

# *Federal Formula Grants for Museums*

## *Why Congress should create a Federal Formula Grant Program for America's Museums -- July 2007*

Museums are the keepers of our nation's identity. They collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit the artifacts, documents, sites, specimens, and heritage of our nation for present and future generations. They protect the tangible evidence that tells the stories of the people, experiences, natural environs, achievements, challenges, and creativity of the United States and the world. Museums, found in virtually every corner of the country, include art and natural history museums, science and technology centers, historical societies and museums, botanical gardens, zoos, children's museums, and aquariums. An estimated 17,500 museums across the country have approximately 865 million visitors per year or 2.3 million visits per day. However, there are two critical challenges facing the nation's museums: a significant lack of public funding and the absence of a nationwide support system to provide a strong foundation.

The mission of the Federal Formula Grant Coalition – an alliance of more than 40 local, state, regional, and national associations – is to encourage Congress to include federal formula grants for museums when it reauthorizes the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in 2009. A federal formula grant model for museums would:

- Provide significant financial support for all types of museums;
- Bring federal tax dollars home to the states, where each state's unique challenges, needs, and opportunities can be addressed;
- Facilitate the development of networks at the state level to support museums;
- Leverage matching state and, possibly, local funds for museums;
- Enable governments to gather data on museums and their progress over time; and
- Ensure museums are healthy and stable institutions that benefit the nation's citizens.

Museums are comparable to libraries – they both maintain collections for public benefit and provide access to those collections and content for unlimited and lifelong learning. However, libraries have received a significantly greater share of the annual IMLS budget than museums for decades. In 2007 alone, IMLS provided \$210.5 million for libraries and just \$36.5 million to museums. The Federal Formula Grant Coalition seeks to emulate the model currently in place for libraries, not to compete with it. When the American Library Association began lobbying Congress for federal formula grants for libraries in 1956, the nation had only 12,478 libraries. An increase in both federal and state investments increased the professionalism of libraries, their programs, and their offerings. Libraries flourished, and with the addition of federal formula grants for museums, museums will flourish, too.

Museums have only scratched the surface of their potential to impact the lives of our citizens, revitalize communities, and educate future generations. With the reauthorization of the IMLS, Congress has the opportunity to positively shape the future of the nation's museums by supporting the establishment of a federal formula grant program for museums.