



**Testimony of Laura L. Lott, President and CEO, American Alliance of Museums
to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
in support of the IMLS Office of Museum Services
May 11, 2022**

Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Laura Lott, and I am President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). I urge you to provide the Office of Museum Services (OMS) within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) with at least \$54.5 million for fiscal year (FY) 2023, the amount initially endorsed by this subcommittee last year. We also request that the agency be encouraged to explore establishing, and to fund projects related to, 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, *in addition* to the agency's current critical direct grants to museums.

AAM—representing more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, museums of all types, and corporate partners serving the museum field—stands for the broad scope of the museum community.

I want to express the museum field's gratitude for the \$47.5 million in funding for OMS in FY 2022, and we applaud the bipartisan group of 42 Senators who wrote to you in support of FY 2022 OMS funding (a FY 2023 bipartisan letter led by Senators Gillibrand and Collins currently is circulating for signatures). We also applaud the President's budget proposal for additional funding for OMS for National Leadership Grants, the grants program authorized by the African American History and Culture Act, and the grants program authorized by the National Museum of the American Latino Act as steps in the right direction of increasing critical funds available to museums. OMS is a vital investment in protecting our nation's cultural treasures, educating students and lifelong learners alike, and bolstering local economies.

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 and access in communities across the country.

Through the IMLS CARES Act Grants to Museums and Libraries, IMLS awarded \$13.8 million to 68 museums and libraries to support their response to the coronavirus pandemic. IMLS received 1088 applications from museums but was only able to fund 39 awards, fewer than 4 percent of the applications, for a total of \$8.28 million – far below the \$261.5 million requested. Out of \$200 million in American Rescue Plan funds, museums received a small fraction, \$10.5 million (5.2%), to provide direct support to address community needs created or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and in assisting with recovery as nearly all of the funding was directed by Congress to the states for broadband expansion.

Museums are a robust and diverse business sector, including African American museums, aquariums, arboreta, art museums, botanic gardens, children’s museums, culturally-specific museums, historic sites, historical societies, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, public gardens, railway museums, science and technology centers, and zoos.

Museums are economic engines and job creators: According to [Museums as Economic Engines: A National Report](#), pre-pandemic U.S. museums supported more than 726,000 jobs and contributed \$50 billion to the U.S. economy per year, including significant impact on individual states. For example, the total financial impact that museums have on the economy in the state of Washington is \$1.01 billion, supporting 14,145 jobs. For Missouri it is a \$852 million impact, including 13,653 jobs. Nationally, museums spend more than \$2 billion yearly on education activities and the typical museum devotes 75% of its education budget to K-12 students.

IMLS is the primary federal agency responsible for helping museums connect people to information and ideas. The [IMLS FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#) frames how the agency envisions meeting the essential information, education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the American public. OMS supports all types of museums—from art museums to zoos—by awarding grants that help them better serve their communities. OMS awards grants in every state to help museums digitize, enhance, and preserve collections; provide teacher professional development; and create innovative, cross-cultural, and multi-disciplinary programs and exhibits for schools and the public. Congress reauthorized IMLS at the end of 2018, with wide bipartisan support. OMS grants to museums are highly competitive and decided through a rigorous peer-review process. In addition to the dollar-for-dollar match generally required of museums, grants often spur more giving by private foundations and individual donors.

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. By leveraging significant private, state, and local funding, OMS grants amplify a small federal investment for maximum impact in the community. There is high demand for funding from the IMLS Office of Museum Services. In FY 2021 OMS received 943 applications requesting more than \$154 million, but current funding has allowed the agency to fund only a small fraction of the highly rated grant applications it receives. \$54.5 million in FY 2023 funding would allow OMS to increase its grant capacity for museums, funds which museums will need to help recover from the pandemic and continue to serve their communities. This funding increase would still be greatly shy of the high demand of \$154 million in highly rated grant applications the agency received in FY 2021.

A Grants to States program administered by OMS, *in addition to* the agency’s current direct grants to museums, would merge federal priorities with state-defined needs, expand the reach of museums, increase their ability to serve their communities, address underserved populations, and meet the needs of the current and future museum workforce.

