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American Association of Museums

Association of Science-Technology Centers

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**The**  
**INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM SERVICES**  
**Considerations for Program Extensions**

**Statement of**

**American Association  
of Museums**

**Association of  
Science-Technology Centers**

**Nancy M. McBride, Director  
Virginia Museum of Transportation**

**Before the  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior  
Sidney R. Yates, Chairman  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**March 10, 1987**

## SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM EXTENSIONS:

### INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM SERVICES

IMS - 10 years.... As we celebrate this productive public/private partnership, you, the supportive Members of Congress, the IMS boards, staffs, reviewers and museum professionals, all can attest to how much this small but successful, well run federal program has contributed to the health, vitality and stability of this nation's museums. As the many accounts brought before this Committee through the years have certified, a significant benchmark in museum development has been achieved.

The existing IMS programs--General Operating Support (GOS), Museum Assessment Program (MAP), and Conservation--fill critically important needs for American museums and the publics they serve. They are and should remain the first priority for IMS.

#### Museum Growth: Science Centers as Examples

Today, ever broader constituencies are using and enjoying America's museums. For example, communities spurred by rising concerns over slippage in America's competitiveness and technological literacy are turning to science centers to motivate and inspire their youth, to support and strengthen science education in their schools, and to educate and inform their citizens about the advances in science and technology that impact their future.

This popularization is pushing--demanding--museum expansion and program growth. The nation's science and technology museums are bellwethers of this growth and often are cited as the fastest growing segment of the museum community. The ASTC membership of institutions in the U.S. has doubled in the decade since IMS was founded.

From Albany to Atlanta, Tuscaloosa, Cedar Rapids, Columbia, San Jose, and Santa Anna, small new science centers are opening their doors to their inquiring public. While most start on a shoestring, they have committed and growing local support from individuals, community groups (such as Junior Leagues and PTAs), industries, corporations, and other private sources.

At the same time, established science centers in Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, Seattle, Fort Worth, St. Louis, Miami, Durham, Hanover and many other places are expanding or relocating into larger facilities to meet the demand for more hands-on exhibits, educational programs and services.

However, as with all growth industries, these museums, as well as art and history museums, face certain strains and problems.

#### Professional Development Needs

Museums are faced with acute shortages of skilled professional personnel. The specific needs for professional development vary with each type of museum, although several are common to all: executive leadership, financial and facility management, education, development, and marketing expertise, and strategic planning. The old days when museum staff were not expected to know any of these business and management skills is over; modern museums have the complexity and diversity of large businesses and corporations. It remains, though, that museum professionals are expected as a matter of course to train themselves, with little assistance from institutions strapped for resources.

For science museums, each new capital project brings a need for new trained staff--from executives and financial managers to direct museum operations, to educators skilled in interpreting such new fields as biotechnology, molecular biology, space sciences, or robotics. These professionals must also be skilled in their understanding of young minds and their potential for learning. There are openings for creative designers and fabricators sensitive to the interplay of exhibit and public, and capable of building interactive exhibits. Other specialized technicians are needed to maintain and repair much used hands-on exhibits, videodiscs, computers, and complex planetarium equipment.

Current examples of expansion-driven professional recruitment are:

Boston's Museum of Science, currently completing a \$23.5 million expansion project, is seeking 50 additional staff.

Miami's Museum of Science has started a \$5 million expansion campaign that will add 10 new staff positions.

Chicago's famed Museum of Science & Industry has completed a new \$12 million Space Center and filled 12 new positions.

Philadelphia's Franklin Institute Science Museum has initiated a \$41 million capital expansion plan and expects to add in excess of 20 new jobs.

As a rough estimate, each million dollars of science museum capital expansion carries with it two new full-time professional staff positions. A sampling of thirteen ASTC member institutions (of varied sizes) indicates their combined current projects exceed \$150 million. Using the projection, 300 new science museum professionals will be needed by these few centers. On a national scale, the need for museum professional staff development and training is significant.

#### Natural Extension of the IMS Museum Partnership

As IMS invests in museums of all kinds to strengthen operational management and requires high standards of quality, so too should the agency foster professional development and training. No other agency is in a position to initiate this critical function as well as the IMS. Like the GOS program, modest seed corn grants to support professional training would stimulate much needed progress on the human resource, personnel side of the museum community.

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need

The craft of museum work is special, and underserved by the courses and texts of higher education. Museums are specialized institutions, and the predominant need is for education and training in mid-career, after individuals have entered the profession. Internships have proven to be especially valuable. Numerous directors, exhibit designers, and educators owe their success to internships and exposure to leaders in the field. Other pilot projects, such as workshops, seminars, summer institutes, and specialized training programs developed by museums in cooperation with local universities, laboratories, or companies, should be planned and supported. The education of professionals must be accelerated in order to catch up with the growth of museums.

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#### Research into Museum Practices Needed

During this period of expansion of museums and their services, greater emphasis needs to be placed on museum studies, evaluation, policy studies, museum research and analysis. We know far too little about museums, their roles and functions, and the changing nature of their needs in meeting future challenges. Only the AAM's Museums for a New Century has attempted to look beyond the present, to examine the course of the profession as a whole.

#2  
need

Detailed scholarly reviews and analyses of museum policies and practices should identify specifically what works best and why; what are the costs of various methods and what efficiencies can be instituted; what services are essential and should be expanded; and what are practical orders of growth and how growth can be supported. Museums that want to engage in research to better the profession as well as improve their own programs in

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education, in exhibitions, in collections management, should be able to compete for appropriate support.

The museum profession needs to maintain a close watch over its sense of direction, a self knowledge that can guide and direct museums as they serve their communities.

#### IMS Grant Process--Solid Base for Extensions

The IMS has worked, and has been supported by our nation's legislators, because it has carefully targeted its activities and has remained responsive to local needs and to the museum profession itself. The National Museum Services Board, the peer review system, and careful IMS consultation with the field have all played a role. New programs should maintain these strengths, and no new initiatives should be developed without extensive field participation, an open competition for support through the proposal process, and full peer review of all awards.

The IMS staff have been remarkable in processing General Operating Support proposals; the IMS is among the most efficient of federal agencies. As programs are added that require expertise and effort to insure proper stewardship of federal dollars, additional staff will be needed to support those programs. It is the proper price to pay for quality.

The IMS has been of inestimable value to museums during the past decade: it is due a stable and predictable future.

#### In Summary:

It is time to plan, implement, and fund these modest extensions to the Institute of Museum Services that will have a profound long-term effect on the service that museums provide to this country and its citizens. There needs to be support for those professional activities that will strengthen museum staffs and improve our understanding of museums to make them better servants and stewards of our country's cultural and educational life.

**Note: Professional Training and Museum Studies By Other Countries**

At the present time, nations throughout the world are studying American science centers. There is a steady stream of foreign visitors from governments, universities, foundations, and museums examining and assessing the characteristics of our science centers. They are founding new museums on our model in Barcelona, Paris, London, Bristol, Monterrey, New Dehli, Bombay, Hong Kong, Vantaa, Jerusalem, Jakarta, Oslo, and Beijing.

As part of the ongoing cultural exchange between the U.S. and India, the Indo-U.S. Subcommittee on Education and Culture has sponsored numerous exchanges between the two countries' science museum professionals. The Indian government assumes responsibility for training staff of their science museums to better serve and educate the population. Small groups of Indians regularly visit science museums in the U.S. to improve techniques of exhibit design and fabrication and hands-on science education.

There appears to be more foreign studies of American science museums than there are American ones; we have not adequately supported the intellectual effort necessary to understand our own museums so that they might be better planned and operated in the future.