



Association of Art Museum Directors

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The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) is composed of the directors of 170 of the leading art museums in the United States, with additional members in Canada and Mexico. We are grateful for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the record on the issue of whether philanthropy serves diverse communities. The following statement addresses philanthropic grants to museums. It also addresses how museums serve their communities, regardless of funding source.

Art museums are among the most used and cherished institutions in their communities.

- Total annual attendance at AAMD member museums in the United States is approximately 50 million.
- Most AAMD institutions report that between five and ten percent of their attendance is in the form of organized school groups.

Additional children are served by individual visits, outreach, and on-line programs. Given the parlous state of art education in the public schools, especially in inner-city schools, art museums are the sole source of exposure to visual art for many at-risk children and youth. Any discussion of philanthropy and diversity must take these facts into account.

Beyond the numbers, though, it is important to state what museums stand for. As a former museum director said just last month,

Our museums reflect creativity, history, culture, ideas, innovation, exploration, discovery, diversity, freedom of expression and the ideals of democracy. Today, museums matter more than ever, as museums protect and preserve our culture and civilization. In these dark and dismal days of nationalism; religious wars; terrorism and torture; museums present the highest ideals and achievements of humankind to be admired and cherished.

America's museums were founded in many cases by generous individuals who believed that art should belong to the people. Their attitude was in marked contrast to Europe, where collections formed by royal and aristocratic patrons were often unavailable to a broader public. The public-spirited generosity of American donors both of art and of funding then and since is a living tradition that has enabled museums to offer affordable access to unique collections. The motto of the Taft Museum of Art in Cincinnati expresses it with succinct elegance: *One Family's Treasure. Art for All.* In the same city, the Cincinnati Art Museum offers free admission due to the generosity of donors stretching back to 1906, when Mary Emery established a fund to make Saturday admission free to all; free general admission for children was subsequently endowed by local corporations; and finally, a generous gift from The Richard and Lois Rosenthal Foundation established free general admission for everyone at all times.

All of AAMD's members share a commitment to serving the public through exhibitions that inspire, entertain, and confront the issues of the day. They offer educational programs and classes for people and families of all ages, origins, and socio-economic status. Their programs for teachers – showing how to connect works of art to school curriculum in every academic subject – are irreplaceable. All partner with other community institutions, including health, human service, and education organizations, applying the unique resources of the arts to serving a wide variety of purposes. Our institutions are anchors in their communities, often serving as the centerpiece of new or revitalized neighborhoods, providing jobs, attracting tourists as well as residents, and in a less literal sense, helping to form the community's identity – its sense of self.

There is still too little diversity in the top leadership ranks – a reality that we are committed to changing. Our adult audience, while diverse, is still not diverse enough. Nevertheless, education and community engagement – not just outreach, but actual engagement – are at the heart of museums' missions. It is worth citing a landmark report that our sister organization, the American Association of Museums, issued in 1992 after two and a half years of intensive work. Titled "Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums," it sets forth guidance on ten basic principles for museums, of which the first three are:

- Mission: Assert that museums place education-in the broadest sense of the word-at the center of their public service role.
- Audience: Reflect the diversity of our society by establishing and maintaining the broadest public dimension for the museum.
- Learning: Understand, develop, expand, and use the learning opportunities that museums offer their audiences.

These principles are now universally accepted in our field, and art museums are committed to using their encyclopedic collections, which range over five thousand years and are drawn from every known civilization in every part of the world, to speak eloquently to diverse audiences. Museum collections are a primary resource for people who wish to learn more about their own heritage, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or economic resources. America's non-profit system ensures that these collections are held in trust for the public – not just part of the public, but all of it, and not just for today's audiences, but for the future as well.

To prepare this testimony, AAMD polled the members of its Education Committee. Their response was immediate and overwhelming. Here is a small sample of what they had to say:

The director of the **Delaware Museum of Art** reports:

The Museum currently has over 60 partnerships with community groups such as Kuumba Academy, a charter school for the arts that mostly serves economically needy children, the Latin American Community Center, Girls Inc. and other agencies that service disadvantaged people. Since my arrival in 2005, I have met personally with many community leaders to ask them how the Museum can meet their needs. They have responded unanimously that while their people need many basic services they also need the creative outlet and emotional oasis that only an art museum such as the Delaware Art Museum can provide ...

The director of the **Queens Museum** says that his museum "is in America's most diverse county, and a large section of our audience is immigrants. Therefore it makes sense that:

- We employ a community organizer to work in our 90% "minority" local community;
- We conduct free digital media (and other) classes in Spanish;
- Our admission is by voluntary contribution;
- All events are free;
- Family workshops at the Museum cost \$2 for materials;
- Our most expensive program is an art camp at \$50 **per week**, and scholarships are available;
- Two fully trained art therapists on staff work with special needs communities;
- 50% of executive staff and 60% of overall staff members are people of color;
- Our staff speaks eight languages; and so on."

