

Museum on Main Street  
2008 National Planning Conferences  
Sharing Best Practices

***Best Practices Model: Assessing and Meeting the Needs of Local Hosts: Community History Development Fund***

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*MoMS Tour(s) That You've Coordinated (exhibition and year):* PFV '01, KI'04, BF'06, NH'08

Community History Development Fund (CHDF)—the program provides organizational assessments for small humanities-based organizations, after which the organizations become “partners” of the CHDF and may request support to accomplish goals or recommendations in their assessment report. Partners may receive up to \$2500 per request, and we do not limit the number of requests. There are no deadlines; it is first-come-first-serve until our annual allocation is spent. We require all MoMS host organizations to become a partner of the CHDF.

*How did extra effort(s) in this area come about? Needs identified in the state; among the local hosts, etc.*

We did not develop this for our MoMS program, but rather as a way to work with small organizations outside of our formal grant program. The CHDF is more flexible, does not require a proposal, is not competitive, and can provide incremental (i.e., expedient) results.

*What council resources/expertise were you able to utilize? What partner resources/expertise?*

We refer to CHDF organizations as partners very deliberately. For each partnership, we invest financial resources and our partners contribute time & energy to cultivate their organizations in a way that leads to increasingly sophisticated programming. We use funds that would normally be in our grant program to fund the CHDF since these partners no longer apply for our grants. Also, we rely heavily on our assessors across the state.

*What were the steps involved in implementation?*

Basic program development: develop guidelines, marketing, and finding assessors. In terms of the MoMS hosts, we require them to undergo an assessment as soon as they sign onto the project. We put together an outside panel of five people across the state to review each request.

*What were the results?*

The CHDF is in its 5<sup>th</sup> year, and the results have been mixed, but are becoming stronger as the program matures. Some partners disappeared after the assessment, but others have accomplished so much they are ready for a new assessment or strategic plan.

*What adjustments (if any) did you make along the way?*

Aside from some administrative adjustments over time, the biggest change has been with the assessors. We started with a lot of them, and some just didn't produce very useful reports. We now have only three, and they spend at least two days on site and partners wind up with truly important documents. It may take longer to schedule and we pay the maximum. But we decided that as the basis of the partnership, the assessment is crucial to how the partner moves forward.

*What's been the short and long term benefit to the local hosts?*

When the partner is a MoMS host and is required to become a partner and also to request support for companion programming from the CHDF, we make our assessors very aware of that. In those assessments, the assessors include ways for the hosts to maximize the MoMS project for their organizations and their communities with short term project goals and in the context of long term goals.

*What's been the short and long term benefit to the state council?*

Short term I think the CHDF allows us to begin meeting, often dire, needs of organizations. In the long term it establishes lasting relationships with partners. Overall, it allows us to maximize our funding dollars—we can accomplish a lot with very little money through this program.

*What advice would you have for other state tour coordinators trying to make a similar impact in this area?*

Each state is so different in terms of what sort of resources are available in this area and the context of institutional and cultural infrastructure. In TN, for example, we have vast swaths of minimal infrastructure and overall minimal support for small humanities organizations, so we needed to respond with a program in addition to MoMS.

Once we figured this out, and that our grant program was not effectively serving this group, we came up with a program and we also got involved with our state museum association, which now relies on us a great deal to help it serve its small members.

*Do you have any files, forms, documents or digital images illustrating this component of your MoMS tour(s) that we could post on-line to share with others?*

No, the CHDF doesn't even use an application form. Our guidelines are on our web site; <http://humanitiestennessee.org/community/devfund.php>

*Would you be willing to serve as a mentor to other state coordinators, advising them on this topic? If so, please indicate the best way for them to contact you.*

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