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Museum Services Act (1984): News Article 02

Ellen K. Coughlin

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Obscure Federal Agency Helps Museums Meet Their Everyday Operating Costs

Institute for Museum Services makes grants for almost anything that improves services to the public

By Ellen K. Coughlin

WASHINGTON

A small, obscure federal agency called the Institute for Museum Services is trying something virtually unheard of among granting agencies: giving money to museums to help them pay for personnel, supplies, renovations, or whatever else they need to improve their services to the public.

Unlike the fledgling institute, most foundations and government agencies will not even consider awarding a grant to a museum unless it is intended for some special project. The larger an exhibit and the bigger the audience it attracts, they believe, the better.

The National Endowment for the Humanities, for example, handed out half a million dollars in 1977 for partial support of the spectacular exhibit of ancient Egyptian objects, "Treasures of Tutankhamun," now on a six-city tour of the United States.

But most museums do not operate on the scale of Washington's National Gallery or New York's Metropolitan Museum. Many have barely enough money to survive, let alone to mount a showing of the treasures of King Tut.

That's where the Institute for Museum Services comes in.

It's "sort of fantastic" to find a grantor willing to help a museum with its everyday

operating expenses, said John Carswell, curator of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute Museum. His institution received a \$15,000 grant from the institute last year to help make its collection more accessible to the public.

"It's difficult to go to a private donor and say, 'Look, we just want to be better,'" Mr. Carswell said. The basic support offered by the museum-services institute, he said, represents a "show of faith" in what museums are trying to accomplish.

Designed to Give Operating Support

Congress created the Institute for Museum Services in 1976 with the passage of the Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act.

Unlike the other federal agencies that make grants to museums—the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, the Smithsonian Institution, and the National Science Foundation—the museum-services institute was specifically designed to provide general operating support. By law, at least 75 per cent of its grant money must be awarded to museums to help meet their administrative, staffing, and operating costs.

The establishment of the institute represents a considerable commitment by the federal government to the survival of museums.

The institute's program, with a \$7.8-million

budget for fiscal 1979, is similar in size to the \$7.5-million museum program at the humanities endowment and smaller than the one at the arts endowment, which will award approximately \$11-million to museums this year.

According to early reports concerning President Carter's fiscal 1980 budget, which is scheduled to be released this week, the Administration will ask Congress to appropriate \$10.4-million for the institute for next year. However, that figure is nearly \$5-million less than H.E.W. requested, preliminary budget figures indicated.

The museum programs at the Smithsonian and the N.S.F. amount to less than a million dollars each.

"Museums, which have buildings, high maintenance costs, and great salaries—salaries account for 80 per cent of the museums' budgets—just cannot compete with inflation and escalating costs," said Lee Kimche, the institute's director.

'National Patrimony'

Mrs. Kimche argued that most museums in this country—including zoos, planetariums, aquariums, and botanical gardens—not only need that kind of support; they deserve it.

"Museums represent our national patrimony," she said, and the federal government has a responsibility to try to preserve that heritage.

Besides, she said, "museums are playing an increasingly important role in education." One reason the institute is housed in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, she said, is that its Congressional sponsors wanted to encourage more cooperation between museums and schools.

The institute awarded its first grants in fiscal 1978—in all, \$3.7-million to 259 museums. Of that, \$646,945—or 17.5 per cent of the total—went to 33 university museums.

Last Year's Grants

The university-based museums that received grants from the institute last year represent nearly every size and species of museum in this country. Besides Chicago's Oriental Institute Museum, they include:

► The Goldie Paley Fabric Library, associated with the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, which received a \$2,500 grant that is being used principally for salaries.

► The University of California Botanical Garden at Berkeley, which was awarded a \$12,000 grant to develop a master plan for encouraging greater public use of its facility.

► The University of Arizona's Flandrau Planetarium, which got \$17,484 from the institute to improve its educational programs for area elementary-school and high-school students.

► The Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas, which received \$25,000—the maximum grant awarded by the institute in 1978—to pay for salaries and supplies for photographing many of the museum's 25,000 objects. The museum will also use part of the money to support its public services: tours, concerts, lectures, and the like.

