Museum on Main Street
Selecting & Scheduling Exhibition Venues

Selecting Venues

It's likely that there is no more important task for a state coordinator than overseeing the selection and confirmation of venues for the exhibition tour. Sample forms and calls for application of previous state humanities council participants are readily available at the MoMS web site.

The ideal Museum on Main Street venue is characterized by organization and enthusiasm among community members. While some towns may lack a museum quality facility, there is no substitute for sheer energy demonstrated by local participants. The qualities of community pride, imagination, a willingness to learn, and enthusiasm for "The Smithsonian Coming to Town" are at the heart of any Museum on Main Street success.

Below are some criteria to consider when selecting your venues:

• POPULATION: Museum on Main Street is expressly designed to reach rural cultural organizations and the audiences they serve. From the exhibition format to the philosophy behind program development, "rural" is at the core of this project. Unfortunately there is not a uniform definition of "rural" that satisfies every state and every situation. Experience tells us that Museum on Main Street can work very well in towns of fewer than 2,000 (successful venues have been selected with fewer than 500 residents), and that the project is frequently lost in communities over 20,000. Populations of 4,000-8,000 seem ideal. It all depends on the dedication of the local project team. However, in larger communities, especially those with cultural organizations of notable size that may be offering their own cultural experiences, a MOMS project can be lost in the crowd.

> *NOTE: There are certain situations that warrant the selection of a venue that is not rural. Some states have concluded their state tours with a showing at a State Fair (featuring the stories and collections of rural towns). In addition, sometimes the exhibition can be used to political or public relations advantage at State Capitols, however these are* ***exceptions to the rule****. Museum on Main Street is meant for under-served rural audiences, enabling remote towns to participate in a unique experience not found in more populated communities****. State councils wishing to place a MOMS exhibition in a non-rural venue must first contact the MOMS office to discuss their request before confirming the venue.***

• HOST ORGANIZATION: Although small museums constitute the majority of MoMS host venues, libraries and other cultural community organizations also make fine host sites. Consider whether or not the applying organization has ever worked with the state council before. If not, this could be an opportunity to develop a new relationship. Does the host organization have special/timely events that could augment the exhibition such as an anniversary year or a facility re-opening? Does the organization have the staff and/or local committee potential to successfully host a MOMS exhibition?

• FACILITY: MoMS exhibitions are designed expressly for remote museums or cultural organizations with severe space limitations, especially non-traditional gallery spaces that require compact configurations. For these reasons, they're intentionally designed to be small and

portable. Conversely this means that they do not work well in large spaces; their impact is lost and their design falters. Over and over again experience has shown that placing a MoMS exhibition in a large venue, such as a conference ballroom or field house does not bring optimal results.

• GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION: State humanities councils often aim for broad geographic distribution when selecting their MoMS venues—looking for “dots on a map.” While this strategy is can be highly effective and can make for easier, less conflicted publicity efforts, be sure to take into account cross-state shipping expenses and remember that geography should not be the only factor considered when selecting a MoMS venue.

• POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS: Selecting a venue solely for political reasons limits the potential of MoMS. While there can be advantages to placing an exhibition in a certain political district, make sure that the host institution and community are fully dedicated to the project and satisfy some of the other criteria listed above.

• NUMBER OF VENUES: Just as you have flexibility in which venues to select, you also have flexibility in the number of venues you select. However, the resources MoMS provides for your state is based on the exhibit touring 6 venues in a 10 month tour. It is recommended that you keep the number of venues as near to six as possible because it will directly impact the number of weeks the exhibition will be at each venue and the number of publications and PR resources available to each site.

• SITE VISITS: Councils often discover that they have more organizations applying to be a host site for a tour than there are spots available. Many state tour coordinators find it helpful to make site visits in order to assess the facility conditions and determine the level of commitment that the organization/community has for the tour. This is especially helpful if the site in question is an organization that has never worked with the council before.

Confirming and Announcing Your Tour

Once you have determined your sites for your tour, we ask that you discuss your selections with your MoMS liaisons before notifying the sites and/or making any public announcements. This professional courtesy allows us the necessary lead time to handle any sites that may be atypical or may need special considerations. We appreciate your cooperation on this matter.

Scheduling the Tour

• LENGTH OF EXHIBITION STAY: Our experience shows that the ideal length of each exhibition stay is no fewer than four weeks and no more than eight weeks; this time-frame avoids over-taxing the spare resources of rural museums and helps maintain enthusiastic momentum through public programs and activities. Scheduling showings of significantly shorter duration brings unnecessary wear and tear on the exhibition and raises challenges regarding installation and de-installation. It also limits the local programming that is key to a successful MoMS experience. Remember, MoMS exhibitions are made whole by virtue of local participation. We pride ourselves in each council's ability to extend local ownership of the Smithsonian through rich local exhibits, ancillary special displays and hands-on activities. Unless there are public programs planned around shorter stops, it's highly likely that the public at such venues would think "this is all there is"--an unfortunate event when educationally and organizationally state councils provide so much more.

• TIME ALLOTTED BETWEEN VENUES: You should allow for at least one week between opening and closing dates on the itinerary. The timing of these dates depends largely on two factors: the preferences of the communities (they often want to accommodate a community festival/holiday or special event), and your shipping arrangements (if you are moving the exhibit with a commercial carrier you should allow a minimum of 10 days between venues).

• CONFIRMING THE ITINERARY:Approximately one year before your opening date you should have the venues and dates confirmed in a statewide itinerary. This is important for several reasons: to maximize your ability to secure statewide sponsorships, to boost local fundraising success, to improve publicity opportunities, and to ensure that the tour and related events are included in state, national and electronic calendars.

One year before your MoMS tour begins you should forward the following itinerary information to SITES:

• Host organization name & mailing address
• Host organization shipping address (street address if different than above)
• Host organization's phone, fax and email (if any)
• Local coordinator name & mailing address (if different than organization)
• Local coordinator's phone, fax and email (as applicable)
• Opening and closing dates of the exhibition