IMLS' Office of Museum Services for FY10, an increase from the current level of approximately \$31 million. Over the next five years, we recommend a significant increase in the annual appropriations to \$95 million.**

We further recommend the reauthorization of IMLS' Office of Museum Services to both enhance the current national programs and begin the process of helping to build statewide networks of support for museums. We are pleased to outline below our consensus agenda on IMLS reauthorization, which links some newly authorized mechanisms to increases through the annual appropriations process:

**Strengthen Existing National Programs:** A significant increase in annual appropriations for IMLS is needed to support current national programs that have

repeatedly been insufficiently funded. This increase would allow for enhanced investments in pivotal areas, such as technology upgrades, lifelong learning, capacity building, preservation of important collections, community engagement, data collection, and the development of the next generation of museum professionals.

**State Needs Assessments:** Once the annual appropriations level exceeds \$45 million, up to \$2 million would be appropriated for states to conduct needs assessments. The needs assessments are an important step toward establishing a program to provide grants directly to each state (see below).

**Conservation, Traveling Exhibits, and Helping Smaller Museums:** As the annual appropriations level rises from \$45 million to \$72 million, IMLS would establish new grants for conservation and traveling exhibitions, as well as a program to help small museums more effectively compete for federal grants.

- **Museum Collections are at Risk:** The 2005 *Heritage Health Index* concluded that immediate action is needed to prevent the loss of 190 million artifacts that are in need of conservation treatment.
  - 59% have collections damaged by light.
  - 56% have insufficient security to protect their collections.
  - 80% do not have an emergency plan that includes collections.
  - 71% need additional training and expertise for staff caring for collections.
  - Only 13% have access to endowment funds for preservation.

**Grants to States:** Once the annual appropriations level exceeds \$72 million, the IMLS Director would have discretion to provide up to \$20 million of any annual appropriation in excess of \$72 million toward a state grant program. Such a program would include states that have completed their needs assessments and have an approved five-year plan on how the funds would be used. Once the appropriations level exceeds \$92 million, the IMLS Director would have discretion to provide up to 50% of any additional funds toward the state grant program.

- **The Case for a Statewide Approach**
  - Each state faces unique challenges in helping museums serve the public. Most states do not have an agency, commission, or department that specifically gathers information about the state's museums or addresses their needs. Museums of all sizes, disciplines, and geographic locations have varying needs, and there isn't currently a statewide entity set up to address each state's needs. A comprehensive statewide approach that enhances, rather than competes with, the national programs would:
    - Leverage funding from both public and private sources
    - Enhance data collection on museums
    - Ensure museums are healthy and stable institutions that benefit the nation's citizens.
    - Broaden the reach of museums into every community
    - Help coordinate efforts on related statewide efforts, such as school outreach and the promotion of travel and tourism.

**Evaluation:** After the state grant program has been in existence for two years (not including the state needs assessments), a study would be conducted to evaluate the progress and viability of the state grant program.

In addition to our agenda for the reauthorization of IMLS, our field has a broad agenda for the new Congress and Administration. Over the course of the next few months, we look forward to working with you on issues such as:

- Improving No Child Left Behind to encourage museum visits that help teach the curriculum;
- Maintaining a strong nonprofit sector and its important tax-exempt status;
- Increasing historic preservation efforts;
- Providing health insurance coverage for museum employees; and
- Ensuring that we do everything possible to promote charitable giving, the lifeblood of most museums, which is in grave danger during these uncertain economic times.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you our policy recommendations for supporting our nation's museums so they can continue to provide our communities with exceptional opportunities to learn and explore the past, present, and future. We welcome the opportunity to discuss any of them in further detail, and look forward to working with you.