At the **Baltimore Museum of Art**, the tour most requested by school groups – and BMA welcomes 20,000 students each year -- is the African collection, because the study of Africa is a curriculum element in Baltimore's public schools, and the museum affords a

unique means for children to learn about the continent's history and culture. Its African collection was founded in 1947 by wealthy white donors and it continues to be the most rapidly growing collection in the entire museum. The museum is planning a major reinstallation for which important financial support has been received from the city government. Surely it is significant that a city with no lack of social needs sees fit to invest in its art museum. We note also that just last year a donor endowed a free admissions policy, for all, and in perpetuity. Since that policy went into effect last October 1, attendance at family programs has grown by 88 percent.

In Flint, Michigan, with a population of which 53% is African American, and with statistics that are high in unemployment, poverty and illiteracy, the recently redesigned and greatly expanded **Flint Institute of Arts** has risen as a symbol of renewal and a catalyst for change. It offers a wide range of exhibitions and educational programming which provide an invaluable resource to the community - educationally, socially, economically and culturally. Located in the heart of the city, the FIA serves nearly 100,000 visitors each year, of which 30% are students (kindergarten through 12th grade), in public schools and alternative educational programs. Admission to FIA galleries is free of charge and most FIA programs (classes, films, etc.) are discounted. However, the FIA is not funded by Federal, State, County or City dollars. One third of the FIA's annual budget is supported through income from endowments; another third is from earned income. The remaining third is from the financial support of generous, civic-minded individuals. It is arguable that eliminating inducements like tax deductions will reduce the frequency and amount of gifts given, in which case, the underserved will continue to be just that - underserved.

The **Frick Art & Historical Center** in Pittsburgh offers free and reduced rate programs to schools and families in need. Thanks to foundation grants, over the past year it has provided scholarships to 450 students, teachers and families. Additionally, the Frick provides free programs to schools and community service organizations in neighboring areas where the population is predominately African-American. Over the course of ten years and through four distinct community programs, nearly 12,000 children and chaperones from at-risk, high-poverty areas have been introduced to art, history and science through the collections and grounds at the Frick. All of the community programs are multi-visit and interdisciplinary, providing the students with an opportunity to learn about art and history in a variety of hands-on experiences. Because of grants the museum is able to continue offering these community programs at no charge along with free busing, snacks and program materials that allow the children to participate in creative take-home projects. During the 2006-07 school year, the museum collaborated with the Homewood-Brushton YWCA's Departments of Teen Services and Children and Youth to design and implement weekly or bi-weekly art and history programs. Goals for the teens stressed positive mentoring and leadership skills and incorporated the core values of the YWCA: Caring, Respect, Excellence, Safety and Trust.

At the **Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts**, located in Montgomery, Alabama, exhibitions and works of art in the collection by African-American artists are a focus. The museum has, for more than twenty years, welcomed and provided free tours (with

free art-making in the studios) for 3,000 third graders from the Montgomery Public Schools. The museum also provides free outreach presentations to kindergarten classes and presents a special art-related puppet show followed by a tour for preschoolers. Other system-wide tours include public school seventh and eleventh graders at times when exhibitions have a direct relationship with the schools' curriculum. The makeup of the students on these tours is a direct reflection of the diverse Montgomery community.

Expanding the museum's offerings and appeal to other segments of the community, based on age, gender, ability economics, education and schedule is one of the museum's top priorities. All public areas of the museum meet or exceed ADA standards. The museum has designed programs for Korean families and for senior citizens, appealing to groups from assisted-living centers as well as individuals, and it has held initial planning meetings on addressing the small but growing Hispanic audience's interests and needs. Its 4,000 square foot ARTWORKS interactive gallery is an ideal starting place for visitors with vision or hearing disabilities; the museum offers (with advance notice) "do touch" *White Glove* tours for the blind that closely guide and supervise sighted or blind visitors while they touch selected sculptures from the Museum's permanent collection.

The **Montclair Art Museum** (MAM) in Montclair, New Jersey exists to collect, preserve, present and interpret American and Native American art and to stimulate creativity in ways that educate, inspire and connect people of all backgrounds so that a deeper understanding and appreciation of America's diverse cultural heritage enhances the overall quality of life in our community, region, and world. It is committed to being an inclusive and diverse organization that respects and welcomes individual differences among people in order to offer the most meaningful art experience to the widest possible audience. It strives to cultivate an environment that fosters productivity, creativity and individual satisfaction by celebrating such differences as race, gender, nationality, age, religion, sexual orientation, and physical abilities.