Museum officials say they couldn't be more delighted with the work of the museum-services institute. They agree that there is almost no place else they could go for help in paying salaries and other operating costs.

"They're literally bailing us out," said Paul Rovetti, director of the William Benton Museum of Art.

The Benton Museum, which is part of the University of Connecticut, received a \$15,000 grant from the institute in partial support of the salary for a new "exhibitions coordinator."

Because of a statewide freeze on new hiring, Mr. Rovetti explained, "we had just about exhausted our normal sources for funding for the position."

University Museums' Double Purpose

Beth Chernichowski, director of the Skinner Museum of Mount Holyoke College, said university-based museums needed basic operating support more than most other types of museum because they serve a double purpose: They are learning resources for students and faculty members as well as functioning museums for the public at large.

The Skinner Museum, with only one full-time professional staff member, received a \$3,000 grant from the institute for salaries and office expenses.

A university museum, Ms. Chernichowski said, is often the only—or the best—contact between the university and the community, since townspeople attend museum programs far more often than they attend classes. Despite that, she said, the museum is usually the last item in the university budget to get funds.

Before the services institute came into being, museums—including those based at universities—had to rely on grants for special projects as almost the only route to outside support. But that presented a problem to many smaller museums that lacked the resources to put together a special exhibit.

Special projects often are "simply contrived" by museums, Ms. Chernichowski said, to obtain needed salary or other overhead money that would be included in the award.

Even other granting agencies are happy with the institute's approach.

"We're excited" by the idea of something like the Institute for Museum Services, said Cheryl McClenney, director of the museum program at the humanities endowment.

In the long run, she said, the institute will make museums financially healthier and put them in a better position to compete for special-project money.

No Grants for Non-Public Collections

One stumbling block the institute encountered among its applicants in academe, Mrs. Kimche said, was the fact that collections at many university museums are oriented to teaching or research and not open to outsiders.

Because the institute was established to help museums improve their service to the public, she said, the limited amount of grant money available could not be stretched to include collections used exclusively for research or teaching.

Choosing among requests for salary or operating support, which nearly all museums need, sometimes proved trickier than deciding among competing projects, Mrs. Kimche conceded.

"One of the things that we're looking at very closely [in reviewing applications]," she said, "is the management of the institutions. If we feel that the money is just being wasted, that they don't have good management, then I think that we will be reluctant to fund them."

"What we're hoping is that the money that we can give them will give them some stability and will enable them to develop programs



CHRONICLE PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN C. PHILLIPS

Lee Kimche, director of the Institute for Museum Services, and the sculpture with which she shares her office.

"Immediately on your left, as you leave, you will see a little old lady begging for coins. She is the Museum Director . . ."

which will help them to become more self-supporting."

On the other hand, the institute does not want to become the sole source of support of selected museums. Although the law requires that all grants by the institute be matched on a one-to-one basis from other sources, the institute does not wish to provide museums with even 50 per cent of their operating budgets, Mrs. Kimche said.

"One of the things that the panelists looked at very closely when they reviewed the grants," she said, "was whether or not the museum was getting community support, and how much, and whether it was getting private support from foundations and corporations. If there was a good mix, then we felt that their chances of funding were much better."

Hand in hand with the museum's increasing financial problems go new difficulties in staffing.

Training a New Breed of Manager

"Most of the people who run museums have been hired because of their expertise in science, art, or history," Mrs. Kimche said. "It's only been recently, with the competition for dollars and the fact that endowments are shrinking, that museums have had to worry about broadening their financial base."

In such a situation, she said, "you really

need a different kind of person from the one who's trained in, say, zoology or botany or 16th-century Renaissance painters."

