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Museum Services Act (1984): Correspondence 04

Linda Bell

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January 9, 1991

TO: SANDY CRARY
FROM: LINDA BELL *Linda Bell*
SUBJ: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON G.O.S. STUDY

Enclosed are copies of the questionnaires I promised that are part of our current study of the General Operating Support program. As I mentioned, it's the first detailed examination of the program, and focuses on impact of grants that have been awarded, its existing policies and procedures, and elicits recommendations of any improvements that should be made. Projected completion date is July 31, 1991.

The "Invitation for Comments" requests narrative response on several areas of concern, including the method of review of applications (both panels and reviewers), whether accreditation should be a factor in the awarding of grants, and other areas constituents have brought to our attention. Over 5,000 questionnaires were mailed to museums, including every museum that has applied for GOS over the last five years. We haven't yet seen the responses, which are currently being compiled and reviewed for us by our contractor; happily the rate of return was far greater than was anticipated.

The other questionnaire is the statistical survey. It has not yet been cleared by OMB--I must ask you to keep its contents confidential until we have OMB approval. However, we don't anticipate that the questions will change significantly, so I'm enclosing it so that you will have an idea of the type of information that will be asked for.

We are working with our contractor every step of the way on this, and are confident it will be a review of the program's first ten years that will guide us responsibly toward any changes in policy the Board and our new Director may undertake.



INVITATION FOR COMMENTS
ON THE GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT PROGRAM
(GOS)

AGENCY: Institute of Museum Services

ACTION: Notice of Invitation for Comments

SUMMARY: The Institute of Museum Services (IMS) is conducting an evaluation of its General Operating Support program (GOS). We invite comments from museum professionals and other interested persons in response to the questions listed under SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION.

DATES: Responses are due November 3, 1990

ADDRESSES: Please send all responses to IMS' contractor at the following address:
GOS Comments
Reed Public Policy
Suite 600
1250 Twenty-Fourth Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information about the GOS program and grants to museums, contact the IMS program staff at 202/786-0539. For information about this Invitation for Comments, contact Carol Maus at Reed Public Policy 202/466-0566.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

We invite comments responding to any of the following questions. We want to obtain a broad variety of views, suggestions, and positive and negative experiences regarding GOS. Please use specific examples and factual information whenever possible.

It would be helpful if you provide a phone number where we may contact you to ask for clarification or further information. Your comments will be used by IMS and its contractor to help evaluate GOS, and will be available for public inspection.

We welcome your comments on any or all of the questions below, but please show which question you are answering (for example, question 2c).

1. GOS grant money is intended to help meet museums' operating expenses. Sometimes this money allows a museum to undertake a function or project it could not otherwise afford, either because the museum spends its GOS grant on the function or project, or because the GOS grant frees up other funds. We want to know about several particular types of functions or projects that may have been made possible by GOS grant money. We are asking about these particular functions and projects because we need to understand them better, not because they are more important than other uses of GOS funds.

a) Please describe any examples of how GOS grant money has enabled a museum to provide education that helps solve a problem of general concern to society (for example, illiteracy) unrelated to the museum's own artistic, scientific or cultural field.

b) Please describe any examples of how GOS grant money has enabled museums to foster research, particularly research using the museum's collections or facilities. Cite publications in scholarly or professional journals, or other products of the research. (By research, we mean activities aimed at advancing the state of the art in some field of knowledge. Please do not include research that is merely a teaching tool, such as school assignments.)

c) Please describe any examples of how GOS grant money has enabled museums to improve collections and their care. This includes:

- improving the process for acquiring objects for the collection,
- identifying and determining the significance of objects in the collection,
- preserving and conserving objects in the collection, and propagating living collections,
- other actions to improve collections.

d) Please describe any examples of how GOS grant money has enabled museums to produce benefits for the public that would seem valuable even to people with no interest in the museum's own artistic, scientific or cultural field. For example:

- public enjoyment,
- economic development,
- support for charitable causes,
- others.