Located in one of the most fully integrated suburban communities in the US, and with a Museum Board leadership that has included two Presidents and a Chairman who are African-American in the last six years, MAM attracts a racially diverse membership and audience. However, there are many other segments of the population that it works to serve; at-home mothers and caregivers of small children, families who home-school, seniors, and all age groups in between. School-age children from all counties in Northern New Jersey and the metropolitan area visit the museum, as well as autistic children and other children and adults with special needs. The museum's Yard School of Art enriches the surrounding communities year in and year out by offering courses that have often been cut from many public school curricula. It offers free admission on Friday mornings in an effort to attract and sustain senior and other audiences and those from disadvantaged communities, and wherever possible educational events are free, as are the very popular Family Days that happen quarterly. The museum recognizes that key to new audience development is the participation of the museum's minority stewards, trustees, docents and other volunteers who will play integral roles in working to develop sustainable relationships with the target audiences.

The **Barnes Foundation** in Merion, Pennsylvania has spent the past six years working to present educational programs to the students in the Philadelphia School District. For five years, the Foundation has presented a program, **Patterns in our Culture** which was designed for first and second grade students. Looking at patterns in art, literature, mathematics, music and dance, the program tied into the overall curriculum of the school. Currently the Foundation is partnering with the Philadelphia Museum of Art and three other institutions to build a curriculum for the entire fourth-grade of the Philadelphia School District. **Art, Literacy, Museums** seeks to increase the targeted students' and teachers' knowledge of the visual arts and museum experiences, illustrate how the study of art can be used to advance literacy skills, and provide a new model for art institutions working together to create basic programming that will increase their impact in the community. This program is fully subsidized by the participating institutions through contributions.

The **Philadelphia Museum of Art** serves 75-80,000 Philadelphia school children annually. It reports that a single grant from a foundation enabled 13,927 Philadelphia public school students to take part in lessons at the museum. At all times, children who are twelve years of age or younger are admitted to the museum free of charge, and students and seniors receive discounts every day. Classroom groups from Philadelphia's public schools participate for free in programs serving K-12 children. Another grant, from a different funder, allowed the museum to serve nearly 6,000 people with visual and hearing impairments, mental and developmental disabilities, and physical impairments, as well as adults living in isolation or in residential centers. The museum has also received grants for outreach programs for Chinese-American, African-American, and Latino residents.

The **Blanton Museum of Art** recently opened its spacious new home at The University of Texas at Austin with a mandate to serve as a “gateway” between university and the wider community of Austin and Central Texas. Its “Art Central” program provides high-quality, multi-visit museum experiences for 1,000 fourth-through-sixth graders in the Austin school district each year. A growing body of research attests to the effectiveness of multi-visit museum programs in raising not only visual literacy, but overall school achievement. The Blanton reaches out to schools that cannot afford regular museum trips by providing free bus transportation to its Art Central classes. These vital educational programs which have served over 30,000 underserved schoolchildren in Austin would not be possible without the generous support of private donors and corporations.

The museum offers free admission every Thursday to all visitors, and free admission every day to children 12 and under. In its first year of operation in the new building, it welcomed 177,000 visitors. Of this number, 53,000 were free community visits -- 30% of all visitors. 33% of visitors are non-Caucasian (12% Hispanic). The Blanton's ability to continue to offer high-quality programming for free to so many members of our community is entirely dependent on the generous support from individuals and corporations without whose donations we would have to reduce our service to the outside community drastically. Indeed, this new cultural resource itself would not exist without the generosity of individual donors who understood the importance of sharing the Blanton's cultural treasures with the entire community.

The **Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego** has addressed diversity in many ways over the past twenty-plus years. All of the museum's exhibition wall labels, texts, etc., are presented in English and Spanish, regardless of the exhibition subject matter. Latinos are represented on both the staff and the board of trustees. Many exhibitions have addressed related themes, most recently the 2006 exhibition, *Strange New World/Extraño Nuevo Mundo: Art and Design from Tijuana/Arte y diseño desde Tijuana*. The museum has several school programs, including one that serves Title I schools in the poorest areas of San Diego. The museum has received numerous major grants for its community programs and audience development activities. These include grants of \$500,000 or more from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Wallace Foundation, and The James Irvine Foundation.

In conclusion, we suggest that discouraging gifts to the arts by reducing their tax deductibility would have a counter-productive effect. It would lessen institutions' growing ability to serve the very populations whom Members of Congress most wish charity to serve, and would deprive those populations of the chance to participate fully in civil society and to have access to collections and programs that speak to their specific needs and interests. The social safety net has many strands; weakening any single strand only diminishes the safety net's overall integrity. We must insist that supporting the needy and supporting the arts are not mutually exclusive enterprises, and that the arts provide unique and irreplaceable service to this nation. Our service is not perfect, but the way to improve it is to provide more resources, not less.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.