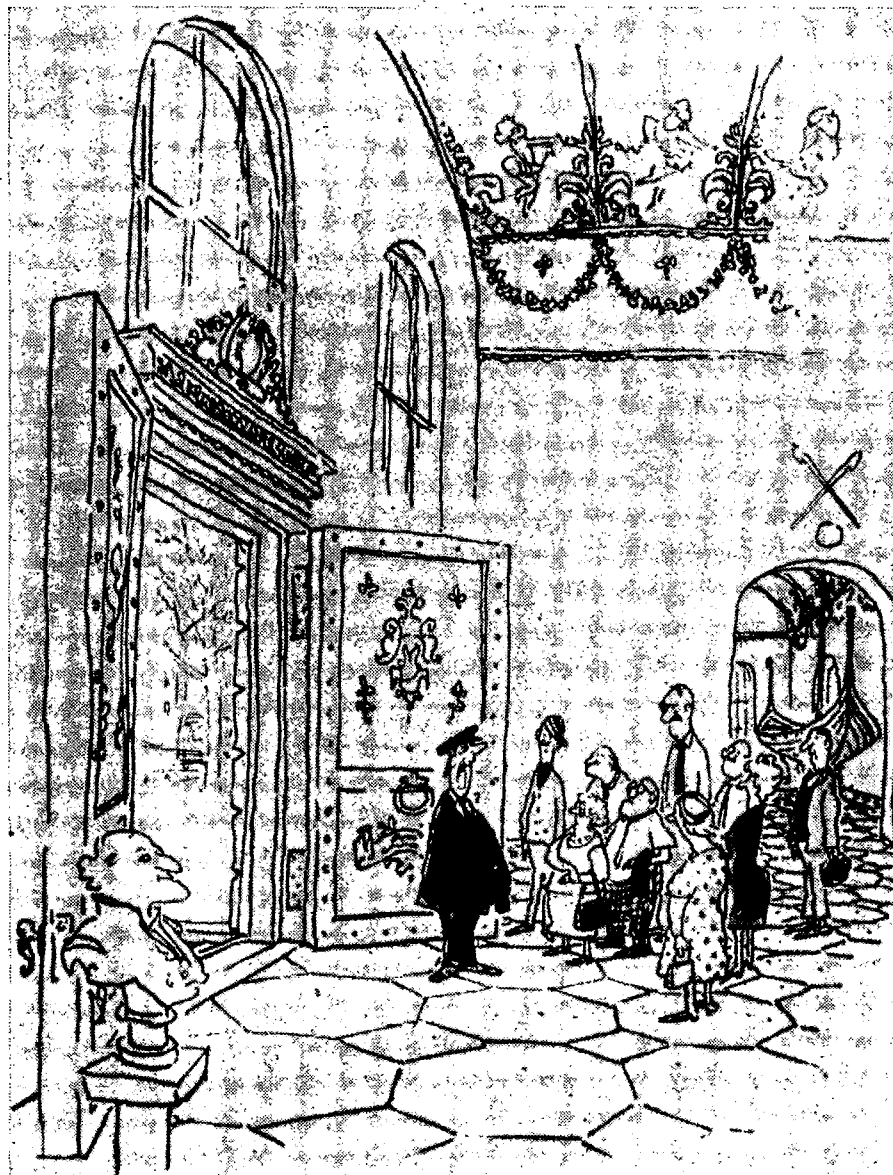
University-based museums are uniquely suited to offer training for the new breed of museum manager who is needed these days, Mrs. Kimche said. From the museum, students can get invaluable on-the-job training, she explained, while from the university, they can take advantage of courses in business administration and financial management, as well as science, art history, and other museum-oriented studies.

An important question now, she said, is what kind of training courses universities should develop for museum personnel.

"Part of the problem is that we estimate that there are probably 110,000 people that work in museums. Out of that 110,000, only 32,000 are full-time employees. So it is not very practical for a university to offer [museum] training because there aren't that many jobs available."

The bleak employment situation notwithstanding, Mrs. Kimche believes museums will not have much trouble attracting able persons.

"There's a certain mystique about museums," she said. "People are basically all collectors; they like the idea of having all these objects around."



In wake of court ruling

NEA May Be Forced to Drop Its Private-College Members

WASHINGTON

Because of a federal judge's ruling, the National Education Association is considering whether to drop its members who teach in private colleges and universities.

U. S. District Judge George Hart ruled that the N.E.A. was a labor organization subject to the federal Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act. The law, better known as the Landrum-Griffin Act, governs the internal operations of labor unions, including their finances, the election of their officers, and the rights of their members. It requires unions to file financial and other reports with the U. S. Labor Department.

The Labor Department sued the N.E.A., which had refused to file the required reports because it argued that it was not covered.

