



Testimony of Laura L. Lott
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to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies
in Support of Funding for
NEH, NEA, Smithsonian Institution, and Historic Preservation Programs
May 24, 2017

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Laura Lott and I serve as President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). We urge your support for at least \$155 million each in fiscal year 2018 (FY 2018) for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and 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 (HPF), including at least \$55 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), \$15 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and \$28 million to preserve the sites and stories of the Civil Rights Movement. We request restored funding of \$30 million and \$4.6 million respectively for the Save America's Treasures (SAT) and Preserve America programs.

Before detailing these funding priorities for the museum field, I want to express my deepest appreciation for the increases enacted by the Subcommittee in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, Public Law 115-31. The additional funds for the NEH, NEA, Smithsonian Institution 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 2017 despite a very limited 302(b) allocation speaks volumes about its commitment to our nation's cultural institutions. The American Alliance of Museums is deeply troubled by proposals from the Trump Administration to slash many of these priorities, and we look forward to working with you—our bipartisan allies—to reject them. While the Subcommittee will once again have to make very difficult decisions this year, I contend that each of the priorities outlined below will both protect our nation's cultural treasures and provide a tremendous economic benefit.

AAM is proud to represent the full range of our nation's museums—including aquariums, art museums, botanic gardens, children's museums, culturally specific museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, science and technology centers, and zoos, among others—along with the professional staff and volunteers who work for and with museums. We are honored to work on behalf of the nation's more than 33,000 museums, which employ 400,000 people, invest more than \$2 billion annually in educational programs, receive more than 55 million visits each year from primary and secondary school students, and directly contribute \$21 billion to their local economies.

Museums are essential in their communities for many reasons:

- Museums are key education providers. Museums already offer educational programs in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and

financial literacy, geography, and social studies, in coordination with state and local curriculum standards. Museums also provide experiential learning opportunities, STEM education, youth training, job preparedness, and a range of programs geared toward homeschooling families. They reach beyond the scope of instructional programming for schoolchildren by also providing critical teacher training. There is a growing consensus that whatever the new educational era looks like, it will focus on the development of a core set of skills: critical thinking, the ability to synthesize information, creativity, and collaboration. We believe museums are uniquely situated to help learners develop these core skills, and this is borne out by evidence. According to a recent University of Arkansas study, students who attended just a half-day field trip to an art museum experienced an increase in critical thinking skills, historical empathy and tolerance. For students from rural or high-poverty regions, the increase was even more significant.

- Museums create jobs and support local economies. Museums serve as economic engines, bolster local infrastructure, and spur tourism. Both the US Conference of Mayors and the National Governors Association agree that cultural assets like museums are essential to attracting businesses, a skilled workforce, and local and international tourism. Travelers who participate in cultural or heritage activities spend 60 percent more than other tourists.
- Museums address community challenges. Many museums offer programs tailored to seniors, veterans, children with special needs, persons with disabilities, and more, greatly expanding their reach and impact. For example, some have programs designed specifically for children on the autism spectrum while others are addressing veterans' post-war trauma or providing youth job training opportunities.
- Digitization and traveling exhibitions bring museum collections to underserved populations. Teachers, students, and researchers benefit when cultural institutions are able to increase access to trustworthy information through online collections and traveling exhibits. Most museums, however, need more resources to digitize collections.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1965. Grants are awarded to nonprofit educational institutions—including museums, colleges, universities, archives, and libraries—for educational programming and the care of collections. NEH supports museums as institutions of learning and exploration, and as keepers of our cultural, historical, and scientific heritages.

In 2016, through Preservation & Access, one of NEH's national program divisions, 43 peer-reviewed, competitive grants totaling over \$2.5 million dollars were awarded to museums, historical societies and historic sites for a variety of projects to preserve and provide access to our nation's rich cultural heritage. Across all NEH divisions (including Preservation and Access, Research, Education, Public Programs, Challenge Grants and Digital Humanities), these institutions received 150 awards totaling over \$21.3 million. Demand for humanities project support, as demonstrated by NEH grant application rates, far exceeds available funding. In FY 2016, NEH received 5,304 competitive grant applications representing \$518.2 million in requested funds, but was only able to fund 16 percent of these peer-reviewed proposals.

