

# Museum on Main Street

## Overview: Congressional Relations

### **Why Congressional Relations is Important:**

Both the Museum on Main Street program and state humanities councils rely on Congressional funding. MoMS is subsidized directly by federal appropriations to the Smithsonian Institution and through indirect support to the state humanities councils via their funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), also a federal agency. It is this funding that enables state humanities councils to bring Museum on Main Street to the local communities that host the exhibitions. Actively working to keep Senators and Representatives informed about the benefits of MoMS and the role that state councils play in the program is essential, ensuring the project's growth and well-being and the continued support of the state councils via the NEH. It is important to remember that all partners in Museum on Main Street, at the national, state and local level, play important roles in this effort and benefit from it. To make our job a little easier and to standardize and simplify our approach of tracking congressional relations, we have developed the following process and resources for state humanities councils and for local hosts:

### **The Role of the State Council in Congressional Relations:**

Citizens in rural America are important constituents to congressional members and state humanities councils are the critical link that enables these small communities, through Museum on Main Street, to leverage local support and create lasting improvements and partnerships.

As an overarching strategy in congressional relations, MoMS project results should be shared with your congressional members in regular correspondence and during the annual Humanities on the Hill campaign. MoMS provides brochures, other printed materials and talking points to state councils to enhance their communications with their congressional representatives.

For a more targeted approach, taking the following steps can help ensure that your Senators and Representatives are well-versed in the benefits of MoMS and the role of the state council in sponsoring the state tour of a Smithsonian exhibition:

1) Once your itinerary is confirmed, the council should send a letter to **each** of your state's Senators and Representatives announcing the project and positioning the council as the presenter of the project in the state. For contact information, visit [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) or [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov).

2) At the state program planning workshop one participant from each venue should sign a group letter to send to **each** of your state's Senators and Representatives announcing the upcoming tour and thanking them for supporting cultural programming for rural constituents and for MoMS in particular. A template letter is provided, but the more state-specific the letter can be, the better. Typically the council prepares this letter on behalf of the group, but **not** on state council letterhead—use plain paper.

3) You should prepare a second group letter to be signed at your installation workshop. This letter, again drafted by the state council and signed by a representative from each venue, should cite specific activities on the tour and inform Senators and

Representatives that individual sites will contact them to ask them to participate in local events. The message of his letter should simply be, “The Smithsonian has arrived! Thanks again for your support for MOMS and rural communities.” Again, a template letter is provided.

4) Consider ways to include Senators and Representatives in tour events. A press conference or other “announcement” event to publicize the exhibition’s itinerary is an excellent opportunity to involve elected officials. In fact, you should make the most of any chance to involve members of your congressional delegation. We’ve found that most Senators and Representatives are eager to be involved in presenting the Smithsonian to underserved constituencies. When their schedules allow, they’re typically eager to participate in one or more of your tour-related events.

**IMPORTANT:** Once you’ve confirmed the participation of Senators and Representatives in any MOMS related event, please notify John Matthews at the Federation (703.908.9700, ext. 12) and Carol Harsh at the Smithsonian (202.465.5267). In some cases, Carol may be able to arrange for someone from the Smithsonian to attend, adding prestige to the venue’s activities and PR efforts.

5) At the project’s close, the council should send a letter to its Senators and Representatives describing the project’s impact. Councils frequently send along pertinent statistics, program results, publications, or press clippings to amplify their points. Many councils also include these items in their Humanities on the Hill visits with Senators and Representatives.

**IMPORTANT:** We ask that any copies of congressional communications from the councils be sent to the Secretary of the Smithsonian and to John Matthews at the Federation of State Humanities Councils—addresses provided below. Thank you in advance.

### **The Role of Host Venues in Congressional Relations:**

It is important that each host venue communicate to their Senators and Representatives of the opportunities and benefits that their participation in Museum on Main Street provides. Each host venue is expected to send a minimum of two letters to their Senators and Representatives. For contact information, visit [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) or [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov).

1) An “invitation” letter should be sent a few months before the exhibition’s opening to ask Senators and Representatives to participate in exhibition and program events. A template letter is provided.

Suggestions for ways in which elected officials might participate in Museum on Main Street events:

- Ribbon-cutting ceremonies at opening event
- Give welcome and introduce keynote speaker at opening or other events
- Contest judge
- Share personal experience or artifact that relates to exhibition theme

Once you’ve confirmed the participation of Senators and Representatives in your event, please notify John Matthews at the Federation (703.908.9700, ext. 12) and Carol Harsh

at the Smithsonian (202.465.5267). In some cases, Carol may be able to arrange for someone from the Smithsonian to attend, adding prestige to the venue's activities and PR efforts.

2) A "thank you" letter should be sent to the Senators and the Representative that represent the venue. We encourage each venue to include town press clippings, program highlights, products or stories as part of hosting "the Smithsonian." This letter should expressly thank them for supporting federal appropriations to Museum on Main Street, and cite the state humanities council's role in their success. A template letter is provided.

3) It is enormously helpful for us to know the status of communications between host venues and Congress. In order to ensure that MoMS is a high priority for the Smithsonian, please send copies of any letters sent to Senators and Representatives to the Secretary of the Smithsonian and John Matthews. Their addresses are listed below. You should also send a copy to your state council tour coordinator. Thank you in advance.

Send copies of all congressional communications to:

John Matthews  
Federation of State Humanities Councils  
1600 Wilson Blvd. Ste.902  
Arlington, VA 22209  
jmatthews@statehumanities.org

Secretary Lawrence M. Small  
Smithsonian Institution  
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