Public Employees Excluded

The Landrum-Griffin Act excludes unions that represent public employees. Although the vast majority of the N.E.A.'s members are public-school teachers, it does represent a handful of teachers in private institutions, most of them colleges and universities.

Even though those private-school teachers constitute less than 1 per cent of the N.E.A.'s 1.8 million mem-

bers, Judge Hart said, they are enough to make the organization subject to the Landrum-Griffin Act.

"Are we to say that the public interest may be just a little jeopardized?" Judge Hart asked. "Can we say that the protections of the interests of only a few score or a few hundred private-interest employees are unimportant? The answer is an emphatic 'No.'"

Both Judge Hart and Labor Department lawyers indicated that if the N.E.A. were to drop its private-sector affiliates, it would not come under the law.

Even so, dropping those affiliates is only one option being considered by the association, Robert Chanin, the organization's general counsel, said last week.

Officials of the N.E.A. are still studying the ruling, he said, and may decide to appeal the decision or to say "o.k., we're subject" to Landrum-Griffin.

The N.E.A. would prefer not to come under the law, Mr. Chanin said, simply because "it's administratively burdensome."

"It's a restrictive statute," he added, "and nobody in their right mind goes under a restrictive statute if they don't have to. It would limit the flexibility of our organization."

In addition, he noted, Labor De-

partment officials have told the N.E.A. that "certain aspects of our operating procedures" may violate the law. Mr. Chanin declined to say which procedures are involved, but they are believed to include the organization's requirements for representation of minority groups and women in its governing bodies.

Uncertainty over Numbers

Association officials said they were uncertain exactly how many private-college faculties the N.E.A. represents in collective bargaining.

In papers prepared for the lawsuit, the N.E.A. claimed seven private-sector affiliates with a membership of less than 400.

However, in most listings of faculty bargaining agents, including the N.E.A.'s, the association's affiliates are shown as representing faculty members at 15 private colleges and universities, including the University of Detroit, the University of Duquesne, Rhode Island School of Design, and Roger Williams College.

The reason for the discrepancy, Mr. Chanin said, is that some of those organizations are affiliated with the N.E.A. only at the state level.

Even if all those faculty members are included, he said, the private-sector membership of the N.E.A. is still only 1,500. —PHILIP W. SEMAS

Woman Gets \$30,000 in Sex-Bias Suit

MADISON, WIS.

A charge of sex discrimination against the University of Wisconsin has been resolved in an out-of-court settlement that pays \$30,000 to Joan Roberts, a former Madison professor and women's-rights activist.

"It's not only a great personal victory; it's a victory for any woman in higher education," said Ms. Roberts, who is now chairperson of child and family studies at Syracuse University.

In 1974, Ms. Roberts, then a professor in the educational policy-studies department on the Madison campus, was denied tenure by a committee composed entirely of male colleagues, who said she had not published the results of enough scholarly research. Ms. Roberts's lawyer argued that a number of tenured male professors in the department had done far less scholarly research than Ms. Roberts had.

After the department denied her tenure in February, 1974, Ms. Roberts filed sex-discrimination complaints with both federal and state agencies, charging that she had been denied tenure because of her role in women's causes.

She said she had been denied tenure because she was in a position to demand that a new wom-

en's-studies program be given formal funding.

"Apparently, some people at the university didn't want money spent on the program," she said.

In December, 1975, investigators from the state's Industry, Labor and Human Relations Board found there was probable cause to believe that Ms. Roberts had been discriminated against.

Ms. Roberts's case, which had financial backing from the Wisconsin affiliate of the National Education Association, became a major issue on the Madison campus. Hearings and discussions of it often drew large crowds. Student petitions backed Ms. Roberts, some faculty members defended her, and students burned the department head in effigy.

The out-of-court settlement was "an agreement to disagree," Ms. Roberts said. It states that the university and Ms. Roberts still disagree on the evaluation of her research and on whether or not her tenure "was affected by discrimination" and that "the questions will not be resolved."

A spokesman said the university admitted no wrongdoing but had decided to settle the case because it would probably cost more than \$30,000 to defend it in court.

—NOREEN MCGRATH