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President Said to Plan Study of Endowments

By GRACE GLUECK

The White House is expected to announce shortly the appointment of a group to study the structures of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities. The panel will also determine how more money can be generated for the arts from other than governmental sources.

Although no official confirmation has come from the Reagan Administration, it is understood that Charlton Heston, the actor and chairman of the board of the American Film Institute, will play a prominent part on the panel and that another important member may be Hanna Holborn Gray, president of the University of Chicago.

A third member would probably be W. Barnabas McHenry, general counsel of the Reader's Digest Association who is on New York City's Advisory Commission for Cultural Affairs. He has been working closely with the Administration on the idea of the group.

Yesterday, Frank S.M. Hodsoll, deputy assistant to the President and deputy to the White House Chief of Staff, James A. Baker 3d, confirmed that discussions had been held with Mr. Heston and Mr. McHenry.

"No decisions have been made," he said, "as to precisely what we're going to do in terms of demonstrating our support for the two endowments. We're looking at ways in which we can involve the private sector to a greater degree. There are a number of proposals before us, of which this is one, but we

haven't come to a conclusion yet. We're working on it."

Mr. Heston, a friend of the President and Mrs. Reagan, has consistently been mentioned as a candidate for leadership of the arts endowment. But he has said his acting interests would limit his participation to a part-time role.

Asked whether he would lead a panel on the arts and humanities, Mr. Heston said, "I really can't speak for the record until the White House makes an announcement."

Mr. McHenry said: "We just don't know. In two weeks, they're either going to have a task force or they're not."

The prospect of a group to study the endowments has caused concern among some Washington arts officials. They say such a group would be set up primarily to explore restructuring the endowments as an independent agency similar to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.