

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.

Background: 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 2022 [survey](#), 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 demonstrated the critical role museums play in our country’s infrastructure and deepened their social impact in their communities.

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 136 Representatives and 42 Senators signing the FY 2023 appropriations letters on its behalf. In FY 2022, Congress provided \$268 million to IMLS, of which \$47.6 million was directed to the Office of Museum Services. With this funding, OMS provided 280 grants totaling \$44.6 million to museums and related organizations in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

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We urge Congress to:

- provide at least \$55.5 million for the IMLS Office of Museum Services for FY 2024 level with current FY 2023 (FOR SENATORS: and oppose the recent \$3.25 million in cuts recommended by the Senate Appropriations Committee.)
- 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 give more. Charitable giving accounts for more than one-third of museums' operating funds. Only about ten percent of taxpayers now itemize deductions, however, and both the amount given and the number of donors were declining prior to the pandemic. Smaller gifts increased during the pandemic due to the enactment of the temporary deduction for nonitemizers. **We ask members of the House and Senate to:**

- Cosponsor the Charitable Act (S. 566/H.R. 3435), which would renew and expand the charitable tax deduction for taxpayers who do not itemize deductions. The deduction allowed taxpayers to deduct up to \$300 (\$600 for couples) for charitable gifts during the pandemic, but it expired at the end of 2021, leading to a marked drop in small donations.

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 \$207 million in FY 2023 appropriations.

- **We urge Congress to** provide at least \$207 million for the NEH for FY 2024 level with FY 2023 (FOR REPRESENTATIVES: and oppose the recently approved 10% cut to \$186.3 million by the House Appropriations Committee.)

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. NEA received \$207 million in FY 2023 appropriations.

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- **We urge Congress to** provide at least \$207 million for the NEA for FY 2024 level with FY 2023 (FOR REPRESENTATIVES: and oppose the recently approved 10% cut to \$186.3 million by the House Appropriations Committee.)

Elementary and Secondary Education

Museums are vital education providers, educating students, providing professional development to teachers, and helping teach local curricula, 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](#). Strong civic education is essential to the future of our constitutional democracy. AAM is an active member of the [CivXNow Coalition](#) and supports legislative efforts to invest in K-12 civic education. 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 urge members of Congress to support and cosponsor the Civics Secures Democracy Act, expected to be reintroduced in the House and Senate, which would invest in K-12 civic education and American history.
- 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.

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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:

- fully fund and authorize museums to participate in STEM engagement and informal STEM education programs across federal science agencies;
- include opportunities for public engagement as part of agency research programs with significant public interest and ensure that museums are eligible to compete for related awards;
- 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 \$75 million, NOAA's Office of Education at \$38 million, NASA's Office of STEM Engagement at \$150 million and Science Mission Directorate's Science Engagement and Partnerships Division at \$48 million, and NIH's Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) program at \$25 million;
- ensure that museums have the opportunity to compete for funds related to facilities improvement to address areas including public health, sustainability, and energy efficiency, including opportunities available to schools and other educational institutions; 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. In FY 2023 an omnibus spending bill outlined appropriations for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) with a record-setting overall funding level of over \$204 million. \$62.15 million of which was allocated to State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and \$23 million to Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). Competitive grant programs received funding as follows: Save America's Treasures (SAT): \$26.5 million, African American Civil Rights: \$24 million, Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant program: \$12.5 million, Historically Black Colleges/Universities: \$11 million, Semiquincentennial celebration grants: \$10 million, History of Equal Rights grants: \$5 million, Underrepresented Community grants: \$1.25 million. **We urge Congress to:**

- support the permanent reauthorization of Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), and increase the authorization to at least \$300 million annually; support FY 2024 funding of at least \$70 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and at least \$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs); provide at least the following amounts for competitive grant programs under the HPF: \$40 million for Save America's Treasures, \$28 million for African American Civil Rights, \$17 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grants for the

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rehabilitation of historic properties and economic development of rural communities, \$13 million for Historically Black Colleges/Universities, \$11 million for U.S. Semiquincentennial celebration grants for our nation's 250th commemoration, \$7 million for Equal Rights grants, \$5 million for Underrepresented Community grants; and support the Historic Tax Credit by cosponsoring the Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act upon the bills reintroduction.

Climate Action and Museums

Museums can help advance carbon neutrality and respond to the impacts of climate change. Museums are considered one of the [most trustworthy sources of information](#) in America, and as such are excellent entry points for climate conversations, both community-oriented and internal. As educational institutions, museums are valuable engines for understanding environment and climate issues. They have a distinct ability to engage the public and the media with data, images, and context for knowledge-building. Museums are research hubs and have contributed to climate change research across a variety of areas. Museums are valuable pilot sites for experimental technologies through operations and exhibits. 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 [Energy Efficiency Materials Pilot Program for Nonprofits](#) — 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.
- Increase funding for other museum eligible grant programs, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Climate Smart Program and to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) specifically to support climate change work in museums, including facility adaptations and resiliency work, as well as exhibits and programs.
- Include museums as named community partners and as eligible nonprofit organizations in legislation for energy and climate funding opportunities and education initiatives.

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.

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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 \$11 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.

- The museum community, including botanical gardens, strongly supports efforts to protect native wildlife, including declining pollinator populations.