

Legislative Agenda: Issues At a Glance

Museums—the vast majority of which are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations—play a key role in education, job creation, tourism, economic development, historic preservation, environmental conservation, and advancing scientific literacy and global competitiveness. Museums are essential community infrastructure and have strong public support: a 2017 national public opinion poll, [Museums and Public Opinion](#), showed that 95% of voters would approve of lawmakers who acted to support museums and 96% want federal funding for museums to be maintained or increased. The museum community—which includes aquariums, art museums, children’s museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, public gardens, railway museums, science centers, and zoos—has worked together to develop this federal policy agenda.

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Museums and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic has inflicted profound damage on US museums, the vast majority of which are 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organizations. The museum field will take years to recover to pre-pandemic levels of staffing, revenue, and attendance. Far fewer museums than initially expected are in danger of permanent closure and tens of thousands of jobs were saved thanks to several federal relief programs. However, according to a [recent survey](#), 2021 proved to be another painful year in which operating income sank further and attendance was down nearly 40 percent for many of our nation’s museums. Despite the tremendous financial and psychological stress caused by the pandemic, museum professionals are filling the gaps to meet the needs of their communities. They are demonstrating the critical role museums play in our country’s infrastructure and deepening their social impact in their communities. **We urge Congress to:**

- provide additional funds to the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) program, as well as for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), for museums ineligible for SVOG due to its requirement that museums have “fixed seating.”
- In unity with the broader nonprofit sector, we support the requests in this coalition letter and urge Congress to strengthen charitable giving incentives to ensure that all nonprofits, including museums, have the resources to serve their communities. (See details in AAM’s [Tax Policy issue brief](#).)

Institute of Museum and Library Services’ Office of Museum Services Funding

IMLS is the primary federal agency responsible for helping museums connect people to information and ideas. Its Office of Museum Services (OMS) awards grants to museums to support educating students, preserving and digitizing collections, and engaging communities. Grants are awarded in every state, but current funding has allowed the agency to fund only a small fraction of the highly rated grant applications it receives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, OMS has provided critical leadership to the museum community through its CARES

Act and American Rescue Plan grants, and the agency has been providing science-based information and recommended practices to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to staff and visitors engaging in the delivery of museum services. Its Communities for Immunity partnership is working to boost COVID-19 vaccine confidence in communities across the country. Congress has regularly reauthorized IMLS with broad bipartisan support, most recently in 2018. OMS has set a strong record of congressional support during the appropriations submission process in each of the last several years, with 151 Representatives and 42 Senators signing the FY 2021 appropriations letters on its behalf. In FY 2021, Congress provided \$257 million to IMLS, of which \$40.5 million was directed to the Office of Museum Services. With this funding, OMS provided 275 grants totaling \$40.5 million to museums and related organizations in 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. **We urge Congress to:**

- provide \$54.5 million in fiscal year (FY) 2022 for the IMLS Office of Museum Services (the House-passed and Senate draft approved level), a much needed increase of \$14 million, and provide a robust funding increase for FY 2023.
- include funding for the agency to explore establishing a roadmap to strengthen the structural support for a museum Grants to States program administered by OMS, as authorized by the Museum and Library Services Act, 20 U.S.C. Section 9173(a)(4), in addition to the agency's current direct grants to museums.

Tax Policy

Contributions to 501(c)(3) charities such as museums are tax-deductible, incentivizing those who itemize deductions to greater generosity. Only about ten percent of taxpayers now itemize, however, and multiple measures show that both the amount given and the number of donors were declining prior to the pandemic. Giving appears to have increased during the pandemic, especially smaller gifts, due to the temporary provision that allowed people to deduct up to \$300 of charitable gifts even if they do not itemize. **We urge Congress to:**

- Cosponsor the Universal Giving Pandemic Response and Recovery Act, H.R. 1704 and S. 618, which would renew the universal charitable deduction that expired at the end of 2021. It allowed taxpayers who don't itemize deductions to deduct up to \$300 (\$600 for couples) of charitable contributions.
- Incorporate language from the Legacy IRA Act (S. 243) into retirement reform legislation, allowing seniors to make tax-free distributions to planned giving accounts as well as to charities.

National Endowment for the Humanities

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) provides direct grants to museums, universities, archives, and libraries in support of research, education, and preservation. Due to high demand and extremely limited funding, NEH is only able to fund a small percentage of the proposals it receives. The agency also provides annual grants to state humanities councils in every state and US territory. NEH received \$167.5 million in FY 2021 appropriations.

