



**Testimony of Laura L. Lott
on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums to the
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
in Support of Funding for
NEH, NEA, Smithsonian Institution, and Historic Preservation Programs
March 10, 2022**

Chair Pingree, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Laura L. Lott and I am the President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). We urge your support for a robust increase in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a robust increase in funding for 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, including at least \$65 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and \$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). We support \$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. We request funding of \$35 million for the Save America's Treasures program and \$12 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grants. We support at least \$10 million in funding for U.S. Semiquincentennial celebration grants for the country's 250th commemoration.

Before detailing these funding priorities for the museum field, I want to express my appreciation for the increases enacted in FY 2022. The additional funds for the NEH, NEA, 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 2022 speaks volumes about its commitment to our nation's cultural institutions. We also are grateful for last year's supplemental grant funding of \$135 million (American Rescue Plan) for each endowment to help cultural organizations, including museums, cope with and respond to the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the pandemic, essentially all museums were closed to the public. 33 percent of directors felt their museums were at some risk of permanent closure without immediate support—a threatened loss of 12,000 museums and 124,000 jobs. While federal relief funding has provided critical lifelines, a [recent survey](#) shows attendance remains down 38 percent on average from pre-pandemic levels and 17 percent of directors still feel there is some risk of closing permanently without additional relief.

Representing more than 35,000 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, railway museums, science and technology centers, and zoos—and corporate partners serving the museum field, AAM stands for the broad range of the museum community.

Museums are essential community infrastructure for many reasons:

- Museums are economic engines and job creators. According to *Museums as Economic Engines: A National Report*, U.S. museums (pre-pandemic) 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 Maine is \$195 million, including supporting 3,405 jobs. For Ohio it is a \$1.54 billion impact supporting 25,973 jobs. This impact is not limited to cities: more than 25% of museums are in rural areas. The import of these data is not the numbers alone – but the larger point that museums give back tremendously to their communities in numerous ways – including economically. The federal funding for NEA, NEH, and the other programs does not stay in Washington, DC, it goes back to communities across the nation. And it is leveraged many times over by private philanthropy, and state and local investments.

- 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. Museums also answered the call and significantly ramped up online educational programs and resources for students and families throughout the pandemic. 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. It is not surprising that in a 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.
- Museums will be essential to rebuilding communities as we emerge from the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, museums across the country have continued contributing to the ongoing education of our country's children by providing lesson plans, online learning opportunities, and drop-off learning kits to teachers and families. They are using their outdoor spaces to grow and donate produce to area food banks, as well as maintaining these spaces for individuals to safely relax, enjoy nature, and recover from the mental health impacts of social isolation. They provided access to childcare and meals to families of health care workers and first responders, have donated their PPE and scientific equipment to fight COVID-19, and are serving as vaccination centers. Despite the financial and psychological stress caused by the pandemic, museum professionals are filling the gaps to meet the needs of their communities and will be vital to their recovery. Museums are demonstrating the critical role they play in our country's infrastructure and deepening their social impact in their communities, addressing learning loss, and fostering intra-community trust and dialogue.

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

In October 2021, NEH awarded \$87.8 million in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to nearly 300 cultural and educational institutions, including museums, to help them recover from the economic impact of the pandemic, retain and rehire workers, and reopen sites, facilities, and programs. Grant awards were made in all 50 U.S. states.

In FY 2021, in addition to the money distributed through ARP grants, the NEH awarded 677 grants totaling more than \$85.4 million to institutions across the US, including museums. All of

NEH's divisions and offices support museums, including the Office of Challenge Grants which offers matching grants to support much needed capacity building and infrastructure projects at museums. Humanities councils in every state and U.S. territory sponsor family literacy programs, speakers' bureaus, cultural heritage tourism, exhibitions, and live performances. Many councils also offer grants to local cultural organizations, including museums.

In preparation for the U.S. Semiquincentennial in 2026, NEH's new "A More Perfect Union" initiative provides funding opportunities across the agency's seven grantmaking divisions for humanities projects that promote a deeper understanding of American history and culture and that advance civic education and knowledge of our core principles of government.

Here are just two examples of how NEH funding was used to support museums' work in your communities:

- The **Maine State Museum in Augusta, ME**, received a \$56,000 ARP grant to redesign existing educational programming and create new programs to advance the study of US maritime history and address post-pandemic needs within the community. The coronavirus pandemic brought to light shortcomings in the museum's existing programming and its need to diversify its offerings and better connect with evolving national conversations.
- The **Idaho State Historical Society in Boise, ID**, received a \$200,000 ARP grant to support the salaries of seven critical humanities staff as they work with 10 scholar-advisors and two consultants to create a comprehensive interpretive and audience development plan for the Old Idaho Penitentiary through a yearlong, inclusive engagement process. The Old Idaho Pen was placed on the National Register of Historical Places in 1974 and is only one of a handful of such historic sites in the nation.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) 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.

In January 2022, the NEA announced it had recommended ARP awards totaling \$57.7 million to 567 arts organizations, including museums, to help the arts and cultural sector recover from the pandemic. Organizations are using this funding to save jobs, and to fund operations and facilities, health and safety supplies, and marketing and promotional efforts to encourage attendance and participation. Grants were recommended to organizations in both rural and urban communities; in all 50 states. Among the recommended organizations, 27 percent were first-time NEA grantees and 78 percent were small or medium sized organizations with budgets of less than \$2 million.

Since 2010, the NEA has collaborated with Blue Star Families and the U.S. Department of Defense on Blue Star Museums, which provides free museum admission to active duty military and their families all summer long. In 2019, more than 2,000 museums in all 50 states participated, reaching on average more than 900,000 military members and their families.

The federal role of the NEA is uniquely valuable; 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 up to nine dollars from other sources. 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.

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- **Children's Museum & Theatre in Portland, ME**, received a \$150,000 ARP grant to support personnel and expenses to help the museum maintain operations during recovery from the devastating economic and health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This assistance benefits the museum's constituency, such as arts workers, artists, and audiences, and supports artistic activities and traditions to strengthen the nation's cultural infrastructure.
- The **Utah Museum of Fine Arts in Salt Lake City, UT**, received \$35,000 to support the ACME (Art, Community, Museum, and Education) community outreach initiative hosting community conversations in the region to assess the needs and interests of future audiences, commissioning artists to produce socially engaging projects, and curating exhibitions that respond specifically to the K-12 curriculum.

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 as much as \$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 globe, underscoring the power of our national museums to educate and inspire. We support 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. And we applaud the establishment of the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum and the National Museum of the American Latino.

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. Historic preservation programs are not only essential to protecting our many heritages; they also serve as economic development engines and job creators, and provide vital funding to help museums serve their communities.

I hope that my testimony helped make it clear why these priorities are of critical importance to the nation and how they provide a worthwhile return on investment to the American taxpayer.

Thank you.