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April 11, 1990

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
Chairman
Subcommittee on Education,
Arts and Humanities
U. S. Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510-6300

Dear Senator Pell:

I am pleased to provide a response to your questions for the official hearing record on the reauthorization of the Institute of Museum Services.

1. Question: The Institute has a relationship with the National Endowment for the Humanities, does it not? What services are supplied by the NEH and at what cost, if any, to the Institute of Museum Services?

Answer: The Institute’s interagency agreement with the National Endowment for the Humanities provides the Institute with administrative services such as automated data processing, personnel, budget, accounting, contracts and procurement, audit, Equal Employment Opportunity, reproduction and printing, processing of travel authorizations, supplies and materials, and mailing services. These services are provided on a routine basis and the Institute is charged by the hour or item purchased. The annual total charge is anticipated to be $76,000 in fiscal 1990 and $79,192 in fiscal 1991.

The Institute’s needs for such goods and services requires input from over 20 staff members already providing these functions for NEH, ranging from GS-3 to GS-15. Their expertise is not required full-time, yet the scope of their knowledge and service spans a great deal of breadth in all areas of our operations. The expense of separately creating, staffing, housing, and providing equipment for such positions on a full-time basis would be far in excess of what the Institute has requested or feels is currently justifiable given the current small size of our budget.
This arrangement provides great advantage in efficiency, since we are located within the same building and the NEH staff is well acquainted with our mission and needs. It is also cost-effective, since we pay on an as-needed basis. The expertise and level of service provided by NEH is excellent; and, to the best of our knowledge, the Agreement in its current configuration is acceptable with that agency as well.

2. Question: I understand that reviewers of General Operating Support applications are instructed to base their judgment on how well a museum makes use of its existing resources to fulfill identified purposes. I take this to mean that a museum’s current operations are the primary focus for reviewers. How much weight, then, is given to the answer to question #4 on page 50 of the application form, which asks, "How will 1990 GOS funds, if awarded, be managed to further the museum’s objectives?"

Answer: The General Operating Support applicant is asked to respond to nine sections in the application: audience, collections, collections care and management, exhibits, education and research, staff and physical facilities, support, administration, and long range plans. Reviewers make comments on and assign one score to each of these nine sections. Each section is weighted equally.

This particular question is one of four questions in the section on long range plans. The weight given to this question could be said to be approximately one-fourth of the weight of the section.

GOS funds are not project grants and can be applied to the entire range of museum activities. All GOS recipients are required to submit a final report which details grant expenditures. Therefore, the museum professionals who serve as peer panel reviewers for the GOS program have recommended that the National Museum Services Board review this question when they meet on April 27, 1990.

3. Question: What percentage of applications are funded in the Conservation Project Support Program? Are these applications reviewed in the same manner as the GOS applications, i.e. by field reviewers? How are reviewers selected for this more specialized type of support?
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Answer: In the FY 89 Conservation Project Support competition 459 applications were received and 53% (243) were funded. These are small matching grants for all types of museum conservation projects. The Conservation Project Support applications are reviewed using a combination of field and panel review.

Applications are evaluated by reviewers who are familiar with the category of collection and type of project proposed. Reviewers are selected based on their expertise in a variety of conservation fields including: paper conservators, historic preservation architects, objects conservators, and many others.

Each application is mailed to two field reviewers for a highly technical and detailed evaluation of the project. The FY 89 competition used 72 field reviewers to evaluate the applications. Reviewers score and make comments on eight elements of the proposals and make funding recommendations.

The Conservation Project Support panel consists of 16 professionals, selected for their in-depth knowledge in a variety of conservation areas. They meet for four days, working in teams of two, to review all applications and reviewer comments and scores. They make final funding recommendations and National Museum Services Board reviews these recommendations.

All Conservation Project Support reviewers must have a minimum of three years professional experience beyond advanced training. We solicit reviewers through recommendations from previous reviewers and through professional museum and conservation associations including the American Institute for Conservation, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, and American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta.

Sincerely,

Daphne Wood Murray