2. The most obvious benefit to museums from GOS is the grant money. Does GOS produce other benefits to museums? What are specific examples of how these benefits have helped museums, or why are these not real benefits? For example:

a) Recognizing quality museums in a nationwide competition,

b) Bringing together practicing museum professionals in a cooperative process that builds consensus on standards of museum operation,

c) Providing an opportunity for museums to improve their operations through self-evaluation and reviewer comments,

d) Providing professional development for persons who serve as GOS field reviewers,

e) Helping the museum to obtain cash or non-cash support from other sources.

3. IMS is reviewing GOS to determine which aspects are working well, and which aspects can be improved. We welcome comments on any of the following aspects. Please explain your reasons and give specific examples where possible, rather than merely saying you support or oppose a certain change.

a) Why should the GOS application be kept the same, or how and why can it be improved? For example:

- The amount of information required from applicants,
- The clarity and simplicity of the questions and/or instructions,
- The type of questions (i.e., essay-type questions as opposed to short answer or multiple choice questions),
- Whether the applicant is allowed to submit documents it already has, instead of filling out certain parts of the application,
- Whether the applicant is allowed to submit additional documentation that it thinks will strengthen its application,
- Whether IMS allows multiple deadlines, so that a museum that cannot submit its application by the first deadline may be considered later that same year.

b) Why should the kind of information museums get back from review of their GOS applications be kept the same, or how and why can it be improved? For example:

- The length and number of comments from reviewers,
- Whether there should be standard formats for reviewer comments,
- Whether IMS should tell applicants what scores the reviewers assigned,
- How IMS explains to applicants the process for selecting GOS grantees (field reviewer scoring, GOS panel review, standardization of scores, etc.).

c) Why should the way GOS recruits, trains and rewards field reviewers be kept the same, or how and why can it be improved? For example:

- The standards for becoming a field reviewer,
- The instruction and training IMS provides to field reviewers,
- The honorarium,
- Other benefits to field reviewers,
- The way field reviewers are managed and evaluated.

d) Why should the kind of information field reviewers use to evaluate applications be kept the same, or how and why can it be improved? For example:

- Whether reviewers come from the same geographic region as the applicant museum,
- Whether reviewers visit the applicant museum,
- Whether reviewers use personal knowledge of the applicant museum, or rely only on the written application,
- Whether reviewers discuss applications among themselves, or assign scores without discussion.

e) Why should the standards for evaluating quality of GOS applicants be kept the same, or how and why can they be improved? For example:

- Whether IMS should establish objectively measurable standards of museum quality (such as use of certain security practices or preservation techniques) as a factor in awarding GOS grants,

e) Continued on Page 4

e) Continued

- Whether accreditation of a museum by certain organizations should be a factor in awarding GOS grants,
- Whether other awards to a museum, or professional activities of its staff, should be a factor in awarding GOS grants,
- Whether the GOS review process should decide which applicants are the very best, and award them grants, or whether it should only decide which applicants are good, and distribute the limited number of grants among all good applicants based on a factor other than quality (random selection, time since last grant, etc.).

f) Why should the decision-making bodies for awarding GOS grants be kept the same, or how and why can they be improved? For example:

- Whether the GOS panel should have a different role in determining which museums receive grants,
- Whether the field reviewers should have a different role,
- Whether to create regional panels,
- Whether to allow large groups of museum professionals to vote on which applications should receive grants.

g) Why should the criteria for awarding GOS grants be kept the same, or how and why can they be improved? For example:

- Whether to award grants based on quality,
- Whether to award grants based on need,
- Whether to give priority to particular museum initiatives,
- Whether to give priority to serving particular population groups,
- Whether to distribute grants randomly among all eligible museums,
- Whether to set aside grants for museums of certain sizes, disciplines, or geographic regions.

h) IMS is committed to providing the maximum support to museums within the limits of the Federal budget. Why should the size, duration and frequency of grants be kept the same, or how and why can they be improved to give museums more benefit from whatever money we can obtain for GOS? For example:

- Whether to keep average grant size the same, make larger grants (but fewer), or make grants (but smaller),
- Whether to change the relationship between a museum's budget size and the size of its GOS grant (grant is currently 10% of museum's budget, up to \$75,000),
- Whether grants should be for one year or multiple years,
- Whether there should be any limit on how frequently a museum can receive a grant (such as three years out of five).

Daphne Wood Murray
Director, Institute of Museum Services