

Museum on Main Street Community Assistance Subsidies

Museum on Main Street is a partnership between state humanities councils nationwide and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) that provides Smithsonian-quality exhibitions as the basis for locally developed humanities programs in small, rural communities. Since 1994, Museum on Main Street has engaged 300 small towns in 35 states. In 2002, the Smithsonian received a congressional appropriation that added \$500,000 to the MOMS budget. This appropriation, which we fully expect to be ongoing, allows us, through a contract between SITES and the Federation, to make available subsidies to support activities in local communities hosting MOMS exhibitions. These subsidies, provided in the second and third years of each tour, have amounted to just over \$3,000 per state per year since they became available. State Humanities Councils are asked to choose from among a range of activities for which the funds could be used. Assuming continuation of the federal appropriation, Community Assistance Subsidies will be provided annually to participating councils, who are expected to report back on their use of the funds. Please note that these Community Assistance Subsidies are intended to supplement, not replace, council grants to communities or fees paid to scholars. They are not to be used to cover shipping costs.

The following are some examples of how councils have utilized these funds:

- ◆ One state used a portion of their CAS funds to send local project directors to exhibition development training at AASLH national workshops. While not every local coordinator on the tour could participate it enabled a handful of the most ambitious sites to build on their MOMS experience with more in-depth expertise.
- ◆ One state used CAS funds to pay for a half-day workshop for local coordinators on exhibition development, cheap and easy methods in exhibit fabrication, and simple practices in object handling. The workshop was presented by the registrar of a well-respected state museum.
- ◆ Another state used CAS to help offset costs in bringing together tour participants for an in-depth evaluation of the MOMS experience and the impacts it had on the host communities. Facilitated by Federation representatives, the meeting allowed the council to solicit information on best practices, and gauge areas of improvement in their grant making and PR strategies.

Other ideas to consider for use of your Community Assistance Subsidies:

- ◆ Cover stipend and travel costs to bring technical assistance training opportunities to your communities via the Education Workshops or Docent Training Workshops offered by MOMS. (For details visit http://www.museumonmainstreet.org/admin/barn_admin/barn_state.htm)
- ◆ Host a “Booster Meeting” for local coordinators mid-way through the planning year. Such a meeting can be effective in helping develop program plans at the local and state level.
- ◆ Supplement Council grants to local hosts—increase a \$2,000 grant to \$2,500 per community.
- ◆ Provide training and content-related resources for local hosts. Ideas include reference and how-to manuals for local museums, reference books on exhibition themes (see exhibition bibliographies); sets of fiction for adult reading programs that coincides with exhibition theme; children’s books, games, toys related to exhibition theme, etc.

- ◆ Contracting with an education curator, or extending the contract with the project scholar to provide for additional site visits or a complete round of packaged programs at each venue.
- ◆ Talk with your communities about how they think these funds can best be used. They may have ideas that you hadn't even considered!

If you have questions regarding the appropriate use of your Community Assistance Subsidies, contact your MOMS project liaison or Esther Mackintosh at 703-908-9700 x 13 or email emackintosh@statehumanities.com.