

1979

## National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities: S. 1386 (1979): Speech 02

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STATEMENT OF  
THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES, UNITED STATES SENATE  
  
FOR HEARINGS ON THE AUTHORIZATION OF THE  
INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM SERVICES,  
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AND  
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

JUNE 28, 1979

The American Association of Museums is a national organization founded in 1906, which represents 1,500 museums and more than 4,600 museum professionals and trustees from all parts of our country. Our members are institutions of every size--from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City to the John Brown House of the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence; and every discipline--museums of art, history, science and natural history, zoos, arboreta, botanical gardens, aquariums, planetariums, science-technology centers, art centers and youth museums. Our individual members include museum professionals who are involved in every aspect of museum work--directors, curators, educators, registrars, trustees, conservators, public relations and development officers, sales and security personnel.

From this vantage point, the association can see the growing public awareness that museums are essential and exciting cultural resources in their communities and, through our members, we know that there are new challenges for museums, their staffs, their trustees and their other supporters.

With these new challenges comes a growing need for the kinds of assistance provided by the agencies whose authorizations are being considered by this subcommittee. It is encouraging that, for more than a decade federal support has increased, and with that increase has come a corresponding commitment from the private sector and state and local governments. But as museums play an even larger role in our cultural life, direct federal support, in partnership with others, for museum programs and operations becomes even more essential.

Direct federal support for museums is provided by five federal agencies. The Institute of Museum Services, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities come under the jurisdiction of this subcommittee. In addition, the National Museum Act, Smithsonian Institution and the National Science Foundation have programs of direct support for museums.

The memorandum of understanding on museums issued by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities last month is an important step in a continuing process of articulating the areas of responsibilities of each federal agency. The objective must be to insure that there are adequate programs and financial resources to provide support for projects, challenge grants and general operating support to all museums of quality. It will become clear during the course of these hearings that much remains to be done before these objectives are achieved.

While adequate appropriations to support federal programs of assistance to museums is the major concern that must be addressed, there are a variety of policy issues that deserve attention. This subcommittee offers a valuable forum for the continuing review of all these matters. The goals and policies established as the result of these hearings will provide the overall policy guidance for federal assistance to museums for the next several years. Also, the legislation will provide leadership for the private sector, and state and local governments.

Before addressing more specific matters, the association feels it is important to call to the subcommittee's attention the need for adequate administrative support for each of these agencies. In the course of their work, the staffs of the two endowments and the institute provide a substantial amount of technical assistance, which helps museums to improve their programs and their management. Although these agencies have been fortunate to attract dedicated and knowledgeable

personnel, administrative requirements and funds too often have been limited, and this in turn hampers the agencies' ability to develop programs that meet the needs of museums. The recent action by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies increasing administrative funds for the Arts and the Humanities Endowments was most important and gratifying. While administrative support relates more directly to appropriations, it is important to keep this need in mind during these hearings.

The Council of the American Association of Museums considered the role of federal agencies supporting museums at both its May, 1978 and January, 1979 meetings. The attached statements were adopted unanimously by the AAM Council.

Direct federal support for museums falls into three categories:

- 1) General operating support grants,
- 2) Challenge grants, and
- 3) Project grants.

General operating support grants are provided by the Institute of Museum Services. In its first two years the institute has focused attention all across the nation on the need to generate increased financial support for general operating expenses. The work of the institute has provided the beginning of a concentrated national effort on the part of all museums to acquaint foundations, corporations, individuals, and state and local governments with the need to assist in support of the general operating costs of museums on a matching basis with the federal government.

The institute and the National Museum Services Board continue to work with museum leaders to refine the agency's guidelines and procedures. This cooperative effort will enable the institute to administer efficiently and effectively the increased funds needed in fiscal 1981 to leverage greater support for general operating needs.

It is important that reauthorization provide the leadership that will assist the institute in obtaining increased appropriations so that grant amounts can be increased substantially above the present \$25,000 maximum and can be awarded on a multi-year basis. With significantly increased funds in fiscal 1981, the Institute of Museum Services will be able to make major progress in addressing the goals established for it by the Congress when it was created.

Challenge grants provide substantial support for cultural institutions desiring to make a special effort toward reaching program and fiscal stability so they can better serve increasing public demands. Although challenge grants were conceived and adopted by the Congress to serve all museums, as well as other cultural institutions, it is clear that a substantial number of high quality museums, particularly science and youth museums, have not received equal consideration. The Association of Science-Technology Centers has prepared a study of challenge grant recipients for fiscal years 1977-1979 which reveals that science and "other" museums received only slightly more than 20 percent of the challenge grant funds awarded to museums by the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities.

The association believes that the original policy that all cultural institutions with high quality programs and services should have the opportunity

to receive challenge grants must be carried out. This matter deserves the considered attention of this committee as well as the agencies.

Project grant support for museums has been provided almost exclusively by those agencies whose charter it is to nurture and disseminate information relating to the disciplines of art, history and science, namely the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities and to a limited extent the National Science Foundation. In order to carry out their responsibilities these agencies support a broad variety of cultural, scientific, educational and social organizations, including museums.

Museums do not easily lend themselves to classification by specific type or kind. Instead, they have developed in response to the communities and regions they serve. The Newark Museum, for example, has substantial collections in art, the natural, physical and earth sciences as well as ethnology and archaeology. Another example is the Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Missouri which, as its name implies, has collections of art and archaeological materials as well as ethnological artifacts.

The association is gratified that the Federal Council memorandum on museums acknowledges a commitment by the Arts and Humanities Endowments and the National Science Foundation to provide substantial support to museums for projects--for example, exhibitions, public education programs and catalogues. It is important that the agencies continually examine their programs to insure that they meet the needs of museums. For example, as the Arts Endowment more carefully defines its parameters of support, care must be taken so that quality projects of artistic and aesthetic significance undertaken by any museum continue to receive assistance.

A great deal of progress has been made in recent months not only toward defining more clearly the responsibility for providing federal assistance to museums, but toward developing and implementing procedures to insure an exchange of information so that two or more agencies do not unknowingly fund the same project. Of course, in some cases there are valid and important reasons for funding being provided by more than one agency. In these cases, it is important that there be cooperation and consultation among agencies. It is also important that there be a comprehensive record of all support provided to a museum by the five agencies with direct programs of support for museums. This can be used by the staffs, panels, councils and board in assessing their programs and developing grant recommendations.

Efforts to secure coordination should not result in complex or overly mechanized systems. In the end the process will depend on the commitment of the federal agencies, the good will of all involved, and the support and cooperation of the museum community. We believe that all concerned are working towards these ends.

Services to the field grants provide assistance to organizations that offer a variety of programs and technical assistance to museums. These organizations, such as our association, the American Association for State and Local History, the Association of Systematic Collections, and regional and state museum associations have been formed by museums and museum professionals to meet common needs. The Federal Council memorandum of understanding on museums indicates that the Institute of Museum Services and the National Museum Act will be primarily responsible for providing assistance to service groups. The administration bill does not, however, include authority for the Institute to support these groups.

The same is true for graduate and undergraduate training programs that prepare individuals for professional museum careers. These programs are essential to the long-term well being of museums.

We hope the committee will give consideration to including authority for the Institute of Museum Services to support museum related organizations and museum training programs.