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Museum Services Act (1984): Report 01

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Department of Interior and Related Agencies
1989 Appropriations Act
Institute of Museum Services

Senate Provision:

Provided further, That the Institute of Museum Services shall develop and implement a plan, by which, within three fiscal years, each state shall receive, at a minimum, one-half of one per centum of the grant funds available, provided that each state submits at least one qualified application: Provided further, That the director of the Institute of Museum Services shall submit to the chairmen of the Committees on Appropriations of the Senate and the House of Representatives, a report detailing the reasons for a judgment that the application or applications of a museum or museums from a particular state were deemed not qualified, causing that state to fall below the one-half of one percent criteria.

House Provision:

No comparable provision.

Effect:

IMS strongly opposes the Senate provision because it undermines the competitive grant process. It requires IMS to award one-half of one percent of its grant funds to each state. States could receive less than the minimum if no museum in the state submits an application or IMS provides a written explanation to the Congress.

IMS awards competitive grants to recognize and promote high quality museum operations through its general operating support and conservation programs. Its policies are guided by the National Museum Services Board. Awards are based on the impartial rankings of outside museum professionals with expertise in relevant fields.

The competitive process encourages museums to improve their operations to qualify for IMS grants. Because the results of the competition indicate quality, the process attracts non-Federal funding to IMS grantees and multiplies the effectiveness of each Federal dollar.

The Senate language runs counter to this philosophy, diluting the impact of IMS grants. It creates the impression that IMS grants would no longer be based on merit. Awards would appear to be driven by a state-by-state formula rather than by professional, impartial judgments about quality. The provision is also inequitable for museums located in states which would receive more funds without the minimum.

The Senate amendment also imposes an unnecessary reporting requirement. Unsuccessful grant applicants already receive information on why their application was not funded. Also reporting this information to Congress is redundant and may provide unwanted negative publicity for some unsuccessful applicants.

IMS currently undertakes many activities to increase the number and quality of applications, disseminating information and counseling potential applicants through site visits and seminars. Museums who wish to improve their programs and thus their competitiveness can also apply for small non-competitive grants to assess their operations. IMS is continually enhancing these activities.

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Provision:

...Provided, That none of these funds shall be available for the compensation of Executive Level V or higher positions

Effect:

The IMS authorizing statute requires that the Director be compensated at the same "rate provided for level V of the Executive Schedule". A 1984 decision by the Comptroller General (copy attached) reconciled the apparent conflict between the appropriations and authorization language by stating that, although the Director's position is not formally an Executive Level V position, he or she "is entitled to a rate of pay equal to the rate authorized for Level V of the Executive Schedule". Thus the appropriations language should be deleted as it has no practical effect and is obsolete.