



Testimony of Laura L. Lott
President and CEO, American Alliance of Museums to the
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
in Support of Funding for
NEH, NEA, Smithsonian Institution, and Historic Preservation Programs
April 27, 2018

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Udall, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Laura Lott and I serve as President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). We urge your support for at least \$155 million each in Fiscal Year 2019 (FY 2019) for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), as well as sufficient funding for the Smithsonian Institution. We also request your support for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), including at least \$55 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), \$15 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and \$25 million to preserve the sites and stories of the Civil Rights Movement. We request restored funding of \$30 million and \$4.6 million respectively for the Save America's Treasures (SAT) and Preserve America programs.

Before detailing these funding priorities for the museum field, I want to express my deepest appreciation for the increases enacted in FY 2018. The additional funds for the NEH, NEA, Smithsonian Institution and historic preservation activities will enhance museums' work to enrich their communities and preserve our many heritages. The Subcommittee's choice to make these investments in FY 2018 speaks volumes about its commitment to our nation's cultural institutions. AAM remains deeply troubled by continuous proposals from the Trump Administration to slash many of these priorities, and we look forward to working with you—our bipartisan allies—to reject them.

Representing more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, institutions—including aquariums, art museums, botanic gardens, children's museums, cultural museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, science and technology centers, and zoos—and corporate partners serving the museum field, the Alliance stands for the broad scope of the museum community.

Museums are essential in their communities for many reasons:

- **Museums are economic engines and job creators.** According to *Museums as Economic Engines: A National Report*, U.S. museums support more than 726,000 jobs and contribute \$50 billion to the U.S. economy per year. The economic activity of museums generates more than \$12 billion in tax revenue, one-third of it going to state and local governments. For example, the total financial impact that museums have on the economy in the state of Alaska is \$280 million, including supporting 3,240 jobs. For New Mexico it is a \$298 million impact supporting 4,934 jobs. This impact is not limited to cities: more than 25% of museums are in rural areas.
- **Museums are key education providers.** Museums spend more than \$2 billion yearly on education activities; the typical museum devotes 75% of its education budget to K-12

students, and museums receive approximately 55 million visits each year from students in school groups. Children who visited a museum during kindergarten had higher achievement scores in reading, math and science in third grade than children who did not, including children most at risk for delays in achievement. Also, students who attended a half-day field trip to an art museum experienced an increase in critical thinking skills, historical empathy and tolerance. For students from rural or high-poverty regions, the increase was even more significant. Museums help teach the state and local curriculum in subjects ranging from art and science to history, civics, and government. Museums have long served as a vital resource to homeschool learners. For the approximately 1.8 million students who are homeschooled—a population that has increased by 60% in the past decade—museums are quite literally the classroom. It is not surprising that in a 2017 public opinion survey, 97% of respondents agreed that museums were educational assets in their communities. The results were statistically identical regardless of political persuasion or community size.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1965. Grants are awarded to nonprofit educational institutions—including museums, colleges, universities, archives, and libraries—for educational programming and the care of collections. NEH supports museums as institutions of learning and exploration, and as keepers of our cultural, historical, and scientific heritages that can foster critical dialogues on challenging issues of our time.

In FY 2017, as a whole, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded 743 grants to institutions across the U.S., including museums. These grants total \$70,644,137.88. NEH also continued its support for the activities of 56 state humanities councils in each state and U.S. territory. Many of NEH's divisions and offices support museums, including:

- NEH's Division of Public Programs offers grants that bring the ideas and insights of the humanities to life in museums and other spaces by supporting exhibitions, community conversations, and place-based history. Additionally, Positions in the Public Humanities supplements provide professional development opportunities for new museum professionals.
- NEH's Division of Preservation and Access provides funding to museums for a variety of efforts—such as audiovisual preservation, digital preservation and preventive conservation—to preserve and provide access to our nation's rich cultural heritage.
- NEH's Division of Education Programs support efforts to bring educators into museums for intensive summer training programs on humanities topics.
- NEH's Office of Digital Humanities offers grants to support innovations in technology at museums, universities, and other institutions.
- Beginning again in 2018, Challenge Grants will offer matching grants to support critical capacity building and infrastructure projects at museums.

In calendar year 2017, 232 NEH-funded permanent and traveling exhibitions were open around the nation, providing life-long learning opportunities to a wide public audience. Humanities councils in every state and U.S. territory sponsor family literacy programs, speakers' bureaus, cultural heritage tourism, exhibitions, and live performances. In 2017, 55 state councils supported 2,222 exhibitions, 185 preservation projects, and 1,585 local history programs, attracting a total audience of close to 7 million people.