NEH also provides approximately forty percent of its funding directly to states through grants to humanities councils located in every state and US territory. In 2016, 55 state councils supported

2,419 exhibitions, 280 preservation projects, and 1,612 local history programs, attracting a total audience of 5.5 million people.

Here are just two examples of how NEH funding was used in 2016 to support museums' work in your communities:

- The Minnesota Historical Society in Saint Paul, MN received a \$600,000 Public Programs grant in 2016 for implementation of a traveling exhibition, a website, and public programs examining the history of World War I and its impact on America.
- The Museum of Idaho in Idaho Falls, ID received a \$500,000 Challenge grant in 2016 for a much-needed expansion, which will allow it to once again display a Columbian mammoth exhibit that has been called an “anchor of Idaho history.” This grant will also leverage at least \$1.5 million in matching funds.

The National Endowment for the Arts 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 2016, more than 2,000 museums participated as Blue Star Museums—a partnership between NEA, Blue Star Families, and the Department of Defense—to offer free admission to all active duty and reserve personnel and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day. This particular effort served more than 923,000 people, while many other museums offer military discounts or free admission throughout the year.

In 2016, NEA made more than 180 direct awards to museums, totaling over \$5.4 million. Forty percent of NEA's grant funds are distributed to state arts agencies for re-granting, and many museums benefit from these funds as well. 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 more than nine dollars from other sources.

Here are two examples of how NEA funding was used in 2016 to support museums' work in your communities:

- The Oak Grove Center in Murrieta, CA—a nonprofit residential, educational and treatment center for at-risk children—received a \$10,000 Challenge Grant to support a visual and performance arts program. In addition to hosting guest artists and producing a public exhibition, the students also participated in field trips to exhibits, galleries, and museums.
- The Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, ME received a \$25,000 Art Works grant to support transportation costs of an exhibition about Maine native Marsden Hartley's relationship with his home state, featuring paintings of Maine's rugged coastline and iconic Mount Katahdin.

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 roughly \$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, including the National Museum of American History, the National Air and Space Museum, and the National Museum of Natural History. The Smithsonian reaches visitors and learners of all ages, in the nation’s capital and across the country, with innovative exhibits and programs. Every year, its 20 museums—including the National Zoo—attract over 28 million in-person annual visitors. Its websites reach more than 100 million unique visitors, while its content and curriculums are used by teachers all over the country. The recently opened National Museum of African American History and Culture has captivated audiences from around the world, underscoring the power of our national museums to educate and inspire. We support funding 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.

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. These duties include making nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, reviewing impacts of federal projects, providing assistance to developers seeking a rehabilitation tax credit, working with local preservation commissions, and conducting preservation education and planning. This federal-state-local foundation of America’s historic preservation program was established by the National Historic Preservation Act. Historic preservation programs are not only essential to protecting our many heritages; they also serve as economic development engines and job creators. We urge you to provide \$55 million for SHPOs and \$15 million for THPOs through the Historic Preservation Fund.

We enthusiastically applaud the Subcommittee’s FY 2017 restoration of funding for the Save America’s Treasures program, and urge you to fully restore it to \$30 million in FY 2018. From 1999 to 2010, federal funding of \$315 million for 1,287 Save America’s Treasures projects leveraged an additional \$400 million in non-federal funds, and created more than 16,000 jobs nationwide. These projects protected some of America’s most iconic and endangered artifacts, including Ansel Adams’ prints and negatives, Frank Lloyd Wright structures including *Fallingwater*, and the American flag that inspired the *Star Spangled Banner*. We request \$4.6 million for the Preserve America program, which has not been funded in recent years.

We also applaud the Subcommittee’s FY 2017 investment in competitive grants to preserve the sites and stories of the Civil Rights Movement. The initial round of grants for this initiative is currently helping museums and historic sites around the country conserve endangered structures, document stories, and share resources with the public. We support FY 2018 funding of \$28 million for these Civil Rights Movement grants.

I want to once more acknowledge the difficult choices that the Subcommittee faces. I hope that my testimony has made it clear why these priorities are of critical importance to the nation and will provide a worthwhile return on investment to the American taxpayer. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.