- **We urge Congress to** provide \$135 million in supplemental COVID-19 economic relief grants and at least \$225 million in regular FY 2022 appropriations for the NEH.

National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) works to bring the arts to every community in America, including rural areas, military bases, and urban centers. It provides grants to all types of arts organizations—including museums—to exhibit, preserve, and interpret visual materials. The agency's federal role is uniquely valuable: no other funder, public or private, funds the arts in every state and the US territories. The NEA also distributes roughly forty percent of its grant funds to state arts agencies for re-granting. The NEA received \$167.5 million in FY 2021 appropriations.

- **We urge Congress to** provide the House-passed level of \$201 million in FY 2022 for the NEA and provide a robust funding increase for FY 2023.

Elementary and Secondary Education

Museums are vital education providers, educating students, providing professional development to teachers, and helping teach local curricula, which is especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Museum education programs help bridge the [digital divide](#). [Museums represent one of the only educational systems outside of our formal framework with the knowledge and people power to back up our teachers and parents on the front lines](#). Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the "Every Student Succeeds Act") provides states with significantly more flexibility in setting and meeting performance targets, which could make it easier for schools to work with museums.

- We support efforts to promote school-museum partnerships (including museum schools), require greater collaboration between the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, fully fund federal education programs in which museums participate, and fully implement the "well-rounded education" provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act, which include the many subject areas in which museums help teach the curricula.

Higher Education

Median earnings for adults with a bachelor's degree are approximately 64 percent higher than those with a high school diploma, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Yet, student loan balances constitute the largest source of debt for American households. While many museum jobs require bachelor's or even advanced degrees, nonprofit museum professionals often do not earn as much as they might in the private sector. Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) is a vital tool in allowing talented and highly trained employees from all socioeconomic backgrounds to work at organizations that make an impact in their community. Many museums benefit from Higher Education Act (HEA) program funding.

- We support legislation that ensures Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) is accessible and achievable and support reforms that waive the full-time employment criteria during the pandemic, overhaul the disqualification rules to reflect the original intent of Congress, clarify the kinds of payments and services that count toward forgiveness, as well as expand the types of loans that may be forgiven. We support

efforts to improve the affordability and accessibility of higher education for all students. We also ask that Congress support funding for HEA programs in which museums participate, such as Title VI International and Foreign Language Education.

Lifelong STEM Engagement

Museums, science centers, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, and other cultural institutions have an important role to play in increasing the understanding of and engagement with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) among people of all ages. As museums are key partners in ensuring Americans' lifelong engagement in STEM, **we urge Congress to:**

- support federal agency efforts to implement the 5-year Federal STEM Education Strategic Plan;
- fully fund and authorize museums to participate in STEM engagement and informal STEM education programs across federal science agencies;
- fund the following programs at levels that meet or exceed inflation-adjusted levels from recent years: NSF's Advancing Informal STEM Learning (AISL) program at \$65 million, NOAA's Office of Education at \$35 million, NASA's Office of STEM Engagement at \$130 million and Science Mission Directorate's Science Engagement and Partnerships Division at \$47 million, and NIH's Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) program at \$22.5 million; and
- regard museums as vital components of the STEM education ecosystem, including by ensuring that such organizations are eligible for relevant federal funding opportunities and represented at appropriate conversations convened by federal agencies.

Historic Preservation

In addition to preserving and protecting more than 1 billion objects, many museums are historic themselves, and their collections are critical to telling our collective national story. Historic sites and historic preservation efforts not only protect our national heritage, but they are also economic engines and job creators in the thousands of communities they serve. Minimal government funding helps to leverage significant private support, often through the Historic Tax Credit. The FY 2021 appropriations for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) provided \$55.7 million to State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), \$15 million to Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs), and \$21.1 million for grants to underserved communities and to document, interpret, and preserve the stories and sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement. Save America's Treasures (SAT) received \$25 million in FY 2021 through the HPF, and the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant program received \$7.5 million. Congress also provided \$8 million for the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission and \$10 million for a National Park Service competitive grant program to honor the 250th anniversary of the US by restoring and preserving state-owned sites and structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places that commemorate the founding of the nation.