NEH funding has supported museums' work in your communities, including:

- \$360,000 for reinstallation of the *Gallery of Alaska* in the University of Alaska's Museum of the North. The funding will allow the museum to hire an anthropologist, who will visit Native communities to solicit their input into the gallery project, as well as consult with a team of humanities scholars. This funding helped leverage a lead gift of \$1 million by longtime museum supporters and \$500,000 from smaller individual donations.
- \$150,000 for the Museum of New Mexico's initiative of cultural and educational activities designed to increase knowledge and understanding around the nineteenth-century forced relocation of Navajo and Mescalero Apache peoples from their homelands to Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

The National Endowment for the Arts makes art accessible to all and provides leadership in arts education. Established in 1965, NEA supports great art in every congressional district. Its grants to museums help them exhibit, preserve, and interpret visual material through exhibitions, residencies, publications, commissions, public art works, conservation, documentation, services to the field, and public programs.

Since 2010, the National Endowment for the Arts has collaborated with Blue Star Families and the U.S. Department of Defense on Blue Star Museums, a program which provides free museum admission to active duty military and their families all summer long. Each year, more than 2,000 museums participate, reaching on average more than 856,000 military members and their families.

In 2017, the NEA provided more than 167 awards directly to museums, totaling more than \$5.1 million. Communities' demands on museums continue to climb, increasing pressure to serve more people with limited financial and human resources. Receiving a grant from the NEA confers prestige on supported projects, strengthening museums' ability to attract matching funds from other public and private funders. On average, each dollar awarded by the NEA leverages nine dollars from other sources, resulting in \$500 million in matching support in 2016. The federal role of the National Endowment for the Arts is uniquely valuable. No other funder—public or private—funds the arts in every state and the U.S. territories. Forty percent of NEA's grant funds are distributed to state arts agencies for re-granting.

NEA funding has supported museums' work in your communities, including:

- The Anchorage Museum received a \$60,000 Creativity Connects grant to support a series of programs exploring the ecology of the Arctic, in partnership with the University of Alaska Anchorage. The organizations will work with artists and scientists on exhibitions, events, and online presentations to engage the public, conveying the complexity of the northern landscape through curated experiences.
- The International Folk Art Foundation in Santa Fe, New Mexico received a \$60,000 Art Works grant this year to support an exhibit featuring folk art from the United States and international artists. The artists' work may reflect responses to societal crises, such as war, political instability, dislocation, and ecological challenges. The exhibit will be accompanied by artist residencies, lecture, and demonstrations.

In addition to these direct grants, NEA's Arts and Artifacts Indemnity program also allows museums to apply for federal indemnity on major exhibitions, saving them roughly \$30 million in insurance costs every year and making many more exhibitions available to the public—all at virtually no cost to the American taxpayer.

The Smithsonian Institution comprises some of the most visited museums in the world. The National Museum of African American History and Culture has captivated audiences from around the world, underscoring the power of our national museums to educate and inspire. We applaud the FY 2018 funding increase and support further funding increases that would allow these world-class museums to undertake critical collections care, make needed technology upgrades, conduct cutting edge research of every type, and increase access for all.

The Historic Preservation Fund is the funding source of preservation awards to states, tribes, local governments, and nonprofits. State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices carry out the historic preservation work of the federal government on state and tribal lands. These duties include making nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, reviewing impacts of federal projects, providing assistance to developers seeking a rehabilitation tax credit, working with local preservation commissions, and conducting preservation education and planning. This federal-state-local foundation of America's historic preservation program was established by the National Historic Preservation Act. Historic preservation programs are not only essential to protecting our many heritages; they also serve as economic development engines and job creators. We urge you to provide \$55 million for SHPOs and \$15 million for THPOs through the Historic Preservation Fund.

We applaud the FY 2018 restoration of funding for the Save America's Treasures program, and urge you to fully restore it to \$30 million in FY 2019. From 1999 to 2010, total federal funding of \$315 million for 1,287 Save America's Treasures projects leveraged an additional \$400 million in non-federal funds, and created more than 16,000 jobs nationwide. These projects protected some of America's most iconic and endangered artifacts, including Ansel Adams' prints and negatives, Frank Lloyd Wright structures including *Fallingwater*, and the American flag that inspired the *Star Spangled Banner*. We request \$4.6 million for the Preserve America program, which has not been funded in recent years.

We also applaud the FY 2018 investment in competitive grants to preserve the sites and stories of the Civil Rights Movement. The initial round of grants for this initiative is currently helping museums and historic sites around the country conserve endangered structures, document stories, and share resources with the public. We support FY 2019 funding of \$25 million for these Civil Rights Movement grants.

I want to acknowledge the difficult choices that the Subcommittee faces. I hope that my testimony has made it clear why these priorities are of critical importance to the nation and will provide a worthwhile return on investment to the American taxpayer. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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