

Museum Advocacy: A Primer

Getting Ready for
Museum Day 2022

Overview of Today's Session

- Mark Your Calendars for Illinois Museum Day, March 9, 2022
- Review Major Initiatives that Will Benefit Many of Illinois' Museums
- Pick Up Tips on How to Best Communicate with Your Elected Officials
- Learn What You May and May Not Do as a Museum Advocate

Museum Day Talking Points 2022

- American Rescue Plan Funding Request in FY 2023 to Allocate \$100 Million from the State Coronavirus Urgent Remediation Emergency Fund to Grants for Public Museums
- \$50 Million Allocation to the Public Museum Capital Grants Program in FY 2023
- \$350,000 Allocation to Restore State Funding for the Illinois Association of Museum in FY 2023
- Support for Related Industries, Including the Illinois Arts Council, Illinois Office of Tourism, and Illinois Humanities
- Support for the Illinois Creative Future Fund, which Includes \$75 Million for Museum Capital Grants

American Rescue Plan Funding Request

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) Funding Request: \$100 million through support for a \$100 million appropriation from the ARPA State Coronavirus Urgent Remediation Emergency Fund to the Department of Natural Resources for grants to public museums. ARPA permits the state of Illinois to strategically invest in museums and educational institutions for targeted infrastructure improvements, public health expenditures, and to mitigate continuing pandemic economic hardship.

Public Museum Capital Grants Program

Public Museum Capital Grants Program (17 IL Admin Code Sec. 3200, Title 23: Education and Cultural Resources, Subtitle B: Cultural Resources, Chapter II: Department of Natural Resources, Part 3200, Subpart B: Public Museum Operating Grants Program).

- **FY23 Funding Request: \$50 million** for the Public Museum Capital Grants Program. This program is designed to help public museums in Illinois expand and upgrade facilities, create new exhibits and add amenities to meet public needs. The Illinois Public Museum Capital Grants Program is open to any museum operated by local government or located on municipally owned land. The maximum grant award has been \$750,000 and matching funds are required in many cases based on museum attendance levels.

Restoration of State Funding for the Illinois Association of Museums

FY23 Funding Request: \$350,000 through restored state funding for the Illinois Association of Museums. All museums across Illinois - whether large or small - are economic drivers. We request a reinstatement of direct operating funding for IAM. This funding will allow IAM to positively impact the Illinois museum community, which consists of over 1,000 museums, many of which are all-volunteer. According to **Forefront's COVID -19 in Illinois: Impact on Nonprofits:** *programs that provide connection to experienced peers and professional expertise* is the third highest need for nonprofits in Illinois.

Support for Full Funding of Related Agencies

- Illinois Arts Council
- Illinois Office of Tourism
- Illinois Humanities
- Arts Alliance Illinois' *Illinois Creative Future Fund*, which includes \$50 Million in Capital Grants for Museums

Advocacy Tips

- Develop a coordinated message to share with elected officials, appropriate to their level of service (local, state, national).
- Arrange a meeting in their office during a museum advocacy event or a mutually agreeable date.
- Do your homework before you meet with your elected officials. Often, their websites provide insight into their values, passions and hobbies. Find common ground using this material.
- Be aware that the average meeting with an elected official or staff member is 7 minutes. Be brief, organized and prepared.
- Develop easy to follow, bulleted points and museum-related materials to leave behind.
- Always be honest. Do not exaggerate and do not guess at an answer if asked a question. Offer to find out the answer and provide it quickly.
- Share personal stories and anecdotes. Stories and photographs of children, seniors and families enjoying a particular program or exhibition go a long way when advocating for your cause.

Advocacy Tips Continued

- When visiting a legislator, consider involving stakeholders positively impacted by your organization (e.g. parents, students, teachers, seniors, special-needs clients, volunteers). The same applies to correspondence. Testimonials from stakeholders attesting to the positive value of your organization or a particular initiative can carry great weight.
- Rehearse your visit before you go. Role play through it with another individual.
- Be flexible. A legislator's schedule changes quickly. Even with an appointment, you may meet in their office, in the hallway or at the rail.
- You may end up meeting with a staff member in lieu of the legislator if a scheduling conflict arises. Treat this individual with the same courtesy and regard as you would the legislator. Remember this person's name and thank them for the meeting.
- Be courteous and respectful with anyone who meets with you. Thank the individual for their time. If they have supported a recent initiative that has benefited the museum or recently attended an event, thank them for their support.
- Be sure they know in your opening comments who you are, where you are from, and that you serve their constituents.

A Few More Tips

- The meeting may not go as you hoped or planned. Regardless, be courteous and thank the individual for their time. Never argue or threaten. Never publicly make negative comments about the legislator or staffer. You are relationship building. Lack of action today does not necessarily translate into lack of action tomorrow.
- Understand that legislators are very busy. Give them time to provide a thoughtful response.
- Understand that public policy does not happen overnight. Changes are often incremental and dramatic shifts may occur over long spans. As a recent example, it took four and a half years of consistent advocacy to see funds restored to the Illinois Public Museum Capital Grants program.
- Invite the individual to visit the museum the next time they are in the district. If we have an interesting exhibit opening or event, invite them, or offer a private tour.
- Follow up after your meeting with a thoughtful, well-written thank you note.
- When corresponding on an issue that impacts the museum, a thoughtful, well-written letter carries more weight than dozens or hundreds of form letters. In this case, quality greatly outweighs quantity.

Keep in Touch and Keep Building Relationships

- Add your legislators to your newsletter and e-blast lists. Encourage them to follow you on social media. Keep them in the loop on what you are doing.
- Ask if your legislator will promote upcoming programs and events.
- If a legislator takes action that benefits the institution or a related initiative, thank them and publicly acknowledge their action.

Museum Advocates May...

- Participate in political campaigns on their own time
- Provide financial support for political candidates on their own dime
- Host forums for political candidates
- Enthusiastically support political candidates as a private citizen
- Post campaign materials in their private residences
- Provide issues-related education for potential voters
- Promote voter registration
- Participate in “get out the vote” drives
- Allow candidates to rent museum spaces at fair market value (Note: Some museums choose to develop policies prohibiting use of rental spaces for any political purposes).
- Ask all candidates to fill out a questionnaire related to museum issues
- Work on behalf of a ballot measure
- Make candidates aware of your non-profit’s agenda/issues that impact the organization
- Congratulate re-elected or newly elected officials

Museum Advocates May Not...

- Use the museum's name or resources for a campaign
- Treat one candidate differently than another
- Invite only preferred candidates to museum-sponsored forums or discuss a single issue
- Wear a candidate's campaign paraphernalia at the museum's office or events
- Decorate the museum's space(s) with materials showing support/opposition for a particular candidate
- Tell people who to vote for/against
- Register only voters who agree with you
- Tell people who to vote for/against
- Allow only certain candidates to rent a space, or donate said space at a discounted rate for a particular candidate
- Ask only selected candidates to fill out a museum-sponsored questionnaire
- Spend a substantial amount of the museum's time/resources on a ballot measure
- Ask candidates to endorse your organization's agenda/issues
- Congratulate re-elected or newly elected officials in a partisan way (e.g. "a victory for our issues")