

January 4, 2021

America's Libraries: Essential Partners in the Arts and Humanities

Memorandum for the Biden-Harris Transition Arts and Humanities Group

Libraries are a vital segment of America's communities, with more than 116,000 public, school, college, tribal, and other libraries employing approximately 370,000 American workers. Americans visit libraries over 1.3 billion times each year – more often than they visit museums, national parks, and live music and theater *combined*. Libraries play vital roles in advancing workforce development and skills training, lifelong learning from infants through seniors, entrepreneurship and small business development, digital literacy, and social inclusion. As the nation emerges from the economic and social devastation of the coronavirus and the extreme division of the Trump era, libraries will be at the forefront of helping Americans to recover and reconnect.

Institute of Museum and Library Services

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is a key federal partner in arts and humanities policy.

Agency snapshot

- IMLS is an independent federal agency, established by the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996, with lead federal responsibility for supporting library and museum services and advising the President and Congress on these topics.
- IMLS, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts, together comprise the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities.
- IMLS FY21 budget: \$257 million
- Director: Crosby Kemper (confirmed January 9, 2020)
- Key activities to support America's public, school, college, tribal and other libraries:
 - Grants to States (\$168.8 million in FY21) – the foremost federal support for libraries, provides flexible funding to meet local priorities in every state and territory according to a population-based formula
 - Native American Library Services (\$5.3 million in FY21)
 - National Leadership Grants (\$13.4 million in FY21)
 - Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant Program (\$10 million in FY21)

- Research, Analysis and Data Collection (\$3.5 million in FY21)
- Program Administration and Interagency Collaboration (\$15.5 million in FY21)

Past 4 years context

Funding: Every Trump budget proposed to defund IMLS – but Congress rejected these, and has increased IMLS funding by \$26 million since FY 2017, but even so, the agency’s funding remains below its authorized level.

Authorization: In 2018, Congress overwhelmingly passed, and President Trump signed, the bipartisan Museum and Library Services Act to reauthorize IMLS through 2025. The reauthorization sharpened the programs’ focus on equity and inclusion, including of tribal libraries, and maintained the minimum level for state funding, which provides equity across states.

Personnel: In 2019, President Trump nominated Crosby Kemper to a 4-year term as Director of IMLS, the only presidential appointment at the agency. ALA strongly endorsed this nomination. The Senate confirmed the nomination by bipartisan voice vote. Director Kemper previously served as director of the Kansas City (Mo.) Public Library.

COVID-19 response and recovery

IMLS quickly assumed a national leadership role in helping America’s libraries to respond to COVID-19 and keep their communities connected during the pandemic.

- IMLS sponsored research and disseminated information about resources for libraries, in coordination with federal partners such as the Federal Communications Commission, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Small Business Administration and community partners such as ALA.
- IMLS quickly distributed \$50 million in emergency funding to libraries and museums appropriated in the CARES Act, which has assisted libraries in supporting their communities through the pandemic. For example, this funding extended the range of library WiFi and provided new digital reading and learning capacity.

Next steps for IMLS

ALA recommends that the Biden-Harris Administration:

- Propose funding for IMLS in the FY22 President’s Budget at the authorized level.
- Include libraries in COVID-19 recovery proposals. Key bills from the 116th Congress:
 - Library Stabilization Fund Act (S. 4184/H.R. 7486)
 - Build America’s Libraries Act (S. 5071)
 - HOTSPOTS Act (S. 4285)
- Consult with IMLS and Director Kemper on issues affecting America’s libraries and national priorities in which libraries could play a supporting role, such as efforts to strengthen America’s infrastructure, workforce, and early childhood literacy.

- Reinstatement of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities as an advisory committee to IMLS. Prior to the Trump Administration, IMLS contributed staffing for programmatic support to the committee.
- Consider opportunities for Dr. Biden to work with IMLS and America's libraries. Previous First Ladies, including Michelle Obama and Laura Bush, awarded the National Medals for Library Services, and worked closely with IMLS on initiatives to promote learning and literacy.
- Continue to include IMLS as a member of U.S. delegations to the World Intellectual Property Organization, UNESCO, ITU and other intergovernmental meetings relevant to cultural and information policy.
- Leverage the resources and reputation of libraries in broad national and international policy undertaken by the Domestic Policy Council, National Economic Council, and National Security Council. IMLS has long contributed to telecommunications, internet governance, trade, copyright, and cultural public policy.

National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts

- ALA recommends that the Biden-Harris Administration support the continuation of NEH and NEA activities that support libraries and grant opportunities for which libraries are eligible, such as the NEA Big Read program and the NEH Picturing America initiative.

National Archives and Records Administration

ALA recommends that the Biden-Harris Administration:

- Propose continued funding for NARA, including the National Historical Publications & Records Commission, in the President's Budget.
- Work with NARA to strengthen management and preservation of federal and Presidential records.

The American Library Association

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. ALA advocates for federal policy on behalf of the nation's 117,000 libraries from its office in Washington, D.C.

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