

MUSEUM on Main Street

Making the Most of MoMS: SITES Technical Assistance Reimbursement (STAR) Funds

Museum on Main Street is a partnership between state humanities councils and the Smithsonian Institution that provides Smithsonian-quality exhibitions as the basis for locally developed humanities programs and exhibitions in small and rural communities. Each year, MoMS reserves a portion of its congressional appropriation, formally called CASSA funds, to support technical assistance at the local level that raises the quality of local programs and exhibitions related to the MoMS exhibition. This assistance should complement the program support already offered to host communities by the state humanities councils and support technical training, professional development, or one-on-one consultations with experts that will enhance the capabilities of host organizations while strengthening their relationships with host councils. Funds can also be used for special projects that enable host organizations to digitize, document, and share its collections or exhibitions that complement the MoMS exhibition and reach a broader audience.

Through the MoMS project, state humanities councils and the Smithsonian Institution work together to enable host organizations to reach new audiences, develop new exhibitions and a vast array of public humanities programs, develop new civic partnerships and school collaborations, and improve professionalism among museum staff. This is accomplished by one-on-one consultation with project scholars, technical training in professional practices, and networking opportunities via planning meetings and installation workshops, as well as technical assistance that may relate directly to organizational needs.

Communities have expressed the desire to learn more about developing promotional websites, collecting oral histories, developing interpretative exhibitions, digitizing collections for web use, training volunteers to be good docents, and developing better grant writing skills. Under the watchful eye of state humanities councils, MoMS STAR funds are used for these, and many other, training needs that maximize the MoMS experience and leave a lasting impact on host organizations. Councils have the flexibility to use the funds to assist only a few or all of the communities on their MoMS tour.

One way to ensure maximum benefit for your humanities council is to involve host organizations in the decision-making process. Some councils require host organizations to complete a self-assessment that articulates training needs. Other councils allow host organizations to pick from a menu of training opportunities, or provide one-on-one assistance tailored to the expressed needs of the organizations. Councils should not feel constrained to provide a one-size-fits-all training program, but rather, feel free to provide help where it is needed most to benefit local hosts and the host council. Hosting an evaluation process or focus group as part of the MoMS project has proven to have a long lasting benefit to councils as they determine how to most effectively provide services for and strengthen their partnerships with small cultural organizations in their states.

Allowable Uses for STAR Funds:

- Honoraria, travel expenses and material costs for presenters at a program planning or installation workshop. Presenters can be in-state experts or from the MoMS Workshop Bureau;

- Hotel accommodations and per diem for training participants at a program planning or installation workshop, if an overnight stay is required because additional training is included in the workshop;
- Honoraria and travel expenses for one-on-one consultations by scholars, content specialists, technical experts or other professional mentors to assist host organizations develop their local exhibitions and plan public programs, or to provide other on-site professional assistance;
- Costs associated with web-based training that enhances the professional capacity of host organization(s) while improving their ability to present the MoMS exhibition;
- Costs associated with developing special projects, websites, oral history projects, podcasts, etc. that allows host museums to digitize and share exhibitions, collections, or stories that augment the MoMS exhibition and enhance the ability of the host organization to reach a broader audience.
- Registration and travel costs for host organizations to attend state or regional conferences or professional development opportunities related to the MOMS exhibition.
- Costs associated with hosting an evaluation process about a MoMS project or focus group to help councils strengthen their relationships with small museums in their states

In-eligible Uses for STAR Funds:

- Food and entertainment
- Bricks and mortar projects
- For fundraising purposes
- Shipping
- State-wide publicity

Procedures & Timeframe:

Each year, MoMS staff will ask five state councils to participate on an ad hoc committee to oversee the expenditure of the MoMS STAR funds. At the beginning of each fiscal year, MoMS will notify participating state humanities councils about the amount of money set aside for STAR activities. Councils will plan their training accordingly and send the Request and Report Form to MoMS staff, via email, to harshc@si.edu. Requests will be reviewed by council peers on the ad hoc committee and by the MoMS staff. Approvals will be given within 2 weeks of receiving the request. Councils can implement their training plans in the second or third year of the project. Once the training or special project has been completed and the appropriate paperwork submitted to MoMS staff, reimbursements will be sent to the councils in quick order.

If you have questions regarding the appropriate use of the MoMS STAR funds, please contact Carol Harsh at SITES, 202-465-5267, harshc@si.edu.