- **We urge Congress to** support FY 2023 funding of at least \$65 million for SHPOs, \$34 million for THPOs, \$35 million for Save America's Treasures, \$12 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grants, support at least \$10 million in funding for U.S. Semiquincentennial celebration grants for the country's 250th

commemoration, \$24 million for African American Civil Rights Grants, \$12 million for Historically Black Colleges/Universities, \$5 million for Equal Rights Grants, and \$3 million for Underrepresented Community Grants. Further, we request co-sponsorship of the Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act ([H.R. 2294](#) / [S. 2266](#)), and the Historic Preservation Enhancement Act [H.R.6589](#).

Environmental Sustainability and Museums

Museums can help advance carbon neutrality and climate change reduction. Museums are considered one of the [most trustworthy](#) sources of information in America, and as educational institutions, museums are valuable engines for understanding environment and climate issues. They have a distinctive ability to engage the public and the media with data, images, and knowledge. Museums are research hubs, and have contributed to climate change research across a variety of areas, including mining historical data in journals, archives, and natural history collections, and conducting current citizen science research. Museums test experimental technologies through exhibits such as comparative wind-powered generators, test gardens, and green building designs like living roofs, passive solar heating, and rainwater catchment. Museums are essential community infrastructure and local partners for achieving environmental sustainability goals. They are connected to their fellow nonprofits, educational systems, and local businesses, and can model green practices to inspire and collaborate with their communities to help reach desired outcomes. **We urge Congress to:**

- increase funding for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's Sec. 40541 Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Grant program — a \$50 million pilot program to award grants for energy-efficiency materials upgrades to buildings owned and operated by 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, including museums.
- include museums as named community partners and as eligible nonprofit organizations in legislation for funding opportunities and education initiatives.
- provide supplemental funding to IMLS specifically to support climate change work in museums, including facility adaptations and resiliency work, as well as exhibits and programs.

Public Diplomacy and the Protection of Cultural Property

As welcoming and trusted community anchors, museums are perfectly positioned to help build cross-cultural relationships, which are enhanced by collections that span the world across centuries. In recent years, irreplaceable cultural property has been lost in places like Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Mali, and Afghanistan. Protecting this property—both directly and by working through international organizations—is a vital part of United States diplomacy, showing the respect of the United States for other cultures and the common heritage of humanity. American museums and the conservation professionals who work with them are some of the world's best at protecting and caring for cultural property.

- **We urge Congress to** pursue measures that protect cultural property around the world, and to consider museums and conservation professionals as part of the solution to these issues. We expect the United States Government to comply with international law and urge the U.S. Government to maintain its commitment to its longstanding practice of not targeting cultural sites during peace or wartime.

Shutdown Prevention and Economic Impact

Government shutdowns occur with some frequency; there have been 20 of them since 1976. During the 16-day shutdown in October 2013, hundreds of museums nationwide—as well as national parks, forests, monuments, and historic sites—were forced to close their doors. This prevented the public from enjoying artworks, historic treasures, and lands that are intended to be held in the public trust. The economic impact of these closures was devastating, not just for the entities themselves, but for many businesses that rely on the tourism they generate. The damage from the 35-day 2018-2019 partial government shutdown—the longest in US history—was enormous and cost the government a total of \$5 billion. The Smithsonian lost an estimated \$3.4 million in revenue and the National parks lost more than \$10 million in revenue.

- **We urge Congress to** amend the Anti-Deficiency Act to allow for the continuity of operations and public access to our nation's public lands and federally operated museums in the event of a funding gap.

The Multinational Species Conservation Funds and Wildlife Conservation

In addition to educating the public about wildlife, accredited zoos and aquariums also protect species in their collections and across their natural habitats. The Multinational Species Conservation Funds (MSCF) are targeted investments in global priority species such as African and Asian elephants, tigers, rhinos, great apes, tortoises, freshwater turtles, and marine turtles. The MSCF program helps to sustain wildlife populations by combating poaching, reducing human-wildlife conflict, and protecting essential habitats globally. Despite its modest funding level, this program has a significant impact because it consistently leverages almost a 2 to 1 match of federal dollars from partner governments, local NGOs, international conservation organizations, and private businesses.

- **We urge Congress to** pass legislation (H.R. 6023/S. 521) to reauthorize the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp which benefits these critical programs.
- The museum community, including botanical gardens, strongly supports efforts to protect native wildlife, including declining pollinator populations.