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September 11, 1989

Memo to: Sandy Crary

From: Ellen Griffiee

Subject: Confirmation hearing for Daphney Murray as
director of IMS

It is our hope that the questions of Daphney Murray will
explore what she plans to do about a major area of
concern--the GOS review process.

The GOS grants are an absolute blessing to those who get
them, but there is too much luck involved. The following
is a summary of directors' opinions and recommendations.

The IMS system of awarding GOS grants to museums is
flawed in two major ways--the review process and the
computerized scoring procedure. Among science museum
directors there is agreement that the distribution of
funds through the general operating support program is
subjective, inconsistent and unfair.

Typical concerns of the review process are:

The isolation of individual field reviewers jeopardizes
fairness and consistency;

Reviewers selected are often not the most experienced
in museum administration and management;

Many reviewers are not adequately trained to give
reliable, valid reviews;

Reviewers frequently rate proposals on need, not on
excellence as the guidelines require.

Some changes which would alleviate these problems are:

Use review panels made up of museum professionals
(directors) with broad experience in administration
and management;

Discard all individual reviews that are conducted
contrary to the guidelines;

Establish a new appeal process in which the museum has
true recourse.

No single step would do more to improve the quality of
reviews than to have competent panelists meet face to
face to discuss proposals. The objectivity and fairness
gained would be well worth the higher administrative
costs and such funding should be authorized. Several
models of effective peer review exist at other agencies
and should be copied.

(Note: IMS staff are currently offering reviewer training sessions which may help improve the performance of some reviewers.)

The other major defect is with the statistical software program that sorts the standardized scores of applications within a pool into a rank ordering across pools. This statistical merge--the second tier process--is inaccurate and inappropriate. The system has the effect of making the reviews meaningless. Unfortunately, the IMS staff considers the process fair, but it needs to be reexamined and a more equitable system devised.

Also, both reviewers and applicants report that the application is longer and more complicated than needed to provide a sufficient review of a museum.

Now, in the good news area...

With the recently instituted Professional Services Program, IMS has, in a most practical way, begun to strengthen the museum field by supporting professional development projects. While funding levels, at present, are exceedingly small, and projects are impractically limited in duration to one year, ASTC is encouraged by this constructive, future-building direction.

Best wishes, Sandy, for an informative hearing. We appreciate your suggestion that we share our thoughts with you.