Museums are vital to our nation's recovery from this pandemic, and after sudden and long-term closures, they will require financial assistance to remain open, maintain their staffs, provide educational programs to communities, and assist in rebuilding local tourism economies. PPP 1 and PPP 2, and Shuttered Venue Operators Grants (limited to museums with theatres with fixed seating) provided a critical lifeline for many museums. But the museum field will need robust ongoing support from IMLS, especially as not all museums were eligible for pandemic relief funds. According to a report by McKinsey and Company, the arts, entertainment, and recreation sectors will not fully recover from this public health crisis and muted economy until 2025.

Indeed, 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 our most [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.

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.

Here are just a few examples of how OMS helps museums better serve their communities:

In 2021, the **Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience in Seattle, Washington**, was awarded a \$178,311 Office of Museum Services Museums for America grant to offer a new program series, "Wing Luke Community Connections," of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) art workshops, art talks, free public readings, film screenings, and discussions. The series will feature a variety of artists, authors, filmmakers, and scholars who have been exploring the diverse AAPI immigrant experience to bring greater understanding to historic roots, heritage and culture, socio-political issues, and ongoing identity formation. The program will include a mix of virtual-live and in-person formats including interactive arts/heritage workshops, AAPI artist talks, learning modules for young adults on social-justice issues, and a story series for families and kids. This programming also will help with AAPI identity formation, resiliency, community recovery, and combat the rising tide of anti-Asian hate during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, the **Suquamish Indian Tribe of the Port Madison Reservation in Washington** was awarded a \$85,400 Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services grant to update an oral history project conducted from 1981-83 that has guided the development of the Suquamish Museum for over 30 years. The project will engage the 78 Suquamish elders who are 70 years of age and older to document their biographical, cultural, and personal knowledge for use in more contemporary programming and museum exhibits. Although the tribe recognized the need to gather oral histories during a retreat in 2018, the COVID-19 pandemic not only increased the sense of urgency but provided time to consider a plan for the project. Collecting oral histories of experiences in the more recent past will guide long range planning and help the museum focus its collections acquisitions for the next foreseeable decades.

In 2021, the **Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture in Spokane, Washington**, was awarded a \$249,589 Museums for America grant to expand access to its collections of inland northwest history, art, and cultures with a long-term plan and policies for digital preservation of collection materials. A new, state-of-the-art, cloud-based, digital collection management system will support delivery of services to diverse populations and help ensure the museum meets increasing demands for data security, access, connectivity, exhibit development capacity, improved curatorial workflows, and community engagement. This will allow communities in rural eastern Washington, northern Idaho, and western Montana to access the collection for generations to come.

In 2021, the **Missouri Historical Society in Saint Louis, Missouri** was awarded a \$115,813 Museums for America grant to process and digitize 73 linear feet of film and prints created by the Sievers commercial photography studio from the 1930s through the 1960s. These images capture the civic and personal lives of St. Louisans during an era when the city experienced a rapid decline in population through suburbanization and loss of manufacturing. Items selected for digitization will be based on subject matter and condition. The museum will employ two full-time, temporary positions—a processing archivist and a digitization archivist—for 24 months. The museum also will provide access to and promote the use of the material by publishing the index, records, and digitized images on its website, making them freely downloadable for all.

In 2020, the **Walt Disney Hometown Museum in Marceline, Missouri**, was awarded a \$38,240 Program Inspire! Grants for Small Museums grant to expand its education and professional development programs for rural educators. The initiative is the result of a collaborative partnership that includes museum staff, K-16 educators, and others from the local community. Educators will have the opportunity to participate in an immersive learning workshop program where they will experience and explore place-based learning opportunities alongside guided instructional planning. The initiative will solidify bonds between the museum and the community, as educators and museum personnel collaborate to strengthen their understanding of how local culture connects to learning.

In closing, I highlight recent [national public opinion polling](#) that shows 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. Museums have a profound positive impact on society. If I can provide any additional information, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.