

Federal Formula Grants for Museums

FAQs

Federal Formula Grant Initiative for Museums

Updated 2/07

What are Federal Formula Grants?

Federal Formula Grants are funds that go directly from the federal government to each state government for distribution. A formula determines how much each state receives. Such formulas usually have an equal base amount for each state plus an amount based on a variable such as population.

Why do libraries, arts councils, humanities councils, historic preservation offices, and other cultural sectors receive money through Federal Formula Grants, but not museums?

To date, no one has asked Congress for Federal Formula Grants for museums.

Why go through the states? Why not just get more money for IMLS?

Making the states partners offers several advantages. It leverages increases in state funding, as well as federal funding. It supports statewide organization and planning as states decide how best to use the funding. It allows focused funding that reflects the diverse circumstances and needs of museums in our nation—the highest use of funding in Connecticut may be quite different from the best use in Arizona.

There are also practical political considerations. Legislators like to know that money is “going home.” State partners can deliver that message well. Moreover, our goal is get a lot more money to a lot more institutions. That will require grant management and the ability to be accessible to small institutions. States deal with these institutions face-to-face on a regular basis; federal administrators do not. And it takes as much work to give \$10,000 to a small museum as to give \$500,000 to a large one. If that management is all in the federal government, legislators will wince. If it is in the states, they will applaud. Legislation can control the percentage of total funds states use for administration.

Who gets the money in the states and what are the requirements for receiving it?

In IMLS’s library program, the funds must go directly to a state agency for distribution within the state. It is up to each state to name its receiving agency. The Federal Formula Grant Coalition has decided the museum legislation should include language requiring each state to name an Advisory Board for Museums that will create a five-year plan developed with broad stakeholder participation and recommend how the funds will be spent each year. In the library program, each state matches the federal dollars it receives. Language can also be written into legislation to ensure that federal dollars enhance and leverage, rather than replace, state support.

Who will be eligible to receive the funds in each state, and how will you make sure small museums or segments of the museum community aren’t left out?

It will be up to each state’s Advisory Board for Museums to articulate who will be eligible to receive the funds and how the funds can be used. But the federal legislation could direct that a percentage of funds granted to each state must benefit small museums. The legislation could also include the types of organizations that must be included in the advisory board, planning efforts, and grant decisions within each state. These are the kinds of

details the museum community needs to work out before approaching legislators. That's why it's important that all organizations that service museums participate as an engaged member of the Federal Formula Grant Coalition. The Coalition will make all decisions regarding the language of the legislation that is proposed.

How much money will museums get and how can it be used?

Our \$200 million target is only a draft figure at this time; the museum community, through the Coalition, will decide how much to ask for from Congress. Whatever the amount, it will be sought in addition to current IMLS museum funding programs, not as a replacement for them.

For comparison, the 2006 appropriation for IMLS's library program was \$210,597,000, while the museum side was appropriated at \$36,547,000. Library funding includes \$163 million for the formula grant program as well as \$7 million for program administration, \$12 million for National Leadership Grants, \$3.4 million for Native American Library Services, and \$23.7 million for Laura Bush's 21st Century Librarian program. Under the current library formula at IMLS, each state receives a minimum amount of \$595,281 and another distribution based on population.

Use of the money will be based on broad guidelines in the federal authorizing legislation as decided by the Coalition, and the plans developed by each state.

But there are an estimated 122,000 libraries in America, compared to an estimated 17,500 museums. So how does federal funding parity make sense?

The costs of operating a museum include one huge component not suffered by libraries in America – collections acquisition and care. According to The Heritage Health Index published in 2006 by Heritage Preservation, over 4.8 billion artifacts are held in the public trust – and they are in danger due to a lack of funding for collections care and preservation. Although museums have many more needs financially than just collections care, this cost alone makes the cost of operating a museum much higher than other nonprofit organizations.

What's in it for museum service organizations that join the Coalition to support this effort?

Stronger museums for America. That's it. There will be no direct financial gain for any service organization. It's important that museum service organizations participate as a member of the Coalition, or they will have no voice in the development of the legislation. The initiative has the potential of increasing the sustainability of museums, and each and every museum service organization should be behind that goal as an engaged member of the Coalition.

Who will ask Congress for the money?

The Federal Formula Grant Coalition will work together to develop an outline for what will be included in the legislation, then hire a lobbyist to work with the Coalition to secure the legislation with Congress.

What will it take to make this happen?

IMLS will be reauthorized in 2009, and the Coalition will make sure legislation is introduced at that time to provide federal formula grants for museums. It will take a strong commitment throughout the museum community to build a consensus on what we want and support for that consensus. We should expect an advocacy campaign (with a paid lobbyist) that lasts as long as two years to get the program authorized, and constant effort after that to maintain and grow the program. The Coalition will work together to develop a long-term plan for making sure federal formula grants remain in the IMLS budget for the long haul. But museum service organizations should not wait for all the questions to be answered before joining the Coalition. If organizations wait, they will not be part of the solution and will simply have to live with whatever decisions are made by the Coalition. We encourage service organizations to be part of the solution by joining the Federal

Formula Grant Coalition. Coalition members will be asked to make a modest financial contribution to the effort (\$1,000 per year for national associations; \$500 per year for regional associations; \$150 - \$500 per year for state associations). Funds will be used to support a lobbyist and travel.

Where do things stand today?

Coalition members meet monthly via conference call to make decisions. Members debate such things as how the legislative language should articulate who sits on advisory boards in each state, what will count as match by the state governments, and how the legislative language can guarantee fair and equitable distribution within the states.

If I think this is a good idea, or have questions and concerns, what should I do?

Start by making sure the leaders of the organizations you belong to know what you think. Encourage them to participate in building the national consensus. Find out more details in the advocacy section of the AASLH web site, www.aaslh.org. Contact Terry Davis davis@aaslh.org.